

From the Courtroom to the Summit: Miami Litigator Takes on Mount Rainier

By Michael A. Mora

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What You Need to Know

- The attorney went on the epic climb to raise awareness and money for Sherpas killed on Mount Everest, and to honor a best friend's late father.
- The climb took 41 hours, with the peak of the trek on the top of the mountain with a view of the heavens.
- The experience is one of the many ways an attorney can attain work-life balance.

Dan Dolan, a co-founding partner of Dolan Dobrinsky Rosenblum Bluestein, was at his desk when he received a call from his buddy, Jeff Zonarini, the managing director at HIG Capital.

"Guess what?" Zonarini said. "We got chosen."

Zonarini was referring to an ambitious climb of Mount Rainier, a summit elevation of almost 14,500 ft., sponsored by the Juniper Fund, which selects nine climbers each year to raise money for families of Sherpas killed on Mount Everest. Without telling Dolan, Zonarini signed them both up three years earlier, with no expectations of being selected.



(Courtesy photo)

The six mountaineers trekking up Mount Rainier.

"We're in!" Dolan cheered.

Over the next six weeks, while balancing a busy legal practice, Dolan trained at least 90 minutes a day six days a week, running up staircases in his building as well as all around Miami. For the final three weeks, Dolan ran up to seven miles each day in the mountains surrounding Lake Tahoe to become accustomed to a higher altitude climate.

And on the day of the climb, Dolan donned a 50-pound pack equipped with an ice axe, and journeyed up the first leg of the climb from the parking lot to base camp, about 7,000 feet above



The six mountaineers trekking up Mount Rainier.

ground. After setting camp, the nine climbers rested for four hours and arose around midnight.

Leading the way was Melissa Arnot Reid, the guide who was the first American woman to have summited Mount Everest without oxygen. The climbers trekked for an hour, stopped to ingest 300 calories and

drank half a liter of water at a breakpoint, and repeated that sequence each hour of the ascent.

“Three of our nine did not make it past the first breakpoint,” Dolan said. “My mental process is you’re always checking on your body. But with the mountain gear, at a certain point, you don’t really like the answers you are getting back from your body.”

And about seven hours later, the six climbers reached the peak—a crater, as Mount Rainier is an active volcano.

“The visuals of being at the top of any high place certainly puts you in perspective of your own life,” Dolan said. “It was a beautiful view. You could see the clouds all beneath us.”

But there was one more thing that had to happen.

Zanarini lost his father earlier in the year, and they dedicated the hike to both the Sherpas, and his dad, Roger.

“Jeff brought a big flag of his dad up on the mountain, and we broke that out,” Dolan said.

“It was a picture of his dad from high school and it resembled Jeff, and we both laughed that Jeff brought a picture of himself. We went from Mount Rainier to Chicago the next week and had the celebration of life for his dad and had that flag there as well.”

But as all experiences have their highs, the next stage of the climb was heading to the low point. Walking down the mountain, Dolan stayed vigilant to each step to avoid a misstep that had caused knee injuries and other medical maladies to many previous mountaineers.

“There’s no impact when you are climbing up,” Dolan said. “But there is a significant impact when you are climbing down. It is magnified by the weight of the pack and the gravity of stepping. If you lose your balance, your knees will not like that very much.”

And about 41 hours after the hike began, it came to a successful end.

As far as other litigators thinking about trading their law books for mountain gear after a buddy suggests the idea of a climb, Dolan had one piece of advice.

“Say yes and do it.”

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