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Meanwhile: The art of blogging at the Hotel Chelsea

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In the spring of 2005, a fire at the Hotel Chelsea sent residents fleeing to the lobby. While the firefighters worked, the residents passed a bottle and told stories about life in the legendary Bohemian outpost, known for being artistic (Thomas Wolfe wrote "You Can't Go Home Again" at the Chelsea), profane (Sid Vicious allegedly murdered his girlfriend, Nancy Spungen, there) and celebrity-haunted (guests have ranged from Mark Twain to Janis Joplin).

When the night ended, Debbie Martin and Ed Hamilton, a couple of transplanted Kentuckians who have lived at the Chelsea for more than a decade, wanted to keep the stories and camaraderie going. And so was born "Living with Legends" (hotelchelseablog.com), a hip, literate blog about life in the brick and iron behemoth on West 23rd Street.

"Living With Legends" is a repository of history, lore and memoir. There are links to writing about the hotel, including a Granta essay by Arthur Miller about staying at the Chelsea in 1960, after his breakup with Marilyn Monroe ("It was thrilling to know that the hollow-cheeked girl on the elevator was Viva and the hollow-eyed man with her was Warhol and that scent you caught was marijuana"). In November the blog featured a video of William Burroughs reciting his sacrilegious Thanksgiving Prayer (thanks "for decent churchgoing women, with their mean pinched bitter evil faces").

The blog is at least as focused on the here and now. A main theme, Martin says, is that the Hotel Chelsea remains a vibrant place. There are profiles of artist residents, and reflections on the often-eccentric tourists who pass through. Hamilton contributes "Ed Hamilton's Slice of Life." In a recent post, he told of a tourist staying next door who left behind a pen, a stamped envelope and a notepad with a note saying: "Write that letter today. You know which one I'm talking about. You'll feel better if you do." The man told Hamilton he had been doing that ever since he found a note like that when he checked into a hotel and wrote a long-overdue letter to his father.

Martin and Hamilton — who also write the community-minded blogchelsea.com — try to promote artists who live at the hotel, and in a feature called "All Tomorrow's Parties," highlight upcoming musical performances, readings and other public exhibitions of their work. Thanks to the blog, they say, a filmmaker and an actor who live in the hotel have started to collaborate.

"Living With Legends" does not get many reader comments, which perplexes Martin. But she knows her neighbors read it, because they react passionately to recent posts when she sees them on the elevator. Many also respond in a way that is more in keeping with the Chelsea's great literary reputation: They stuff handwritten notes into her hotel mailbox.