

Why I Come to Kent State Every May Fourth

Preface

Ever since I became involved in activities relating to the Kent State shootings, people have asked me, "Did you go to Kent State?" No, I never attended Kent State University. However, my stock answer has always been, "Yes, my whole generation went to Kent State. Our tuition was paid in blood."

In fact, I was 16 years old on May 4, 1970, and attending high school at Montoursville High School in the "boonies" of north-central Pennsylvania.

So why do I care about Kent State? How could the shootings have possibly affected me?

Well, I became active in the anti-war movement, such as it was in central Pennsylvania, around 1967. Having grown up a patriotic, white Boy Scout from the country whose heart filled with pride at the raising of the American flag on the Fourth of July, I was an unlikely candidate for an anti-war activist. However, as I tried to apply "American" principles – democracy, freedom, individual rights – to my world in the 1960s, I concluded that my government's policies were very often un-American. The Cold War, the Cuba Missile Crisis, Che Guevara, the Kennedy assassination, the civil right movement, Cassius Clay (n/k/a Muhammad Ali), the Beatles and the post-1964 rock-n-roll explosion – all of these things led me to read about current and past events to try to find reason in the insane world in which I lived. Books like *The Ugly American* and *Stride Toward Freedom* got me started. As I dug deeper into the causes of the seeming chaos of my world, I discovered, among other things, that Castro wasn't pure evil, that the U.S. wasn't pure good, that socialism might not be such a bad idea, that American imperialism was very real, and that what I had been told about the conflict in Vietnam was a crock of Grade A bullshit.

By 1967, some of my friends and I, following the lead of the so-called "hippies," started to grow our hair long and question authority – our school, our churches, our parents, our government. At some point during the turmoil of 1968, I joined the SDS. I also became active in the Vietnam Peace Committee, a local group of activists from the Williamsport, PA area centered around Lycoming College. We held peace vigils in front of Williamsport's federal building every Saturday and participated to the extent that we could in regional and national anti-war activities. One event we organized was an all-night "Speak Out" at Lycoming College which featured speakers representing various schools of politics and philosophy, including Blaise Bonpane, a Mary Knoll priest who spoke about American imperialism in Guatemala and about Vietnam, and Mark Rudd from SDS.

The Vietnam Peace Committee, as far as I remember, never organized a march. The political climate of central Pennsylvania was very conservative, to say the least. Parents and grandparents of friends were members of the KKK and the John Birch Society, which had a pretty large following. Hair protruding over a man's ears by any more than a quarter of an inch could get that man's ass kicked. At the very least, restaurants would refuse to serve "longhairs." Wearing beads or a peace sign (footprint of the great American chicken, natch) or expressing doubts about war in Vietnam could also provoke violent reactions from the people of my

community. Our peace vigils were routinely photographed and intimidated by the FBI and local cops. When the local newspaper printed a relatively meek anti-war letter to the editor I wrote, my family received countless threatening phone calls.

Then came Chicago, My Lai, Woodstock, many marches on Washington, and the invasion of Cambodia. By early 1970, the counter-culture was on the rise and so was the movement against the war. I would have to register for the (then-active) draft in about a year, and it seemed that Nixon's war policies were indefensible. How could we continue to fight against a people who only wanted their own independence? How could we continue to send millions of dollars and thousands of young men to die in a war that could not be won – and which we never should have started in the first place? Friends and acquaintances were returning from Vietnam forever changed, and some didn't return at all. It was wrong – immoral, illegal, unjust – yes, un-American from this Boy Scout's point of view.

May 4, 1970 and After

Unlike most other May 4th contemporaries (with the notable exception of County Joe MacDonald), I don't have a stunning recollection of where I was when I first heard about the shootings. I seem to recall that I was in a classroom in my high school when a friend of mine came in and told me that there was a riot at Kent State and people were shot. At that point, I don't think we knew whether the victims were students or Guardsmen. (Indeed, some of the early news stories indicated that the Guardsmen were shot.) I also remember going home and reading the paper. But I don't have a "I-know-where-I-was-when-they-shot-Kennedy" moment.

