

## Graduate College Janine Lee Memorial Scholarship Tribute

*“God is always faithful. I trust [Him] to take care of me, although it may not be in my timing or according to my plan”*. This quote from Janine, in an email communication to a sibling in January 2017, exemplifies the role Christ played in Janine’s life and how her profound faith in her Protector would set the terms for both her life and her untimely death. Janine’s journey to first pass the bar exam and eventually become a law professor may have ended prematurely on June 28th, 2017, but it ended with the Lord at her side every step of the way.

Janine’s journey to pursue and successfully complete a law school education in her 40’s was not a race run alone. God was with her every step of the way. The Lord was to Janine her compass, her guiding light, and her judge and jury. Her journey started at an early stage of life, when Janine confronted demons that lured her away from family as an early teenager. But when she found God she turned her life around. Rejoining her family and started a family of her own. Even as a single mom, Janine never forgot where she came from. Always trying to help others by using God’s teachings and personal experiences to humbly show others in need there is always a better way. There are many examples of Janine’s charity too numerous to count. In one account, shortly after learning of Janine’s death a high school classmate of one of Janine’s brothers contacted our family to confess that Janine had written to him while he served a prison sentence in the late 80’s. In the letter, dated “October 18, 1988”, Janine pleaded with her sibling’s friend to turn his life around, and even offered him her own humble account of how turning to God helped her own life around. When at the young age of 15 she too had lost her way. No one in our family knew Janine wrote this prisoner. Our family friend kept the letter for nearly thirty years, and relinquished it to us in the hopes that it could serve as a testimonial to the kind of person Janine was.

But to say Janine’s life revolved only around the Lord would only be telling one half of the story. Janine had a tenacious and caring spirit, manifest in everything she did. In her personal life, she cared deeply about her family. She loved her precious children, cared deeply for her brothers, adored and respected her parents and treasured the time she spent with her nieces and nephews. She especially loved time with her sole granddaughter, who she considered the pearl of her eye. Family was always important to Janine, and in some strange way we think she tried to compensate for lost time from her past estrangement to her family by going above and beyond to maintain special bonds with each of us. In her personal and private journal, Janine wrote often about what her family meant to her. She pleaded with the Lord to help resolve conflict when situations in her life called for compassion and forgiveness.

In Janine's professional career, Janine wasn't afraid to work. Work meant to work hard with 110 percent until you could not work any longer or harder. She was her own toughest critic. She always punished herself if she failed to achieve her goals. She studied hard, prepped until she knew the material, and was always eager to express herself verbally in class to show what she knew. Nothing seemed to slow her determination. In one occurrence during her second year of law school, she exclaimed to a sibling how she had to take a 4-hour essay test completely by hand. The computer at school malfunctioned and she was not given permission to have the test rescheduled. So with neck and back pain breathing down on her like a harrowing rain, she buckled down to write four hours of essay responses all by hand. A personal and physical torture most of us could not begin to appreciate. But she did it, didn't complain or make excuses, and moved on to tackle the next challenge because this is simply what Janine did.

And although Janine suffered from physical pain from multiple back and neck surgeries, she didn't let physical pain get in the way of fulfilling her goals and dreams. When others would have used physical limitations as an excuse to fall short of one's goals, Janine did the opposite by raising her bar even higher. This is because it was not enough for Janine to say she finished law school. To Janine, she wanted to finish at the top of her class. She did just that. Janine was on the honor roll each and every semester. All the while juggling a full time job as a senior paralegal during the day, and never forgetting her number one most important role as a loving mother of two grown children at night. So when Janine earned the coveted distinction of Magna Cum Laude, it was a personal tribute so deserving there are simply no words to describe it. But that was Janine.

If Janine was alive to write this tribute, there is little doubt she would take it as seriously as she did in her own life. Janine would want to make sure individuals chosen for these monies understood what is fundamentally important in life. God. Hard work. Never forgetting where you come from. Always setting the bar high. Love to family. Living humbly. And striving to excel at one's dreams even if it kills one trying. Janine's life ended striving to excel, and even in her darkest hour on the day of her passing she knew she was not alone. This was her mark.