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# PREAMBLE

The National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico (NFBNM) is a 501(c)(3) consumer organization comprised of blind and sighted people committed to changing what it means to be blind. Though blindness is still all too often a tragedy to those who face it, we know from our own personal experience that with training and opportunity, it can be reduced to the level of a physical nuisance. We work to see that blind people receive services and training to which they are entitled and that parents of blind children receive the advice and support they need to help their youngsters grow up to be happy, productive adults. We believe that first-class citizenship means that people have both rights and responsibilities, and we are determined to see that blind people become first-class citizens of these United States, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. The most serious problems we face have less to do with our lack of vision than with discrimination based on the public’s ignorance and misinformation about blindness. Join us in educating New Mexicans about the abilities and aspirations of New Mexico’s blind citizens.

(Adapted from NFB of Ohio newsletter.)

# SAVE THE DATE

Make plans to attend the 2022 National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico State Convention.

August 25-28, 2022

Embassy Suites Albuquerque

More information will follow through our NFBNM listserv.

If you would like to be added to listserv,

please email Tonia Trapp at

nfbnewmexicosecretary@gmail.com

The planning team is working hard at having a safe, informative, and fun event.

As we begin to emerge from the Pandemic we must work together to continue to build our federation!!!

# FAR MORE THAN BLIND: SAM CHAVEZ’S LIFE, 1904-1981

*By Richard Melzer*

(Reprinted with the author’s permission, this article originally appeared in LA HISTORIA DEL RIO ABAJO.)

*La Historia del Rio Abajo is a regular column about Valencia County history written by members of the Valencia County Historical Society since 1998.*

*Special thanks to Greg Trapp, executive director of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind, for his expert, kind assistance in the writing of this column.*

*Opinions expressed in this and all columns of La Historia del Rio Abajo are the author’s alone and not necessarily those of the Valencia County Historical Society or any other group or individual.*

It snows a lot on the east slopes of the Manzano Mountains. But, as anyone who has lived in the small villages of Manzano, Tajique, Chilili and Torreon can tell you, there are snowstorms and there are *snowstorms*.

This story is about a particularly bad snowstorm and how the driver of a Greyhound bus and his passengers were rescued by a brave 42-year-old passenger named Sam Chavez. What makes the story truly remarkable is that Sam Chavez had been blind since birth.

**The Storm**

Samuel Chavez had been born on June 3, 1904, the second son of Eulalio and Clarita Chavez. When old enough, Sam attended the New Mexico School for the Blind in Alamogordo. By World War II, he had become quite independent, especially after he acquired a German Shepard guide dog named Silver.

In a typical act of independence, Sam and Silver had traveled to Albuquerque and had boarded a Greyhound bus to return to his family’s home in Manzano on Feb. 9, 1946. Storm clouds gathered as the Greyhound traveled east through Tijeras Canyon. Luckily, the bus with Sam, Silver and nine other passengers aboard made it through the canyon, turning south at the village of Tijeras, before the storm reached blizzard proportions.

In the heaviest snowfall of that winter, traffic soon came to a virtual standstill east, west and north of Albuquerque. Eventually, as many as 70 vehicles needed help on old Route 66 through Tijeras Canyon.

But things got worse for Sam, Silver and their fellow passengers as their bus continued south. About seven miles south of Tijeras, at a place called Cedro Canyon, their bus got stuck in the snow. Despite considerable effort by its driver, the bus could not be moved.

The situation grew worse as time passed and the temperature dropped. The bus driver kept the heater going but his ten passengers knew that they might all freeze to death if the vehicle ran out of gas and the heater shut down. Something had to be done, and quickly.

**To the Rescue**

It was at this point that Sam offered what sounded like a foolhardy solution: he volunteered to go get help.

But how could a blind man make it through whiteout conditions with night quickly approaching? The answer was simple. Sam was already blind so that neither blowing snow nor the darkness of night were obstacles to him. He knew the route from his frequent trips down this same road as a passenger in cars and buses over the years. And Sam had Silver, his faithful guide dog that could be relied on to help Sam deal with almost every difficulty, from strong winds to three-foot snow drifts.

