

#Retriever

magazine

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Issue No 7

A NEW
Perspective
on LIFE

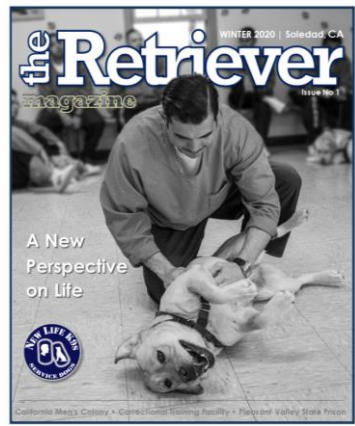


California Men's Colony • Correctional Training Facility • Pleasant Valley State Prison



The Retriever

The Bond-Based service dog magazine



COVER: Kris & Faith on a belly rub break during a teaching session at CMC



7 Jett, CTF's first puppy, finds his forever match



15 An outsider captures the bonding experience

FEATURES

- 7 SERVICE DOG GRADUATION**
[Ready Set Jett!!](#)
- 9 RAISED THE BOND BASED WAY**
[From puppy face to professional grace](#)
- 11 A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE**
[John Pierson takes readers inside](#)
- 13 A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE**
[Delta the dog changes more than just one life](#)

7

Supporters of all ages show up to celebrate



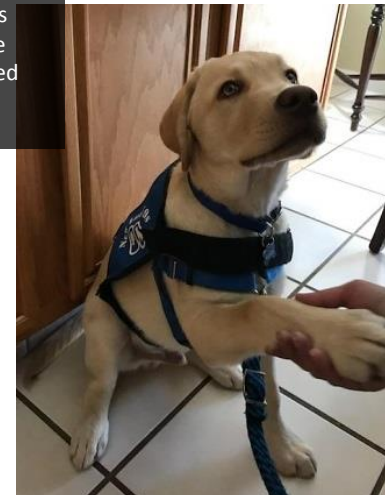
15

Inside NLK9s:
An intimate look into the educational process at CMC



13

An Introduction:
How NLK9s does it the Bond-Based way



CONTENTS

- 4 FROM THE EDITOR**
[A pep talk for turbulent times](#)
- 5 HEART OF A HANDLER**
[CTF South handler learns how to succeed](#)
- 15 WEEKENDS WITH DAISY**
[Greg Faulk reviews the book on puppy raising](#)
- 23 CURIOUS ABOUT CANINES**
[Our handler scratches your Bond-Based itch](#)
- 26 TALE END**
[The service dog community remembers a global humanitarian](#)

NEW LIFE K9S

Service Dog Program



Volunteer

To provide life-saving service dogs to Veterans and First Responders, at no cost, we need your support! Volunteers are encouraged to donate their time by becoming weekend puppy raisers.



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Become a member of 22 for life by donating \$22 monthly to provide veterans and first responders a new life with their service dog.

Apply Today

Our service dogs are provided free of charge to veterans and first responders living with the PTSD. If you or someone you know is struggling with the life changing symptoms of PTSD, apply online for a service dog today.

www.newlifek9s.org

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the Retriever

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Letter from the Editor

In a time when our fortitude and toughness are challenged, consider this spring issue of *The Retriever* a halftime pep talk. As 2020 began to unfold, our whole country was intimidated and smacked around by a big-shouldered opponent we don't know very well named COVID-19. Frontline healthcare workers have seen death and sickness on disaster levels while lots of folks have lost jobs and small businesses have shuttered.

Meanwhile, our prison visiting rooms sit empty of conversation with tables gathering dust, and our classrooms and libraries are missing the curious students and readers who needed that space to seek necessary knowledge. As we add new concepts like social distancing to our vocabulary, we are all separated from what we love for the sake of safety.

We are fortunate to bring good news to our readers with our latest issue. Before the prison gates were closed to outside visitors, we held a graduation ceremony for Jett here at CTF North where the NLK9s family added Chaplain Mike, and his wife Kathy, to our community. In February over at CMC, the team hosted writer/photographer John Pierson, who left prison a changed man after sitting in on a weekly handlers meeting. He was kind enough to allow us to reprint the article and photos posted on his website www.streetbeatphoto.com. Visit his page for a complete look at his eye-catching work.

In spite of the interruptions and uncertainties of a global pandemic, the teams at CTF South and Pleasant Valley State Prison (PVSP) contributed heartfelt articles for us to witness what it's like to get a prison dog program started. We want to give huge props to PVSP and the *Four Paws Bulletin* for publishing their inaugural issue with great articles and amazing artwork. Keith Erickson, their Editor-in-Chief, hooked up *The Retriever* with a great article about his second chance with Delta.

This issue ends with a farewell to a true pioneer. Sister Pauline Quinn is known worldwide as the big-hearted healer whose compassion continues to transform prisoners and their surrounding communities. In these trying times, we particularly miss someone who never wavered in her service to others. She helps us remember that when life or pandemic brings trauma, NLK9s will still bring healing.

