

PUPPIES BEHIND BARS



VALERIE SHAFER PHOTOS

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

THE PUPPY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Spring 1999

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Brandy's American Adventure

Brandy, the eldest of the five pups raised at the Bedford Hills women's prison, flew west on March 10 to begin the professional training that will determine whether or not she has the confidence to be a guide dog. It is hard to believe that sixteen months have passed since Brandy first entered Bedford Hills as an eight-week old puppy.

Thanks to American Airlines, which allowed Gloria Gilbert Stoga, president of Puppies Behind Bars, to bring Brandy on board, and to Susan Segal, a weekend puppy-sitter who donated air miles for the ticket, Brandy arrived at her school well rested and excited to begin this next phase in her life. "She was thrilled to be in her new environment," Gloria reports, "immediately investigating the other dogs and the nice new people with whom she will spend the next five months."

Puppies Behind Bars is delighted to be able to donate one of our pups to the school, which has an excellent reputation but a shortage of dogs. If all goes according to plan, Brandy should be a working guide dog by July, but, Gloria cautions, "even though Brandy has been accepted by the school, there is still a possibility that the stress of the training will be too much for her to handle." In that case, Brandy will be returned to Puppies Behind Bars, which will then donate her as a pet to a family with a blind or visually impaired child (see article

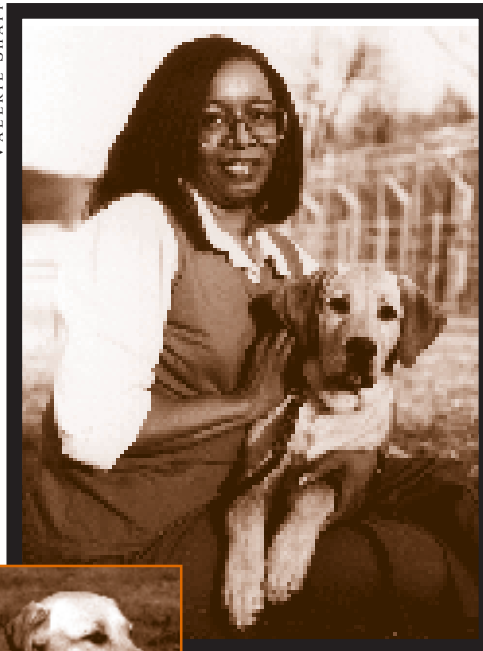
on page 4). One thing is certain: she has matured into a well-loved, well-mannered dog, and will be a valuable companion to someone who needs her.

In an interview in late February, Linda, Brandy's raiser, talked about the bittersweet prospect of her pup's "graduation." Brandy "is going to be leaving in 17 days," she said. "I've been counting them. It's going to be hard, but I'm proud, too." Asked how being a puppy-raiser had affected her, the 49-year-old mother of two compared the experience to being a parent: "It gave me a lot of patience. It was like raising a kid again. The best thing was watching her grow. The hardest thing was the work in general: the getting up,

Brandy at twelve weeks of age with Linda, and at 18 months, about to leave for school

the taking her out, the exercising, the teaching the commands — that's where the patience comes in. But it's good work; you enjoy it." With fond maternal humor, Linda described Brandy's first weeks of training. "At ten or twelve weeks, she was still a puppy, but she knew her commands," she recalled. "She didn't always obey them, but she knew them."

As for Brandy's future, Linda said that the pup had "lots and lots of love going with her. A lot of love, a lot of dedication. Not just from me, but from the whole facility. She's taking all that with her."



VALERIE SHAFER

The Guiding Light

Everything starts with the puppies. And all P.B.B.'s pups — ten to date, with four more slated to go into the Bedford Hills prison in April — have been donated by Guiding Eyes for the Blind in Yorktown Heights, New York, one of the nation's most prestigious guide-dog schools. The school breeds approximately 600 puppies a year, of which 80 percent remain in Guiding Eyes' own raising program, 5 percent go to other institutions, and 15 percent (who don't show the right temperament to be guide dogs) are released as pets. Jane Russenberger, director of the Guiding Eyes breeding program and the woman in charge of the hundreds of volunteers who raise the puppies for the first 16 months, has been a tremendous source of wisdom and encouragement for P.B.B. Board member Elise O'Shaughnessy talked with Russenberger about her experience with the program and the makings of a successful guide dog.

E.O'S.: You had initial reservations about our program. What were they?

J.R.: When I was approached by Puppies Behind Bars, the first thing I thought was "prisoners — people behind bars — are they going to be nice to the puppies? Will they be doing it for the right reasons?" I stereotyped prisoners as people who didn't care about other people. How could they give the puppies what they needed?

E.O'S.: What changed your mind?