I do, however, remember the immediate aftermath. Along with students from Lycoming College, I helped organize a memorial for the Kent victims in the campus chapel. And, although my high school did not go on strike, students at Lycoming College did. We organized rallies on the campus and watched as our comrades across the country shut their campuses down. I remember seeing a full-page ad in the *New York Times* protesting the shootings and saying that Kent State was our generation's Lexington and Concord. That truly expressed what we were feeling. We were outraged. We were angry. The bastards had gone and done it this time, and we weren't going to lay back and take it. The bullets let loose at Kent State were metaphorically aimed at all of us.

That Friday, some conservative students at Lycoming College attacked some of the protesting students. One friend of ours had huge red footprints on his back from being stomped. I hadn't heard the news, and when I was hitchhiking that Saturday from my town to Williamsport, my best friend's brother picked me up and gave me the news. He was on his way to a hardware store to buy axe handles, and I went with him. We bought 15 or 20 axe handles and distributed them to the more militant students. An ultimatum was issued to the college administration: If you don't protect the protesting students, they will protect themselves. This may not sound all lovey-dovey and peace-creepy, but at that point we weren't about peace and love. Our brothers and sisters had been killed and countless students across America were being beaten and gassed, and it was no time for pacifism. (We weren't really pacifists anyway, according to the local draft board, which consistently denied us conscientious objector status, so we saw no hypocrisy in our point of view.) As it turned out, the college finally did discipline the

guys who had beaten our friends, and the strike at Lycoming College ran its course as campus strikes did across the country.

The student strikes and anti-war crescendo that followed the Kent State shootings threatened to rip the country apart, and on the home front, they exacerbated the so-called "generation gap." We were, of course, a rebellious generation. Our parents could not understand our culture or our politics, and we considered their culture and politics moribund. Many people have seen the famous photo of a sign in a Kent front yard saying, "Guard: 4, Students: 0." But if you weren't there to experience the venomous atmosphere that developed between us and our parents, you would be hard-pressed to imagine it. I can recall arguing with my father about the war and the shootings, an argument that ended with him shouting, "They shoulda killed more of 'em." I responded, "What if I had been there? Should they have shot me, too?" "Yes," my father replied, "if you had been there, they shoulda shot you, too." End of argument. Probably the beginning of the end of my relationship with my father. So be it.

Coincidentally, Peter Paul & Mary had been scheduled to play at Bucknell University, as part of its regular concert series, on May 8, 1970. Bucknell is in Lewisburg, PA, about an hour's drive from my hometown. When we arrived at the campus for the concert, the students were on strike, and there was revolution in the air and heavy security on the ground. PP&M gave a tremendous concert, and I can remember them commenting on the Kent State shootings and the student strike. ("I think that Jesus Christ is in the streets tonight," said Paul.) You would have had to be there to appreciate the mood of the crowd. It was electric, defiant. The sadness of the shootings was already giving way to anger – and solidarity among students. (Many, many years later, I met Peter Yarrow at the Philadelphia Folk Festival. He said that, yes, he vividly remembered that concert.)

1970-1977

Well, off I went to college, where I continued my anti-war and other radical activities. I was a member of Student Mobilization Against the War and founded Student Mobilization – Ambler Campus (SMAC) at Temple University's suburban campus in Ambler, PA. We took part in the student strike of November 1971 and generally worked against the war until its final, pathetic conclusion in 1975. My conscience continued to burn bright with the flame of 1970: I worked as a volunteer boycott organizer for the UFW, successfully organized student support for striking physical plant workers at Temple, took part in a sit-in that was successful in making Temple enroll anti-war students who had been expelled from Villanova University, took part in anti-apartheid protests, and was active for a time in the IWW, among other things. But, except for following the litigation that resulted from the shootings, I had no direct involvement in the May 4 commemorations. It seems like I was always unable to go: had finals, had no money, had other plans, whatever. I had very strong feelings about May 4 and referenced the shootings all the time, but that was it.

On May 4, 1977, I passed my oral examinations to obtain my Master's degree in history at the University of Rhode Island. After the long course of study prerequisite to my written and oral exams, I had no idea it was May 4th. However, when I went to the departmental office to pick up my mail, I discovered that a fellow grad student had left a note in my mailbox saying, "Today is the seventh anniversary of the massacre of students at Kent State!" Wow. Reality

check. Here I was, a sold-out history student, ignoring the past of my own life to obtain a piece of paper saying I knew about history. Irony. Hypocrisy. To thine own self be true.

