

Get Inspired!

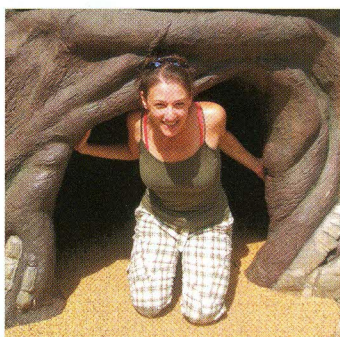
Three super milspouses share their stories.

by Heidi Smith Luedtke, Air Force spouse

Last month, in a story called “More Than a Military Spouse,” we encouraged you to invest in yourself, even when the inconveniences of military life leave you feeling lackluster. This month we’re back with three shining examples of milspouse self-development done right. Prepare to be inspired.

Jacqueline Larkowich

Army spouse
Social worker
Volunteer
Marathon runner



Eight-year Army spouse Jacqueline Larkowich fell in love with her husband, Maj. Jacob Larkowich, during her last semester in college. The couple moved to Germany a few months after their marriage, but her time there was no European vacation. While Jacob deployed, she worked as the Exceptional Family Member Program Coordinator, coached swimming, taught a study skills class, and volunteered to help at-risk children. She also took graduate courses through the University of Oklahoma while living in Germany.

“I loved traveling, making new friends, exploring new cultures, and learning a different language,” Larkowich says.

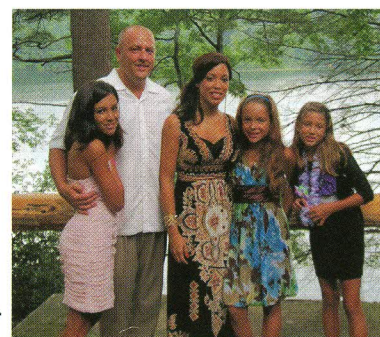
Each time she has relocated, Larkowich seeks out opportunities to grow. During a stint in Cambridge, Mass., she volunteered with Big Brothers and Big Sisters and fell in love with school social work. “This career combined the best of everything: counseling and kids!” Larkowich says.

At their next duty station, Larkowich applied to Virginia Commonwealth University, where she earned her Master’s in social work. Now she counsels students—including many military kids—at a school near Fort Drum.

It has definitely been a winding path. But Larkowich doesn’t regret taking the scenic route to her career goals, because she has explored four U.S. states and western Europe along the way. And she doesn’t believe she’s made sacrifices, either. Instead, she learned “to be patient and flexible,” she says. When she got discouraged, Larkowich redefined short-term objectives and looked for ways to make the most her situation. “I think it’s important to take advantage of the benefits [of military life], as opposed to focusing on the difficulties,” she says.

Maria Morrison

Air Force spouse
Mom of three
College graduate
Beach walker
Business owner



Maria Morrison has been married to Master Sgt. John Morrison for 16 years. In that time, they’ve

seen six duty stations and weathered a year-long separation when John went to Greenland unaccompanied. Today, the sun is shining on Morrison, who is stationed at Patrick AFB in Florida.

“Besides my beautiful girls, finishing my bachelor’s degree, and moving on my own to a new state, my biggest accomplishment as a military spouse is starting my business,” Morrison says. She wanted a durable nail polish free of harsh chemicals, so she created Cult Nails. Since January, customers in 24 countries have purchased her polish. Her cutting-edge colors—like “My Kind of Cool Aid”—have a cult following.

Morrison admits she’s a dreamer, and she sometimes feels guilty she’s not a stay-at-home mom. “I want to be an amazing wife and mother, but I also want to build my own success,” Morrison says. Through Cult Nails, Morrison makes a difference in her family and the community. She’s donated polish and profits to the HollyRod Foundation, which provides compassionate care to people with autism or Parkinson’s disease, and to Orlando Dress for Success.

Her husband is her biggest advocate. “When I doubt myself, John reminds me how far I have come and pushes me forward,” she says. “He even brings my polish to work to show off to the guys!” Morrison encourages military spouses to follow their dreams now. “Don’t wait,” she says. If you want something bad enough, you’ll make it happen.

Lori Volkman

Navy Reserve spouse
Mom of two
Prosecuting attorney
Award-winning blogger
Philanthropist



Lori Volkman celebrated her 19th wedding anniversary with husband, Cmdr. Randall Volkman, during his mid-tour leave in June. Being a geographically-single working mom hasn't stopped her from pursuing her passions. As Volkman nursed her own mom through cancer treatment, she and her friend, photographer Niccole Wollam, founded Lens of Hope, a non-profit that provides free professional portraits to families battling cancer in Washington and Oregon.

The venture has pushed the envelope on Lori's personal skills, consuming weekends and sleep time, she says. "Lens of Hope was founded with a lot of 11 p.m. Skype meetings between two moms with sleeping children. As a military spouse, one thing I know how to operate well is my webcam!"

Their fledgling philanthropy has already done a world of good. "We recently photographed one family whose mother and father both died soon after pictures were taken," Volkman says. "Knowing these portraits are the only ones their kids have makes all the sacrifice worthwhile." She's also proud to be teaching stewardship to her own kids. Lens of Hope reminds Volkman how little control we have over our circumstances and how important it is to reach out. 💕

Shout-Outs

We asked you to tell us about a military spouse who has inspired you. Here are just a few of your responses:

Charity Phillips-Lander: Karen Santiano Francis is the bomb! She helped me get my friend squared away with everything she needs after her husband was injured—all while working, going to school and doing a ton of volunteer work. I have no idea how she keeps all the plates spinning. She is the consummate Momma Bear protecting her cubs. I love her!

Kristen Wolfe: My grandmother! 30-year Army wife and Army Sgt. herself (serving 2 enlistments!), she is there for me day in and day out, always reminding me to take pride in my family's sacrifice, and to hold my head high even on bad days. She is my best friend, and never once missed a phone call when my husband was deployed last summer.

Rebecca Hearen: I would say that Kelie Carlton Zeller inspired me the most. She was the first friend I made when my husband and I did our first PCS away from home. She welcomed me and my kids into her family and taught me how to be independent. I try and treat other wives I meet how she treated me. She has truly helped shape the person I am today.

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