

# PUPPIES BEHIND BARS



VALENTI STAFF PHOTOS

Training Inmates to Raise Puppies to be Guide Dogs for the Blind

THE PUPPY PROJECT NEWSLETTER Winter 1999

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## THE INVISIBLE PRISON: A View From the Guide-Dog Users

**J**and Kent Stanley visited Fishkill Correctional Facility, the medium-security men's prison where Puppies Behind Bars has its second class of puppy-raisers and dogs, in June. Jenine, who is the head of Guide Dog Users, Inc., (the nation's largest association of guide-dog users) has been blind since birth, while her husband, Kent, began to lose his sight in 1985; both are forthright, humorous, and full of the same honesty that they told P.B.B. they admired in the prisoners at Fishkill. The night they spoke with P.B.B., their guide dogs, Toby and Drummer, provided the opening topic. "They've been bugging me all night for doggie ice cream, a soy-based dessert they go berserk over. And they know I'm a sucker so they kind of keep coming up to me and just standing there and looking longingly," Jenine explained. "I think they're going to get together with the cats and figure out how to open the freezer," Kent added.

P.B.B.: Give us some idea of how you felt going in to Fishkill, and the experience you had there.

K.S.: Well, I decided to become involved with Puppies Behind Bars because I saw that these were dogs that were going to be raised in a structure that by its very nature brought discipline and regularity and consistency. And that's something that I think is missing — or isn't emphasized enough — in dogs that are raised in the other environments. And I wanted to meet the people that were doing it, and then also see how the dogs behaved... I have a guide dog which was raised in a strict environment, and he's very good. He can go off leash; he behaves well; he's about 95 percent predictable.

He's not a general nuisance like dogs can be. That was important to me — to see if it was a place where I could get a dog that would be like that. I also felt that from the way I understood the program, as Gloria [Gilbert Stoga, P.B.B.'s president] presented it, it was a win-win situation. We received excellently trained dogs, in terms of discipline, and the people that were doing it maybe



Jenine and Kent Stanley with their guide dogs Toby and Drummer

learned a skill.... They have a purpose now, and as for us, the guide-dog users, we were going to get a product that I believed was going to be a notch above what was being produced now.... And people are going to resent that you call a dog a product, but in reality it is.

J.S.: I decided to go with Kent because, although I've been a supporter of dogs in prison, a lot of the members of Guide Dog Users, Inc. had a lot of concerns. I wanted to go see what kind of environment the dogs were living in. I knew it wasn't

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# Take 2,300 Inmates and 1,000 Staff. Add 5 Puppies: A View From the Superintendent's Office

Until this fall, Wayne Strack was superintendent of Fishkill Correctional Facility, the second largest prison in New York State — a busy man, in other words. When Puppies Behind Bars called to talk with him, he had people in his office, but he picked up the phone, saying, “The dogs are barking.” Superintendent Strack was retiring after 35 years in the corrections system and seven years at the helm of Fishkill, a medium-A security men’s prison (the next level down from maximum security) with more than 2,300 inmates and about 1,000 civilian and security staffers. As he stepped down, we wanted to thank him for his support of P.B.B., which started its second class of puppies at Fishkill in December 1998, and learn what it looks like from where he sits.

P.B.B.: What is your philosophy about corrections? What is it you try to do every day?

W.S.: The corrections system is about dealing with people. Yes, they’ve been convicted of a crime, but they are still

**“It’s a society within itself. We have our commissary; we have our schools; we have our cafeterias or mess halls; we have academic and vocational programs; we have our churches. And then we have our job assignments. So it’s really like a community behind the fence.”**

