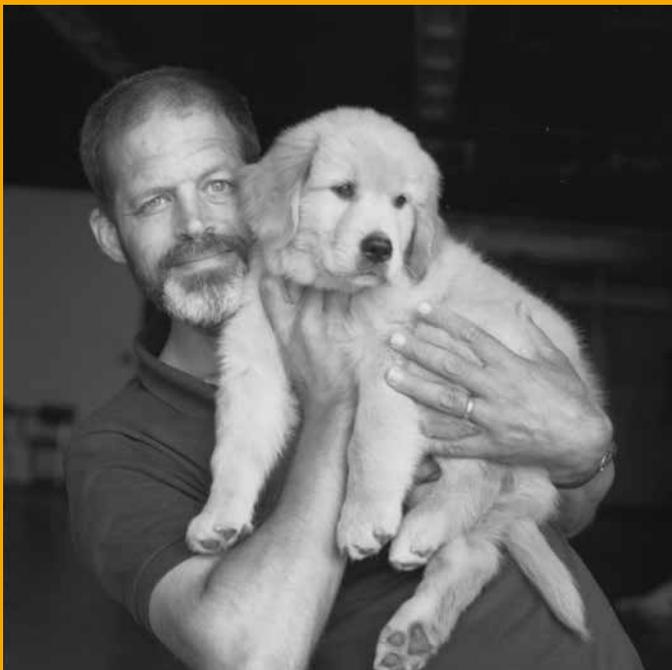




Puppies  
Behind  
Bars



Photos: Valerie Shaff

**25TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL 1997-2022**

# PROVIDING COVID RELIEF: **NEW YORK MARCH–MAY 2020**



Photos: PBB

When New York City was a COVID hotspot and the city was completely shut down, the New York National Guard asked us to bring our dogs to visit and comfort the young soldiers fighting COVID. Of course we jumped at the chance. Manhattan seemed like a ghost town, populated mostly by soldiers, nurses and doctors, and NYPD officers. Three times a week for three months we brought our dogs in to help those brave first responders cope with the trauma of disease, death, and loneliness. For the four PBB staff members and one volunteer, Dr. Peter Kross, who accompanied the dogs on their rounds, those three months remain imprinted in our hearts and minds as a way that we, too, gave back.

## A TIME FOR REFLECTION, AND TO LOOK FORWARD



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Last summer I announced that I was leaving Puppies. I thought it was time for renewal: for someone to take Puppies to the next level and for me to embrace new challenges. But as my departure loomed, I realized I was wrong. I was not ready to leave; Puppies was a greater part of my being than I realized; there is still much to be done and new ideas to implement.

I am incredibly lucky that both the board and Executive Vice President Eric Barsness, who had been asked to become interim president, agreed that my staying was a good idea. It's rare that we get "do-overs" in life, especially on huge decisions, so I feel blessed and grateful. Eric is, and will remain, an invaluable part of Puppies' leadership as we continue to evolve.

The support of Acting Commissioner Anthony Annucci of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and Acting Commissioner Victoria Kuhn of the New Jersey Department of Corrections has also been absolutely essential. Without them, Puppies could not have continued its work throughout the pandemic.

Our history tells me that Puppies will continue to change, but our history also tells me that we will continue to have an outsize impact on the individuals and communities we serve—in the world and in the correctional facilities where we operate. Our dogs,



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the individuals who raise them, and the veterans, first responders, explosive-detection canine handlers, and police departments who work and live with our dogs will continue to do amazing work.

Thank you for your interest in Puppies Behind Bars. I know that Puppies is important to you and hope that you will continue to engage with, and support us, in all the ways you have.

I could not be more excited about our next chapter.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gloria Gilbert Stoga". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gloria Gilbert Stoga  
*President & Founder*

# OUR FIRST 25 YEARS



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Photo courtesy of Judy Goldman



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Photo: Valerie Shaff



Photo: Extreme Makeover: Home Edition



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**The New York Times**  
National

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 2012

## For the Battle-Scarred, Comfort at Leash's End

### Service Dogs Used in Post-Trauma Cases

By JAMIE LOEBER

**J**ust weeks after Chris Gehring, 25, an Iraq war veteran, got a dog, he was able to cut in half the dose of anxiety and sleep medications he took for post-traumatic stress disorder. The night terrors and worrisome thoughts that kept him awake for days no end ceased.

