

for the love of water



(Top left) Amy and Erik in 2015 aboard a Viking 42 SC. (Top right) Krueger's Boats & Motors circa 1949 in St. Clair Shores, Michigan. (Above) Amy boating in the North Channel in the early 1980s.

The Lakota people perhaps say it best with *Mni Wiconi* — quite simply, it means “water is life.” Those who have grown up around the water know that is true, especially if they have fallen in love with boats along the way.

Just ask Amy Krueger Malow. As a child growing up in Algonac, Michigan, she reveled in a family lifestyle filled with boating, swimming and fishing, but she never imagined that her own future would be forever entwined with the water.

It likely was inevitable, however. Her family's roots ran deep in the Great Lakes.

Malow's great-grandparents had a business in St. Clair Shores, Michigan, called Krueger's Boats & Motors, where they sold and serviced outboard engines and small boats. Her great-grandparents, grandfather and father, Gregory Peer Gynt Krueger, would all work in the family business; her dad also managed houseboat rentals for Sunset Marina on Harsens Island and even captained the Harsens Island ferry on the north channel of the St. Clair River.

In 1971, Krueger began a career in boat sales at Jefferson Beach Marina, becoming No. 1 in sales within six months, and quickly working his way to the top. He later

established Jefferson Beach Yacht Sales (JBYS) with his wife, Nancy. The two owners worked passionately in their pursuit to deliver the boating lifestyle — Greg serving as president and Nancy overseeing administrative affairs — until their passing in 2015 and 2005, respectively.

Changing course

Malow and her younger brother, Erik, were the fourth generation in a marine industry family. In childhood, she might not have been thinking about her business future — but she was thinking about boats.

“My brother got his first boat on his seventh birthday,” she recalls. “It was a 9-foot Boston Whaler, and we were only allowed to use oars to paddle up and down the canal at first. The second summer, we added an outboard. We had to make boat payments as elementary-aged kids, even if it was just \$10 a month.”

In those early years, the family had a 28-foot Bertram, which gave the children their first memories of long boating vacations. Each summer, the Kruegers would take two weeks off and spend time in cruising Meccas such as Door County, Georgian Bay and the North Channel.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMY MALOW



Jefferson Beach Yacht Sales' Amy Krueger Malow is an advocate for the boating lifestyle, promoting a love for the water.

by Heather Steinberger

Malow remained close to the water as she entered middle school, spending summers between Michigan's Lake St. Clair and Lake Charlevoix and earning a little money painting bottoms and washing boats.

“I can remember painting the bottom of this one boat at Jefferson Beach in about sixth grade,” she says. “It was right in front of what is currently the marina office building, where our service team now operates from. My dad would bring Erik and I to work a couple days a week. We would have lunch at Brownie's where our Grandma Dorothy, my dad's mom, was the manager.”

Malow, along with her brother, helped work boat shows as kids and continued boat washing during summers. As her high school years drew to a close, however, Amy set her sights on a very different vocation.

“I'm actually a registered dietitian,” she says with a chuckle. “I never intended to be part of the family business.”

She earned a bachelor's degree in dietetics at Michigan State University (MSU), and after graduation, she headed west to pursue her master's degree at the University of Washington in Seattle. Amy worked as a clinical dietitian and lived out west for two years. Then she got some news that changed everything.

“My mom became ill,” she says. “It was hard to be so far away, so I moved back to Michigan to be closer to family.”

Malow ultimately finished her master's degree in human nutrition at her alma mater, MSU, and embarked on a successful career in public health working for the university. At approximately the 10-year mark, however, the winds of change were blowing, due to both her mother's advancing illness and the start of her own family.

“I had a very good career,” she remembers. “I worked hard to achieve it, and I liked it. But at that point, joining the family business felt right, and it's been surprising how my skills ultimately applied. I'd worked in a trauma hospital as a clinician, and then in public health developing state and federal grant programs and managing large teams. What I experienced in those venues helped me to look at things a little differently in family business I guess.”



(Top left) The Krueger's 28 Bertram in 1980 during a family boat trip. (Top right) Peer & Dorothy Krueger, Amy's grandparents, at Harsens Island in the 1940s. (Above) Greg delivering Amy and Erik's first boat, a 9-foot Boston Whaler.



(Left) Amy and Greg salmon fishing in 1982. (Middle) Amy and her daughter, Alayna, on a dinghy ride on Round Lake in Charlevoix, Michigan, in 2018. (Right) From left to right, Amy, Greg and Nancy at Okeechobe Lodge during a Viking Rendezvous in 1993.

Coming aboard

Malow came aboard at JBYS part-time in April 2004. Her first child was just 2 years old, and Malow maintained contract work in the public-health field from home. She says it took a little time to feel out the dynamic at JBYS and find her place.

"It was such a well-established company, with long-standing employees, and you think, 'How do I fit in, and will my perspective even have value in this setting?'" she says. "All of a sudden, I'm now with my mom, dad and brother every day — all of us, together, all the time. Learning the workplace dynamic was important."

