



Puppies Behind Bars



PHOTOS BY RADHIKA CHALASANI

TRAINING INMATES TO RAISE SERVICE DOGS FOR THE DISABLED AND EXPLOSIVE DETECTION CANINES FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT

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THE PUPPY PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Fall 2008

“IT’S THE BEST DAY EVER”: AN AUTISTIC BOY AND HIS DOG



LAST AUGUST, Cole, a seven-year old autistic boy, graduated from East Coast Assistance Dogs (E.C.A.D.) with Jordan, a yellow Labrador Retriever raised at Mid-Orange Correctional Facility. Cole’s mother (who asked that his name be changed for this article) agreed to talk to Puppies Behind Bars about the progress her son has made with Jordan and what it has meant for Cole and their family. She too wished to remain anonymous, but signs herself “A Most Grateful Mom.”

The story of Cole and Jordan is unique, but it represents something new, and very important, for P.B.B.: helping kids. Since P.B.B. began raising service dogs, two years ago, half the pups have gone to children with disabilities, while the rest are partnered with wounded veterans.

P.B.B.: *Are there public misconceptions about autism?*

Cole’s Mom: In the early years, many a head would turn, followed by a disapproving look, when Cole had one of his unruly tantrums as we shopped. Physically, Cole looked normal, so people would just assume that we were indulgent parents with an out-of-control child.

I vividly remember an afternoon when Cole laid down in front of a grocery-store entrance after he realized that he was not getting a treat he wanted. I couldn’t get Cole into the car, as he was drooping and heavy. I just sat there in front of the store and developed “alligator skin” while people stared. When I finally got him to sleep that night, the tears came pouring down my face. All I could think was, Doesn’t anybody understand?

Fortunately people are becoming aware of

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autism and its symptoms, thanks in part to media coverage.

P.B.B.: *Can you tell us a little bit about autism in general and about Cole's autism in particular?*

In very basic terms, autism is a developmental disorder. Usually diagnosed in children by age four or five, it can vary in severity and form. Currently, autism affects 1 in 150 persons in the United States. There is no known cure, but with treatment the goal is to maximize the individual's independence and ability to adapt socially.

In Cole's case we felt something was not quite right with his development by the time he turned three, so we sought medical advice. He had been slow to sit, crawl, and walk, and had a vocabulary of only 50 words. He began to exhibit crashing behaviors with toys at school, and did not want to join in group activities. Cole was soothed by a predictable nighttime routine, which included having the light and ceiling fan on and my company until he fell asleep. It was often extremely difficult to distract or reassure him from his thoughts or fears, and he would often get stuck in thought.

Cole was initially diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, but after some time the diagnosis was refined to atypical autism. With the help of new medicine and therapists, Cole has made some huge gains. He has a small set of friends with whom he is eager to play, but he still does not understand a great deal of hidden social nuances. Cole can read and write and understands language in a literal sense, but does not understand sarcasm or words with double meanings.

P.B.B.: *Tell us something about the daily tasks Jordan helps make easier.*

We sought out a service dog for Cole to help him manage his tantrums and their aftermath, increase all of our socialization, and be a steadfast companion. We have gained all of this, and so much more. Jordan has increased our ability as a family to socialize. Having neighbors and friends ask Cole about the dog, and how they work as a team, helps to enhance Cole's social skills, and we as a family are there to help him answer questions when needed.

We have learned to recognize the onset of Cole's tantrums and direct Jordan to Cole. Jordan licks Cole, providing a soothing sensory relief. Cole becomes distracted and forgets why he was mad. With Jordan's help, Cole can now navigate parking lots and cross streets

safely. Some autistic children run away from a parent on a street or in a crowd, so safety is always a concern. In Cole's case, he gets distracted and forgets to look before crossing the street. Jordan wears a harness which Cole holds onto, and I hold onto Jordan's leash. If I notice that Cole is inattentive, I simply tell Jordan to wait as we approach a curb or crosswalk. It works beautifully. No more nagging Cole! Depending on his mood, we talk about why Jordan took a rest.