James Ely, 21, another Iraq veteran with the stress disorder, scrapped his medications entirely soon after getting a dog — and set fire in a grocery store for the first time in three years.

The dogs to whom they credit their improved health are not just pets. Rather, they are psychiatric service dogs, specially trained to help traumatized veterans leave the battlefield behind as they reintegrate into society.

Because of stories like these, the federal government, not usually at the forefront of alternative medical treatments, is spending several million dollars to study whether scientific research supports anecdotal reports that the dogs might speed recovery from the psychological wounds of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In dozens of interviews, veterans and their therapists reported dramatic reductions in P.T.S.D. symptoms and an increase in confidence after receiving a service dog.

Veterans rely on their dogs to gauge the safety of their surroundings, allowing them to venture into public places without constantly scanning for snipers, hidden bombs and other dangers lurking in the hands of those with the disorder.

In August, Jacob Hyde got his service dog, Mya, from Puppies Behind Bars, a program based in New York State that uses prisoners to raise and train dogs for lives of service. The organization has placed 23 dogs with veterans with P.T.S.D. in the last two years, training them to obey 87 different commands.

"If I didn't have legs, I would have to crawl around," said Mr. Hyde, 25. "If I didn't have Mya, I wouldn't be able to leave the house."

If Mr. Hyde says "black," the dog will stand perpendicularly in front of him to keep other people at a distance. If he asks Mya to "get his back," the dog will sit facing backward by his side.

The dogs are trained to pull a soldier from a flashback, dial 911 on a phone and even sense a panic attack before it starts. And, perhaps most important, the veterans' sense of responsibility, ego and self-awareness is renewed by caring for the dogs.

"The dogs help soldiers understand what's happening as it's happening, what to do about it, and then doing it," said Juan Ramirez, a generalist whose research again has received \$300,000 from the Defense Department to study the issue. "You can use your dog kind of like a mirror to reflect back your emotional issues."

The dog is also often the first visible manifestation of a former soldier's disability. Because people are curious about the animal, the veteran gets an opportunity to talk about his condition and his war experiences, discussions that can contribute to recovery. More formally, the dogs help increase public awareness of P.T.S.D., which the Veterans Affairs Department said affects about one quarter of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with whom it has worked.



The dogs learn to fetch, turn lights on and off and even dial 911.

**When soldiers can't leave the war behind, dogs may show a path.**

Because I'm a prisoner who is part of "The PUPPIES BEHIND BARS" program I've been given a puppy to teach, to protect, to love and to train. I'm to make this frisky guy ready for a guide-dog school, I'm learning to be fit for the task. I'm not going to intellectualize what it means to have a puppy in my charge, I won't talk about the humanizing effect the puppy has on me or the prison guards or the other prisoners. There is, however, an impression of altruistic concern where I've not seen any before. So what does it mean to be given a puppy while in prison? I guess it means to be part of humanity.



Photo: Peggy Vance



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Photo: Peggy Vance



Photo: Peggy Vance



All photos this page: PBB Archive

## The P.B.B. Experience: Learning About Myself

As a P.B.B. puppy raiser, raising my puppy has already been an enriching experience though it has not always been easy. It has had its ups and its downs, its good times and its bad, its proud moments and its not so proud moments. Overall, however, I've genuinely enjoyed being a part of this program. I am definitely a richer person for the experience, and the most important part of my life that has been enriched by this program is my relationship with my son.

In raising and caring for my puppy, I've acquired a very sensitive awareness of how I interact with Rosetta and how that interaction might affect her. I am always conscious, though never with a conscious effort, of everything I do, everything I say, and every situation I place her in and their possible impact on her.

Several months ago while in the prison visiting room, I noticed that I was suddenly very conscious of my interaction with my son and its impact on him. I had become painfully aware that a prison visiting room is not a natural environment for a father and son to nurture a bond, but it has been the only environment our relationship has ever known. That being the case, my newfound awareness has allowed our bond to continue to grow even in the unnatural environment of a prison visiting room. I now find myself weighing my words and measuring my actions very carefully and trying to understand how it all might affect him.

This newly acquired sensitivity of awareness as a result of my puppy raising experience, I believe, has drawn closer the special bond my son and I share. I've truly learned more about myself and my relationship with my son from my P.B.B. experience.