We are in this together, all of us, and we will bounce back because our bond is just that strong!

Heart ♥ of A Handler

Dennis Meman
Handler/Contributing Writer

When I was growing up in Hawaii, an uncle gave me a Brindle Pit Bull puppy. I wasn't really creative at twelve years old, so I named her Blacky. She was ferociously aggressive and mean to most people, especially strangers, but it was fine because she was obedient to me. No one could get close to her without being harmed, not even my own family. My mom constantly told me to get rid of Blacky or to keep her chained at all times, but I loved her too much to keep her in chains. When she was with me she was an angel and gave me all her attention. We had a strong bond. My daily routine with her was having her pull me on my bicycle or skateboard. She was very good at it and we never had an accident. She listened to me when I gave her basic commands like sit, stay, down, go, come, stop, and heel.

One day, while at my grandmother's house, I received a call from my mom saying I should come home because Blacky was

gone. I remember clearly coming down the hill crying and stumbling and hurrying to get home. When I finally got there Blacky was gone for sure. I cried and cried that day, and I stayed up all night too exhausted to sleep, anxiously listening for barks. In the morning we decided that someone had stolen her because even though she would stray from time to time she always knew when to come home. I was devastated, angry, and suspicious. I even thought and suspected my family got rid of her because she was too spirited and expressive, which to them meant too aggressive. I didn't agree. Blacky was my loyal companion.

After Blacky disappeared, I became indifferent to people and developed a rebellious attitude. I turned my interest to other activities. I became mean like Blacky, impatient and intolerant to most things. I lost my way and joined a gang which meant I tried to raise my status by any means. Violence and aggression was the easiest and fastest way to do that, and we shared the common belief to never back down or have fear of a perceived challenge.

“
Whatever
you think
you know
about dogs,
throw it
all out the
window.”

Lobo & Dennis



Dennis with Kodi in his GRIP graduation gown celebrating an important milestone



In gangs, I learned my place, and in turn I taught dogs to also learn their place. Training by way of rewards and punishments was my technique and philosophy with all dogs. That is, of course, until New Life K9s was introduced to my life.

When New Life K9s was introduced here at CTF South yard, I elbowed my way to be first in line to sign up, but a couple of guys beat me to it. I was irritated for fear of not getting my shot to apply. Determination is an attribute I'm happy to have. In the end, I'm blessed and honored to become part of New Life K9s. I still remember how excited I was to show off my dog skills. Out of the eighty or so that was interviewed, I'm one of the original fifteen who made the team. How lucky I am, I thought, during our first class meeting with Nicole Hern and Kate Johnson, New Life K9s Director of Education and Canine Educator, respectively.

In the meeting, I also vividly remember what Nicole said: "Whatever you think you know about dogs, throw it all out the window." When I heard that, a fleeting moment of disappointment and prideful stubbornness ran through me, but I did my best to listen intently to every word about Bond-Based Choice Teaching.

Since that first meeting I have read Jennifer Arnold's bond-based book "Love Is All You Need". The amount of information I newly acquired humbled me and opened my naïve eyes to how ignorant I was about dogs. At the same time, I felt a new vigor and passion

to learn everything I can about dogs and about the bond-based philosophy. We have been learning how to treat dogs with unconditional love and respect, a lesson I began learning at home in Hawaii as a child. At present, I am a primary handler to a handsome Black Lab named Lobo. Before Lobo I was a secondary handler to Team Kodi, one of our Chocolate Labs. What an honor and blessing to be entrusted to both puppies along with eight other adorable puppies. We are instrumental in their education to become service dogs for veterans and first responders living with PTSD. Through bond-based choice teaching philosophy, my teammates and I are growing along with our

puppies. We are learning patience, tolerance, compassion, understanding, and love. Along this journey I'm learning that pride and ego has no place in NLK9s. In order for the team to thrive we need to make sacrifices and be accountable for our actions. Anger and violence must be replaced with love and assertiveness. Struggles, obstacles, and mistakes must be considered as a learning lesson and not as a failure. For us to succeed and get our puppies to become service dogs someday, we must synchronize with their positive feelings and thoughts. I believe bond-based choice teaching is a lifetime contract of equal relationship between humans and canines.

Ready Set Jett!

The Team

Chaplain Mike, a retired fire captain, with his wife Kathy and the people that love Jett most: handlers Sergio & Tim, joined by puppy raiser, Amber, and her children, Nathaniel and Miyah.



Service Dog Graduation



Lets Celebrate

1) NLK9s Team Members kick off the event in style performing a cheer with Enaleah & Leilah 2) Supporters Kris and Bud with family and friends 3) Handlers Damian and Tim serving up goodies 4) Alia, Paige, and Dahren have fun posing with Ned in the photo booth



By **Greg Dorsey**
Staff Writer

New Life K9s supporters, staff, friends, and team members filed into the visiting room with excitement, well aware of the importance of the day.

