

April 17, 2007

Yesterday was a crazy day. I don't really think I need to go into the events, as the news media is painting a fairly accurate picture of what happened.

I'm OK.

Everybody in my building is OK. Some are a little shaken up, but all in all people seem to be coping. I think part of it, at least for me, is that the school is so large that I can sort of detach myself from the recent events. At least for the moment, it seems like this mood will hold.

It turns out that I was supposed to have a class in Norris about 20 minutes after the event occurred, however my teacher had cancelled class in the wee hours of the morning because he was out of town at a conference. I probably would have been showing up for class as they were starting to remove people from the building.

Instead, I was taking a nap. I had gotten up early to go to breakfast, and hadn't gone to sleep particularly punctually the night before, so I felt as though I deserved this. On the way to breakfast, I really paid no mind to the seven police cars parked outside of West AJ. That probably should have tipped us off. However, after going to sleep, I was soon roused by sizable group of police cars racing down the hill. I tried to go back to sleep, but after two more groups of similar size sped past, with their sirens blaring, I knew something was up. And that was when I checked my email for the first time, and events began to fall into place.

I now know that yes, I did know one of the victims. He taught the first half of my surveying class, and he and all of the TAs had a meeting on that floor of Norris around that time.

One of the people down the hall was in a room on that floor as well, however they noticed that something was wrong and barricaded their door with a desk. The door was shot at multiple times, and two bullets went through, but nobody in his class was hurt. The story he tells does highlight one thing: the police did an exceptional job.

I'd like to underscore this. When watching cable news (something we did a lot of around here yesterday) all of the anchors seemed to want to know how something like this could happen. Based on what I know about the campus, the actions seem perfectly understandable. Sure, the email about the shooting in AJ came out a bit late, but they don't want to instill panic with ridiculously vague emails—something that still almost happened.

All indications were that it was an isolated, domestic incident. One event involving just one wing of one floor of one dorm, though tragic, doesn't merit the whole campus shutting down, especially if the best intelligence said that the person was heading not only off campus but also out of state.

Next, these TV personalities wonder how somebody could get into an academic building unnoticed while armed. Well, one of the great things about the campus is how open it is. You can come and go as you please, and as long as you don't piss off the parking services people,

nothing bad comes of it. The academic buildings are unlocked from 7am to 9pm (or later, in some cases) so people can do work at their convenience, and of course there are no metal detectors. I wouldn't want to have to go through a metal detector every time I went to class, and besides, the costs of installing and staffing such a system would be quite excessive.

So all the people I talk to are actually quite satisfied with the response. In any case, the university officials followed their preexisting emergency plans, which is really the best that could be expected in such a trying time. My neighbor down the hall, the one who was trapped on the second floor of Norris says that from the beginning of the shooting to them being rescued by police, evacuated, and him being on his way back to the building was about 15 minutes, tops. That is a remarkable response time.

Later in the day, the people in my building generally tried to go on with their lives, but we were never really that far away from a television, showing that same low quality cell phone video over and over again, like we'd never seen anything like it before. There's definitely such a thing as overexposure. Anyway, since there were no on campus food places open for lunch, and my roommate was complaining about how he was hungry and had no food, and my situation was quite the opposite, I decided to do something about this.

After securing permission from the Honors department staff downstairs, I sent out an email to our building-wide address list about how we were going to have a Lunch Potluck, and people could bring whatever snack items they had with them and we'd all make a meal of it. It went over really well, as people brought far more food than we actually needed. People have since came up to me and said that it was not only a good way to get some food but that it was a great way to get together and spread information and really just to make sure that everybody in the building was OK. Basically, we just made do with what we had and tried to keep ourselves entertained and provide distractions for those who weren't handling the events of the day particularly well.

Today, we get word that the university has cancelled classes all week. Honestly, I wasn't originally very happy with this plan. I like my routine, and wanted things to get back to normal. However, the more I talk to people around the building and the more I see peoples' reactions at things like the university convocation, the more I realize that there really are some people who need a break to spend time with their families. It remains an inconvenience, and we will have to reschedule things like crazy due to it, but it is acceptable and probably the right thing to do.

Speaking of the convocation, I was planning to go. However, as soon as I heard that President Bush was coming to speak, I knew it was going to be a mad house. They also said that they were going to put it on campus television, so a number of us decided to set up the Honors department projector in the dining room (a big meeting room downstairs in my building) so that those who didn't want to make the trek over or couldn't get a seat could watch it and participate anyway. As it turns out, they filled the basketball stadium (where the event was held, holding 11,000 people) and a good part of the football stadium (overflow crowds could watch it on the big screen). I found some pictures online below, from the Associated Press. We wound up watching it on CNN because of the superior audio quality to VT Chanel 4. The convocation is also

available online as a streaming video on the Hokie Sports website at <http://www.hokiesports.com/convocation.html>. I recommend watching it, as the people had good things to say. The ending was a completely different mood then I expected, so watch for that.



Convocation in Cassell...



and Lane Stadium

So that's where we are now. Classes are cancelled for the week, so things are probably going to get really quiet around here for a while. Pretty much everybody I know now has either already left, is writing stuff to family and friends (like me), or is doing something distracting like playing video games (though some of them would be doing that now anyway). As for me, once I finish this up I'm going to go and fold my laundry. That's just what I do every third Tuesday afternoon, and I'm trying not to let recent events impact my usual routine. At the moment, I don't plan to go home, as I'd like to spend time around here with the people of my community. Some of them can't go home, either because of distance or work responsibilities, so I feel like there should be some people around to keep them company. That's where I stand right now; however, I could probably be persuaded to do other things. We'll see.

So yeah, don't worry about me. I'm fine. Things are just going to be confusing around here for a while. But we'll be alright

*Pete*