J.R.: When I met Gloria [Gilbert Stoga, P.B.B.'s president], I could see right away that she would never let anyone get hurt, let alone a puppy. But my first real impression was when Gloria brought two dogs [from the Bedford Hills prison] with her in the car, and they were sitting there quietly together — puppies who were maybe four or five months old, and they were sitting so quietly, so perfectly. Then, when I went to the prison, I could see the dedication and the caring — how the puppy raisers worked as a team. We went outside with four pups and they just walked right by a little poodle that was tied up with a leash. I was so impressed. And I knew that we all shared the same goal: to make the puppies into guide dogs.

E.O'S.: Even the prisoners.

J.R.: Especially the prisoners. You know, puppy-raising is a lot of hard work. You really need to do it for the right reasons. And it hurts to give up a puppy — you don't do it unless you really, really want to help somebody.

E.O'S.: You test the puppies you breed at 7 weeks of age, in order to decide whether they should stay on track to be guide dogs. Can you

tell us a little about the testing?

J.R.: We started puppy testing in 1988, to try and match pups to raisers. We put them in a strange room, and watch them explore their new surroundings. We introduce them to new people, give them a ball of crumpled-up paper, wave a towel tied to a rope, shake a tin can with rocks in it. We open a little umbrella with a toy inside it. And we watch their reactions. Along the way, we started learning the subtleties of puppy behavior — do their ears drop? does the puppy's tail get closer to its body? are its lips drawn back? — and asking, "What qualities do these signs correlate with?"

E.O'S.: What exactly are you testing for?

J.R.: For confidence — self-confidence. An ability to handle pressure. You can't make up for lack of confidence environmentally, and guide-dogs must have that quality. Dogs who don't have it may make good pets, they're sweet and obedient, but they're followers not guiders.

E.O'S.: And the raisers — what do they bring to the process?

J.R.: If the dog has the natural confidence to be a guide dog, then the puppy raiser has two really important roles: to socialize the pup and to teach it good manners. You can't do either of those things in a kennel; you need the loving bond and you need to give the dog experience. The dogs need to be trained to sit to eat their food, not to bother your food, not to jump up on people, not to jump up on furniture, etc.: all the things that will make them a pleasure to live with. Socialization begins with getting them used to low-key environments, and then you work up to increasingly noisy, busy, crowded environments. P.B.B. has incorporated every aspect of our raising program into theirs — and made it even better. I think that Gloria has done something unique with the weekend puppy-sitting that she organizes — taking the dogs into Manhattan, for instance — which gives them additional exposure.

E.O'S.: How would you rate the job the P.B.B. raisers have done so far?

J.R.: I can say wholeheartedly that I think they've done an absolutely super job. If you judge on the percentage of puppies who become working guide-dogs, it's too early to tell. None of the dogs have reached that point yet. But in our raising program, we judge on whether the dogs have been raised to their full potential, and by our standards Puppies Behind Bars has had a 100 percent success rate. The dogs are more confident than I'd have expected and certainly more well-mannered.



VALERIE SHARP

Have a friend who might be interested in Puppies Behind Bars?

Fill out the form (next page) if you know someone we should add to our mailing list.

Weekends are Made for Puppies

P.B.B. has a loyal, conscientious, and wonderful group of weekend sitters for our Bedford Hills pups. Some live in New York City and take the pups to Central Park or Bloomingdale's, walking them along the city's crowded sidewalks. Others, who live near Bedford, have introduced their pups to football games, malls, and car rides. All of them love the experience and are a vital part of the Puppies Behind Bars network: without these weekend excursions the puppies would not get enough exposure to the outside world. We are now looking for a similar group of volunteers to take our Fishkill puppies for one or two weekends a month and include them in regular household experiences. A two-hour training course and references are required; if you are interested, please contact Puppies Behind Bars at (212) 750-2073 for further information.

Puppy Love at Fishkill

On December 21, four Labrador Retriever puppies, generously donated by Guiding Eyes for the Blind, entered the Fishkill

Correctional Facility, a medium-security men's prison in Beacon, New York. Eight inmates, who were recommended by their counselors and work supervisors and met the standards set by Puppies Behind Bars, had been taking classes five days a week since December 1 in order to prepare for the arrival of Ollie, Jonas, Brenda, and Rosetta. But clearly nothing had prepared these men for the way they felt when they first held their puppies in their arms and got those

first warm, wet, exuberant puppy kisses.

Each puppy was assigned a team of two puppy raisers with equal responsibility



for its care. The puppy raisers must attend all Puppies Behind Bars classes, turn in homework assignments, and participate in

the dogs' feeding, training, grooming, and socializing. Now that all the pups are housebroken, know their names, and have been taught to sit on command, they are accompanying their raisers to work sites all over the prison. Ollie, for example, spends his morning in the laundry, where he is getting used to hearing industrial-size washers and dryers and being around lots of activity, and his afternoons in the small-engine repair shop. Rosetta goes to the library, where she is becoming accustomed to computers and learning to be quiet around people. Jonas goes to various administrative offices, where the sounds of fax machines, telephones, and copiers are becoming second nature to him. Brenda goes to the electrical shop where she, too, is being exposed to a variety of noises and activities.

