

MAY 4, 1970: 4 LAY DEAD AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

An Account Written By

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BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION - JUNE 1973

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

WHEN I SAW THE HELICOPTER OVERHEAD AND A MAN IN THE HELICOPTER SAYING OVER THE BULLHORN "EVACUATE THE CAMPUS IMMEDIATELY," I THOUGHT TO MYSELF.... WAR ZONE...WE'RE IN A WAR ZONE. FOUR KENT STATE STUDENTS DEAD IN OHIO - JEFFREY MILLER, ALLISON KRAUSE, WILLIAM SCHROEDER AND SANDY SCHEUER.

DURING THE WEEKEND OF FRIDAY MAY 1ST THROUGH MONDAY, MAY 4TH; TO SAY THAT THE AIR WAS THICK AND YOU COULD CUT IT WITH A KNIFE WAS AN UNDERSTATEMENT. THE ATMOSPHERE ON KENT STATE'S CAMPUS WAS SO TENSE THAT I LIKENED IT TO JUST THAT...THICK AIR. SO THICK WE COULD NOT BREATHE EMOTIONALLY. THE MONTHS AND DAYS LEADING UP TO THE MAY 4TH SHOOTINGS WERE FILLED WITH DISTRUST, PARANOIA, ANGER, INNER AND OUT REBELLION AS I REMEMBER. I SAY AS I REMEMBER BECAUSE I AM WRITING FROM MY PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE OF WHAT I SAW AND REMEMBER. I WAS A 17 YEARS OLD, FRESHMAN WHEN I STARTED AT KENT STATE IN THE FALL OF 1969. AT THE TIME OF THE MAY 4TH 1970 SHOOTINGS, I WAS ONLY 18 YEARS OLD. THIS WAS A LOT FOR ANYONE THAT AGE TO TAKE IN.

I DO REMEMBER A GROUP CALLED SDS WHICH STANDS FOR STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. THEY WERE ONE OF MANY SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS ON CAMPUS VYING FOR THEIR RIGHTS AND DEMANDS ON THE ADMINISTRATION. ALSO, THE GROUP I AM MOST FAMILIAR WITH IS BLACK UNITED STUDENTS OR BUS.

BOTH OF THESE GROUPS WERE AT THE TIME CONSIDERED MILITANT GROUPS BY THE UNIVERSITY. THE SDS WERE BASICALLY AN ANTI-WAR GROUP. THEIR MAIN INTEREST WAS TO PROTEST THE END OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM. ON THE OTHER HAND, BUS WAS INTERERESTED BLACK STUDENTS RECEIVING THEIR RIGHTS AND JUST DUE ON CAMPUS.

STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY (SDS) ON MANY OCCASIONS APPROACHED BLACK UNITED STUDENTS (BUS) REGARDING DEMONSTRATING AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM. THERE WERE RUMORS AND TALK THAT BUS WOULD JOIN SDS IN A PROTEST; BUT TALK IT WAS. THE BLACK STUDENTS HOWEVER SYMPATHIZED WITH SDS AND THE END OF THE WAR IN VIETNAM; BUT PROTESTING WAS AN ALL TOGETHER DIFFERENT STORY. BUS WAS NOT INTERESTED IN A SIT-IN OR PROTEST OF ANY KIND. THE REASON BEING WAS FEAR OF BEING TARGETED BY ANY MILITIA IN THE EVENT SOMETHING JUMPED OFF. THE BLACK STUDENTS HAD THEIR OWN ISSUES/AGENDA; AND

PROTESTING THE WAR IN VIETNAM WAS A MAJOR CONCERN BUT NOT IN THE FOREFRONT OF MORE PRESSING ISSUES FACING BLACK STUDENTS ON CAMPUS. BLACK STUDENTS FELT THEY WOULD BE A TARGET. WE WERE NOT IN A POSITION TO PUT OURSELVES COMPLETELY OUT THERE IN THE POLITICAL CLIMATE OF ANTI-WARISM OF THE 1960'S. TRAGICALLY FOR ANY STUDENT, 4 WHITE STUDENTS WERE GUNNED DOWN. I WAS IN SHOCK!! AS I AM WRITING THIS REMEMBRANCE, TEARS ARE WELLING UP. MY EMOTIONS GO BACK TO THAT VERY DAY, AND I CANNOT THINK OR SPEAK ABOUT MAY 4, 1970, WITHOUT TEARS.