Cole, like many autistic kids, has difficulty thinking of the sequential steps needed to complete a task. He has been taught four sequential commands to use when he wants to play with Jordan. By using these, Cole is able to get the desired response from Jordan and avoid unwanted behaviors such as jumping. This has taken time, but he was motivated to achieve this out of his love for Jordan and his yearning to play with him. Our hope is that Cole's success with sequencing will motivate him to transfer these skills to other areas of his life, including his studies. He is currently writing a story about Jordan.

After dressing in the morning, Cole makes time to lie down with Jordan before school. He loves Jordan's fur, because it provides him with a soothing feeling. After school, Cole knows he needs to follow a routine, including feeding and exercising Jordan. By telling him that Jordan needs to rest we take the focus off Cole. At Cub Scout meetings, the library, and restaurant and mall outings, Cole is more relaxed. The environmental distractions around him do not appear to disturb Cole as much, as he is preoccupied with attending to his dog.

At night, we read with Cole. But now it is Jordan who stays to provide Cole with company as he falls asleep. This has freed my husband and me to have some much needed quality time together as parents.

P.B.B.: *Tell us about Jordan and Cole's initial training period at E.C.A.D.*

Cole was initially afraid of Jordan, who had a great deal of energy. But Cole soon became less afraid and we rationalized that Jordan's energy level would likely mellow with age and that a livelier dog would better carry Cole places he needed to go, versus a docile companion. We put our bet on Jordan and

began training.

I quickly realized that Cole should be a part of Jordan's team-training as well. "He can do this," I said to myself. It was a smart move. Though he needed much supervision, Cole was so motivated that he trained for hours and would color pictures, his favorite pastime, during breaks. He rarely complained and was very focused. Watching him manage the tasks competently was heartwarming. Cole loved being with Jordan and the E.C.A.D. dogs. I made a calendar, which reassured Cole, to show him how many days were left until graduation and what was to be scheduled each day.

His favorite training task by far was going to the movie theater to see *Underdog* with Jordan. He was so thrilled. The entire ride home he sang over and over "It's the Best Day Ever," a song from the Nickelodeon television show *SpongeBob SquarePants*. I called Lu Picard, the director of E.C.A.D., on my cell phone. "Can you hear him? He's beaming ear to ear. Thank you!" She replied, "That's why I do this."



P.B.B.: *Has your family life with Jordan and Cole as a team changed in ways you did not predict or expect?*

Thankfully, all our family members love Jordan. We all work together to teach Cole and Jordan new tasks and have grown positively as a family as a result of this experience. As we go about our daily routine, teaching the public about service dogs—when to pet and when not to pet—has become a constant. This has been good for Cole's socialization, but admittedly sometimes it can be the most challenging part of the job. At last we do not feel like a family with a child with special challenges, but like an average family. In a simple way, Jordan helps us to feel typical even when everything is helter-skelter around us. This is something most "normal" families are able to experience, yet we had been unable to do so due to the added stress that training a pet would have placed on our family. Jordan has helped us to feel whole, where collectively we had come to feel broken. He has been a godsend.

P.B.B.: *How do you think your son has changed since Jordan entered his life?*

Thanks to Jordan, Cole's smiles show very

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visibly his greater sense of competence. He is becoming increasingly independent. Cole no longer holds our hands when walking. Instead he holds the harness of his capable service dog. Most importantly, Cole is slowly learning to control his emotions. Jordan acts as Cole's barometer. Cole has learned that Jordan becomes frightened if he rages, and knows that he needs to control his emotions in order to be with his friend.

P.B.B.: *Talk about Jordan with respect to how his personality complements Cole's, and how Jordan and Cole have bonded.*

Cole and Jordan have similar temperaments. Both have times of high energy contrasted by periods of quiet low reserve. For the most part the two are in sync. They are amazingly tolerant with each other when they might be in different moods. Sometimes Cole will crawl right on top of Jordan while he is dead asleep, or hug Jordan too tight, noticeably bothering Jordan. Other times Jordan will jump on Cole and leave a hurtful scratch on his arm. But both have a give-and-take attitude that is great!

