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# In Memoriam



*Mike Micucci on Mount Monroe with his daughter, Isobel.* NANCY HIRSCHBERG

## Mike Micucci

The outdoors community in the northern White Mountains of New Hampshire is bound together by a handful of energetic, enthusiastic personalities, each sharing love of the mountains and forests with anyone they meet. This love of place crosses generations and organizations. These people are our glue, and when we lose one of them, a small part of the North Country departs, too.

Michael Micucci, of Randolph, New Hampshire, who for four decades inspired and served the White Mountains community as outfitter, rescuer, caretaker, and more, died at home on October 22, 2020, of cancer. He was 66. His wife, Sally Penrose Micucci; daughter, Isobel, 17; and son, John Michael Owen, 15, were with him. The night before, three of his best friends had gathered at his bedside for their weekly “Guy Night,” playing guitar over pizza and good beer, much as they had done for nearly twenty years.

Mike was born on February 13, 1954 and grew up in the 1960s and 1970s not far from the Androscoggin River, on McFarland Street in Gorham, New Hampshire. He graduated with a degree in environmental conservation from the University of New Hampshire, then spent a brief period away from the North Country, working for the Xerox Corporation.

He came of age in a time when the mountain community was both smaller and more tightly knit than it is now. Rare was the person who worked or volunteered for just one organization. If you lived in the North Country long enough and loved the mountain lifestyle, you naturally moved around. Mike's involvement with the region touched nearly every mountain organization. During his life he volunteered or worked for the Wildcat ski area, U.S. Forest Service, Mount Washington Observatory, Mount Washington Auto Road, Randolph Mountain Club, Androscoggin Valley Search and Rescue, and the Appalachian Mountain Club.

For a few years starting in 1978, at age 24, Mike worked as a weather observer and photographer at the Mount Washington Observatory. The summer before, he had already put in a season at the base, working as a stagecoach driver for the Mount Washington Auto Road.

Mike was an active four-season search-and-rescue volunteer for decades. He served on the board of directors of AVSAR, including a stint as treasurer. "His levels of physical fitness, strength, and EMT training set an important example for longtime and new members," recalls past President Diane Holmes. "His unique talents, good humor, and organizational skills helped to build the strong organization that exists today."

Mike contributed much time and boundless energy to the Randolph Mountain Club. He began volunteering for RMC in 1976, after college, when he worked as the club's first spring caretaker at Gray Knob. Steve Chase, who worked later both as a caretaker and on the trail crew, remarks, "Mike was a pioneer caretaker who ushered in a new era at Gray Knob Cabin and Crag Camp—a year-round RMC presence," Chase said. "He would show up at Crag Camp with his mountain boots, 60/40 parka, wool balaclava, and glacier glasses—and always an ear-to-ear grin." Mike was not just enthusiastic for his job—he enjoyed working with the public, too, a theme throughout his life. "He treated everyone he met on the mountain as part of a special community and was a role model for initiates like me. We wanted," said Chase, "nothing more than to follow in his footsteps."

During his 25 years running Gorham's Moriah Sports, however, he truly became a North Country fixture. He embodied the single best source of

information, energy, and enthusiasm for the mountains and trails of the region. He started the shop in 1983. Moriah Sports was the region's go-to outlet for hiking, cycling, camping, and paddling gear. Mike bailed out many a northbound Appalachian Trail hiker after their pass through the White Mountains left them with shredded and broken gear.

Mike was always encouraging others to get outside. From his Moriah Sports he led twice-weekly rides and epic adventures to Montreal. He sold kayaks and then led trips to Lake Umbagog, long before the area received National Wildlife Refuge designation. He founded the Wildman Biathlon, a running and bike race that operated for years in Shelburne and on Wildcat Mountain. Once, riding down in the old Wildcat gondola after the final run to the top of the ski area, one athlete turned to him in shock and muttered, "I'd like to meet the guy who had this idea."

