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Subject: May 4 story
Date: 22. October 2021 at 12:19
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On my tenth birthday on the last day of April 1970, President Nixon announced that he would send troops into Cambodia, setting off an exciting weekend of student protest at Kent State. It started on May 1st, a warm Friday night. I was sleeping over at my oldest friend Nancy's house, and just as we were drifting off to sleep, we heard lots of yipping and yelling and glass breaking from the direction of downtown. Huddled together in the big pink bed, I tried to comfort Nancy, who was terrified because she thought that Indians were attacking Kent. I reassured her that such a thing would never happen, but I lay awake for quite some time listening to this mysterious ruckus, imagining a big Sioux wielding his tomahawk and breaking into the window to scalp me and the Clarks. Would he spare my life if I told him that the Indians were my personal heroes, and I always rooted for them over the cowboys in Westerns?

The next day, we all went downtown to see the damage. I found out that it wasn't Indians, but "jerks", as my mom succinctly put it, who caused the mess. It was pretty thrilling to see broken windows in everyday drug and dime stores, as well as the big bank on Main Street. We had to be careful not to step on the shattered glass that lay all over the sidewalks. The front page of our local paper, The Record-Courier, was covered with photos of downtown that day.

That night, the excitement escalated even more. Someone set fire to the ROTC building, and we went out on our porch and watched the orange glow in the sky. A bunch of neighbors gathered and some started saying things like, "They ought to shoot those hippie troublemakers." My mom pulled me closer to her when such comments were made, and calmly said, "Your father and I used to drink coffee in that building when we were students."

The next day, things were relatively quiet. After church at St. Pat's, my mom was picking up groceries at Sparkle Market and we saw Governor Rhodes and what looked to us like tanks in front of the police station. We drove up to the campus to see the burned wreckage of the the ROTC building. The students were walking around in the spring sunshine and one seemed to be that angry. The Harrison kids and my siblings and I went to our school to see the Guardsmen. They were friendly to us, and let us eat some of the doughnuts that the Salvation Army had provided for them. We sat on a little hill outside of our school and watched the soldiers playing on our monkey bars and merry-go-rounds. They were laughing and enjoying themselves and it looked to me just like recess. Later on, my mother came by to walk us home. She struck up a conversation with one of the young Guardsmen who had joined us on the little hill. He was very nice and looked exhausted, and I was transfixed by his combat fatigues and the string of ammunition he had casually slung across his shoulder. "You must be very tired," my mother said to him sympathetically; the Guards had just gotten off a long week of duty at a violent trucker's strike in Akron. "Yes, ma'am", he answered, "I'm so tired I'd shoot at just about anything right now." He even let us hold a bullet in our hands, and we were struck by the weight of it. After that, my mom took us home. My Uncle Ed, who was in the National Guard and working at the trucker's strike, flew his helicopter over our house that night, as he often did when he was in the area, as a way of saying hello.

We had a curfew that evening in the town, and for me and my little brother, it added a whole new dimension to our neighborhood games of "Cops and Robbers", because we had real live tanks and uniformed men with ammo in town, and police cars driving around announcing curfews on bullhorns. I remember rolling down a hill, running behind a tree, and holding my cap gun up to the side of my face, while the theme song from "Mannix" thronged in my head. We felt like lawbreakers ignoring the curfew, but of course our moms called us all in.

That night things got really crazy. Helicopters circled the sky with search lights. One of our neighbor's sons went out in his front yard to talk with some friends who drove by, and the cops were there in no time to warn them about the curfew. My older sisters and I hung out of the window, drinking in the mayhem. It was a hot night, and the helicopters were so noisy that sleep was an impossibility. I kept wanting to run outside to see if I would get arrested. Sometimes we would wave to the choppers, and a searchlight would flash into my room, flooding it with bright light. We would scream with delight and terror. I wondered where Uncle Ed was.

A family friend, a music student who rented a basement apartment from my mom's friend Lib Fleming, who lived 3 doors down, passed my window that night and we yelled down to him. We had nicknamed him "the Fiddler" as he was a violinist, and he's just been up at the dorms entertaining some of the students in curfew there. He stopped for a brief conversation, and then we said he better get home because of "the Fuzz". He gave us a friendly good-bye and went on his way. Seconds later, two neighbor men came running by, one wielding a golf club and the other a rolled up newspaper. "Don't worry, Guenveur," they shouted, "We'll save you!" We shrieked with laughter at the absurdity of it and ran downstairs to tell our mom. She was not amused however; her face went ashen and she ran out the door saying,

"My god, they're going to beat the Fiddler up!" She returned a few minutes later, telling us that the Fiddler had made it home safely - the "protectors" had run into an irate Mrs. Fleming, who opened her front door to see them with their weapons raised, and hollered out in her booming Texan drawl, "What in the Sam Hill goin' on here?!" They sheepishly crept home. We also heard throngs of students angrily chanting anti-war slogans a few blocks away on the intersection of Main and Lincoln, "Hell No, We Won't Go", but eventually it was just the sounds of the helicopters.