Vince  
September 6, 1999



Photo: Valerie Shaff

## WAGGING RIGHTS

Twenty-five years ago, when Puppies Behind Bars (PBB) was still an unnamed dream, its founder, Gloria Gilbert Stoga, could not have imagined the impact it would have across the United States. Or that it would pivot again and again in response to seismic changes in the world—terrorist attacks, wars, pandemic—all while remaining true to its core principles.

At first, the fledging non-profit worked primarily with Guiding Eyes for the Blind and the Guide Dog Foundation, taking their guide-dogs-in-training into state prisons in New York and New Jersey, where incarcerated individuals taught the pups ten basic commands and manners, and helped socialize them. The dogs then went back to the schools to be professionally trained and paired with their visually impaired clients.

Four years later, the September 11 attacks shook New York City and the country to the core. “I remember being astonished at the huge numbers of law enforcement officers, many from agencies that I didn’t know existed, that blanketed New York City,” says Gilbert Stoga. “And I remember wanting to find ways to help them cope with the consequences of what had happened.”

Since she lived across the street from a police station, her first idea was to offer her apartment for officers to take showers, to nap, or to use the phone (at a time when cell phones were not yet ubiquitous) to call home. Her second idea was to walk her two PBB-raised Labrador retrievers to the Jacob Javits Center, which was a staging ground for first responders at the World Trade Center site, at 11:00 p.m. every night.

“That was when shifts changed and workers would emerge from Ground Zero, shellshocked and covered head-to-toe in white dust,” she recalls. “Some were too dazed to even notice us, but others would stop, interact with the dogs and tell me about their own dogs at home. After dealing all day with tragedy and horror, they needed a bit of normality. The experience opened my eyes to the healing impact dogs could have.”

### **“I MAY BE INCARCERATED, BUT I AM STILL AN AMERICAN.”**

As an organization, Puppies Behind Bars’ response to the terrorist attacks was to start raising explosive-detection canines (EDC’s) for law enforcement agencies around the United States and for other governments who were then America’s partners in fighting terrorism. Though Gilbert Stoga had wondered how the prison inmates would feel about raising dogs to help law enforcement, they all said the same thing: that they were grateful for the opportunity to help their country. “I may be incarcerated,” one puppy-raiser told her, “but I am still an American.”

It was after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan and Iraq that Gilbert Stoga’s experience at the Javits Center truly came into play. More and more American military personnel were coming home wounded, physically and/or psychologically. Women and men with amputations, severe burn scarring, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder and other wounds needed service dogs. It seemed an obvious, if daunting, decision: Puppies Behind Bars would raise and train dogs to help these veterans return to normal life.

“The shift was enormously challenging,” she remembers. “We needed more dogs; we needed to learn how to train them on dozens of commands; we needed to invent new commands that were relevant to the issues confronting the veterans who would receive the dogs. Eventually, our dogs learned 92 specific commands—everything from a command for tactile grounding during a panic attack, to a command to call for help if a veteran had a flashback.”

The challenge didn’t end there, she notes. “We had to build relationships with the military to identify veterans to receive our dogs, find a place where we could take vets to train with their new ‘battle buddies,’ and develop protocols and practices to help sustain them and their dogs when they returned home. And we had to raise the money for all this new work.”

The puppy raisers leapt at the chance to learn and, in their own way, to serve. A PBB guide-dog recipient, Wendy Davis, who was working as a psychologist

at a VA hospital, spread the word at the VA and among veterans that this small service dog organization in New York City was ready and able to help. PBB developed substantial relationships with different branches of the military, especially with West Point. And it tripled its volunteer base to help socialize the dogs outside prison.

From retirees to school kids to families to foundations, people gave what was needed. “We were—and continue to be—humbled by the overwhelming generosity of our fellow Americans who stepped up with financial support,” Gilbert Stoga says.

In 2008, PBB paired its first service dog, a gorgeous male yellow Lab named Pax, with an Iraq war vet—and from there the initiative grew in scale and scope. For the past fourteen years, staff, puppy raisers, and volunteers have had the privilege of working with veterans and of seeing how PBB’s service dogs have transformed their lives. Women and men with physical and/or psychological wounds, are able not only to cope, but to flourish.

