

PUPPIES BEHIND BARS



VALERIE SHAFR PHOTOS

TRAINING INMATES TO RAISE PUPPIES TO BE GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND

THE PUPPY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Spring 2000

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The Lucie Show

The TV cameras were rolling, and the puppy-raisers of Bedford Hills women's prison were gathered, as Lucie, the first of P.B.B.'s puppies to become a guide dog, returned to the place she got her start. Lucie was accompanied by Judy, a blind nurse from Pittsburgh, making this another P.B.B. breakthrough: the first time a guide-dog user has come into a prison to thank and meet the people who raised the dog.

Lucie was an 8-week-old pup when she first came to Bedford Hills in February 1998. She was trained by inmates Diana and Marie for 14 months, then went to the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind in Smithtown, Long Island in April 1999 to start four months of professional guide-dog schooling. That August, Lucie was paired with Judy, who lost her sight three years ago to a stroke - and then lost her job as well. "No one wants a blind nurse," Judy says. Judy had used a cane for a year, because she couldn't find a guide dog. Then the Guide Dog Foundation called, and Judy flew to Smithtown, where she and Lucie trained together for 3 1/2 weeks. She loved Lucie from the start, and was dismayed to be summoned to the Foundation's office. Usually a student is called to the office for bad news: something is wrong with a dog, or the dog and user are not deemed a good match. What Judy heard instead was, "You're doing great, but we need to tell you something: your dog was raised in prison, in a special program. You don't have to keep her - what do you think?" All she felt was relief that Lucie wasn't going to be taken away. "Lucie was such an incredible dog, I didn't care where she was raised," she says.

Fast forward nine months, to May 23, 2000: Lucie, Judy, and Judy's husband, Lou, spent the morning with the puppy-raisers in the program at the Fishkill men's prison, then drove over to Bedford Hills. Their visit was being covered by



Lucie, accompanied by Judy, left, is reunited with her raisers Marie, center, and Diana

Fox's *Ten O'Clock News*, which aired the story the following week.

Judy thanked Marie and Diana and all the women for the work they had done, and talked about what a difference Lucie has made in her life. Lou said that after he and Judy found out that she

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A Life Saved: *Susan's Story* by Suzanna Andrews

I was emotionally wiped out," Susan Hallett says of the day in January 1998 when she was told by the parole board that, although she had served 25 years of her life sentence with good behavior, she would not be released from prison for at least two more years. Dazed from the shock, Hallett remembers leaving the meeting and walking into the recreation room of her unit at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, where Emily, a P.B.B. puppy, bounded over to her. "She just stuck with me all day. She comforted me," says Hallett. "After I got hit by that board, I didn't think I was going to make it." But then a fellow inmate approached P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga and offered to give up her own spot as a puppy trainer so that Hallett could join. "Gloria said, 'No, you stay and Susan can come into the program,'" Hallett recalls. "Gloria saved my life. In prison it is so easy to slide into mental illness or to just give up. There are people who come along and don't realize they are life savers, but they are, and Gloria is one of them."

Hallett, 51, was a nurse before she was convicted of felony murder and sent to Bedford some 27 years ago. Like many model prisoners, she got her bachelor's degree while at Bedford. She had a job as an administrative assistant in the mess hall. She tried to keep busy knitting and making pottery and she helped to found an arts and crafts program for Bedford inmates. But until she became a puppy trainer, she remembers that she slept a lot and watched TV and just tried to get by. "I led a very sedentary life," she says. Working with P.B.B. changed all that. Even before Hallett got her own puppy, there were training classes to attend and assignments that had to be completed and a rigorous schedule to follow. "We would go outside with the puppies, wind, rain, or snow," Hallett says.

"Gloria said, 'If you want to come into the program, you can, but you are going to have to work and that's it.' It wasn't: 'I'll pity you.' It was: 'You are not going to wallow in that pity because I won't allow that,'" says Hallett. "Every program that comes into prison gives the inmate something. Puppies Behind Bars comes in and says: You are going to give back, and inmates respond to

that. They need more programs like that. Part of what is wrong with the whole prison system is that inmates are not given enough to do. They say 'mop this floor' or 'sweep that one.' But you know that nothing's going to really matter if you do or don't do it. But if you're in a position where somebody's going to suffer because you don't do it, you take a pride in doing it well."

Last summer, Hallett got her first puppy, a black Lab she named Chloe. Having Chloe live with her 24 hours a day was "really daunting" for Hallett at first, but she says it changed her life in a dramatic and wonderful way. "All of a sudden there is another living being you have to consider," she recalls. "For so many years, you live alone, alone among a lot of people, and you really are only concerned about yourself and just making it through. And suddenly, there is

“Puppies Behind Bars gave me so much confidence. It made me realize that I could do things where I would have said before, ‘Well, I can’t do that’ and I wouldn’t even try. When I went on my job interview, I told them that if I did it with P.B.B., I can do this job. I was able to take everything with that experience and say: ‘I can translate it into this job.’ And I got the job.”