Needless to say, we didn't get much sleep that night, and I found out the next day in school that most of my class didn't, either. May 4th was a bright, warm, fragrant day, and none of us did a very good job of of paying attention to our teacher's lessons. Larry even fell asleep in class at one point, laying his head on his desk, grasping his ever-present book of Edgar Allen Poe stories. Tammy had to get something from her locker, and when she came back, she reported in a shaky voice that she had seen "a hippie walking down the hall with a rock in his hand!" That did it. Our teacher, Mrs. Strawman, promptly devised a drill which entailed specific hiding spaces in the cupboards and closet where we would silently gather when the hippies inevitably came to take over Walls Elementary School. A fever pitch of excitement was starting to rise among us. This sure as heck beat studying arithemetic any day!

After lunch, David's mom came by the class to pick him up. She wanted David to be safe at home from the "major riot" that was suddenly engulfing our town. One by one, worried parents came by to fetch their children, and finally the stern principal (whose office my mother marched into a few years prior, when he refused to lower theflag to half mast after Martin Luther King, jr's death) came on the loudspeaker and gravely announced that school was canceled for the rest of the day. Hooray! Mr. Harrison, a beloved education professor, came by for me and my brother, and Alita and her brother and sister, and we took a thrilling and mysterious walk home. Mr. Harrison seemed anxious and quiet, not at all his usual lively self. Alita and I occasionally fell behind the pack to feel dangerous. We saw no signs of this "major riot", but people seemed to be acting funny. When we rounded the corner to Edgewood Drive, one of the neighborhood housewives was out on the sidewalk hysterically yelling something about "the hippies putting LSD in the water supply."

John and I said good-bye to the Harrisons and entered the haven of our home. We were told to stay inside, and we started to feel a bit scared. Our usually tidy kitchen was a mess - the table was full of unwashed soup bowls, and our mother was nowhere to be found. Polly and Sally soon arrived home, and they told us about the crazy things people had been shouting on the streets on the way home from Davey Junior High. Among the rumors were that the Black Panthers had taken over Kent, and there were snipers on the rooftops downtown. I just wanted my mom to come home. Where was she? There was a major riot out there! Was she helping the hippies in their conquest of the schools and businesses of our community? We turned on our local radio station, WKNT, to get some answers. There were warnings to stay away from the windows, as if gunfire was all around us.

My mom came home soon, to our vast relief. She seemed shaken up. She and my friend Lisa's mom had apparently been running through Dix's woods across from our house as a shortcut to the school. They were both clad in jeans, and a helicopter was hovering over them, following them on their panicked journey. My mom was sure that someone from this chopper was going to shoot them, seeing as they looked like radicals on the run. I held my breath in terror for a moment - I had come this close to being an orphan. What was happening here? We asked my mom about the mess in the kitchen. She told us that Uncle Ed and some of his National Guard friends had eaten lunch at our house. She had just finished driving them to the KSU airport when she heard on the car radio that there had been some shootings up on campus. She barely made it back to Kent due to traffic blockades.

The rest of the afternoon we sat and listened to WKNT in stunned disbelief. The first accounts of the shootings reported that two Guardsmen and two students had been shot; the local paper even had that as their headline. Gradually it was revised to four students who had died. They weren't sure of the identities and kept changing the names. One minute it would be Sandy Schroeder, the next it would be William Schneider. Finally the names of the four dead were established: William Schroeder, Sandy Scheuer, Allison Krause and Jeffrey Miller. By the time evening approached, the television news had started its coverage, and we were riveted to it. The same shots of the ambulance wailing its siren and flying down a road into the campus were shown over and over again, until I developed an anxious stomachache. Kent was even on the national news with Walter Cronkite that night, which secretly thrilled me. We were famous! I became fascinated with Allison Krause's boyfriend, Barry, who was interviewed just outside of the emergency room. He seemed dazed and tired, like it hadn't really hit him yet that his girlfriend was dead, and I felt sorry for him.

The next day, school was canceled. "Hurray, no school today because of the major riot!" I scribbled in my diary. It was a grim, rainy day and my mother and older sisters were very depressed. I was excited because Kent was on the Today Show. How strange to hear the familiar,

authoritative voice of Frank Blair saying the name of our town, along with Cambodia. Polly and Sally made black armbands, with the number four written in white, to wear the next day at school. I wanted to wear one, too, but my mom wouldn't let me.