Fall 1977 – Move the Gym

Fate, however, was about to bring Kent State back into my immediate reality. That fall, I moved to Pittsburgh, PA, to attend the doctoral program in history at the University of Pittsburgh. I had been following the anti-gym protests in the media, but after Blanket Hill was cleared of the May Fourth Coalition, I thought it was all over. The grim reality: The forces of reaction had won again, and like Lidice, the Czech village that was totally obliterated by Hitler in retaliation for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, Blanket Hill and its history was going to be bulldozed into oblivion.

Then, one day I saw a flyer at Pitt soliciting students to go to Kent State that weekend to continue the struggle against the gym. Well, I had missed the highly emotional commemoration/protests of the mid-1970s and I had missed the fight at tent city on Blanket Hill, so I sure as hell was not going to miss this opportunity to go to the place that meant so much to me and my generation and fight the good fight.

I participated in several rallies, including two large anti-gym demonstrations, at Kent in September 1977. The details of each demonstration blend together now after 30 years, but I remember the broken ground and the broken trees and the full-riot-gear cops behind the chain link fence around the gym construction site. I remember marching around the campus and stenciling the names of the dead students on campus buildings as we renamed them. Our voices thundered across the Commons, bounced off the dormitories. It felt good. Passing the dorms with little faces in every window peering out at us big, bad, off-campus radicals (the proverbial “outside agitators”), the march chanted, “Long live the spirit of Kent and Jackson State.” Driving the point home, our contingent pointed at the apprehensive students and filled in the brief silence between chants, “It coulda been you!” While there were a few scuffles between protestors and cops, I wasn’t involved, although I remember being behind a protestor who was hit in chest with a tear gas cannister as we marched towards the gym construction sight over the rise between Taylor and Prentice Halls. Someone had a tape player, and “O-H-I-O” was booming out across the Commons as we marched up the hill. Suddenly, a gas canister hit the comrade in front of me in the chest, dropped to the ground, and then exploded. The gas streamed out of the canister up into his chest and face. His skin turned bright red, like a lobster dropped in boiling water, and he fell back into the arms of those of us behind him. We passed his writhing body back towards the Commons, where we hoped there was someone who could provide medical care.

After the protests I drove exhausted back to Pittsburgh with the Maoists who had organized the trip, members of the Revolutionary Student Brigade, arguing with them the whole way about the impossibility and contradictions of their politics. Unfortunately, there was apparently no love lost between the May Fourth Coalition that had fought the gym that summer and the pseudo revolutionary heroes who organized the protests that fall. The demonstrations would have been larger if not for that, and I would have been able to connect with a lot of good people who were no longer physically active in the fight.

I couldn't have cared less about the politics of the organizers. I wasn't buying the dictatorship of the proletariat crap. I was at Kent State expressing my outrage at what had happened on May 4, 1970, protesting the bulldozing of the history of my generation, shouting my support for wounded students and the families of the victims who were seeking justice in the courts. I was – finally – there, standing up against tragic injustice that took lives of Jeffrey, Sandy, Bill, and Allison.

Back at Pitt, I tried to organize support for the anti-gym movement. We gathered hundreds of signatures on a butcher-paper petition that was sent to the president of KSU. We published letters in The Pitt News. Still, the Pitt students were not much interested in going to Kent, except for us few.

Saturday, October 22, 1977, was a cold, damp morning in Pittsburgh. I kissed my (now former) wife goodbye, and she told me to be careful. Agreeing to be careful, I walked the mile or so across Oakland, hunkering down in my hooded sweatshirt to stay warm and dry. At the meeting point, the Carnegie Library, there were only a handful of people, most of them RSB'ers. We drove around Oakland for about an hour, while the Commies stopped at various houses and apartments trying to find people who had agreed to come but hadn't shown up at the appointed time. We increased our number by only 3 or 4 more, including two guys who were still semi-drunk from the previous night's partying. I'll probably never know why they wanted to drive up to Kent or what happened to them in the turmoil that occurred after we got there. As I recall, they didn't come home with us.