--Wayne Strack, former superintendent, Fishkill Correctional Facility

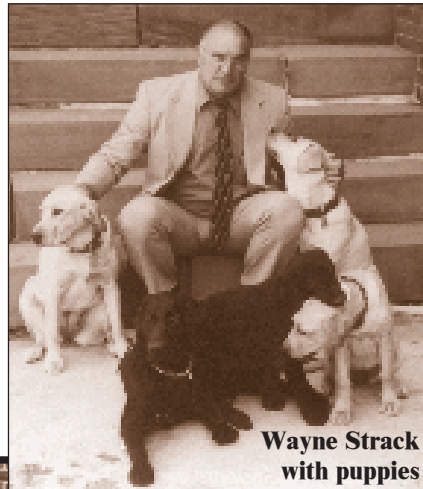
people. If you deal with the inmates as individuals, it works very well. My thing in working every day is to make sure everyone gets treated fairly and that they follow the rules and regulations — and with no malice. I try to explain that to the inmates when I walk around, if they’ve got a complaint. We have certain rules you have to follow.

If you don’t follow those rules then you get a misbehavior report. It’s really that simple. It’s a society within itself. We have our commissary; we have our schools; we have our cafeterias or mess halls; we have academic and vocational programs; we have our churches. And then we have our job assignments. So it’s really like a community behind the fence.

P.B.B.: But these are people who already

guys I knew when I worked at Greenhaven, or Attica, or Sing-Sing, so the same type of people come here. But what happens in a lot of the medium-security prisons is sometimes you receive inmates who are doing 3 1/2 to 7 years, who are young, and they can cause some problems. They don’t have a concept of how to follow the prison rules and regulations, because they’re just coming off the street.

P.B.B.: What is the pub-



Wayne Strack with puppies



**“...the more positive things the inmates can experience in the prison system, the better they’ll be when they return to society.”**

--Wayne Strack

lic’s greatest misconception about the prison system?

W.S.: That it is just punishment, that [the inmates] are locked up and we feed them 3 meals a day. People don’t have information about the factory, the vocational programs we have, the other work jobs. Here the inmates have built some of the cells, yard towers, recreation yards; they make desks and chairs. The public has no idea that we do this type of work.

P.B.B.: When someone said, “Let’s put puppies into this environment,” what was your first reaction?

W.S.: It didn’t bother me at all. I enjoy dogs. I thought it was a good challenge for the employees and the inmates. It’s a growing experience for them. Yes, there was some apprehension from staff. Yes, we had a few complaints. Until the program got started. Once it got started and people were working with it, the whole population accepted it. No complaints now. Staff really got involved with

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haven’t worked out in the communities they came from.

W.S.: Years ago, when they had the draft, if a young guy was getting in trouble they’d try to get him to join the service and learn discipline and supervision and to accept orders. ... Basically, that’s what we’re doing here. It’s like a semi-military thing — the inmates have to follow all the orders. If you can talk to them and get that across, you have no problem working in the prison system. In 35 years, I’ve actually had no serious problems dealing with inmates, approaching it that way.

P.B.B.: Does the level of security make a difference in how you run a prison?

W.S.: Not really. Because lot of inmates come from maximum-security facilities. They’re six years from the parole board, and if they’ve got a good institutional record they’re allowed to come here. Some of these

# Puppy Momentum

P.B.B. is expanding its programs in prisons. At the Bedford Hills women's prison facility, we are moving into our new standing housing unit. Thanks to the support of the New York State prison system, we will have 30 cells (which means we can accommodate up to 20 dogs), a fenced-in area, and an outside enclosed area where the dogs can run and play. The unit will also include a livingroom and a kitchen, so that the pups can get used to a home environment. "The state is really making a commitment to the program," says P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga.

At the Fishkill men's prison, the supervisor has agreed to allow us to expand within the wing of the housing unit where four puppies are currently being raised. In

January, four more dogs will join the program, and eventually Gloria hopes to have as many as 25 puppies there. As P.B.B. increases the number of dogs at both prisons, she adds, "we want to come up with an operations manual, so that the program can be replicated in other facilities." Gloria is also working with three veterinarians to produce a veterinarian-assistant course for the puppy-raisers: a tough, one-year course that will give them a skill they can use when they leave prison.

