



Puppies Behind Bars



PHOTOS BY RADHIKA CHALASANI

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

Spring/Summer 2011

The Perspective from Inside and Out

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Three members of the Puppies Behind Bars (P.B.B.) staff worked raising our puppies for years before they ever set foot in our office. Geraldine Hardwick, Nora Moran and Gilbert Molina III were inmate puppy raisers at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility (Geri and Nora) and Otisville Correctional Facility (Gilbert), where they impressed us so much with their skill, integrity, and work ethic that they were all offered full-time jobs when they were paroled. Geraldine was incarcerated for 23 years, Nora for 10 years, and Gilbert for 19. We asked them some questions about their experience with Puppies Behind Bars.

How did the P.B.B. puppies, and program, transform you while you were in prison? What was life like in prison before you joined the P.B.B. program?

Nora: I applied for the program because I knew I

needed to invest myself in activities that would allow me to grow to help myself and others. I had no sense of self and I had only recently begun to pull myself out of a two-year battle with anorexia and bulimia. I realized that through my eating disorder, I was being just as destructive as I had been during my crimes and I didn't want to be a person who created damage. I loved dogs and I believed in the program's mission.

Gilbert: I was already in the process of transforming myself prior to entering the program. The program and the puppies helped make that transition easier. The program constantly gave me goals to achieve. As I accomplished these goals I felt better about myself and determined to continue on a positive path.

Prison life is boring and dangerous if you allow your mind to remain idle. Sadly, many men fall

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Geraldine Hardwick (left)
Nora Moran (middle) and
Gilbert Molina III (right)

into a pattern of just living without any direction. I struggled to stay on top of things and ready myself to once again return into society. I never lost that focus.

Geri: Before Puppies Behind Bars, I went through many stages in my personal growth. I went through pre-college and then college. After completing my master's degree I became anxious and knew I had to involve myself in something new to keep focused and develop further. The puppies, and the P.B.B. program, were very important. They gave me a sense of belonging and a greater level of responsibility.

How did the fact that P.B.B.'s program is tough on participants and requires a lot of hard work affect you?

Geri: Being a part of the program was hard work, but it was rewarding and kept me busy. I knew that I was around women who were dedicated to changing their lives and making a difference in the world.

Gilbert: The program being strict is a very good thing. It maintains its integrity and it demands integrity from each person in return. There's no hiding in the program.

Nora: It didn't take long before I realized that P.B.B. challenged puppy-raisers to do more than just train and raise pups to their fullest potential. Gloria challenged us to become the best people we could be so that

we could bring out the best in the dogs, each other, and the program.

What did you learn about yourself from Puppies Behind Bars?

Geri: I've learned to be more patient with people, and to communicate without conflict.

Gilbert: The most important thing I learned about myself while participating in P.B.B. was that I am capable of being a responsible person (I can follow rules) and that I truly enjoy working with dogs.

Nora: I'm thoroughly convinced that dogs teach us to be better people! Through working with the dogs... I learned how to become a better daughter, sister, friend... a good team member, and later a good team leader.

What other programs did you take advantage of while incarcerated? How did they compare with P.B.B.?

Gilbert: I participated in other programs and tried to learn as much as I could while in prison. Even with programs that aren't very good, you can still learn something. When I felt a program was terrible, I said I would learn patience which will help me to complete the program. Guess what? Good dog trainers must be patient. So I gained something after all.

Geri: I knew I was getting a good trade with P.B.B., but I wanted to learn something else as well. I took cosmetology. Not only did I learn another trade, but making

myself beautiful helped with my self-esteem. I didn't view it in comparison, but in conjunction with improving myself.

Nora: The other major program that I was involved with while incarcerated was the college program. Both programs complimented each other and had a significant impact on my personal growth [and] continue to play a major role in my life today.

What surprised you most about P.B.B. when you started working here, versus when you participated in prison?

