

May 4th Recollection

In the spring of 1970 I was a junior nursing student and my husband was a 5th year architecture student. We lived off campus in the trailer park about ½ mile from campus. We were busy full-time students raising our 3 year old son and were not active in the usual student extra-curricular activities, including protests.

On Saturday, May 2nd we learned about the previous night's disturbances in downtown Kent from a phone call we received from my parents living in Erie, Pa. We assured them we were fine and not involved in any way, but we began paying attention to what was happening. On Saturday evening we could hear the sirens and later see the glow of the fire at the ROTC building. Soon there were helicopters with searchlights flying overhead. On Sunday, we drove around campus and town and saw tanks, jeeps, guardsmen, and signs of the disturbances of the previous nights.

On Monday morning, May 4th I went to my 8AM nursing class which was held at the Newman Center on campus and my husband took our son to daycare in Twin Lakes before going to his classes at Taylor Hall. My plan for the day was to attend class, study at the library and meet my husband around 1 pm to get the car, run errands and pick-up our son later in the afternoon. My only remaining class that day was in the evening.

Around 10 am I headed to the library and somewhere along the way learned that there was to be a noon rally protesting the presence of the National Guard on campus. I decided to proceed to the library as planned but to leave early to "see what was happening". Shortly before noon I headed to The Commons and found National Guard soldiers with and without gas masks adjacent to the burned ROTC building, a jeep, and tear gas going back and forth across the field. The students/protesters were at the bottom of the hill below Taylor Hall and many other students were transiting between classes and/or observing what was happening.

I decided to make my way around the Commons on a sidewalk that took me toward Prentice and Taylor Halls. I failed to notice the direction of the wind and as I made my way, I experienced the unpleasant effects of being tear gassed. I also noticed that most of the protesters seemed to benefit from the blowing wind while the onlookers did not. At this time, the National Guard began their march across the field and around the other side of Taylor Hall. As I approached Prentice Hall I tried to enter a backdoor in order to get away from the gas. I was denied entrance because I was not a resident. So I proceeded up the hill and into the adjacent parking lot. I passed 3 National Guardsmen standing casually in the parking lot and said "hello" to them. I noticed that the large group of guardsmen that had marched across the Commons were now entering the practice football field surrounded by fencing on 2 sides.

At this point I stopped to "take it all in". It was a warm, sunny spring day. There were students lying on "Blanket Hill" enjoying themselves. There were some protesters yelling. I, personally, did not witness rock throwing, but there was quite a distance between the Guard and the protesters. Finally, there were hundreds of students just passing through the area, likely on their

way to class or lunch. Some stopped to watch, many just walked through. It is worth mentioning that I was standing in the parking lot near Taylor Hall about midway across its width. Since that day and after a recent visit to see the memorials I can say with certainty that I was equidistant between Jeff Miller and Allison Krause, perhaps 6-8 yards from each.

I watched the guard mull about the field. They did not seem to have a plan. They had gas masks, rifles with bayonets, and tear gas. I was fascinated, but unafraid. It DID NOT occur to me that I was in danger!!! When the guard decided to move, they marched slowly with their rifles pointed forward. I decided that I could gain a better vantage point from the 4th floor design studio in Taylor Hall because of the large windows around the building. I ran, perhaps 15 yards, to the building and up 4 flights of stairs and found my husband and friends. As I approached the windows, the firing began. I saw guardsmen around the pagoda. Having never in my life heard actual gun fire I did not recognize it as such, but when I turned the other way and saw the body in the road with blood flowing downhill, I knew that something terrible was happening. We also saw students tending to the person at the base of the metal sculpture and others in the parking lot I had just left. I saw the girl screaming and the boy with the flag jumping in the blood. I thought somebody needs to call an ambulance. Somebody needs to stop the bleeding. Somebody needs to do CPR. It DID NOT occur to me that I was present and could do any of those things! It was more like I was watching television.

After the shooting we watched in stunned silence until the ambulances left the scene. At that point my husband and I left the building, ran through the parking lot where many of the injuries and all of the death occurred and drove to the daycare center. We took the side streets through Kent and it was surreal. People were casually walking about, riding bikes and cutting the grass. How could that be? We just witnessed the most awful thing we had ever seen and all these people were just doing normal things? We reached the daycare and everything was normal there as well! We told them why we were early and what (we thought) we had seen. That created quite a stir since many of the workers had family and friends that were also connected to the university.

When we got back home, friends were milling about our home and yard. The TV and radio were on. We heard that there had been a shooting on campus and that guardsmen were dead. REALLY? That is not what we saw! Chaos reigned. We hung on every word. Nothing was making sense. About 3:30 pm the telephone rang and I answered it. I heard my hysterical mother saying, "you're OK. you're ok." I responded, "Of course" and immediately hung up on her. She had been trying for 3 hours to get the call through!! It was not until later that evening, on the CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite that I heard Ike Pappas report the story of the shooting at Kent State, and I finally understood that what I had seen really happened.

Written: May 3, 2020