



# Puppies Behind Bars



PEGGY VANCE

TRAINING INMATES TO RAISE SERVICE DOGS FOR WOUNDED WAR VETERANS AND EXPLOSIVE DETECTION CANINES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

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Winter 2012

# HOST WITH THE POSTS

IT WAS THE THIRD DOG TAGS GRADUATION ceremony to be held in New York City, but the first to be tweeted about by the evening's host, inspiring hundreds of posts and retweets. "Heading to event to recognize wounded warriors and their service dogs," wrote Anderson Cooper on Sunday, November 13th, as a crowd of Puppies Behind Bars supporters, staff, and volunteers converged on the AXA Equitable Center to celebrate with Johan Arenas, Sean Judge, William Pagan, and Drew Reese. The four veterans, all of whom have post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D.), had just completed training with their new canine companions at the Fishkill men's prison, where the pups were raised by inmates.

Cooper, who has reported from many hot zones, most recently Egypt, Japan, and Haiti, acknowledged the enormous sacrifice these soldiers have made, and urged the audience to support returning troops as much as possible. He was introduced by Brian Fischer, the commissioner of New York State's Department of Correctional Services, who spoke about the difference the dogs had made in the lives of the prisoners who raised them, and the bonds he witnessed between the inmates and the veterans.

After each dog saluted, then took a "diploma" in his or her mouth, Chris Fesmire, who was a graduate in 2010, rolled his wheelchair to the microphone to describe the difference his dog, Glenn, has made in his life. The 33-year-old retired Marine sergeant lost both of his legs while serving as a fire-team leader in Al-Anbar

Province, Iraq, and suffers from P.T.S.D. Though Glenn (named for the great actress and P.B.B. supporter Glenn Close) was trained to follow more than 90 commands, Fesmire focused on how much the dog had done for his emotional and psychological well-being. "I perceive myself as such that there is a damper, a sense of gloom, when I am around. Glenn lightens the mood... People focus on her happiness and sweetness, and compliment me. This has led me to start going places, and contributing to society more, since I know that wherever I go there she is. This makes me feel secure."

The last line of Cooper's Twitter post after the ceremony captured what everyone at the AXA Center felt that night. "Hosted great event for Puppies Behind Bars. Service dogs trained by prisoners then given to servicemen with P.T.S.D.," Cooper wrote. "Honored to be a part of it." To thank him, P.B.B. has named a new puppy "Anderson"—a little pale-haired Labrador who began training at the Fishkill men's prison in December.



Left to right: Anderson Cooper, Glenn, Chris Fesmire, and Drew Reese

EVENT PHOTOS BY GEORGE GERBACIA, COURTESY OF AXA EQUITABLE PRODUCTION GROUP

Uniforms, dogs, and devotion to P.B.B.'s mission were hot topics as guests mingled before and after the brief but moving ceremony.



## See How They Trained

*To get to that triumphant Dog Tags graduation ceremony, the four wounded warriors put in weeks of work, with not a little help from friends. P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga wrote the following dispatch to the board as she and Nora Moran began training the veterans and their dogs:*

Nora and I moved in to the Hampton Inn in Central Valley last night, which will be our home for the next 16 days. The men, from Brooklyn, Philadelphia, the Boston area, and the Salt Lake City area, arrived as well. Class starts in a few hours.

Each “team training,” as these 16-day periods are called, involves training in prison, for hands-on experience with the dogs, coupled

with “outside” experience in grocery and department stores, restaurants, museums, parks, etc., so the men know how to position their dogs in such situations and, more importantly, how to respond to the public and to store managers when they are told “no dogs allowed.”

In past sessions Nora and I have taken the men to Stewart airport so they know what it is like to go to an airport with their dogs, but the airport here is really small and we could never get past security. This past June, the Westchester County Police Department got two bomb-sniffing dogs from us, so I figured I'd ask for their help with the airport.

They have arranged to take the men (and Nora and me) to the much larger and busier White Plains airport, and to take the soldiers

all the way through security and to baggage claim, etc., so the guys get the full experience of what it will be like to fly with their dogs. I am incredibly grateful for this.

