

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

Researchers speculate that they may detect an odor produced by chemical changes in the body, pick up on electrical brain wave activity, or recognize telltale body language. "All our experience tells us that an alert dog is born with this ability," says Darlene Sullivan, founder of Canine Partners for Life in Cochranville, Pa. In the past 20 years, the nonprofit organization has trained 60 seizure alert dogs, along with many other service dogs who assist people with a variety of physical and cognitive disabilities. Sullivan says that while any dog can

be trained to take action once a seizure has begun, "he can't be trained to alert if it's not in him naturally."

Shiloh, now 9 years old, is a certified service dog who accompanies Larrabee everywhere. They give presentations on service dogs and promote shelter adoptions—with his history and impeccable manners, Shiloh is the perfect ambassador for both. He charms just about everyone he meets, even Larrabee's normally standoffish cat, Iggy, who has been best friends with Shiloh since day one. "He's

been a totally different dog with me," Larrabee says. "It's as if he decided, 'I'm where I'm supposed to be, and with [the person] I'm supposed to be with. I'll do whatever needs to be done; I'll never let you down.' He never has."

— Arna Cohen



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The Cruelty Behind the Pageantry

Matador-turned-activist spreads message of reform

He was hailed as *El Pilarico* during the six years he spent battling bulls before cheering audiences. Then at age 18, a fight turned against him, and Álvaro Múnera lost the use of his legs. Soon after, his closest friend died from bullfighting injuries.

These experiences didn't make Múnera bitter. Now 43, he has devoted his life to rescuing animals in his hometown of Medellín, Colombia, and speaking out against the blood sport that was once his passion. In January, Múnera will extend his reach when he joins

forces with Humane Society International, Asociación Mexicana por los Derechos de los Animales (AMEDEA), and México Antitaurino to tackle Mexico's bullfighting industry.

"It will be the first time an ex-bullfighter has come to Mexico to speak up for the rights of animals," says Ara Ferris, AMEDEA's public relations coordinator. "We believe his visit will reinforce the ethics of the new generations, and it will mean invaluable support for legislators who are against bullfighting."

Around the world, an estimated 250,000 bulls are killed in fights each year. Far from being the fair contest its promoters claim, bullfighting pits a terrified, confused animal against a trained executioner with a sword and assistants. Even before the matador steps into the ring, the bull has been taunted with capes and his neck pierced with barbed lances.



Álvaro Múnera, who nearly died as a young bullfighter, now devotes his life to protecting animals.

While many countries long ago banned this cruelty, bullfighting is still common in a handful of nations. Mexico hosts more fights than any country except Spain and is home to the world's largest bullfighting ring, which seats up to 60,000 people.

Yet bullfighting doesn't enjoy widespread public support there. "Most Mexicans have never been to a bullfight and will never go to a bullfight," says Susan Prolman, who as director of HSI Campaigns helped launch the effort in Mexico. Many spectators are tourists who believe they are witnessing local culture, not realizing that so many Mexicans have no interest in these bloody spectacles.

The Mexican government helps prop up bullfighting through taxpayer-funded subsidies and promotions, even while a 2009 poll shows that 88 percent of Mexico's citizens don't want their tax money used to support bullfighting, and 87 percent oppose government funding of bullfighting schools, where children as young as 6 are trained for careers in the ring.

HSI and its partner organizations in Mexico City are calling for an end to the government handouts. They're also lobbying to remove the bullfighting show *Toros y Toreros* from public television and working to ban all government support of child bullfighting.

"Bullfighting is condemned to disappear," Múnera says. "I feel like it's my job to accelerate the process."

As a teenager, Múnera was a rising star of the bullfighting world. But all he remem-

bers is pain, especially when he thinks back to his final fight on Sept. 22, 1984, in Albacete, Spain.

Up to that day, he had killed more than 150 bulls. But this time, the bleeding animal in the ring turned back and charged, clipping Múnera's left leg. The bull hit him once more before Múnera landed in a heap with back, neck, and head injuries. He couldn't move

or speak, and he struggled to breathe. "[The doctor] didn't think I was going to survive," he says.

It took 3 months to regain sensation and movement in his upper body. He was eventually transferred to a hospital in Miami. While healing in a country where bullfighting isn't practiced, Múnera gained

a new perspective. When he told people his story, he says, they sometimes reacted like he was "a psychopath." Múnera began feeling ashamed of the years he'd spent killing animals for sport.

A few months later, he learned that his best friend—a matador nicknamed *El Yiyó*—had died from bullfighting injuries.

Ever since, Múnera has worked to help as many animals as he can in Medellín, where he established an animal shelter and serves as the city council representative of FAUNA Colombia, a coalition of animal welfare groups. And he uses his personal experiences to advocate against bullfighting in his country and abroad.

Bullfighting is a waste of human and animal life, he says. "I survived to straighten a crooked path." —*Andy MacAlpine*

➤ **FOR MORE** on HSI's efforts to end bullfighting in Mexico, visit hsi.org/bullfighting.

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