

Larry Raines, Personal Narrative

It was 10:30 PM, Sunday, May 3, 1970 when a knock came at my door. It was Dean Kahler who lived two doors down from me in Wright Hall. He joined our lively discussion, the topic having to do with the National Guard and their militant stance on campus. After the breakup of the early evening rally, the National Guard ordered that no one was allowed outside any of the campus buildings. As a result of this dictate, four displaced students, who couldn't get to their apartments, were using my room to sleep in.

Dean asked to talk to me in private, so we went to the student lounge. Dean, a freshman, had a question about the anti-war rally that was being planned for Monday, May 4th. He said, "I want to go to the rally, but I don't want to get into any trouble. I'm a little perplexed, what should I do?" I was a sophomore and had been involved in a few other anti-war demonstrations at Kent State and on the campus of the University of Buffalo. I suggested to Dean that if he wanted to go, then he should keep his eyes on me at all times. I had a sixth sense of knowing when to get out before the conflict got too out of hand. After a few minutes of discussing our plans for staying together on Monday, we went back into my room.

It was a sunny day, May 4th, as we walked through the Prentice Hall parking lot on our way to the Commons for the rally. (Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that in 45 minutes I would be right back there with blood on my hands.) From his jacket Dean pulled out a plastic bag with two blue bandannas soaking in water. He gave one to me. It was a good idea, that way, we could fight off the effects of the tear gas we both knew was going to permeate the air. Although we were laughing and mocking the establishment, I was somewhat apprehensive about the rally. As we descended Blanket Hill to the Commons, Dean and I joined other students, who at that time were chanting anti-war slogans, such as "Pigs Off Campus, and No More War!"

Dean had a smile on his face as he was yelling and taunting the National Guard to get off campus. This was like a game of dare, he showed none of the anxieties of the night before. The order to disperse came and the tear gas followed. We were prepared. Out came our bandannas, which we used to cover our mouths and noses to filter the gas. The protective covering did make a difference, we were able to withstand the choking effect of the gas for a reasonable amount of time. The troops began their approach to break up the rally. We ran up Blanket Hill toward the Prentice Hall parking lot. When I got to the middle of the parking lot and stopped running, I realized that Dean and I had become separated.

The National Guard had moved onto the football practice field. I was in the group along the fence, bordering the parking lot and the practice sport field. There were several

students, including myself, who began throwing rocks, missing our targets by a considerable distance. When the National Guard shot tear gas canisters into the crowd, a couple of people picked up these canisters and threw them back at the guard, and the Guard, in turn, threw the gas back at us.

At the same time the National Guard began their retreat up to the top of Blanket Hill, I was in the parking lot moving in a parallel direction with them. The shooting began as I reached the lamppost where the access road meets the sidewalk leading up to Taylor Hall and on past the pagoda. At first, I thought it was just more tear gas, but as I turned to run, 10 yards to my right, I saw a student, Jeffrey Miller, fall to the pavement with blood gushing from his body. Cognizant that they were shooting real bullets, I took cover behind the first car I could find, a Volkswagen. As I looked up, I saw a friend, Michael Brock, carrying a wounded student out of the line of fire, that student was Tom Grace. Tom was the very first person I met when I came to Kent State for freshman orientation. (To this day, Michael, Tom and I, all living in Buffalo, NY, are still friends and keep in touch.)

The shooting subsided after 13 seconds and 67 bullets having been fired by the National Guard, but it seemed more like minutes. My first reaction was one of shock; I had never before seen violent death. The scene was grotesque, blood flowing out from the wounded and dead students. Incredible hysteria and confusion exploded. I just stood there for a few moments, in a dazed state of mind and panned the area looking for Dean. As I started walking around to see if I could help with the wounded, I came upon Sandy Scheuer's body, her spirit for life no more. I knelt down and touched her head and cried, "Why Sandy?" She was one of the most non-political students I knew. All she wanted to do was smile, have a good time and get an education. Her innocence was always exhilarating, so enlivening. I will never forget that last time I saw her.

I wiped away my tears and used my jacket to dry my hands of her blood. Ambulances had arrived and began the process of taking the wounded and dead away. I finally re-encountered Dean. He was already on a stretcher being wheeled to an ambulance. A paramedic said that he had been hit in the back. The paramedic pointed to the location where Dean was shot, which would have placed him about 20 yards from where Jeffrey Miller was killed and 30 yards, in a direct line, from where I stood when the shooting commenced. That sole bullet took away the use of Dean's legs and has confined him to a wheelchair. (Whenever I think back, I wonder how different things would have been if only he had stayed with me those last few moments.)

I headed back to the Commons after watching Dean's ambulance drive off. Once there, I drifted toward Steve Sharoff, who was one of the student anti-war leaders, and a faculty member, Professor Glenn W. Frank. Hundreds of students were just sitting on the hill; you could feel the grief, you could see the disbelief on their faces. Everyone was stunned. No one was threatening the National Guard at this time, no one knew what to do, the shock was just too much to overcome. Professor Frank, Steve and I approached a National Guardsman. We pleaded with him to allow the students to remain peacefully on Blanket Hill and for the guard to withdraw from any further military action. This

National Guardsman, holding his baton in both hands, defiantly and contemptuously, said, "Move them out or else!" Perceiving that we were dealing with a madman, a group of us including the Student and Faculty Marshalls began to move the students off Blanket Hill and the Commons. I was stupefied that the National Guard was unnecessarily willing to take more innocent lives. (It's a sad commentary when American soldiers are killing American citizens on American soil.)

Dean has always maintained that he went to the rally by himself, and because of that contention, my connection to him has never been historically established. None of the investigating agencies ever subpoenaed or even sought to question me.

When the National Guard opened fire on us, they brought the war home for all of America to see. The back door to Viet Nam was violently pushed opened. It was no longer just the war being fought in the jungles of Viet Nam or on our TV's. What erupted was an intensified civil war on the streets and college campuses all over the country. Its soldiers were us, the middle class citizens, the life blood of any revolution. With the killing and wounding of 13 students, Kent State became the rallying cry for a nation's fight to stop the senseless massacre in Viet Nam. Student protests across the country erupted with the singular objective being to force the government to end the genocide in Viet Nam. A mobilized American public in response to the shootings at Kent State adversely affected the government's war policy from that point on. Kent State University, on May 4, 1970, was the beginning of the end of the Viet Nam War.

All of us who were witness to this atrocity went through many emotional and political changes. I resigned my position as assistant manager of the school basketball team, so that I could devote all my efforts into having my voice heard on the issues of Viet Nam. In becoming an active participant in the struggle, and to show my solidarity with the movement, some of my undertakings were, organizing a fund raiser for students and faculty members that had been indicted (Kent 25) and traveling to Washington, DC, numerous times to confront the administration's war policy. In May, 1971, after disrupting a ROTC Award Day, I was indicted and arrested for that particular political showdown. However, no matter what actions I was involved in, I always believed that our civil disobedience was righteous.

The events that occurred in 1970 continue to have a profound impact and influence on my daily life. We made a difference that day. We made the country stand up and take notice.

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