

Susan Hill (Larowe)

March 19, 2007

**Grievance Statement:**

During my period of employment with the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Kirk Rhinehart was initially my manager and subsequently became my administrator. During this time that he held these positions of authority over me, he has made repeated requests to me for "personal favors" as related to me providing hunting trips to a particular area of private property to which I had access. These requests were initially for himself and later for himself and his two sons. I have consistently refused to grant these requests from him.

I came to hold my current position (Coastal Resources Scientist Supervisor of the Ecological Review Unit, Restoration Technology Section, Coastal Restoration Division) based on a competitive interview process and a recommendation by the interview committee that I be promoted from my Coastal Resources Scientist 3 position to fill the vacant position. Subsequent to this recommendation, I was called into my administrator, Kirk Rhinehart's office, Diane Smith was also present and sat silently. He complimented me on my education, accomplishments, and abilities and then said none of that mattered because "if we can train monkeys to fly to the moon, we can train anybody to do any job here." He said he wanted to make sure I was going to go along with whatever he wanted and therefore, he was going to detail me for one year into the position before making me permanent.

After allowing me to have the supervisor's position, he came to my office one day and said he wanted to ask me for a "personal favor" and again asked me to go on a hunting trip on the private property to which I had access. I stated specific reasons why that was not possible and I again refused to grant his request.

On Monday, March 19, 2007 at 1:00 pm, Diane Smith notified me in her office in the presence of Karim Belhadjali and as she indicated, as per Kirk Rhinehart's directive, that they were demoting me and taking away my position as a detailed Coastal Resources Scientist Supervisor (which did not expire until June 2007) and that the position would be advertised on March 26. I asked "why?" and she shrugged her shoulders and said "this is why, because you asked 'why'." I said "can I appeal this?" and she said "no" and I said "can I have a reason why?" and she gestured to Karim Belhadjali who angrily said "I will be doing your closeout PPR and I will put it all in there." He continued, "you should have seen this coming." I said "how could I have possibly seen this coming?", "you have never indicated to me any problems with my performance as a supervisor, is there a problem with my performance as a supervisor?" There were no replies to these questions.

I have never been issued any letters of warning, caution, counseling, or reprimand. Karim Belhadjali had previously told me in an evaluation that I was "too enthusiastic." He had previously requested that I not discuss with him any Ecological Review Unit matters or other matters as they arose, he wanted me to only inform him and talk to him

on Tuesdays at 9:00 a.m.; once he informed me of this directive of his, I strictly adhered to it.

Faced with what I perceived to be a threat and specific intention by Karim Belhadjali to harm my career negatively, I told Diane Smith of the previous hostility and suggestions of physical violence and corporal punishment with a ruler by Karim Belhadjali directed toward me.

This "ruler" event was the culmination of a series of harassment and hostility events being directed toward me and of my previously unsuccessful report to my manager, Karim Belhadjali, when I informed him that Chris Robertson had been repeatedly pushing and shoving on me. I notified Karim Belhadjali that I had repeatedly asked Chris Robertson to stop pushing and shoving on me and yet his behavior had continued. I then informed Karim Belhadjali that I did not want to be pushed and shoved by Chris Robertson and I stated emphatically to Karim Belhadjali that I wanted Chris Robertson "to keep his hands off me and I wanted it to stop."

The physical pushing continued again in the presence of Karim Belhadjali when Chris Robertson pushed on me while I was seated in a chair in Karim Belhadjali's office and Chris Robertson was seated next to me. Karim Belhadjali was seated at his desk across from Chris Robertson and me and he was looking directly at us and clearly saw this happen and said nothing. I waited for Karim Belhadjali to say something and he ignored Chris Robertson's behavior. So then I said "Karim, this is what I wanted stopped." Karim Belhadjali said, as he picked up a ruler and handed across his desk to Chris Robertson, "if she doesn't want you to touch her with your hand, here hit her with this instead of your hand." Chris Robertson did not take the ruler from Karim Belhadjali and nothing further was said about the incident. As opposed to stopping the assaults on me, my manager, Karim Belhadjali sanctioned the inappropriate behavior, joined in on it, promoted hitting me, and suggested escalating these assaults on me to another level.

Diane Smith asked Karim Belhadjali if this had occurred and if he had said what I stated he said. Karim Belhadjali denied both the event I described and what I stated he said.

Diane Smith turned to me and said "if I asked Chris what happened what will he say?" I said, "I don't know. If he decides to tell the truth he will acknowledge it happened and if he decides to lie he will deny it." Diane Smith placed a call to Chris Robertson and asked him to come to her office. When he arrived, she said she had two questions for Chris Robertson. The first was "did he push and shove on me." He eventually acknowledged he did. The second question was about what I had related about Karim Belhadjali handing Chris Robertson the ruler and suggesting he hit me with it, Diane Smith asked did that event occur. After considerable time and giving more than ten evolving answers and repeatedly being asked the question, Chris Robertson went from saying various things such as "I'm not denying that it happened" to saying something to the effect "it seems like something that I might have remembered happened." Chris Robertson was then dismissed from Diane Smith's office.

