

# Jackson's Journey

## From the Puppy Mill to a New Beginning

Hi, my name is **Jackson** and I am a puppy mill survivor. I am a six and half year old male Shih Tzu.



I spent six long years living in a cage and being a "stud." The following is my story about getting a "new beginning," about finding freedom and love when I thought all life provided was pain and misery. My story starts on a cold and snowy Saturday in December of 2007, when I was released by my breeder/owner to New Beginning Shih Tzu Rescue (NBSTR). The rescue picked up a number of younger dogs that were excess stock and the breeder decided to throw me in with the rest as I was at the end of my usefulness.

Early one morning all us refugees were unceremoniously loaded into crates and handed over to a volunteer transporter. The transporter loaded us into a car and we began what turned out to be a very long journey from Arkansas to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and freedom. Every couple of hours we would stop and the transporters would let us out of the crates to go potty outside and to give us food and water. If anyone had what they called an "accident," the transporter cleaned out the crate, so we would have a clean place to sleep. Then we would be reloaded into a different car and off we would go. The other dogs and I had no idea what was happening, but each of the transporters spoke to us in soft loving voices and actually seemed to care about us. This was new to all of us and I certainly had never experienced anything like it. The last leg of our trip was very scary. There was a terrible snow storm and the roads were completely snow covered and very slippery. For the last leg of our journey, the transporter drove about 100 miles through the snow to get us to Milwaukee. On that last leg I learned a few new words and was beginning to wonder if everyone in Wisconsin was as crazy as this guy. I could tell he was nervous as he talked to us and alternately yelled at the other drivers the entire time we were on the road.

When we finally arrived in Milwaukee, my rescuers didn't even know I was included until the crates were unloaded and the rescue volunteers were picking up their new fosters. When all the other dogs were accounted for, there I was...an extra! I was miles from home, so scared I could barely move and there was no place for me to go. Everyone was talking about what to do with me, when the transporter who had just risked his life to get us here, said "I'll take him." I was relieved; at least I wouldn't end up out in the snow. At the same time I thought just my luck, all these other dogs are going with good looking women and I end up with a crazy man. I was loaded back into my crate and off I went to my new foster home.



When I got to my foster home I was placed in a big pen all by myself. There were blankets and pillows to lie on and fresh food and water. There were other dogs in the house and they came by to say hello but pretty much left me to myself. Thank God! I was

too tired and scared to do much but have a drink of water, a bite to eat, and curl-up and go to sleep. After all, I was up at dawn, had been on the road for over 12 hours and it was nearly midnight. My new foster parents told me to go to sleep, and turned out the lights.

In the morning, there was more food and I was taken outside to do my "business." My foster parents were happy and surprised that I waited to go outside. Then they said "You are a dirty stinky little puppy. You need a haircut and bath." I was going to be offended, but then I remembered my motto, "Hey, call me anything you like, just don't call me late for supper." As it turned out I was a "dirty, stinky little puppy." Just look at my picture.

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You can't tell from the picture but the entire back half of me was one big mat. My foster dad brought out some scissors and started to give me the first haircut I had had in a very long time. He slowly started to cut the mats away. I was very scared; I didn't know what to do so I just laid there and hoped he wasn't going to hurt me. My foster dad moved very slowly and started to snip away at my hair. Every time he snipped my skin hurt a little less; as the individual hairs embedded inside the mats were cut, they stopped pulling my hair roots and my skin. After over



two and half hours of snip, snip, snip, my butt was almost bare but I had lost all of the mats and the rest of my hair was cut short. You can see in this picture, how long my hair was and how short my backside was cut to remove the mats.

Next it was bath time. I was still so scared that I sat perfectly still and let my foster parents scrub me and scrub me. They finally finished, gently took me out of the wash tub, dried me off and put me back in the pen to finish drying. They turned on a space heater so I

would stay warm. It was delightful! The lavender soap they used made me feel very clean and relaxed. I also smelled wonderful!