Sam, Silver and a passenger named Antonio Padilla plowed through the snow until they reached a ranch house about five miles from the stranded bus. After summoning aid, Sam, Silver and Padilla headed back to the bus. They made steady progress until Padilla collapsed from exhaustion, unable to take another step. Although only 5’6” and 155 lbs., Sam carried Padilla the rest of the way to the stranded bus.

A wrecker from Albuquerque arrived about half an hour after Sam, Silver and Padilla’s return. The passengers and their driver were safe after ten hours of dread and anxiety.

News of Sam’s heroic act spread far and wide. Sam in fact received an award from the American Humane Society on Sept. 16, 1946. With Silver at his side, Sam’s neighbors cheered him at a ceremony held during the annual fiesta in Manzano. The story followed Sam through the years, including in 1957 when he visited the New Mexico House of Representatives. Rep. Fred Ortiz (D, Rio Arriba) introduced Sam, describing his heroic rescue in considerable detail. Sam would always be known as the blind man who, with his guide dog Silver, rescued a bus and its passengers, despite the incredible odds against them in a formidable storm.

**A Blessed Award**

New Mexico celebrated the courage of another resourceful blind person in 1946. Like Sam Chavez, Cecelia “Celia” Lovato had been blind from birth and had attended the New Mexico School for the Blind. Celia’s teachers chose her prize-winning essay, “Failure is Impossible,” to be read at her graduation ceremonies in May 1946. She soon landed a job as a secretary at the Barelas Community Center in Albuquerque.

Celia had three goals following graduation. First, she wanted to purchase a guide dog with the money she earned at the community center. Second, she hoped to raise enough money to take her new dog to be trained at the Seeing-Eye Institute in Morristown, New Jersey. Finally, with a guide dog at her side, Celia planned to earn a college degree in education so she could teach.

Newspapers reported that the 22-year-old’s admirable ambitions “captured the imagination” of Albuquerque residents, especially when the odds of achieving her goals seemed remote. Celia kept hearing from the guide dog school that she would have to wait because the school was swamped with applications from veterans of World War II who, having lost their vision in combat, had a higher priority in obtaining dogs and getting them trained. Even if she made it to the top of the waiting list, she would need hundreds of dollars for the trip to New Jersey and to pay the institute’s tuition.

But Celia was determined to succeed with a degree of courage that equaled Sam’s determination to rescue passengers on a stranded bus. With help from organizations like LULAC and the Alianza Hispano-Americana, she began what we might call a “go-fund-me” campaign. Starting in September 1946, contributions arrived from many groups and individuals. Employees at the Rio Grande Welding Co. pooled their resources and contributed $12. Children at the Santa Ana Pueblo day schools gave pennies, nickels and dimes equaling $9. Teens at Washington Junior High School gave $43.68. Members of the Albuquerque Women’s Club raised $100 at a benefit party. Carrie Tingley, New Mexico’s flamboyant former First Lady, gave $10.

With contributions large and small, Celia’s trust fund grew to $700 by the end of October, $808 by the end of the year and $900 (over $10,000 in today’s money) by the end of January 1947. Local newspapers reported the campaign’s steady progress from week to week.

We don’t know how, where or when Celia Lovato and Sam Chavez met. They may well have admired what each had accomplished despite their visual challenges. All we know is that the couple met, became engaged and were rather quickly married on New Year’s Day, 1947. The ceremony took place at Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church in Bernalillo. A reception followed at Celia’s family home and at the Barelas Community Center that evening. Friends, family and all those who donated to Celia’s campaign were invited to attend.

Sam Chavez was thus doubly blessed with an award from the Animal Humane Society in September 1946 and a new marriage with a bright young woman just five months later.

**Other Peaks**

Sam led an active life in the coming years. At various times, he lived in San Juan (Veguita), Manzano, Albuquerque, Chimayo and Las Nutrias. Many good neighbors helped him through the years. In 1957, for example, Reuben Sandoval of Chimayo organized a committee to help Sam remodel his home soon after Sam moved into the village. Later, Rose Barncastle, a friend in Albuquerque, gave him rides to places he needed to go to in the city and as far away as Santa Fe.