Being faced with the prospect that I knew Karim Belhadjali had just lied to Diane Smith, and not knowing what other lies about me Karim Belhadjali had told her, I told her I was being retaliated against by Karim Belhadjali by him wanting to take my supervisor position away from me. With this new knowledge of Karim Belhadjali's lie to her, I expected her to view all other information, provided by Karim Belhadjali about me that led to the stated intention to demote me, as suspect or at a minimum I expected her to make further inquiry of me or others into the matter. I again told her I was being retaliated against and I would like the matter to be investigated and discussed further. She said "no" and she again told me that I was being removed from my supervisor position and the position would be advertised on March 26 and she gestured with her head for me to leave her office.

I then told Diane Smith I would be filing a complaint about this retaliation being directed toward me, of being removed from my supervisor position and being demoted. I immediately went to Human Resources and related details of the pattern and practice of requests for "personal favors," harassment, hostility, physical assaults, and retaliation against me to Anne Tillman and Lane Brown.

I then subsequently had a discussion with Randy Hanchey, Deputy Secretary, of DNR.

#### **Relief Sought:**

Since becoming the manager of the Restoration Technology Section, Karim Belhadjali, had repeatedly made comments about building his power and control of his section. When the most recent employee left to take a lateral position out of the section he said "it is his goal to run all people out of the section that he did not hire." He said "he wants his mark on things" and "he want to get rid of anyone he did not hire." I was hired by Kyle Balkum.

Due the continuing and ongoing pattern and practice of harassment, hostility, and retaliation, by Kirk Rhinehart, Diane Smith, and Karim Belhadjali and in light of the implied threat of the drafting of a negative "closeout PPR," I do not feel it is appropriate that any of these individuals have the ability to continue to have authority over me or to write evaluations of me. As was suggested to me by Randy Hanchey, it may be necessary to move me to another position. I do not wish to be demoted or suffer any detrimental economic effects because of the consequences of me reporting the actions taken against me by these individuals occupying the current line of supervision over me. As this is an ongoing and unresolved matter, there may be other relief that is later necessary.

# YAHOO! MAIL

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Date: Wed, 17 May 2006 11:14:39 -0700 (PDT)

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: trained monkeys

To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED].....it was rather shocking to have the administrator tell me that "if we can train monkeys to fly to the moon, we can train anybody to do any job here".....I came back down from his office and wrote that down immediately so i would not forget his direct quote.....[REDACTED]

[REDACTED].....the status is that i was the committee's recommended hire, and now the administrator is deciding to offer it to me or not.....I guess he fears that i'm not a trained monkey...and that is what he would prefer.....

# YAHOO! MAIL

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**Date:** Sat, 22 Jul 2006 12:32:38 -0700 (PDT)

**From:**

**Subject:** 2:30 new job application

**To:**

i checked my work email just now...

...then i wouldn't be working for that administrator who made the "trained monkey" comment to me....he is the one who "detailed" me to the position i have now for only a year....so that he can make sure i am strictly a "yes man" which is all he wants working for him.....

I'll have to tell you about how he came to my office the other day and said he wanted to ask me a personal favor....he wanted me to set up an alligator hunt for him on the island and he wanted to bring his two little boys who are about 4 and 6 I think.....I explained that it wouldn't be possible because of liability issues and especially small children around guns and alligators....there is more to the story....he has spoken to me with inappropriate innuendo in the past....anyway....he has a lack of professionalism.....

Groups are talking. We're listening. Check out the handy changes to Yahoo! Groups.

**YAHOO! MAIL**

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Date: Fr, 13 Oct 2006 06:18:36 -0700 (PDT)

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: -&gt; 8:00 am

To: [REDACTED]

good morning [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

i'm staying home this morning..i have things to do around the house.....i may go out later and run some errands....

something i ran out of time to tell you was that the reason my employee Yure called me into a private conference room was to tell me he was leaving my section. [REDACTED]..he has been in ecological review for 5.5 years and he has been passed over for promotions (including the recent supervisor position i got) and he wants to lateral over to another dnr position to hopefully provide himself for an opportunity to move up....i knew he wanted to do this...i had told him i completely understood the way ed and karim our managers were treating him...they do not like him and they come down very hard on him....i do not agree with how they treat him....i do not treat him that way....nevertheless i just lost the only employee in my section who knew anything besides me.....the institutional knowledge of writing ecological reviews is all gone now.....

when i came into the section 2.5 years ago....i was the 5th person added...there was the supervisor and 3 existing scientist positions and everyone was trained and fully functioning....i became the 4th scientist....now everyone has been run off because of various things including our administrator Kirk (the trained monkey comment to me) who runs on favoritism and friends... [REDACTED]

increasingly loooooow morale in my section and my division because of Kirk, Ed, and Karim.....so there is

so now i am left as the supervisor of a section with Mandy who just recently came into the section...and doesn't know a whole lot about ER.....the new person we just went through the interview process and has not started yet..and who know nothing about ER..and empty slot that Yure will be vacating....and an unfunded slot that will not be filled.....and i was given an evaluation by Karim where i was told i was too enthusaistic...and then Karim tried to enter a power struggle with going back on all the things he agreed to do in an 1.5 hour evaluation....and after the weekend telling me he changed his mind and would not do any of it.....so i have an unreliable, untrustworthy, flaky, weak man as a manager.....

