


CHANGE
 Katie was in the police force for 16 years

I swapped my life on the beat for sausage dogs

We are a nation of pooch lovers, with more than a third of households sharing their home with a dog. But Katie Saywell loves her four-legged friends so much she gave up her job – for a sizzling new career training sausage dogs.

“Now I have the best job in the world,” says Katie 39, from Cornwall, who has even won a business award from Dragons’ Den’s Theo Paphitis.

“Training dachshunds and coaching their owners is super fun.

“There is a serious element to it, but we have a great laugh. I always say a silent sausage is a suspicious one. When they are quiet, they are usually up to mischief.”

And she’s dealt with some memorable characters over the years. “How could I forget Bonnie and Clyde,” says Katie. “Rescue siblings with anxiety, they had their owners wrapped around their paws with their antics – excessive barking and an inability to be left alone. They are now completely reformed.”

Then there was Libby, a diminutive dachshund who refused to walk. “She now gets excited when her owners say it’s time to go to the pub,” laughs Katie.

But before the pooches came the police. A career in the force seemed on the cards for Katie who grew up in Nottingham. A family photo shows her aged three in a pedal police car.

“But alongside me is Candy, a Labrador who I was even more devoted to,” she says. “I’ve always had a special connection with animals and actually wanted to be a vet nurse.

“But my family pushed me to get a ‘proper’ job, so I applied to the police, which I thought would offer a stable career and decent pension.”

Katie started as a Special Constable in the city’s Clifton area in 2004, before taking on a Police Community Support Officer role.

“When I became a ‘regular’ officer I moved to a new station in the city centre. I helped lots of people, but saw things that no one should have to, had heart-breaking conversations, and dealt with a fair few horrible people. I worked riots and had rest days cancelled. It was tough and took its toll,” she says.

“I moved to frontline response work in Clifton and had the best few years with a fantastic team. But staff shortages meant I found myself

Many thought Katie Saywell was barking mad when she gave up a career in the police to train dachshunds – but she says she’s never looked back

alone covering a huge area, with back-up all the way on the other side of the city. I was sent to three horrible jobs one after the other – which knocked me for six.” Katie went on to an office job interviewing and processing people in custody, before a spell in CID. But she grew increasingly

unhappy. “I became overwhelmed with the politics and bullying I experienced in the force,” she says. She gave up night-shift work in early 2016 and bought dachshund Chipolata to cheer herself up.

“I’d wanted a dog for years, and even borrowed other people’s to walk and pet-sit. Dachshunds are adorable, with crazy big ears and loving eyes,” she says. “But Chip was a challenge – a tough dog in a tiny body. I had sleepless nights, and it was hard work to toilet-train and get

her to walk on the lead.

“But the worst was the barking. Dachshunds are loud. When I looked, there didn’t seem to be much support out there.

“All the local dog training was aimed at large breeds that want to please their owners. Sausages are very independent.”

Katie left the police force in February 2020. “I ended up taking a few months off work and during that time I realised I had outgrown the force and its culture,” she says. “I

wanted to work with what I was passionate about – animals.

“So I decided to set up a business training dachshunds because of how difficult I found it to get the right help.”

And so The Dogs Code was born, with in-person and online courses and one-to-one training sessions for sausage dogs and their owners. It soon won a Small Business Sunday award from Dragons’ Den’s Theo.

“People thought I was crackers leaving a secure career for a dog training business – but that added fuel to my fire,” says Katie, who also runs ‘doga’ (dog yoga) sessions.

“My online clients tell me their dogs scramble to the screen and assume position when they hear my voice over the computer. Another is famous for sitting on his bum like a meerkat when the session starts.”

Since starting her business, Katie has helped countless owners – even flying to Switzerland for one.

“I’ve helped get people’s love lives back on track when their sausage dog was causing havoc,” she laughs.

“They’re all so different – from Chilli, the unpredictable lunger turned well-behaved boy, to Betty from Bermuda who I’m currently teaching not to bite.”

It all comes down to understanding, says Katie. “While dachshunds are seen as lap dogs, they are hunters by nature – sassy and fierce,” she explains. “They are completely underestimated as a breed.

“Owners can get extremely upset – if they can’t leave their dog, it impacts their social life. Owners of dogs that bark, lunge or bite experience judgment too. But once we have a conversation, they feel a weight has been lifted. I have had

owners in tears and they have described my training as life changing.”

She admits she’s never felt more fulfilled.

“When I worked on the force it was disheartening if the CPS didn’t run a case, or if a traumatised victim saw a minor sentence being handed

out. I didn’t get a sense I was helping,” says Katie.

“Now I have a real sense of achievement when I see owners and dogs become best friends, understanding and trusting each other. As a police officer I was waiting for a pension that was ever changing, now I control my own finances.

“Working for myself I always have a lunch break. I finish on time and have a holiday when I choose.

“The experience of being a police officer gave me some great skills and I take my hat off to most cops as they do a great job and are massively undervalued. But it’s good to be recognised and not criticised.”

Katie estimates she has worked with almost a thousand sausage dogs – and the demand is only growing.

“After the pandemic more owners than ever need help with dogs affected by lockdown,” she says.

“And especially sausages. They are small with a huge character – like a doberman that hasn’t grown legs yet.”

■ Visit thedogscode.com for more information.

INTERVIEW BY VANESSA HOLBURN


OBEDIENT
 Katie loves her clients

“I’ve helped get people’s love lives on track after their sausage dog caused havoc”

“I’d outgrown the force and its culture... I wanted to work with animals”

NEW PATH
 Katie with a beloved dachshund