

Joann Berrios : A multi-talented individual

If Joann Berrios didn't work as the SSA Assistant General Manager at the Detroit Zoo, it's quite probable she would be teaching English as a Second Language – possibly again in Japan.

When she was in the Air Force, she was stationed in Japan for five years. In addition to her military duties; Joann was an English teacher for a Japanese company. This second job provided her with tremendous satisfaction as she enjoyed working with people who really wanted to learn. She also took the opportunity to immerse herself in the culture of this island country in the Pacific.

But how did Joann end up in the military?

At 19 ½ years old, Joann was sitting in an upper level psychology class at Western Michigan University and her instructor shouted, "Save the world with Behavioral Analysis." This thought made Joann realize that maybe she could develop a better understanding of the world if she stepped outside the box and explored a new and exciting path. So she did. As a result, Joann joined the Air Force. After Basic Training, she was stationed at Yokota, an Air Force base outside of Tokyo where she worked for the Defense Accounting and Finance Service. While in the military, Joann earned a bachelor degree in psychology with a minor in business.



Joann receives the Jr. Enlisted of the Year award.

incorporate your own style into your job," she said.

Joann said, "I can respond to the needs from different levels of people and filter them while keeping balance." She shared that she is stimulated from interacting with people.

"I have a strong desire to help others. I take joy in watching people grow personally, beyond their expected limitations," she added.

With her boundless energy and love of adventure, it's no surprise that Joann describes herself as a sponge -- absorbing passion from music, books, family and others. "I'm generally outgoing, quick moving and never waste a minute, which may very well be my strength and weakness." At times this may seem a bit overwhelming to others but to Joann it's her way of trying to have urgency and



Joann with the owner of the English school

accomplish as much as possible. And she's not the only one who believes she displays these characteristics. When she was in Japan, her nickname was "Sakachi," which means hasty or impatient as she was always on the move.

Growing up in Detroit

A typical blue collar neighborhood in the suburbs of Detroit is where Joann called home. Two strict-loving parents, three older siblings, 15 aunts and uncles, 47 cousins, 102 other relatives, and countless friends laid a foundation in Joann to understand and appreciate many different kinds of people. Not to mention chaotic situations, which we all can



relate to when friends and family get together for food, fun, music and dancing.



Speaking of music and dancing, one Christmas with Joann, her favorite holiday, would certainly bring you up to speed on Joann's love of these activities. *It's A Wonderful Life* is on the TV in the background, Feliz Navidad belting on repeat, friends and family eating and reminiscing, while Joann is dancing and singing with whoever she can grab out of their seat. But Joann's love of music does not stop there. When not hard at work she often can be found with friends and family on her self created karaoke circuit delivering a great Natalie Merchant hit. Joann's appreciation for sharing, fun and good times in life are countless. One can say she definitely will never look back on life and regret investing in these finer qualities of life.

With all this talk of love and the artistic side of Joann, one might be tempted to forget Joann's competitive side. She began playing competitive sports as a child and continues in athletics, although admitting not as much as she would like



Softball playoffs in Yokota Japan



Joann and the Karaoke crew in Japan

to. Joann has a strong belief that pushing yourself and your team to be their best is rewarding and builds the type of character

that helps you succeed in today's world. "We try to make a difference in teaching these kids how to become better citizens and not let them quit," she said. One of her heroes is her sister Jennifer, Detroit's catering operations manager. Joann said, "I've always looked up to her and enjoy coaching with her. Sports brought us closer together. We're opposite personalities, but we respect each other."



Unfortunately, Joann lost her father while she was in high school. She attributes her strict upbringing in making her the person she is today. When asked who she would most like to have lunch with, she quickly replied her father.

Joann's interests

Joann likes to travel; her last trip took her to Czech Republic, Slovakia and Amsterdam. If Joann could travel anywhere, she would want to go Australia to experience the Aboriginal culture along with the mountains and ocean.

Joann is a big sports fan, especially basketball. She also enjoys Detroit Tigers baseball. But it's just not the game that appeals to her. She said that she can't be late to a game; she has to be there before the national anthem is played. "I can't miss it, because there is just something about this song in a quiet stadium packed with people that makes me appreciate our country."

Few people know that she wants to learn to play the guitar. And she claims she has made it a goal even though she knows it's going to be difficult. Joann doesn't have just one favorite musician as she likes most music, from 60s folk tunes to the current radio, Beatles and of course, Motown as this type of music was born in Detroit. Joann said she couldn't live without music. Her most valued possession is her music collection. While she values her music collection, her sentimental possession involves the end of her blanket she had as a youngster. She rescued it from the trash after her mother tossed it out for safety reasons.



Joann, sister Jennifer (right) and friend at the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame



On a relaxing note, when Joann has time, she enjoys reading and taking photos of her nieces and nephews. With these color and black-and-white images, she creates photo collages. These collages make one-of-kind presents for friends and relatives. One day she hopes to have her own darkroom to develop her own film as she doesn't plan on making the switch to digital.

Joann, with sister Jeannette