The Krueger family and extended JBYS team rose to the occasion. As Malow got involved in the varied aspects of the business, she was quickly reassured that the family atmosphere her parents fostered across the team ensured positive, open working relationships.

"The family component must be solid; everyone in the family needs to walk the walk, and there has to be trust. All families have challenges and dysfunction to some degree, so it's important to recognize that trust can look and feel different over time," she says. "You have to be able to work together during good times and bad. This isn't an easy business. And life isn't easy either."

Nothing could have prepared them, however, for the life challenges and economic crisis that lay ahead. In December 2006, the Great Recession hit, and it got ugly fast.

"The sh** hit the fan," Malow says frankly. "We went months without a boat sale. It was stressful and intense, and for years, we didn't know how or if we would stay in business. We knew we had to start thinking outside the box because in economic downturns, our type of business is the first in and the last out."

"Think about a submerged life jacket," she continues. "That was us. As the years went on, I was still technically

part-time but working full-time, and I had become deeply invested, I wasn't going to leave. So, I asked myself, 'How can I be part of a greater solution?'"

So Malow became a full-time employee at JBYS, she focused her energy on building a strong and more diverse leadership team, and her role evolved.

Taking the helm

A light began to shine at the end of that very dark tunnel in 2014. By mid-2015, the proverbial life jacket started to surface, but not before another life-changing event.

"In April 2015, our father passed away unexpectedly," Malow says. "Fortunately, the recent recession had forced us to change our decision-making and operational processes, which resulted in our team learning to work together in new and better ways. Both of my parents gave so much to us and the team, it was now our turn to really do something with all of that. The last couple of years have been the best in the history of the company."

"We have a wonderful team of highly talented professionals who are also exceptional people. Many of my teammates I consider to be family; some I've known for more than 30 years," she continues. "We have been through a lot together, both professionally and personally. Erik and I lost both of our parents who were heavily involved in running the business. I recently lost my fiancée unexpectedly. Many of our team members have suffered their own tragic losses and experienced life-threatening health problems. We do what it takes to shore each other up and leverage our strengths."

Now that both parents have passed on, Malow and her brother are JBYS owners, with Malow serving as president and Krueger as vice president. They remain active members of their team in every possible way.

"We're not owners telling people what to do," she says. "We're workers and planners, and between



"When I cruise around the Great Lakes and see people enjoying the water aspect of this earth as a result of our business, that's pretty cool."

the two of us, we're involved in most everything. It's important to understand all aspects of your business, what you want the team to become and why. You have to comprehend it to lead it."

Boating advocate

These days, JBYS has 38 employees at its seven locations: The company headquarters in St. Clair Shores, Michigan; the Chicago office at Marina City Towers; and offices in Charlevoix, Holland, Grand Haven and Spring Lake, Michigan; as well as Catawba Island, Ohio. JBYS brokers boats and represents 12 premium new boat brands, including Viking and Sunseeker, for both of whom JBYS is the oldest dealer in the world.

In addition, Malow sits on the board of directors for Boats Group, the Michigan Boating Industries Association (MBIA) and the Recreational Boating Industries Educational Foundation (RBIIEF). Her father actually cofounded RBIIEF in the mid-1980s. His goal was to build a better future for the marine industry through education and training.

"The foundation has a scholarship program, with the intention of supporting MBIA members by helping their kids or employees with higher education costs and developing marine training programs," she says. "Historically, it was not just for kids going into the marine industry. I remember my application essay back in the day, and I wasn't going to lie — I said I had no intention of going into the industry, but I would always be an advocate for boating and believed I was worthy of the support.

"I got the scholarship," she adds. "And now I'm not only in the business, I sit on the board!"

Funny how life works out, but Malow says she wouldn't have it any other way. After nearly 16 years at JBYS, she still loves her work. She has a philosophical take on the sense of purpose it has given her.

"Some people see us as just a 'yacht' dealer, and they say, 'We could never have what you sell,'" she explains. "Maybe so, but that's not what this is about for me. It's about promoting a love for the water, whether on a kayak or whatever. Of course, being aboard a beautiful Viking Yacht is a great venue! But seriously, getting people on and loving the water is the premise for everything we do at JBYS. Our employees share this love, which has always been a driving factor in our success, and is the concept our parents began with."

"We nurture the 'want' because we think the boating lifestyle is awesome," she continues. "When I cruise around the Great Lakes and see people enjoying the water aspect of this earth as a result of our business, that's pretty cool."

Looking at Malow, Krueger and their children — the fifth generation in their marine industry family — it's clear that the love of boats and the water can last a lifetime.

"My brother and I take our families to all the same ports and anchorages we visited as kids," Malow says. "The people we grew up spending time on the water with remain some of our closest friends. Water is part of my soul. If I were away from it, I wouldn't feel whole. It makes me feel closer to God."

Mni Wiconi, indeed. ★

(Left) Amy and her son, Wade, running a Carver C37 in 2019. (Middle) Amy on the left and Erik on the right with families during a cruise to Mackinac Island, Michigan, in 2019. (Right) Amy and Erik at a Viking dealer meeting in 2016.