



Katie Krenz Doan

Striving for Perfect 10 for Injured Workers

by Emily Donovan

To this day, Catherine J. Krenz Doan of **Rubin Law Group** wants to not only win, but win with perfect form.

“She addresses every case as though she wants it to be a perfect 10,” says Arnold G. Rubin, an equity partner. “And if you strive for perfection, you’ll end up with a great result.”

Doan, a partner who represents workers’ compensation petitioners, was a competitive gymnast through college. Now, she applies to the law the discipline she used to earn All-American honors twice.

She’s handled cases in arbitration, the circuit court and the appellate court. She likes that workers’ compensation allows her to directly help her clients. She’s not helping a corporation save \$1 million; she’s helping someone get the livelihood needed to support a family or get required medical treatment.

“This is one of the most important areas of law,” she says. “You’re talking about their livelihood, their job, their health, their personal well-being, and it affects their family life.”

She is also a published author. She wrote the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association workers’ compensation notebook chapter on psychological injuries and has written articles on subjects including the medical fee schedule and legal practice reform published by the Illinois State Bar Association, Illinois Institute for Continuing Legal Education and Law Bulletin Publishing Company.

And she even does speaking engagements on various topics, including medical bills, intake and social media.

“I like to challenge myself and lecture on different topics,” Doan says.

Doan says she gets invested in her clients’ well-being, since workers’ compensation legal problems can be so personal to the petitioner.

“I’ll have clients say, ‘You’ve been with me through my worst, when I’m screaming and yelling and upset and crying, and then

you see me at my best,” she says. “That’s rewarding. I get to help with that.”

Competitive Gymnast’s Discipline

When Rubin realized Doan was an elite athlete, he knew he had found an ideal candidate: someone who was self-motivated, had dedication, and could work for a team or perform solo.

“There’s a team effort to getting that case ready,” Rubin says. “Once that effort has been done, it’s almost like her training for her competition. She had a coach, she had teammates, but then she was on her own.”

From the age of 2 until the end of college, Doan balanced gymnastics with her academic studies.

She climbed all over everything as a child, so her mom decided to take her to a parent-child gymnastics classes to try to wear her out.

“That didn’t work,” Doan says. “It just taught me how to climb things better.”

Doan stuck with it. She was an all-rounder, meaning she competed in vault, bars, beam and floor events, but she considers bars her best event.

She qualified as elite when she lived in England and was level 10, just below the elite level, when she lived in Texas. The University of Wisconsin at La Crosse recruited her for gymnastics and, despite a demanding athletic schedule, she graduated with highest honors.

Doan says this made her very good at scheduling her life. She would go to classes, go to the gym for six hours, then do homework as soon as she got home. There was no such thing as partying on weekdays, she says.

“You train yourself,” she says. “It’s the discipline that comes with being able to work out 20 hours a week and still do school.”

Doan says she’s always been pretty independent, and part of that comes from gymnastics. It’s an individual sport, even if it required practicing as a team and coaching her teammates.

In addition to developing the work ethic she applies to her legal practice, gymnastics also led, unfortunately, to a better understanding of what her injured clients experience.

During her junior year, she tore her anterior cruciate ligament and dislocated her kneecap. She had surgery and was in rehabilitation, but a bad recovery put her out of commission for the full year. She was on crutches and frustrated.

That experience helps Doan relate to her injured clients now. She understands how frustrating it can be to go from being in top physical shape to not being allowed to walk.

“I’ve been through it,” she says.

Still, even though she couldn’t compete

while injured, Doan chose to attend every practice and meet. She wasn’t obligated to, but she moved mats, kept scores for the coach and helped coach the bars.

She returned to competing her senior year and is proud that she got back to the high level she had been performing at before the injury. That year, her coaches selected her as the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Scholar Athlete of women’s gymnastics, honoring her as the senior gymnast who best exemplified both academic and athletic achievement.

World Traveler, Good Heart

Doan was born in Chicago and considers herself a Chicagoan now, but she used to be somewhere between an ex-patriot and a Texan.

Her dad worked as the chief financial officer of an international company based in Plano, Texas, and he oversaw finances in Europe, Africa and Asia. They moved to a suburb of London for his work and moved between England and Texas every few years as she grew up.

Doan’s mother worked as an accountant, so there were no lawyers in the family before Doan. Still, while her parents loved numbers, Doan was more drawn to writing, words and arguing.

“I think my mom would tell you I started arguing with her from the moment I could talk and haven’t stopped,” she says.

When her elementary class in Texas studied Jordan, her teacher didn’t believe she had visited there. Like the lawyer she later became, she brought in a photo of herself in Petra the next day to prove it beyond a doubt.

Doan learned to talk in England, but lost her English accent when she moved back to Texas between the ages 4 and 9.

“My parents say when I talk about my London friends, I’ll have an English accent,” she laughs.

She says living in a London suburb and traveling as a child throughout Petra, Rome, Athens, Bath in England, and the Lapland region of Finland gave her a more diverse view of the world.

“We were able to see so much and experience different cultures, which I think makes you more open to exploring everything,” she says.

People who live in the United States for their entire lives don’t understand what it’s like to be in a different culture, she says, and they need to have some cultural differences explained. For example, she remembers being shocked at first to find nothing was open on the weekends in England. She realizes people from other cultures might be looking at things differently than her American clients, so she has to find a

different way to explain it.

