



Love your cat
Prevent a ma

INTERVIEW WITH A CFMG

MELISSA H. HALL

MEET MELISSA

BY MELISSA H. HALL, CFMG

OWNER, A TOUCH OF CLASS PET GROOMING , ARIZONA

My story begins with dogs. I started out as a dog groomer. I am a salon groomer and always have been. It is also a story of how I faced my fears, rose above them, conquered them, and became a better groomer and business owner.

I come from a grooming family. I am the grooming black sheep of this family. It's true. My mother was a thirty plus year groomer. She showed, bred, did obedience trials, and groomed dogs. She did it all. Over the years she showed several dog breeds: Afghan hounds, Bull Terriers, Miniature Schnauzers, Scottish Terriers, and Standard Poodles. She was always grooming something in the house or in the back yard, even horses. My younger sister also shared in our mother's interest in grooming as well as all things equine. You would think it would be natural for me to follow the family trade. I have had many assume it must be easy for me since I grew up with it. This was not the case. I was afraid of dogs. Sure, they were beloved family pets and all, but mom did their grooming. I had a real fear. I saw a dog attack another child when I was around 5 years old, and it stuck with me.

My mother opened her salon in 1996 in Apache Junction, Arizona. I struggled with grooming due to my fear. I muzzled most dogs. My mom would swear the dog would not bite, but if I felt uneasy, I muzzled. My sister was more tolerant of my fear. That first year, one of my close friends introduced me to someone and then stated; "This is the friend I was telling you about - the dog groomer who is afraid of dogs." They laughed, I did too. Why not? It was true.

Why? Why was I so scared? I asked myself, "Do you love dogs?" The answer was yes.

I needed a job, a trade, and I was determined not to fail. My mother was hard on me. My mother once pulled me aside in the salon, and said, "Honey, maybe this isn't for you." We all laugh about it now. Honestly it took a solid year of grooming and training with my mother for this fear to subside. My mother pulled me aside again and said, "If you could just like horses, now my life would be complete."



The Ultimate Cat Groomer Encyclopedia

Danelle German

Second Edition



National Cat Groomers Institute of America • www.nationalcatgroomers.com

Another problem I had in those early years was getting regular clients. Mom was a gifted groomer. My sister was talented and fast as well. Then there was me. I always felt like the groom shop underdog. It was hard to get clients. They were naturals when it came to grooming. My mom and sister had regulars. I did not. I did the shave downs. My handling was getting better, but I was a slow learner. In just a couple of years, my handling level grew. It really changed. I believe I had to just practice and keep doing it. For someone who was afraid of dogs, I eventually became the difficult dog specialist. At least that's what the girls at the shop started calling me. Old dogs, chow chows, puppies, anything sensitive, I could do well. I could groom them safely and get paid well. My confidence grew. I started to love grooming. I put my cranky, difficult dogs on regular grooming schedules. I now had clients asking for me! Nobody wanted to do those dogs anyways. Perfect!

My sister was the salon cat groomer. She would shave a cat from time to time, but mom told me I didn't want to mess with cats.

I had little interest until 2009. You see, I was newly divorced and trying to figure out how to make more money grooming.

I knew I could handle cats. I wanted to learn. No one in the salon was going to teach me. Believe me, I asked! My mother did not groom cats. My sister and the other groomer were not giving up their cat clients for me to practice on. I

Googled cat grooming and found NCGIA. Wow! I soon became a member and ordered *The Ultimate Cat Groomer Encyclopedia*. Just look at these cats - I was floored when I explored the book! I had groomed a few cats, but my cats definitely did not look like this.

In August 2011 I was engaged to be married. I longed to escape working for the family business and do something on my own. I wanted a fresh start. I moved back to my home town of Yuma, Arizona, after 20 years of living in the Phoenix area. It was a scary yet exciting experience. In November of the same year, I opened my salon and chose to call it the same as my mother's shop, A Touch of Class. Sure, after all it was how I answered the phone for years so why change it, and I knew it would make her proud. I would need her expertise.