—Susan Hallett

someone else there who has all these needs. You really start getting drawn out into thinking about other things than just yourself." Chloe had to be housebroken, fed, exercised, loved and brushed. And because Chloe was going to be sent to a guide-dog school in France, Hallett had to teach Chloe her basic commands...in French.

When Chloe had to leave after eight weeks, "it was heartbreaking. I felt as though my baby was gone," says Hallett. "I'd wake up in the morning and there was no little puppy looking at me, no little wet kisses. It was the most difficult thing I've done," says Hallett, adding that for her and for most inmates "saying good bye to your puppy" is the hardest part of P.B.B. "You

miss their devotion, the dogs just give you so much." But Hallett learned that letting the puppies go was also perhaps the most rewarding part of being a puppy trainer. "You don't know who's got the dog and you know you'll never see him again," she says. "But you know that someone is out there who is in a prison



Susan first joined Puppies Behind Bars in 1998 "because she wanted a puppy to love."

not of their own making because they can't see or travel or get around. What little bit you did helped to free that person, and that makes you feel so good.

"That was something that had never happened before. They wouldn't do that to prison inmates before, give them dogs and take them away. But Gloria said, 'Wait a minute, people have to grow up here.' She is very upfront about it. The women appreciate that, someone who doesn't lie to you, someone who tells it like it is."

Like many of her fellow inmates, Hallett initially joined P.B.B. simply because she wanted a puppy to love. "We weren't really focussed on what we were doing. It was 'this woman, Gloria, is bringing us puppies,'" she says. "That was part of what Gloria had to do, educate us that it wasn't about us, but about bringing a puppy to its fullest potential so that it could possibly go to guide-dog school." But in the process, says Hallett, Gilbert Stoga taught them much more. "The women at Bedford

have absolutely no trust in people and Gloria came in and said, 'Trust me, I will never screw you' and she didn't. You learn that there is trust out there and I don't think that Gloria ever banked on that happening and I'm not sure that to this day she realizes the value of that," Hallett says, her eyes watering. "I get so emotional when I talk about this. If you could hear the women talk about Gloria, the loyalty, they way they feel about her. She tells you a lot of things you don't want to

messed-upness, so to speak. This program helps you work through that. It helps you get rid of a lot of those feelings of mistrust. You know you have value because you have something that shows what you do care about. When you teach the dog certain behaviors and Gloria says to you, 'That's perfect, you've done such a good job,' you start to believe in yourself. I came out thinking I can do anything if I really want to do it."

Just before Thanksgiving last year, Hallett was given responsibility for Thornton, a yellow Lab, whom she affectionately calls "Mr. Thornton," or "my little boy." Talking about him makes her eyes well up with tears, however, because only two months after she got Thornton, in January 2000, Hallett went before the parole board again, and this time, to her complete shock, she was finally granted parole. It was traumatic in a completely different way for Hallett from the board's last decision. She was terrified of leaving Bedford, her home for 27 years, and devastated at having to leave Thornton before her puppy was ready to "graduate." On her first night of freedom, Hallett sat down in her room at Providence House, a half-way house in Brooklyn, and sobbed. "I want to go back to Bedford. Take me back tonight," she told her parole officer. "I missed my friends, I missed my dog," she says now. She had only a few items of clothing, very little cash, and no idea what she would do next. "It was so difficult," she says.

In a very short time, however, Hallett's mood brightened. Her sister took her shopping for clothes, she soon mastered the New York subway and bus systems, and she got a job interview. "Puppies Behind Bars gave me so much confidence," she says. "It made me realize that I could do things where I would have said before, 'Well, I can't do that' and I wouldn't even try. When I went on my job interview, they told me I would be doing this and that. I said I had worked with the puppies program and this was

expected of me and that was expected of me and this is what I did. I told them that I knew that if I did it with P.B.B., I can do this job. I was able to take everything with that experience and say: 'I can translate it into this job.' And I got the job."

Today, Susan Hallett is a case manager in the mental health division of an organization called Services for the Underserved. She works long hours and loves her job helping needy people with mental illnesses rebuild their lives as she rebuilds hers. In May, she went to visit her family in Pennsylvania, taking her first plane ride in 30 years. She hopes to get her own apartment later this summer and eventually to be a week-end puppy sitter for Puppies Behind Bars. She spends her spare time volunteering for the group. She recently spoke about P.B.B. at a New York City church because Gilbert Stoga asked her to. "Whoever thought that one day I could stand up in front of all those people and talk?" she says with a broad smile. Winston, a Bedford Hills puppy, was at her side throughout her talk, which ended with a standing ovation from the 1,000 members of the church's congregation.

