

Visiting Boyfriend, Coed Trio Alert Residents to NYC Fire

CHRIS MICHAUD AND ALISHA BERGER ON OCT 26, 2003



Brett Helsham, a student, holds her journal, which she salvaged after a fire burned through her apartment.

Photo credit: New York Post

An early morning fire swept through an East 18th Street walk-up yesterday, injuring eight people, but an alert trio of New School coeds and a visiting boyfriend managed to bang on doors and warn neighbors as they fled for their lives.

The six-story brick building at 340 East 18th St. between First and Second avenues filled with smoke just before 5:30 a.m. yesterday, sending panicked residents roused from their sleep through hazy hallways and into the street.

More than 100 firefighters from 25 units fought the blaze, which officials said was caused by an overloaded power strip, bringing it under control at 6:11 a.m.

"I could see flames shooting out of the room and from the ceiling" of apartment 2A, the three-bedroom apartment where the fire broke out, said Kevin Harley, who trained as a firefighter and was staying in his girlfriend's place one floor above the burned unit.

"I was screaming 'fire, fire' to everybody at the top of my lungs," said Harley, 27. The hallway smoke "was so thick from the waist down we had to feel our way down the stairs," he said.

Harley's girlfriend, Lindsay Joelle Meyer, who lives in apartment 3A with two roommates, said she was awakened by what smelled like burning plastic.

"My boyfriend grabbed me and my roommates," Meyer said. "The hallways were already billowing with smoke."

"He went to other apartments and knocked on doors" as the four of them made their escape, the fourth-year New School University student said.

"I just wanted to get out of there. I was barefoot and in my jacket. My bedroom is completely gone," Meyer added.

Her roommate, Brett Helsham, said, "It was so smoky we couldn't see anything. It was so scary. My hair is singed."

Helsham, also a New School student, went back after the fire to retrieve her journal.

A 22-year-old woman from Pennsylvania visiting a friend at the apartment where the fire started was in serious condition at New York Weill-Cornell Burn Center, fire officials said.

Melissa Bloch was sleeping on the couch in her friend Jeff Edmonson's apartment. "I got a call at 6 a.m. that she'd been taken here," her mother said. "She has carbon-monoxide poisoning and some burns" and was in isolation.

With reporting by Jamie Schram & Marianne Garvey