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PHOTO Alice Chau-Ginguene

DESIGN Prudence



► Chau-Ginguene and her own pet, Fa Fa.

▼ Simba the Cat only understands French ... but that's no problem for this 'Cat Lady' linguist.

Getting a feel for those feline feelings

Cat behaviour therapist (Part 2)

LAST week, Alice Chau-Ginguene told *English Street* how she had followed her heart to start up in business as a cat-sitter and cat behaviour solutions counsellor. In Part 2 of her story, the feline specialist describes the challenges, satisfaction and essential qualities of her job, writes **Joanna Ho**.

► Cat Lady at her Pet Expo 2010 stand in Dublin, Ireland.



◀ Chau-Ginguene finds Lily quite sweet, although a bit shy.

English Street: What are some of the greatest challenges you face?

Alice Chau-Ginguene: The current challenge is that this is a fairly new field. It can work for as well as against you. The good side is there isn't much competition out there; conversely, most people are completely unaware that such a service exists. Sometimes, I encounter veterinarians who are **suspicious** of my business so this, too, can be discouraging.

Also, since it is a new field, there isn't much **infrastructure** available in most countries for people in the same line as me. For instance, many overseas pet sitters have difficulty finding suitable business insurance.

ES: What gives you the most satisfaction? Could you share some of your unforgettable experiences?

ACG: Honestly, being able to work every day with the animals I love is a blessing. But I must **emphasise** that each day is not always fun. In the

early days, when it was snowing or raining and I had to walk for half an hour to get to a remote location, I would joke with myself: 'You could be sitting in a comfortable office right now!'

But when I finally got to the cats and saw that they were happy to see me, or when owners sent me thank-you cards, these were the moments that encouraged me to keep going; they warmly reminded me about why I decided to do what I'm doing now.

It is difficult for me to single out certain unforgettable experiences I've had at work. I am totally sincere when I say that each and every one of the cats I've taken care of is special to me. I remember all my clients' names, eating habits, their favourite toys, and so on. They have all brought so much happiness to my workdays.

ES: What qualities are needed to do this job well?

ACG: First of all, it is important to be aware that it is not an easy job and you might not make much money. But if you are an animal lover, and if you aren't afraid of challenges and enjoy a varied workday, it could be the job for you.

Being knowledgeable in running a business is also vital and something that should not be

underestimated. In fact, I completed a 'Start Your Own Business' course with Dublin Enterprise Board before setting up my own company. I believe it is necessary to learn about accounting, cashflow, and marketing in any business. Nowadays, basic IT skills such as website updating, Internet advertising, blogging, and so forth are essential when running an enterprise.

Expect a lot of hard work, as you might be the only one doing all the administrative chores, attending sales meetings, designing and executing marketing strategies, walking in bad weather, as well as cleaning unpleasant messes made by the animals. In this way, you will have realistic expectations of the job nature and thus realise that it is not all about playing with cats.

ES: In your opinion, what challenges would a Hong Kong cat-sitting industry face?

ACG: I suppose the challenge in Hong Kong would be to develop a market. First of all, the pet-owning population in Hong Kong is much lower than in most Western countries. Add to the challenge the fact that Hong Kong people are not used to having strangers visiting their homes. They are generally quite **conservative** about the privacy of their residence, so it would take a lot of marketing to break down this **barrier**.

Look up info on this Cat Lady's work at: <http://maowcarebylarmalarm.wordpress.com/>

▼ Cat Lady explaining her service to two potential clients at the Pet Expo 2010 in Dublin, Ireland.



▲ Two happy clients, Lily and Gonzo, enjoy tid-bits from the Cat Lady.

Some owners' special requests:

- Chau-Ginguene received a special request from a two-cat owner. Believe it or not, she had to stand between the jealous animals as they ate - to prevent them from stealing each others' food! She was surprised at having to become a Cat Lady referee.
- Another owner asked Chau-Ginguene to place the animal on the windowsill each time she visited so the cat could look out and admire the view. Although the fussy feline

seemed perfectly capable of jumping up by herself, if her tame sitter refused to elevate her to window level, the cat would start yowling!

- Once, a **besotted** cat owner told Cat Lady she had hidden the animal's Christmas presents and pleaded with her not to tell the cat where. Chau-Ginguene had to open the pampered animal's gifts and feed it a Christmas dinner of roast beef, prepared in advance and kept in the fridge.

GLOSSARY

1. suspicious (adj. 猜疑的)
2. infrastructure (n. 基礎設施)
3. emphasise (v. 強調)
4. underestimate (v. 低估)
5. conservative (adj. 保守的)
6. barrier (n. 障礙)
7. besotted (adj. 溺愛的)

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*Big words and Amazing phrase(s) are published on ES16.