It was a special occasion because NLK9s at CTF would be saying goodbye to their first service dog to arrive as a puppy. Jett's special day brought together people with a wide range of perspectives: some were catching up with old friends, some were meeting new friends, and some were gaining a new member of their family while others were losing someone who had become a huge part of their lives. One couldn't tell who was who by the brightness of all the smiles throughout the room.

As the start of the ceremony drew near, people began to take their seats as some NLK9s handlers were putting the final touches on decorations. Sergio Zarazua, master of ceremonies, stepped on stage to get things rolling. But two adorable little girls, Enaleah and Leilah Castillo, daughters of Team Ned secondary handler Nazario Castillo, interrupted him. At first, it looked like something was wrong until the

pair yelled out with excitable little girl voices, "New Life, Ready?" Suddenly, they were leading five handlers in a cheer-style dance the mini flash-mob certainly helped to set a celebratory mood.

Tim Galvan, Jett's primary handler, shared special memories of watching Jett grow up and how being in the program helped him find his purpose. "Not only have I found the unconditional love that has been missing from my life, but I also found a way to give back to the world I took so much from." Being a singer and songwriter, Tim expressed his love and appreciation for Jett's singular personality through song. With just a guitar and his voice, he sang and rapped his song, titled "Extraordinario," and the song lived up to its name.

Other speakers stepped up to express their admiration for Jett's impact on the program. Sergeant Gregory spoke to the time and

commitment involved in getting Jett to his graduation and how it required so much more than Sergio and Tim. It required the entire handler team. She commended all the handlers by asking them to stand as she led the audience in a round of applause in recognition of completing their mission.

Amber Martinez, Jett's devoted puppy raiser, was instrumental to Jett's transformation from timid to capable service dog. For all her love and affection toward Jett, NLK9s at CTF presented her with the Hercules Honor, an award created to recognize exceptional service and commitment to our mission.

After receiving her plaque, Amber took the time to talk about what it was like raising a service dog. From putting in her puppy raiser application and taking Jett home to teaching her kids how to love and let go, Amber opened up about the huge impact Jett had on her family. "Jett has brought closeness to my family that we haven't felt in years," she said.

Finally, the moment that everyone had been waiting for finally arrived: the ceremonial presentation of the newest member

Puppy raiser Nancy looks forward to the day her pup Nova graduates



of Team Jett. The deserving recipient was retired Fire Captain Mike who has served his community of San Luis Obispo for over twenty years. After a mountain biking accident left him confined to a wheelchair, Mike found his new calling as a chaplain for the same fire department where he once worked.

As Sergio, Tim, Amber, and Mike stood in front of the crowd, one could feel not only the sense of pride and accomplishment hanging in the air, but also the undertone of loss. Jett may have been losing three great friends but he was gaining a forever family, which would give him the ability to enrich an entire community in his blue service dog vest.

Upon receiving Jett's leash, Mike told the crowd with great emotion about his personal struggles. "I was in a dark place," he said through tears, "and Jett brought laughter and brightness back into my life. There's no doubt it -- Jett has saved my life and brought my family and I closer."

Mike even touched on how his

will was tested during the boot camp recipients are required to attend before taking their service dog home. Due to his heat sensitivity he was worried that he would not be able to continue with the camp, not to mention the added obstacle of Jett's uneasiness with Mike's wheelchair. But he persisted, and with the help of his wonderful wife, Kathy, and NLK9s capable and compassionate staff, he made it through boot camp ready to use the bond-based choice teaching philosophy to forge a lasting bond. After hearing Mike's story and then seeing him and his family with Jett, one could see clearly that there was no finer match. It was a beautiful sight to see Jett become the service dog he was destined to be.

In the two years of teaching and loving a New Life K9s service dog before he graduates, countless lives and hearts are mended while old assumptions are upended. When the leash is passed on and that dog enters service hood, the healing power continues.



Curious About K9s

By Justin Clarke, Staff Writer

We don't just get questions from guys on the yard about our dogs, we also get questions from COs and free staff with dogs of their own. We relish the opportunity to explain how our bond-based choice teaching techniques can solve everyday problems. What follows are actual questions from regular folks who want to learn how to better love their dogs.



Q: I'm having a hard time with my dog fighting with my girlfriend's dog. They snarl, growl, bark, and bite each other. It really sounds like a fight and I don't want either dog to get hurt. What should I do?

A: The solution to this is pretty simple. Unless one of the dogs is cowering in fear or actual injuries occur, just ignoring them is your best bet. Dogs communicate differently than humans. Play can often sound serious, but rarely is. How your dog is responding is a better indicator of his mood. If they're mutually playing, they're fine. When a dog cowers in fear or is being teamed up against by multiple dogs a human should step in.

If the dogs are having a hard time getting along with each other one thing you can do is begin with a high-value treat like a hot dog or string cheese (that's what we use). Call the dogs over to you by name and share some of the yummy treat with one dog and say, "This is for Max." Then repeat with the other dog. The act of sharing food helps to strengthen your bond. Sharing food together helps them to feel at ease and shows them good things



come when they're calm and showing good manners.