I hoped to maybe hire a groomer one day. But my vision for my business was small. I just wanted to make it, pay my business and personal bills. That was all I could hope for. However, within the year I was so busy I needed part time help! By winter of the following year, I had two full time groomers working in my salon. I had my dog clients and I had a few cat clients- maybe thirty cats would grace my salon in a year. I had no idea how to get them on a regular grooming schedule, what grooming schedule to recommend, or any solid advice for these clients. I was missing something. My cat work was more than flawed to be sure.

Did you know....the NCGIA has a totally free online course called "Intro to Cat Grooming - Is Cat Grooming Right for You?" Check it out! It's free!

In the summer of 2013 my mother suddenly passed away. This was a difficult time for our family. My sister urged me to take over my mom's Apache Junction salon. I honestly told her to close the doors. How could I go back? Did I have enough in my account to run both payrolls? I live so far away - 230 miles! That's a heck of a commute! It was a lot to consider at that time. We decided to give it a year. The staff in place was excellent. Mom rarely worked there and had quit grooming clients' dogs years prior. I had just starting paying myself a small salary in Yuma. We decided to take the risk and run the salon.

My husband quit his career of 20 years as a general contractor to join me in the endeavor. He was already an excellent bather brusher from helping me and my mother. He could also repair just about anything. Every salon has things that break. My husband is also an excellent cat assistant. Who couldn't use that?! If it didn't work, we could sell the place. We had options. I did not groom much in Apache Junction the first year after my mother died. My husband would travel, make payroll, and do necessary day to day chores. I had the income of two salons now and decided that I wanted to go to cat school. I needed to learn more....do something different.

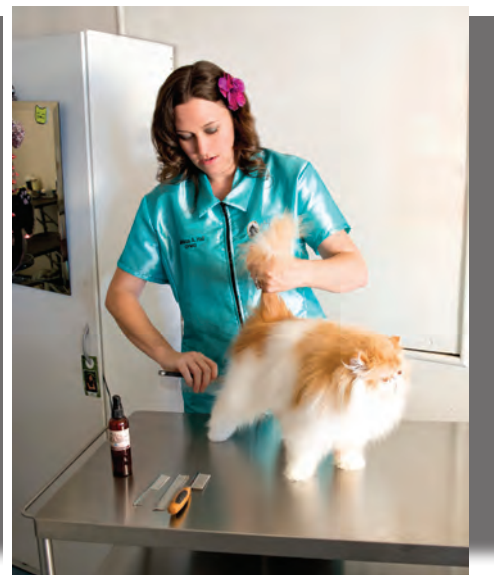
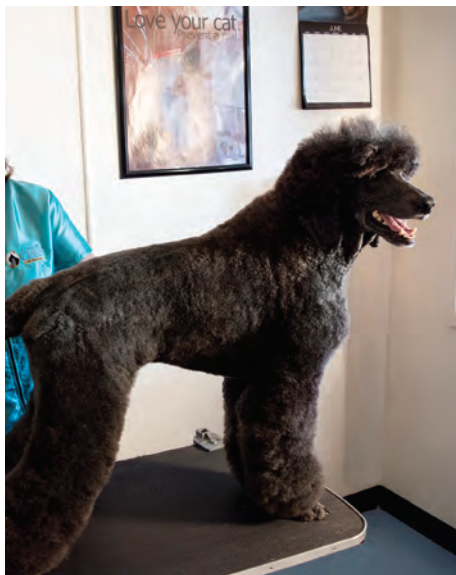
In June 2014, despite my fear of flying, I departed for South Carolina for the 2-week school session. I left two busy salons, 3 kids, 4 dogs, 2 cats, and 14 plus chickens! I had studied for 2 months, I was ready. I will not lie to you, I thought school was hard. While the written exams are not easy, I did better than I thought. It was the practical work and handling that once again proved most challenging for me. Do cats smell fear, I wondered. I was sure of it. I did not fear cats as I did dogs many years earlier. I was more afraid of hurting them or cutting them. I learned how to improve my handling techniques while at school by grooming many cats, and getting help from the instructors.