I will never forget the paranoia I felt the first few times I came to Kent, Ohio. Helicopters. Belligerent townspeople. Evil cops. There seemed to still be something in the air – anger, repression, hostility, tension . . . something intangible but at the same time palpable – left over from May 4, 1970. But this Saturday, the sensation was very strong. Something was up, but we didn't know what . . . yet. We soon found out. We stopped at a pay phone at the edge of town, and one of the RSB people made a call. When he came back, he told us that KSU President Brage Golding had gotten an injunction or court order of some kind forbidding the anti-gym protest. In fact, the order forbade "outside agitators" from entering campus and gatherings of more than three people. It basically forbade freedom of speech and assembly and any other Constitutional rights we might believe we were entitled to. At the time, we just sort of looked at the guy and blinked. We weren't sure what that meant exactly and what was going to happen to us now that we were here, a hundred miles from Pittsburgh with nowhere else to go.

Our caravan of two cars arrived at the ever-so-wonderfully-yet-ironically-named Student Life building. We rounded that building to the left, passed through where the MACC auditorium is now, and walked up the access road along the Lake Hall dormitory. At the far end of Lake Hall, where the gym construction site started, the University had built a set of wooden steps (now concrete) that led up past the end of Lake Hall towards Blanket Hill. As we started up the steps, a troop of Portage County Deputy Sheriffs in full riot gear started down. I still remember backing out of the way as they descended the steps, the fresh two-by-fours and planking reverberating with the heavy stamp of their jack boots. Once they passed, we headed up the steps and made our way to the Commons on the far side of Taylor Hall. There we saw a relatively small group of protestors gathered by the Victory Bell. We joined the group, discussing amongst ourselves the meaning of Golding's injunction and how we should respond to

it. We were given a telephone number in case we were arrested. We were told that the organizers had established an off-campus headquarters in Kent that would serve as a point of dissemination of information and assistance in the event of arrest or injury.

Soon a troop of Portage County Deputy Sheriffs deployed on the far side of the Commons. Dressed in full riot gear, brandishing sticks and guns, they gradually formed a sort of skirmish line facing the crowd at the Victory Bell. It was eerie because they were forming up exactly where the Guard had on May 4, 1970. They read the riot act, ordering us to disperse.

I wasn't sure what to do. I had not expected that the situation that day would turn violent. I certainly had not expected Golding's injunction and the suspension of the Bill of Rights. I wasn't really prepared to go to jail or get my head beaten in. I went up the hill from the bell to the trees near Taylor Hall and approached one of the faculty advisors/observers, identified by armbands. I asked him what was going to happen. He explained about the injunction and told me that it appeared that the cops were determined to stop the demonstration. I could try to leave now. If I stayed, I would at the very least be arrested for criminal trespass.

Here I was, a hundred miles from home. The RSB people were staying, and they were my only ride home. I admit that I was scared. Those cops – more like soldiers – were intimidating as hell, and I did not relish the thought of being beaten, arrested, and jailed. On the other hand, I was angry about Golding's injunction. No one, not even Brage Golding, was going to tell me I had no right to speech, no right to assembly. Moreover, this was Kent State. I had the legacy of May 4 to uphold. This was no time for cowardice, no time to run. Besides, where would I run to?

I didn't have too long to play Hamlet. After the riot act was read, the cops started moving across the Commons to clear us out of there. Their line moved slowly forward, in measured steps. Each cop was holding his baton with both hands, as one might hold a shovel full of dirt, the business end of the baton pointing up and towards the crowd. With each step, each cop pulled his baton back and then thrust it forward, so that if one were standing in front of the cop, his end of the baton would come forward and up into one's gut. As they crossed the Commons, they appeared like a large shiny black machine, the sticks mechanically moving forward on every step. It appeared that May 4th was happening all over again.

