

Fire Drills as Social Occasions

Modern life has a lot of quirks.

One of those quirks is the fire drill.

The fire drill is a uniquely 20th century thing, made for 20th century and 21st century buildings. And if you think about it, it's really strange. A bell goes off and dozens and even hundreds of human beings start flowing out of their 20th and 21st century buildings all at once.

It only happens a couple of times a year. You'd think it was a holiday or something.

These rare occasions - along with the occasional fire false alarm - bring . There's a low-level feeling of possible danger combined with the thrill of novelty and the security of the belief that there is almost certainly no fire. Maybe you experienced these drills in school or at work, but in any case, you probably remember them with fondness and amusement.

As everyone streams out, you make dark jokes with your coworkers/classmates about your office/school building burning down to the ground.

You meet with coworkers/co-tenants/schoolmates you might never otherwise encounter. The streams of people become a friendly, bustling social occasion for neighbors to meet and laugh at the collective cattle herd.

You watch excitedly if the fire trucks arrive.

You smile at what people thought to bring with them as they leave the building.

Maybe you have one of those street pianos near your office, and maybe your coworker sits down and starts playing that solo from Careless Whisper (you know the one).

Maybe your office building brings donuts.

Or maybe when the false alarm is over, the security guard says "you may now return to your offices, but returning to work is entirely optional."

You thank God there is no fire, and you thank your luck that a fire drill or a false alarm can create so many opportunities for everyday humanity and grace.