All this has created a serious need for

additional staff. Fortunately, Lisa Bruno joined P.B.B. this summer, bringing an impressive array of skills and a vast enthusiasm for the program. After 11 years as an international banker, Lisa decided to go into non-profit work and was volunteering as a literacy teacher at the Bedford prison when she saw a couple of puppies go by. Her curiosity led to a job that combines her administrative experience with a longtime ambition: "Working with dogs has always been a goal of mine," she says.



## Superintendent's Office

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it. Matter of fact, they enjoy having the dogs around. They look forward to seeing them, they check on them.

P.B.B.: What impact has the program had? What has it meant in terms of daily life?

W.S.: It's a common bond for inmates and staff. The staff are rooting for the dogs to do well, too. The inmate handlers get support. Also, the staff are talking about something with a positive note: rather than giving orders to an inmate, they're asking questions about how the dog's doing. It shows the human aspects on both sides. The inmates are talking more, too. They're talking to the staff about how well the dog is doing, what he's doing now, how he retrieves the ball — different stuff. It gets communications on a different level, more on a common goal rather than supervisory goals.

P.B.B.: That sounds as if it dovetails with your philosophy of how to deal with people.

W.S.: It really helps when you treat people like human beings. Everybody knows who you are — they know you're an officer. But if you can learn to deal with people without having to project that, the job's a lot easier. And this has helped in that.

P.B.B.: What surprised you most about the experience?

W.S.: The positive reaction from the people who don't have day-to-day contact [with P.B.B.] when the dogs go to their areas. It can be the inmates who go to the school, the inmates in the factory, or the secretaries and staff when the dogs go to the administration building. I figured there would be some positive reaction and some just nonchalance. But 99% react positively. They even get a little jealous if they can't get the dog over to where they can pet him.

P.B.B.: What's your response to people who

say, "Why should any effort be made to improve the quality of life for inmates, people who've done terrible things and are behind bars for a reason?"

W.S.: Because the more positive things they can experience in the prison system, the better they'll be when they return to society.

## Appeal for Wheels

P.B.B. is in desperate need of a van to transport the puppies to and from the vet and between the prisons so that they can meet their weekend sitters. If you can make a donation or refer us to a friend in the automobile business, please call us at (212) 924-7404 or e-mail at [info@puppiesbehindbars.com](mailto:info@puppiesbehindbars.com). Remember, all donations are tax deductible.

## Donation Form

I would like to be a **PROGATE OWNER** of a puppy (minimum donation: \$1000.)

I accept my donation for:

puppy's weekend visit to NYC (\$25)

leashes and bowls for 1 puppy (\$50)

sleeping crate for 1 puppy (\$85)

Other amount \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Include my friend to your mailing list

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail your tax-deductible contribution with this form to: **Puppies Behind Bars • 99 Madison Avenue, 2nd Floor • New York, NY 10016**



# Guide-Dog Users

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going to be bad, but I wasn't quite sure what to expect....All the images I had of prison were from movies or tv. You think that you're going to go into this environment and you think, How could they have puppies in there? And it was a little intimidating, but I have to say it was really fascinating once we went through the process of going in. The inmates didn't scare me at all; I knew that I was completely safe....

K.S.: Overall, the physical prison became invisible to me.

J.S.: I went out in the exercise yard with the puppy-raisers, and the lieutenant (who was our escort) almost had a heart-attack, but I felt completely safe. These guys with their dogs were going to protect me — they would never let anything happen to me.

K.S.: I'd appreciate Gloria's passion for the program, but, seeing her in action, I found out that she is actually a very good trainer of people, and understands people issues and dog issues—

J.S.: She's tough!

K.S.: — and she's tough.

J.S.: (laughing): When we came in initially, to meet the prisoners, we were going to do a little presentation. We were in a classroom, and the guys came in, and Gloria had it all structured and everything, and we just started mixing like a cocktail hour. Immediately, the guys started talking to us, there was a lot of communication back and forth — “Oh, let me see your dog” “What does this do?” “What's your harness about?” Gloria sort of lost control for a while.... The inmates were very open and immediately were just like sponges: they wanted to know everything we could tell them, they were curious, they were very interactive.