Q: My dog goes berserk when he sees another dog while we're on a walk. Is there anything I can do to get him to ignore other dogs?

A: Yes, but it takes practice. Dogs, like people, tend to pay attention to whatever is most exciting at the moment. Bringing a very tasty treat on your walks is the first step. Next, and this part is important, try to anticipate your dog's behavior. When you see another dog in the distance and you know your dog is about to lose it, say, "Mmmmm," and begin food sharing. Remember to talk to your dog through the event. If you can't make it past the other dog and your dog can't remain focused on you, take a different route. The time and distance from the other dog should calm down your dog. Don't expect him to get it perfect on the first try. Build him up in stages. Remember

to always praise him and remain in communication. Our dogs don't understand everything we say, but if we talk to them all the time then they learn to read context.

Thank You!

The only way that New Life K9s is able to continue in its mission of "Saving Lives Through The Healing Power of The Human-Canine Bond" is because of its dedicated volunteers and puppy raisers, and the generous grants and donations we receive from people who care.

Paul, Dorothy, & Stephanie Leyba
Continually supporting us with your generosity and helping our team grow closer

Sgt. Gregory
For staying the course even when the water gets choppy

JP Espinoza
Helping *The Retriever* fulfill its mission

Aurora Navarro
For being the dogmother to so many of our dogs

C/O Estrella
Making sure everyone has what they need to do a great job

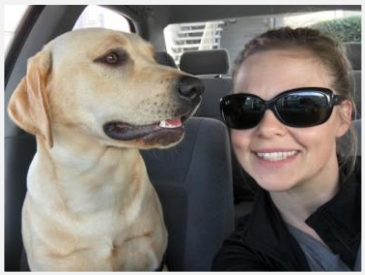
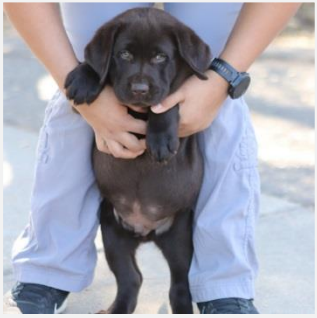
The King-Ramirez Family
Donating media equipment that improves our lives

C/O Childers
Making the environment bright and fun for our dogs

So many other names could not possibly fit on this page, but to our supporters known and unknown: We could not do it without you.

Raised The Bond-Based Way

From the first hands that greet a young pup to the final hands that receive a life-saving service dog, an entire community endures challenges as they keep sight of the ultimate goal. Of course, everyone has fun, too!



6-8 Weeks

NLK9s educators select puppies from breeders specifically for service. The puppies are assessed primarily based on their responsiveness to humans.

8 Weeks

The puppies go to prison. Correctional staff prepare a place for the process to begin as two handlers await the chance of a lifetime.

8-10 Weeks

School is in! Using the Bond-Based Choice Teaching method, our growing pups sharpen cognitive skills and learn how to serve with love.

4 Months

A weekend puppy parent agrees to help the dog develop good manners through healthy socialization. Dog meets world by making friends and stealing hearts everywhere a service dog can go: pet stores, markets, doctor's offices, workplaces, etc. Once he learns how to take selfies, he's family forever!

22-24 Months

Using a conscientious matching process, NLK9s staff connect canine with veteran to ensure compatible social styles. All hands are in at a two week boot-camp where the recipient learns from handlers, puppy parent, and NLK9s staff the essential tools and principles needed to lock in their new bond.

24-26 Months

The life of the service dog begins. Having earned that blue vest, he leaves prison for good and goes into the community with his person. He heals trauma by loving the spots medication and counseling sometimes can't reach.

S

urrounded by acres of asphalt and a maze of chain-link fencing and razor wire, I find finally myself in prison. The voices of the inmates reverberate throughout the yard as I walk the long concrete corridor to the gate. Through the fence, I spy two men sprinting and lunging on a makeshift racquetball court, smashing a ball against a splintered wood partition. Others are sitting on stoops and picnic tables and some are striding purposefully across the grounds.

Despite being flanked by an official prison chaperone and a friend who's been to the prison on several occasions, I find myself unable to completely quiet the feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty.

We arrive at the gate. My ID is checked, my gear is searched and an officer buzzes us through. The prison chaperone tags out with Lieutenant Eilers, our contact for the day. Eilers certainly looks the part. Stocky build, black Oakley shades, cargo pants, seven-pointed gold badge and a utility belt that Batman would envy. I instantly take a liking to Eilers and I feel immediately reassured as he extends a warm handshake. Lieutenant Eilers happily greets officers and inmates as he leads us beyond the gate. As we make our way to our destination, we encounter a man wearing a powder blue smock and navy colored sweatpants with "Prisoner" boldly emblazoned on the leg. He suddenly approaches, looks me in the eye and asks assertively, "Chiefs or 9ers?". Without even considering the question or the implications of my response on who will win this coming Sunday's Super Bowl, I blurt out, "Chiefs!" Kansas City is the closest NFL team to my home in Omaha, Nebraska and I'm a fan. But this morning, I am at the California Men's Colony, a state prison located in San Luis Obispo California, just 175 miles from San Francisco. I immediately realize I've just given the wrong answer. The man stares back at me and smiles, "That's right, go Chiefs!" I've feel like I've passed my first test.