We jeered at the cops as they came closer. Like Jeffrey Miller, we gave them the finger. However, they moved towards us inexorably, and shortly those sticks would be hitting us. Someone yelled, "Lock arms!" Within a minute or so, the formerly amorphous crowd formed itself into a column about 4- or 6-wide, the protestors in each row locking elbows. The column faced towards Johnson Hall and the site of the old ROTC building, our direction perpendicular to the movement of the police. Just as the police line came within striking distance of the column, we heard someone yell, "Move out!" The rear of the column bending slightly to avoid the oncoming line of cops, we did just that. I thought that the cops would break ranks and start clubbing us, but they didn't. They let us go. Chanting and hollering, the column of several hundred protestors skirted Johnson Hall and headed across campus to Summit Road. There would be no replay of May 4 today.

I don't know the names of all of the buildings we passed along the route, but we passed several dormitories. We had been told that the University had advised KSU students to go home for the weekend. If they had to stay on campus, they were to stay inside to avoid the "outside agitators." As we passed the dorms, it didn't look like many students had gone home. There were faces in just about every window, looking at us as if we were some kind of aliens. A few shouted disparaging remarks at us, but most of them just stared. As our column snaked between the dorms, we chanted, "Long live the spirit of Kent and Jackson State," and again, in the interval between chants, a few of us yelled, "It coulda been you!"

One rather sinister thing we all noticed, however, was that there were figures on the roof of just about every building around the gym site. Cops? Certainly. FBI? Probably. Snipers? Well, who knew? We saw them photographing and filming us. For use in later prosecutions? Most assuredly.

There was no time for paranoia on this score, however, as we made our way to Summit Road. Now that we had "escaped" the cops and organized ourselves into a compact yet mobile column, we were feeling good. We headed east on Summit Road past the Student Life Building and regrouped in the area between Summit Road and Williams Hall. There was a loading dock and dumpsters at that end of the building, and the protest organizers climbed up there and started speaking to the crowd through megaphones. They said something like, "The demonstration may be over, but the rally will continue!" The cops may have chased us off the Commons, but we would continue the protest right here.

Unbeknownst to us – or to me anyway – the police we had encountered on the Commons and barely avoided must have headed over Blanket Hill through the Prentice Hall parking lot, skirted the edge of the gym construction site on Midway Drive, and formed up again near the Library behind Williams. Our rally had proceeded only a brief time when suddenly cops poured through the gaps on both sides of the building, from the right and left of the speakers, and attempted to envelop the rally in a pincer movement. This time, the cops were spearheaded by cossacks on horseback brandishing long sticks that they could use to hit protestors on the ground.

I must say at this point that we all owe our health to the bravery and presence of mind of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. They moved towards the cops while the rest of us moved back in reaction to the attack. They knelt down in front of the horses, just out of reach of the extra-long batons, and held the poles from their horizontal march banners at the horses' knees. This maneuver stopped the horses from moving forward while the rest of us escaped. (I also should state here for the record that I had, and have, nothing but respect and admiration for the VVAW. They were the most organized comrades in the anti-war movement and, in my estimation, did more to end the Vietnam war than other single group.)

The vets could hold the advance of the police only so long, however, and within minutes they had dispersed the rally. Clubs were swinging all around me, and no one knew where to go. In a moment right out of the Red Badge of Courage, I ran before the onslaught of the cossacks across Summit Road to a copse of trees surrounding a small building that sits back off the south side of Summit, all the time waiting for a nightstick to hit me or a cop to grab me. In another curious move, however, the police backed off after clearing the area between Williams and Summit Road, and they did not pursue those of us who had run across the road. Realizing this,

we regrouped and crossed back over Summit to the campus proper. The cops had sealed off any exit towards the Student Life Building, so we ran out into the open space that then existed between the complex of buildings including Smith and Williams and the clump of dormitories at Summit and Loop Roads --- Altmann, Stewart, etc. At this point, all hell broke loose.

Curiously, I don't recall the cops using tear gas when they advanced on either side of Williams Hall to disperse our rally. However, once they pushed us into the large open space to the east of Williams, they broke out the gas. Using tear-gas "fog" machines (about the size of a large chain saw or leaf blower) and cannisters fired from shotguns or gas launchers, the police began to blanket the entire area with gas. Soon, I could hardly see anything around me. I caught glimpses of other protestors as they ran through the clouds of gas. Suddenly, a cop car loomed out of the fog at a high rate of speed. A cop was in the back seat, firing tear cannisters out the side window. To this day, it is hard to believe that no one was hit by the cop cars as they zigzagged across the gas-covered field at practically zero visibility. (There was a rumor that day among the protestors that the cops were using CS gas containing a gene-mutating chemical. I never found out if that was true, although I later had two perfectly healthy children.)