K.S.: They hadn't seen the end product.

J.S.: The men at Fishkill had never seen a working guide-dog before.

K.S.: I was concerned about the environment the dogs were raised in, how they were cared for. And the prisoners were concerned about how we used them, did we take care of them, were we mean to them — things like that. And what happened is we came away with mutual respect for each others' jobs, as raisers and users.

P.B.B: Talk about the bond you felt with

the inmates, in terms of lost freedom.

K.S.: They're prisoners of their actions and we're prisoners of our biology. And we went down the list of being angry, in denial, and all of the emotions that were involved. I had four guys that I got quite close with — and a couple of them were, I think, the toughies of the bunch — and they turned out to be the biggest marshmallows. J.S.: It was actually very funny, because there was some role reversal too. Kent was talking about a lot of the emotional things



and I was talking technology — you know: here's how the harness works, here's how you make a leash....

K.S.: It wasn't typical guy talk; this was person-to-person talk. We talked about general health issues, about what it was like, the loss of freedom... And the same thing we feel as disabled people — that society generally keeps us in a prison, although we don't have the same level of security about us — it made it very easy to identify with that loss of freedom that the inmates felt.... Up until about 15 years ago I was a normal individual and then I began to lose my vision. I was driving cars, flying airplanes, climbing mountains, and generally leading a very full life. And what happened is I became a ward of society, the same as a prisoner is.

J.S.: We brought a video in with us called “The 10 Commandments of Communicating With People With Disabilities” — a kind of training video, cultural-diversity video — and the video talked a lot about the concept of “person first.” We watched it with the guys and

we've never seen a reaction to this video like we saw with these men. They really got into the video and into the “person first” language of the video. And that was so important to them: that this was what disability was about, what people with disabilities wanted to say to other people about themselves — that we're people first. It seemed to be what the inmates wanted to say about themselves.

K.S.: That was the main thrust of it: that we treated them like people; they treated us like people. It never crossed my mind that I might be bumping shoulders with a killer; they were just men.... Jenine is blind since birth, and I have some vision, and the prisoners adjusted very well to our different needs —

J.S.: Better than most of the public do, actually. When they were serving lunch, they were just so appropriate. I said, “You guys do so much better than most waiters in restaurants who've had A.D.A. [Americans with Disabilities Act] training and things like that.” It was so natural. And they said “Well, why not?”.... But [she laughs] they were so embarrassed about the prison food.

K.S.: It was good.

**“Up until about 15 years ago I was a ‘normal individual’ and then I began to lose my vision. I was driving cars, flying airplanes, climbing mountains, and generally leading a very full life. And what happened is I became a ward of society, the same as a prisoner is.”**

--Kent Stanley

J.S.: Of course they have Johnny Marzetti [macaroni and cheese, and hamburger with tomato sauce], and if you're from Ohio you grew up on Johnny Marzetti. It was the elementary school lunch forever.

K.S.: When we were leaving, they took us into the cell block — or dormitories, I guess they call them — and it was kind of depressing to me. I felt for them. I felt very bad that they were there. Jenine made her speech, and when it was my turn I couldn't talk. All I could say was just, “Thanks.”

J.S.: There are guide-dog schools that have graduations for their students when they finish a class — and this is sort of controversial, because it's a very emotional experience. At the end of your month of guide-dog training, when you're absolutely physically and emotionally exhausted, they have this ceremony where the dog is turned over

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## Wagging Our Tails

- On August 22nd, The New York Times devoted the front page of its Westchester section to a very favorable article about P.B.B.'s program at Bedford Hills. It quoted Deputy Superintendent Jose Morales as saying that "The dogs have had ...a tremendous humanizing effect on the prison community." And the article noted that "being part of this program is the first success in many of these women's lives." Jenine and Kent Stanley (see interview beginning on first page) spoke for the blind community, saying they were "impressed with the level of training and socialization."
- The puppies at the Fishkill men's prison got a first birthday party on October 22. One of the inmates designed the



