

# JEANNE COLLINS

Jeanne Collins is irrepresible! After a successful decades-long executive career in advertising sales, she decided to go back to school for advanced studies in interior design, and now runs her own luxury design firm, called JerMar Design, based in New Canaan. She's a single mom to 16-year old Madeline, they live in a house in New Canaan Jeanne bought seven years ago, and they together manage life as a dynamic duo of businesswoman and New Canaan High School rising senior. She now also aims to become recognized as an inspirational speaker and author...and it's a safe bet she'll be giving a Ted Talk before you can say Tony Robbins! And she's just released *Two Feet In*, a book about her life experience, with the goal of sharing her lessons and energy with people of all ages.



# TWO FEET IN

PHOTOS: ELLYETT PHOTOGRAPHY

Jeanne grew up in Greenwich, the older of two girls with divorced parents, in what Jeanne describes as "the worst house in town, right next to the shopping center next to the train station. But my mom knew that it was worth a struggle to give me and my younger sister a great education and as culturally rich a background as possible." After graduating from Greenwich High, she went to the University of Massachusetts, and after two years not enjoying the cold weather and everything-indoors way of life there, she transferred to Arizona State University to get a degree in Communications and to get some fun-in-the-sun! She studied Food Service in graduate school at NYU and spent a few years working in the restaurant and catering businesses, then pivoted to sales and marketing. Jeanne recalls, "I got a job with Valassis in Wilton working on beauty accounts like L'oreal, Revlon, and Clairol. I started as a sales assistant - to a woman who lives in New Canaan and who's now my good friend. Working my way through a male-dominated industry and securing an executive MBA along the way, I worked hard and started moving up the sales ladder. I started selling the 'rookie route' in Rochester and Buffalo at Valassis, and after a company change 11 years into my career, I worked my way up to VP of Sales at Coupons.com. And after ten years at Coupons.com, I ultimately restructured myself out of a job. I was content to cap my successful two-decade sales career - but eager to apply my business skills and experience in my own venture."

"I'm passionate about interior design and I'd done the design work in a few houses I'd flipped for a profit over the years," Jeanne explains. "I knew starting my own business was the right thing to do, I knew I was ready, and I knew the old adage that when you're passionate about your work it won't seem like work at all, was correct...so I formed JerMar Designs. To learn the how-tos of getting design done, I completed graduate level programs at both the New York Institute

of Art and Design and at Parsons. I hired a business coach who specializes in interior design firms to help with my business development. And to build a portfolio, I advertised on the local moms' Facebook group that I was willing to do design work for free - and within 10 minutes I had 25 willing subjects! One couple asked me to do a total room design plan for the living room in their 6,000 square foot house in Darien and when I presented it, they said they loved absolutely everything but one candle...They bought the full room design and commissioned me to do their entire house! It was the big break I needed, and things have been going gangbusters ever since! I like the flexibility of running my own business and, although a lot of my clients are in Westchester and Fairfield, being able to have clients located anywhere. I love the creative opportunity and practical challenges of turning a vision into reality and am rewarded when my clients tell me that what I've done for them really fits their lifestyle without screaming a particular style or look." Indeed, Jeanne has developed a rich and sophisticated feel and is able to design rooms which transcend stylistic type. JerMar Designs is a thriving business, and Jeanne's design work has previously been featured in B&NC Mag.



PHOTO: AMY VISCHIO

But as if Jeanne's success with JerMar Designs isn't enough, she's now also launching a career as an inspirational speaker! And she's going about developing her brand with the same straight-forward business-minded planning, organization, method, and enthusiasm that's worked for Jeanne in corporate America and with JerMar Designs, and that makes success a tautology. ...First step ...Jeanne's new book...*Two Feet In!* ...Which is all about Jeanne's mantra of striving to be the best at whatever you do...and jumping in with both feet when doing it!

These excerpts summarize Jeanne's purpose and philosophy: "I want you ...to discover the right energy for your own life [with] the *Two Feet In* philosophy. It means committing to [your] choices one hundred percent. It means knowing that no matter what challenges [you] face, [you] will make it through. I live *Two Feet In* because I trust myself now. I stick to the decisions I make for myself instead of endlessly analyzing and second-guessing. There's no bigger blockade to progress than an internal dialogue clouded by doubt. Life requires perseverance, but it also

needs vulnerability. We must open ourselves up to our potential and hold onto our truth when others try to break it down. ...This philosophy was not formulated overnight. I've faced many changes in my life: divorce, romantic struggles, motherhood, and a professional career that has drastically shifted not just once, but twice. With each passing year, I became more and more myself, refining and reshaping based on the lessons that just wouldn't stop coming my way. ...Building a life is not something one does with a wandering mind or insecure fears. While it can be nice to daydream, our lives can only be created with real commitment. Hence: feet, two of them in particular, should be planted firmly in the world in which we want to live. I don't mean to make this sound easy. It took me decades to take command as the designer of my life."



PHOTO: AMY VISCHIO

Jeanne says enthusiastically, "I wrote *Two Feet In* to convey the lessons and energy of my experience. ...And it's really much more about my personal life experience, and overcoming the adversity of two bad marriages and several other failed relationships - which I chronicle in the book - than any kind of a how-to on my work-hard-to-get-ahead strategies. How I make decisions and why. All about learning - and moving on! As it says right on the cover, *Lessons From An All-In Life!*"



**"IT TOOK ME DECADES TO TAKE COMMAND AS THE DESIGNER OF MY LIFE."**



PHOTOS: JANE BEILES

Interestingly, focus groups reading *Two Feet In* reflect that her story and message appeal to a wide socio-demographic spectrum and to men as well as women. "It's funny about men liking the book so much, but it's because the book resonates with different people in different ways and relates to spirituality, career, relationship and self-reflection." Jeanne remarks, "But you know I find the same thing when it comes to my design work. I think it's because I design with the experience of *living in the space* as the primary perspective and purpose. My work comes off as elegant and refined, but it's 'user friendly'. As a very broad adage, you might say I get selected because women like the way my design *looks* and men like the way it *feels*."

*Jeanne's book, Two Feet In: Lessons From an All-In Life, can be found locally at Elm Street Books in New Canaan, and is available online at Amazon. Jeanne will be at Elm Street Books on October 18th at 6:00 for a discussion with Casey Kaplan of B&NC Magazine.*