Sam worked as a piano tuner, a weaver, a chair caner and a farmer. He also worked as an interpreter for the courts and at political meetings and rallies. An ardent Democrat, he is said to have translated speeches with more enthusiasm and eloquence than the politicians themselves.

Sam served as a campaign aide and ran for the office of state representative, although he lost in a primary election in 1958. He was chosen as a delegate to the state Democratic convention held in Albuquerque in 1964.

Sam also became active in the New Mexico affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind. He attended state conventions held in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Glorieta. He was elected the organization’s vice president in 1959 and was one of New Mexico’s three delegates at the annual convention of the National Federation of the Blind held in Miami, Florida. He visited the French Quarters in New Orleans, Louisiana, en route to Miami that year, 1960.

According to the *Rio Grande Sun*, Sam was a talented man who enjoyed “composing memorials and Spanish songs.”

**Four Valleys**

But Sam faced deep valleys as well. He and Celia were married only five months before she filed for divorce, claiming incompatibility, perhaps due to the vast difference in their ages. By 1956 he had married another blind woman, Maria Amadea Vigil, of Chimayo. Maria also filed for divorce, once in 1971 and again, after an apparent reconciliation, in 1975.

Other challenges were sadly typical for visually impaired men and women in mid-twentieth century America. Four examples come to mind.

First, in 1947, when Sam had called for a cab in Albuquerque, the driver did not allow Sam to bring Silver into his vehicle. When Sam objected, the driver reportedly handled Sam roughly. Seeking $5,000 in compensation, Sam filed a civil suit against the Black and White Cab Co. Sam won the case in district court, but was awarded just one dollar in damages. The case made the news as far away as San Antonio, Texas.

In 1948, Sam and Silver were walking on South Fourth St. when they were hit by a motorist backing out of a driveway. The car knocked Sam down, only bruising him, but injuring Silver quite seriously. Realizing that Sam was blind, the motorist refused to disclose his name and license number. Fortunately, a passerby jotted down the license number so the police could track the driver down in what amounted to a hit-and-run accident. Descriptions of Sam’s encounter ran in newspapers not only in New Mexico, but also in Arizona, Oregon and Utah.

We do not know if Silver’s injuries led to his death, but by 1952 Sam had acquired a new dog, named Sylvia. We first learn of Sylvia because in 1954 Sam reported her missing from his backyard at 430 Pacific SW in Albuquerque. Although he recalled tying her securely, she had somehow strayed from the property or been stolen.

We know that Sylvia had returned home by early 1955 because by that date one of Sam’s neighbors in Barelas had reported him to the police, accusing him of cruelty to animals. Sam was accused of beating, kicking and strangling his guide dog. The authorities took Sylvia to an animal shelter, while Sam was arrested but not detained. The case was soon dismissed in police court. Sam sued the neighbor, the arresting officer and the City of Albuquerque. The outcome of the suit is unknown.

A year later, in a fourth incident, someone shot Sylvia in the leg. Injuries to her paw were sufficiently severe that she remained in an Albuquerque animal hospital for at least a week.

Sam and Sylvia remained familiar sights on the streets of Albuquerque and Española when they lived in or near those cities. The man and his dog were inseparable for fourteen years, or until Sylvia became ill and died in May 1966.

Sam’s next guide dog was sent from Pilot Guides, Inc., of Columbus, Ohio. Canya, a 26-month-old German Shepard, arrived soon after Sylvia’s death. A 1966 photo of Sam and Canya in the *Santa Fe New Mexican* showed the pair as Sam became one of the first patrons of the New Mexico state library’s services for the blind.

**Suggested Epitaph**

Being refused access to public transportation, being struck by a hit-and-run driver and being the victim of possible theft and the intentional shooting of his guide dog: these were the unjust indignities that Sam and many other visually impaired Americans often suffered in their lives. Sam fought for his rights in court, in the press and through the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico.

