

July 2009 LOVE IN AN ELEVATOR?

So, fellow Chicagoans, I am interested if anyone else is worried about the high rise elevators. I admit I haven't been worried about much City infrastructure since being First Deputy Building Commissioner. I have been enjoying the political ignorance of being a private citizen. That is, until today. My story is probably not special or shocking but I will share an experience with those who may have had or will have the same.

I was at a downtown high rise today. I have been to this building hundreds of times and have even noticed the aging elevator certificate with some humor and disdain. But today, as I was in the elevator going to a meeting with 5 other fellow travelers who were complete strangers, the elevator just conked out. Of course many of us gasped and looked nervously at each other, but after the initial shock, I was acutely aware that my previous willingness to think this old, uninspected elevator was safe was coming back to haunt me.

See, I had joked for a year and a half that this elevator was last inspected when Mary Richardson-Lowry was the building commissioner. In that moment I realized that the Richardson-Lowry days were way before even I (now, 5 years separated from the Department of Buildings) knew anything of the ways of City Hall. In fact, as I looked down in that moment of dread, I realized this elevator had not been inspected in almost a decade. Then, my stuck-in-between-floors self was remembering all of the reasons we should all wish that our elevators are deemed safe via inspection. My brain was flooded with questions...Isn't that one of the things we expect from the City? Doesn't City Code require that these elevators get inspected annually? Do these high rises pay for annual inspections but not GET annual inspections? Is it more important to have building inspectors generating revenue than keeping us safe? And, most pointedly, did I care about this lapse of City protocol until I was stuck in an elevator with 5 strangers?

Just then, the elevator continued to chug along and my scared travel mates and I breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Perhaps the best lesson for those of us who are private citizens in this City is to look at inspection dates more carefully and voice and vote our concern about one another's safety. Although I must admit, once the elevator started running again...no one called 311...not even