[Continued on page 17]

Dogs

A **NEW** Perspective on **LIFE**

Article and Photos
By John Pierson



Giving Incarcerated Men Purpose



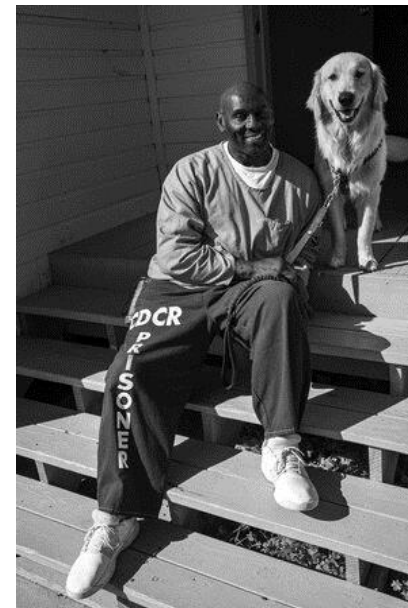
We arrive at Lieutenant Eilers' office, where he cross references my gear with the list I submitted, then we head out.

As we walk past the prison barbershop to our destination for the day, I see the dogs first. It's an assortment of about twelve labs, golden retrievers and doodle mixes. Most are full grown, with a couple irresistible puppies mingling in the mix. They stand, sit and recline dutifully by the sides of their handlers. Everyone, dogs and inmates alike, wait with alert and eager expressions.

I've waited a long time for this day.

Two years ago, I learned about New Life K9s from Suzanne Maury and Pat Beitz, owners of the Top Dog Coffee Shop and Rescue Me Coffee Company in Morro Bay California. Suzanne and Pat proudly and enthusiastically sponsor a dog named Cooper in New Life K9s and they were instrumental with getting me connected with the program.

New Life K9s is a non-profit organization that partners with three California state prisons in San Luis Obispo, Soledad and Fresno County where selected puppies are placed with prisoners for an immersive two year learning and bonding experience.



Each dog has two inmate handlers; many of whom are serving life sentences. The dogs are eventually permanently placed with U.S. military veterans and emergency first responders in the community who have been diagnosed with PTSD. For the recipients the dogs are a lifeline that provide essential physical and emotional support.

I'd heard from many people about how this powerful program impacts the lives of everyone connected to it, and today I was afforded the rare opportunity to witness it where it begins.

New Life K9's team members, Nicolle Hern, Rosa Mendoza and Jack Gould join the large group of dogs and humans and enter into a long, clapboard outbuilding. I'm also accompanied by Greg Gallo. I met Greg last year and I had the opportunity to photograph and video him with his dog, Eddie. Eddie was trained in the prison by a former inmate named Mike Nelson. Greg is a former police officer and received Eddie to help with severed symptoms of PTSD. Greg is now employed by New Life K9s. Mike Nelson works for

Clockwise starting below: Lt. Eilers greeting Wayne and Brandon with Cole; Brandon grooming Cole; Program Educator Rosa Mendoza instructing Osa as he teaches Darla; and Bernard smiling with his dog, Dante.



Top Dog Coffee and has also started his own dog training service.

The area of the prison we are in were once military barracks. It has now been repurposed and it's where the prisoners reside and work with the dogs. The building we are entering looks as if it could have been a mess hall at one time. Inside, it looks more like an elementary classroom. Cute photos of puppies, paw print stickers and inspirational sayings like, "Ready, Willing, Able" and "Forgive, Teach, Care" adorn the walls. The inmate handlers and dogs file in and sit on low benches and on the tiled floor. It's packed.

New Life K9's CEO, Jack Gould, thanks the group for all their efforts and celebrates the upcoming parole of one of the members of the group. He also reminds them the recidivism rate for released members of the group is zero percent. It's an incredible statistic, but it's also a source of pride as well as a lofty expectation for the incarcerated members.

The groups are divided into two classes. The first group stays inside with Rosa who is NLK9's Lead Educator while the second class walks outside with Nicole who is the Director of Rehabilitation. Rosa's class works on an exercise where the dogs learn to "go get help". For each trial, the handlers move to the

entry way of the building out of sight of the dogs. They simulate a fall by crashing hard to the floor and shouting the dog's name. When the dog comes, they yell, "go get help!, go get help!" The expectation is for the dog to locate the second handler and lead him to the one "in trouble". The dogs demonstrate a wide range of proficiency. The puppies simply practice coming when they're called. There is one particular dog that aces the test. Rosa raises the stakes by asking the handler to go behind a closed door. Now the



dog must open the door by pulling it open using a cloth tied around the knob.

