

## **The Juskiewicz Family: A Spirit of Service**

**Written by Marybeth Cale**

**\*Previously printed as the November 2023 Cover Story for Living Rhinebeck Magazine**

In honor of Veteran's Day this month, we highlight Michael Juskiewicz (Veteran of the United States Navy), his wife Lori (my longtime friend and fellow graduate of Rhinebeck High School Class of 1992), their son Dylan, and Lori's mom, Barbara Riedel.

Their collective spirit of service has continued over the decades since Mike served our country; today, they work tirelessly in volunteer leadership roles with the VFW, among many other initiatives. Regardless of the context, this is a family who leads with humility and heart. It is an honor to call them friends and a great privilege to share their story. Here's more from our interview:

**Lori, I recall when you first moved to Rhinebeck, when we were both in middle school. Tell us more about your childhood.**

I was born in Niskayuna NY. I had a typical childhood with my mother, father, and my brother, Craig Andrews, except that we moved around a lot in our younger years due to my father's job. In 1986, when I was in 6th grade, we landed in Rhinebeck. I knew the area a little since my aunt, Cindy White, and her family had lived here; it was clearly a small, tight-knit town with lots of charm. As a new student at Bulkeley Middle School, I instantly made friends and I am still in touch with several of them to this day. I prayed that my father would not get transferred again. I loved my school, my teachers, and of course all my friends. My prayers were answered and I graduated from Rhinebeck as part of the Class of 1992.

***\*Publisher's note: Lori was, and remains, an officer for Rhinebeck's Class of 1992, continuing to serve as Secretary; she has helped organize five reunions for our group over the past 30-plus years since we graduated from RHS!***

**And how did you and Michael meet?**

Mike and I met in April of 2001. We were accompanying our friends as they met for the first time in the early days of [match.com](http://match.com). We all met up at a car show in Washington, DC, where Mike and his friend had a car on display. We hit it off but lived 500 miles away from each other. I was in Connecticut and Mike was living in Virginia Beach. For the next 3 months, I traveled every other weekend to go visit Mike so we could get to know each other. I finally ended up relocating to Virginia Beach, VA in July of 2001. We eventually moved a little further north to the Petersburg area. While back up here to visit family in 2003, Mike proposed at Hunter Mountain. We were married in 2004, and bought a house in VA where we had our son Dylan in 2008. We celebrated 19 years of marriage in August.

**What inspired you to build your family life in Northern Dutchess County? What do you most enjoy about living here?**

After living in various parts of Virginia for 10 years and becoming parents to Dylan, I felt ready to move back home to be closer to family. As much as I loved Virginia and our proximity to Mike's family, I missed mine. And I wanted Dylan to grow up like I did - in a small community where you knew everyone. Mike originally landed a job in Connecticut, where we lived for 3 yrs. He then transferred and we made our way to Fishkill, NY. We loved living there - Dylan attended 1st grade through 6th grade in that community and we wouldn't have changed anything. Just before COVID hit, we ended up coming back to Red Hook. We didn't originally intend on staying, but we all fell in love with our community. Having grown up in Rhinebeck, I was back home. Mike joined the VFW, and Dylan loved his new school. The sense of finally having Dylan in a community that would give him a similar upbringing to mine was heartwarming. I knew now that he would excel.

**Mike, can you tell us about your background and your military service?**

I was born at Naval Air Station, Lakehurst, NJ to Walter and Sonia Juskiewicz in August 1959. Due to my

father's military career, we moved around a lot during my elementary school years, finally settling in Virginia Beach when I was in the fifth grade. I graduated high school in 1977, married my first wife in 1978, and in January of 1981 I enlisted in the US Navy as an E-1. Nine weeks later, I graduated from boot camp in Orlando Florida as an E-3.

Shortly thereafter, I was ordered to NTC Great Lakes, Illinois for Machinists Mate A school. Upon graduation from A school, I was meritoriously advanced to Machinist Mate 3rd class (E-4) and received orders to NTC Orlando, Florida where I was assigned to the security force at Fireman Apprentice School.

During this time I was advanced to Machinist Mate 2nd class (E-5) before receiving orders to the USS McCloy, FF-1038 - stationed in Norfolk, Virginia. Onboard this ship, I made many deployments to the Mediterranean, North Atlantic, and Caribbean. I then transferred to the USS Emory S. Land, AS-39. At this command I advanced to Machinist Mate 1st Class, E-6 and qualified as Engineering Officer of the Watch and Enlisted Surface Warfare Specialist (ESWS). I became the senior engineer and was responsible for all of the engine room, fire room and all auxiliary engineering equipment. While stationed aboard this ship, my first son, John Michael was born.

