

MICKY

**7 YEARS OLD
‘ĀINALOA, HAWAII ISLAND**

“Assistive technology is being introduced, and our hope is that a tablet he controls with his eyes, in addition to a wheelchair he controls with his head movements, will let him speak for himself in all moments with all people. Watching Micky learn to use this tech and realize he can participate in his environment are the best parts of our day.”

- Grace & Eamon, mom & dad



Our story is one of confluence. We, Grace and Eamon, had our story, and **Micky** had his, until we found each other.

We came to Hawai‘i to teach in 2019, only months before the COVID-19 Pandemic. We knew we wanted to adopt a child with a disability at some point but needed time to settle in. We hadn’t yet registered with the state of Hawai‘i to be Resource Caregivers—a foster family—when a friend who knew our eventual goal of adoption forwarded us a phone call. There was a child, 2 years old, who needed placement as soon as possible, but the severity of his disability and the absence of a capable and willing biological family were making it difficult to find him a home. We told the state we’d like to meet him.

Micky was born at 24 weeks, three months premature, with a Level II brain bleed and addictions to the drugs his birth mother had been taking while pregnant. She had no interest in keeping him. After four months in the NICU, he was released into the care of the people we now call Mama Gina and Papa Jamie, a foster family with 25 years of experience in caring for infants with disabilities. Micky was loved from their first minute together. Gina and Jamie gave him every opportunity to grow and learn and love. By the age of 2 years, Micky’s physical disability and global cognitive delay were clear, along with his need for a permanent home

The first time we saw Micky was on a screen alongside several other faces, members of his care team, all Zooming in from home. Gina held the camera above Micky’s face as he lay on a pile of blankets. The conversation was about all of us in turn—Micky and his capabilities and needs, us and our capabilities and needs, and the legal team from the state and their matchmaking. At our house, we were already imagining a life with this beautiful child. It took a year for us to save money and find a place to live where Micky could join us. It then took another year of fostering before we could adopt him, which was one of the greatest days of our lives and an anniversary we still celebrate.



As an adoptive family, we didn't go through the shock of learning a diagnosis after we met our child; we knew his diagnosis first and never hoped for another situation. But on the Big Island, we are isolated away from family, from prompt medical care, and from the community that would otherwise rise around kids like ours and their families. Instead, we have found online forums for parents of kids with CP to be valuable and connective sources of hope and normalcy from around the world. We get tips and resources from them, trade used equipment, and offer services, like the family that makes custom washable adult-size swim diapers or the family that offered us a nebulizer to borrow when we forgot ours when traveling in their area. They give advice on recovery from surgeries, celebrate birthdays, and boost morale when one of us doesn't know how to keep going. We would not have as healthy an experience as parents as we have without these online havens.

Today, Micky is 7 years old, tall and big for his age, with a booming voice that fills the room. He loves swimming, reading, joyriding, and listening to music. He especially

loves going to school, where he socializes with other kids with and without disabilities and learns to navigate his world. He loves circle time and singing and dancing, focuses hard in English and reading, and often cries through math. He is accepted by his peers and pushed to learn alongside them. The key to his education has been unlocking his communication with those around him. Micky is nonverbal and has only slight control of his hands, making sign language impossible. Instead, he uses his eye gaze to direct others' attention to what he wants or chooses or understands. Assistive technology is being introduced, and our hope is that a tablet he controls with his eyes, in addition to a wheelchair he controls with his head movements, will let him speak for himself in all moments with all people. Watching Micky learn to use this tech and realize he can participate in his environment are the best parts of our day.

