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## JOAN DILLON & FAMILY:

*The Transformative  
Power of Grit and  
Compassion*



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Photos by April Marie Photography

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## *Joan Dillon & Family:*

# THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF GRIT AND COMPASSION

By Elizabeth Russell  
Photos by April Marie Photography

**J**oan Dillon, after weathering an unexpected divorce in 2011, has treasured those things in life that have enriched her. She has prioritized her children and found meaning through a life of service.

Joan Dillon graduated from Loyola University and then attended Loyola Law. She graduated from law school and chose to take the risky move of immediately opening her own law practice and “hanging a shingle” in the Printer’s Row neighborhood in Chicago. “Most of my peers thought I was crazy,” she remembers. “However, I wanted to establish something that was truly my own, and wanted to build it from the ground floor up. I visualized establishing a small practice based upon customer service – a Chicago practice with a hometown feel. The concept proved to be very successful and I steadily grew. With true Irish grit and determination, I grew my practice from my very first client to what it is now. I have since represented just over nine thousand families!”

“That is the beauty of grit,” she reflects. “Anyone, whatever their background or resources, can lay claim to it.” Joan specializes in real estate law. She works with high quality real estate agents and lenders, helping families finalize their sales and purchases. She also works with distressed homeowners, where she finds the greatest satisfaction in her job.

She helps homeowners who have fallen delinquent on their loans or behind on payments



due to crisis. “Most of the families I represent have reached a tipping point in their lives, and something has gone awry. Common occurrences are the death of a loved one, the serious illness or lingering illness of a spouse or child, the loss of a job, the downsizing of territory, or divorce. For these families life is full of stress, fear and many times a feeling of helplessness. That’s where I step in.” Joan negotiates with the client’s lien holders to reset the terms on their Note or release them from their mortgage obligation and allow them to sell their home for less than what is owed. That process is commonly known as a short sale.’

“The majority of my clients are hardworking, responsible people, and life has dealt them some bad cards. Together we unravel the disorder and press the reset button. These families are grateful for the support and the chance to start anew, and I am grateful for them. I have learned a great deal from the families I represent. Their stories inspire me.

“I grew up in a conservative Irish Catholic home, and my parents have always been a guiding voice for me,” Joan reflects. “They were such soft people, yet they were driven and sturdy as anything. They lived lives of service and were known for their acts of kindness. Their voice gives me confidence and reminds me to strive to be better.”

Joan opened up to me about her own hardships, and how they have softened her outlook on life, and helped her to empathize even more with friends and clients. “Divorce was so far off my radar screen, that I never imagined such a thing could happen. No one in my family was divorced. I had the very naïve outlook that it only happened to people who didn’t try hard enough or pray hard enough. This misconception fueled the isolation I experienced when I was going through it. My hardship ultimately changed me. I became much more sensitive to the plight of others and I became an impassioned advocate. When my clients tell me they are struggling, I understand it because I lived through it myself. I know what it felt like to live in fear of the unknown. That is why it is so important to me to be there for them as source of emotional support too. It is through this type of advocacy that I have found my calling.”

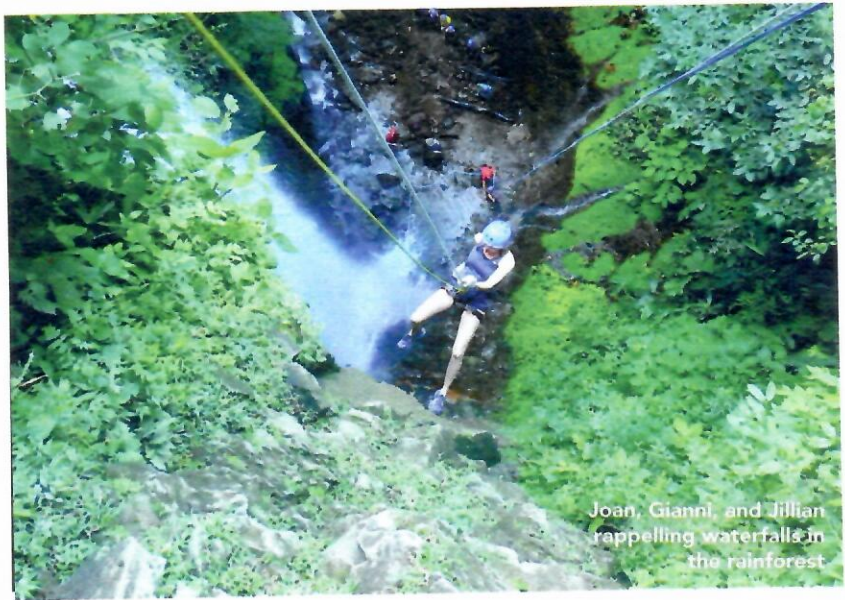
In addition to Law, Joan also enjoys cooking, hiking and planning adventures, especially with her kids.

