

## The Miracle of Sam: A Story of Love and Adaptability

**Michael Harris**

Xlibris (Jan 1, 2013)

Softcover \$12.47 (185pp)

978-1-4797-7545-3

There's a lot of imagined doggy talk in *The Miracle of Sam*, a heartfelt story of a couple in Sedona, Arizona, and the canine companion who renews their lives.

As Andy Rooney once quipped, "If dogs could talk it would take a lot of the fun out of owning one." It would also take some of the fun out of reading about one. Sam, born of a male coyote and a female golden retriever, comes across as a bit verbose. For example: "I can't speak, being born without the gift of verbal articulation; however, I can easily make my needs and desires known, though my gentle gestures must often be made repeatedly for the caregivers to understand my needs and intentions."

His verbosity aside, Sam lives up to his "miracle" billing. For instance, he locates another couple's lost pet, leads paramedics to Linda after she breaks a leg while hiking, and—most heroically—finds a lost deaf child. The deaf child incident is described in novelistic detail and pacing. The boy was chasing a doe; sharp hooked thorns tore his jacket; fear turned to terror "worse than monsters under the bed." By comparison, the telling of other events in the book fall a little flat.

Michael and Linda Harris were at a low point when they adopted eighteen-month-old Sam from a shelter. They had suffered large financial losses and the death of their beloved golden retriever, Sarah. Things hadn't been going well for Sam either. He had run away from two previous placements and had spent time as a starving stray.

The story is told in voices alternating among that of the author, Linda, and Sam. Sometimes it's difficult to know who is talking.

The reader need not be a dog lover to appreciate the bonding that occurs over time between the couple and Sam. Patience on the part of all parties plays a major role in their relationship. Michael and Linda come to understand that. Sam needs to be with the animals from his paternal heritage, who are called the "Others." And Sam comes to understand that it's sometimes best to rely on the gentle, maternal side of his nature—the side reflected in a number of appealing photographs of him at play, in full stride along a wilderness trail, and, most charmingly, in full canine repose, as shown in a frame-worthy picture on the cover.

TOM BEVIER (May 30, 2013)

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