Again, the dog passes with flying colors and the class erupts into jubilant cheers and applause.

The class outside with Nicole practices walking on a leash around the grounds. While this may seem like a rudimentary task, the cornucopia of sights, sounds and smells the prison offers present alluring distractions for the dogs. Having the dogs walk calmly and consistently by the handlers' side is an essential skill; especially

if the dogs will eventually be placed with people with physical or mobility challenges.

While handlers are waiting their turn with Nicole, I offer to take portraits. The response is overwhelming. The handlers immediately begin to excitedly line up with their dogs to have their photos taken. The pride they have in being a part of the program is readily apparent.

After lunch, the groups swap. The outside walking class goes inside with Rosa and the class that was working on "go get help" goes outside with Nicole.

As I weave in and out of scenes with my camera, I see so much evidence of the powerful bonds that have been forged. Bonds between handlers and dogs. Bonds between inmates. Bonds that have been forged between the educators and handlers. It's more than I expected and it is truly inspiring.

At the end of the day after the classes

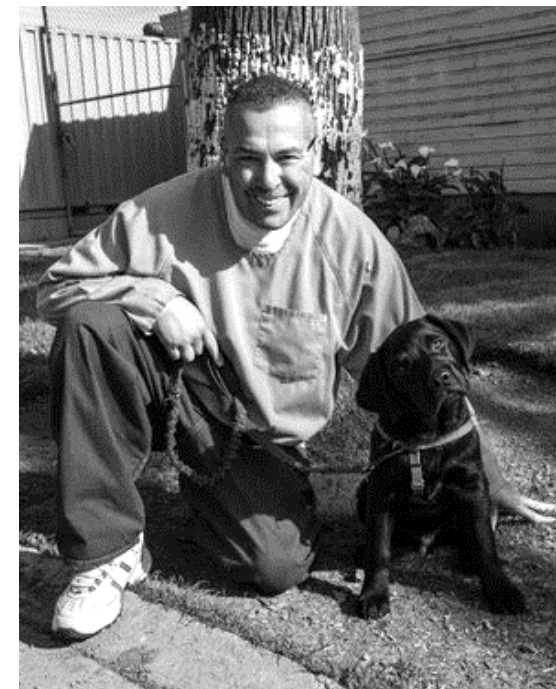
have wrapped up and Rosa and Nicole have made their final comments and given homework assignments, I stand at doorway to thank the men as they leave. As I shake each hand, I become aware of how the trepidation and uncertainty I felt at the beginning of the day has vanished. I have no fear and harbor zero judgment. I simply feel respect and admiration for the unwavering commitment these men have to change lives for the better; the most notable lives being their own. They say prison changes a person. It's certainly changed me.



Left:
Black Lab pup,
Ruthie, just
starting her
education to
become a
service dog



Right:
Yellow
Lab, Jenni,
demonstrating
"go get help!"
with her handler
Carlos



Clockwise starting above:
 Bobbi with his handler, Will; Crawford with his handler, Chris; Blitzzen hangin out in the dorm with his handler, Nick; dogs and handlers in their living quarters

Earlier, during lunch in Lieutenant Eilers’ office, I tossed out the idea of getting access to the dormitory where the dogs live with the inmates. I fully expected to hear a litany of regulatory and liability reasons why this would not be feasible. Instead, Eilers simply said, “sure we can make that happen.”

So, now, I walk with the men and the dogs to Dorm 28. The dormitory is another long, narrow wooden building in need of some repair and a fresh paint job. A sign

at the top of the steps reads, “Caution, Dogs Inside”. As I enter, I’m struck with the precious commodity of privacy. Even though I’m an invited guest and I sense no resistance or resentment from the men, I worry a bit that I might be intruding.

As inconspicuously as possible, I walk throughout the dorm taking images, and for the first time today the stark reality hits. This is prison. The tiny metal cots are less than three feet apart with no walls or barriers in between them. Each cot is separated by a padlocked, five-foot

high metal storage cabinet and a dog kennel. I think about how the inmates sleep an arm’s length away from each other and I realize how much I take my own privacy and freedom for granted.

As the inmates prepare for supper, the dogs nestle on the floor and squeeze onto cots and into kennels. I quietly exit the dorm, leave the prison and return to my life with a new perspective.

For more content from John Pierson visit:
www.streetbeatphoto.com

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I simply feel respect and admiration for the unwavering commitment these men have to change lives for the better; the most notable lives being their own.

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By: Keith Erickson
Inmate / Handler
Editor In Chief,
Four Paws Bulletin-PVSP

A Second Chance at Life

After months of planning and anticipation on the yard, the dogs made their entrance here at Pleasant Valley State Prison in July 2019.