All this is orchestrated to further the puppies' socialization and bolster their confidence in different situations, but we are also seeing an unintended effect: the puppies are helping to socialize the people. Wherever the pups go, staff and inmates alike stop to ask if they may pet them. A corrections officer in the housing unit where the puppies live says that the entire unit is calmer since their arrival. But perhaps the change is best described by one of the puppy raisers. "I am noticing that feelings and emotions which I had closed off for so many years in order to survive in prison are coming to the surface again," he wrote. "This program is allowing me to regain my humanity."



VALERIE SHAFF PHOTOS

IAMS Funds a "Best-Friend" Investigation

It's an old saying that a dog is man's best friend, but what effect does a dog really have on a person's well being? And if that person is in a prison environment, what impact can a dog possibly have? The Iams Company, which generously supplies the Eukanuba dog food we feed our pups in both Bedford Hills and Fishkill, has given Puppies Behind Bars a

grant to explore just these questions. Using tests designed to measure various attributes, Dr. Jeffrey Kleinberg and Dr. Mary Beth Cresci of the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health in New York City are overseeing a study of the Fishkill puppy raisers and a control group of inmates who are not working with the puppies. In sixteen months, when the dogs

leave the prison, Drs. Kleinberg and Cresci will compare the puppy raisers with the control group, to see whether there is a difference in the men's optimism, confidence, sense of responsibility, and ability to affect their own lives.

Donation Form

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

Please accept my donation for:

- 1 puppy's weekend visit to NYC (\$25)
- Leashes and bowls for 1 puppy (\$50)
- A sleeping crate for 1 puppy (\$85)
- Other amount

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

Add 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

Throw Us A Bone!

O pups need bones, balls, and other toys; they need to get to their kennel sitters; and they need medical care.

O puppy raisers need educational materials such as videos, books, and copies of articles on guide dogs, guide-dog users, and issues facing the blind.

The bottom line: Puppies Behind Bars needs money.

Please make a donation. \$10 will buy a puppy some toys, \$25 will bring a puppy into New York City for a weekend, \$85 will buy a sleeping crate, and \$1,000 will allow you to name a puppy after a friend or loved one. Your gift could be made in memory of the friend's pet who has recently passed away or in honor of the vet who has given so much care to your own four-legged companion. Whatever the amount, please write a check today. It will be deeply appreciated and immediately put to good use.



VALERIE SHAFF

who took the newsletter, it would be the puppies they newsletters will first class of puppies excerpt from her Much I Smelled You, m's best-selling book

the woman behind thanks to her skillful widely read and vishly of their time

and expertise — and they ve made P.B.B. look great.

PUPPIES BEHIND BARS
The puppies at the Bedford Hills prison have had the great good fortune to be cared for by Dr. Nyssa Reine of the Animal Medical Center in New York City. Now the Fishkill pups have a doctor too: Jerrold Scheck, of the Hudson Highlands Veterinary Group in Beacon, whose practice is just minutes from the prison. An enthusiastic supporter of the program, Dr. Scheck even visits Fishkill to treat his patients and share his knowledge. A few weeks ago when he gave the pups their vaccinations, he spent extra time explaining to the puppy raisers what each shot was for. Then, with his stethoscope, he let each raiser listen to his puppy's heartbeat and taught the men how to locate their pups' livers, kidneys, hearts, and intestines. Puppies Behind Bars is deeply grateful to Dr. Scheck for letting the puppy raisers know there are people outside the prison who are rooting for them and their pups.

P.B.B.'s Junior League

If any of the puppies in our program don't turn out to have the necessary confidence to become guide dogs, they will be donated to families with blind or visually impaired children. As pets, rather than working dogs, they will help children to understand the responsibilities of having a dog. When a child with a P.B.B.-trained dog turns sixteen and has the option of applying for a guide dog or using a cane, he or she will be able to make an informed choice. Puppies Behind Bars currently has a waiting list of families around the United States who are interested in adopting one of our pups, should they become available. If you have a blind or visually impaired child and would like further information, please write us at the address shown.

Bowling for Dollars

The eighth grade at the New Canaan High School in Connecticut held a bowl-a-thon to raise money for Puppies Behind Bars and the Make-a-Wish Foundation. Their contribution to P.B.B. was a phenomenal \$1,000, which means that the class will name one of the second group of puppies going into the Bedford Hills prison and receive regular reports on its progress. P.B.B. wants to thank all the eighth graders, Assistant Principal Gary Field, and class delegate Caroline Stoga, who spearheaded the drive to raise money for the program.

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