a tree, with a bucket roped around her waist, to capture crow eggs from nests her father had monitored with binoculars. “The mother and father crow would be dive-bombing you, and he’d say, ‘Now don’t hit a branch and drop the bucket!’” she recalls. “I guess he figured he could spare one of us kids.”

Because “there was nobody else doing it,” Animal Ridder seemed like a logical career choice. The goal was to help private homeowners and businesses with “nuisance wildlife management” — you know, a raccoon that has tumbled down a chimney or a mole that’s tunneled under a manicured lawn. For the first seven years, Darling did all the work solo. Since then, she has hired three full-time employees and two part-timers, who do the ladder or roofing jobs. “All my work keeps me on the ground,” Darling says. “I enjoy being outdoors and getting exercise. When I’m doing mole work, I walk around all day long. It’s better than sitting behind a desk.”

She runs the company out of her Lyndon home, setting up pickup truck routes in the morning, capturing critters during the day and — always for less than 24 hours — storing the caged animals in a shed near her house. The spring months are busiest, and it’s common during this time for the crew to bring in 100 animals — flying squirrels, opossums, groundhogs, chipmunks, beavers, coyotes, bats and plenty of others — weekly. Darling owns about 600 various traps and, when possible, releases the animals back to the wild.

After about two decades, Darling has plenty of stories, some of which she shares in a newsletter mailed to clients. There was the beaver lodge she fell through. And the raccoon that caused nearly $10,000 in damages when it got trapped in a vacationing family’s home. And the man who scared his 12-foot-long pet Burmese python with a vacuum cleaner and needed Darling and her workers to come control it. She’s seen it all, though she still prefers to avoid some animals. “I wouldn’t want to do alligators,” she says, “nothing that could take me down.”

— Josh Moss

How do you first learn about the Chelsea Hotel?
“It played a part in the lives of so many great writers that it was always coming up in the books I read. But perhaps I first heard it mentioned in connection with Andy Warhol and the Velvet Underground as the place where all the weirdos hung out in New York.”

What is your favorite aspect about living there?
“It’s got to be the creative energy and its sense of history — those two things are connected I believe. The greats of the past are with us (in the Chelsea) day-to-day. Their work is literally hanging from the walls and you couldn’t avoid them if you wanted to.”

What changes have been made since BD took over?
“They’ve done the worst thing possible, which is to refuse to allow any more permanent residents. In an artistic community such as this you need new blood to churn the pot. In terms of the atmosphere, it’s just not the same without Stanley.”

— Ashley Dawson

Chelsea Hotel resident and punk-rock icon Dee Dee Ramone, who died from a heroin overdose in 2002. Photo by Rita Barros ©