During my time at school I realized I needed to make some overall changes in my business practices. I needed a better website. I needed a logo. I learned how to market myself as a cat groomer. I needed a better accountant. I also needed to be an LLC. I learned I needed to charge more, and to get these cats on regular schedules like my dog clients. The business education I received from NCGIA has been just as important as the grooming. I had a lot of work to do! I needed to become more familiar with cats' and clients' needs if I was to win their trust.

While at school, a red and white bi color Persian cat named Dumplin needed a home. I needed a shop cat. He was a sorry sight when I saw him at school. He was a gross cat. He was by no means a pretty Persian like the ones walking around at school. I knew I needed him, and he needed me, too. So I flew home a new CFMG with my first ever registered cat. I had done it! CFMG #4 in Arizona!!

After school the local paper published an article about me. I hit up every vet with business cards and NCGIA brochures. I started reading cat magazines. I was in a learning mode and just loved talking about cats! I volunteered my services to several cat rescues. Two cat rescues decided to give me a try. Purrfect Solutions is a feral cat program in Yuma. While I don't groom feral cats, it has helped me actually reach cat owners and a local vet. I have enjoyed having this vet's referrals. The other rescue is near my Apache Junction salon. Working with Hope for Cats of Arizona has been a very positive experience and rewarding one. I groom (mostly bath and brush) their cats available for adoption free of charge. They have referred many clients my way and advertise for me in return. I once had the rescue volunteer come into the salon. I was confused, as it wasn't a rescue day. She said, "My own cats need grooming." Now I groom her cats as well as her daughter's as regular paying clients.

I decided at some point that I would only groom cats in Apache Junction. I felt like I needed to get my hands on as many cats as I could. Cat grooming, just like my dog grooming, became better with practice. I relied on my NCGIA training with each cat I



groomed, and gradually I improved. In the two years since I left school, I have gained over 250 cat clients at each location! Most of these are on regular 6-week grooming schedules. I myself, groom more cats than dogs some weeks. Not too long ago I bought a Catty Shack Vac, another goal I had set for myself. After using one at school, I needed to have one. I missed it!

I offer a feline exclusive Monday in Yuma. At the Apache Junction salon I do very little advertisement. I groom 4 days a month there and groom at least 24 cats in those 4 days, sometimes more. I work every other weekend in Apache Junction, with 3 full time groomers at each location. I did hire a better accountant, created a logo, a brand, and became a corporation. We rented an apartment to be close to our shop in AJ. I truly feel happy with where we are.

With more experience comes knowledge. I can groom just about any cat that comes my way in the salon. My grooms were show quality. I could produce results. I could fix clients' problems. I now had them booking regularly. I had to test myself. I entered my first cat show last December which is the largest show in Arizona. I took my red and white cat, Dumplin, from school. (Yes, he was "the gross one"). He had been shaved into a lion cut style for years so I grew out his coat. Weekly baths were a must. I wanted to see if my grooming could compete in the show cat world. We did great! I could not believe my cat! He kept winning. He earned his Premiership title that weekend. I received nothing but compliments on my cat and grooming. If you knew Dumplin back then, you would know that winning anything would be huge for this cat. This was a pet cat groomed to show perfection!

I went back to school for a CFMG workshop last summer. I believe education is very important for continuing our success. This past January we hosted a three day cat grooming workshop. Connecting with other groomers is vital. I have met many successful groomers and have learned so much from them. I attend trade shows at least once a year.

I have not forgotten my dog grooming roots. I am competing for the first time at Super Zoo, in the large poodle class. I just bought a new standard poodle girl to show AKC in the future. I am excited to see what she can do in the show ring. I just finished a weekend in Utah for my first phase in obtaining my canine master grooming certificate for NDGAA. After attending NCGIA I learned so much about cats, and grooming them, I felt I had to do the same for dogs.