**Birthday party at Fishkill, with invitation (inset)**

invitation and the mess hall baked cakes in the shape of dog biscuits. "It was a pretty amazing event," reports Gloria Gilbert Stoga. "More than once I looked at the 100-plus people in the room, all the gifts they brought for the dogs, the banners the puppy-raisers made, the decorations, and the cakes, and said to myself, 'And this is happening in a men's prison.'" Before the party, the puppy-raisers gave various demonstrations — showing dog-handling skills; talking about guide-dogs and issues facing the blind, about what the dogs will go on to do, about how it feels to do something for someone else, and about what the program means to them.

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## Learn to Sit

P.B.B. conducted a training session at the Bedford Hills prison on Saturday, October 16, for 15 people who were interested in becoming weekend sitters. In addition to hearing what would be asked of them should they decide to commit, the potential sitters got lessons in dog-handling techniques and the differences between raising a dog as a pet and raising one for guide-dog work. Another session will take place early in 2000; anyone interested should contact Lisa Bruno at (212) 924-7404 or e-mail her at [lisa@puppiesbehindbars.com](mailto:lisa@puppiesbehindbars.com)

## Gifts That Keep Us Giving

Two years of trailblazing, P.B.B. is a prov-  
**A**ccess: we know that what we are doing works. Guide-dog schools, blind people, and other prisons all want our program. We want to be able to accommodate them, but funding is still a problem. Please think of us during the holidays. If you wish to make Thanksgiving or holiday donations in honor of dog-lovers and socially-conscious friends and family, we will send them a beautiful card, featuring a photo of our puppies, and telling them that a gift has been made in their name. A flyer explaining the details was mailed in November. For just \$10.00 you can buy a Playful Puppy Package, which means our brand new puppies in the men's and women's prisons get toys and your friends get beautiful cards telling them of the gift you've made on their behalf. More gift ideas can be found on the donation form in this newsletter.

### POSTAL DISTURBANCES POSTAL DISTURBANCES POSTAL DISTURBANCES POSTAL ISTURBANCES

Neither rain nor snow.... But the post office has told P.B.B. that it will not forward our mail, as we were subtenants at our last address and subtenants don't get forwarding service. If you were kind enough to write us with a donation, and did not receive a thank-you acknowledgement or a cancelled check, it means we didn't get the contribution. Please try again.

Our new address:

**Puppies Behind Bars**  
**99 Madison Avenue, 2nd Floor**  
**New York, New York 10016**  
**phone 212-924-7404**  
**fax 212-620-7136**  
**website: [puppiesbehindbars.com](http://puppiesbehindbars.com)**

We're very sorry for any inconvenience.

# PUPPIES BEHIND BARS

**99 Madison Avenue, 2nd Floor**  
**New York, NY 10016**

# Lucie Leads the Pack

In August, Lucie became the first of P.B.B.'s puppies to graduate from guide-dog school; she was paired up with Judy, a blind nurse in Pennsylvania who had waited for over a year to get a guide dog. "I cannot begin to tell you how awe-

some the feeling of independence and safety is," Judy reported. "Lucie has become very protective. We have gone in crowded stores, which was always a problem for me, and she guides me around the crowds easily. At a volunteer meeting for the AIDS task force last week, she was a pro — sat beside me and no one even knew she was there. We have a busy schedule this week: several meetings and a visit to a patient in the hospital.... We have a bike/walking trail that we walk: it is so peaceful and we listen to all kinds of birds singing."

Judy plans to visit Bedford Hills prison, where Lucie was raised, this spring. In the meantime, she has kept the inmates updated on their first graduate: "Thank you for taking care of Lucie and giving her such a good start," she wrote them. "It really shows!" Lucie's raisers are incred-

ibly proud, and they have every reason to be.