Hallett also spends hours exploring New York. "I am just enjoying my life here so much. I discovered the dog run at Union Square. And sometimes I hang out there with people and tell them about my little Thornton," she says. "Dogs love you because they love you. And that helps to heal a lot of people. Things that you never thought were possible become possible. Puppies Behind Bars is something I do believe passionately in. People really need to support it," says Hallett. "Gloria is giving people an opportunity to do something, to try and give back, to make up for what you did, which you can never make up for, but she gives you that opportunity."

Andrews is a P.B.B. supporter and a contributing editor to Vanity Fair.



Susan in June 2000, starting her new life, shown here with new P.B.B. puppy Josh.

hear — that you're not doing something right, or that she gave you an assignment you didn't complete — and you learn that you can hear them and still survive.

"I know what P.B.B. has done for women at Bedford. It's helping so many. The majority are either survivors of incest or have been abused, so they have a history of

ACT THREE? ACT NOW!

Can you help us expand to a third prison?

Another correctional facility wants our program, and guide-dog users desperately need our puppies. All that we're missing is the money. Please send a donation to Puppies Behind Bars — you'll be helping to change the lives of blind people and prison inmates.

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The Graduates

This summer, three P.B.B. dogs are getting their diplomas — and their important new jobs.

Noah, who left Bedford Hills Correctional Facility last August for his final training at Southwestern Guide Dog Foundation, Inc., in San Antonio, Texas, became a working guide dog June 15. Rosetta and Jamie, who left Fishkill in March, are in school for their professional training and should be working as guide dogs by the autumn.

Meanwhile Brenda, who left Fishkill in February and was ruled out as a potential guide dog, has become the companion of a blind 11-year-old boy. The boy's parents speak movingly of how Brenda has attached herself to their son and is raising his self-esteem. "Even though we have two other children, it was with our visually-impaired child that Brenda immediately bonded," they told P.B.B. "Within a few days they became inseparable, and she waits patiently for him to come home from school every day. We feel that she is already building his confidence and making a huge difference in his life." Congratulations to the puppy-raisers, prison staff, and P.B.B. volunteers who worked to train four dogs — and thereby change the lives of four blind people.

The Lucie Show

continued from page 1

was gradually losing her vision, they did not smile until the day, a couple of years later, that Lucie walked into their lives. Judy is a transformed person, he told the inmates. When she used a cane, Lou used to be petrified every time she went out. He would walk a couple of blocks behind her, terrified she was going to fall, or get hit by a car, or get lost. "Now," he said, "I don't do that. She's completely independent."

In fact, both Judy's husband and her daughter had to go through a period of transition when they felt they were no longer needed. All of a sudden, Lucie was doing their job. But they love the dog, who soon became an absolutely integrated part of their lives. Lucie goes everywhere with Judy, allowing her to live her life again. Even though Judy has some vision, at night and in the snow she's 100 % blind. "I would never go out by myself in those conditions with the cane," she told the inmates. "With Lucie I can go out in the snow again. I can feel it falling on my face. It's such a feeling of freedom and happiness." She said that while it was just too difficult to go into crowded stores with a cane, she now does so with complete ease.

"The inmates couldn't get over what they were seeing," reports P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga. "For a lot of them, it was the first time they'd really felt success. They could see a tangible example of something they'd done that was good. Judy was thanking them, and they were saying, 'We can't believe we did it' and 'Thank you for having the courage to come in and meet us and tell us that we did something good.'" Meanwhile, Lucie had been let off her lead

in the recreation yard, where "she just played and played and played with the eight puppies in training," Gilbert Stoga reports. "It was like old times."

Judy wants to return to Bedford Hills this fall: she said was so impressed by the women, and so comfortable with them, she would like to get to know them better. Her visit was enormously inspiring to the 17 inmates who are currently involved with P.B.B. One woman, who'd been through all



PHOTO BY VALERIE SHARP

Lucie at 8 weeks of age with Diana

the preparation and coursework for the program but was nervous about actually becoming a puppy-raiser, made a decision on the spot. "I've been telling Gloria I want a puppy, but maybe not till July or August," she said to Judy. "But seeing you here and seeing Lucie, I've decided that I'm going to get a puppy as soon as one is available, because I too want to make a difference in someone's life."

Raising Well

Ten guide-dog users and their dogs visited the Fishkill men's correctional facility on April 28th to see for themselves how the puppies are trained, learn how they are socialized in prison, and meet the people who are raising them. "This kind of contact — between guide-dog users and puppy-raisers — is extremely important," says P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga. "It gives our inmate puppy-raisers the chance to meet people who use the 'product' they are working so hard to create, at the same time as it gives

them a chance to show guide-dog users how serious they are about their commitment to the dogs and the program. For the guide-dog users, it helps break down barriers set up by stereotypes of prison inmates and helps them see the men and women in the P.B.B. program as sincere, caring individuals." There wasn't a dry eye in the group when, at the end of the visit, one of the guide-dog users turned and said to the men, "What you are doing to help us regain our freedom is extremely important. We cannot thank you enough for all you do for these dogs, for all the hard work and love you put into them, and for letting go of them so they can continue their

journey and become part of our lives."

