

but it can apparently fry your brains as well."

15 During an 11-day siege of national antiwar protests, violence again erupts at a college campus when two black youths are gunned down by police at Jackson State College in Mississippi. Before the month is out, students and activists will be joined by the AFL-CIO, a New York City lawyers group and 43 Nobel Laureates in denouncing U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

South Africa is officially banned from all Olympic competition because of its apartheid policies.

22 Responding to uncomplimentary media coverage, Vice President Spiro Agnew attacks the *New York Times* and a number of other publications, calling them left-wing, self-appointed guardians who would run the U.S. themselves.

1970 JUNE

3 President Nixon claims that the Cambodian incursions have been among the most successful of the Vietnam conflict and stresses that all forces will withdraw from Cambodia by June 30.

Singer Ray Davies rerecords two words on the Kinks' hit "Lola," replacing "Coca-Cola" with "cherry cola," to circumvent BBC product-endorsement regulations.

7 The Who perform their rock opera *Tommy* at New York City's Metropolitan Opera House.

13 Top of the charts: the Beatles' "Long and Winding Road" (pop single) and *Let It Be* (pop album).

14 Embarking on a tour of Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland, Blood, Sweat & Tears become the first U.S. rock band to perform behind the Iron Curtain.

15 The Supreme Court upholds the right of an individual to claim conscientious-objector status if that objection applies to all wars.

16 Ten months after the Tate-La Bianca murders, jury selection for the Charles Manson trial begins in California.

Chicago Bears star Brian Piccolo dies of cancer at age 26.

24 The U.S. Senate repeals the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin resolution, which allowed the president to treat the Vietnam conflict as a war.

chrissie hynde on kent state

I WAS A FRESHMAN at Kent State University in Ohio in 1970 and, as I recall, the weekend before the shootings was kind of a blast for us students: The National Guard was shooting tear gas, and we were throwing the canisters back at them. Students were ripping up sheets and dipping them in water, showing us how to put them on our faces for protection. It was like a crash course in how to deal with the military – with tear gas. The Guardsmen had put up big Cyclone fences, and a bunch of guys were jumping against them until they had pushed the stakes over far enough so that the fences were nearly horizontal and you could jump on them like you would a trampoline – people were running up and bouncing off. It was crazy – everyone was out of their heads, and we actually had fun, in a way. I hate to say that, but I was eighteen – just a kid who had been in high school a year earlier.

I don't want to be flippant about it, but I still don't know exactly why the shootings happened at Kent State. I believe they were a horrible, horrible mistake, and I don't think anyone ever really understood why it all turned out the way it did. I still have a pretty good grasp of the proceedings, though, since I saw it all firsthand.

I started going to Kent State in the summer of 1969, when I was seventeen, and I guess you could have called me a little hippie. I had already embraced the free-love, vegetarian, barefoot, flower child sort of thing and had been reading books by Jack Kerouac and on Zen Buddhism before I was even getting drunk or having sex.