#### **A DOG IN YOUR LAP MAKES IT EASIER TO ASK FOR HELP. OR CRY.**

The next evolution was in response to the 2012 mass shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. As she had before, Gilbert Stoga thought about those who were dispatched to that nightmarish scene. “Like war veterans, first responders are regularly confronted with damaging trauma and coping with the consequences,” she says. “PBB—and our dogs—could do something about that.”

To begin with, dogs were paired with individuals who had served at Ground Zero and were still suffering the consequences. The next step would be placing dogs with police departments, to ease the distrust and anxiety officers experience on a daily basis. A police officer walking the beat with a Labrador by her side will seem much more approachable. A police officer feeling overwhelmed, depressed, or suicidal finds that a dog in his lap makes it easier to ask for help. Victims will welcome the comfort that a PBB-trained Lab can provide.

Today PBB has 15 therapy dogs in departments on the East and West Coasts. Six more will be paired this summer and close to 40 more are currently in training for the work. One of the three pups with the

NYPD recently stayed with the family of an officer killed in a tragic shooting this winter. For PBB, “it’s been an honor to work with the department that kept our city safe after the horror of the 9/11 attacks,” says Gilbert Stoga, “as well as with other police departments from around the country.” All the officers paired with dogs report vastly improved community relations, describe having conversations with people who would never have approached them before, and say that they love their jobs more than ever. They notice increased morale throughout their precincts.

The healing power of a PBB dog may never have been clearer than it was in the spring of 2020. With New York City the epicenter of COVID, Gilbert Stoga got a call: Could the pups bring comfort to young National Guard soldiers and medical professionals from across the country, who were shouldering the grim work? Her answer was an immediate “Yes!”

“The doctors and nurses were working 12- to 17-hour shifts, seeing more death than they imagined they would see in a lifetime,” she recalls. “Because no family members or clergy were allowed into hospitals, they were also the only emotional support for patients who knew they were dying. Imagine the toll that took. And imagine the impact on a young National Guard soldier pulling long hours in a make-shift morgue.”

Three times a week for three months, PBB brought its dogs to the two hotels in Times Square where the soldiers and health-care professionals were staying. Some of those heroic workers threw balls up the long, empty corridors of the hotels and laughed with glee when the Labs came bounding back with them. Some just sat on the floor and cried into the dogs’ fur. For the PBB staffers who volunteered to make the visits, those days and nights are extraordinary memories, testimony to what dogs can do for people in pain.

#### **IT IS ALL ABOUT THE DOGS.**

Through all the changes, the guiding philosophy of Puppies Behind Bars has been that it is all about the dogs. The women and men who are incarcerated have been asked to put puppies at the center of their lives and commit to producing the best service dogs in the country. Year after year, dog after dog, they have delivered.



Photo: Rudy Valdez

PBB is a tough program—less than half of the individuals who start, stick with it—but for those who do, it is transforming. They gain marketable skills, learn to make and keep commitments, and develop the ability to work together. Perhaps more important, they learn to be proud of themselves and come to see that they are more than the crimes they committed. Their families see that they are engaged in worthwhile work and are comforted by that. Many of the puppy raisers have found work in animal-related fields upon parole; all of those who stay in touch say the program set them up for success on the outside.

Ultimately, Puppies Behind Bars is about dogs and about people. It's a small organization—the extraordinarily dedicated staff numbers less than

fifteen—but it punches way above its weight because of the wide variety of stakeholders who are critical to success. To the staff and the incarcerated individuals who train the dogs, add PBB's volunteers, donors, veterinarians, police and military professionals, veterans, friends who go to amazing lengths when problems need to be solved, corrections department officials and officers, and board members.

As it enters its next quarter-century, PBB reflects the efforts, values, and vision of one person above all: Gloria Gilbert Stoga. She took this unique organization from a dream to a solid reality, navigating change after change. And, on the eve of her retirement, she was brave enough to share a personal discovery—that she loved working at PBB more than she knew, and didn't want to go.



Photo: Peggy Vance



Photo: C. Sutton, ATF



Photo: Peggy Vance



### GLORIA, JAN & JULIETTE

I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO EXPERIENCE MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THIS WORLD BY HELPING TO TRAIN THESE DOGS IN THE DETECTION FIELD. IT WOULD MAKE ME FEEL PROUD AND CHANGE SOMETHING WITHIN MYSELF KNOWING I WAS A PART OF MAKING OUR COUNTRY A BETTER AND SAFER PLACE TO LIVE.