BUS HAD A MEETING; HOWEVER, I DO NOT RECALL THE EXACT DATE BEFORE MAY 4TH. USUALLY THE BUS MEETINGS WERE ON A SUNDAY. THE MESSAGE GIVEN AT THAT MEETING TO ALL BLACK STUDENTS WAS TO STAY OFF THE YARD (SLANG FOR CAMPUS) THAT WEEKEND. EVERYONE FELT THAT SOMETHING SCARY WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. AS I SAID THE AIR WAS THICK. BLACK FEMALE STUDENTS WERE ADVISED TO GET AN ESCORT IF TRAVELING ACROSS CAMPUS.

THE ATMOSPHERE WAS VERY TENSE IN THE CITY OF KENT AND ON THE KENT STATE CAMPUS. THERE WAS A LOOMING FEELING OF DISASTER. I FELT SOMETHING WAS GOING TO JUMP OFF, BUT I HAD NO IDEA OF A MURDEROUS OUTCOME. I REMEMBER FEELING STRUCK BY A PHOTO IN THE KENT STATER STUDENT NEWSPAPER SOMETIME EARLIER THAT QUARTER OF A MOCK GRAVE SITE ON FRONT CAMPUS. STUDENT ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATORS MADE MOCK TOMBSTONES WITH ANTI-WAR SLOGANS AND PLACED THEM IN FRONT OF ROCKWELL HALL.

FRIDAY, MAY 1, 1970, AS I RECALL SAW RUMBLINGS DOWNTOWN KENT, OHIO. TENSIONS WERE MOUNTING AMONG STUDENTS AND SOME VIOLENCE BROKE OUT. THIS WAS THE START OF WHAT WOULD CULMINATE INTO THE HORRIFIC DEMISE AND DEATH OF 4, I BELIEVE INNOCENT STUDENTS. I REMEMBER HEARING THAT THE CITY OF KENT WAS CLOSING ALL OF THE BARS IN DOWNTOWN KENT. STUDENTS WERE EVERYWHERE AND RESTLESS. TENSION CONTINUED TO MOUNT AND SATURDAY EVENING THE ROTC BUILDING WAS SET ON FIRE AND BURNED DOWN. I, ALONG WITH OTHER STUDENTS INCLUDING A FRIEND NAMED RUFUS HEARD, WATCHED FROM MY DORMITORY IN TERRACE HALL THE ROTC BUILDING BURN DOWN. IT WAS MADE OF WOOD, SO IT DID NOT TAKE LONG. IT WAS UNREAL.

BY SUNDAY MORNING THE GUARD WAS ON CAMPUS. I BELIEVE THEY CAME LATE SATURDAY NIGHT OR EARLY SUNDAY MORNING BECAUSE WHEN I WOKE SUNDAY MORNING THEY WERE ON CAMPUS. ON SUNDAY, I SPENT MOST OF MY DAY AND WELL INTO THE NIGHT MAKING TEA AND HOT CHOCOLATE FOR FELLOW STUDENTS WHO LIVED IN TERRACE HALL OR VISITING TERRACE OR JUST HANGING OUT. I WENT TO BED VERY LATE...EXHAUSTED. NO ONE SUSPECTED OR EVEN THOUGHT THE NEXT DAY THAT 4 STUDENTS WOULD LIE DEAD.

