

August 21, 2014
HISTORY of
MEMPHIS ANIMAL HOSPITAL
5617 Memphis Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44109
(Final Version)

My late father, Dr. Myroslav Mychkovsky, DVM, opened **Memphis Animal Hospital** at *5617 Memphis Avenue* in the summer of 1963, within a year of having moved to Cleveland from Port Clinton, Ohio. Dr. Mychkovsky, his beloved wife Anna Luba, and first-born son Michael, immigrated to the United States in 1949 following World War II. He had fled from Soviet-occupied Ukraine via a Displaced Person camp in Germany, where he met and married his wife and where Michael was born. The family first resided in this country in Montana. “Tato” (Ukrainian for “Dad”) served as a veterinarian for the state of Montana for seven years, and in that state his two youngest sons, Ihor and George, respectively, were born to him and Anna Luba, also deceased. He moved with the family to Port Clinton in 1956, primarily to be closer to the Ukrainian émigré community in Ohio.

Dr. Mychkovsky, or “Doc” as he was belovedly called by neighbors, since neither his first nor last name were easily pronounced by his Anglo-Saxon friends and acquaintances who dominated the area, worked for the state of Ohio as a veterinary meat inspector. *(As an aside, his wife and close friends referred to him as “Slavko”, but he was NEVER called that by non-Ukrainians.)* He traveled to slaughter houses across the northwest corner of the State to ensure that the beef that Ohioans consumed was prepared sanitarly in order to protect the citizens’ health. He maintained a small side business after work hours, operating a veterinary clinic from the basement of the house. The Mychkovsky family affairs were conducted after the traditional Eastern European template, with the bread-winning husband working very long hours, while the stay-at-home mother directed the child-raising and all things domestic.

A near-fatal explosion in February 1962 at a boiler in one of the slaughter houses changed the course of family history. Shortly after recovering from the accident, Dr. Mychkovsky applied for and accepted a job with the city of Cleveland Health Department as a veterinarian. Maintaining the pattern he had in Port Clinton, Dr. Mychkovsky opened an after work-hours business running a veterinary clinic. This was no easy task, since his city job was a full 40-hour per week job. Furthermore, this current business venture required a building separate from the house, which was ranch-style, to serve as the hospital. Therefore, the building on the property to the south of the house, which had previously been used as a window supply store, was renovated for this purpose. This east-west elongated building was ideal for the hospital. The entrance to

the office was on the east, and the kennels, for boarding and recovery, were on the west side of the building. The far south-east corner of the building had a room converted to a bedroom, where my father slept on those nights when a patient in serious to critical condition required frequent observation.

Recognizing that the general public would struggle with his name, Dr. Mychkovsky selected a generic business name, **Memphis Animal Hospital**. The setting was ideal, however, from the perspective that it was located across the street from a very busy McDonald's restaurant, still in operation, and apparently a very successful one. Even at that young age of eight, I impishly and naughtily viewed that by healing some of the animals in the neighborhood, the patrons of McDonald's were spared the possibility of having "Fido" or "Whiskers" in their burgers. That just shows you why at an early age people told me, "You ain't right!"

At first glance, the entrance to the hospital seemed confusing, since the business sign, which was an illuminated sign (the lights stopped working after just a few years, and were never fixed after that) atop an eight-foot tall black cylindrical pole, was only about 20 feet in front of the house. *(Since the business sign and the hospital were separated by the house, there was no way of getting a photograph showing the business sign next to the hospital.)* But Dr. Mychkovsky's loyal clientele soon got used to driving past the house to the veterinary hospital in back. While Dr. Mychkovsky had treated primarily farm animals in his native Ukraine and in Montana, in Cleveland it was pet dogs and cats who were his main fare of business. Yes, there were a few guinea pigs and hamsters, but canines and felines occupied more than 99% of his business. *(I recall only one time, in the late 1960's, that my father went to a stable to treat a horse.)*

