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The Courage to Face Lions

by Sean Gonsalves

Rev. Jeremiah Jones was a very brave man, well known for his admonitions to never back down from a physical threat because he believed it only emboldened evil to attack.

One summer the circus came to town. Everyone wanted to see the star attraction, Czar Khan, the lion. But on Saturday night, Czar Khan escaped from his holding pen.

The townspeople looked to Rev. Jones for leadership. He implored his followers not to be scared and that just as God delivered Daniel from the lion's den, so too would the Lord save them from the ferocious Czar Khan.

As was his routine every Sunday after church, Jones set out on his walk home. About halfway down the road, Jones was startled by the roar of a lion. Now, Jones was brave and strong but without his gun he knew he would be no match for the Czar Khan.

He immediately fell to his knees, closed his eyes and began to pray, calling on God to save him. After several minutes of desperate pleas to heaven, it dawned on Jones that he hadn't yet been attacked.

Frightfully, he opened his left eye to see if Czar Khan had run off. No dice. Czar Khan was actually just two feet away from him. But something was strange. Czar Khan was kneeling on his hind legs. The lion's massive head was bowed and his huge paws were covering his face.

"Whatcha doin?" he asked the lion.

"Saying grace," the lion roared.

Rev. Jones didn't understand the difference between physical courage and moral courage, just as Staff Sgt. Camilo Mejia's detractors don't.

Mejia is that Florida National Guards-man who refused to return to Iraq from leave. He has filed for Conscientious Objector status and has spoken out against the war in Iraq saying, "I could not continue to do the things I was doing in Iraq...I'm completely against it because it's an oil-motivated war."

The other day I heard two talk radio heads berating Mejia for abiding by his conscience - a choice the radio show hosts considered to be a supreme act of cowardice.

My father, who served in a tank battalion in Vietnam during the Tet offensive, once told me there's courage in facing the truth and then telling it to others. And sometimes that takes more courage than following the crowd.

Contrast that with Condoleezza Rice. Though she was more than happy to hit the TV news circuit, her handlers had refused to let her testify before the 9-11 Commission. But, having relented largely because of the testimony of Richard Clarke, she is slated to testify publicly on Thursday.

I hope the commissioners get a chance to read Laura Flanders' new book "Bushwomen: Tales of a Cynical Species," which includes a profile on Rice.

"Rice, who served for 10 years on the board of the Chevron Corporation, deserves at least as much scrutiny as the other members of Bush's oilgopoly," Flanders told the Institute for Public Accuracy last week.

In the first Bush administration, Flanders points out, Rice defended the CIA when it stood accused of misleading Congress into arming Saddam Hussein. "Now her NSC stands accused of skewing the intelligence to persuade Congress to destroy him. In the years between her stints in Washington, she used her expertise as a Sovietologist to secure for Chevron some of the richest oil contracts in the post-Soviet republics alongside Cheney. Just this week, a judge ruled that a

case can proceed in which Nigerians accuse the company of human rights crimes - including killings - during Rice's tenure."

Also, both Salon and the British newspaper, The Independent, are reporting that a former FBI translator, Sibel Edmonds, testified before the 9-11 Commission that Rice's oft-repeated assertion that national security officials had no prior information about the likelihood of terrorist plane bombings is "an outrageous lie."

"I gave (the commission) details of specific investigation files ...," Edmonds told The Independent.

What's more courageous - Mejia's refusal to participate in a war he believes is "oil-motivated," or Rice, the former oil industry executive, articulately offering us a Rev. Jones-style analysis in the face of Richard "Lionheart" Clarke?

Sean Gonsalves is a Cape Cod Times staff writer and a syndicated columnist.

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