

'I WANTED TO LEND MY VOICE TO IT'

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At the last minute, Tom Grace decided to take part in a student demonstration at Kent State University on May 4, 1970. That decision changed his life.

Tom Grace went to Kent State University to study history, not become a part of it.

That all changed May 4, 1970, when Grace's left foot was shattered by a bullet from an M-1 rifle fired by an Ohio National Guardsman.

"For 20 years I was just Tom Grace," said the Syracuse native. "Now for the past 20 years I've been 'Tom Grace, Kent State victim.' I'll never go back to the way things were before May 4, 1970, but life was certainly a lot simpler then."

Four of Grace's fellow students were killed, eight others wounded. Depending on your frame of reference, the names of the dead -- Allison Krause, Sandra Scheuer, Jeffrey Miller, William Schroeder -- are either answers to a trivia question or searing reminders of an ugly chapter in American history.

Grace easily could have been a fifth fatality. He was closer to the Guard than any of the four who were killed.

The Lyncourt native, whose parents still live on Delmar Place, attended St. Daniel's School and Christian Brothers Academy. He graduated from CBA in 1968 and chose Kent State because he liked its course offerings in history, a lifelong passion.

The morning of May 4, 1970 Grace took a test and promised a friend he would stay away from an anti-war rally scheduled for noon on the commons. At the last minute, he changed his mind.

"I believed in what (the demonstrators) were doing, and I wanted to lend my voice to it," said Grace, now 40 and a social worker in Buffalo.

Hundreds of students went to the rally to protest President Nixon's escalation of the Southeast Asia war into Cambodia, and to protest the presence of National Guardsmen on campus. Thousands of other students were there to watch, or were passing by on their way to classes.

The Guard had been sent in by Ohio Gov. James Rhodes two days earlier because of vandalism in downtown Kent and the torching of a campus ROTC building.

Its mission on May 4 -- a warm, sunny, breezy Monday -- was to break up the rally.

"Until that day," said Grace, "there wasn't much to separate me from 250,000 or a half-million other radical anti-war activists across the country. But a National Guard bullet changed all that."

In the Thick of It

Shortly after noon, about 100 Guardsmen wearing gas masks marched across the commons, firing tear gas into the crowd.

Grace -- who had taken part in a dozen or so anti-war rallies on campus and in Cleveland and Washington, D.C. -- was in the thick of it, yelling slogans at Guardsmen along with his roommate, Alan Canfora. Canfora carried a black flag with "Kent" spray-painted on it, and waved it to taunt Guardsmen. He was later shot.

As the troops advanced and tear gas drifted across the commons, demonstrators and bystanders scattered. Many climbed Blanket Hill, a campus necking spot, and ended up in a parking lot next to a football practice field.

The Guard had accomplished its mission of clearing the commons. But officers ordered the troops to continue onto the football field, where they found themselves hemmed in by a chain-link fence and jeering demonstrators.

Guardsmen continued firing tear gas canisters at the students, and a few students lobbed the canisters back. Others threw chunks of concrete from a nearby construction site. Many were unaware the Guardsmen had live ammunition in their weapons.

The President's Commission on Campus Unrest later reported, "Some among the crowd came to regard the situation as a game -- a

tennis match,' one called it -- and cheered each exchange of tear gas canisters."

After about 10 minutes the troops retreated, crossed two campus roads and climbed an embankment next to Taylor Hall, an academic building next to Blanket Hill.

Grace, who earlier had been tear-gassed on the commons, said he had just finished rinsing his eyes and distributing wet paper towels to other students near Prentice Hall, a women's dormitory. He then walked to the foot of a hill below Taylor Hall, and watched the Guardsmen from what he thought was a safe distance, later measured at about 160 feet.

The Guardsmen, about 75 of them, reached the top of the embankment and appeared to be returning to their base, an ROTC building across the commons.

The particulars of what happened next, at about 12:24 p.m., have been hotly disputed for 20 years.

