

The Memory Of Injustice: My Neighbor Who Died At Kent State

by Darlene Friedman

Churchill, Pennsylvania, in 1970 was a page right out of a "Wonder Years" script. A quiet, safe suburbia that—as I remember it—had survived the turbulence of the '60s virtually unscathed. Sure, my parents continually battled with my brother about the length of his hair. And a few of us might have known someone who knew someone who had been to Vietnam. My friends and I were into wearing MIA/POW bracelets back then—squeezed around our pre-adolescent wrists, more trend than sentiment. But for the most part, it was a comparatively innocent time, when choices and issues were easy. Our parents went to PTA meetings, our older brothers to college and not to Vietnam, and we kids were busy just getting through the teenage angst years.

At 14, I was more concerned with surviving the rigors of Wilkins Junior High School and breaking out of my awkwardness to worry about Vietnam or radical politics. For the first time in my rather bleak life, things were looking up that year. It was my second year in a new neighborhood and I was beginning to detach from my pathetic, painful childhood. I was cultivating healthy friendships—a somewhat new experience.

One of the people I hung out with was a girl who had recently moved onto the street directly above mine. So tall, dark and exotic was my new friend Laurie Krause. Her tie-dyed ideas continually seized my imagination. Vietnam. Hippies. Freedom. I had always been an independent thinker but generally kept my ideas to myself; life was easier that way. To stumble across someone who was herself a free thinker, and who encouraged that trait in me, was exciting and liberating.

My eyes were opened to the '60s fervor as I began seeing and feeling new ways and believing new things. My mother sensed the change and perceived Laurie to be a cause of it. "She's a rebel, that one," my mother re-



Susan McAninley

marked one day after driving Laurie and me home from one of our many outings to the mall.

innocence forever. "Allison Krause is dead," Susan sobbed into the phone.

Susan had the details wrong but the outcome right. Allison hadn't been killed in a bomb explosion, as was first reported on the radio. The truth was even more horrifying.

By that evening, Allison's family had been notified, and the gory details blared from the TV: Allison and three other Kent State students had been shot to death by National Guardsmen during a campus demonstration. I stared wide-eyed at the TV as the events leading to the deaths unfolded and the local angle was exploited. Doris Krause fainted when she got the call at work, the TV reporters said. I watched as my friend Laurie's father wept into the TV camera. "For years," Arthur Krause sobbed, his tall frame bent in shock and grief, "I thanked God that I had two daughters so that I would never know the pain of having to send a son to Vietnam. And now, my daughter is dead."

Nothing in my 14 years' existence had equipped me to deal with the horror of this event. That night, as I lay sobbing and hyperventilating, my parents gave me a sedative.

A few days later, I gathered my tentative courage and went with a few friends to pay our respects at the Krauses'. By the time we got there, I was weeping uncontrollably. The house was filled with people, food, flowers and telegrams, including one from then-President Nixon. Not wishing to add to the anguish of the somber scene, I retreated to the laundry room. Up against the cold steel of the washing machine, I cried my 14-year-old heart out until Laurie walked in on me. She was holding herself very straight, almost imperiously, and was completely dry-eyed. "Don't cry," she said in an eerily detached voice. "Allison wouldn't have wanted you to."

I didn't even recognize this stranger who was my friend, and her words were lost on me. I left the Krause home immediately.

For many people, including those who lived through them, the '60s represent nothing more than an amusing and quirky aberration in American history. Yet they were by no means happy times. Our country was bitter-

I watched sadly as the Krause family became ostracized from the community for their quixotic attempt to exact justice for Allison's death.

ly divided over the Vietnam War and grappling with the moral dilemma of racial inequality and hatred. While I collected money for an Allison Krause memorial, more than one person told me, "Those kids were goddamned trouble-makers and got what they deserved."

I might have been 14, unsophisticated and naive about the political climate of my country, but I knew for sure there was no possible way those Kent State kids deserved to be murdered. Stunned and shaken by the vehemence and hatred of these remarks, I retreated into myself.

