



Fire Alarms

Mary Anne Schuerger

Fall quarter 1970 was my first term in college. Although the vast majority of students were townies—also known as commuters—I was a dormie who lived on the fourth floor of Spanton Hall. Bulger Hall was a dorm for men, and Spanton, Sisler, and Orr Halls housed women. Across campus and across Jackson Field from us was Torrey House, which was a dorm for men.

Almost from the beginning, the first four dorms mentioned above seemed to be taking turns having fire alarms pulled, some dorms almost every night. There seemed to be no set pattern about which dorm it was. It got so that no one on

my floor would take a shower after a certain time in the evening lest the fire alarm in my dorm got pulled. With the weather getting colder, nobody wanted to evacuate in a robe with wet hair and flip flops. We assumed that the fire alarm going off was most likely a false alarm but always evacuated to the surrounding plaza just in case we were wrong. After a while, the people on the plaza would get the all clear signal and file back into their dorm. I remember getting up in the morning and inquiring which dorm was picked on the previous evening and estimating how likely it was our turn that evening. This got really old really fast.

On October 29, 1970, Torrey House had a real fire in the wee hours of the morning. The only reason there weren't fatalities was that Warren Allgyer had been up late studying and had detected the fire. He and a companion were around the dorm and woke everybody up. At least one student broke his leg jumping out of a second floor window. Everyone got out, except Allgyer. He was found passed out just inside the outer door, but was discovered in time and pulled to safety. All of a sudden the fire alarms on my side of campus stopped totally. Sometime later, a campus security guard was indicted for the Torrey House fire. I heard that he was later convicted.

In the spring, Buchtel Hall, the historic building on campus, had a serious fire that did a lot of damage. My first reaction was "Oh, no, not again!" It was later determined to have been an electrical fire. I was relieved that it had not been set by a person.