Once the gassing started, I tried to hold my breath as I ran, but that didn't last long, as you might imagine. The exertion finally forced me to take short, gulping breaths, and within a short time I began to feel the effects of the gas: burning eyes, nose, and throat, constricted lungs, red skin. I don't think I will ever forget the smell of the gas, a peppery, industrial smell somewhere between heavy car exhaust and mildew remover. (Some protestors had brought bandannas soaked in vinegar with them to try to withstand the gas. However, it turned out that under Ohio law, a person wearing a mask while committing a misdemeanor is prosecuted under a felony charge. It appears that it was part of the cops' strategy that day to force us to wear anti-gas "masks" so that any trespassing charge or other misdemeanor would become a felony. The authorities photographed and filmed everyone so that they could use the "mask law" -- ironically, an old anti-Klan law, I was told -- to prosecute us.)

So, eyes, nose, and throat burning, coughing, barely able to breathe, I ran -- towards what I didn't know. Any second I expected a cop to grab me and start beating me. In a few moments, however, I came to a dormitory. I don't know the name of it, or even if it still exists. Several of us arrived out of fog at about the same time. We tried the door. Locked. We pounded on the door. We yelled, to the extent we could, asking Some student peered through the wired glass window in the heavy door, shock and fear on their faces. "We can't let you in!" they yelled through the door. We pleaded, our pain-contorted faces smeared with tears and dirt: We just wanted to get out of the gas and wash our eyes and faces. But they wouldn't let us in.

Meanwhile, behind us in the open field, the cops had ceased their gas attack, and the poisonous clouds were slowly blowing away. Bodies of protestors were scattered across the open area. People were coughing, hacking, trying to regain their breath. I quickly discovered that if I rubbed my eyes, or anywhere on my skin, the gas caused an extremely painful burning sensation. I stopped rubbing. Gradually, the effects of the gas wore off.

To their credit, some of the organizers of the protest called us together. The group, or what was left of us, reformed. One of the organizers invited discussion of what to do next. We didn't know exactly what to do. We didn't know what the cops were doing or why they hadn't

tried to round us up in a mass arrest. We knew that our group was much smaller than the group that was at the rally at the time of the attack, but we didn't know what had happened to our missing comrades. This was real democracy, a "town meeting" on the field of battle.

A few people decided that they had had enough. We all agreed that there was no dishonor in those folks trying to find their way off campus. Most of us, however, decided that it would be too dangerous for us to try to leave. We figured that the cops would just pick us up one by one, and "defeat us in detail," as Napoleon might have put it. How right we were, we found out later.

The group collectively decided that our best chance was to re-form and march back to the gym site. There was relative safety in numbers, and maybe the cops would simply let us finish the rally and go home. After all, it was getting late in the day. If we were arrested, it would be as a group. Less chance for police brutality against isolated protestors that way. Better for all of us if we went to jail as a group. We would hang together so that we wouldn't hang separately. Anyway, what was I going to do? I was an out-of-stater a hundred miles from home.

Scared as I was, I formed up with the rest, and we began our march back across campus towards the gym site. As we approached the gym site, our stinging eyes were met with a wondrous site. Also marching towards Blanket Hill was another group of protestors – our missing comrades. We found out later that they had had an experience similar to ours. After being dispersed and separated from the rest of us in the gas attack, they had had a similar meeting after the attack stopped, and had similarly decided that their only chance was to regroup and head back to the construction site. Better than this, however, we saw a group of students near the fences at the gym site. They were chanting, "Cops off campus! Cops off campus!" We ascertained that the KSU students who had remained in the dorms that weekend (the University had recommended that everyone who could should go home) witnessed the attack on the protestors and had, on their own initiative, decided that enough was enough. Scores of them streamed out of the dorms and went to gym site, incensed at the brutality of the Portage County Deputy Sheriffs. What a sight for sore eyes! "Cops off campus!" got even louder as we lent our voices to the cry.