The next day, P.B.B. took a group of 18 people to Bedford Hills women's prison, where they spent 2 hours with the inmates and their puppies and learned about the program first hand. The women spoke openly and eloquently about their histories, what it is like to be in prison, and what it means to be entrusted with the care of a puppy in such an environment. As a result, one of the visitors volunteered to host a lunch at her home on May 22 to get people together to talk about how to help P.B.B. fund its current mission and expand it to other correctional facilities.

L.A. Confidential

You never know where one of our puppies will turn up. In April, actress Doris Roberts, who plays the mother on *Everyone Loves Raymond*, was the featured star on Oxygen's new TV program *I've Got A Secret*. On the show, a panel tries to guess the star's secret — which in Doris's case was, "I've got a puppy in prison."

A friend of Doris's had sponsored a P.B.B. puppy in her honor and named it after her. When the panel (which included actress Teri Garr and *3rd Rock from the Sun*'s Chris Hogan) failed to guess her secret, Doris won \$1000, which she announced she would use to fund another P.B.B. puppy, named Raymond. She also gave an eloquent explanation of P.B.B.'s mission — rehabilitation and redemption through service and unconditional love — to Oxygen's 10 million viewers.

There was another secret to be revealed, however — this one between the show's producers and P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga. At the end of

On the show, a panel tries to guess the star's secret — which in Doris's case was, "I've got a puppy in prison."

puppy jacket), during the limo ride, facing the lights and screaming audience on the TV set — "nothing bothered her," Gilbert Stoga reports. "She was incredibly calm, as though she were already a guide dog." Can we say that a star is born?



Doris Roberts sent the photo above to Chris Rogers, who is raising Doris, the dog, right.



Applause

Paws for

• **P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga** was voted Volunteer of the Year by the staff of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility and honored at a dinner there on May 18.

• **Lisa Bruno**, who joined the staff of P.B.B. last year, has created a veterinary assistants' training course, which she is teaching twice a month to 17 inmates in the programs at Fishkill and Bedford Hills. This is an important extension of P.B.B.'s mission: inmates who complete the course will have a valuable skill with which to seek employment when they leave prison.

• **Kent Stanley**, who visited both the Bedford Hills and Fishkill prisons in July 1999 with his wife, Jenine, (the president of Guide Dog Users Inc.) was so impressed by what he saw that he has established a fund to help P.B.B. puppy-raisers get started in new lives after they leave prison. He has raised



Jenine and Kent Stanley

\$10,000. In other news from the Stanleys, the International Association of Assistance Dog Partners gave Kent and Jenine its Best Article of the Year Award in the association's 1999 Writing Competition for their article, "Parallels," about their visit to Fishkill. The Stanleys were interviewed on the front page of the last P.B.B. newsletter.

• **Multi-media show:** In addition to the Fox 10 *O'Clock News* segment mentioned on page one, *The New York Post* ran a story on May 15, 2000 about the program at Fishkill, WABC's *Eyewitness News* filmed a segment that aired in late May, and a German TV crew will be filming in June. P.B.B. also was a topic on Curtis Sliwa's radio show, and will be the subject of a piece on the internet TV channel Bark TV. The internet magazine *allpets* published a lengthy story, which can be found online at http://www.allpets.com/magazine/driver.asp?url=pnp1_puppies-bars_may_2000.htm

Give Us Shelter

Over the years, P.B.B. has been very fortunate in having office space donated to us. The good news is: we're expanding, the bad news is: *that means we have to move.* **If you or anyone you know can donate office space for three people**, please call Puppies Behind Bars at **212-924-7404**.

coming soon...

Puppies Behind Bars **t-shirts!**

Short-sleeved cotton t-shirts, printed on front and back, will soon be available from Puppies Behind Bars! These t-shirts make great gifts and are available in adult sizes small, medium, large, and extra large. Send a check for \$15.00 plus \$3 shipping and handling for each shirt to:

Puppies Behind Bars
99 Madison Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10016

call **212-924-7404** for more information

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GOING FOR THE GOLDEN:

P.B.B. has received its first Golden Retriever puppy — which is also its first puppy to come from Guide Dogs of America, in California. Sponsored by Doug Schoen, of Penn, Schoen, & Berland Associates, Joshua is named for Doug's 8-year-old son, who has two dogs at home and is very excited to have a third in the Puppy Project. *Right:* Joshua meets Joshua.