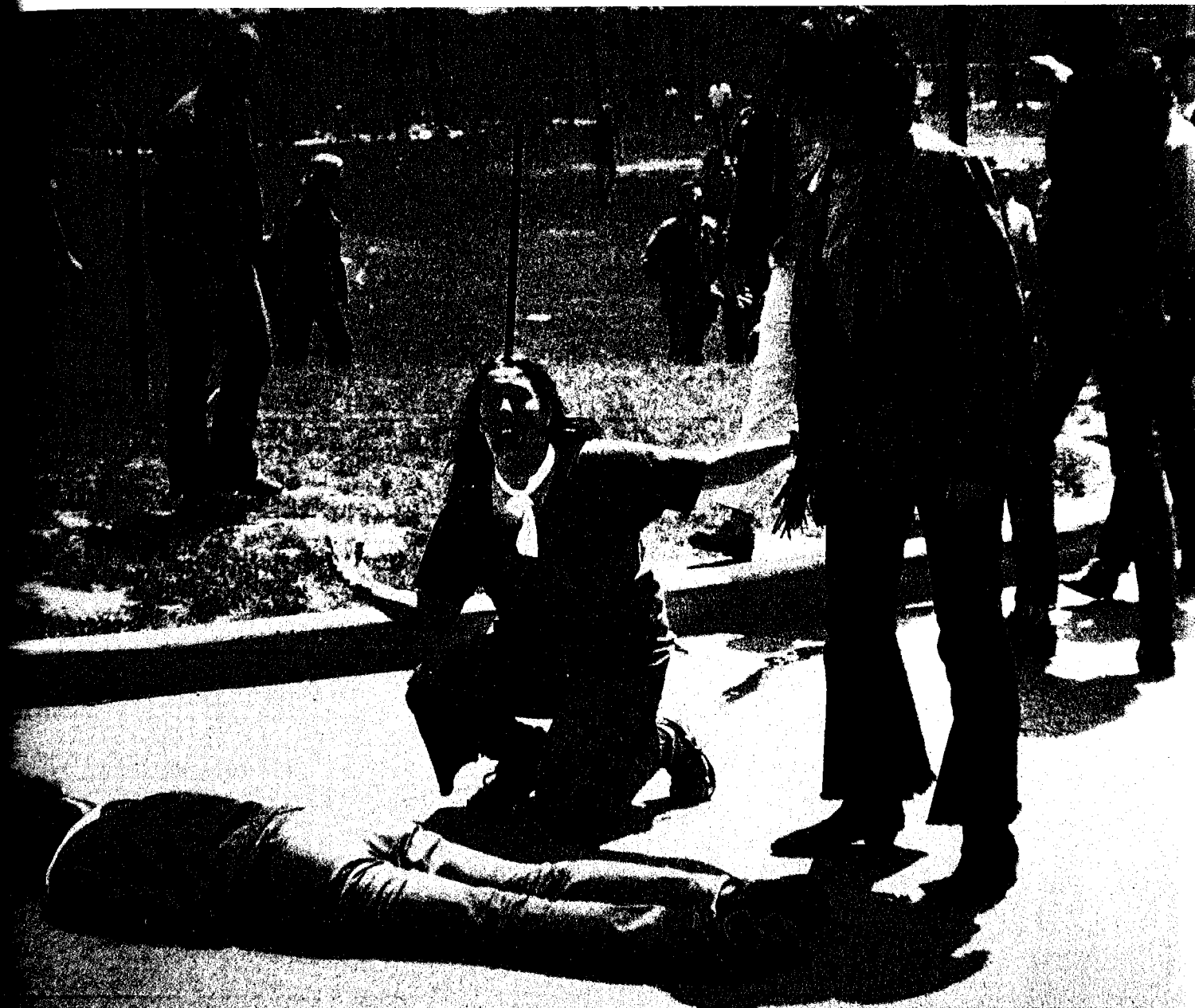
That was my generation! We were pot smokers, reading about mystical Eastern religions and taking a stand against anything that was Establishment, rejecting all the values that had come before. The general sentiment on student campuses at the time was extremely anti-Vietnam War. Americans were supposed to be fighting against communism, but, of course, from our point of view capitalism didn't look so great either. Our antiwar attitude was part of a rejection of our parents' values, and the students at Kent State were sincere in this – I don't think anyone was just going along with the trend.

For us, there was a big question mark hanging over the war. No one understood the Vietnam situation – it was shrouded in contradictions. None of us had any faith in anything that was going on over there, and we thought it was wrong for the U.S. to be involved. We harbored a general suspicion of the war's validity, a feeling compounded by our overall sort of peacenik attitude. I remember that I personally thought the Vietnam War was a truly evil thing. We were also all very personally threatened because it was claiming many of our peers – I think the average age of everyone who was fighting was around nineteen. You could avoid being sent over there by going to a university, so ghetto kids would get drafted, but kids with better resources were managing to get out of it. The inequality of it all didn't seem right. Everyone was living in fear of this war. Actually, I don't think most of our generation would have been so reluctant to go off to war if they had known why we were fighting – but nobody did. As a result, there was this large body of American students and kids with no clear way to vent their frustration at a senseless war; student unrest was rife in the United States.

At the time, Kent State University was considered a pretty radical campus by Midwestern standards. It had a very strong cinematography department, and I myself was a fine arts major. I thought we were a pretty sophisticated bunch, but looking back, we were just a bunch of Northeastern Ohio kids. I'm not saying we were all farmers, but we definitely represented Middle America.

Kent was this old, rustic town which had an old train station and a small-town kind of vibe. All the towns surrounding it were small, too, like Ravenna, Ohio, and a lot of the students were from that general area. Kent had a concentrated downtown

May 4, 1970: Moments after the National Guard opened fire, Kent State University sophomore Jeff Miller lay dead in a puddle of blood



27 Antiwar resistance continues in a disparate manner, as two different decisions are reached a day apart: The U.S. Church of the Brethren announces its support for nonviolent demonstration, while increased militancy is favored by the Strategy Action Conference at the University of Wisconsin. On Aug. 15, the National Student Association will opt for a nonviolent strategy.

29 U.S. troops officially depart Cambodia with 337 dead and 1,524 wounded in ground combat, after having killed an alleged 11,349 enemy troops. Unannounced Cambodian incursions and air attacks by the U.S. will continue, though the Senate approves a troop-limiting measure, the first such restriction on presidential action.

1970 JULY

3 The three-day Atlanta International Pop Festival features Jimi Hendrix, B.B. King, the Allman Brothers and others, drawing 200,000 and a promise from Governor Lester Maddox to outlaw all future events.

