



## In-Decent and Un-Safe

*"At Risk" Citizen's are being put in harms way by many privately operated HUD facilities. Security Expert J. R. Roberts explains why the disadvantaged are being threatened by negligent and inadequate security that puts them at high risk for fatal neglect, rape, and homicide.*

By J.R. Roberts

When Alma Mae Miller began to show signs of disorientation, confusion, and depression, her two sons were concerned.

Retired and on a fixed-income, Mrs. Miller was a 67 year old widow facing the challenges so many "at risk" seniors are confronted by. While having her undergo medical evaluation, the Miller boys moved their mother into the home of the younger son and his family. It wasn't long before the independent and proud matriarch insisted on "independent" living.

"I won't be a burden on my children." Ms. Miller declared. "I want to live in my own apartment."

After conducting a thorough and exhaustive search for a suitable facility, the family interviewed with "Bethlehem Towers" a HUD Sec. 202 apartment complex.

Sec. 202 provisions are specifically designed to respond to the decline in available, affordable living quarters for the elderly. Under these guidelines, the Federal Government created incentives to private builders and property companies by providing cheap loans for construction and operation of facilities specifically designed for this "at risk" population and with the clear proviso (as is the case with Sec. 8) that such housing facilities furnish and maintain decent and safe living environments.

On a rainy Tuesday afternoon, Mrs. Miller's son received a phone call at work from the county morgue asking him what he wanted done with the body. Confused, the horrified Miller was informed that his mother's body had been at the morgue for some hours.

Sometime between 4 and 6 a.m. Alma Mae Miller plunged nine stories to her death.

What emerged was a pattern of indifference and neglect.

An analysis of 911 police calls for service to the apartment complex revealed a series of desperate calls from tenants complaining of abuse, tenants who had experienced severe falls and injured themselves, often lying helplessly for hours, a tenant who had been left alone without food or water for three days.

A site analysis of the premises revealed a building constructed in the mid 1980's of concrete construction, central corridors, and modern sprinkler systems. One odd feature stood out

immediately in the form of two foot "ledges" jutting from underneath traditional sash windows. The windows led directly to the ledge, which contained no railing:

- 1.) When interviewing Mrs. Miller, the facility asked for and received extensive financial records which included much of Mrs. Miller's recent medical treatment.
- 2.) The Millers were assured that "they had someone check regularly on tenants", a claim that was proven to be untrue.
- 3.) The privately owned facility was part of a large 20 million dollar property portfolio which received government support. The facility in question had incorporated as a senior citizen/nursing home.
- 4.) The facility was in a unique position to be expected to assess the condition of and safeguard against common breaches of safety and security issues involving seniors. Particularly their vulnerabilities to fall (Falls are the leading cause of injury deaths for Americans 65 years and older)
- 5.) With a central sprinkler system, and both indoor and outdoor stairwells for the purposes of evacuation, the facility should have installed or offered to install window guards in apartments above the first floor. (In New York, the number of injuries caused by falls from windows decreased 98% after a law required landlords to install window guards) They should have additionally built protective railings around the ledges.
- 6.) The facility was also in a unique position to note Mrs. Miller was starting to show evidence of "Sundowners Syndrome" a condition associated with early on-set of Alzheimer's disease and which created panic, confusion, and disorientation among the patient which is exacerbated in late evening/early morning.
- 7.) The property in question had the option to:
  - Decline to accept Mrs. Miller based on even a cursory review of her potential medical condition.
  - Refer Mrs. Miller to one of their more "intensive/full care" facilities
  - Insist Mrs. Miller have live in assistance
  - Modify the apartment unit (an inexpensive retro-fit, window guards run about \$8.00) to increase Mrs. Miller's safety
  - Place her on the first floor
  - Fulfill their obligation to monitor their residence on a regular basis

The failure of the facility to meet and maintain a reasonable standard of care specific to the population they served, resulted in a tragic and unnecessary death.

A death made all the more terrible as a consequence of greed, neglect, incompetence, and dehumanizing indifference.

<sup>1</sup>Center for Disease Control, National Resource Center on Aging & Injury

<sup>2</sup>Oregon Health & Science University Study, July 2001

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## About the author

**With 25 years of experience, J.R. Roberts offers specialized security consultation and services in three specific arenas:**



**Expert Testimony:** plaintiff and defendant in a wide variety of civil suits have retained Mr. Roberts to provide consultation, analysis, and testimony across the United States (for a partial list of representative cases and attorney endorsements, [click here](#)).

In matters concerning premise liability, crime foreseeability, private security guard training, and industry standards of care, J. R. Roberts can make a significant difference in your case. To schedule an initial free confidential discussion of the fact pattern of your case, or to obtain additional information, including rates and a current Curriculum Vitae, call our LAN Line at: (912) 927-4669.



**Seminars and Training:** As the former Director of Risk Management for Valor Security Services, Inc. J. R. wrote, developed, and implemented the training program for that company. He has lectured Nationwide for trade associations, property management firms, and fortune 1,000 corporations.

To discover how J. R. Roberts Security Strategies, can assist you in providing the very latest training For your employees on such critical topics as employee theft/shoplifting prevention, Liability, or Comprehensive Security Guard Training visit our seminars and training page, or contact our Savannah, Ga. office.

## Contact information

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