

The Sacramento Bee
SATURDAY
June 24, 2000

I SCENE



Music on the air
Ani DiFranco, left, is among the
many musicians who perform on
"The Best of Hard Rock Live"
tonight on the VH1 channel.
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RELIGION & ETHICS
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▶ **COMICS** I-8, I-9
▶ **TELEVISION** I-6

Cause and effect

*Lesley Ann Clement
is on a mission —
embracing tough
methods — to change
the way nursing
homes operate*

By Cynthia Hubert
Bee Staff Writer

Lesley Ann Clement's crusade began with a chilling telephone call on an April night more than six years ago. "Something happened to Grandma Dorothy," a familiar voice told her.

Grandma Dorothy was Dorothy Palmer, her great-aunt, who had moved into a Marin County care home three months earlier with symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. She was 82 years old.

By the time Clement arrived at the hospital from Sacramento, doctors had reported Palmer's injuries to police. A petite and reserved woman who weighed less than 100 pounds, Palmer had fractured ribs, torn abdominal muscles, cuts on her face and deep bruises on her arms and legs. Physicians suspected that she had been beaten.

The next day, Clement, a young lawyer whose biggest clients were land developers, made a decision that would steer her life in a dramatically different direction. She decided to sue the nursing home for elder abuse.

"I had never litigated a case like this before," she said. "But I was so angry. You cannot imagine something like this can happen when you leave your loved one in a facility."

Clement's case went to trial, and after three weeks she accepted a large settlement offer from the care home, which

never admitted wrongdoing. Then she began pushing for state regulators to seize the owner's license. Eighteen months later, they did.

By then, Clement had left the firm where she had been working and had established her own law practice, focus-

ing on elder abuse and neglect. Today she is one of only a handful of lawyers in the country who work exclusively on such cases and is a nationally recognized expert in the field.

"Before Lesley came along, it was al-

See CLEMENT, page I3



Bee photograph/
Lollani Hu

Attorney Lesley Clement talks with one of her nursing-home abuse clients, Maxine O'Hara.

Clement: Lawyer's practice has its critics

From page 11

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Nosy people n vague answers

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The Bee
Life, Captured daily

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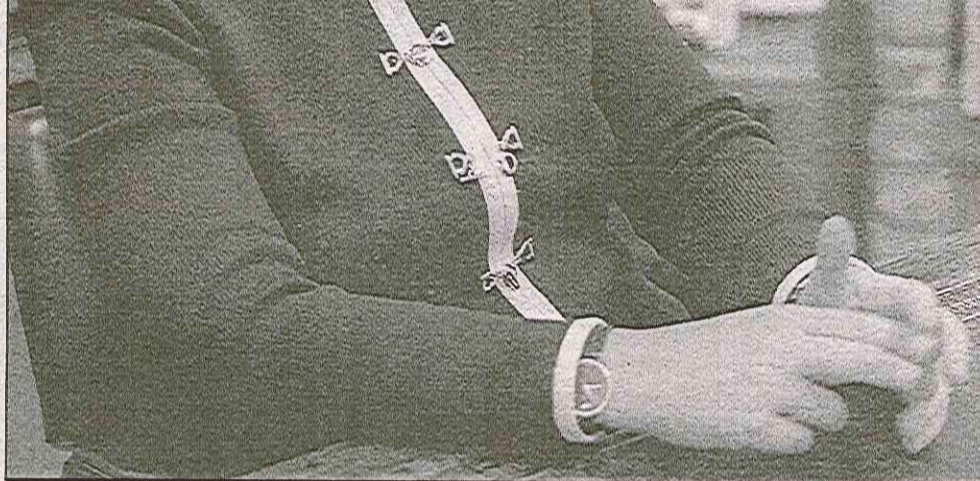
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Jim Geary, who has gone up against Clement in alleged abuse cases, said he believes many of Clement's cases are overblown. He said insurance companies that represent nursing homes settle many of her cases even though they believe no abuse or neglect has occurred.

"A lot of these people are there to die," he said, "and when they die, it is a messy situation. They have chronic illnesses. They wither away. They die through no fault of anyone."

Nursing homes and their insurance companies, he said, would rather settle such cases quietly than face possible negative press coverage and juries that are biased against the industries.

"Physical abuse certainly happens because of the setting and the frustration and the difficulties of working with some of these people," said Geary. "But it happens a lot less frequently than



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