

August 26, 2017

### For the Love of Micah

Micah was born on June 4, 2006, and rescued by A Forever Home in March of 2011, from a puppy mill somewhere in rural Virginia. He came with the name "Digger".

His story is not one of spending his rescued days on the bow of a boat on the Chesapeake Bay, or in the snow of a Mid-Western ski town, or even chasing a Frisbee in his own back yard. Micah did not know, or understand, how to play and only in the last few years would display a rare burst of interaction with some of his stuffed toys. This is nonetheless, Micah's story, and a story that should be told.

We adopted "Digger" on May 15, 2011 and named him Micah, after a prophet in the Old Testament who talked about God's plan. Micah looked like our dog Snoopy who had passed away on Sept. 26, 2010. We would not have adopted Micah had he not come to our home along with the dog we were thinking about adopting. It would have been too painful to adopt a dog that looked so much like our sweet Snoopy. But the dog we were interested in was too intent on chasing our cats who were terrorized; Micah paid them no mind. And so Micah became part of our family.

Micah had spent the first 5 years of his life confined to a wire cage and was rescued along with 3 truckloads of other poodles of all sizes. He came with a heavy metal chain around his neck, even though he was a toy poodle. He had ear mites; gum disease with 5 teeth that needed to be removed — eventually 5 more had to come out; and sweet little Micah had been "debarked".

A Forever Home said that Micah needed to be placed in a home with a calm environment, but the psychological impact of his tragic beginning became as prominent as the physical scars of confinement and debarking. When he first arrived, he would often stand upright in a corner and continuously dig at the wall. A puppy mill rescuer had asked me shortly after we adopted him, if this was a behavior that I had noticed. She said that it is very common in dogs that have been caged for a very long time, and is often done out of boredom and a need for activity. When Micah would have an anxiety attack during a storm, this is a behavior he would revert to.

He was withdrawn on cloudy days, afraid of even a mild rain, and beyond panic during a storm. He would stand in a corner, or go from door to door and scratch endlessly, peeling paint and scratching wood. Neither a Thunder Shirt nor any calming medication ever swayed his fear. And throughout his life, the sound of any loud noise, indoors or out, created stress. The kids playing basketball next door, car doors closing, trash dumpsters being set down — any loud noise, no matter how short-lived, would turn him around on a walk, straight to home.

And from the time we got him until the week before he passed away, years of confinement left him uncomfortable outside in the open. He always wanted to walk up next to the walls of the house, in the mulch and spider webs; along the outside edge of the parking lot pavement; up against, or under, the sides and backs of cars; and along the fence in the back yard. On the sidewalk, on his way to the park, he often tried to walk up in the bushes/weeds along the walk. He hugged the sidelines and always veered away from being out in the open.

Micah was afraid of everything and always a little reclusive. He would not lay on the bed with me, and seemed to have a panic attack if I would carry him upstairs and put him on the bed at night. Eventually I slept downstairs on the sofa and he slept in his den or on the hard floor across the room even though there were many pet beds around the room. During his last year he came to sleep in the pet bed next to the sofa, but often came there after I had fallen asleep. He would not lay on the sofa next to me and really he was not comfortable being held until a couple of weeks before he passed away.

Sadly, Micah often seemed a little detached, somewhat in his own world, preferring to lay in his den or across the floor from where I would be sitting, rather than wanting to be next to me. In the evenings when I would be sitting on the sofa watching a movie, he would be laying on the hard floor outside of his den, or in the dining room. He did not seem to be able to fully comprehend closeness, though over the years it seemed to slowly develop. He did greet us when we would return home, and during his last 6 months, 5 1/2 years after he came to live with us, he seemed to be developing a closer attachment to JT and me. When JT's car would come in, he would run to the door to meet him and even run to the car if I let him out. He would also come and lay in whatever room I was in as if to keep an eye on me and I think that was a sense of "closeness" for him. But overall, 5 years of confinement, and probably little or poor human interaction, robbed him of the joy of showing, and accepting, deep affection.

Micah's confinement also caused major skeletal problems with his ankles and back, and arthritic problems with his hips and back. Micah stood with his front elbows flared out, like a person with their hands on their hips, and with the bend in his ankles occurring further back than the natural bend. This unnatural bend was caused by years of standing in a wire cage, which eventually led to back problems too. And Micah's hip deterioration was so severe that by Christmas of 2016 he was no longer able to walk. He began Laser and Acupuncture treatments in January, and along with daily medication, he regained his mobility until he passed away.