Twenty-eight Guardsmen turned and fired at least 61 shots in 13 seconds. All but a few came from M-1 rifles, combat weapons with a killing range of more than one mile.

When the shooting started, Grace turned to run, but a bullet ripped into the back of his left heel and exited the side of his foot.

"I was startled and terrified," he said. "I was knocked to the ground before I realized what was happening. I started to get up, and I heard Alan Canfora yell, 'Stay down -- it's buckshot!'"

"I was out in the open, so I just stayed as low as I could to avoid any more gunfire. The closest thing to me was a tree about 10 or 12 feet away, and Alan Canfora (who had been shot through the right wrist) was behind that."

From his vantage point on the ground, facing away from the Guard, Grace saw students running and dropping.

"I didn't know if they were being hit by bullets or they were just hugging the ground," he said. "We know today that it only lasted 13 seconds, but it seemed like it kept going and going and going. And I remember thinking, 'When is this going to stop?'"

What the Bullet Had Done

When it did stop, a student whom Grace did not know, Mike Brock, ran to Grace, picked him up over his shoulder and carried him into Prentice Hall. They passed the body of Jeffrey Miller, who had been shot in the mouth. His blood formed a stream several yards long on the pavement.

(Only two victims were shot while facing the Guard; four were shot from the side, seven from behind.)

Brock put Grace on a couch in the lobby of the dormitory, where he finally saw what the bullet had done to his foot. His boot had been blown off, and a bone was sticking through his green sock.

A nursing student who happened to be in the dorm applied a tourniquet to Grace's leg before he was taken away in the same ambulance that carried Sandra Scheuer.

Unlike fatalities Jeffrey Miller and Allison Krause, Scheuer was not active in the rally. She was walking to a class when she was shot in the neck. The fourth student killed, William Schroeder, was an ROTC student who had taken an exam in war tactics that morning. He was not participating in the rally.

Peter Davies, the author of one book about the killings, speculated that Grace and Canfora were among several demonstrators singled out by Guardsmen as specific targets. One student, Joseph Lewis, was shot while making an obscene gesture at Guardsmen.

Grace admits he was yelling at the Guard earlier on the commons, but denies carrying a flag or encouraging rock-throwing -- as the FBI speculated in 1970 -- or doing anything else to provoke the Guard before the shooting started.

"I can't think, for the life of me, of anything I did that day that would single me out," he said.

As the ambulance sped away from campus, Grace looked down and saw attendants trying to revive Scheuer. "I remember their saying, 'It's no use, she's dead.' And then they just pulled up the sheet over her head."

Grace spent nine days recuperating at a hospital in Ravenna, about 10 miles from Kent. FBI agents visited his room several times to question him about his activities during the rally.

He refused to cooperate.

"I had no confidence in them, nor would I today," he said. "Plus, I was going to be involved in a lawsuit and I didn't want to say anything on the record."

Grace had other things on his mind. It was a week before doctors were confident his foot could be saved. After checking out of the Ravenna hospital, Grace returned to Syracuse for a month of rehabilitation at Community General Hospital.

Summer at Home

The day he was released in late June made Grace realize "how great I felt to be alive, to breathe fresh air and see the sun shining and things growing."

Grace spent the summer at home in Lyncourt with his parents, Thomas V. and Collette, and three younger siblings. At the time, his sister Anne had just graduated from Nottingham High School, and brothers Robert and Patrick were underclassmen at CBA.

America in 1970 did not hold radical anti-war activists in high regard.

A Gallup poll taken May 13 and 14 indicated 58 percent of the public blamed the demonstrators for the shootings.

Four days after the shootings, helmeted construction workers in New York City attacked students at an anti-war demonstration. They then stormed City Hall and forced officials to raise the American flag to full-staff; it had been lowered to half-staff in memory of the four dead in Ohio.