It was right about now that my foster dad decided to name me "Jackson," after Stonewall Jackson, a Civil War general who got his nickname for standing like a stone wall while his men were panicking during the battle of Bull Run, or Manassas as the Southern folk like to call it. He said I deserved such a fine name for the way I sat like a stone wall while I was being clipped and bathed. Little did he know that I wasn't being brave, rather I was frozen in pure terror from all that was happening to me.

Well, here I am all cleaned up and have been given the run of the house. Except I have to wear a belly band since my foster parents don't appreciate me trying to leave my mark on every door jam in the house. The other dogs in the house are all pretty nice, and just leave me alone. I don't really know how to play or socialize so I pretty much stay wherever my foster parents put me. Here I am sitting in my first chair. You can see I am still pretty scared. But the chair is soooo much more comfortable than the cold wire cage floor I had to sit or stand on in the mill.



The next couple of days were uneventful. I got to relax and just hang around the house. I kept my distance from everyone, but life was good. There was

plenty of water and food. Unfortunately, I didn't feel like eating a lot because the infections in my mouth hurt so bad they made chewing painful. There was a warm, soft place to sleep and no one locked me in a cage or tried to hurt me. Then one day my foster parents took me to the vet. She poked and prodded me and touched me in places I didn't think any respectable girl would on a first encounter. We found out from the vet just how hard my six years living in the mill had been on my body.

Physically I was a mess. My coat was thin and very coarse and my skin was red and flaky, both conditions due to the substandard food I had been fed. My ears and eyes were infected. The

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corneas of my eyes were scarred from the infections and from being scratched and irritated from my long hair and who knows what. As a result I am partially blind in one eye and I do not produce enough tears. So now I need an ointment applied to my eyes every day.

The vet next looked in my mouth. She was shocked at how bad my teeth and gums were. I was missing many of my teeth, and of those I still had, the majority were either rotten or broken. I guess I busted them when I was chewing on the bars of my cage at the mill. The gums were very badly infected. It's no wonder that I had such a hard time eating and I was at only about 70% of my ideal weight. I weighed about 12 pounds when I should have weighed 17. I was slowly starving to death because it hurt too much to eat.

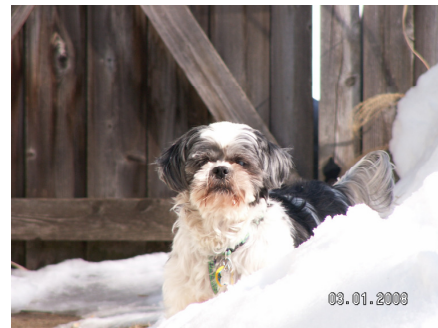


Then the vet listened to my heart. She said it sounded like a washing machine. Instead of thump, thump, thump, it goes swoosh, swoosh, swoosh. The vet said I had somewhere between a class 4 and 5 heart murmur. My vet rates heart murmurs on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the worst. A heart murmur indicates abnormal blood flow within the heart, which is usually due to a change in the function of the heart valves. It was my vet's opinion that although I may have had a mild murmur from birth (not uncommon) the seriousness of my murmur was caused by the lengthy and massive infections I have had to endure. The infections had attacked my heart and caused my heart valve tissue to degenerate. I was diagnosed with cardiomyopathy, or heart muscle damage.

As the valve tissue degenerates, the heart is not capable of pumping enough blood to the tissues of the body. As the heart weakens, fluid retention in the lung and the body cavities increases, leading to congestive heart failure. I was also diagnosed with congestive heart failure. The vet said I was in such bad shape that had I not been rescued when I was, I probably would have died within a couple of weeks. The vet said my current life expectancy on medication is less than a year. Thank God I don't have any sense of time or this news might have been depressing.

Then my foster dad asked, "When can he be neutered?" NEUTERED! I thought, what the heck are you talking about Jack? I started to try to voice my opinion but nothing came out. Curse those bastards at the mill! They had had me debarked. That is, my vocal cords were cut so I can't make any noise. If ever I needed to voice my opinion now was the time! Anyway, the vet said we would have to wait for that. First I needed a dental exam and cleaning urgently. But even before that, I needed to go on antibiotics to get the infections under control. Plus there was the problem with my heart being so weak that there was a strong chance I would not make it through the dental cleaning surgery.

