

The Magical Charm of JOAN DUKORE

By Simone Marron

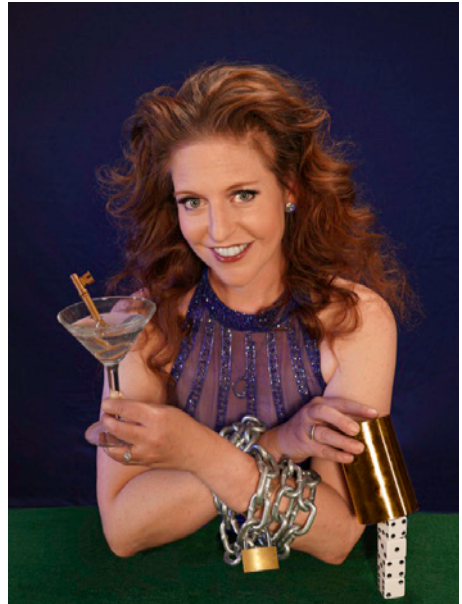
I.B.M. member Joan Dukore is a talented, charming, entertaining, and witty magician. She is very in demand, and fills her busy schedule performing for corporate clients, magic clubs, and at the Lost Spirits Distillery in Las Vegas, Nevada. "I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii on August 4, several decades ago," she said. (Secretly, she is forty-seven and proud of it.)

Joan's mother was born and raised in Hawaii, and her father was head of the drama department at the University of Hawaii. "I call myself half an only child. My mother only had one child and didn't want any more. She knew they couldn't get more perfect!" joked Joan. Her dad remarried and gave Joan a half brother when she was ten, and a half sister when she was twelve.

Joan's mother moved to Oregon after Joan finished high school, and lived there until she passed in 2012. Her father taught at Virginia Tech and now lives in Washington, D.C. Her half-siblings also live in the D.C. area.

She comes from a family of authors. "My mom wrote fiction, and her first book won the Maxwell Perkins prize. She also wrote plays and wrote for the Honolulu Magazine. My father writes about other writers. He is a specialist on George Bernard Shaw, but also writes about directors like Sam Peckinpah, and playwrights

like Harold Pinter. If you have studied George Bernard Shaw, you have probably read one of my dad's books. My uncle wrote movies like *Greased Lightning* and put himself through college writing teen romance novels. He also ghost wrote one of the Nancy Drew novels." Joan's grandfather wrote about Hawaiiana. Although Joan is not a writer, she has recorded approximately sixty-four audio books in her spare time.



Joan Dukore. RICHARD FAVERTY PHOTO



Promotional shot for Joan and Jacob Jax's show at the Peller Theater at the Magic Castle for their 2023 show. RICHARD FAVERTY PHOTO

Joan has always been frustrated with people mispronouncing her name. “When I go to Starbucks, they usually call for ‘Joanne.’ I ask them if they would go to the bank and ask for a ‘lo-ann,’ and if not, why would they think my name is ‘Joanne?’ If they do pronounce my name correctly, I know they have spelt it ‘Jone.’ There just are not many Joans around nowadays! I was also friends with Joan Lawton, and we used to joke about being the last two Joans. I always wanted to meet

Joan Rivers to ask her how famous she had to be before people pronounced her name correctly. The one time I was next to her, I was playing a silent character and missed my opportunity.”

When Joan was fifteen, she moved to Virginia to attend the Virginia School of the Arts, where she studied ballet dance for two years. “I was kicked out for not losing enough weight. In ballet in the nineties, there was no such things as weight shaming or fat shaming. It was ‘You need to look like this, or you need to go.’” Joan was by no means overweight, but the standards were very strict, and only their idea of ‘perfection’ would pass muster.

Undaunted, Joan returned to Hawaii to complete her junior and senior year at Punahou School, while working in restaurants. “Obama went to Punahou before me, but after my mom,” she said. Joan also worked as a soloist at the Honolulu Dance Theater and appeared on shows at the Waikiki Beachcomber, where other acts predicted her future was in Las Vegas. After being unsuccessful in several auditions with ballet companies, Joan, at the age of nineteen, packed up her life and moved to the city of lights. “They told me that ‘just like that,’ I would get an apartment, and a job, and everything would



Joan performing in the 654 Close-up room at the Chicago Magic Lounge.



