

## **On the Positive Side**

### **Sam's story: Distinguished dog helps saves petsitter**

**By Jean Gilbert / For the Sun-News**

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Pit bulls as a breed have been vilified, getting a bad rap for the notoriety of people implicated in cruel practices like dog fighting. Prejudice toward the breed also comes from a bully image perpetuated by people for vicarious reasons, with the dog used to project a tough or macho appearance. We know the fear and discrimination leveled at pit bulls here at home, caused by alleged dog fighting in the region or the alarm caused by the publicity of a rare attack on a human by a provoked or abused pit bull.

On the positive side, we are changing the negative view and countering discrimination by embracing pit bulls through humane education and awareness campaigns.

One story that might change some minds took place last November. The extraordinary dog involved is Sam, a full-blooded American Staffordshire Pit Bull Terrier, a neutered male and a cherished family member. He belongs to Las Cruces residents Sandy and Charlie Cruz, who have owned Sam since he was a puppy. On the day I interviewed them for this story, Sam was busy greeting guests and being a companion to their toddler-grandson, Josiah.

At 8 years old, Sam weighs 90 pounds, a stocky guy with a concentrated mass of muscle typical of his breed. He is a handsome fellow, with brown-and-white coloring and beautiful gold eyes. His stature comes from his social nature and readiness to please his family. He will sit for treats, or just relax in close proximity as companion and protector. I observed this during the interview, along with play time (happily carrying soft toys in his mouth) and darting to windows with a keen eye and ear to the outside goings-on.

Sandy Gibson, a volunteer in humane education, was present at the interview along with pet sitter Marlene Ham. Marlene is an in-house pet sitter, "Grandma" to a myriad of dogs and Sam is her guardian angel. She was at the Cruz home, caring for Sam as she has done on other occasions when the family was away traveling. At bedtime Sam was on his blanket, on the left side near the foot of the large bed with Marlene occupying the right side. Sam is well-behaved and very smart, Marlene notes, so he won't get on the bed unless granted permission, with his blanket laid out. He is a sound sleeper and doesn't move a muscle all night.

This particular night Marlene was stirred from her sleep. It was well past midnight and Sam had scooted to her side of the bed. He was resting his head solidly on her thigh while gently nudging her, looking for a response. As Marlene awakened she sensed a dramatic drop in blood sugar. As a diabetic, she knew she was in trouble.

Marlene managed to pull herself up and hold on to the walls to stay erect while making her way to the kitchen, feeling so dizzy she could pass out. Her blood sugar registered dangerously low at 42, but fortunately climbed to normal limits after some cake and milk.

Marlene had been insulin dependent for many years, but nothing like this episode had ever happened. She was dangerously close to a coma saved by Sam's feat of detection. Marlene is grateful to him for saving her life.

How did Sam know what to do? Marlene and the Cruz family are still pondering the question with information and insight gleaned from a variety of sources. But the simple fact remains: Sam innately knew what to do, and he did it.

Sam is a celebrated guy, for sure, and distinguished among his breed. Sam is a hero to Marlene and his family, a guardian angel. And theirs is a love returned every day.

For information online about the topic, search "dogs detect diabetes." For information on the plight of pit bulls, go to the "No Kill Revolution" blog spot by Michel Meunier at [www.lascrucessunnews.org](http://www.lascrucessunnews.org)

For information about pit bull dogs available for adoption, contact ACTion Programs for Animals at 644-0505, the Animal Services Center of Mesilla Valley at 382-0018, the Humane Society of Southern NM at 523-8020, and Safe Haven Animal Sanctuary at 805-5338, and go to Pet Finders online for rescue animals.

Jean Gilbert is a humane educator, board member and volunteer with the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.