I had not touched a dog in nearly twenty-five years, so it was very hard holding back my fascination with furry little creatures I had grown up loving. Dogs have a way of making everything feel okay, or so I believed as a kid. As an adult, that idea proved to be enduring. I cried the first night I had my dog with me in the cell. They were not tears of sadness, but they held the deep emotion I had forgotten existed in me after all these years of only having to love and look out for myself.

I had already walked away from gangs, and from the criminality and destruction that so many of us adopt within these walls because of hopelessness. Still, I was finding it difficult to get back to where I needed to be as a human being, to being more than just a prisoner with a lifetime number. My dog, Delta, gave me a sense of belonging and purpose right from the start. I began investing everything I have in me into this little guy because his graduation is the one great thing I know I am going to do that is never going to be taken away from me even after he is placed with his recipient. I have a second chance at life because I am giving back to the world out there instead of taking from it.

The world in here, inmates and staff alike, have received the presence of dogs very positively. Correctional officers are human beings just like us. They put on the uniform every day knowing they are doing a job that requires them to interact with men who have done harm to the communities where they are raising their families. They do not come to punish us, but nor do

they come here to let us continue living in the same ways that put us in prison. We take it as nothing personal that many COs are reluctant to see us through a different lens, however, the dogs are a constant reminder that there is goodness that can come from our mistakes. It is not an overnight process, yet the changing atmosphere here at PVSP shows them a side of us they may have never seen. We get a lot of support from the correctional staff when it comes to ensuring the safety and progress of all the dogs because they see our care and our hard work.

For us handlers, not a day goes by where inmates don't ask to pet our dogs. Everyone seems to need their daily dose of canine love, that is for sure, and we love supporting the population in this way. Although a service dog program was a fresh idea in a level three environment, it reminds inmates on the yard that they once had their own lives outside of prison. Many of us had dogs growing up and still have an attachment to those guys after all these years. We have lost everything but those memories.

We know the ways that a dog can love you unconditionally, and although we often become desensitized to the many things we have endured as a result of poor choices in our lives, we haven't forgotten how our dogs made us feel before incarceration was a part of our lives. At our best, and at our worst, they loved us just the same.

Whether it is on the yard, in the college classrooms, or any of the self-help groups that are taking place, you are sure to see one or more dogs resting at our feet making everyone feel a strong sense of normalcy despite the concrete and barbed wire.

I don't think there has ever been a more positive idea than introducing dog programs into correctional facilities throughout the country. Rehabilitation starts with coming to understand the impact of our wrongs, but it continues with learning how to value one another and ourselves the way that human beings should. The dogs remind us of our common humanity in more ways than you can imagine.

“ I cried the first night I had my dog with me in the cell. They were not tears of sadness, but they held the deep emotion I had forgotten existed in me after all these years of only having to love and look out for myself. ”

**Keith
&
Delta**



Book Review

By **Greg N. Faulk**
Editor

Weekends with Daisy

is a story about Sharron Luttrell, a journalist and mother of two who longs to fill the void left by the death of her family dog, Tucker. One day while shopping she happens upon an adorable Yellow Lab named Daisy. This is the beginning of a journey that leads her to fall in love, end up in prison, and befriend a convicted murderer, forever changing her life.

After chasing down the pup, Sharron realizes the dog is wearing a “puppy-in-training” vest and discovers that the dog belongs to National Education for Assistance Dog Services, or NEADS, an organization that trains service dogs at the nearby prison. After learning more about the organization, she decides to become a weekend puppy raiser. What she doesn’t bargain for is the deep bond her entire family forms with Daisy, not to mention the friendship she forms with the prisoner assigned to train Daisy. Besides taking her little Yellow Lab on outings as part of the necessary socialization process, Sharron’s responsibilities are to go inside the prison on a weekly basis to pick up and drop off Daisy and meet with the inmate trainer, Keith. These meetings are necessary for the puppy raiser and the trainer to

update one another on the progress of the puppy they are co-parenting.

The shared goal of raising a service dog brings the two strangers together even though they are from two very different worlds. In the beginning, being a puppy raiser is mostly fun and games. However, Sharron soon realizes that producing a service dog is serious business and the smallest mistake could derail Daisy’s career. Sharron and Keith work together to get through the challenges of “puppy parenthood,” such as helping Daisy through her bad habits of eating food off the ground and her fear of loud noises.

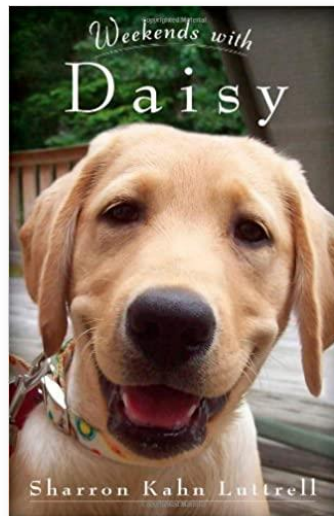
These challenges are complicated when Sharron faces some bumps in the road in her own life, like losing her job. The situation is further exacerbated when Sharron’s curiosity gets the better of her and she begins to wonder what landed Keith in prison. After discovering that he is a convicted murderer serving a life sentence, she begins to question their

partnership. Her trepidation fades the more time she spends working with Keith and seeing the love and devotion he has for Daisy. I can imagine most puppy raisers in prison dog programs have an

experience similar to Sharron, wondering if prisoners are even capable of the kind of care and compassion a service dog needs. How can he be responsible for another life when he couldn’t even be responsible for his own?

