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Pit bull warns owner of danger, then dies in fire

BY STAN FINGER
The Wichita Eagle

Four years ago, Steve Poole saved Baby's life.

Wednesday afternoon, the brindle pit bull returned the favor.

Poole, 36, was asleep in the only home he's ever known when Baby began frantically scratching at the outside of his closed bedroom door.

Fire had broken out in the kitchen of his house at 1139 N. Terrace, and she was trying to warn him.

Poole awoke shortly before 3:30 p.m. to a cloud of smoke and ran to the neighbor's house to call 911 -- and noticed Baby hadn't followed him outside.

"I came back to the house, opened the front door, and the smoke was down to here," he said, holding his hand about a foot off the floor. "Even if I had belly-crawled, I wouldn't have gotten very far."

Firefighters were able to put out the fire in less than a minute, but it was too late to save 10-year-old Baby. She had crawled into Poole's bedroom, seeking safety.

Four years ago, Poole found Baby, badly mauled, in the street in front of his house, dumped by someone.

"It looked like she had been in a fight," he said.

He nursed her back to health, and she had been devoted to him ever since.

"I saved her life, and she saved mine," he said.

The fire caused an estimated \$25,000 in damage, Wichita Fire Capt. Brad Crisp said.

A stove burner, accidentally turned on, ignited towels and other combustibles before the flames spread through the kitchen, Crisp said.

That explanation makes sense, Poole said. The knobs on his stove move so easily he could have brushed up against one of them and turned on a burner without realizing it.

Poole said he found the cause of the fire painfully ironic.

"I'm a cook, and my kitchen catches on fire," he said.

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