Top: Joan's father teaching her to dance at age four. Bottom: Joan at age three with her mother.

happen for me. 'Just like that' took a year. It was rough, and at my age now, I wouldn't have the guts to do that again."

After a year in Vegas, an agency offered Joan a job in Japan but the contract wouldn't begin for a while. They offered her an interim position as a dancer with Circo Dolarea – a small family-owned circus that mostly toured the Hispanic communities in Southern California. Some of the Dolarea family members were magicians. Between her father teaching her some magic and learning on her own from magic books, Joan's interest in magic was piqued.

Joan worked with magician Bryan Stoops throughout her six months in Japan. Although she was a dancer in the show, her growing magic knowledge afforded her

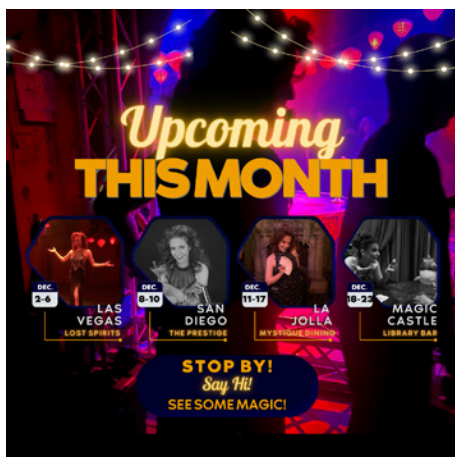


Dressed as a ballerina magician for Halloween – age 6 or 7

the opportunity to also work with Bryan as his assistant. She learned some magic principles from Bryan and would often go to an international bar in Tsu City, where she performed card tricks and bar bets. She already had a decent knowledge of the Japanese language, which she learned during her many years in Hawaii, and her language skills only increased during her stay in Japan. She later returned to Japan for a second contract.

Joan returned to Vegas and, one day while waitressing at Denny's, a magician by the name of Scott Hitchcock came in. Joan had not been aware that there were full-time magicians who were not illusionists. Before long, the two were dating, then engaged, and putting together an act.

Jeff McBride was putting on a show at Magicopolis, in Santa Monica, around the same time. "Jeff said that if Scott and I put together an act, that we could have the variety spot, and assist him in the rest of the show," Joan said. "We put together an act with the help of Tobias Beckwith, combining our swing dancing and magic, and we took on the name of 'Magic Feet.' I really loved that act. It was cute and so much fun."



Joan's busy December 2023 schedule.

Joan had started working at Caesar's Magical Empire in 2000 as a Destiny Guide, but temporarily left to tour her and Scott's expanded act with Jeff McBride in Atlantic City, Virginia Beach, and the World Cruise.

Magic Feets also performed at the world-famous Magic Castle in Hollywood, and you can see a video of that performance at bit.ly/MagicFeets. Joan tells us, "Eventually, Scott and I started growing apart. We are still great friends, but the biggest devastation is that "Magic Feets" is no longer."

Joan also worked several summers as a counselor at Tannen's Magic Camp. She spent time with mentors like Rocco and Simon Lovell, among other talented legends. She even got to meet David Copperfield. Many performers auditioned to work Tannen's Jubilee, and Magic Feets was among those hired. "We got hired to replace Rudy Coby, whose legs got stuck in Europe," Joan said. "We had the emcee say, 'I'm really sorry, but our previously announced performer could not perform this evening. However, our next act does have four legs.'"

Joan's first solo gig, which was a silent act with music, was in September 2001 at the Magicians' Alliance of Eastern States convention. "I don't think you're supposed to do your first solo act at a magic conven-

tion. If that wasn't enough, Johnny and Pam Thompson were in the audience! I didn't tell anyone it was my first time, and I think it was at least ten years later when I confessed that information to John and Pam," said Joan.

Despite her trepidation, the act went well. "I did my rope act, which I still do a version of today, my coffee act, which I retired because working with liquids is too stressful, and I did fire-eating," she said. The last time Joan performed fire-eating was in Japan in 2010. "I'd love to still do fire, but dealing with the fire laws and fire marshals are a nightmare, and my fiancé Benny prefers I don't do it."