17 Love Valley Rock Festival in North Carolina gains the support of the local mayor, and the next day the Allman Brothers and others perform, though one youth is shot and injured by police and another dies of heatstroke. The same day, an estimated 30,000 crash the gates of the New York Pop Festival at Randall's Island to catch performances by Grand Funk Railroad, Jimi Hendrix, Steppenwolf, Elephant's Memory and others. Many of the artists refuse to play until paid, and promoters declare it a financial disaster, blaming gate-crashers and community activist groups who demanded portions of the proceeds.

23 A published Justice Department memorandum reveals that the National Guard had no cause to fire on protesters at Kent State, while the Presidential Commission on Campus Unrest finds that the Nixon administration lacks understanding of the current wave of student dissent.

29 Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, which examines the rapid rate of technological advances and its effects on society in the latter part of the Twentieth Century, is published.

Pioneering hallucinogen

area with about twenty-seven off-campus bars and a live-music scene. I remember a lot of bands playing there at the time: Joe Walsh with the James Gang, Eric Carmen and his band and many others. Consequently, in the Northeastern Ohio area, starting Friday night of every weekend, all the hilljacks and bikers and crazies from all over the area would come in to Kent and hang out with the college students in all these bars. There wasn't really much else going on in the area.

I was living off-campus that year, and on May 1 - I remember it was a Friday night - we heard that President Nixon had ordered the invasion of Cambodia, which totally went against what we had been led to believe was going to happen in Vietnam. We were downtown at the time - not all of us students, but predominantly so - feeling this sense of betrayal and anger. A small protest started up: We took these big garbage cans from the side of the road, wheeled them into the middle of the street and set them on fire. It was an awesome sight. It was basically a peaceable protest, albeit attended by a bunch of tripped-out acidheads and drunks who were hanging around at the time. No one could drive through the streets, though there was a bastard who decided to try, but we just jumped on his car and kicked all the windows out to punish the driver for having the gall to interfere with our protest.

A curfew was imposed Saturday night on the whole city. I believe everyone had to be in by 8:00 p.m. if they were in town, and a little later if they were on campus. Consequently, people like me had asked one of their mates living on campus if they could sleep in their dorm room that night in order to stay out the extra time. So there were a lot of students - "anti-students" living off-campus like me - avoiding the curfew and hanging out in the middle of the university grounds that Saturday night. I remember the tone of things: A lot of people were taking acid, and it was a pretty crazy scene. Hey, it was 1970.

So everyone - and when I say everyone, I mean there were thousands of students, though I don't believe there were any outside agitators or anyone like that - had congregated around this hilly area called the Commons, which is where the ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) building was.

The ROTC building was this old wooden shack with other buildings surrounding it. The art building, which was used for the Life Drawing classes I attended, was one of them, so I remember the setting well. The students resented this sort of military aspect of the university very much. Someone had the idea of burning down the ROTC building, and everyone said, "Good idea." Then someone else got some railway flares, lit them, ran down the hill and threw them right into the building. Everyone was thinking, This is fantastic - we're burning down the ROTC building! And it burnt right down to the ground.

As soon as it flamed, the fire trucks arrived, and students started pulling hoses out of the trucks so the firefighters couldn't use them. I was right there in the front line.

At the same time this was happening, we suddenly saw, coming down Main Street from Ravenna, actual military jeeps and tanks. It turned out there had been a trucker's strike in Ravenna, about eleven miles up the road from Kent, and the National Guard had been stationed there. Now their presence added increasing fury to our protest. The Guardsmen tried to disperse the crowd of students, using tear gas, and everyone was cordoned in by Cyclone fences, so thousands of people were running rampant within them. It actually became a riot.

Though we were angry, the whole scene was kind of a gas, too, because it was Saturday night, and a lot of people (myself not included) were tripping. With or without drugs, it was awesome to see the hated ROTC building going up in flames. It was definitely a night to remember.

My recollection of Sunday is that everything around town was completely dead, nothing was happening.

I know that the following Monday was the end of half-term, because I had my portfolio of drawings with me. I had left my apartment and was walking onto campus toward the art building, at around noon or one o'clock. On the way in, my girlfriend had told me there was going to be a peaceful demonstration on the Commons because everyone was very pissed-off that the National Guard was still on campus. What had been the ROTC building was now a pile of about four inches of charcoal, in a huge rectangular area surrounded by National Guardsmen, who were each on one knee pointing a rifle, as if guarding this burnt-down building. It was creating a very bad vibe.

I was strolling down into the Commons area, and just as I caught sight of the art building, I saw at least fifty guys - I don't know the exact number - with rifles. They were surrounding the building, and it looked really scary to me.