He ran the Mount Washington Road Race a dozen or more times. One year he entered his father, Joseph R. Micucci, and teased him, "Put up or shut up!" His father completed the race, not easily. The story is legendary in the Micucci family. More recently he helped start and was co-race director for the Randolph Ramble trail race. I was not a dispassionate observer of Mike's life. For 25 years we played together in the mountains. I could count on Mike for an adventure in the mountains, whether it was a wintry predawn ski or a trail run to one of the RMC cabins at the close of a long summer day. His energy rarely flagged.

Mike was a role model for me and many others. He was wonderfully funny. Once on a backcountry ski trip, he helped brainstorm the Eleventh Mountain Division, a parody of the Tenth Mountain Division. Team members included Major Chaos and General Malaise. Maya Angelou wrote, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel." You could not be around Mike and not smile. He harbored few if any grudges and was modest and self-deprecating.

We had each other's backs during tough mountain rescues, and on hot summer days we would grab Ben & Jerry's ice cream and run it in to the RMC trail crew. With friends, we hiked, bushwhacked, trail ran, backcountry skied, cycled, and paddled our way through the region. Most memorably, for a dozen or more winters we would leave AMC's Pinkham Notch Visitor Center many weekday mornings, skin up to Tuckerman Ravine, visit the Hermit Lake caretaker, and get first tracks down the Sherburne Ski Trail. Mike said there was no such thing as a bad morning on the Sherburne.

Mike and Sally married in 2002. She is a physical therapist who had emigrated from the United Kingdom to the United States in 1996 and settled in Gorham. A few years after their marriage, Mike suffered a bout with prostate cancer. He told Sally that, if his life were going to be shortened, he wanted to stop working full time and primarily be a stay-at-home father. So, in 2008, he sold Moriah Sports, and his family became the center of his world. He relished his new role. In the years that followed, Mike rejoined the RMC board of directors, serving as vice president and co-chair of the Trails Committee. He returned to the Auto Road as a stage driver, later managing that team. He worked at AMC's front desk at Pinkham Notch Visitor Center. *Appalachia* Editor Christine Woodside remembered, "Mike was often working at Pinkham when I went there to give talks. He always made everything go smoothly. I loved talking with him—he never minded my asking about his life." One interaction has stayed with her. "I got involved in trying to revive a dying man on the Tuckerman Ravine Trail. Later, I ran into Mike by the Visitor Center. He told me not to overdo it the rest of the day. I could tell," Woodside said, "he knew well the emotional hangover that rescuers deal with."

In his final days, Mike wrote his own obituary, telling one friend that everyone should do so. "It makes you realize what's important." Facing the choice between a short time without chemotherapy or a somewhat longer period with debilitating drugs, Mike chose the former. "Many people fight a courageous battle against cancer," he wrote in his obituary, "but Mike Micucci willingly chose to accept the inevitable and let the disease take him on its schedule." Modest and self-effacing, he might fall in the category of the courageous.

He left with "one unfulfilled dream—to be with his children through the next episodes: graduations, college, careers, and possibly families of their own. To help when needed, get out of the way when not." His sense of humor stayed with him to the end. He wrote that he "passed away at home surrounded by his beloved family and with a full head of hair and all of his own teeth."

His survivors, besides his wife, children, and father, include his sister, Elizabeth "Liz" Micucci Jackson of Gorham. His mother, Jean Welsh Micucci, died in 2015.

At his request, Mike's service was limited to family and a small number of friends. On October 26, they gathered at the Randolph Church to say their farewells. He rests now in the Randolph Hill Cemetery behind the church within sight of the Northern Presidentials. Unlike the popular quotation

from the Book of Ecclesiastes, “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven,” sometimes people can leave too soon.

An upbeat, supportive, enthusiastic, wise mountain friend is gone. The North Country without Mike Micucci is a lesser place. All of us who crossed paths with Mike, whether for an hour or a lifetime, were lucky.

—*Doug Mayer*

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DOUG MAYER worked at the Mount Washington Observatory and for the RMC, where he served as trails chair for many years. A longtime Randolph resident, he currently lives in Chamonix, France, where he runs the trail-running tour company Run the Alps.

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