We were all feeling a lot better now. Not only had our protest re-formed at the gym site, but now there were a large number of KSU students in the fray. That was good for us, because we knew that it was one thing for the cops to beat up "outside agitators," but quite another for them to beat up students. After all, despite many similarities, this was not 1970. The police again took up defensive positions inside the chain-link fence surrounding the construction site, and many mysterious figures appeared on roof of Taylor Hall and the surrounding buildings, but they did not take offensive action against us.

It's funny, because I don't recall whether we all gathered on the Commons or somewhere on the hill or whether this information was passed by word of mouth through the ranks, but at this point we learned that attorneys representing the groups who organized the protest had met with the authorities. It turned out that when the police first began advancing across the Commons to break up our demonstration, they had also raided the off-campus RSB information center and pulled the phones out of the wall. From the get-go, then, there had no longer been anyone to help us with bail, no one to offer assistance even if we had been able to call the

emergency phone number, no one to tell the media what was happening. More, the cops had pulled buses up at all of the roads leading off campus. Their plan, as we had more or less instinctively surmised as we met in the field after the gas attack, had been to disperse us and then arrest us one by one, or group by group, as we attempted to leave campus. With no backup from our off-campus "command and control" center, we would have been defenseless, sitting ducks. The film and photographs the police had taken all day was to be used as evidence to arrest us, and then convict us, for criminal trespass and perhaps more serious offenses. (Those wearing masks would have been charged with felonies.)

It was, indeed, a very neat little dish the pigs had cooked up. The only thing that saved us was our solidarity, our collective decision to regroup after the police attack and return to the gym site to continue the protest. That, and the decision by the students to come out of their dorms and protest the police brutality. As we all converged on the gym site, the cops realized that their plan hadn't worked. Now they would have to disperse us all over again, and this time there would be KSU students to deal with in the bargain. They decided to negotiate with the attorneys.

The deal was: If we stopped the demonstration, the authorities would let us peaceably exit the campus. It wasn't a great deal, but it was the only one on the table. Besides, we had made our point. We had, in fact, protested the gym in spite of Golding's injunction and police repression. More, we had succeeded in getting the KSU students involved – or rather, the cops had done that for us. (The following day, I understand, some of these students went to the Victory Bell and began reading the Constitution out loud in violation of Golding's injunction. As many Wobblies had in times gone by, each speaker was arrested in turn, underscoring the viciousness and hypocrisy of Golding's administration and the local authorities.) Bottom line: We took the deal.

The trip back to Pittsburgh was relatively subdued, as we were exhausted. The two partied-all-night guys, as I recall, were not with us. I never did find out what happened to them. We stopped at cheap steak house to grab something to eat. (Over my protests: I was, and still am, a vegetarian, but I guess Maoists are carnivores, and it was their car....) I didn't eat, but I did gather up all of the leftover bones for my dog and stuffed them into my hooded sweatshirt pockets. I guess some of the steaks were rare, because when I got home and opened the door, my wife took one look at me and gasped. Not only was I dirty and disheveled, but the front of my sweatshirt was bloody. I assured her that I was OK. I gave the bones to my dog and went to bed exhausted, with the smell of tear gas still in my nose and the feel of tear gas still on my skin.

Before I fell asleep, I made a silent vow that I would continue to go to Kent State for every protest and every May 4 commemoration for as long as I was able. And so I have. The KSU administration can thank the Portage County Sheriff's Office and Brage Golding, in addition to the Ohio National Guard, for my annual visits to Kent State on May 4. Kent State finally got its god-damned gym on Blanket Hill, as we ultimately failed, but it also got another May 4 activist. For all of the great mathematicians that the University has employed, it never figured out this equation.