As I approached, I heard what I thought were fireworks but actually was, I later realized, gunfire. Since the time was around noon, everyone was on their way to classes. I heard somebody say, "They've killed someone!" and I just stood there in utter disbelief. Suddenly I was aware of a real sense of mayhem - I can remember hiding and running through back gardens and behind buildings to try and get to a friend's house for safety, and to find out who had been killed. All I knew, at the start, was that some students were dead. I heard sirens, and there were ambulances everywhere. The campus was evacuated; there were jeeps on every corner. Kent State became a little war zone.

Apparently what had happened was that a few students had picked up rocks and started throwing them at the National Guard, saying, "Fuck off - get off our campus," and the Guardsmen had just fired into the dense crowd of students. Later I learned that four students had been killed, including Jeff Miller, the boyfriend of the girl who had told me about the demonstration earlier that day.

Everyone I knew was in an utter state of shock. I refused to leave campus but was finally forced to when they cleared everybody off. I think they evacuated the entire city, and certainly they evacuated the whole campus. By that evening there were hundreds of students hitching out of the area to go back to their homes. It was the end of the school year, and that was the end of the debacle as far as I remember.

In the aftermath of the killings Neil Young wrote the song "Ohio," and I thought it was particularly fitting because Jeff Miller had been such a big Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young fan.

I can't remember whether I ever went back to Kent State. I do recall that we were supposed to finish our courses through the mail. If I did go back, I didn't last long, because I started working as a waitress then and started saving my money to leave the country altogether. I don't think my decision was a direct result of the shootings. I was sure I didn't want to live in America, but it wasn't because of the political scene - it went a lot deeper than that. I wanted to see the world; I didn't have a plan.

By today's standards, those killings might not sound that shocking - these days someone can walk into McDonald's and blow away fifteen people and it doesn't surprise us. Of course, Kent State was different because it was the *government* killing students. But I can still remember standing there looking at those poor guys in their uniforms. I think that when the National Guard were called in, they were not highly trained in crowd control or anything like that. They were just young guys; they looked exactly like the students, only they were wearing uniforms. In fact, some of them *were* students!

Of course, at that time in American history, uniforms provoked a very negative response in those of us who were opposed to the war. Today, anyone who was a Green Beret or served in Vietnam back then will tell you about the venomous response they got from civilians when they returned to America. It didn't matter whether they were war heroes

or not, they were considered real scumbags just for going over to Vietnam. That sentiment really divided the country.

So I remember looking at these poor guys who thought they had simply obeyed orders by shooting into the crowd, and I can now imagine how stunned they must have been when they realized they had just blown away all those students - students who were their peers.

Kent was a leafy, green, nice suburban place - it was *Ohio*, not Vietnam. That fact just magnified the tragedy. Trying to explain its occurrence is kind of like attempting to figure out the cause of a road accident, you know. Was the driver drunk? Did he lose control? Were there some weird weather conditions? Did something fall in front of the car?

I still don't know whether there was a conspiracy, whether one person was behind the tragedy or whether it was actually provoked by student leaders. I do know that it was a really big fuckup - inexperienced people were put in charge of events they didn't know how to handle.

Because I left the States in 1973, my political sensibilities were kind of arrested, still back in that time. When I came home after living in London, I noticed that Americans had become extremely patriotic. Weird things started happening around America - it reminded me of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Suddenly, instead of putting up an American flag only on Veterans' Day, people everywhere were flying flags all the time. I thought that maybe everyone was afraid there was going to be an alien invasion, and so were reasoning: In case someone lands, let's let them know what country they're in! Then I noticed these patriotic bumper stickers and kick-butt slogans - gung-ho Americana.

Especially around the time of the Gulf War, the media seemed to reflect that sort of gung-ho-ism. When I went to New York at one point, it was such a sensitive issue that I wouldn't dare say anything that related to the war; I didn't feel free to express myself about it. I remember reading the *New York Post* headlines with their kick-butt attitude and thinking that the national mood had shifted into a whole new redneck gear - fierce patriotism - that was way beyond anything I could have fathomed back at Kent State.

I remember that when Sinéad O'Connor came over to the States and said she didn't want the national anthem played before her concert, she was nearly run out of the country. Suddenly the whole idea of freedom of speech in America seemed to be a sick joke, because now if you criticized America, everyone went fucking ape-shit on you - even the so-called hip people! I found it really odd that Sinéad was booed (though she was cheered, too) at the Bob Dylan tribute. She's a very sensitive person who left the stage in tears because of the response she got for being political and for ripping up a picture of the pope on television.

See, back in my day we all believed we were *supposed* to be free to express ourselves, but now, suddenly even Bob Dylan fans were booing Sinéad for doing it. I guess I found it all especially weird because of my long absence, and I really didn't know what to say to her, so I just said, "Hey, when I lived here, we were burning flags." ☹