



## *The Hughes Family* — Sharing Their Big Hearts

By Jenna Caputo | Photos by Angela Mia Photography

Mariesa and Chris Hughes have a big bed. They actually have a *really* big bed, measuring about 21 feet wide. That's because along with their big hearts, they also have 22 rescue dogs that like to sleep with them!

Their love for dogs started at a young age. Born and raised right here in Clifton Park, Mariesa grew up enjoying many family parties with her large Italian family, spending summer days at the pool and participating in Girl Scouts. She rescued her first dog off the streets of Troy when she was nine years old and named her Honey. After that, Mariesa always had dogs. Initially, she never realized you could buy dogs as well. She thought they always came from a shelter. Later, she began working with Forever Home Greyhounds and started her fostering career there.

Chris was born in High Wycombe, England. His family moved to the US after his father's job at IMG assigned him to work in Cleveland, OH for 18 months. Their family never ended up leaving. His mom wasn't allowed to have dogs when she was younger, so once they got here, she made sure to have as many as possible. Chris' first dog was Beethoven, a mix breed rescued in Elyria, OH.



Chris was an athlete his whole life, participating in several sports like baseball, basketball, golf, tennis and football. His family went on many big vacations. One of their favorites was going to Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean near the southeast coast of Africa.

Chris went on to a career in marketing and Mariesa to occupational therapy, after caring for her grandmother until she passed at 103. During that time, Mariesa realized she wanted to help other senior adults as well, and now practices in skilled nursing facilities, as well as long term care and assisted living facilities. “I love the population I work with, helping them improve and regain function to be their best selves,” says Mariesa. Chris now works as a digital media specialist for Weruva International, a pet food company.

After meeting Chris through a friend on Facebook, Mariesa eventually moved to Ohio to give their relationship a chance, but there was a stipulation— “He had six dogs and I had two,” says Mariesa. “We said if our dogs didn’t get along, we would call off our engagement and go our separate ways. We are very lucky that they did get along!” They married in October 2013, and later that month, moved back to this area to be closer to Mariesa’s family. As an OT and the only girl of her family, she felt very strongly about being near her parents as they age.

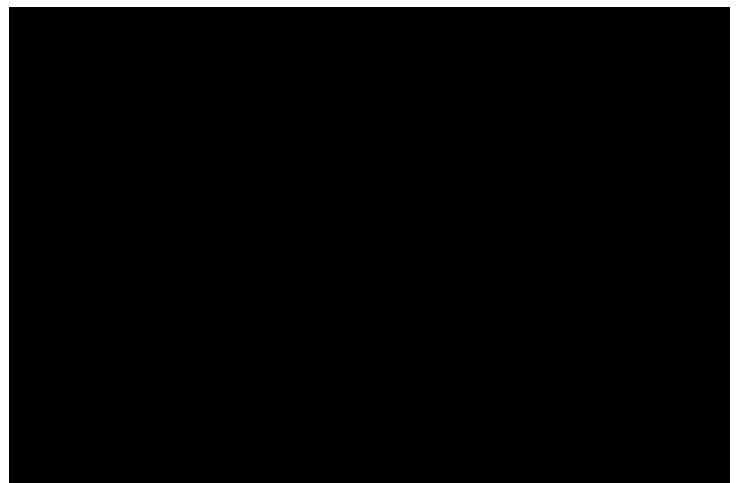
The couple had one very special dog together—Mr. Moses. He’d been with them only 21 months when he unfortunately passed away from an inoperable spinal cord tumor at 12 years old. They spent everything they had trying to save him, and they realized just how expensive having a senior dog can be. They decided to start the Mr. Mo Project in his memory to save senior and special needs dogs and pay their medical expenses for the rest of their lives. The Mr. Mo Project motto is “The Best For The Rest.” Pulling dogs from shelters and owner surrenders, they place them in forever foster homes and cover all of the veterinary care for the rest of the dog’s life.

