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From award-winning police officer to running a soft furnishings business, how one woman changed her career and never looked back



FAMILY AFFAIR (main) From a small start, Kerrie's business has grown dramatically – with help from daughters Grace (left) and Eve

MADE WITH LOVE (below and bottom) Upholstered footstools, pretty cushions and colourful aprons are just a few of the delights created by the Pins and Ribbons team



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Were you to open the door to Kerrie Murray's Victorian house in Eaglescliffe, County Durham, chances are you'll find her surrounded by fabric samples while her daughters add their own creative style to their mother's flourishing home-furnishing business. It's a pretty picture, and it takes a leap of imagination to grasp that Kerrie was twice commended for bravery in her previous life as police sergeant: once for talking a man out of brandishing a knife, and once for helping prevent an armed robbery at a betting shop. But knowing what Kerrie has achieved in the past couple of years confirms that she's not one to shy away from new challenges or difficult situations.

'A couple of years ago I was a police sergeant, waiting to be promoted to inspector. I went into the police force straight from school – it was what I'd always wanted to do,' says Kerrie, 34. 'I had the girls, Grace, who's now nine, and Eve, five, when I was in the Force, and slowly became more strategic in my role. My husband, David, does shift work, too, so juggling that with middle-of-the-night childcare, was hard.' At the same time, Kerrie was busy restoring her home and making beautiful soft furnishings. 'I'd always made curtains and cushions. It was a hobby that gave me a lot of pleasure,' she says. 'Then a friend of mine asked me to make

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a pinboard for her. Her friends started putting in requests, too, and that's when the idea for the business began.'

By this point Kerrie was missing the operational side of her job and starting to think about new avenues. But it was facing two traumatic situations in succession that really made her consider what to do next with her life.

'In 2006, I had a really serious car crash and had serious burns and injuries to my hands, arms and back. Also, I'd just dropped Grace off, so it played on my mind that she could have been in the car. Psychologically, it took about 18 months to come to terms with what happened, but it gave me the time to reflect on life – had that been the end of my career, where would I want to take my life from there on? Then a year ago, my mother was diagnosed with a brain tumour, and that really made me realise you just don't know what's around the corner. You can't think about how life will be in 20 years – it's about being happy now.'

Kerrie had registered the name 'Pins and Ribbons' for her soft-furnishing making in 2006, but it wasn't until last year that she decided to take the plunge and make it a full-time business. 'It was daunting leaving a successful career and a good income. But to have been in policing after Mum was diagnosed would have been a nightmare because we were at the hospital all the time. I wanted a job that would allow me to be in charge of my own time, and be there for my family, too. My husband was very supportive about Pins and Ribbons – he saw that I was unhappy and told me to go for it.'

Starting with just two products – pinboards and doorstops – Kerrie began the business sewing at the kitchen table and testing sales potential on eBay. Now she's built the range to an impressive array of home furnishings, from bedding, curtains and headboards to wedding

accessories and dog beds. Everything she makes not only has her trademark fresh and pretty handcrafted style, but is also created solely from UK-sourced materials.

She now sells via her website, is stocked by an impressive 130 shops nationwide, and has a small but dedicated team of three sewing up a storm in a local industrial estate.

'They were all friends of mine. I met Jane dog-walking in the local park – she's a trained machinist and was out of work at the time. Leah's children are friends with mine; she started part-time, and is now looking to go full-time. And my mother's best friend does the admin for us. Following treatment and surgery, Mum's doing well and often comes in to lend me a hand herself.'

Kerrie appreciates the difficulties of managing home and work and has made the hours as flexible as possible. 'Leah and I drop our children off together and then start work at the unit. We pick the children up after school and then work at night time when we have to – recently we had a last-minute order for 60 metres of wedding bunting! And Jane walks her dog, Oscar, before she comes in – sometimes she brings him to work, too.'

The business is burgeoning but Kerrie's ethos is to keep it small and standards high. 'I don't ever see it being a huge production,' says Kerrie, who still brings her machine home and works at the kitchen table to get orders done. 'We'd quite like a shop locally, but I don't want to make a vast fortune. The company wasn't launched for that – it was launched because I want to be happy doing what I'm doing and in control of my own destiny.'

Kerrie's new life is a million miles away from her career in the police force, but despite such a huge change in direction it's obvious her new job brings her just as much reward.

'Apart from Mum making a full recovery, there's nothing I'd wish for now. The children are very happy and I'd love it if they ran the business when they grow up. Eve would last five minutes because she gets bored, but Grace is very creative. We were in a fabric shop recently and she was getting very excited choosing the material. She declared: "We're going to be the youngest designers in the world!"'

● **To see more of Kerrie's creations, visit pinsandribbons.co.uk**

BEAUTIFUL PRINTS
(far left) All of Kerrie's products are made from UK-sourced materials

WORKING FROM HOME
(above) While Kerrie's working, her girls like to help. Grace especially has shown an interest in following in her mother's footsteps

IN CONTROL (right)
Kerrie loves being in charge of her own destiny, even if it means working into the night sometimes. 'I don't mind at all,' she says. 'Relaxing doesn't fit with my character.'



'I've always made curtains and cushions – it gives me a lot of pleasure,' says Kerrie