Sam died at his home in Albuquerque on December 2, 1981. With the Romero Funeral Home of Belen in charge of arrangements, Sam was buried at the San Ysidro Catholic cemetery in Las Nutrias.

Sam’s gravestone has no epitaph, just his name and the dates of his birth and death. If an epitaph were added, some might suggest that it should refer to Sam’s blindness. But such an epitaph would be insufficient because Sam was much more than his visual impairment. Given all that he had done in his 77 years, his epitaph might better read:

Samuel Chavez

June 3, 1904, to December 2, 1981

New Mexico Hero

# NAVAJO TIMES ON NEWSLINE FOR THE BLIND

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: March 18, 2022

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NAVAJO TIMES ON NEWSLINE FOR THE BLIND

The New Mexico Commission for the Blind is now providing the Navajo Times to persons who are blind or visually impaired through Newsline for the Blind. Newsline for the Blind is a free telephone-based service that enables persons with disabilities who qualify for National Library Services (NLS) to read newspapers and magazines 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The Navajo Times has covered the news, events and happenings in the Four Corners area since the 1960’s.

The Commission for the Blind also sponsors NFB-NEWSLINE®, which is a service of the National Federation of the Blind. NFB-NEWSLINE® uses text-to-speech technology to provide interactive telephone access to over 500 publications, including now The Navajo Times.

“I am very proud that we have been able to bring this about,” said Greg Trapp, Executive Director of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind. “Through our efforts here in New Mexico, we are bringing this important publication to the Four Corners area, and indeed the entire nation,” added Trapp.

“We appreciate the partnership between the New Mexico Commission for the Blind and the Department of Diné Education, to provide these technology options for our Navajo people. This is an important step in the right direction to be more inclusive and engaged with all of our people and communities. Thank you to Mr. Trapp and his team for working together with the Navajo Nation,” said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez.

“We record each issue of the Navajo Times so that Newsline users in New Mexico can read the paper,” said Krista Mireles, Newsline Coordinator.

Anyone who is visually impaired or qualifies for NLS services can apply for Newsline or get more information by calling Krista Mireles at 505-841-8844.

Public Law 115-141 Notice: The Commission receives federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education and from the Health and Human Services Department. For Federal Fiscal Year 2022, the Commission will receive approximately $5,134,772 for Vocational Rehabilitation with a $1,389,716 state match; $55,500 for Supported Employment with a $3,083 state match; $225,000 for Older Blind with a $25,000 state match; and $60,969 for Independent Living with a $6,774 State match.

# CRUISING THE CARIBBEAN

By Nancy Burns

The large cruise ship on which we had traveled docked in San Diego on December 7, 2019 and was our fifteenth incredible voyage. This trip had taken us through the Panama Canal and then into Costa Rica. It was our second such itinerary, but each trip was a new and different adventure. After disembarking in San Diego, Don and I spent an early Christmas with family members in California. Soon after returning home to Albuquerque, the Covid pandemic struck and most travel plans were suspended. We found ourselves glued to the news. Thousands of deaths worldwide had created this horrific pandemic. Previously unknown restrictions were placed on our ability to move about, even locally. Masks were mandated and numerous businesses were closed as a result.

All of these restrictions necessitated the need to find alternative activities, in or near our home. I found myself occupied with working on a book which described and reflected back on our fifteen magical cruises. While writing those pages, I had two important issues on which I intended to elaborate. It has always been my desire to educate the public about the abilities of those of us who happen to be blind and to eradicate stereotypes and false assumptions. My thinking is that by publishing this book, I might educate at least some of the general public about the fact that a blind couple is perfectly capable of traveling and exploring distant lands. My secondary hope is to encourage other blind or visually impaired people to travel abroad.

In late 2021, Covid cases began to decline and some travel restrictions were lifted. We had lamented the fact that we might never be able to travel again. At times, our itinerary was secured through a travel agent, but not always. After receiving notification from this agent regarding a Caribbean cruise, we began looking forward to traveling once again. This was a seven-day cruise and was to take place in early December, 2021. We booked this cruise, and we were again looking forward to sailing the ocean. Documentation of vaccination was required, and masks were mandatory on the ship. We were fine with all of these requirements.