In my case, I am responsible for an enormous Golden Retriever,

Country, who has a puppy raiser that also happens to be a correctional officer. In reading Sharron’s perspective, I found myself filling in the blanks of Keith’s story. I connected with his desire to do something good and worthwhile with his long prison sentence by helping someone in need. It is possible he didn’t really know how much his good work



with Daisy impacted his puppy raiser – until he read her book.

Our experiences, however, are probably very different. Sharron was what we might call “free staff” and not a C/O at the prison. I had to navigate a different social dynamic than Keith and Sharron. I am not new to prison dynamics, so I am very familiar with the unspoken rules that govern interaction between inmates and C/Os. Inmates don’t talk to C/Os. If you do, don’t ask too many questions. Don’t give up any information.

But, this dynamic had to change if we were to co-parent a dog that needed two people on the same page regarding his learning needs. We both had to develop a professional relationship in order to complete our mission. We’re working together to raise him and prepare him for what he will be doing for his entire life. Just like Keith and Sharron, we both share many of the same struggles. We laugh together at our dog’s funny antics. We worry together when issues arise that may keep him from being a service dog.

I don’t look at my puppy raiser and see a correctional officer. I see her as a person, my partner, and as someone who will share the heartbreak of saying goodbye to someone we love who happens to be covered in fur.

In the end, Daisy graduates and Sharron’s heart is broken as Daisy moves on to a life of service. However, as Sharron learned at the beginning of her journey, nothing heals a broken heart like the love of a puppy. Within weeks she opened her home to a new puppy named Holly.

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Tale End

By **Aaron Carter**
Editor

Born Kathleen Quinn in California in 1942, she died on March 13, 2020 surrounded by her Adrian Dominican sisters and her beloved Golden Retriever, Pax.

A force for positive change, Sister Pauline experienced and accomplished so much in her 77 years with us. Her life of service and determination is a testimony to everyone who has survived trauma and vowed not to be defined by it. Before her life as a nun, her early years were filled with abuse and rejection. Family members and staff at mental institutions failed to meet her needs for safety and love. The persistent neglect she experienced across fourteen

different institutions eventually led to homelessness and extreme poverty.

Everyone needs a bridge out of trauma and hopelessness in order to find purpose in their lives. For Sister Pauline, her dog Joni was the bridge that led her to dogs. “Because I loved Joni I wanted to learn how to train dogs,” she said in her book *Secrets Shared*. “Unconditional love brings people together. I became other-centered. A new life started to open up to me.”

Her new life as a champion for the downtrodden meant people in tough situations all over the world could count on her as something of a guardian angel, particularly prisoners. In

1981, at a women’s prison in Washington State, she established the Prison Pet Partnership so prisoners could train dogs for disabled people. “There were many disabled [people] waiting for a dog,” she recalled. “Having a dog by their side would help them regain their self-respect and esteem.”

Sister Pauline wanted to help as many people as she could with their pain. In words that could easily sum up the New Life K9s experience, she realized through her work that “prisoners who trained the dogs started to heal from their own pain. I saw firsthand that finding meaning for our lives through the unconditional love of a dog can help people to be healed.” This

insight reverberated throughout the country and eventually the world.

She had a direct hand in establishing prison dog programs in places as far away as Argentina. For other programs, her example was strong enough to convince policymakers and prison administrators that dog programs were worthy vehicles for rehabilitation.

In May 2017 Sister Pauline visited NLK9s at CTF where handlers are required to read her book and write a book report. Tony Leyba and David Hanley, brand new handlers when they met Sister Pauline, were impressed by her input even though she did not adhere to the bond-based choice teaching philosophy. It was her book that left

a mark on David. “It brought a lot of insight and healing with my own childhood struggles,” he said.

Tony, on the other hand, was moved by her easy interaction with prisoners. “Her perseverance an ability to continue to help and extend her hand y showing people love is amazing. When she came to Soledad and took a picture with me and my teammates and our dogs, that was something I would have never imagined,” he said.

The NLK9s family celebrates the life of Sister Pauline for showing us what it looks like to walk the walk in spite of challenging circumstances.

The world says goodbye to Sister Pauline, the patron saint of prison dog programs, who passed away in Michigan after a spirited battle with cancer.

The newly formed
NEW LIFE K9s team at CTF
during a visit from Sister
Pauline in May of 2017





Top Dog Coffee Bar

New Life K9s is excited to announce a joint venture with Top Dog Coffee Co., a coffee seller and distributor with multiple locations in and around the Central Coast. To learn how you can help visit:

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