

SSM

A Tough Job, But a Necessary One

Debbie Won

Staff Writer

neighbor's roommate left after several days, so the girl packed up and literally moved into our room. She intimidated my roommate by threatening to beat her up, and she ate all our food within three days. On the last day of camp, I walked in our room to find my clothes thrown from the drawers, and several of my shirts had been deliberately cut and torn."

All roommate problems - especially those which endanger the safety or property of the other roommate - need attention on both sides. The perpetrator of the problem must be confronted with his or her actions, and the other roommate must take the initiative in addressing the problem, no matter how uncomfortable that may be.

If you have a hellish roommate, chances are he or she will not even think about changing their behavior unless the issue is brought to the surface. Many times, however, a face-to-face discussion about the problem is the first step in reaching a compromise about your roommate's actions. If that doesn't work, talk to an SLI or other official. DA's also serve as mediators of roommate disputes as well as overseers of the residence halls. "Just go talk to your DA," an NCSSM DA said. "They can usually help roommates work out their problems, but if they can't, that's what SLI's are for."

Of course, not every mediation is guaranteed to be successful.

Some roommates will never be able to get along well, no matter what. If the problem is serious enough, and it's impossible for both of you to be in the room without inciting a verbal battle or other clash, it may be possible to have your roommate moved out of the room or for you to move. However, simply talking to your roommate about the problem goes a long way in relieving tensions on both sides and opening the lines of communication.

NCSSM dormitories are more than just rooms, each with a bed and a desk. Living at NCSSM means dealing with any number of problems that can arise when up to thirty teenagers are living together on one hall. That puts a lot of pressure on the school to make living here enjoyable, which is why an SLI alone can't handle the responsibilities that come with overseeing a hall and why each SLI needs a couple of helping hands throughout the year whom we call DAs, or dorm assistants.

These DAs take on a huge responsibility when they agree to assist a hall full of students while they are away from home, and the DAs' duties begin even before the school year commences. Sacrificing a week and a half of their summer vacations, dorm assistants spent a week at school so that SLIs could equip them with and teach them to utilize the tools they need to carry out their roles and duties as DAs.

During this DA orientation week, DAs attended seminars and workshops such as conflict/resolution mediation training, an active listening workshop, and a leadership workshop. They also were given the task of coming up with a theme for the hall and representing it with a poster just outside the hall. For example, third Beall's poster of a monkey, elephant, and lion, and construction paper palm-trees outside each door went well with their jungle theme.

Before other students arrived, the DAs cleaned the entire hall and filled out the room condition check sheets. According to James Knutson some "notable things about DA week were: the difficulties some halls had in cleaning, the SLI/DA role playing (neurotic Jeff; Marc throwing chairs; Manuel throwing his roommate out the window...), the kiddie pool"

Third Beall DA Aimee Chung says, "DA week required much more work than I had first imagined, but it was worth every minute. If I had a chance to

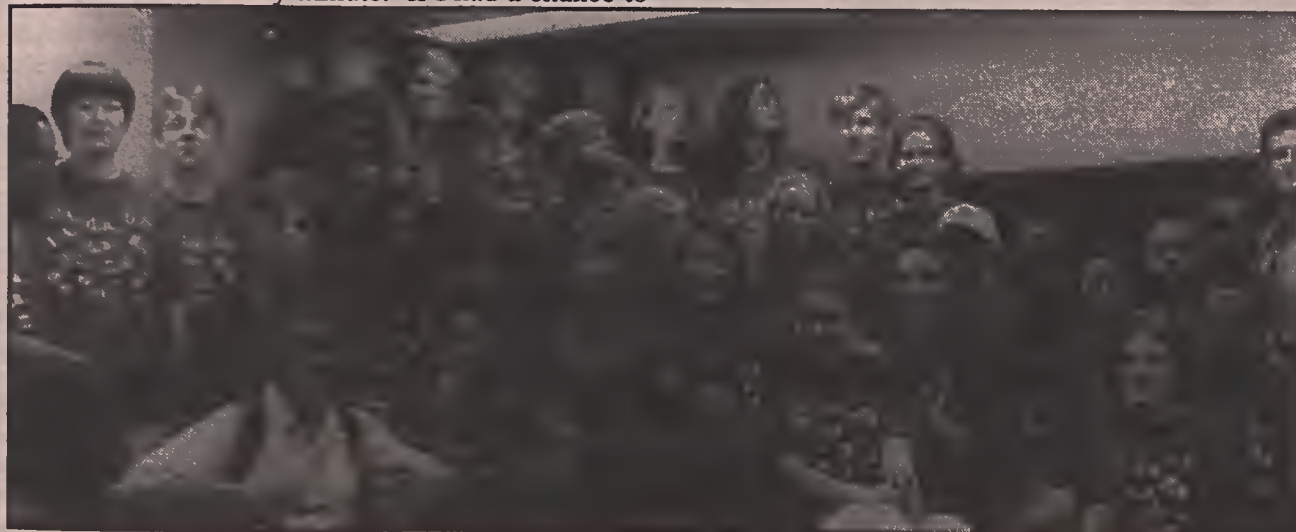
do everything all over again, I definitely would." That's what being a DA seems to be all about: wanting to help students adjust to and enjoy their lives at NCSSM and to contribute to the community even if it means going out of his/her way and doing a lot of work. First Hill DA James Knutson even "pledges to [him]self and to this year that [he] will perform the duties for maintaining an orderly and enjoyable hall so that the legacy that [they] create this year will live on."

During the school year, halls handle things differently, but all DAs must take care of in-dorm and on-hall curfew checks, help organize hall activities, maintain a reasonable noise level on hall, and attend meetings with their SLI to discuss any problems.

Their most valuable duty to the hall, however, is offering answers and advice to hall members who have questions or personal concerns. "You have to make sure you're always in touch with your SLI, your co-DA, and most importantly, the people on your hall....A lot of the info that I get about the hall...is stuff that I've picked up on while chatting with people on hall....You have to be really open, or else you'll miss what's whizzing by, like if someone has a problem with their roommate, or if someone is depressed, or just basically keeping your eyes open and your ears in touch." as first Beall DA Carolyn Chu says.

Rashonda Steadman confirms that "[being a DA] is a lot of hard work." Next time you see your DAs, be sure to thank them for all that they do for you and your hall.

Here's what some of your dorm assistants think about being a DA: "...nothing like I thought it would be; on a daily basis, it's pretty simple: do check and keep up with housekeeping...but then it involves a lot more time than you would expect."



All Smiles: The Dorm Assistants for 1995-96