Dr. Mychkovsky kept overhead to a minimum, with my mother doing limited assistance (mostly answering calls and setting up appointments), and the sons, me included, cleaning kennels and occasionally holding a difficult four-legged furry patient for a shot or tooth-cleaning treatment. It is important to note that in those days there were NO such professions as veterinary technicians and/or assistants. My father worked in the pre-computer, much less pre-Internet, era, and records were transcribed onto 3" x 5" index cards, filed away alphabetically into metal drawers. Appointments were hand-written onto calendars, and emergency treatment was referred to larger veterinary clinics appropriately staffed and equipped. There was no advertising or coupons – just business growth by word of mouth and running on his work history, not away from it. The low-cost approach to veterinary services was part of my father's common-sense approach to animal care – they were our friends, to be loved and cared for, but NOT as important as our fellow human beings. I remember one time a young boy brought his sick dog in for treatment to my father without his parents' knowledge because supposedly they couldn't pay even the modest fee. My father charged the young man all of twenty-five cents (\$0.25) for the service AND medicine, and happily his dog recovered nicely.

Operating an animal hospital required access to prescription medication, and those frequently came via Butler and other suppliers. Included among that medication were powerful pain-killers that would have had a significant street-value in the criminal world. Yet to the credit of the neighborhood of that time, I recall my father telling me of only one time where he had perceived of an attempted, and unsuccessful at that, break-in.

On top of all this, Dr. Mychkovsky was a prominent leader in the Greater Cleveland Ukrainian Community, involving himself and the rest of the family in Ukrainian School, Youth Organizations, and the Ukrainian Catholic Church. In fact, maintaining his Ukrainian roots and heritage were his true passion in life, and understandably so. My father lived the first 30-plus years of his life in Ukraine, and left his entire family behind the Iron Curtain in the Old World.

Dr. Mychkovsky had quadruple by-pass heart surgery in July 1988, resulting in a severe winding-down of his practice. And so twelve months later, and after 26 years of operating the business, at the age of 80 Dr. Mychkovsky sold the clinic to another veterinarian. *(As an aside, for various reasons, none of the sons followed in the father's footsteps of being a veterinarian.)* My father opened up to me during the last year of operating **Memphis Animal Hospital**. On a visit in March 1989, he told me how hard it was going to be to leave veterinary practice, which he had carried out for 54 years of his life. His work had touched many lives in a positive way, and I can attest to that by all the people who told me that my father had helped heal their beloved pet, or offered heart-felt condolences when they had finally passed away. Being a veterinarian for my father was a passion, not merely a job. Therefore, it was sobering, sad, and inevitable when **Memphis Animal Hospital** was sold in the summer of 1989.

My father and mother moved to a condominium in Broadview Heights. He lived there until passing away in July 1997, just short of his 88th birthday. His beloved Anna Luba, ever the faithful partner and care-giver, passed away at approximately the same age in October 2011. The sons are all alive, involved in various endeavors.

Memphis Animal Hospital was sold subsequently, as approximately 10 years ago while visiting my mother I saw a coupon for a **Veterinary Clinic of America (VCA)** located at *5617 Memphis Avenue*. As happens to everything animate and inanimate, the veterinary hospital at that address, with the house in front of it (our former home) and the house immediately to the east, were demolished. What the plans are for the property there that is now a vacant lot, I don't know. I stopped in front of the property in June 2013, during a visit to the "hood" that I left in 1973 upon graduation from Rhodes High School. In my mind's eye I could see the buildings and hear the voices and sounds of yesteryear. I made the sign of the cross, said a prayer of thanks for the experiences and memories, and asked God that my parents were in His care. During high school reunions, trips to the old "hood", or encounters with ex-Old Brooklynites (one of

which goes to my church just north of Columbus), I reminisce about that old veterinary hospital, as that simultaneously brings tears to my eyes and joy to my heart.

Respectfully submitted,

George Oleh "Myroslavovich" Mychkovsky, youngest son of Dr. and Mrs. Mychkovsky,
[contact information omitted -Ed.]