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MEET MATILDA, THE ALGONQUIN CAT

By **Gail Eisenberg** | August 10, 2010 3:21 PM

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The [Algonquin Hotel](#). NYC landmark, birthplace of the [Round Table](#), a celebrated group of literary and theatrical tastemakers known for their acerbic wit.

As legend has it, the long-standing tradition of having a feline on the premises began when a stray wandered into the hotel one day during the 1930s. He was named Rusty because of his marmalade color, but before long hotel owner Frank Case changed the cat's name to a more dignified Hamlet, a role John Barrymore was performing at the time.

"The first seven cats were boys, all named Hamlet," explains administrative assistant Alice de Almeida, "then two girls followed. Unfortunately, the hotel changed hands frequently, so we have no idea who or why females were named Matilda."

The reigning Matilda is a fifteen-year-old, Blue Mitted [Ragdoll](#), and has delighted hotel guests from across the globe since May of 1998. She gladly poses for photos and is usually tolerant of being petted.

But, beware, she does not like being picked up. Matilda has run of the hotel (except for the [kitchen](#)), and the coat closet in the lobby is her quiet home away from hotel. Of course, that doesn't mean she doesn't occasionally wander.

"She sometimes takes the elevator upstairs, and then the staircase back down to the lobby," de Almeida laughs. "If she's not in her usual spots, I know to look behind the staircase door."

A half-dozen Algonquin staff make sure Matilda is cared for, but for the last five and a half years she has been primarily in Alice's charge. With three indoor cats (all rescued strays), and one outside feral cat who lives on her deck in Sunnyside, Queens, De Almeida is well-suited for the job. "She usually waits for me at the Front Desk in the morning. After breakfast she naps behind the computer there, but once rested she patrols the lobby and sits on the bell cart or her personal chaise checking out our guests."

No worries for those who can't say hello to Matilda on-site.

The [friendly feline is online](#), where De Almeida serves as her ghostwriter. "You know, since cats don't have thumbs, she needs me to hit the space bar," she jokes. "People write asking her advice like, What do you do when your heart is broken?" Matilda's reply: Act more cat-like and just ignore it.

When Cosmo, the dog, wrote Matilda to ask if he could bring his human parents into the lobby for a cocktail, she told him sure, I love dogs. In fact, a woman who lives in the neighborhood brings her three-legged Pit Bull into the hotel and pushes the two of them around the lobby on the luggage cart.

Whether Alice is fielding the Matilda's emails, keeping up with her 800-plus Facebook friends ([Matilda - The Algonquin Cat](#)), Twitter followers ([@Algonqueen](#)), or the snail mail she receives, De Almeida always closes Matilda's messages the same way: Have a PURRfect day.

But Matilda is more than just a purry face and a bundle of surrpersonality. She is also philanthropic, raising

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But Matilda is more than just a purrty face and a bundle of personality. She is also philanthropic, paying forward her good fortune each year with her birthday celebration and cat fashion show to benefit [North Shore Animal League America](#).

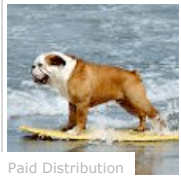
One year, she jumped on her birthday cake, and another she hid and refused to come out. A well-known cat psychologist in attendance tried to coax her, but Matilda held fast. Hey, it's her party, and she'll hide if she wants to.

Send her a happy birthday wish. Hope you had a PURRfect day, Matilda!

Matilda's Birthday Celebration, with master of ceremonies John Fulton, host of Animal Planet's upcoming series "Must Love Cats," was held this year on August 11th.

Gail Eisenberg is a NYC-based freelance writer, and co-star of [Cat Eisenberg](#), [Dog Eisenberg](#), an original Web series on blip.tv. Visit her at [www.gaileisenberg.com](#).

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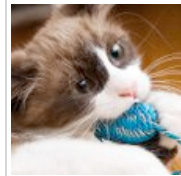
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happy birthday beautiful! :)
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Matilda, you are just way to cool. Happy Birthday!
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