

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

Search continues for hero dog Zulu

By Adriana Gómez Licón For the Sun-News

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EL PASO - No one loves his dogs more than Robert Sumrall, his family said.

But there is something about Zulu, the dog that helped him stay warm and survive seven days in the frigid mountains of the Gila Wilderness.

The 3-year-old black Labrador mix ran away when two people approached Sumrall on Friday near a stream.

Now people from El Paso to New York have fallen head over heels for Zulu, which remains missing in the wilderness.

Animal lovers have donated money to the Find Zulu Reward Fund, an account started by Lorraine Kubala, an El Paso Times blogger. The account has grown to about \$3,500, Kubala said Wednesday.

Sumrall was still in a coma in a critical but stable condition Wednesday at University Medical Center.

Zulu was the youngest of the three dogs living with Robert Sumrall and his wife Jan Sumrall, a former El Paso city representative.

"Zulu never wanted to leave the house, not even for a walk," Jan Sumrall said in an interview. "She has never lived anywhere else."

The dog was born in July 2006 in the backyard of the Sumrall's house to Lucy, another of the family's dogs. The Sumralls live in a private cul-de-sac in the Coronado Hills neighborhood.

Robert Sumrall's granddaughter, Emma Hoggard, named the puppy Zulu, after the South African tribe. It was Emma's dog, but she could not take it home, Jan Sumrall said.

His granddaughter's closeness to Zulu is perhaps the reason why Robert Sumrall was attached to the dog as well.

"She's broken-hearted," Jan Sumrall said of Emma.

Every day, when the 11-year-old arrives to the Sumralls' house from school she asks:

"Did anybody find Zulu?" Jan Sumrall said. "We tell her she can survive a lot longer."

The playful Zulu had gone with Robert Sumrall hiking only once before the two vanished Nov. 28 in the Black Range of the Gila Wilderness. Jan Sumrall said she is worried about the defenseless Zulu, which once was intimidated by the family's cat.

The spirit of a fighter may be in Zulu's genes.

Her mom, Lucy, was rescued more than four years ago in the desert and brought to El Paso. The Animal Rescue League, that searched for Zulu Wednesday, then took Lucy from a dog pound to their shelter. The Sumralls then adopted Lucy. She has the heartworm disease.

Jan Sumrall said the much-loved Zulu is intelligent, strong and healthy, but that she doesn't have survival skills.

Doctors, however, say the dog may be stronger and more capable of resisting the cold and wild life in the mountains, than what her family thinks.

"They got survival skills, probably better than us," Roger Freund, a veterinarian with the Coronado Animal Clinic.

The biggest problems Zulu faces are cold temperatures and hunger. Freund said Labradors could survive fairly cold

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temperatures. They can also go up to a couple of weeks without eating, but Zulu may already be scavenging the forest for rabbits or birds.

Regarding the threat wild animals pose for a domestic dog, Freund said Zulu has an advantage.

"She's big enough size. She's not an easy target," he said.

Zulu's survival story has attracted attention from animal lovers, but also from people looking to claim the reward.

Robert Sumrall's son-in-law, Chris Hoggard, said the family has received some false calls from people claiming they found Zulu, when in reality it is not the black Labrador with the white marks.

The owner of the property where Sumrall was found, Cissy McAndrew, said she has seen hikers trespassing and believes the rescue should be left to the professionals, the Animal Rescue League.

Robert Sumrall was found in the area near Royal John Mine Road, a long road that comes off New Mexico Highway 61. Most property in the road close to the Gila Wilderness is fenced and privately owned.

"Anybody going out there is not going to find the dog. All they are doing is hurting the situation," said McAndrew, a Silver City real estate agent. "We all need to be kind to the family."

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