Gilbert: I was surprised as to how much office work actually goes on in the office. The idea of "team" is big here. I knew as an inmate puppy raiser that we were providing a service for military personnel who were dealing with psychological issues. Now I realize how emotionally fragile the soldiers are and that P.B.B. staff really needs to be sensitive towards that and help with support even after the soldiers have received their dogs.

Geri: What surprised me most about working in the office is the many different details and components that go into one task. Whether training the dogs or working in the office, it is a challenge. However, helping the people in need of our dogs is worth it.

Nora: When I was in prison, I really didn't grasp how many people were involved in the behind the scenes "ins and outs" of P.B.B. and how many lives were affected by

P.B.B.: The Musical?

Thanks to an article in *Southwest Airlines Spirit Magazine*, a group of high school students recently transformed the true story of a veteran and his Dog Tags service dog into a fast-paced, choreographed stage presentation, bringing awareness of both P.B.B.'s work and the plight of veterans with PTSD to new audiences, and in a new way.

When Geoff Epperson, who directs the performance center at Carl Sandburg High School in Orland Park, Illinois, read about marine veteran Jacob Hyde and his service dog Mya, he had never been so moved by an in-flight article. He shared the story with his students, and "How Mya Saved Jacob," a stage work that

gives voice to Mya as well as many of the humans involved in Jacob's story, was the result. As Alyssa Zazcek, the student who played Mya in the production, put it, "Jacob and Mya's story was so important to me because it tells a side of the war story that not many people hear — a soldier that was scarred not by bombs or bullets, but by the horrific things he saw and experienced.

Mya's obvious love and devotion to Jacob is truly moving, and Jacob's strength and adoration for the service dog that effectively saved his life is just so sincerely beautiful to me." The students not only spread the word, but raised money for P.B.B.'s Dog Tags program from fellow students and audience members.



each and every dog in the program... Reading volunteer sitter letters as part of my office role gave me the opportunity to see how much love, dedication, pride, and commitment our volunteers invest in the dogs.

What were some of the challenges you found starting full-time employment with Puppies after being incarcerated?

Gilbert: Dealing with emails and using the internet. In prison we are not allowed email or internet access.

Nora: I think the biggest challenge I faced when starting full-time at P.B.B. was that I had to learn how to multi-task efficiently...prioritize my workload and figure out what tasks were more time-sensitive than others.

Geri: After spending 23 years in prison, the biggest challenge was learning new technology, and trying to find my niche in the work force.

Geri & Nora; How was it to go back into prison when you started teaching there?

Geri: I have the greatest amount of respect for the system. I also feel compassion for those I see incarcerated. Every week it is a constant reminder. I will walk a straight line and I will remain productive, for I don't want to go back.

Nora: The hardest part about going back into prison to teach was anticipating what it would be like. I was worried that I wouldn't be accepted as an instructor ... or taken seriously by staff or puppy raisers. Instead, they seemed to "get it" that my intentions in being there were, and still are, to share with them the lessons the dogs and P.B.B. taught me and to, hopefully, serve as an example of how life changes when those lessons are applied.

Gilbert: Hey, I want to teach one day too!

FROM THE HEART

Last fall, a group of dedicated women raised a substantial amount of money to support P.B.B.'s Dog Tags program through the Community Clothes Charity (CCC) annual sale of designer clothing, held each year in Wayne, Pennsylvania. This spring we invited the women to see their hard-earned dollars at work with a visit to puppy-raising class at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. While they were there, a puppy-raiser surprised us all with this poem. To learn about this year's sale, visit communityclothescharity.org.

THANK YOU

by Aisha, P.B.B. Puppy-raiser, Bedford Hills Correctional Facility

Some of us go on lot of visits
To stay in touch with the world
While others of us read the NY Times
Which in here is like finding a pearl
Still many of us see no one at all
Except the maintenance workers
Who roam the halls
So when you care
And come into

A prison to support
What we do
You do know that
We are grateful right?
It's a privilege and honor
To host you despite
You being from
The realm of the free
I see you trust me and we, PBB
Thank you, CCC
So this is what you do
In the Keystone State?
Great!
It's worth every dime time
After time, dog after
Dog, the log
Of success
Continues to grow long
And we are glad
That you can see
Where your money has gone
Straight to the dogs
But that's not a bad thing
Because they reach a potential
About as high as the stars
And there is no better investment
Than in Puppies Behind Bars.

