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**Photo Bram Eisenthal**



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## TALES FROM "THE CATMAN"

# ICONIC NYC ALGONQUIN HOTEL'S RESIDENT CATS GET ROYAL TREATMENT

WITH MIKE COHEN

NEW YORK, NY - My family and I celebrated the end of 2015 by spending a wonderful five days in New York City. Of course, the Big Apple is a pretty terrific place to shop, from the boutiques of Madison Avenue, the iconic department stores on Fifth Avenue, the world's largest Macy's, the two bargain-packed Century 21 locales and the fashion-forward shops in SoHo and the Village. There are many great museums to choose from, as well.

Among the most popular tourists stops in the Big Apple are the 9-1-1 Memorial, the Empire State Building, the Museum of Civilization, Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty, Central Park, the Central Park Zoo and the Bronx Zoo.

We really wanted to stay close to Times Square on this trip and

hit the jackpot with the famous Alonquin Hotel ([www.algonquin-hotel.com](http://www.algonquin-hotel.com)). Located in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, this jewel of historic New York hotels commands the center of 44th Street, close to the bustling heart of Times Square and Fifth Avenue. The Algonquin first opened its doors in 1902. Today it is part of the Marriott chain's Autograph Collection, an evolving ensemble of strikingly independent hotels. Each destination has been selected for its: quality; bold originality; rich character and uncommon



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# CATS

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details. From near-to-far, iconic-to-historic, the result is an array of properties that is nothing less than unique. The Algonquin Hotel is the first New York City property to become a part of the collection.

Each of the 181 rooms and 25 suites features a comfortable well-lit work desk, as well as complimentary Wi-Fi. Always one step ahead of everyone else, the hotel was the first to offer accommodations to actors and single women travellers. We stayed in a very comfortable one bedroom suite named the Robert Sherwood Suite.

But as a cat lover, first and foremost, I was eager to meet Matilda, the house cat. She is a real beauty and can be found sleeping atop her cat house at the front desk or making her way through the different cat doors on the main floor. Matilda is a large ragdoll cat, soft as velvet. Operations manager Abeer Soliman was kind enough to bring her out so I could pet her.

For many years the tale of "The Algonquin Cat" was believed to have its origins in the 1930s, when a stray cat came wandering into the hotel for food and water. After the hotel acquired an out-of-print book written by the hotel's first general manager, Frank Case, a chapter was discovered about a cat named Billy. Based on the timeline of the book, the hotel is now proud to say the lineage of



The Algonquin Cat dates back to the early 1920s. Two days after Billy passed, a stray cat wandered into the hotel and The Algonquin welcomed Rusty. The famous classical actor, John Barrymore, was a resident at the time (the early 1930s) and Rusty was renamed Hamlet in his honor (Hamlet is said to have been Barrymore's greatest stage role). The hotel has had a total of 11 cats, including Billy. The lineage includes sev-

en Hamlets and three Matildas. Each cat that has reigned at The Algonquin has been a rescue. In 1980, author Hilary Knight immortalized The Algonquin Cat with his cartoons for a children's book on which he collaborated with Val Schaffner. The current Matilda began her residence in December 2010.

Today, Matilda is looked after by the hotel's Chief Cat Officer, Alice De Almeida. The hotel's executive chef cooks her special meals on holidays. She receives fan mail and gifts constantly, from around the world, including Japan, Australia and Russia. Matilda can be found on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. She can also be reached via e-mail: [matildaalgonquincat@algonquinhotel.com](mailto:matildaalgonquincat@algonquinhotel.com).

The hotel hosts an annual cat fashion show where the cat models— or "mewdels," - were mostly stationary, arranged on a circle of tables in the Oak Room, just off the main hotel lobby. This year's sold-out show benefited the animal-welfare nonprofit the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, in addition to paying tribute to New York City's first responders. Accordingly, each cat was outfit-

ted as a different civil servant. A cat dressed in an M.T.A. uniform lolled in front of his food bowl, and a Persian in a tiny fireman's hat snoozed next to a neighbor dressed as a paramedic. Cami, a rescue representing the nurses of New York, reclined near a stethoscope with a small, clear plastic cone around her neck, which was practical, not aesthetic. "

Matilda lives in a custom-made pet home perched atop the front desk. She freely roams the luxurious property (except the kitchen and dining areas), takes plenty of catnaps (which are in her job description), and receives fan mail and gifts from all over the world (including the aforementioned pet home).

Mike Cohen can be reached at [info@mikecohen.ca](mailto:info@mikecohen.ca). See his travel advice column at [www.sandbox-world.com/travel](http://www.sandbox-world.com/travel)

**ED. NOTE: Côte Saint-Luc city councilor Michael J. Cohen also holds the municipality's animal protection portfolio and founded the local Cats Committee. More on the CSL Cat Committee in a future issue of Precious Pets. We take a paws to thank Mike for a story well told!**

