

# A Malinois in a Wiener Dog Suit

Down to Earth: Sheriff Woody and his badge

## Two extraordinary Dachshunds make their mark as police detection K-9s.

**S**ue Stejskal was inching along on her belly in a dark crawl space that may have once held the corpse of a murder victim. A headlamp was all she had for light.

She was in that tight spot because of Chili Dawg, a sweet 8-pound Dachs-hund with wiry hair the color of a caramel milkshake. Stejskal got the dog a few years earlier as a pet and show dog.

Somehow, her sweet little puppy had grown up to become a cadaver dog, trained to sniff out the scent of death.

When detectives needed help with a 20-year-old cold case, they contacted a 5-foot, 2-inch woman and her sniffer dog, who was a little taller than an iPhone at the shoulder.

It may seem like an odd choice but for this job, no one would have been better.

“We were called in *because* of her size,” Stejskal told *AKC Family Dog* in a phone interview. “She was small enough to get into the crawl space.” Chili’s nose provided clues that helped with the case.

### NO JOKE

Dachshunds are not exactly what spring to mind when people say “police dog.” In popular culture, their sausage bodies, pointy noses, and *Who? Me?* expressions are the stuff of comedy. No Halloween parade is complete without a few wiener dogs on a bun.

Recently, the South Australia Police announced a new division—Small Area Urban Searching and Guided Evacuation Dogs—consisting of three Dachs-hunds. “We can chuck them under beds, in cupboards, and other furni-



Chili Dawg displays her ACE medal in 2011. She also earned honors from the United States Police Canine Association.

ture,” said the police commissioner. “We can even attach them to drones.”

It was an April Fools’ prank.

Jokes aside, Dachshunds possess many qualities that make them suitable for detection work. Discerning noses are just part of it. They were developed in 17th-century Germany to hunt badgers, wild animals that are 25 to 40 pounds of teeth, muscle, and bad attitude. The Dachshund’s short legs and long, low bodies are designed to dive into tunnels after their prey.

The ideal Dachsie temperament, notes the breed standard, is “clever, lively, and courageous to the point of rashness.”

As Stejskal put it in describing Chili: “She was like a Malinois trapped in a wiener dog suit.”

### A QUARTER AND A DREAM

Whippets and Cardigan Welsh Corgis had been Stejskal’s breeds for 30 years, and she participated in conformation, obedience, and tracking.

Then in the late 1990s, a series of surgeries limited her upper-body

strength. A smaller dog, she thought, might be easier to handle.

She got a 10-week-old miniature wirehaired Dachshund pup in 2001. Chili quickly earned her AKC championship, passed her Canine Good Citizen test, and earned a tracking and Rally Novice title.

She was a live wire, full of energy and curiosity. Stejskal was struggling for ways to keep her occupied. Then she remembered a book that she picked up for a quarter at a library sale eight years earlier. It was about search and rescue dogs.

“I never, ever thought about the possibility of getting involved,” she recalls. “But I had a dog, a dog with a nose, a dog who loved to use it. Maybe?”

She called the president of a national search-dog organization and described Chili’s drive and eagerness. She waited until the end to reveal that she was talking about an 8-pound Dachshund.

To her surprise, the experienced handler reacted with neither derision nor discouragement. All that

mattered, the woman said, was whether the dog was eager to learn. That, she was.

In about a year and a half, Chili and Stejskal mastered the skills to become a human remains–detection team for land and water searches. Through her 11-year career in law, Chili located human remains associated with homicides, suicides, drownings, and missing-person cases.

“Chili was a force to be reckoned with,” Stejskal says. “She moved through life without knowing how small she was. ... On a search, the words I use to describe Chili are *intense, fixated, motivated, and methodical*. Whatever it took, she would get to the source. She never lost focus. Chili was driven.”

In the field, Stejskal carried the little dog in a backpack. She could tell if Chili had caught the scent, because she could feel a change of behavior in her four-pawed detective. She’d start moving around in the bag, sniffing and digging.