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!

Sponsor and name a puppy!

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

(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

CFC# 11902

MOVING PICTURES

Through more than ten educational P.B.B. documentaries that

poignantly capture the power of dogs to heal, filmmaker **Laurie White** has given supporters a rare inside view of the

work that goes into training P.B.B.'s service dogs and explosive detection canines. Her latest film, "**Dog Tags: A Story of Hope,**" explores the immediate, tangible and life-changing benefits to wounded war veterans who have received psychiatric service dogs through P.B.B.'s *Dog Tags: Service Dogs For Those Who've Served Us* initiative.

Interviews with veterans of New York's November 2010 team training class reveal the emotional scars of war experiences, the difficulties of returning to civilian life as they cope with the debilitating effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, and renewed hope in the form of the canine companions with whom they learn to bond and work under the tutelage of inmate puppy raisers.

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

In Colorado, two wounded warriors, both with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, completed team training with instructors **Janet Bayless** and **Michelle Penfold** on April 22. **Sergeant Jon Morris**, an Army squad leader, reported renewed confidence gained from his service dog, **Muggs**. He said simply, "He has given me a new life." Sergeant Dallas Bragg, a truck driver who served in both the Army and Marines, was similarly amazed by how

his new service dog, **Frida**, has changed his life: "Before Frida I hardly ever went anywhere by myself – my wife or a trusted friend would have to go with me. Now I can go practically anywhere, just me and her." To illustrate this point: thanks to

Frida, he just returned from a Project Healing Waters fishing trip and he didn't even know anyone there.

IT'S IN THE NUMBERS

Louis Coletti joined the P.B.B. staff in February as our new Database Manager. Coletti has over 18 years of experience with Citibank doing data analysis and reporting. He has worked with other nonprofits on a volunteer basis since high school. "I always feel it is very valuable to give back to society and I believe working for P.B.B. is an integral part of doing that."

A BROADER BOARD

Our board of directors welcomed two communication experts in January: **Sebastian Junger**, the internationally acclaimed journalist, author, and filmmaker whose experiences on the front lines in Afghanistan were the subjects of his book *WAR* and his Academy Award-nominated documentary "Restrepo," and publicist, **Cathy L. Saypol**, President of Cathy Saypol Public Relations.

On joining the board, Junger comments, "Like all good ideas, pairing service dogs with veterans was so obvious that no one had thought of it—until now. Having prison inmates give back to society by training dogs

that could help our veterans creates a kind of perfect triangle where everyone benefits—including the dogs. I am so thrilled and proud to be part of this program."

Saypol adds, "When I attended last year's graduation ceremony with Sebastian Junger, and saw the difference that P.B.B. had made to the soldiers I met there, I decided right then to use my PR skills and contacts to help spread the word. I was thrilled when Gloria called and asked me to join the Board. I hope that my input will help continued efforts to inform civilians and military of the amazing work that P.B.B. does, and how much more they can do in the future."

IT'S ELEMENTARY

Each spring, P.B.B. is proud to receive numerous donations raised by students at elementary and middle schools around New York City. These donations are a result of the **Common Cents Penny Harvest** program, which allows children between the ages of four and 14 to convert their natural compassion for others into action by collecting pennies to provide grants to community organizations. The program shows young people they have the ability to make the world a better place by introducing them to the power of philanthropy and service during their formative years. The children research nonprofit organizations, present their findings to one another, and select grant recipients through a democratic process. We applaud their efforts and thank them for their support. Visit commoncents.org to learn more.

PAWS FOR
APPLAUSE



Puppies
Behind
Bars

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