Gianni Petrillo, age fifteen, is a sophomore at Saint Francis high school in Wheaton. He is a member of the SFHS golf team and at every opportunity, he hits the golf course.

Jillian Petrillo, age fourteen, is a freshman at Saint Francis high school and loves to do artwork. She loves scuba diving and horseback riding.

Both kids love adventure, just like their mom. Hiking, biking and even some extreme sports. “We reset ourselves through new outdoor challenges,” says Joan.

In 2017, Joan took her kids to Soma Surf School in Rivas Nicaragua where they all took surfing lessons. During the summer of 2016, they went to San Carlos de Alajuela, Costa Rica where they learned to rappel waterfalls. “You are literally hanging off the ledge of a waterfall two hundred and twenty feet up and rappelling down



Joan, Gianni, and Jillian rappelling waterfalls in the rainforest

it. It’s thrilling! During that vacation we stayed in a tree house high above the rainforest. It was stunning to watch the rainforest come alive in the morning.”

Joan strives to teach her children to participate in events that pull them out of themselves. Whether that is volunteering or trying new adventures, she is proud of them because they understand the value of volunteering and are both very grounded. “They are also willing to try new sports, adventures and have grown because of that!” she adds. “Since they have been small, I have also reinforced

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the practice of empathy. I have always believed it should be taught like table manners. I want them to have the ability to be aware of and sensitive to the plight of others and to offer a supportive response. That in my opinion is the stuff of life. The kids have far exceeded my expectation for them. I am excited to see what professions they will choose and watch their lives unfold. I couldn't be prouder!"

They have two dogs, Pal and Scout. Scout is a nine year old golden retriever, and Pal is a new puppy, eight months old.

Joan and her kids attend Holy Cross Catholic Church in Batavia. "Holy Cross is the ideal parish," says Joan enthusiastically. "It has an amazing community outreach and its mission is service. We have found a home there. The kids and I often ride our bikes to Mass or will rollerblade to Mass on a beautiful day. It makes our Sunday experience even more meaningful. Our faith helps us look outside ourselves. It reinforces the need for us to act in service of others. It is also important to me to teach my children that God is the floor in their lives. When storm clouds gather overhead, and they will gather, I want them to know where to go. Through their relationship with God they can find protection, peace and purpose."

Joan, Gianni, and Jillian live in the Windemere subdivision. "We moved here in 2005 and watched home after home being built. The neighborhood is a tightly knit one. Everyone is friendly and stops to talk. I love the sense of community! It's a wonderful place to raise kids. Since my kids have been small they have played in the connecting backyards. Bonfires and Bears games on backyard TVs are common events. Our friends, Jenny and Brian Prodoehl, even started a Bunco card game with a rotating family hosting the festivities. All are welcome!"

The subdivision hosts a fun event on the Fourth of July. There is a 'decorate your bike parade' for the kids where they decorate their bikes and big wheels with streamers and flags, and parade around the subdivision. Windemere hosts a community Facebook site where neighbors trade recipes, babysitters, and garage sale info.



Homeowners can log on to ask for help when they are going on vacation or need someone to help with lawn care. "I am happy my children grew up here. It is a solid neighborhood and it was the backdrop of many happy childhood memories.

"I know it is a simple mantra but it's very true: Every day you have the opportunity to be the answer to someone's prayer," Joan emphasizes. "Look for that opportunity. It could be dropping off a meal, being patient with other drivers in traffic, or listening to the lonely person in line at the grocery store checkout. Small acts have big impact. Even the smallest acts of kindness pay forward and you have no idea what it means to the other person."

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