After departing Fort Lauderdale, we were sailing toward Half Moon Key. This is an incredible island which is actually owned by Holland America, our favorite cruise line. There were opportunities to dine on barbecue, among other choices, while strolling on this island. We gravitated toward the sound of island music, and found ourselves in an area selling all sorts of souvenirs such as handmade hats and purses, sea shells in bottles, along with the ever-present T shirts.

A significant part of such a journey is, actually, the days at sea. These days are made even more enjoyable by spending time on the balcony, when affordable. Because of our many cruises, we were upgraded to a larger cabin and even to a larger balcony. This particular balcony included a table, two chairs and hassocks. One morning, we ordered breakfast to be delivered to our room. While relaxing on the balcony, this meal was thoroughly enjoyed. Listening to the sounds of the ocean waves and experiencing the smells of the sea air just put this breakfast over the top.

The next port, Bimini, Bahamas provided us with a nice long walk along the ocean side. This port is especially desirable for ocean swimmers and scuba divers. It provided us with the sounds and smells of the fresh ocean air as we walked along the ocean with other fellow tourists.

The food on such a cruise ship is phenomenal. A wide selection of main courses is available. The dessert menu frequently catches my attention. Chocolate cake with rum filling, tiramisu, and fruit crisps, with various sorts of ice cream toppings, were only a few of the offerings.

A variety of shipboard activities are available during the cruise. The Christmas theme was evident throughout the ship, including Christmas carols that could be heard in the background. On the main deck a huge display of gingerbread houses, churches, and other such buildings was displayed. The wait staff in dining rooms and bar areas is always helpful and quickly learns and remembers names. We find this amazing, but it has been the norm on each and every cruise we have taken.

Amber Cove, Dominican Republic was our next port and provided a huge display of rum in the shops. There was everything from large bottles of rum, down to smaller samples of differing rum flavors. This area is one of the largest producers of rum in the world.

Disembarking from the ship into Freeport, Bahamas, Don and I once again found the weather to be Caribbean warm and wonderful. Vendors of everything imaginable dotted the walkway. This port provided another opportunity to select unique Christmas gifts to bring home. Handcrafted items were displayed along the walkway. Vendors were happy to answer questions and allowed us to touch their merchandise. This allowed us the opportunity to communicate with local vendors and to get a glimpse of the local culture, an important bi-product of such voyages. As we attempt to educate the locals, we in turn take away knowledge of the area we are exploring.

I routinely carry my Victor Reader and take daily notes of the land explored. As a writer, this helps with any writing I desire to complete. Don and I have sailed thousands of nautical miles, have explored many countries, and have met many fascinating people along the way. Our home is filled with a collection of souvenirs, such as a pair of wooden shoes from Holland, and a variety of key chains from nearly all over the world. Each of our collectables brings back memories of our unusual and exciting travel adventures.

# GOOD EATING

## EASY HOMEMADE LOAF BREAD WITH REGULAR FLOUR

This recipe makes 3 loafs of bread.

1 tablespoon salt

1/3 cup oil of your choice

1/3 cup honey

2 tablespoons yeast, hast to be active dry

9-10 cups regular flour, not the self-rising kind

Spray butter, or a stick of room temperature butter/margarine, your preference

4 cups warm water

A dash of sugar

Put 4 cups of warm water in a big mixing bowl. Add 2 tablespoons of active yeast. Add a dash of sugar and whisk/mix together. Put the mixture on a surface that won't get cold, because yeast needs to stay warm. Or just leave the bowl on your stovetop covered for 10 minutes. You can cover with a plate. After 10 minutes, the yeast will be bubbling.

To the yeast mixture, add the salt, oil, and honey. If you add the honey after the oil, it won't stick to your cup, for easy clean up.

Add 5 cups of flour and mix until all the flour is wet. Then add the next 5 cups of flour one by one, mixing after each, until the dough stops sticking to the sides of the bowl. Sometimes you will only need to use a total of 8 or 9 cups of flour rather than 9 or 10, so that is why you incorporate one cup at a time after the first 5 cups. The dough needs to be sticky, but not enough to stick to you or to the bowl.