P.B.B.: *What has your family learned from Cole and his experience both before and with Jordan?*

Throughout Cole's childhood and the unveiling of his disorder, it never mattered

much to us what label people gave his condition. We searched for answers because we wanted the best for our son, and we appreciate him for who he is. We have sought a myriad of professionals to assist us in aiding our son, but in the past nine months we have become convinced that help does not merely come from books, professionals, and therapies ... it can also come from a beautiful four-legged friend.

P.B.B.: *How did your recent visit to Mid-Orange Correctional Facility, where Jordan was raised, match your expectations?*

Prior to my visit last April to Mid-Orange, where I observed P.B.B.'s weekly puppy-raising class, I had never visited a prison. So I had no frame of reference. It is one thing to grasp the merits of the P.B.B. program from looking at the photography book and reading the P.B.B. website. But nothing brings this home like witnessing firsthand the love, devotion, and pride these men exhibit for their dogs! The men were warm, friendly, and gracious, and they thanked me again and again for coming with Jordan to speak to them. They were proud to show me the skills they had taught their dogs. One by one, they talked about what the program meant to them and their lives. They spoke with emotion about giving back to others, and hope for the future. I shook the hand of each of them before leaving. I was honored to have made their acquaintance.

SAVE THE DATE

Honor and Celebrate Puppies Behind Bars
First New York Graduating Class

Dog Tags:

Service Dogs for Those Who've Served

Monday, November 17, 2008

6:30 - 9:00 p.m.

The Atrium Café, Olympic Tower
645 Fifth Avenue, New York City



PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEITH BARRACLOUGH

MAKING

BRIMMING WITH WEST Pointers, military veterans, P.B.B. supporters, volunteers, and even a major star, on June 19 the Americas Society provided the perfect setting for the official launch and celebration of a \$100,000 challenge grant benefiting P.B.B.'s Dog Tags initiative. The program pairs service dogs with wounded veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to help them cope with physical and emotional injuries sustained while serving their country. James Gandolfini, the actor best known for his indelible portrayal of a mafia patriarch on H.B.O.'s *The Sopranos*, lent his presence and his voice to the cause, as an outspoken and passionate supporter of American troops.

The party chatter stopped once P.B.B. founder and president Gloria Gilbert Stoga introduced a video piece by *The New York Times*. The audience found themselves transfixed by footage of the inmate puppy-raisers at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility training service dogs that will ultimately be paired with disabled civilians and veterans.

"One of the many things I've learned since we launched Dog Tags," explained Gilbert

P.B.B. needs your support!


Puppy Kiss... \$\$\$...you decide!

Collar & Leash \$25

Embroidered Puppy Jacket \$50

Sponsor a Pup \$3000

Puppy Food \$100



VALERIE SHAFR

Textbooks & Educational Supplies \$250

Inmate Vet Assistant Course \$850

Veterinary Care \$500

! Bars' rved Us



James Gandolfini and fans



The West Point contingent



Captain Denis Fajardo



Joan LaCaille, Colonel Coots, and Claudia Coots



Larry with a couple of warriors



Gandolfini with his award

THE MATCH

Stoga, “is that Puppies Behind Bars, with your support, not only helps soldiers heal, it helps families become whole.” She shared her gratitude for the generosity of P.B.B.’s donors, noting that they had matched the \$100,000 challenge grant before the party even began.

Following Gilbert Stoga, P.B.B. board member Captain Denis Fajardo introduced Gandolfini. To the surprise and delight of the crowd, Gandolfini announced that a *second*

\$100,000 challenge grant, inspired by the first and offered by another long-term P.B.B. supporter, had been awarded. With just \$2,000 left to raise for this second challenge grant, P.B.B. is well on its way to meeting its goal before the December 31, 2008 deadline.

Brian Fischer, commissioner of New York State’s correctional facilities, introduced Colonel Norvell Coots, then serving as commander of Keller Army Community Hospital

at West Point, who gave both Gandolfini and Gilbert Stoga the Commander’s Award for Public Service, citing their “exceptional support to West Point’s Warrior Transition Unit.” Announcing that he would soon head to Washington, D.C. to run the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Coots pledged his continued support for Dog Tags.