I became consumed by Allison's death and what it meant, particularly at night when I was trying to fall asleep. I remember wondering if there would ever be a time when I wouldn't constantly think of Allison lying on the ground in a pool of blood. Of course, for the world at large it was business as usual. I went back to finish off the last few weeks of my last year in junior high—and my last year as a child. In preparation for our impending adulthood—the test of fire that was awaiting us at Churchill Area High School—my ninth grade class asserted its independence, beginning with a massive sit-in to protest a cancelled class trip. I stopped wrapping my hair around those horrible orange juice cans, instead letting it go free in all its frizzy glory. "Nice hair," my friend Dale scoffed. His reaction was even less kind when I formally announced my split with God—a stance I have yet to reconcile.

I have very few memories of Laurie Krause after ninth grade, even though we went through high school together. She seemed lost to me—inaccessible and unreachable. I backed off as our friendship evaporated. I watched from a distance as Laurie and her family remained highly visible as they waged a protracted and

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two pages to copy. May I jump in front of you?"

"Well," you say, "okay." But then they start copying everything but the contents of their wallets. And since the coin-eating machine must be continually fed, one runs out of change fast. But there's only one change machine on the second floor, so you must give up your place in line to find it, an experience which may trigger in you an impulse to do what the early Christians did to the ancient library of Alexandria.

A friend of mine in Boston went to the Boston Public Library and checked out Simone Weil's *Selected Essays*. He told me the book was worth reading because Weil's comment on the ancient Greeks were fascinating. Naturally, I assumed that Central would have the book (the City Institute branch on Rittenhouse Square told me they had biographies of Weil but nothing actually written by her). But an in-house computer check revealed that *Selected Essays* is designated "RO." Not only that, there was only one copy of the book in the entire Free Library system.

Was there a way out of this house of cards? When I persisted, I was told I could approach a librarian in the Philosophy Department and say I needed Weil's book for a special project. "Exceptions and dispensations are sometimes made," I was told.

So I phoned the Philosophy Department and made the request. When the librarian conducted a cursory computer check, however, she told me the book was out of print. Apparently when books are out of print and when there is only one copy in the system, they stay chained in "RO" limbo forever. "Library rules mandate this," she added. My only option,

she said was to locate the book in a university library. (Drexel, Villanova and La Salle carry the book—but I wouldn't be able to take it out because I don't attend these schools.)

The bottom line: I would have to move to Boston in order to read Simone Weil's *Selected Essays*.

I phoned Central again and begged the librarian to issue me a special dispensation. "I will take care of Weil," I said. "I love books. I am not a thief, though I've read nearly all of Genet."

The answer was no. I would—definitely—have to go to Boston.

Then my Boston friend told me about another book: Dennis Donahue's *We The Irish*, published several years ago. He assured me that any library here would have it. However, when a Free Library computer check revealed that the book was nowhere in the system, I threw up my arms. Then I remembered the delights of the Chester County Library in West Chester (but now located in Exton). This eclectic place—though it was nestled in a provincial redneck stronghold where being openly gay could get you bashed, Tennessee Williams-style—stocked the best esoteric gems: the diaries of Allen Ginsberg and Paul Goodman, as well as scores of small-press gay and lesbian trade paperbacks.

Is there hope for the Free Library system here? I don't know. Most of what the City Institute branch stocks today, for instance, was there when I was a journalism student in 1970—yes, the same old rag-tag bios of Sartre. Northwest Regional in Germantown probably stocks the best collection of books in the city. Still, when it comes to libraries, I'd rather not be in Philadelphia.

What to do? Free the library! Free the books! Free Simone Weil! ■

Kent State

(Continued from page 3)

bitter court battle against the National Guard and the state and governor of Ohio.

I watched sadly as the Krause family became alienated from the community and ostracized for their quixotic attempt to exact justice for Allison's death. To some, the Krauses were pitiable; to others, they were radicals or renegades, and their crusade constituted further evidence that they had raised a child who was somehow responsible for her own death.