I don't really recall what went on in my school when we went back. It just seemed like so many townspeople, even some of our neighbors, had gone nuts overnight, saying things like, "They should have shot 'em all" and "the girls that died were pregnant and filthy" and "the Guardsmen should be thanked for protecting our community." Even when Father Loperfido included the dead students in our prayers at the end of the mass that Sunday, someone stood up and accused him of being a Communist. I was very confused by this - surely everyone adored college students. They made Kent such a colorful and fun place to live, and they shopped at those cool stores where we bought incense, like the Green Gas House. Polly and Sally got in trouble at school for wearing their armbands, and every day Sally came home from school in tears because some classmates were taunting her and calling her "a pinko Commie". For the millionth time, I asked my mother what a communist was, and didn't understand her answer. Life magazine came out with a cover photo of a wounded student clutching his stomach in pain, and my mom recognized him as one of the students she taught in a course up at the Kent State "Experimental College", and said he was a very quiet, well-mannered boy.

I realized that something tragic had happened to the students, and to our town, but as much as I tried, I couldn't quite grasp the true horror of it, not like my older sisters, my mother, or the Harrisons. I felt sorry for the students who died, and I would stare at the their high school photos in the papers and magazines, thinking that when they were taken, they would have no idea that they would be dead in a few years, and so many strangers across the world would see their faces, forever frozen in a black and white wholesome smile. Allison Krause looked so pretty with her dark sweater and pearls, her shoulder length shiny brunette hair with the perfect "That Girl" flip. But she was nineteen, I would tell myself, she led a full life. It's not like she was a kid, I would reason. And these students were now just as famous as the Kennedys and Martin Luther King, jr. now. They were probably hundreds of other girls and boys staring at their pictures like me, memorizing their features. This will make them immortal, I thought, so I made a vow to remember them every single day for the rest of my life, just as I did with my enigma of a late father, a beloved Kent State sociology professor who had died 9 years previous after a car accident.

I wondered about the Guardsmen we had seen on that balmy day before the shootings, goofing around on our playground. And what about that exhausted one who my mom had talked to? Had he fired one of the fatal bullets? We knew that Uncle Ed had been with my mother at the time of the shootings, so we didn't have to worry about what he might have done.

The university closed down early that year, and soon school was ending for us as well. The thrill of an entire summer lay ahead for us - long, lazy days of swimming and playing Chinese jump rope and planning battles against Willow Street, muggy evenings of Cops and Robbers, Ghost in the Graveyard, and Flashlight Tag. And of course playing Frisbee with the Fiddler, as well as maybe spying on a new tenant at Mrs. Fleming's.

The summer of 1970 did indeed play itself out like every summer before it. I saw my favorite composer, Aaron Copland conducting his pieces at the Blossom Music Center with the Cleveland Orchestra. I slept over at Nancy's several times, turned my room into a veterinary practice with the name "Dr. Rowie", and even played Guardsmen and Students with my brother and his friend Steve. The boys were the Guardsmen and I yelled, "Pigs off campus!" to them, and fell to my death in the parking lot when they shot me. We spied on and befriended Jeff, the new English grad student in Mrs. Fleming's basement apartment. When we got to know him well, we recognized him in the background of the cover photo on Life magazine, but he denied it was him. He did the same thing when we found a photo of him at the rally in another magazine. I couldn't understand why he wouldn't admit to it. I'd be thrilled to have my photo in a national publication and anyone connected to this event was close to a movie star to me. Jeff never wanted to talk about it, though. It was a touchy subject for a lot of people. My mother got angrier every day when she read the letters to the editor in the local paper. It was the first time I remember reading the paper myself, because I was so mystified by the hateful letters.

Finally, in late summer, the campus was reopened. My Uncle Ed and Aunt Joan and their three boys visited and we all went up to see the site of the shootings for the first time. Polly refused to go for political reasons, so she stayed home to make a felt bird puppet. We kids were thrilled by the sight of the bullet hole in the metal sculpture, and the marks on the trees where the bark had been blasted off. But the sight that left the biggest impression on me was the huge bloodstain where Jeffrey Miller had died. They tried to sandblast it away, but you could still see it. I think I even knelt down and touched it with a strange reverence. Jeffrey was the most recognizable image of that awful day, his prone and lifeless body lying in the pool of blood while a young girl kneeled next to him and screamed in anguish. This image was so utterly etched into my mind, and

him and screamed in anguish. This image was so utterly etched into my mind, and so standing on that spot filled with an odd combination of awe and nausea. Naturally, this set off a treasure hunt for other blood stains in the parking lot, but we ended up pointing to things like oil marks from cars, examining them closely for signs of gore. When we got home and told Polly about it, she was disgusted by what "vultures" we were and didn't want to talk about it. She had plans of her own to make silk-screen T-shirts with the image of the famous photo of Jeffrey and the girl, as a political statement.

Although I was only 10 years old at the time, this event had a lifelong effect on me - a general distrust of the American government, and the realization that even something as horrifying as innocent kids being shot could bring out the worst in people. I've since come to realize that not every Kentite grew up in a household like mine, closely connected to the university and to students, and a lot of folks were truly terrified and confused that the 'hippies' were out to wreak havoc on our town and the country as a whole. To this day, like many Kent kids of that era, when I hear helicopters, especially on a spring day, I think of that weekend and the terrible, tragic ending of the story.