Micah also came with severe allergies that caused him to bite through his skin, removing hair and flesh. During the first 2 months that he lived with us, he was in the emergency room twice for biting himself so intensely that he caused an ulcer. Six months later we had him tested and he began weekly allergy shots. But even with shots, Micah's allergies were so severe that he needed twice daily prescription oral medication, and in the spring and fall often had to wear a collar to keep from biting himself. This endured throughout his lifetime.

Eventually, at the age of 8, Micah developed Cushings Disease, also a "lifetime" issue that required daily medication, and testing every few months, to ensure that the medication and dosage was still working.

Sweet little Micah's debarking left him with many issues related to eating and drinking. From the time we first adopted him he was always gagging — every time he drank water, sometimes when he ate, and sometimes just out of the blue. When his gagging increased during the last couple of years, we attributed it to growth in his scar tissue related to debarking. Unfortunately, this proved to be a fatal oversight as it masked an underlying heart problem also characterized by gagging.

And 6 weeks before Micah passed away, his hip problems seemed to be having a set-back. He seemed uncomfortable walking, or wouldn't walk, and appeared to be in a great deal of pain.

We made numerous trips to the therapist, his vet, and made a trip to the ER, where they only checked his breathing and released him. Unfortunately Micah's long standing hip problems distorted everyone's perspective, until a week before his death, when the therapist determined that Micah's hip was not the issue.

Micah's immeasurable suffering for those 6 weeks, was in his stomach, caused by pancreatitis which also causes a dog to have trouble walking, or to avoid walking.

Even in his dying, his puppy mill years won out against any chance Micah might have had for a little more time. His gagging, caused by being debarked, masked the progression of a heart problem that went untreated. And his hip deterioration, impacted by years of being caged, masked the pancreatitis, that went untreated, and eventually contributed to his death.

With all that he had lived through, he was the most humble creature ... he would not pass any of the other pets, but stand and wait patiently for them to move, even first thing in the morning when he was needing a bathroom break. If Petey was laying at the screen door, or Lucy was sitting on the porch steps, he would wait for them to move rather than pass by. I would have to make them move out of the way before he would go.

And he was very gentle. Lucy, our neighbors cat, would sometimes get right up in his face to lick his eyes and he would just stand very still and let her. On a walk, he was in his own world. He paid no attention to the ducks on the Greenway, as if they weren't even there. He was totally focused on where he was and what he was doing. The most excitement I would see from him came from noticing another small dog. He probably felt some connection to the only good memory of his past.

Micah was a very special little dog who passed away just after midnight on August 24, 2017. Even with all of his suffering, early in his life, and during his last month, he remained gentle and sweet. I only hope, and pray, that he truly felt loved. Caring for Micah was evident in the devotion of our time, and his great expense. But loving him was hinged to peeling away of years of intense neglect and suffering.

*With deep, deep sadness ... We love you and we miss you so much Micah — more than we could have ever imagined. Know peace, and joy, with Snoopy. I do believe that he saw your hurt and sent you to us to be cared for and loved. Until we meet again...*

mommy and JT.

This is Micah's story and one that should be told.

Now, and each year on Micah's birthday, his story will go to a different charity serving the state of Virginia, and a donation will be made in his loving memory for the purpose of eradicating puppy mills throughout his state. This is Micah's story, and for the love of Micah, it is one that will be told — over and over, and over again.

*Robbin Jo Holland*  
*AJ Holland*

Coming in the door a few months ago, I greeted Micah by calling him Chubby McDougal. He got so excited — he loved that name. I eventually turned his name into a song, which he also loved, and I sang it to him every day.

I sat up holding him at night a few times, during his last month, and would softly sing this song to him. And in the ER, the day before he passed away, I sang this song softly in his ear. I want to remember it because it reminds me so much of this very special little boy.

#### Micah's Song

Chubby Do...Chubby Day, Chubby Chubby All the Way  
Chubby Do...Chubby Day, Chubby Mr. Micah Yeah...

He's a Chubby MacDougal Boy, Chubby Little Micah Boy  
Chubby Do... Chubby Day... Chubby Chubby All the Way

He's a Chubby MacDougal Boy, Chubby Little Micah Toy  
Chubby Do... Chubby Day... Chubby Chubby All the Way

He's a Chubby MacDougal Boy, Lovely Little Micah Toy  
Chubby Do... Chubby Day... Chubby Chubby All the Way  
Chubby Do...Chubby Day, Chubby Mr. Micah Yeah...