

Kath Belfield

Kath was born in 1958 and now lives on a smallholding near Leek. Over the years she has worked in factories, as a coffin maker, at a slaughterhouse and knacker's yard. She even ran her own kennel business, but farming remained her passion and she was born to it. In this part of the interview recorded in May 2017, Kath tells Sheila Hines how she moved into running a kennels due to the downturn in the income from farming.

Part 3 - Kennels

KB. In 2000, we decided to go into kennels. Started doing kennels up and as cows calved I sold 'em.

SH. So, what made you make that decision?

KB. Money, money. I was working, putting a wage in, Jo was putting a wage in and I was doing other odd jobs beside for folk to put money in and we still lost £5000. So really, I'm not only give me milk away, I paid for it to go. So, we had to apply to the Peak Park to convert the buildings to kennels and they said I could only convert the buildings to kennels, they could only be 50% of me income, the farm had got to still be the main income. I said "well, I lost £5000 last year and 3 jobs went into that". I says "have I got to lose £5000 on the kennels as well?" He said, "it sounds like you best do the best you can". We had to convert all the sheds, so working at Redfern's and selling cows and we were still doing a bit of picketing at the time, not as much, cos it was dying out a little bit, if you know what a mean.

KB. Well, having worked in slaughter house and having been on welfare job and I did a bit at knacker yard, then going to kennels, two things shocked me, the amount of dog hairs a dog loses, they seem to have hairs everywhere, but I saw more cruelty and cruelty probably with kindness looking after cats and dogs than I have ever seen in any form of farming. People have gone so far away from understanding animals and the needs of animals, that they're actually borderline cruel on dogs. People come the kennels, the first thing they ask for was heaters, where are the heaters? Never once in the 16 years we had kennels did anyone ever ask where's the ventilation. A dog will always keep itself warm, the one thing a dog struggles with especially a black dog is sun and heat. Not once did anyone ask where is the shade or the ventilation. That shocked me and a lot of things shocked me about people. With the press and the television, what with the Blair government, "All farmers were cruel." Like I say, I saw a lot more cruelty and borderline cruelty with pets than I've ever seen in all my life farming. I've seen some wonderful things with farming, I didn't see that many wonderful with dogs.

KB. I will just tell you one little tale; we had an old woman come. She had a nice little Collie dog, a little bitch, and she was going on holiday, she was going to kill the dog or kick it out and re home it. The dog was the bane of her life, it was an 18 month old collie, and she was going on holiday cause she couldn't cope with it. I hadn't had the

dog on the yard six hours when it was blatantly obvious it were deaf. Stone deaf. She told me it wouldn't do a thing it's told. It wouldn't, cus it was deaf as a post. Strangely enough we had 3 dogs come in to us in 16 years that were deaf, that the owners didn't know. So, I took this dog a walk up the field. All deaf animals look at you, they choose what they're doing, they'll turn round and you'll have half a second and they'll look at you and that dog took its first command and all's I did was hold me hand up to stop it. I didn't know if it would react or what it 'ud do. But the only way to learn anything, anything is to have a go. So, I just put me hand up. Dog looked at me, it was so surprised I had acknowledged it, I hadn't tried to speak to it, I'd acknowledged it with a command and it wagged its tail and came bounding down the field, cause it was that pleased someone had acknowledged it. So, when it come bounding toward me I waved it, I waved it. I thought, it's doing something, I'll put a command to what it's doing. And I think I was the first person in the 18 months of its life that have ever acknowledged it. So, it come toward me so I waved it to me, and it come, and sat down in front of me, so I give it a command to sit and give it a fuss. No good telling it away, cos it couldn't hear me; so I sent me arm away and off it went as happy as Larry. After that he kept looking back at me, I kept giving it hand command; by the end of the week, I could get that dog to do what the average Crufts winner could do, just with a few hand movements.

SH. Did she have it back?

KB. She come to pick it up with her daughter. I said, "I have got a lot to tell you before you have that dog back." She says "I know that dogs a nightmare, I will pay for anything it has done wrong, I'm very sorry." I said "You've already got the wrong end of the stick", I says "you've one of the best dogs I have ever come across, it's absolutely brilliant, but you will have to learn how to deal with it." "I've been trying to deal with it for 18 months, you can't tell me how to." "I can tell you a lot cause your dog is deaf." I says "So talking to it is a waste of time." "My dogs not deaf." I says, "your dog's deaf. That's why it won't do as it is told." I said "Have you got half a brain?" to the daughter. She looked at me gone out. I said, "Have you got half a brain cause your mothers none." So, I let the dog out and I just give it a few hand signals and it went straight down. Do everything. "Well it hates the car" she said after it had stood up, lay down, gone away, come back, done everything she'd spent 18 months not doing with it. So, I pointed at dog and pointed at car and dog went straight in.

SH. So, they went on alright?

KB. She come back three weeks later, just called in. She says, "A million pound wouldn't buy that dog, I can't believe it." She had ill used and abused that dog, because she didn't know it was deaf. But how come I could see dog was deaf in 6 hours and that's in kennels, it weren't in me house. I weren't with it for six hours.

SH. What made you decide to pack up?

KB. What made us decide to pack up? Tiredness more than anything. You're very full on, its 7 days a week.

SH. And dealing with public...?

KB. If you're busy trying to get a job done, they will want to stop and talk to you for two hours and starting and stopping a job starts to blow your head.

SH. And you've still got livestock, you're still doing your farming?

KB. I think that's what got too much, doing the kennels and the farm, I could see both things slipping away from it, cos I just couldn't physically keep up with it and the kennels, people eat your time. It sounds a bit daft, but if you have a customer they'd be in a dash. If another customer come, 'Hang on, I just want to check this.' They'd be there an hour later, this person that was in a dash, because they know they're holding someone else up. If I was sat in the office thinking I'd have half an hour, they'd all dash in and out. If I was busy painting or mending a gate or fixing the tractor you couldn't get rid of them and then you start, you lose the will to live. Don't get me wrong, we met some super folk and met some super dogs, some super outstanding dogs and some of the best dogs we've had, people had come with cause they're problem dogs and troublesome dogs and the problem with the dog is, it's too intelligent for the owner and once you point out what the dog is capable of, they're gobsmacked and they realise they have to up their game to keep up with the dog and you get fed up beating the same drum and the amount of dogs that were coming, more and more, I think dogs have changed considerably in the 16 years we had kennels. We were getting dog after dog after dog coming, 'We can't let it off its lead cause it runs off.' Was it born with a lead? if it wants to run off, let it run off, wave tara, go and get one that wants to live with you. There's thousands of dogs, why would you keep one that doesn't want to be with you. But it were funny, they'd run off for them, but never run off for me. "It's nasty with other dogs". I don't think so, it's not bit my dog. Why should it bite another dog. Does it bite other dogs because you wish it will, because I wish it not to. So, I could take ten dogs up the field at a time, and they didn't bite each other, because I wished them not to. I'm sure some owners wish them to do. Because dogs only there to please you ain't it.

SH. Usually, yeh.