Meanwhile, as the Kent State mythology blossomed, Allison came to symbolize the tragedy. Her martyr status seemed incongruous to me. There had been nothing particularly saint-like about Allison. I don't believe she was some sort of Madonna floating blithely around campus placing flowers into the rifle barrels of National Guardsmen, as was suggested in the media. Rather, she was a normal, healthy, intelligent, pretty 19-year-old—a bit rebellious and inclined to speak her own mind, which she had

learned at home. The need—among the media and the public alike—to portray Allison as some sort of angel repelled me. It was as if martyring Allison rendered her death even more horrible. Allison's death, and the deaths of Jeffrey Miller, William Schroeder and Sandy Scheuer, were an affront to everything this country ostensibly stood for—the equivalent of an automatic death penalty for free speech. The horrible deed stood on its own vileness, without need for embellishment or hyperbole.

Laurie and I made our separate ways through high school. She graduated after our junior year and started college. I was stuck whiling away the last year of my sentence with Typing II and Spanish I classes. My re-established sense of order was shaken up once again when a classmate's mother was shot and killed as she left a Parents Without Partners meeting. This girl, who had been voted "most dependable" in ninth grade, was sweet, popular and enormously intelligent. She had had a tremendous future before her. Her mom, whom I had once met, was a

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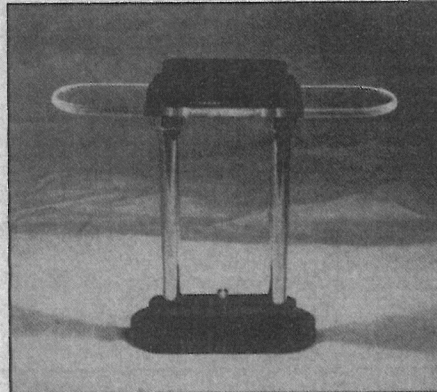
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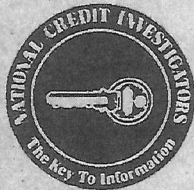
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paragon of motherhood—bright, beautiful and very involved with her kids. When my classmate returned to school after a long absence, her appearance shocked me: Her long black hair was cropped short, her once-slight frame carried many extra pounds. "All right," I told myself. "You don't want to say anything to her. You want to pretend it never happened. But it *did*, so just go over there and tell her how sorry you are."

Taking a deep breath, I walked over and gave her the "I'm so sorry, please let me know if there's anything I can do," speech, feeling inadequate and impotent.

Years later, I began having recurrent dreams about this girl. She was in trouble. I wanted desperately to help her but was unable to. Several times a year I would have a variation of that dream, which each time left me unnerved for days afterward.

Invariably, I would make the shift from that dream to thinking about Laurie Krause and her family, and wishing I'd been able to act more responsibly and compassionately when Laurie had needed me. I'd often drive by the Krause house while I was home in Churchill to visit my parents. Once I tried to stop, but an unexpected avalanche of emotion prevented me from doing so.

A few years later, I was able to go through with it. As I made my way from my car to the front door, I remembered that the last time I had made that journey was right after Allison had died. I was surprised at how vivid that memory still was.

There I was, standing face to face with Doris Krause, a big, gracious woman who seemed delighted to see me. We spent the next hour or so catching up. She had a surprisingly keen memory about me and my family. She filled me in on Laurie's life, complete with scrapbooks and photographs. She talked about Allison a lot, almost as if she were still alive. "So," I thought to myself, "you don't ever forget."

Shortly afterward, I wrote to Laurie in San Francisco, and soon we began to correspond, although somewhat guardedly. Thanksgiving weekend, eight or nine years ago, Laurie and I agreed to meet in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania—halfway between Pittsburgh, where she was visiting her parents, and Philadelphia, where I now live.

I pulled up to the Howard Johnson's and saw Laurie inside the lobby. She looked exactly the same—tall, rail-thin, wild black hair. Our guards were up, neither one of us knowing what to expect. At first we danced around each other like dogs meeting for the first time. But as the weekend wore on, we relaxed. We talked about the paths our lives had taken, our friendship and our perceptions as to what had happened to that friendship.