After a couple of weeks on antibiotics, my mouth was feeling a whole lot better. I could eat and my foster parents let me eat as much as I wanted. I am on three different heart medicines that I have to take twice a day. Now I don't like taking pills, but my foster mom wraps them in liver sausage and I wolf them right down. Let me tell you, these heart medicines are amazing. I have not felt this good in a long time. I can go outside and play in the snow and run around with the other dogs. I can't do it for very long, 'cause I get tired, but it sure is fun.



Then one day we went back to the vet to have my dental work done. My foster dad said I was DNR. I was elated when I heard that! I thought it meant "**Dis**regard **Neu**ter **Re**quest" when it actually meant "**Do Not Resuscitate**". My vet was so

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worried about me that she cleared her calendar for the morning so she could be with me through the dental surgery and the recovery (I think she had a little crush on me). As you probably guessed, I made it through. I lost all but eight of my teeth. I now have two on the top and six on the bottom. When I woke up, my mouth was sore, but so was the other end of my body. I took a quick peek and whoa.... What the hell! I thought I was DNR!

I have since recovered from the trauma of the surgery. And to be quite honest, I am happier without the family jewels. I don't feel compelled to mark my territory constantly and therefore I don't have to wear the belly band around the house.



It has been a few months now, since I was freed from the puppy mill. My foster mom made me a big soft red bed to sleep on. I get to sleep on my bed right by my foster dad's side.

I am so happy! My good friend Bob calls me "Action Jackson" because my tail is always wagging. Now I have a yard that I can run and play in with the other dogs. The other foster dogs, especially the younger ones, (many which have come and gone to their forever homes), taught me the concept of friendship and playing. I have learned to play tug and have become

very proficient at tearing stuffed animals apart. I have a great time ripping all of the arms, legs and ears off of them. However, I still don't quite get the point of chasing the Frisbee around the yard. My foster brothers / sisters and I will sleep together, roll on our backs together while chewing on each other's ears and climbing over each other for treats.

However, all this fun comes at a price, I have two jobs around the house; I help bring in the mail and then I have to rip up all the junk mail. I also help recycle the newspaper. As soon as my foster parents are done reading it, I rip it to shreds. I love my job so much that sometimes I don't even wait for them to put the paper down before I go to work on it.

Most days my foster dad has to go to work to earn money to buy dog food. I can hardly wait for him to come home: he takes me for walks and I always get a treat for being a "good boy." As soon as he sits down I try to jump up to sit with him in his chair or on the bed, but my legs just don't have the strength so he has to lift me up. I am getting better though, and one day I know I will surprise him by pouncing on his lap.



So that's my story. I am so thankful for the "new beginning" NBSTR has given me. I never imagined such a life. All I knew was confinement in a small wire cage, poor food and water, and no human companionship. I was sick, in pain, and there was no one to comfort me. I was seen as excess and had no value. Now I am loved and cared for. I am pain free and have my freedom. My foster parents say it doesn't matter how much my medicine costs, which currently runs \$75.00 per month, or how long I need care. I will always have the medicine I need and a home with a warm, soft bed. On top of all that look at these cool goggles my foster dad got me so I can ride in his T-bird with the top down and not re-injure my eyes. I LOVE car rides!

I am one of the lucky ones. Every year many dogs are forced to suffer the same life I was forced to live but fortunate enough to have escaped. Many of them never get to experience the life I now have and end up dying painful deaths or are killed and thrown away like yesterday's garbage when deemed no longer of value.

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New Beginning Shih Tzu Rescue's mission is to save Shih Tzus like me and our friends. To-date they have rescued over 500 dogs. Most have found forever homes, some still need to find their forever caretakers and to be adopted. Some like me are too sick to go to our own forever homes and will have live out the rest of their lives being cared for by NBSTR. Fulfilling this mission costs money.

If you believe their work is worthwhile, if you believe saving me was worthwhile, please considering donating to NBSTR. If you have time and extra love to give, please consider volunteering. NBSTR is always in need of foster parents. If you are looking for a companion, I hope you consider adopting one of my rescued friends.