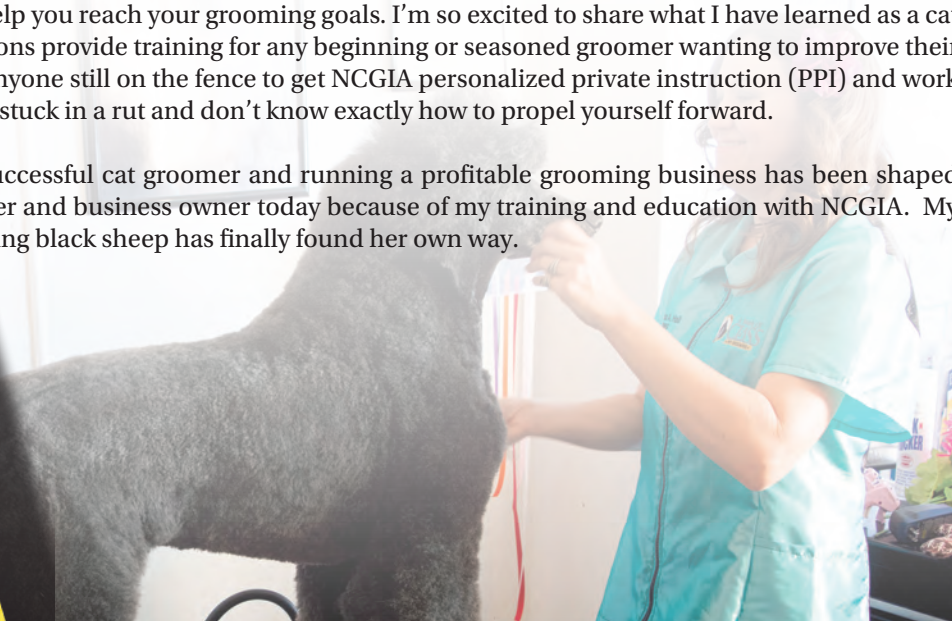
There are several reasons for continuing my education. I want verification of my knowledge, I want to test my skill level, and I want to grow as a groomer and business owner. Education is an investment in you. Get out there. Get critiques of your work. Read books, watch videos, take classes, meet groomers you admire, attend shows, or host a workshop. Like I said, meeting and engaging with other groomers has been an invaluable resource for my growth.

Sir Francis Bacon is believed to be the first to say.... "Knowledge itself is power." It's true. It's about what you learn, not whether you pass or fail. Boost yourself and your career. The more you educate yourself, your staff and clients will listen to you. You produce excellent grooms, solve client problems, know what you're dealing with and how to groom it, and get paid top dollar.


I have found my freedom in my long grooming career; I own a profitable business and the possibilities are more open than ever. I could always go feline exclusive, which is awesome to have the ability to do so. My journey is not set in stone. I now see so much more is out there for me to learn. My fear of dogs seems so long ago. I can laugh at myself today. Don't let fear hold you back, whatever those fears might be.

As an approved trainer for NCGIA, I can help you reach your grooming goals. I'm so excited to share what I have learned as a cat groomer and business owner. Both our salons provide training for any beginning or seasoned groomer wanting to improve their cat grooming skills. I want to encourage anyone still on the fence to get NCGIA personalized private instruction (PPI) and work towards certification. Especially if you feel stuck in a rut and don't know exactly how to propel yourself forward.

Everything I learned about becoming a successful cat groomer and running a profitable grooming business has been shaped by NCGIA principles. I am a better groomer and business owner today because of my training and education with NCGIA. My mother would be so proud that her grooming black sheep has finally found her own way.

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a teal short-sleeved shirt, is grooming a large black dog. She is holding a red leash. The dog is standing on a black table. In the background, there are some plants and a window.

Contact Melissa (or any of
the other Approved Trainers)
for a day or two of training.
Find them on the NCGIA
website!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be "Danielle".