I was surprised at how pedestrian Laurie's life was. Her career in computers greatly surprised me; she'd been so creative and artistic when I had known her. "You are one of the few people who know that I'm artistic," Laurie told me. "I stopped drawing after Allison died."

I'd expected Laurie to be political, as I am. When I had known her, she constantly railed against the world's injustices, but now she didn't seem to have much of an appetite for it. When we got to the subject of Kent State and Allison, I wasn't surprised to hear that I had hurt Laurie. I was unprepared, however, when she said, "Of all the people who

I was undeniably shaped by the events of that day. I walked through life gingerly, and sometimes angrily.

turned away from me, no one hurt me the way you did. I hated you for that. I came here to satisfy my curiosity. My parents really tried to talk me out of it. They said I would just wind up getting hurt again."

While most of my memories of Laurie were from before her sister died, her memories of me were afterwards. Laurie believed that I had turned away either because I blamed Allison somehow or saw her family's reaction as excessive or misguided. I explained that I had turned away merely because, at 14, I was too immature to deal with her trauma and my own. Laurie listened with an open mind, but I realized that no amount of explaining could undo the pain I had inadvertently caused her.

The weekend ended with one final shock. Laurie brought up the subject of our classmate whose mother had been shot. I told her about my recurring dream and asked her what she knew. "Oh, she's been in a mental institution—a ward of the state—almost since we graduated," Laurie replied.

Laurie and I parted with vague promises to keep in touch. But, curiosities satisfied, we never contacted each other again. We were, after all, strangers, sharing nothing in common but one extremely painful event. My expectations of absolution from Laurie were unrealistic. I finally realized that I had nothing to be forgiven for. I'd been 14 years old, a child. I'd done the best that I could and had beat myself up about it for far too long.

As for our classmate, the dreams stopped after my meeting with Laurie. I've tried several times, unsuccessfully, to ascertain her whereabouts.

I was undeniably shaped by the events of May 4th, 1970. From that day forward, I never looked at the world with the same innocent eyes. Instead, I walked through life gingerly, and sometimes angrily.

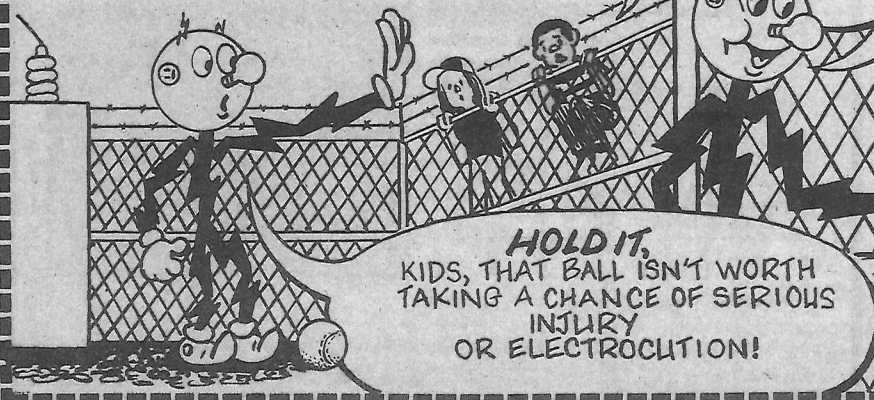
Perspective generally unravels the mysteries of our lives. Now, 21 years later, at age 35, I can find a positive life lesson in Kent State. Allison's death taught me about having the courage to stick by people when they need you. Even if everyone else runs away. Even if it's unbearably painful.

Beyond my own life, I learned absolute respect for the power of a bullet, for the chaos and pain that one piece of steel can wreak on so many lives—whether it's a college student at Kent State or Tiananmen Square, John Lennon, Anwar Sadat, or any nameless, faceless person who happens to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. I learned the vigilance with which we must watch our own government and force it to live up to its expectations. But most of all, I learned respect for the fragility of life and how swiftly it can leave us. ■

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