Also, each “team training” we've spent a day at West Point (going to the commissary and PX, getting a tour of the post) and the F.D.R. Museum in Hyde Park. This year, Wiley [board member Colonel Wiley Thompson] has arranged for us to go to Camp Buckner every day next week, so that the dogs can play off lead at the beach there. It is safe and completely deserted, just us and the dogs. Given how complicated it is to work with four wounded veterans and service dogs for 16 days, it is really wonderful for P.B.B. to be able to call on friends, and to have them respond so enthusiastically.

## Her Faith-Based Initiative

After three years as an Army chaplain, Karen Hallett knows what a godsend a dog can be. In Afghanistan, “I got to work with Sergeant First Class Timmie,” she recalls, referring to a yellow Lab therapy dog who, like all dogs working in the Army, was given his own rank and orders. “And I saw what an impact he had on soldiers coming into the Combat Stress program.”

“I know for myself, as a chaplain, we have our days too,” Hallett adds. There was one day, while she was working with locals at an Afghan hospital, that a death hit her particularly hard. “I was feeling dispirited, but when I got back to base I ran into a mine-detecting dog, and it really lifted me up. I thought, if I could have a dog with me, I could help put soldiers back together all the time.”

Last fall, thinking outside the box, she decided to try and induct some of that canine medicine into her unit, which is deploying to Afghanistan in May, so she called Puppies Behind Bars. The idea struck P.B.B. staff as brilliant, and the decision was made to give Hallett a puppy, along with the same training as the wounded warriors in the Dog Tags program. P.B.B. will retain ownership of the dog for five years, as it normally does, but in Afghanistan the dog will live with Hallett in the officers' quarters on the Forward Operating Base. “We'll keep the dog in safe areas,” she notes, “but when the soldiers come back [from combat zones], they really do need to have something to bring them comfort, and I can't think of anything better than a dog to do that.”

After the unit returns Stateside, in 2013, the dog will continue to be a therapy dog at Stewart Air National Guard Base, her unit's home near West Point. Like Timmie, the pup will have an official rank. “I'm hoping for Sergeant Major,” Hallett says, laughing. “But it will probably just be Sergeant First Class.” She has another hope, too: that word about her idea will spread, making a unit with its own therapy dog more of a rule than an exception.

As the newsletter goes to press, two female black Labs, Zoe and Kona, are being trained and tested for the job, which will involve flying in a helicopter. Thanks to the Westchester Country Police Department, Zoe and Kona will both get their “wings”—a ride in one of the W.C.P.D.'s helicopters. Stay tuned....



EVENT PHOTOS BY GEORGE CERRACIA  
COURTESY OF AXA EQUITABLE PRODUCTION GROUP

# Colton's People

**O**n December 6, 2010, when 20-year-old Colton Rusk was killed by a sniper in Afghanistan, the first to reach the fallen Marine was a black Lab named Eli, the explosive-detection canine Rusk had been assigned to handle.

"Every time he called home, it was always about Eli," his mother, Kathy Rusk, told the Huffington Post. "It gave me some comfort knowing that Colton wasn't alone over there." The young soldier's grieving family were allowed to adopt the dog, and friends searched for ways to honor his sacrifice, responding to Kathy Rusk's plea that her son not be forgotten.

It was Susan Oravetz-Kalman, mother of Rusk's closest friend in the unit, Christopher Kalman, who had the idea of sponsoring a dog in his memory. She contacted P.B.B., and by Valentine's Day 2011 the puppy Colton, who had been born on Christmas, entered training at the Fishkill prison to become a service dog for a wounded veteran. His inmate

puppy-raiser sends photos and updates not only to Rusk's family, but also to the Marine unit in which Rusk served.

Though P.B.B. waived the donation fee after hearing Rusk's story, Oravetz-Kalman

other 3/5 [Colton's unit] Marine Moms helping me, too. One in Texas and the other in Nebraska....

"I do not want to fail to mention the significance that dates related to Colton (puppy)

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sent out hundreds of postcards asking for contributions. "As I tell people, if you got a Christmas card from me, you'll be getting a postcard, too! That is 250 people right there," she wrote to P.B.B. "I am also spreading the cards around at local shelters, doctors'/vets' offices, V.F.W.'s, and firehouses. I have two

have for us all. That he was born on Christmas day reminded us what wonderful gifts God continues to give us although there is sorrow. Then [the dog] being placed on Valentine's Day shows us that the love that was Colton Rusk will be passed on in many, many ways, touching even those we'll never know!"

