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BY Dave Hoekstra

It seemed like a mission impossible: Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes reached a settlement in their much-publicized divorce case less than two weeks after Holmes filed for divorce.

“Two weeks is almost unheard of, particularly if it allegedly caught one person by surprise,” said Gemma Allen of the Chicago firm Ladden & Allen, which represented Jeanne Malkin in her 1990 divorce from Chicago real estate mogul Judd Malkin. “But this shows good divorce planning is worth doing. She had a father who was a divorce attorney. This was carefully orchestrated.”

Chicago divorce attorney Maol Sloan is editor and founder of illinoisdivorcedigest.com, which tracks trial court decisions in Cook Will, Lake, Du Page and Kane counties. He said, “Almost all these cases boil down to: What does she want and what does he want? What are you willing to give to get it? What I’m hearing is that she wanted freedom and primary control over their child [Suri, age 6]. What does he want? He wants his reputation.”

Sloan does not think a firm pre-nup came into play.

“I would assume the dollars are not that big a deal,” he said. “Both of them have more than enough to ever worry about money. That’s true in a lot of these big cases. Apparently his relationship with Scientology is the most important thing in his life, and it is connected with his reputation. She wanted to escape. Apparently there is a good balance between those two things.”

Is there an average time for divorce procedures?

“Don’t forget these people have accountants and lawyers they’re dealing with all the time,” Sloan said. “I’d sense her willingness to salvage his reputation and not to be too aggressive when it comes to money probably was the key. And his willingness to allow her to be free. You like to think both of them are concerned about their kid and they had the decency to not make her a pawn.”

As actors, Cruise and Holmes know about the rehearsal process. “Orchestrating is very interesting,” Allen said. “We often talk to clients about the fact there is something involved in learning to leave. The better that is planned, the more smoothly it will go. Everything about this was professional: in New York, she had high visibility with Suri; the fact he was iced away in Iceland [shooting scenes for his sci-fi film ‘Oblivion’]. It was swimmingly planned.”