Joan struck up a strong friendship with the Thompsons in the late nineties. Pam had asked her to help write a lecture on being a magician's assistant, which debuted at the MAES convention. The Thompsons had to stay a day longer at MAES. With all flights being canceled due to the events of 9/11, they had to rent a car and drive back from the East Coast, with the birds and dogs, to get to a gig at the Magic Castle.

Joan's friendship with the Thompsons grew. Back then, she would go to their



First promotional shot. RICHARD FAVERTY PHOTO



Above: One of Joan's Magic Castle appearances. TAYLOR WONG PHOTO Right: Performing at Illusions Magic Lounge.



home two or three times a week for dinner. Johnny gave her advice for her act and taught her his egg bag routine, and Pam helped her furnish her first condo. Joan would sort out and help them file their taxes. She remained close with them for the rest of their lives. After Johnny's passing, Joan helped with Pam's care.

One of Scott's friends, Sophie Evans, told her that she was good enough to be a magician and that she should consider doing full-time magic rather than dancing. Sophie, along with teaching Joan so much about magic, got Joan her very first solo magic gig for lay people, which was doing strolling magic at a lumber convention. "I was terrified," said Joan. "The only thing that I occasionally still do now that I did in that walk-around set was Professor's Nightmare. I did effects like Pen through

Bill and Insurance Policy. I think it was the most terrifying experience of my life."

Joan opened for Amazing Johnathan and filled in for one of his assistants several times. She would often go and hang



Performing at the Lost Spirits Distillery.

out backstage. The rule was that if you were backstage during the show, you had to come on stage and be part of the *Acid Trip* skit. Even if you were just visiting the backstage, you had to use the masks and wigs while dancing around the stage.

For a couple of months while she waited for Caesar's Magical Empire to rehire her, Joan worked the waiting line at a busy Outback Steakhouse. "It was a paid job, and I got to work out a lot of material there that I still use today," she said. "When you're working a line, you don't have a table, you're surrounded, and people grab things. It's just like working a corporate party. I still work under the same parameters with a lot of my strolling magic today."

Caesars did hire Joan as a strolling magician again, and she continued working there for the next two years until they closed their doors for good. She has great memories of her time working there with so many legends, including Joey Burton,

Earl Nelson, Bob Jardine, the Pendragons, Joseph Gabriel, Daryl, Aldo Colombini, Fernando Keops, George Tovar, Armando Lucero, Apollo Robbins, and Jon Armstrong. On Wednesdays after work, they would all hang out at Gary Darwin's club and hang with the likes of Bob Kohler, Looy Simonoff, Richard Turner, Chris Kenner, and John Calvert.

When Celine Dion opened at Caesars Palace in 2002, security was still being taken very seriously in Vegas. The lines to the theater were so long, and moving so slow, that Joan was hired to perform her strolling magic for people while they waited to get in. She knew it wouldn't last once security became more efficient, and her contract was not renewed.

One of Joan's favorite memories was a red-carpet event when a reporter asked her to pose with Siegfried & Roy. That picture was published in *Las Vegas Magazine*, and Joan was able to get her copy signed



Above: Working at the Magic Castle bar, December 2023. Right: Joan in Hana Hou Magazine, published by Hawaiian Airlines.



by Siegfried at a future Gary Darwin club meeting.

Joan said that she also learned a lot from Jen Adams and Simon Lovell. Simon taught her how to do a spontaneous “Story Deck” from a legitimate shuffled deck, and shared many of his thought processes with her. “Simon was so giving and left a huge imprint on me. He, Jeff McBride, and I would do these story deck challenges when we were working in Atlantic City. To this day, Jeff still sends me anything he finds related to story deck magic, rhyming magic, and Dell O’Dell, as he knows these are my passions,” said Joan.

Alain Nu was another mentor to Joan. Alain helped her develop one of the effects in her current séance routine, and brought her to DC in 2009 to perform for President Obama’s inauguration. While there, she got to hang out with Michael Ammar, Darwin Ortiz, and Joey Burton.

Joan was next hired by Ariann Black to work in the illusion and manipulation show “Secrets” at the Fitzgerald’s Hotel, now the D Hotel, in downtown Las Vegas. She came on board as Black’s assistant, but Black gave her a spot in the show. She was allowed to do whatever she wanted as long as the two acts did not conflict. Joan said that she is forever grateful to Ariann because she got to break in so much of her future act during those six months.