Being able to figure out those differences has improved Doan’s legal practice. Rubin Law Group has clients from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil, Ukraine, Poland and Croatia. Some of Doan’s clients are surprised there are legal protections for employees at all. Her experiences living abroad help her step back to explain things that otherwise could be lost in translation.

“They may not relate to what we take for granted in America,” she says.

The work ethic of a competitive gymnast shines through even in Doan’s story of how she met her husband. He got deployment orders two weeks after they started dating. They decided to stay together but expected to break up before he actually shipped out months later. He was gone in the infantry in Iraq for 15 months, yet they kept dating.

“Allen will say I’m too stubborn,” she says.

They dated long-distance again as he finished his undergraduate degree in La Crosse and she started law school in Chicago. She got all her work done during the week so she had weekends free to spend with him.

Then, during her second year of law school, he got deployment orders again. They set the wedding for three days after her final exam in December, and he left for Iraq again two weeks later.

“I do not recommend planning a wedding while you’re in your second year of law school preparing for exams,” she says. “I think I locked myself in a room, told no one to bother me.”

She knew she would be a lawyer when she started having fun writing briefs and arguing. Doan also realized how much she could help people who needed it if she represented petitioners.

“I’m just a writer at heart,” she says. “When I started writing briefs, I was like, ‘This is so fun.’”

Doan was studying law at the Illinois Institute of Technology Chicago-Kent College of Law, where she graduated *magna cum laude*, when Rubin asked the school to help find him a clerk candidate with a writing background. Doan clicked immediately.

It wasn’t just Doan’s work ability that made Rubin hire her, it was also her personality.

“She is a very humble person,” he says. “She is a solid, good person with a good heart, and that’s what makes her a really good lawyer.”

Doan says she makes a point of listening to find out what her clients really want on the case.

“I try to talk to the client and be there for them as a person as well as an attorney,” she says.

She also explains why she takes each step,

and she helps them set realistic expectations.

“On a workers’ comp case, you’re never going to be wealthy,” she says. “You’re not going to be rich. It’s to compensate you for what you’re missing and for the disability you now have.”

Rubin says Doan isn’t afraid to question his evaluation of a case and give him her honest opinion.

“She’s not a ‘yes person,’” he says. “She’s somebody who wants to have the academic discussion about a case.”

Rubin says she is humble and quiet, but he can tell she loves to win.

“When I congratulate her, I get the little smile,” he says. “And then I know she got it.”

Delivering Incredible Results

From the very beginning, Rubin was “incredibly impressed” by Doan. He says she gets incredible results and that one of her greatest skills is the confidence she instills in clients.

Though Doan is only 31, not even older clients ask him to oversee her work. Clients love her, from younger clients closer to her age to the older clients who can sometimes be wary of having a younger attorney.

“I’m talking about the 50-year-old, tough construction workers,” he says. “They think she is great; they think she is prompt responding to them. They sometimes call her first before they even call me.”

“For somebody with her level of experience to have that degree of confidence from older clients is a real credit to her,” he says.

Doan has been working with Rubin since she was his law clerk. Rubin says she caught on instantly.

“Within one year, we took off the training wheels and she just did it herself,” he says. “I was actually blown away that she understood it so easily.”

One of Doan’s first cases involved a parking lot, something Rubin describes as very technical that requires a lot of supporting evidence and analysis

“I can’t tell you that I was surprised — I knew she would do a great job — but she absolutely won,” Rubin says.

Another of her first cases was a statutory permanent total case, something Rubin describes as a really hard case. The client had lost use of one foot and function in the other after getting hit while driving for work.

“It was an awful situation, but I got to go up there and argue for it and be successful on it,” Doan says.

Rubin describes Doan’s first oral arguments as great and composed, her work reversing an arbitration decision as amazing, and her research skills as incredible.

“She’s very embarrassed when I say

this, but I’m going to tell you anyway: I truly believe she must have a photographic memory because she remembers case names, details, stacks information from appellate court cases that is quite amazing,” he says. “She has an instant recall of these important cases.”

James R. Clune, a partner at Garofalo, Schreiber & Storm who defends employers against workers’ compensation claims like those represented by Rubin Law Group, always looks forward to trying cases against Doan.

“She’s always prepared,” he says. “She knows her cases thoroughly. You don’t waste time getting through unnecessary things that should have already been resolved beforehand.”

For example, Doan and Rubin Law Group handle medical expenses uniquely. Clune and Doan recently presented about this together at a continuing legal education panel.

“It used to be the primary issue was the amount of disability the worker has sustained,” Clune says. “And now it seems the greater cost in cases are the medical expenses and the greater problems are dealing with medical providers who seem to treat more than perhaps they should and seem to charge more than perhaps they should.”

In response, Rubin Law Group hires a professional vendor to process those reported medical expenses. Clune and Doan may still debate whether the case is valid, but Clune can trust that the bills Doan presents him are “cut to the bone.”

“It’s an expense for them, but it’s a refreshing experience to come into the negotiation and know we already know what the bills should be,” he says.

Doan also often has case law to support her arguments. Clune says that’s unusual in workers’ compensation because most workers’ compensation attorneys deal with such a big volume of cases that it can be hard to devote much time to research.

“It’s difficult to have to take the time,” Clune says. “But she does.”

As Doan sees it, that extra research makes her do the best job possible.

“I go overboard on citing cases sometimes because I think that everything needs to be supported, and I want to give the commission as much information as I can possibly provide,” Doan says.

Rubin says he was blown away that she understood niche workers’ compensation law so quickly and so easily.

“I’m very fortunate that our paths crossed,” Rubin says. “The practice is great.” ■