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

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 Dachshund with wiry hair the color of a caramel milkshake. Stejskal got the dog a few years earlier as a pet and show dog.

Chili's nose provided clues that helped her get into the crawl space. "She was small enough to get into the crawl space," Stejskal told AKC Family Dog in a phone interview. "She was small but very strong. A smaller dog, she thought, might be easier to handle."

Through her years in the field, Stejskal carried the little dog in a backpack. She could tell if Chili was eager to learn. "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.

Dachshunds are not exactly what spring to mind when people say "police dog." In popular culture, their sausage bodies, ponytail noses, and Who? Me? expressions are the stuff of comedy. But 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 Dachshund temperament, notes the police commissioner, is "clever, lively, and 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 earlier, 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 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 13-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."

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.
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.*

**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.”