

The Hotel Albert  
A Childhood Memory  
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My childhood memories of the Albert Hotel entail a short stay with my parents. The year was 1958 and I was eight years old. We stayed at the Albert whilst awaiting a vacancy in a Greenwich Village apartment. I recall the deep red carpet in our room. I slept either on a sofa or a little rollaway-bed located near a window in the main room.

My parents were the proud owners of a brand new RCA stereo record player. It came with a 33 rpm record demo that promoted the marvelous accomplishments of stereo sound. Two of my favorite 45 rpm records we owned were "Topsy" and "Anna." I loved to twirl and twirl around the hotel room to this music.

Due to hotel policy against pets in the room, my parents smuggled our dachshund, Schnapps, a smooth red 'tweenie,' into the hotel by suitcase. It was light green. He never made a sound in that suitcase. This became an endless source of delight for us. In fact, Schnapps made us laugh because he soon learned to jump into the opened case on his own without any coaxing – this was how we took him out for walks. To our delight, Hotel staff never discovered Schnapps.

I was enrolled at P.S. 41 in the Village. Mother would pick me up after school each day and walk me home to the hotel. Well, one day Mother surprised me because she arrived at school carrying the green suitcase! She had a great sense of humor and wore a big smile. I knew that our doxie was inside and I was mortified. Mother opened the suitcase. My friends were squealing with delight to see little Schnapps jump out of the suitcase. I, however, was so embarrassed!

I have another memory about the hotel I've not forgotten. One cold November evening we were all getting dressed to walk to a movie (I think it was "Forbidden Planet"). It had snowed and I was bundled up good. I complained how hot I was inside but my parents weren't ready yet. Mother said, "You can take the elevator and wait for us down in the lobby." I entered the empty elevator (I think our room was on the fifth floor). I don't know what possessed me but I pressed several floor buttons above our floor. Well, to my surprise the elevator climbed upward instead of down. It arrived at three floors and each time a hotel guest would thank me, as if I was the operator! I was terribly embarrassed and kept quiet, hoping I wouldn't be discovered for being so naughty. To my relief, the elevator finally descended.

But when the elevator doors opened onto the lobby chaos was all around: a fire had started and firemen and hotel staff shouted at us to get outside quickly. The smell of smoke filled the air, fire hoses snaked around the floor in standing water. Panicked, I followed the adults outside the hotel and across the street. Tears welled up: what would happen to Schnapps? Oh, I was confident that my parents would survive; it was my beloved dog that pierced my heart. I watched in horror as dozens of hotel guests fled the hotel down fire escapes! I was crying by now. Soon, I spotted Mother descending a fire escape from the fifth floor or so, followed later by my step-father. (He assisted hotel guests in locating a fire escape through thick smoke.) “Where’s Schnapps?!” I asked Mother through tears. “He’s still in the room,” she replied. “He’s okay.”

And he was. He was safe from the fire . . . and the hotel staff!