Since Then

In the mid-1980s, of course, the controversy over construction of a memorial for the May 4 victims began. In conjunction with the Tired of Waiting Committee, I organized the Remember Kent State Committee in Pittsburgh. We publicized the memorial controversy, coordinated transportation from Pittsburgh to May 4 commemorations in Kent, and organized numerous concerts in Pittsburgh to raise consciousness and money for the Kent May 4 Center. Mike Pacifico, Kendra Hicks, and Mary Mosher helped get me started and provided ongoing support. Alan Canfora spoke at some of them. These all took place between 1988 or 1989 and 1995 at various venues. Performers who graciously donated their time and talents included: Carsickness and successor band Ploughman's Lunch (and later frontman Karl Mullen, on his own), Feral Family, Damaged Pies (Steve Bodner and company), Steven E. Adams, Mark Scheer, Blindsight, Rusted Root, Anne Feeney, Bitter Delores, Tiny Little Help, Peacefield, Vinyl Back, the Earl Rays, and The Left (w/Scott Frizlen). (Apologies to anyone I've forgotten to mention.)

There were a few memorable moments. Once, at the Upstage Lounge in Oakland (near the University of Pittsburgh), Dennis Brutus, who had been shot by South African security forces and imprisoned with Nelson Mandela, Molly Rush, anti-war activist who had been imprisoned for breaking into a General Electric manufacturing facility in King of Prussia, PA, and pouring "blood" (red paint) on warheads, and Alan Canfora, who of course had been wounded by the National Guard on May 4, 1970, were all on the same stage at the same time. Amazing! In 1991, I was able to promote Alan Canfora as a speaker at a large anti-war demonstration in Pittsburgh. Alan gave an impassioned speech that was very well received, and afterwards we were both interviewed on the University of Pittsburgh's radio station.

The Remember Kent State Committee also participated in the anti-war movement in Pittsburgh during the 1991 Gulf War, including attending the huge march on Washington in January 1991. We worked with both student and nonstudent anti-war groups, and organized two busloads of Pittsburghers who attended a northeast Ohio regional anti-war demonstration at KSU. (The papers of the Remember Kent State Committee now reside in the archives at the Library of the State of Wisconsin.)

In 1995, the Remember Kent Committee ceased activity. I, however, continued to attend May 4 commemoration each year until the University took over the commemorations from the May 4 Task Force. I am proud to say that I designed the 2009 May 4 commemoration logo based on the theme "Remembering the Past, Shaping the Future."

On May 4, 2007, I had the honor of speaking at Bill Schroeder's death site in the Prentice Hall parking lot prior to the post-commemoration anti-war march.

Speech at Bill Schroeder's Death Site Prior to Anti-War March 5/4/07

I am deeply honored to have been asked to speak on behalf of Bill Schroeder today.

All good liberal arts students know that Voltaire once wrote that history is a pack of lies we play on the dead. Mindful of that, I don't want to put words in Bill's mouth that he wouldn't say or misrepresent what he might have said to us today.

I did not know Bill Schroeder. I was not here at Kent State when Bill was murdered on this spot on May 4, 1970. I was a student in Pennsylvania at the time. However, by all accounts, Bill Schroeder was a fine young man with in all likelihood a bright future before him. He was a good student, a good son, and a good friend, and was possessed of much more humanity than the uniformed thugs who gunned him down.

My understanding is that Bill was not a protestor on May 4, 1970. He was, however, deeply concerned about the Vietnam war and his country and his fellow students, and he wanted to see for himself and judge for himself the events that were unfolding on his campus. I think that it is reasonable to say that the seemingly endless conflict in Vietnam, the invasion of Cambodia, and the occupation of his campus by armed troops was at the very least causing Bill to think critically about the war, about his government, and about the right to dissent.

The great radical and song writer Phil Ochs wrote a song that included the following words:

I won't be laughing at the lies when I'm gone,
And I can't question how or when or why when I'm gone.
Can't live proud enough to die when I'm gone,
So I guess I'll have to do it while I'm here.

Bill Schroeder may not have been a student radical or an antiwar activist, but I believe that he would have agreed with the sentiment of this verse. And I believe that, were Bill alive today, he would be laughing at the lies of the Bush Administration. He would be questioning our invasion of Iraq and our concentration camps and secret torture chambers, and the slaughter of innocent Iraqi civilians, and the suppression of dissent.

Bill Schroeder is not here today. But we are. And it is up to us to do what we can while we're here. Our legs must be Bill's legs. Our hands must be Bill's hands. Our hearts must be Bill's heart. And as we march against the terrible wars in Iraq and Afghanistan today, we must live proudly enough to die – as Bill has shown us.