“That was a huge turning point for me,” Joan said. “I went from being a silent act to a speaking act. I didn’t realize I was funny until Peter Reveen, and Norm and Lupe Nielsen came to the show and told me I was.”

During the run, Joan made a five-dollar bet with Ariann that she could get Johnny Thompson to bring Lance Burton to see the show. “Five dollars was worth a lot more back then,” laughed Joan, who said that Johnny talked Lance into attending. “I don’t have a lot of data to back this up, but Lance has this effect on audiences where they suck. I have been in the audience with him twice where the audiences were awful, yet the performers claimed that the crowd always usually laughed. Well, we had the worst audience that night. I was so devastated. The funny thing was that Ariann came out on the stage and handed me five bucks, and said, ‘I didn’t think you could do it.’”

Joan started working at the Venetian in 2003. She continued working there for seventeen years, and during that time performed magic, juggling, and a marionette act. In 2016, Joan started working in the St. Mark’s Square area of the Venetian as a living statue, but they temporarily discontinued the statue program during the COVID-19 pandemic. Joan kept hustling so that she wouldn’t need to return to the



Left: Joan performing in the Secrets show in Las Vegas. Right: Joan with Simon Lovell at Magic Camp.

program, known as Streetmosphere, once it reopened. It was recently announced that Streetmosphere would be discontinued.

“Working at the Venetian was really a huge blessing in disguise,” said Joan. “On the one hand, they didn’t pay a lot, but on the other, they were reasonably flexible with allowing me to take off for other gigs. They got me through the crash of 2008 when there were very few opportunities for being hired as an entertainer. A little money is better than no money, and it was paying the bills. If I didn’t eat, I really didn’t have to do anything else. It covered all my other expenses. I wouldn’t have been able to buy my first condo without that job. It was a nice little cushion to have, but it could also be a hindrance, as I didn’t have to hustle as much.”

When the pandemic struck in 2020, Joan had been working at the Venetian for seventeen years and was able to sign up for unemployment. This got her through an otherwise difficult time. “People made fun of me for working at the Venetian. It’s one of these jobs that sounds more impressive the farther away from the Venetian you get. But, in 2020 when unemployment was so easy for me to obtain, I thought, ‘Who’s laughing now?’”

Joan met Benny Schultz in 2003 when he was working as a stilt-walker at the Venetian, and she was doing magic and

her marionette act. They reconnected in 2008, started dating, and got engaged on Valentine’s Day 2014. Benny was a former Ringling Brothers clown who proudly traveled on the red line. He now works as a stagehand and carpenter at “O” at the Bellagio.

Joan has worked Jeff McBride’s Wonderground several times and in two different locations. “In the early 2000s at the first location, they would inflate this giant tent in the middle of a warehouse,” said Joan. “There would be shadow dancers and close-up magic on the outside, and the show on the inside. I got to perform close-up there for Channing Pollock. I also performed at Wonderground at the Olive.”

Joan got to sit in on many of the early McBride Magic & Mystery School classes and lectures, where she learned much from Jeff and Eugene Burger. “I almost memorized the lectures after hearing them so many times,” she said.

Over the years, Joan has picked up a lot of corporate work. The 2022 NFL Draft took place on top of the lake in front of the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, and Joan got to work one of the draft parties at the Sky Lounge on top of the Delano Hotel for NFL Superstars. All the attendees were former Super Bowl players. “I knew they were all important because they were all wearing these big rings,” said Joan.



Performing Totally Mental.

One of her gigs had her working with three other strolling magicians before a Jerry Seinfeld performance. The four of them joked that they could put on their resume that they opened for Seinfeld, which technically was true.

Another corporate event involved a second magician who would first perform on stage, then enter the crowd to do some strolling magic. Joan was told to stay in her dressing room until he was done, after which she could come out and perform her own strolling magic. The two magicians were not to work the crowd at the same time. “I am in the dressing room, and I hear them announce, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage, David Blaine.’ He was enjoying himself so much that he ended up doing over an hour of strolling magic, until the event was over. They handed me my check and told me thank you, so I didn’t get to perform. David Blaine did my gig for me!”

