

I was 15 in 1970 and living and going to Southampton High School. We had moved every few years before that. Dad got a good job at Southampton College, teaching and we all loved the East End. Dad had taken me to several anti-war protests in Washington and New York by then.

I was pretty happy-go-lucky at 15. It was really cool to make the scene at the protests at the National Mall and the Sheep Meadow in Central Park. I certainly didn't have the level of commitment that Dad did. It was around that time that I realized that the lapel pin my father had worn for as long as I can remember said peace in many different languages.

I never could understand the war mentality that seemed to be in power at that time both Democrats and Republicans. My older brother graduated from college and was very concerned about the draft. He did not want to go and risk his life on the other side of the world for no good reason. He went all the way to induction when he didn't pass the physical.

A very popular boy in town had died in Nam. My best friend's older brother was over there. My best friend and I were 11 when we met and I didn't meet his older brother John Kupidloski until I was 18.

The popular logic for why the war should continue was the danger of the domino effect. You know the one. If Viet Nam fell to the Communists then the Communists would continue through the Pacific Islands right to our shores in Hawaii and California. Of course, it's been close to fifty years since the war in Viet Nam ended and that hasn't happened.

I remember clearly where I was when I saw the news about Kent State on May 4th. It was just like knowing where I was when the Kennedy's were shot, both John and Bobby. I had gotten Bobby's autograph a few years before when he was running for the Senate he came to our town.

But it came on the TV there were 4 college students that were killed at Kent State. These were kids not much older than me. I had protested, and they were shot for protesting. I didn't know where Kent State was. Hell, I barely knew where Ohio was. But I sat in disbelief and cried. How was this possible?

My motivation to protest was raised. I no longer went to make the scene. I felt deeply that the war in Viet Nam was immoral and the dead kids in Ohio were proof that the right, who always wanted to claim the moral high ground had no morals. And let's be clear the Democrats in power in those years were just as far right as any Republicans from my point of view.

May 4th, 1970 was a day that changed the world.

Randy Burke