In Ohio, students with Kent State bumper stickers on their cars were run off the roads. In the city of Kent, the attitudes of many residents were summed up by one who told a Kent State administrator, "They should have shot 400, not four."

In such a climate, the months after Grace was shot were difficult not only for him, but for his parents and siblings as well. Grace doesn't like to talk about that part of his life, and family members declined to be interviewed for this article.

"It's safe to say that people who didn't know you became your friends. And people who should have been supportive were not," Grace said.

He Felt It Was Murder

That summer Alan Canfora hitchhiked from his home in Ohio to visit his bedridden roommate in Lyncourt.

"His family had put a bed in the den for him," Canfora recalled. "He was still in a great deal of pain. And he was very forthright in his criticism of the National Guard. He felt then as he does now, that what they did was commit murder."

The events of May 4, 1970 gave Grace instant celebrity status, something he did not particularly enjoy. The first couple of years were especially difficult.

"By nature I'm not an extroverted person," Grace said. "Because (the shooting) put me in the spotlight, I kind of had to come to terms with that."

Grace's radical anti-war activism -- developed at Kent but born in his "Roosevelt-Truman Democrat" household -- was strengthened by the shooting.

"It reinforced existing opinions that I had," he said. "I have a deeper sense of resolve, more of a sense of purpose. I can't say it really altered my outlook, but it deepened my commitment to it."

When Grace returned to Kent State that September, he organized anti-war rallies and raised funds for the wounded students' medical expenses. He graduated in 1972, a year or so after discarding the cane he needed to walk.

"I never felt sorry for myself," Grace said. "I've always said that I was fortunate. In a lot of ways I'm a stronger person. Physically, I'm not, but my mental attitude is. I'm a much stronger person, and I don't dwell on the negative."

Robert Stamps, one of the nine wounded students, did not know Grace until after the shootings. Stamps saw a lot of him during the trials and was impressed by his level-headedness.

"If you'd want someone to go through that with you, it's Tommy," he said. "He stays cool, but believe me, the anger is there."

Grace's foot was operated on four or five times in all. He wears an insert in his left shoe and limps for a couple of days after taking a long walk or playing softball. He has no lateral movement in his left ankle, and very limited vertical movement.

"It's basically a fused ankle," said Grace, who wears an ace bandage over it when he goes to the beach. "It looks pretty bad. People tend to stare at it. . . . It's just kind of unsightly, that's all."

Legal Battles Drag On

The legal aftermath of May 4 was a series of criminal and civil trials that dragged on for nearly a decade.

First, an Ohio grand jury indicted 25 demonstrators (Grace was not among them) on riot charges. Its report neglected to mention that anyone had been killed, and implied the demonstrators were guilty. A federal judge in 1971 ordered the report destroyed.

In 1974, a federal grand jury in Cleveland indicted eight Guardsmen, but charges were later dismissed.

A civil trial began in 1975, but the 13 plaintiffs -- the nine wounded and the families of the four killed -- lost their bid for \$46 million. Two years later, an appeals court ruled the plaintiffs had been denied a fair trial because of jury tampering. A new trial began in December 1978.

In an out-of-court settlement reached a month later, all charges were dropped in exchange for a lump sum payment of \$675,000. More than half (\$350,000) went to wounded student Dean Kahler, who was paralyzed from the waist down.

The parents of the four who were killed were given \$15,000, and the wounded received awards of \$15,000 to \$42,000, depending on the severity of their injuries. Grace's award -- in excess of \$30,000, he said -- was the third-largest.

A "statement of regret" was signed by all the defendants, including Ohio Gov. Rhodes. Part of it reads: "Hindsight suggests that another method would have resolved the confrontation. Better ways must be found to deal with such confrontations."

'Tommy's Fearless'

Grace and his wife Kitty, a vocational counselor, live in the Buffalo suburb of Amherst. They have two children, CQ Alison, 9, and T.J. (Thomas James), 5.