Joan was regularly hired at Beacher’s Madhouse while it was still at the Hard Rock Hotel. The upbeat nightclub boasted racy shows where celebrities like Paris Hilton, Anna Nicole Smith, and Quentin Tarantino would hang out. “A bunch of us randomly got hired there,” said Joan. “It was the antithesis of me.”

Joan has had a few celebrities in her audiences at the Magic Castle, includ-

ing Curtis Armstrong and Jon Lovitz. “I almost had Jack Black in my audience, but his kids were hungry,” she said.

Between 1999 and 2023, Joan worked about fifteen contracts at the Magic Castle. She has worked every room there, which few performers can claim. In addition to the Magic Castle, Joan has worked at nearly all the Mystique Dining locations, the Prestige Magic Lounge, the Chicago Magic Lounge, Smoke and Mirrors, Poe’s Magic Theater, and Monday Night Magic in New York City.

In Joan’s show, she takes a spectator and makes them into a magician as part of her Linking Ring routine. She tells us what happened once at the House of Cards in Nashville. “I picked this guy Derek, who was having a good time and sitting on the aisle. He was very nice and friendly, and I told him that from now on he would be ‘The Great Derekini,’ and he was great. Usually, after I send the ‘magician’ back to their seat, I say something to the effect of ‘The Great Derekini will be signing autographs in the lobby after the show.’” Unbeknownst to Joan, The Great Derekini was, in fact, the great dancer Derek Hough from NBC’s *Dancing with the Stars*.

In 2021, Lost Spirits Distillery opened at the Area 15 Entertainment Center property in Las Vegas. The self-described Cirque-like rum distillery and cocktail party provides an immersive show that features a maze of stages, lounges, and magical sets – like an amusement park for adults. Joan auditioned for one of the roles as a stage performer and was the fourth entertainer



Some of the books written by members of Joan’s family.



Joan at the Venetian during her seventeen-year-tenure.

hired there. Lost Spirits, which got its start as a rum tasting location, has gone through several iterations and is now more of an entertainment-based experience. Fifteen to twenty entertainers perform there on any given night.

Joan recently celebrated her two-year anniversary at Lost Spirits, where she not only performs but also acts as an emcee, bar magician, and séance officiant. The séances are true shows in which a few participants sit around a table while the rest of the audience looks on from the gallery. Acrobats may be seen dancing on and over the table, with other unexpected activities happening to emphasize the “show” aspect of the séance.

Magicians Jacob Jax, Mondre, Kent Axell, and Will Bradshaw also work at Lost Spirits. With so many other entertainers employed there, Joan has the flexibility to accept other gigs. The venue is very flexible, and the performers must be, too. They often don’t know which role they will be playing until the last minute.

Joan’s television appearances include performing coin productions and juggling for Las Vegas Week on *House Hunters*.

She was also on an episode of TLC’s *Urban Legends* about a runaway bride, whose bones were found fifty years later in a trunk. They tied the story into a performance of the sub trunk. It was filmed on Fremont Street and ended with Joan appearing from the sub trunk in a wedding gown. “It was a hundred and twenty degrees, and we had to do so many takes,” she said. “In the end, when it aired it played in fast forward.” She was also a part of Alain Nu’s television production *Mind Games*.

Joan said that for kids who want to get into magic, she advises them to listen to the people they most admire, especially if they have a chance to converse with them. “There are so many gems that may come up in conversation, that they may have never thought about in both effects and performance theory. So often if something goes wrong, a thing that someone said in passing pops into my head that helps me,” Joan said. “Though it’s good to ask questions, sometimes questions limit us because there is so much knowledge out there that you would never think to ask about. As they say in *Hamilton*, ‘Talk less, smile more.’ Keep your ears and mind open.”

She said that she was very lucky to be in Vegas in the late nineties and early 2000s, “when all these fabulous people were around.” But it wasn’t luck alone that helped Joan become a success. Her talent, tenacity, cheerful nature, stage presence, and ability to entertain an audience brought her to where she is today.

Joan will be working the 2024 Abracornadabra Convention in Des Moines in May. If you are in Las Vegas, be sure to catch this charming and wonderful performer at the Lost Spirits Distillery or one of the other many venues where she appears.

Simone Marron serves as International Treasurer of the I.B.M. and webmaster at magician.org. You may reach her by email at internationalsecretary@magician.org.