MONDAY MORNING MAY 4, 1970, CAME QUICKLY AS I HAD BEEN UP VERY LATE. I HAD A 7:45AM FRENCH 1 CLASS AT SATTERFIELD HALL. I WAS EXHAUSTED, BUT SINCE I LOVED STUDYING FRENCH, I DID NOT WANT TO MISS THAT CLASS. AS I WALKED TO MY CLASS ACROSS THE COMMONS, I PASSED A LINE OF NATIONAL GUARDSMEN STANDING VERY ERECT AND AT ATTENTION. THEY APPEARED AS TIN SOLDIERS. MY CLASS WAS OVER AROUND 8:50AM AND I WALKED BACK TO THE DORM PASSING THE GUARD AGAIN. THEY WERE QUIET TIN SOLDIERS. I WAS SO EXHAUSTED THAT I GOT INTO THE BED OF A FRIEND'S ROOM AND WENT TO SLEEP. ABOUT 2 HOURS LATER, MY FRIEND VICKI FRANKLIN CAME INTO THE ROOM AND WAS SAYING IN A LOUD VOICE." THEY KILLED SOME STUDENTS" "THEY KILLED THE STUDENTS" AND SHE WAS TRYING TO WAKE ME BY SHAKING ME. I JUMPED UP AND HIT MY HEAD ON THE TOP BUNK. BY THEN SHE HAD RUN DOWN THE HALL. I RAN DOWN THE HALL BEHIND HER. SHE DISAPPEARED AND I AM NOT CLEAR AS TO WHERE SHE WENT. I RAN OUT OF THE FRONT DOOR OF TERRACE HALL, PASSING THE EDUCATION BUILDING ON THE RIGHT AS WELL AS ENGLEMAN HALL ON THE RIGHT TOWARDS THE COMMONS. THAT IS WHEN I SAW THE HELICOPTER OVERHEAD AND A MAN SHOUTING FROM A BULLHORN SHOUTING "EVACUATE THE CAMPUS IMMEDIATELY". I THEN THOUGHT WAR ZONE, THIS IS A WAR ZONE.

I DECIDED NOT TO GO ANY FURTHER. THAT I SHOULD NOT RUN ANY FURTHER TOWARDS THE COMMONS. I FELT IT WAS TOO DANGEROUS. I TURNED AROUND AND STARTED HEADING BACK TO TERRACE HALL. BY THE TIME I GOT BACK TO THE DORM, WITHIN A FEW MINUTES, THE DORM WAS A GHOST TOWN. HARDLY ANYONE WAS THERE. I TRIED CALLING MY BOYFRIEND DARRYL STEWART BUT ALL OF THE TELEPHONE LINES WERE JAMMING. ALL I COULD GET WAS A BUSY SIGNAL. I TRIED CALLING MY MOTHER IN CLEVELAND; AND I GOT A BUSY SIGNAL. THE PHONE SYSTEM WAS OUT.

I PACKED UP A FEW CLOTHES AND PUT THEM INTO MY MINT GREEN TRAIN CASE AND GATHERED ALL OF MY BOOKS. I THEN STARTED OUT ON CAMPUS LOOKING FOR A RIDE FROM ANYONE. I DON'T RECALL THE NAMES OF THESE YOUNG BLACK MEN; HOWEVER, THEY WERE FROM THE LEE-HARVARD AREA OF CLEVELAND. I GOT A RIDE TO CLEVELAND WITH THEM. ONCE BACK IN CLEVELAND, I CALLED MY MOTHER AND SHE CAME TO PICK ME UP. I WAS A WRECK BUT I MADE IT SAFELY HOME.

PRIOR TO LEAVING THE CAMPUS, THE MAN WITH THE BULLHORN IN THE HELICOPTER WAS ANNOUNCING TO STUDENTS TO TAKE THEIR BOOKS, ETC. HOME WITH THEM. WE WERE EVENTUALLY SENT INFORMATION BY THE UNIVERSITY THAT WE WOULD FINISH OUT THE QUARTER CORRESPONDING WITH OUR PROFESSORS BY MAIL. THERE WERE ONLY A FEW WEEKS LEFT IN THE QUARTER ANYWAY, SO WE BASICALLY REMOTELY FINISHED OUT THE QUARTER BY STUDYING AND DOING OUR LESSONS, WRITING PAPERS AND TAKING FINALS AT HOME.