In addition to his job as a social worker, Grace is president of a 600-member local of the New York State Public Employees Federation. Negotiation is one of Grace's strong suits, said Stamps, who now teaches at a college in San Diego.

"Tommy's fearless," he said. "He stands his ground. When he wants to say something, he'll take you aside, look you right in the face and very diplomatically put everything on the table.

"I think May 4 made Tommy more understanding of his role in society. It coalesced his anger, and gave him a focal point," Stamps added.

That role, said Grace, is to work for the ideals that were nurtured on Delmar Place, ideals such as racial equality and economic justice.

Canfora said his former roommate is one of many anti-war activists of their era who have "moderated our political views and have returned to the political process."

In 1988, for example, Grace worked on the Rev. Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign, and represented New York on the rules committee at the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta.

He's also working on his second master's degree from SUNY Buffalo, this one in history. And then there is the energy he devotes to keeping the "straight-out, simple facts" of 20 years ago from eluding history.

Every May 4, Grace returns to Kent State for a memorial service and candlelight vigil.

Today, on the 20th anniversary of the killings, the university is dedicating a controversial memorial that bears only three words: Inquire, Learn, Reflect.

Grace was invited to take part in the ceremonies, but wrote to university president Michael Schwartz, saying he would do so only if the names of the four slain students are engraved on the memorial, and an accompanying plaque makes it clear they were killed by the Ohio National Guard.

Last week, the university added a small plaque several yards away from the memorial. The granite marker is flush with the ground and bears the names of all 13 students who were shot, but does not spell out why the names are there.

The size and nature of the memorial have generated great controversy at Kent State, as did the construction of a gymnasium near the site of the killings in 1977.

Earlier plans for the memorial called for a more elaborate structure with 13 pillars, but fund-raising efforts fell far short.

Canfora, who is at the forefront of the movement to build a larger memorial, calls the current structure "a glorified sidewalk with four (unmarked) stones."

Grace and Canfora are among many former students pressuring the university to raise enough funds to erect what they consider to be a proper memorial, one that lists the names of those who were killed.

"When people go to the Vietnam War memorial in Washington, what everyone comments on is the power and presence of the 57,000

names on the wall," Grace said. "But at Kent State, apparently they want the four students to be the forgotten dead, or the nameless dead.

"Over the last 20 years, whenever Kent State has had the opportunity to do the right thing or the wrong thing, it invariably has done the wrong thing," he said. "This may be their last chance."

Kent State Remembered

1 May 4 Noon: The Guard moves across commons towards Taylor Hall with fixed bayonets. Demonstrators retreat.

2 The Guard forces the demonstrators onto practice field, fenced on three sides. Exchange of tear gas and rocks takes place and the Guard retraces their line of march.

3 Near the crest of Blanket Hill, the Guard turns and 28 guardsmen fire 61 shots in 13 seconds towards the parking lot. Four die and nine are wounded.

The Victims

1. Joseph Lewis Jr.
wounded

2. John R. Cleary
wounded

3. Jeffrey Glenn Miller
deceased

4. Dean R. Kahler
wounded

5. Douglas Alan Wrentmore
wounded

6. Alan Michael Canfora
wounded

7. Allison B. Krause
deceased

8. William K. Schroeder
deceased

9. Sandra Lee Scheuer
deceased

10. James Dennis Russell
wounded

11. Donald Scott MacKenzie
wounded

12. Robert F. Stamps
wounded

13. Thomas M. Grace
wounded

• Caption: LOGO: Kent State Tom Grace: 20 Years After. Color. Washington Post The Ohio National Guard prepares to disperse students at Kent State University, above. In the foreground is the burned-out ROTC building. Tom Grace, left, meets Sen. Edward Kennedy at a fund-raiser for wounded students in September 1970. No credit Tom Grace in 1989. Graphic: Kent State Remembered. G. Stickel/The Post-Standard. 30 p x 7 1/2 in.

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