P.B.B. is also proud of Dave, who was donated to the family of a blind 6-year-old girl in Arizona. Dave was released from guide-dog school because he was too easily



**Diana with Lucie at 8 weeks of age.**

distracted to meet the stringent standards for guide-dog work (this is not unusual: 50% of dogs bred for guide-dog work don't make it all the way). But he will be an important, trusted, and loving companion for Maureen, who developed Retinopathy of Prematurity at two months. A Brownie and a first-grader at a regular elementary school, Maureen uses a

cane and various vision aids to allow her to do her homework, and she gets Braille lessons. Dave will give her some understanding of what having a dog entails, and he is already a hit with the family, which includes Maureen's sighted brother, 11-year-old Sean. "Dave is a blast to have around and has a great personality," says Maureen's dad, Joe. "Both kids love him."

## Guide-Dog Users

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to you by the puppy-raiser. I've chosen to go to schools that don't do that, because I think it's a very personal thing. I've had four dogs, and I've met one of my dogs' puppy-raisers, and, yeah, I like to meet them, but I also don't want to get tied into that kind of restricting, reciprocal relationship. I really appreciate what puppy-raisers do, but I always feel like, if I know all this about them, that I'm constantly indebted to them, constantly have to thank them, and that gets really old after a while. It moved me so much to see these inmates do this thing just because they want to produce a good product, they want to do good work. They don't want a longlasting relationship, they don't want anything — they just want to turn out a good dog that's going to be safe. And that, to me, is what puppy-raising is all about.

K.S.: Dogs need structure. They're not so creative that they can be left to their own devices. They want a routine. I, as a consumer, want predictability, and I want a dog that can take criticism, that can take correction, that's a little bit tough. We'd just come back from the American Council for the Blind convention in Los Angeles, and there were several hundred dogs out there, and I thought that the prison puppies behaved better than most of the guide dogs I saw. And when we talked with Bruce Benzler out at the Guide Dog Foundation about Lucie, the [P.B.B.] dog that's out there that has graduated now, he said it was one of the best dogs to come through, if not the best dog.

J.S.: What got to me was actually seeing these guys out there, in the exercise yard, with these puppies — and they were so proud of them, they were having so much fun. We had these guys talking in baby talk to these dogs who are running around, and then they're showing me each dog and telling me about each one — you know: "Here's Rosie, and this is what I do to her coat to make it look so good." And "This is Ollie, and even though he's huge, he's really sweet. He's got a nice pace: he doesn't pull your arm off even though he looks like he could."

K.S.: I'm pushing to get my next dog from P.B.B.

J.S.: I want a prison dog.

K.S.: I want a prison dog. I want one of Gloria's dogs.

## Thrill of the Chase

Every year, the Chase Manhattan Bank sponsors a Global Day of Service, during which Chase employees around the world devote themselves to helping charitable organizations. In 1999, 15,000 Chase employees participated; ten of them worked as part of Puppies Behind Bars, turning their day into a Weekend of Service. Beginning at 8:30 on Saturday, October 23, they drove up to the women's prison in Bedford Hills for croissants, coffee, and an hour and a half of hands-on instruction. By noon, all were headed back to Manhattan and Queens, where they took our dogs to parks, department stores, pharmacies, and even Virgin Records in Times Square: "The music was blasting and the store was extremely crowded," reports Craig, one of our Chase volunteers. "But Brenda did extremely well. She stayed right by my side, and the music never bothered her."

The weekend ended Sunday afternoon with a de-briefing session back at the prison, during which the Chase group reported on their dogs' activities and how the pups handled the different experiences to which they were exposed. The volunteers had such a good time that eight of them wanted to do it again. Cynthia Wainwright, vice president of Corporate Social Responsibility for Chase Manhattan Bank, says, "It was a wonderful way for Chase employees to help out, while we also got experience in seeing the world through a blind person's eyes. Taking these special dogs into New York for a weekend is a wonderful way to experience how important they will be in their blind companions' lives. I guess it's true for guide dogs as well as for people — 'If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere' — and all the dogs we had did extremely well."