Gilbert Stoga closed the formal remarks by announcing that long-term Paws &

DONATION FORM

I would like to sponsor and name a puppy (minimum donation: \$3000.)

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

(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 | 10 East 40th Street, 19th floor, New York, NY 10016

TWO FOR THE OFFICE



Gussie Faier celebrates 100



Reflect volunteer Gussie Faier would be turning a hundred in August. To celebrate this milestone, a dazzling assortment of two hundred mini-cupcakes from Mitchel London were presented to Faier and passed to guests. Faier was invited to share her thoughts on what being a volunteer for P.B.B. has meant to her, and she accepted readily, asking the crowd, "Have you ever known me to be quiet?" Fittingly, the surplus cakes, as well as hors d'oeuvres from caterer Café Frida, were sent back to the West Point barracks with soldiers from the Warrior Transition Unit, for other wounded vets to enjoy.

At every point in the evening, a mere glance around the room provided evidence of the diverse lives touched by P.B.B.'s pups, who were represented at the Americas Society by Remy, a yellow Labrador Retriever in formal service-dog training, and Larry, a black Labrador Retriever, who would soon be bound for another tour of duty as an explosive-detection canine in Iraq. The enthusiasm and energy was palpable to all who had shown up to cheer on P.B.B. as it continues to bridge diverse populations and create new initiatives to meet the changing needs of our community, our country, and our world.

STORIES OF INSPIRATION, overcoming adversity, and second chances are an everyday occurrence at P.B.B. But they are especially resonant when they involve our staff. Former puppy-raisers Geraldine Hardwick and Nora Moran found hope and inspiration in the furry wags and wiggles of the 14 puppies they raised at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. By their own accounts, both women have come a long way since they first became puppy raisers, in 1997 and 2000, respectively.

Geraldine and Nora enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to work in P.B.B.'s office after being paroled. Today, they are part of the team of committed volunteers, staff, and professional supporters.

Articulate and thoughtful, Geraldine and Nora share similar insights about the difference P.B.B. has made in their lives. Says Nora, "The same investment I put into developing and honing my dog-handling skills I applied to turning myself inside out. I wanted to be the best puppy raiser that I could be, and that meant I had to confront my issues, learn how to communicate with others, and in essence grow up." The program boosted their self-esteem, and ultimately changed their outlook on life and its possibilities.

Geraldine was one of ten women in the inaugural program launched in 1997 at Bedford Hills. Among other things, she says, "the program was definitely therapeutic for me. Having a puppy and puppy company was the best medicine around, and having the dogs around gave me something to live for." The program provided a positive goal: to become more social, loving,

and responsible, all while giving back to society. She also found that the puppies' presence helped her combat tremendous feelings of loneliness. The unconditional love that comes with raising a dog under any circumstances is especially profound for P.B.B.'s puppy raisers.

In addition to their full-time involvement with P.B.B., both women availed themselves of the educational opportunities offered at Bedford Hills. Nora earned a B.A. in sociology, Geraldine an M.A. in psychology. Both became role models for their fellow puppy-raisers; they were, and still are, often called upon by P.B.B. president Gloria Gilbert Stoga to represent the program in media coverage.

Nora and Geraldine also now share the responsibility of training New York City volunteer puppy-sitters. It's a role they relish, because it involves working with dogs and teaching people the techniques they perfected. Their passion for the dogs is tangible.

There's a connection between the puppy-raising experience and a spiritual and philosophical inclination in both women. For Nora, it is manifest in her decision to pursue a master's in sociology and chaplaincy training. Her knack for nurturing and fostering the best in the dogs has influenced her ultimate goal: to counsel women who have been incarcerated. And as a member of the steering committee of the Bedford Hills college program, she continues to influence her former peers.

Geraldine looks forward to bringing her years of puppy experience and related studies to a career in grooming and veterinary assistance.

A sampling of the extensive media coverage P.B.B. has received since the last newsletter:

"Prison Puppies" read the June 1, 2008 headline of *The New York Times* article on P.B.B.'s Bedford Hills program. The article explored the process of inmates raising service-dog puppies and showed the purpose, self-respect, redemption, and hope the program provides.