Sprinkle some flour on your work area, and knead the dough for 5 minutes. Spray another big mixing bowl with butter spray or soft butter. Make your dough into a big ball and put it in the buttered mixing bowl. Put some butter spray on top of the dough. Cover the bowl and leave it for 45 minutes. The dough will double its size; that's why a big mixing bowl is necessary.

Next, punch, press, and squish down the dough in the bowl to take out the air bubbles. This is a good workout and stress reliever.

Sprinkle some flour on your work space again and put the dough onto the floured surface. Knead it for 10 minutes to take out as many of the air bubbles as you can. The dough will pop, so don’t get scared: it needs to pop so that your bread won’t have holes in it. No one wants a sandwich that has a big hole in it so your contents fall out while you’re eating it. Therefore, beat the dough as much as you can.

When you are done kneading, separate the dough into 3 equal parts. Spray/coat the bottoms and sides of your 3 loaf pans with butter spray or whatever you are using for that purpose.

Now you are going to make a dough roll that is the same length as the loaf pan. Knead one part of the dough, adding flour if it is too sticky. It will pop, and that is good. Now flatten the dough using a poking motion with all your fingers until it is about the length of the pan. Then stretch the dough out towards you until it is about 2 inches thick. When you are satisfied and it seems to be the length of the pan, roll up the dough tightly and pinch the seams together where the dough ends.

Pick up the dough and drop it hard on to your counter or work space 2 or 3 times. This is necessary to get rid of any big air bubbles. Place the dough roll in the pan. If it is still too long, tuck in the ends and roll it softly before placing it in the pan. Now do the same with the other 2 sets of dough and pans.

After you have placed the dough in the pans, spray or add butter on top (your preference) and don’t be stingy: lather it well. Place the pans on a surface that is not too cold so the dough can rise again. It will double in size. Cover the pans with a kitchen towel or anything you have that is cloth, and let them rest for one hour.

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. After the hour passes, your dough has risen, and you can pop the loaves into the oven for 30 minutes. After you remove them from the oven, take them out of the pans, butter them again, and enjoy. You can cut them up and store them in plastic or glass containers, however you store your bread.

## PECAN PIE BARS

FOR THE CRUST:

2 sticks butter

3/4 cups sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

For crust: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter or spray the bottom and sides of a 13x9-inch baking pan with baking spray. Line the pan with parchment paper or foil, letting the excess extend over the edges of the pan.

Cube the butter and place in a saucepan over medium heat. Cook until butter smells nutty and the solids have turned brown, 6-8 minutes. Immediately pour the butter into a medium bowl to stop the cooking. Whisk in the sugar and salt. Add flour and stir until it is fully moistened. Press the crust evenly into the bottom of the baking pan. (The crust will be moist. Press carefully to reach all edges and corners of the pan).

Bake for 15 minutes. Remove and lightly press down any large bubbles in the crust.

FOR THE FILLING:

2 cups pecan halves

4 tablespoons butter

1/2 cup brown sugar

1/4 cup maple syrup

1/2 cup molasses

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

3 eggs

Turn oven up to 375°F. Place the pecans on a baking sheet and roast in oven for 5 to 7 minutes. Once the dough and nuts have cooled slightly, arrange the pecans in concentric circles to create three rings. You should have enough nuts for two complete layers.

In a medium heat-proof bowl, melt butter (for filling) in the microwave. Stir in brown sugar, all three syrups, salt (for filling), and vanilla extract. Break all 3 eggs into a small bowl; whisk to combine. Add to butter-syrup mixture, whisking until fully combined. Slowly pour mixture over arranged pecans. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, or until pie has puffed up and pecans have browned. Remove from oven and let cool and deflate (this will take about 2 hours). Enjoy!

# MEETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

July 5-10, 2022: NFB National Convention, New Orleans, LA

August 25-28, 2022: NFB of New Mexico State Convention, Albuquerque, NM