I then received orders for Instructor duty at Machinist Mate / Boiler Technician A School in Great Lakes, Illinois. Upon reporting for duty, I participated in the Chief Petty Officer Exam. In August 1986 I was selected and advanced to Machinist Mate Chief Petty Officer (E-7), where I was stationed for 3 years. During this time my second son, Jack Daniel, was born. Then I received orders to the USS Yellowstone Ad-41 IN Norfolk, Virginia. And it was aboard this ship that I was involved in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

During this period of time, myself and two others started a motorcycle club called The Peacekeepers, a military and first responder club. This club is still going strong today and I am the National President. In June of 1992, I was honorably discharged from the Navy and returned home to Virginia Beach. Sometime thereafter my home life changed and my wife and I separated. We shared custody of our two boys.

After meeting and marrying Lori, I continued to work various jobs as a contractor for the military.

Today, I continue to be actively involved with the Peacekeepers Motorcycle club and the Red Hook VFW post 7765. Both of these organizations work to provide assistance to veterans and their families; it is very fulfilling to continue to serve in these capacities.

### **Tell us more about your family's involvement with VFW.**

**Lori:** I became involved with the VFW Auxiliary as a way to be a part of something Mike was passionate about. My Grandfather was a World War II Veteran, and I have a long line of military history in my family. Once I joined the Auxiliary, I became VERY involved. Within my first 6 months of being a member I was asked to be Secretary. This is an appointed position, and was a great way for me to get to know all the ins and outs of what exactly they do.

The VFW Auxiliary is always there to support Veterans, their families, and our communities. We host events throughout the year, two of which are quite significant in terms of engagement and impact: our Christmas event, which last year resulted in us giving away 250 toys to kids in our community - and our Easter event (in 2023, about 85 kids came to meet the Easter Bunny). Both of these events are coordinated in conjunction with the American Cruisers MC Chapter 123.

In March of 2023, I was elected to be Auxiliary President. It is such an honor to work alongside our Commander, Brian Williams, and all of the other Veterans and auxiliary members. Our Post is like an extended family. We all love each other and would be there for one another if needed.

Mike became a member of VFW as a way to meet new people once we moved to Red Hook. He ended up becoming very involved with every event they held. He has chosen to act behind the scenes and thrives helping out in their kitchen. He has been a godsend since the two veterans previously running the kitchen are getting older and it is harder for them to cook for so many. Mike was named Chairman of Veteran Services this past year, and is responsible for getting Veterans help when they need it. He has started delivering meals to homebound Vets, and he also volunteers at every event hosted by the Auxiliary.

**Let's turn to Lori's mom for a moment. Barbara, what has it meant to you to be part of this community for so many years now, and what traditions do you most treasure?**

**Barbara:** Having lived in this region for the past 37 years, I believe I can call this area home. I was born and raised in Troy, NY, so I have always been familiar with the Hudson Valley. What I love most about this area is the diversity - as well as the feeling of community. I worked at Rhinebeck Hardware for 15 years and during that time, I met many people from all walks of life - movie stars, TV personalities, and recording artists, along with locals whose families have been rooted here for generations.

Almost two years ago I also became a member of the VFW Post 7765 Auxiliary in Red Hook, and was recently voted in as Treasurer.

Since becoming a member, I have been able to be a part of helping our Veterans through fundraising and community events. It gives me a strong sense of community and what it means to help others.

**Barbara, I know that you also perform in many parades; can you tell us more?**

**Barbara:** I began playing the Great Highland Bagpipes in 1998 and marched in my first parade in March 2000. The thrill of marching down Fifth Avenue for my first St. Patrick's Day parade will be with me forever. Over the years there have been hundreds of parades, and it has been an honor to have done them with the same people year after year. We've had many laughs - and along the way, some tears as well. To me, there's nothing more beautiful than hearing Highland Cathedral as a bride walks down the aisle - nor is there anything more moving than hearing Amazing Grace at a funeral or memorial service.

**Lori, in your free time, what do you most enjoy doing?**

**Lori:** Mike and I love to go out on his Harley where we attend many charity runs throughout the riding season. We have recently also been getting involved in playing disc golf as a family at Wilcox Park. And every fall, our entire extended family gets together to go pumpkin picking for a day. In the past our favorite place to do that has been Barton Orchards.

**Lori, you have helped coordinate five Rhinebeck High School class reunions since we graduated together in 1992, and now you are raising your son in Northern Dutchess County. What has it meant to you to bring your past into the future?**

**Lori:** I moved away from Rhinebeck in 1997. When you are young, you think there is something better out there. After living in many different places, ending up back in Dutchess County has been amazing. Not only have I been able to reconnect with high school friends, but I am able to share with my son how I grew up. The smaller communities that are always there to help one another. Smaller school sizes where my son can excel and really get to know his teachers. Most of all being back in one of the most beautiful areas there is.

**Learn more about the Red Hook VFW on their website: [vfw7765.org](http://vfw7765.org). The annual holiday toy drive is coming up quickly; if you're inspired by Lori and Mike's spirit of generosity (as we are!), please consider supporting this community-wide event!**

**And on Veteran's Day and every day, remember to express gratitude to those who have served and continue to serve; they have all made tremendous sacrifices to protect our freedoms.**