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# YAHOO! MAIL

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Date: Thu, 7 Dec 2006 08:46:48 -0800 (PST)

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: 10:46

To: [REDACTED]

i'm back from meeting with Karim....he really said nothing...he only asked me questions about what i have been working on...but i have already answered these questions before...so i just answered them again.....i think this was about power and control....he just wants to let me know he has control over me....so i just repeated info to him....it went well...so now it's over....so that is good....

**YAHOO! MAIL**

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Date: Wed, 17 Jan 2007 09:58:47 -0800 (PST)

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: 11:58

To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] walked up when he was discussing this with chris and heard him say my name and i said did you need me for something karim [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

and he also always talks about power and control...jammie in chris's section is taking a lateral position...and he says things like it is his goal to run all people out of the section that he did not hire.....that he wants his mark on things....and he wants to get rid of the anyone he did not hire.....

i do not like him being my manager.....when i took this job....i took it mainly because of th e person who interviewed me...Kyle....kyle was a great supervisor...[REDACTED]....he is aat wildlife and fisheries now.....and i was very sorry to see kyle leave and it has never been the same since kyle left.....kyle was concerned with doing our job....like i am.....and karim and ed before him are obsessed with power and control and the actual production of job product is not their goal.....



# YAHOO! MAIL

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Date: Tue, 23 Jan 2007 10:46:25 -0800 (PST)

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: chris pushing on me

To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] but chris also lately has been pushing on my shoulder....and i don't like it....and today i told him to stop touching me.....and i did this in front of michael....i told chris i do not like it when he pushes on me....he has been doing it rather firmly....so if i am standing...i actually loose my footing.....and he did it 2 times today...and on the second time i told him to stop doing that to me i don't like it.....

7/2/10

**Susan Hill**

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**From:** Christopher Robertson  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 30, 2007 1:06 PM  
**To:** Susan Hill  
**Cc:** Karim Belhadjali  
**Subject:** sorry

Hi Susan,

I'm sorry I pushed you this morning. I didn't mean to offend or irritate you, and I'd forgotten that you'd asked me last week to completely stop all jokey pushing, shoving, and nudging. I won't forget again though, and it won't happen again.

Sincerely,  
Chris

8 of 10

**Susan Hill**

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**From:** Susan Hill  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 30, 2007 1:13 PM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** FW: sorry

Chris originally denied that I asked him to stop...now he says he "forgot" I told him not to touch me....

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Susan Hill  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 30, 2007 1:08 PM  
**To:** Christopher Robertson  
**Cc:** Karim Belhadjali  
**Subject:** RE: sorry

Apology accepted.

**Susan Hill**  
Coastal Resources Scientist Supervisor  
Ecological Review Unit  
Restoration Technology Section  
Coastal Restoration Division  
Louisiana Department of Natural Resources  
[susan.hill@la.gov](mailto:susan.hill@la.gov)

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Christopher Robertson  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 30, 2007 1:06 PM  
**To:** Susan Hill  
**Cc:** Karim Belhadjali  
**Subject:** sorry

Hi Susan,

I'm sorry I pushed you this morning. I didn't mean to offend or irritate you, and I'd forgotten that you'd asked me last week to completely stop all jokey pushing, shoving, and nudging. I won't forget again though, and it won't happen again.

Sincerely,  
Chris

# YAHOO! MAIL

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Date: Mon, 5 Feb 2007 18:27:33 -0800 (PST)

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: 8:26 pm

To: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] i hope you had a nice dinner and you have fun at the game...

i'm going to work tomorrow....i so much dread having to deal with Karim....i can't stand him....i don't think i finished following up with you about the Chris pushing/shoving me again incident that he did in front of Karim....when i said "Karim this is what i wanted to stop"....Karim handed Chris a ruler and said "here, hit her with this instead of your hand"

i cannot tell you how horrible it is to work with people like this.....it is difficult to have to tolerate such an environment everyday.....

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# YAHOO! MAIL

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Date: Sun, 4 Mar 2007 11:07:26 -0800 (PST)

From: [REDACTED]

Subject: 1:07

To: [REDACTED]

both my parents are taking me to the hospital now...my father wants to be there also....i told them i feel bad about both of them wasting their time just sitting there while i'm in surgery and after in recovery....but they said it was their decision and they both want to be there.....

i had a long talk with my mother about the job....i expressed my frustrations with my current job...i told her about chris pushing on me and karim handing him the ruler and telling him to hit me with that....that was shocking to her...i told her i can't complain about it because i would only get more in trouble....