

May 4, 1970. The high school senior class president ran from classroom to classroom, voice trembling with emotion, "Students have been shot and killed at Kent State University!" Everyone froze in a stunned silence. A few classmates began to cry.

My small hometown of Salem, Ohio was home to a KSU branch campus. Most of my contemporaries were first-generation college students. Local working-class parents were able to fulfill their dreams of sending their children to college because the branch campus enabled students to live at home for two years, making the cost of a college education more affordable.

Those of us sitting in our high school classes knew individuals who attended KSU on the main campus. Many of my classmates had siblings on campus that day, and were consumed by the shock and unknowing. The rest of the school day was a blur of fear and confusion.

It was the end of my junior year. My fellow classmates and I were in the midst of an exhilarating, new ritual - applying for college. Summer plans included visiting potential colleges. It was a time of fantasizing about college : exploring new academic areas, making new friends, and encountering unimaginable new possibilities. These fantasies were horrifically shattered by the ugly reality of violence.

My age cohort had experienced the trauma of the assassination of a young, charismatic president who represented hope for a better society. We were further disillusioned by the shooting of Martin Luther King, another energizing leader challenging the status quo. And now, our own tribe was under fire, literally. Our coming-of-age had witnessed the assassinations of leaders, the frightening Vietnam war draft, and now the shooting of student protestors and bystanders. What should have been a time of unbounded youthful idealism, had been forever scarred by fear and anger. It was the end of my short-lived innocence.

Christie Anderson
Kent resident since 1975