NBC Nightly News With Brian Williams ended its broadcast on Monday, June 2, by airing a video piece by *The New York Times* on the service-dog training at Bedford Hills.

During her June 16 appearance on

ABC's *The View*, actress Glenn Close mentioned P.B.B. as one of her favorite charities. Close also invited P.B.B.'s Gloria Gilbert Stoga to join her in radio interviews with six ABC affiliates, as

PUPS IN PRINT

part of a promotional tour for Fetchdog.com, a website featuring fine dog products and Close's blog "Lively Licks." The blog, which

explores the influence of dogs in people's lives, recently included an interview with Bill Campbell, P.B.B.'s first Dog Tags recipient. "Glenn has taken us to her heart," says Gilbert Stoga, "and her support has been invaluable."

HAPPY, BERTHA, JOAN!

Founding board member **Joan LaCaille**'s birthday wish came true. Joined by P.B.B. staffers, Joan and seven of her closest friends made their way to the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility on March 4, to celebrate her 80th birthday with the raisers and their puppies. In tribute to the auspicious occasion, one of Joan's guests sponsored two puppies—appropriately named “Happy” and “Bertha”—who are currently being raised at Fishkill.

...AND THE GIVING IS EASY

If you are a federal employee, you can donate to Puppies Behind Bars as easily as checking a box. This fall marks the kick-off of the **Combined Federal Campaign (C.F.C.)** for all federal employees. P.B.B. is an approved charity with the C.F.C., listed under Animal Charities of America. And if you want to designate that we use your donation solely for our Dog Tags initiative, just let us know. Giving through the C.F.C. is a wonderful way to help us raise much-needed funds for all our initiatives. Our identification number with the campaign is 11902.

American Express also makes it easy to give to the charity of your choice—P.B.B., we hope—through its Giving Express program. If you are a card member enrolled in the Membership Rewards program, you can redeem Membership Rewards points in increments of 1,000, 5,000, 10,000, 50,000 and 100,000; for every 1,000 points, \$8 will be donated. You can also elect to charge a one-time monthly or annual donation. Go to <https://www.124.americanexpress.com/cards/loyalty.do?page=donateonline> for details.

THE SEVEN-MINUTE PITCH

P.B.B.'s impact behind and beyond bars has been highlighted in a brand new seven-minute video made possible by funding from the **Florence V. Burden Foundation**. Featuring footage of the specialized service-dog and explosive-detection canine training in our facilities, “Our Story” can be viewed on our newly upgraded website, puppiesbehindbars.com.

MOGUL'S LEGACY

There was sad news from chairman **Glenn Goord** at the spring meeting of P.B.B.'s board of directors: his beloved Lab, **Mogul**, had died.

Mogul was an unofficial mascot from day one, more than eleven years ago, when Gloria Gilbert Stoga went to see Goord, then commissioner of New York State's prison system, in the hope of convincing him to support her idea for a pups-in-prison training program. The presence of a handsome yellow Lab in the commissioner's office gave Gilbert Stoga her first hint of what an important ally Goord might be—and guaranteed Mogul's place in P.B.B. history.



Glenn Goord
and Mogul

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

Inspired by P.B.B.'s June 19 Dog Tags fundraiser, **Diane Moran**, mother of P.B.B. staffer **Nora Moran**, encouraged 41 employees of the New York State Insurance Fund to pool their resources and contribute a total of \$235 to Dog Tags. Their contribution was matched dollar for dollar as part of P.B.B.'s first \$100,000 Dog Tags challenge grant.

LOOKING GOOD, FEELING FAMOUS

Kathy McGilvery, the graphic talent whose pro-bono work has made P.B.B. look as good as its mission, won three Graphic Design USA awards (out of 10,000 entries) this year. Two were for P.B.B. projects: the book that marked our tenth anniversary and the 2008 calendar. The third was for her work on the quarterly Spanish magazine *SCT Latinoamerica*. In other awards news, P.B.B. was one of eleven organizations inducted into the **Channel 13 (P.B.S. affiliate) Hall of Fame** on July 9.



Puppies
Behind
Bars

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New York, NY 10016