## DONATION FORM

I would like to sponsor and name a puppy (minimum donation: \$6,000.).

Please accept my donation for:

- 1 puppy's weekend visit to NYC (\$35)
- A sleeping crate for 1 puppy (\$85)
- Leashes and bowls for 1 puppy (\$50)
- Other amount

Please charge my credit card:

- Visa  MasterCard  AmEx  Discover

(Please list name as it appears on card. List billing address.)

Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp: \_\_\_\_\_

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

- Add my friend to your mailing list

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

(Tax ID # 13-3969389). Please mail your tax-deductible contribution with this form to:

Puppies Behind Bars | 263 West 38th Street, 4th floor, New York, N.Y. 10018

CFC# 11902



# Puppies Behind Bars

263 West 38 Street  
4th floor  
New York, NY 10018

## GOLD STANDARD

Receiving full accreditation from **Assistance Dogs International** was a great way to end 2011. "A.D.I. full accreditation represents a significant achievement for the staff and management of Puppies Behind Bars," wrote A.D.I. president Peter Gorbong to P.B.B.'s Gloria Gilbert Stoga. "It is indicative of your organization's strong commitment to upholding the highest professional standards of excellence within the Assistance Dog Industry."

## FRANKIE TV

*Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* featured **Sgt. Allen Hill** and his service dog, **Frankie**, on November 4. Frankie was paired with Sgt. Hill through P.B.B.'s Dog Tags program in 2009, and now, thanks to the ABC show, the Hill family has received



a beautiful new home. In just seven days, a 4500-square-foot house was constructed and decorated on 2.5 acres in Ottawa, Kansas, complete with swimming pool and doggie

park (with sprinklers and concrete bone-shaped decorations). Let's face it: Frankie has some kind of star appeal. Last October, as **Oprah** revisited her favorite moments in *The Oprah Winfrey Show's* amazing 25-year run, she reran her 2009 segment on P.B.B. In it, *Damages* star **Glenn Close**—a true-blue P.B.B. supporter—accompanied Sgt. Hill into Fishkill prison, where Frankie was raised by Roberto Rodriguez. Oprah's rebroadcast included a follow-up with Rodriguez, who had since been paroled.

## TWO BY TWO

Even as the P.B.B. board of directors said a

reluctant goodbye to **Katherine Bang** and **Whitney Bracco**, valued colleagues who were stepping down because of term limits, the vote was unanimous to welcome back **Cynthia Mas** and **Daniel Lobitz**, who were returning to action. That's the *good* kind of revolving door.

## COUNTRY GIVING

Board member **Lori Gevalt** and her husband, **Peter**, gave a benefit cocktail in June in Litchfield County, Connecticut, drawing 80 very interested and civic-minded people, several of whom have since become donors. **Col. Wiley Thompson**, his wife, **Tina**, and **Major Denis Fajardo** drove all the way from West Point—Thompson and Fajardo in their dress blues—to be on hand to answer questions about how P.B.B. helps the military and, of course, a pup was in tow. It was a wonderful introduction to a whole new community.



A puppy is sponsored and named and placed into the arms of her highly skilled inmate raiser, who is prepped with textbooks and supplies. Throughout the 20 months that the pup spends in prison, she outgrows many collars and leashes, and devours bags and bags of dog food. The pup and her inmate raiser attend weekly P.B.B.-instructed classes where they learn to use her training toys. She leaves prison for routine veterinary check-ups and ventures out with specially trained volunteers on socialization outings that expose her to family life, restaurants, stores, and nursing homes. Upon graduating, she earns her working-dog certification and is ready to serve a wounded war veteran or law enforcement official.

**Be part of a P.B.B. story and support us!**

## NEW YEAR, NEW OFFICES WE'VE MOVED!

P.B.B. is now at: **263 West 38 Street, 4th floor, New York, N.Y. 10018**. Our phone and fax numbers remain the same.

Enclosed in each newsletter is a self-reply envelope, which has the old address on it. If you are kind enough to think about making a donation, **would you please cross off the address on the envelope and change it to the new one?** We want your donation to go towards our puppies, our inmates, and our wounded warriors, so we are using up these envelopes with the old address and hope you do not mind us asking you to change it.