

Ingenuity

DEA Violent Crime Task Force Detective Bill Doheny stood behind the partially louvered door of a "slop sink" closet on the third floor of a New York public housing project. He held an open can of Coca Cola in his left hand and a long plastic straw in his right.

Bill was using what Webster describes as "the power and quality of ready invention." He had received "information" that crack cocaine, in capsule form, was being sold out of a certain apartment on the floor and needed to develop enough "probable cause" to make a legal arrest and conduct a raid. After a little reconnoitering, it became painfully apparent that he could not just stand on the floor and observe as the stream of customers entered and exited the identified crack distribution "suite." That would be much too obvious and the operation would quickly "shut down."

He needed a place to hide his six foot, two inch, 230 pound body, which meant that the only available concealment would be the "slop sink" closet by the elevators. The closet, which was used by the maintenance "engineers" to clean and ring out their mops, was always open and provided enough space for Bill to comfortably stand and watch the activity at the targeted door through a small louvered window.

However, that only solved part of Bill's dilemma. If he jumped out and grabbed (questioned) a crack customer after he left the apartment, a ruckus would be made; the "stop and question" had to be done off the floor. Considering the fact that most of the customers would not live in the building, logic dictated that the "interdiction" take place in the lobby when the unsuspecting buyer stepped off the elevator.

But this posed another problem; how to identify the crack customer to the Task Force officers waiting in the lobby? If a portable radio was used, the sound would echo in the sterile hallway, alerting the normally vigilant operation that the police were in the area. And while sipping a can of Coca Cola, his favorite soft drink, a light was turned on in Bill's subcranial mass. He would lurk in the "slop sink" closet and observe as a satisfied "buyer" waited for the elevator. And when the opportunity presented itself, he would fill his straw with Coca Cola and "blow" a stream of the dark liquid through the louvered window onto his back, staining his shirt.

In consequence, his fellow Task Force officers in the lobby would only have to concern themselves with those individuals identified by wet dark Coca Cola stains on their back. Although bizarre, Bills ingenuity paid off and the "crack apartment" was closed down in the summer of 1994.