YOU ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR GIVING ME THE COURAGE TO "STAND OUT" SO TO SPEAK IN A WORLD I HAVE VERY LOW SELF CONFIDENCE IN. SO THIS PROGRAM IS AN ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR ME IN MANY WAYS. IT FEELS GOOD TO KNOW THAT EVEN THOUGH I MAY NOT LIVE IN THE "FREE" WORLD, I'VE HELPED THOSE WHO DO.

THANK YOU AGAIN AND HAPPY HOLIDAYS & HAPPY NEW YEAR

MICHELLE

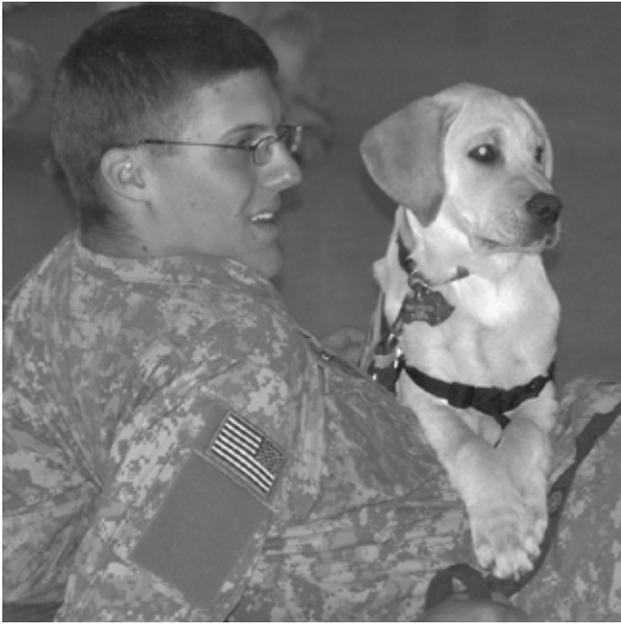
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Photo: Hilarie Runyon



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Puppy Love Behind Bars



Photo: Peggy Vance



Photo courtesy of Andrea Baker



Photo: Peggy Vance



Photo: Peggy Vance



Photo: Peggy Vance

Among his skills, Eric Barsness, our Executive Vice President, is a trained classical singer. Once we moved all of our “team training” graduations into prison, Eric began leading us in the “Star-Spangled Banner,” “God Bless America,” and “America the Beautiful.” And by his side, each and every time, was Dudley. Dudley responded to Eric’s resonant bass voice and would join in precisely when Eric hit climactic phrases. They were completely in sync; with Dudley pausing when Eric did; with Dudley increasing his volume as Eric increased his. Dudley passed away in August 2019, but for those of us lucky enough to have heard this dynamic singing duo, the memories still bring many smiles.

## MISSION STATEMENT

Puppies Behind Bars (PBB) trains incarcerated individuals to raise service dogs for wounded war veterans and first responders, as well as explosive-detection canines for law enforcement. Puppies enter prison at the age of 8 weeks and live with their incarcerated puppy-raisers for approximately 24 months. As the puppies mature into well-loved, well-behaved dogs, their raisers learn what it means to contribute to society rather than take from it.

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Gloria Gilbert Stoga  
*President & Founder*  
*Puppies Behind Bars*



**BE PART  
OF OUR  
NEXT  
25 YEARS!**

Photo: Peggy Vance

Over the years, we have been extremely fortunate to collaborate with these correctional facilities:  
Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, New York  
Downstate Correctional Facility, New York  
Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, New Jersey  
Fishkill Correctional Facility, New York  
Mid-Orange Correctional Facility, New York  
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Puppies Behind Bars is a nonprofit organization under the guidelines set forth in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Tax I.D. # 13-3969389  
CFC # 11902

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**TUNE IN TO OUR PODCAST, "PUPPIES BEHIND BARS:  
FINDING MAGIC IN UNEXPECTED PLACES"**



## SERVING AT NYPD FUNERALS: **JANUARY 2022**



Photos courtesy of City of Middletown Police Department, Colchester Police Department, NYPD, Town of Groton Police Department, Yale University Police Department

In our 25-year history, we have had many honors. Among the most meaningful was to have ten of our dogs at the funerals of two slain NYPD police officers in January, at the invitation of the NYPD. Our dogs comforted the families and colleagues of the murdered officers, and they comforted the tens of thousands of law enforcement professionals who came from around the world to pay their respects.



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