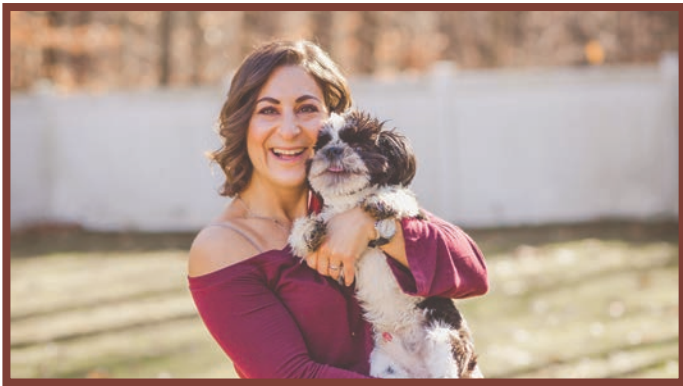
“We found that when you take out the added expense of a senior dog, so many amazing homes open up,” says Mariesa. Normally, they host a big fundraiser each year, but this year’s event was cancelled due to COVID. They are still moving forward with their work, however, and have gained a lot of attention nationally and internationally as well, being featured multiple times on various news outlets, including “The Today Show.” Their work has been incredibly rewarding. “A lot of these dogs that come to us are probably overlooked because of the way they look,” says Chris. “But they have so much life to live. And once you give them the quality care and the right food and all the chances, they really flourish and become just incredible dogs and pets and family members.”

The dogs’ resiliency is an inspiration not only to them but to their forever foster homes as well. “They don’t let their experiences become who they are,” Mariesa explained. “I think it’s so amazing of them, and I wish humans could be more like that. I know if I’ve had a bad day, I just let it become my day. They have gone through neglect and losing limbs because of neglect, and they still shine every day.”



As their own pack has grown at home, they’ve adapted their house to meet all the dogs’ special needs. They’ve installed ramps and agility mats, as well as an oxygen kennel for the dogs with breathing struggles or congestive heart failure and a hydrotherapy pool for the ones that need rehab therapy. And yes, they even had a custom bed made since so many of the dogs wanted to sleep with them, often pushing Chris and Mariesa off the bed. Initially working with a furniture maker to design the custom bed, they ended up with a hand-carved large headboard, built-in drawers underneath for storage and stairs at the end for the dogs that couldn’t jump up. Originally, the plan included a king size mattress along with a full size, but as their pack has grown, it is now two king size mattresses.





Caring for so many dogs is obviously a lot of work, but they are lucky that Chris' job is based from home, so he is able to be there with their special needs dogs throughout the day. Always the athlete though, Chris now focuses on powerlifting as his main sport. He even held the World Deadlift Record for the Revolutionary Powerlifting Syndicate (RPS). He is also the head coach for the ABC Spartans, a Special Olympics powerlifting team from New York. They currently have 10 athletes on the team, all with different disabilities ranging from Downs' Syndrome to Autism. Each athlete competes in the three main lifts—squat, bench press and deadlift—and the best total wins. It has been a rewarding side venture in addition to all of Chris' other work.

The Hughes obviously spend a lot of time caring for their dogs and running the organization, but they always enjoy getting out for a good musical at Proctors when they can, and they're looking forward to doing so again after COVID is over. In the meantime, they will continue to work tirelessly to find homes for senior dogs and remind people that age is not a disease.

If you or someone you know is interested in fostering, visit their website at [mrmoproject.com](http://mrmoproject.com) to fill out the application. Applicants are contacted as dog matches become available. Each new dog in the project is a lifetime financial commitment, so they are limited as to how many they can have at one time. If you are not able to foster, but would like to help out in other ways, you can always host an event or volunteer for the cause. Contact Chris and Mariesa through the website for more information.

#### COMMUNITY EVENT

## 20th ANNUAL ARTISAN MARKET RETURNS!

Contributed by Saratoga County History Center

The "Artisan Market" has returned!

Until Dec. 24th, find handcrafted products created by local artisans with everything from natural soaps and lotions to unique ornaments, jewelry, scrumptious syrups and eatables. All money raised by the Artisan Market will fund Saratoga County History Center public programming and collection maintenance, ensuring that future generations of Saratogians, as well as people from around the world, will be able to learn about and enjoy our amazing, historic region.

#### Brookside Museum

6 Charlton St  
Ballston Spa, NY

Thursdays, 12 – 4pm  
Fridays, 11am – 6pm  
Saturdays, 11am – 5pm  
Sundays, 11am – 4pm

Visit [brooksidemuseum.org](http://brooksidemuseum.org) or email [bsilvestri@brooksidemuseum.org](mailto:bsilvestri@brooksidemuseum.org) for more information.

