

# 'Special' couple has faith and love, needs apartment

By JULIE MACK

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This is a story about the difficulties in finding an affordable apartment that allows tenants to keep dogs.

But it is also a story about faith and love, and of building a "normal" life despite the tremendous odds against it.

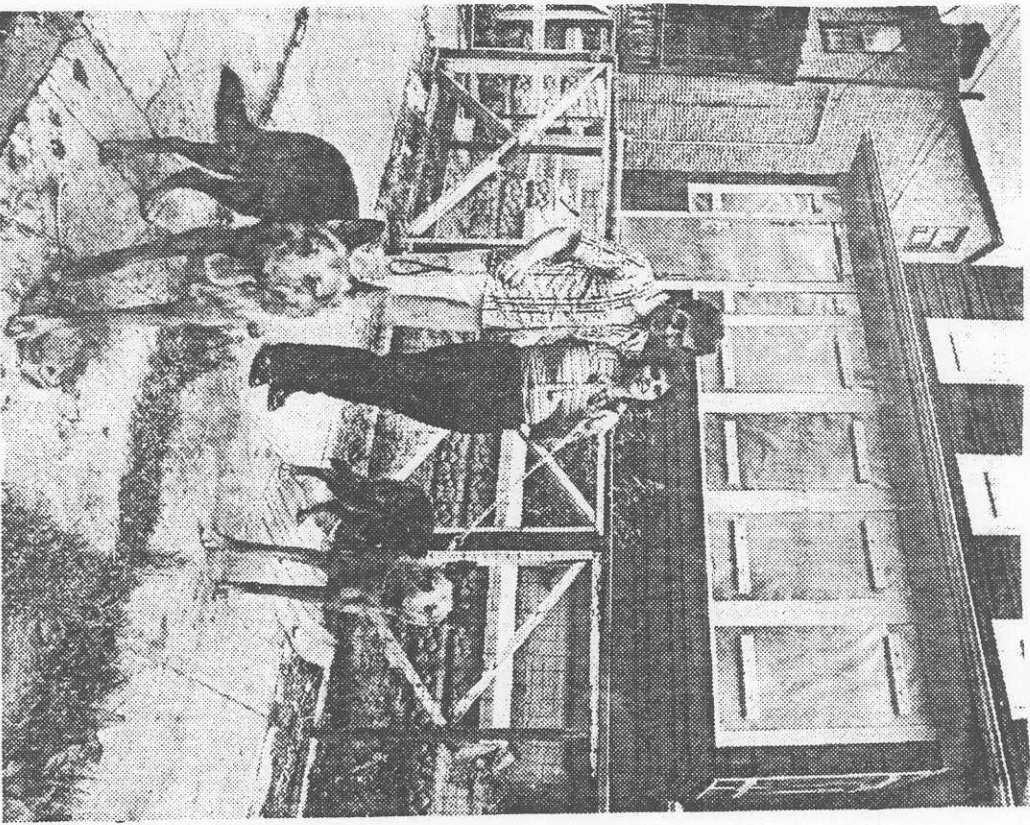
Mannel and Annette Diaz have lived for nine years as an ordinary Staten Island couple. And that, in itself, is extraordinary.

They met in the 1960s, when they were both residents of the former Willowbrook State School. Manny, 38, was a native of Puerto Rico who came to

New York as a child. His father had died. His mother was sick. An aunt in Manhattan couldn't care for Manny and his brother, and they were sent to the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin, Mount Loretto. After five years there, Manny was diagnosed as borderline retarded and sent to the state institution.

Because his retardation is minimal — Manny simply calls himself "a slow learner" — he was released from Willowbrook when he was 20. Uneducated and unskilled, he nonetheless obtained steady work.

Little is known about (See COUPLE, Page A 9)



Mannel and Annette Diaz walk their dogs in front of their former New Brighton house. They were evicted when they could not keep up mortgage payments and other bills; now they can't find an apartment that will let them keep the dogs.

S.I. Advance Photo by Tony Dugai