



Spanish dancer and a Scottish dancer, a welder, people up in trees, three people singing on the steps of the church that used to be across the street. The rain was pouring down and I was playing this electric organ—we put plastic over it. I remember lying there on the ground with the rain falling down and wondering, *Now what? Am I gonna be electrocuted?* I'm playing Joan of Arc, thinking to myself, *Am I literally going to go up in smoke, too?*

And I remember that somebody from one of the apartment buildings leaned out of his window and saw this extravaganza outside his apartment window and decided to sing a duet with me, right in the middle of everything. And, you know, that was fine. We just went with it.

## Kurt Vonnegut

A Midwesterner finds literary welcome in the lobby of **THE ALGONQUIN** hotel.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
GRANT DELIN

One image keeps looming and looming: the grandfather clock in the lobby of the Algonquin hotel. I'm an immigrant to New York, you see. I didn't come across the ocean, but I came up from the Middle West. And The Algonquin, for a Middle Westerner of my generation—I was born in 1922—was our imaginary literary hotel. In 1950, I was a P.R. man working for General Electric in Schenectady, delivering stories and so on to press organizations in New York. One day I just walked in, as anyone is free to

do, but for me, well, I had the same feeling when I first saw Venice, which was, *Am I allowed to see this?* I felt at home there, and it remained a symbol of my arrival in New York and my home away from home, a beacon, a lighthouse for a Middle Westerner.

## Frank McCourt

At **THE LION'S HEAD** you could learn to write by talking.

**M**y home away from home was the Lion's Head Bar—which is gone now—down on Christopher Street. It opened in 1964, and it lasted for about 30 years.

I went there on its opening night—Paddy Clancy of the Clancy Brothers invited me. Before that, I would go to the White Horse on Hudson Street. But the White Horse was becoming too popular—every graduate student in the world would go in there and want to know, “Is this where Dylan Thomas drank himself to death?” The Lion's Head was more intimate. In the back room, the dining room, there was a big round table and we'd sit around there and sing till dawn. The food was terrible most of the time, but it was a great place to talk, and it had a terrific jukebox with jazz.

In a sense, it was our extended family. We'd all go in there when we were having trouble with women. We'd all weep in our beer and feel sorry for ourselves and exchange divorce horror stories. And then you'd move on to the next wife or the next husband.

It was a great gathering place for writers and poets and journalists. There were fascinating bartenders, one of whom was Paul Shifman, a poet, who I think was the only Jewish merchant-marine captain in the world. Norman Mailer would come in; in the early years, Bob Dylan; the Clancy Brothers; Pete Hamill; Vic Siegel and Mike McAlary—who died a few years ago—from the *Daily News*; Lanford