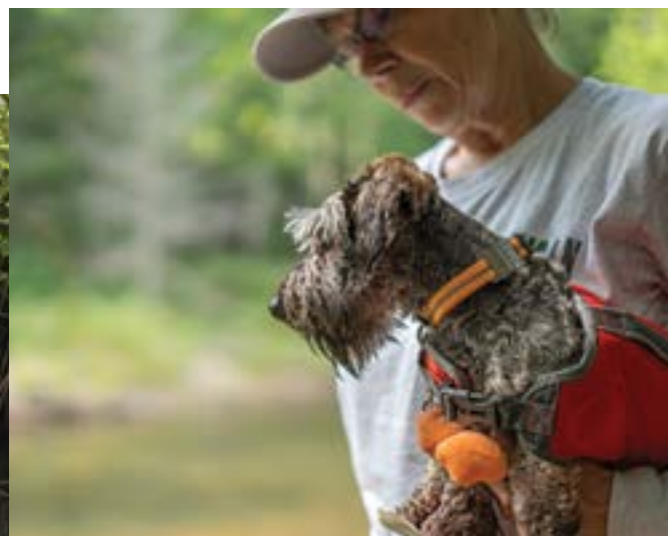
Chili, who passed away at 16 and a half years, helped solve many cases. Equally important, she opened a new world for her owner, whose background had been in science writing and education.

“Soon after embarking down this road, I became a reserve deputy, which

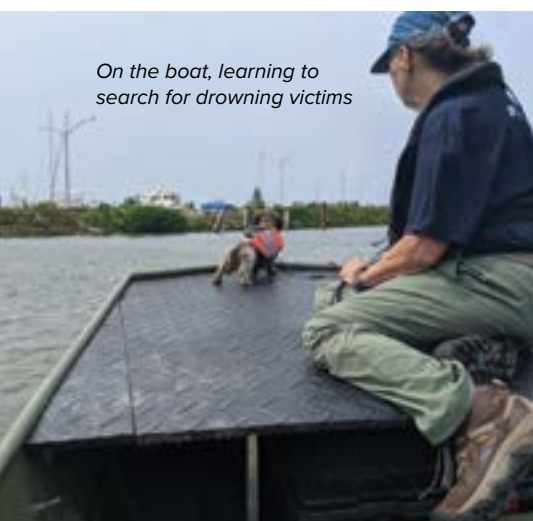


Chili Dawg started her life as a show dog.





Left: "Their tenacious personality and natural hunt drive make many of them very good at what they put their mind to," says Sue Stejskal. "If a Dachshund wants to do something, there may be no stopping them. It's a matter of harnessing that ability!"  
Right: The Team, Stejskal and Woody



On the boat, learning to search for drowning victims

## WATER WORKS

In 2009, while Chili was still active, Stejskal added another detection dog to her team: chocolate Labrador Retriever Buzz. Then seven years later, she got Maple, an English Springer Spaniel.

In 2019, after a distinguished career, Buzz died. Stejskal decided it was "time to return to the world of small dogs who don't know they are small," she says. Enter Hundeleben Oh It's Sheriff Woody Mw, RN, CGC, TKN.

After years of dealing with the rough, raw world of crime, she figured she'd just have fun with Woody and participate in dog sports.

The universe had other plans.

Stejskal realized there was still a great, unmet need for K-9 noses in her community, and she missed being part of that world. For a time, she worked with Maple and Woody in bedbug detection. Then she moved back into human-remains detection on the water.

Woody is more mellow than his predecessor, but he is turning into an accomplished water-detection dog. Stejskal particularly admires his powers

of concentration—his ability to ignore flocks of swans and other birds, for example—while he's searching.

Woody is still in training, but he has already aided in the recovery of a drowning victim. Late last year, he earned an award—Detector Dog Catch of the Quarter—from a regional chapter of the United States Police Canine Association. He has been deputized and serves with the department's Crime Scene Unit and Dive Team, and the county's Major Crime Task Force.

Stejskal clearly loves what she does, but she points out that it's not for everyone. It takes an enormous amount of training, discipline, and dedication to be a K-9 handler for law enforcement.

Still, she says there are ways anyone can experience the thrill of watching dogs search with their noses. Many organized events are based on canine olfactory powers, such as earthdog, field trials, Barn Hunt, scent work (see page 42 on how to get started), and tracking.

"So many ways," she says, "to enjoy the funny small packages that we know as Dachshunds." **FD**

I did for 10 years, with our county sheriff's department as well as a special deputy with the county's dive team," she says. She has been a human remains detector dog and forensic evidence dog handler for the St. Joseph County Sheriff's Department, in Michigan, for almost 20 years. Her resume includes books on detector dogs and bedbug detection, and two children's books about her partners—*The Little Dog Who Did Big Things* and *Buzz-Visits Mackinac Island*.