



**Memories of
The Catskills
The Making of a Hotel**

by Alvin L. Lesser

**Foreword by John Conway,
Sullivan County Historian**

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More than 110 b&w photographs

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Early Praise for

Memories of The Catskills: The Making of a Hotel

“Those were the days my friends!! Whatever your frame of reference of ‘The Catskills’ is—guest, staff member or ‘just heard about the area,’ you will find Al Lesser’s book a delight. Traveling down memory lane, while reading this sincere and heartwarming true story, brought back many wonderful memories. Al Lesser has given us a unique opportunity to go behind the scenes and learn how it all happened. I laughed, smiled, and also shed a few tears with the Lesser family. Whether one came from a smaller property, or a large one such as mine (Grossinger’s), we all traveled the same road, perhaps with a few minor detours. Our ultimate destination was identical—hospitality for the folks who vacationed with us. Next scheduled activity, READ *Memories of The Catskills*.”

~ Elaine Grossinger Etes, Grossinger’s Hotel

“*Memories of The Catskills* by Alvin Lesser is a candid and charming memoir about the rise and fall of the ‘Borscht Belt.’ Lesser Lodge, a small hotel where the author spent the better part of his childhood, lies at the center of this heartfelt tale. Anecdotes in the book range from Kirk Douglas’s father calling out ‘cash for clothes’ and Jerry Lewis appearing in the Catskill hotels, to matzoh balls, fried food, and boyhood memories of catching fish bare-handed in a stream. The spirit of life itself is captured and offered up on these pages.” ~ Robin Reinach, New York, NY

“Anyone who ever set foot in the Catskill Mountains during the halcyon days of the Borscht Belt has precious memories that with the passage of time may begin to slowly fade. Anyone who never did, truly missed something special. Fortunately for all of us, Alvin Lesser put his in a wonderfully crafted book that helps keep those memories alive. Lesser’s genius for weaving humorous (I’m talking belly laughs here) and tearful memories in rapid fire succession (his style is reminiscent of Bill Bryson’s, *In a Sunburned Country*) into a first person grand tale of a bygone era, takes the reader along on a delightful journey back to those golden days. If I close my eyes, I’m at once a kid again reliving all the glory of those magical moments. After reading his book, I am sure you will feel the same way, too.”

~ George Sewitt, Highland Mills, NY, Seasonal guest and camper

“Alvin Lesser’s *Memories of The Catskills* is more than just memorabilia. Famous stars of yesteryear came to entertain in the ‘Borscht Belt’ at Lesser Lodge. An era of economy during the depression and growth during the recovery. Not just the story of the Lesser family, but the warmth of people who made others welcome by providing a respite which made them all family—entertainers and guests alike. Five stars for this one.”

~ Clark Isaacs, Clark’s Eye on Books

“Cross Woody Allen’s *Radio Days* with *Dirty Dancing* and you will have a sense of the world that *Memories of The Catskills* recreates: slapstick, shot through with sentimentality and the fundamentals of Borscht Belt humor: irony, acceptance, and a hearty appetite for all life has to offer.”

~ Christine Roberts, Santa Barbara, CA

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“Lesser’s book, *Memories of The Catskills*, takes you back to the days when the Sullivan County Summer was thriving; when the roads were curb-to-curb with cars, and the days were filled with games and picnics, swimming and visiting; when the nights were filled with plenty of food and soon-to-be-famous entertainers. It’s a day that’s long gone, but one that lives in a lot of memories. How fortunate that Lesser has graciously shared his memories with us; he’s captured the spirit and the harmony that brought the Catskills to life.”

~ Carol Montana, Editor, *The Catskill Chronicle*

“*Memories of The Catskills* by Alvin Lesser is a cordial and funny gem of a memoir. The author’s humorous tone is matched by whimsical sketches that are sprinkled throughout the book. Photographs of Lesser Lodge and the many characters that populated this small hotel evoke a nostalgic appreciation of years gone by. The author’s voice is matter-of-fact and filled with gratitude. Yet, this reader couldn’t help getting the feeling that Alvin Lesser was winking—just a little!”

~ Richard Epstein, New York, NY

“*Memories of The Catskills* is a poignant reminder of simpler times for residents of New York City who escaped to the mountains for a week or two to unwind. It was a rite of summer for many of us, and one that was done repeatedly over the years. This book does an excellent job of describing a time and a place that is difficult for people today to appreciate; read it and be transported back to simpler times.”

~ David Budlin, Valrico, FL

“Alvin Lesser offers valuable reports, photos, and graphics that describe the daily life of a medium-sized Catskills hotel. This is a rare opportunity to learn how these quintessential family-run resorts were managed. The chronological narrative of new buildings, pool, dam, lake, entertainment casino, children’s day camp, and remodeled rooms takes us from the early 1920s boarding home to the destruction by fire in 1963 of a hotel that could hold 270 guests. With its hand-drawn map and detailed descriptions, Lesser’s book makes us feel like we were living that resort life over a half century earlier.”

~ Phil Brown, Northeastern University, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Health Sciences

“New York’s ‘Borscht Circuit’ is second only to Hollywood, CA as the birthplace of a distinctly American entertainment. And just as with Hollywood, so too with the Borscht Circuit, the best stories are often found when one looks beyond the famous people with their bigger-than-life personas to the everyday characters that actually made the place and gave it its sense of style.

“Alvin Lesser’s *Memories of The Catskills* is a book about just such people. It is filled with their stories as seen first through the eyes of an innocent but mischievous child, then through those of a young adult struggling to make his way in the world, and finally from the standpoint of a returning WWII veteran who has seen humanity at both its best and its worst. It is witty, humorous and insightful, but somehow never overtly sentimental.



“*Memories of The Catskills* tells the story of a small but prominent Borscht Circuit hotel: The Lesser Lodge. What one expected when one visited a hotel in the Catskills was to be thoroughly entertained, to escape the daily grind of life, and to eat heartily until you reached the near-bursting point. And so it is with Alvin Lesser’s *Memories of The Catskills*. It will thoroughly entertain you, it will open to you a world that seems today completely fresh and new, and it will fill you with laughter and pure delight.”

~ Don Sucher, Peterborough, NH, Former Catskill Mountain resort musician

“What a wonderful gift to all of us with faded recollection of a bygone era. Let the flood gates of forgotten memories swing open with each flip of the page. This book is much more than a collection of charming stories. This book is an anthology of cultural artifacts. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if all of history could be recorded in such a warm, heartfelt and personal manner?”

~ Dr. Mitchell S. Cohen, Clarke Summit, PA, Former Catskill Mountain resident

To request a review copy of *Memories of The Catskills*, to arrange an interview with Alvin Lesser, to receive cover and/or interior art, or for any additional information, please contact Kate Bandos at KSB Promotions: 800-304-3269, 616-676-0758 or kate@ksbpromotions.com.