

Campus Police to the Rescue

By Rich Snowberg

The next incident I will share was also the funniest and most memorable. This event took place nearly 20 years ago. At the time we were using Coate Hall as our residence hall, and around 2 AM I received a phone call from my assistant director, Irene Doll. She knew she was waking me from a sound sleep, apologized profusely and said she had a problem with a participant. She told me that she wasn't kidding, but it was hard not to think so when she described the problem. Before going further, the reader needs to know some background.

Each summer one or more of the campus residence halls are undergoing some sort of remodeling. Usually we are not using a building that is undergoing some changes, but occasionally it could not be helped. During this particular year, the campus carpenters were removing bolsters from most all of the rooms. A bolster is a bed length storage compartment that was located just above the level of the mattress. During the daytime the bed was pushed against the wall, or under the bolster, so that there was more space on the floor. The bolsters had a hinged opening, and inside residents could place books, toiletries, etc. I don't know the reason the bolsters were being removed, but as they were taken from the wall, several holes remained where large dowels had been used to support the weight of the bolster. Now back to the story.

Irene calmly shared with me the news that a participant had been lying in bed and discovered the hole. She, yes it was a female, placed her finger into the hole and realized it went all the way through the wall into the adjoining room. So it was a deep hole, and when she tried to remove her finger, it would not come out. Irene said they had tried everything they could think of to get her finger out of the wall, and as a result her finger was swelling. Thus it was becoming even more difficult for her to remove her finger. I knew that this was not a job for me! What could I do? Whenever we have a campus problem, we call our Protective Services officers, so that is what we did. The next morning's report from the officer was hilarious.

The first thing the officer told me was that he thought it was a prank. "Sure, there's a bunch of clowns staying in Coate Hall and they are trying to make a fool out of me." Irene knew that he, yes it was a male officer, would be suspect as to the legitimacy of the situation. Thus she waited outside for him to arrive and brief him before they entered the building. He told me later that he was totally stumped as to what they could do to remove the finger. He said he honestly thought they were going to have to remove a portion of the wall. Of course you can imagine the number of resident clowns that gathered around the unexpected event.

What eventually solved the problem was to work as much baby shampoo into the hole, from both rooms, and while the participant tried to pull her finger from the hole, someone else pushed her finger from the other side of the wall. Yes the finger finally was extricated.

Every time an officer responds to a call for their services they are required to write a formal report. I never received a copy of that report, but I certainly wish I had it in my files.