

## LIVING VERTICALLY

By Stacy LeVine June 15, 2013 (Inconsequential NYC Correspondent)

My maiden literary voyage on the RMS Inconsequential revolved around [Manhattan manners](#). Largely focused on rude dog owner behavior, it began with a brief anecdote about my 1989 elevator encounter with a wasp. And now, for the rest of that story... My father is a retired colon and rectal surgeon; a proctologist. (Take a moment to get over the hilarity. Dad is a proud "Ass Man," and he thinks it's far funnier than you do.) As a child, I often found myself in hospital nursing stations waiting for Dad as he made his patient rounds. This situation was always incredibly boring, but highly lucrative when it came time to sell Girl Scout Cookies. It was during one such bound-for-the-nurse-station outing that I was neck-stung. That's right. I was attacked by a wasp in a hospital elevator. Horrific, on so many levels.

The dress I was wearing that fateful day was green-and-blue plaid with a big, white collar. Unbeknownst to me, a wasp flew up underneath that big collar as Dad and I passed buggy foliage en route to the physician entrance from the parking lot. (Wasps are a constant torment in Florida, my home from 1984 to 1997.) It wasn't until we were in the elevator that the winged menace unveiled himself to punish my neck for his collar incarceration.

There was no one in the elevator but Dad and me. The sudden hymenopteran aggression was utterly unprovoked. We were both standing still when I screamed and grabbed my neck. Honey bees die after they sting. Wasps do not. So the menace flew off my neck and began frantically reconnoitering our collective steel prison. Dad and I cowered in a corner until the doors opened and then bolted into the hallway. I don't know what happened to the flying thorn after that, because I was immediately rushed to the emergency room for a stinger extraction. I can only hope the amputated monster was quickly vanquished.

As mentioned in my first Inconsequential piece, I have since nursed a severe anxiety about elevators, which is a chronic headache as an adult New Yorker. Quoting myself, "We live on top of each other here, and we certainly have no escape from nuisance in elevators." We also have no escape from elevators, themselves. According to the most current statistics available from the United States Census Bureau, an estimated 8,336,697 people resided in the five boroughs in July of 2012. And, according to The New York Times, that population is distributed across just 304.8 square miles (789.4 km<sup>2</sup>) of actual land. Of the estimated 3.7 million employed in New York City, 56% work in Manhattan. Of those who work in Manhattan: 6.5% commute from Long Island (Nassau and Suffolk counties); 4% commute from Westchester County, and; 5% commute from Bergen and Hudson counties in New Jersey. Then, of course, there is the rest of New Jersey, plus those who haul ass from Connecticut and the Poconos every workday. The only way to house and provide business space for the millions on this relatively minute land tract is to build vertically. Unfortunately, living vertically is only possible because of elevators. It so happens that my mother also nurses an elevator anxiety, one that predates mine by twenty years and began in New York City. It was 1969. She was eighteen and visiting her aunt and uncle in the Riverdale neighborhood of the Bronx when she and her cousin got trapped in a residential high-rise elevator for twenty-five minutes. Stuck between the first and second floors, they were ultimately pulled vertically by hand onto the second floor, after which Mom broke down. She has been a claustrophobe ever since.

I have been long baffled and annoyed by the propensity of non-elevator-phobes to linger in the darn things. Don't worry about being polite when it's time to step off an elevator, people. (I certainly don't.) Exit as quickly as possible. That said, Japanese businessmen get a cultural hall pass on this personal foible. Having noticed a peculiar practice in my office building, I asked an employee of MITSUI & CO., LTD. GLOBAL why her colleagues always hesitate a moment before exiting the elevator single-file. She explained that it is their tradition to enter and exit elevators in order of seniority. This can take a while. And it is awkward.

I could fill volumes with observations of elevator awkwardness. I once had a bizarre encounter in the same building with a very-pregnant woman who stepped onto an elevator car in which I had previously been alone. Like any socialized human, I was standing with my back to the wall and my face to the doors. Inexplicably, the pregnant woman never turned back to face the doors once she was safely inside the car. We faced each other in uncomfortable silence all the way to the lobby. What the hell was that?

I would like to share a little-known elevator fact. Hopefully, word will spread virally and at least one maddening meme will be vanquished like the oh-so-deserving amputee wasp from my childhood. According to what is, in both my humble opinion and that of those far less humble, America's greatest magazine, The New Yorker: "In most elevators, at least in any built or installed since the early nineties, the door-close button doesn't work. It is there mainly to make you think it works. (It does work if, say, a fireman needs to take control. But you need a key, and a fire, to do that.)" So, yes, you look like an idiot to me when you repeatedly stab that button trying to make some other poor slob even later than you are.

In conclusion, this New Yorker implores the global elevator-riding public at large: Unless it is an obscure cultural tenet to behave otherwise, end the futility of abusing door-close buttons to foil potential entrants, face the doors so as not to unnerve your companions, exit the second you're able and, of course, keep those damn dogs to yourself. ●

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### **STEALING A MARCH**

Charles Fagin has been awarded The Lying Fox award for private enterprise.

Last month, Lord Fagin took on seven more urchins and put them to work immediately. The self-made man of the people said modestly in interview recently, "You've got to make a packet or sue, Bob."

His enterprise is taking advantage of the ideological trend of offering work to youngsters who would otherwise be running free and not taking part in the capitalist exchange system. The new approach fits in nicely with their natural inclination to turn up for grown-up things when they want to.

Fagin added, "We've tapped in to their nature and used it to full commercial advantage by advertising mostly by word of mouth as it is more cost efficient, the axiom, 'Turn up for work when I needs you'. This way everyone's a winner." What Fagin didn't mention was the extensive advertising campaign which has school exercise books emblazoned with the corporate mantra, 'you don't eat if you don't work'.

Fagin also gets significant support from the public purse in the form of a grant which guarantees him profit untainted by running costs including wage bills. "All of my boys leave feedback forms on their customers, so that we can react to customers' views on how to improve our service. Only last week one of my boys gave a customer a discount when he took almost all of his loose change but left him with his store credit card. You can't want for more considerate thieving than that can you?"

The Minister for Pickpockets and Entrepreneurs, Martin Bolsh-it, said, "It just shows you what can be achieved with a 'can do and will do regardless' attitude. Children today have more get up and go than we often portray and with the social and political environment that lacks morality and ethical fairness, well, frankly, anything goes." There is talk that Lord Fagin will be getting a letter of invitation with the Royal letterhead any day soon.

Lord F did however have to let one of his charges go when, in his mano-a-mano monthly meetings, the ungrateful little tyke, in response to being given a wider catchment area for his work, replied, "Please sir, no more."

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### **AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT**

One of the unluckiest people still alive, Lesley Behan, is recovering in a private ward after almost swallowing a kite.

The unfortunate woman is still spitting feathers at her ill-luck: she was out strolling on one of those blustery days recently, when a man, taking his kite for a spin, lost control causing it to plummet towards Ms Behan. Naturally taken aback, Lesley's jaw dropped and the hapless kite came down right into the considerable 'hole'. Before anyone could react to prevent it, the kite became lodged in Lesley's throat. The two parties involved in the incident, Ms Behan and Ken Nothing have at least worked out a mutually agreed settlement without a court case, agreeing to live together and pool their misfortune so as to avoid being sued by strangers. "At least we understand the nature of accident and luck better than most." said a happy Mr Nothing, sharing the bed next to Ms Behan, after falling over her bedpan on a visit to her in hospital.

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### **POINTLESS HEADLINE FOUND TO HAVE NO SUBSTANCE**