AFTER ABOUT A FEW WEEKS OR SO, WE RECEIVED CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE UNIVERSITY THAT WE COULD COME DOWN AND PICK UP OUR REMAINING BELONGINGS. THE STUDENTS WERE SCHEDULED TO COME IN GROUPS BROKEN DOWN BY ALPHABET SO THAT ALL OF THE STUDENTS WOULD NOT BE BACK ON CAMPUS AT THE SAME TIME. DEPENDING ON THE FIRST LETTER IN YOUR LAST NAME WOULD DETERMINE WHEN YOU WERE SCHEDULED TO RETURN TO THE CAMPUS.

WHEN I FINALLY DID GET BACK TO PICK UP MY BELONGINGS, I BELIEVE IT WAS SOME TIME IN LATE JUNE 1970. IT APPEARED THAT ALL OF THE ROOMS HAD BEEN SEARCHED. THE DRAWERS TO MY DRESSER HAD BEEN PULLED OUT AND LOOKED RANSACKED. IT WAS SAID BY SOME THAT THE FBI HAD GONE THROUGH EVERYONE'S ROOM LOOKING FOR ANTI-WAR PROPAGANDA. I AM NOT SURE HOW MUCH OF THAT IS TRUE.

IN THE FALL OF 1970 WHEN WE RETURNED FOR CLASSES, I COULD SENSE A FEELING OF FEAR. YOU COULD HEAR A PIN DROP. IT WAS NOT THE SAME. OUR INNOCENCE ALL GONE. BUT FOR PEOPLE BORN FROM 1948 THROUGH 1958, INNOCENCE WAS FLEETING ANYWAY. WE HAD ALL EXPERIENCED THE PROPAGANDA WITH KRUSHCHEV SAYING RUSSIA WOULD BURY THE UNITED STATES WITH NUCLEAR BOMBS, THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, COLD WAR PROPAGANDA, AIR RAID SIRENS WHERE CHILDREN HAD TO TAKE COVER IN THE BASEMENT OF THEIR SCHOOLS IN THE EVENT OF A NUCLEAR STRIKE ON THE UNITED STATES, THE OUTBREAK OF POLIO AND EVERYONE HAVING TO TAKE THE SABINE ORAL VACCINE, THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY, ROBERT KENNEDY, MARTIN LUTHER KING, THE MURDER OF MALCOLM X, MAJOR METROPOLITAN CITY RACE RIOTS WITH NATIONAL GUARDS ON HAND, AND NOW MAY 4TH....FOUR DEAD IN OHIO. WHO WOULD HAVE BELIEVED THAT 4 STUDENTS WOULD BE SHOT AND LYING DEAD FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE. NO THIS COULD NOT HAPPEN IN AMERICA. BUT IT DID AND SINCE THEN WE HAVE ALL LOST A SENSE OF INNOCENCE.

WE WON'T FORGET MAY 4TH. WE WILL NOT FORGET JEFFREY MILLER, ALLISON KRAUSE, WILLIAM SCHROEDER AND SANDY SCHEUER AND THE NINE OTHERS WHO WERE INJURED – ALAN CANFORA, JOHN CLEARY, THOMAS GRACE, DEAN KAHLER, JOSEPH LEWIS, DONALD SCOTT MACKENZIE, JAMES RUSSELL, ROBERT STAMPS, AND DOUGLAS WRENTMORE...NO NOT EVER. NEVER.

THIS ESSAY WAS WRITTEN 50 YEARS LATER – MAY 4, 2020. THE 50 YEAR MAY 4TH MEMORIAL WAS CANCELLED DUE TO COVID 19.

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