

**KENT STATE MASSACRE**

MEMORIAL REMARKS

AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

2005



# Kent State Memorial

**By Mike Alewitz**

May 4, 2005

*The following remarks are by Mike Alewitz at the 35th commemoration of the Kent State Massacre, about his friend Sandy Scheuer, one of the four students killed by Ohio National Guardsmen on May 4, 1970.*

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IN THE 35 YEARS since I stood on this common, I've had the good fortune to travel and paint murals in some extraordinary places. And wherever I've gone, when you sit down to talk and share, I found that people knew about my friend Sandy Scheuer. Perhaps not by name, but by deed - by what occurred here on May 4, 1970.

In Esteli, Nicaragua, I painted a mural about Ben Linder, a young engineer working to provide clean water for poor farmers, who was murdered by US-backed contras. There, where the torturers hand had touched so many families - people knew of what happened here.

In the Arab village of Anata, I painted about Rachel Corrie. She was a student from Evergreen State College in Washington - murdered by the Israeli Army while opposing the demolition of Palestinian home. Here too, people knew of what happened 35 years ago.

In the embattled island of Cuba, victims of a cruel embargo that hurts the very young and very old - I found students who were so proud of their school - named The Martyrs of Kent School.

At Chernobyl, where death is invisible and silent from their nuclear poison; in the bombed city of Baghdad; in beleaguered Ardoyne section of occupied Belfast - wherever I have gone - people knew of what happened here, and shared our loss.

## **The Student Movement at Kent**

At the time of the massacre, I was a member of the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) and Chairman of the Kent Student Mobilization Committee Against the War in Vietnam (SMC.) SMC was a national organization that demanded the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the US from SE Asia. The Kent SMC chapter sponsored the largest student demonstrations on this campus prior to the shootings.

Sandy, like Allison Krause, would occasionally come to a meeting or help with distributing some flyers. She did it because she was my friend. She did it because she could not be silent in the face of great injustice. I teased her about becoming more active - she laughed and ignored me.

On the day of the shootings, after the Guard had fired, Jerry Persky ran up to me. "They shot Sandy," he said. "Who?" I said. Sandy! It wouldn't sink in. Why would they shoot Sandy? I can scarcely believe it today.

## **National Student Strike**

After the shootings, a massive student strike shook the country. Students occupied the universities and ceased all business-as-usual. I traveled to a number of strike rallies. I saw gatherings where thousands of students were meeting, discussing, debating and acting. I saw the great creativity that was unleashed by this

mass action. I began to see that we might win.

Later, I was involved in organizing in Texas. Students were pivotal in reaching out to soldiers at the many military bases in that state. On October 27, 1971, I watched as twenty thousand protesters marched past the Texas statehouse, led by thousands of active-duty GIs, and I began to understand that we would win.

And we won. We forced the US to withdraw. The army had been won to the anti-war movement and was becoming unreliable - refusing to fight. We succeeded because of the actions of millions. Not a small group of radicals. Not some liberal politicians. No – we did it. People like you, and I. Sandy Scheuer was part of that. That is her legacy.

When we act together, millions of us, we can change the world. Human solidarity can defeat corporate greed. That is the great lesson of our time.

We must not allow the history of our movement to be re-written. We must not allow them to trivialize what we, in our millions, accomplished.

Our great movement inspired new struggles – the women's movement, the gay rights and ecology movements. We laid the basis for a more powerful movement against war – and this is an ongoing fight – the struggle of our epoch.

### **The Legacy of Kent and Jackson**

Today, as we meet here, skeletons of once-mighty cities surround us – ruled by leaders whose minds are empty of ideas or vision.

Even the pharaohs, with their slavery and cruel overseers, built pyramids and created new science. The robber barons, in their brutality, built railroads and industry. But today we live under a ruling class that produces only death and destruction, with leaders devoid of morality or imagination.

In their lust for profits they would balkanize the world – create a thousand wars with millions of deaths. But we can envision a world without borders.

These children of wealth and privilege, who have never worked, would plunder our social security for personal gain. They cannot see a world where labor has value and dignity - but we can.

They cannot imagine a world where human needs come before profits. But we do.

And they would continue to sacrifice our brothers, sisters and children - they are mad with greed. But we can still see a world of peace and we will still fight for it.

### **The Anti-War Movement Today**

The February demonstrations against the war, prior to the US invasion, were the largest anti-war actions in human history.

Today, as we meet here – major industrial unions have taken positions against the occupations. The west coast longshoremen are discussing actions to refuse to ship war goods. Railroad workers in England, Italy and Japan have struck against the war.

Today, on May 4, 2005, there is a growing movement of active-duty GIs and their families for an end to the bloodshed. Today, all across the country, high-school students are organizing to drive military recruiters from their schools.

There is a global movement that is saying 'Bring the Troops Home, Now.' That is the legacy of Kent and Jackson – the legacy of our martyrs.

I can still see the spark in Sandy Scheuer's eyes as though it was yesterday. I have seen that spark on faces across this country and around the world – animated by a collective vision of peace and justice. I see it in your faces today.

I have not come to mourn, but to honor our friends and celebrate that collective vision. I have come to say only that we are here, we will never forget, we are marching, and we will win.

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*Mike Alewitz was founder and chairman of the Kent Student Mobilization Committee Against the War. At the time of the shootings, he was the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) candidate for student body president and the socialist columnist for the Daily Kent Stater. An eyewitness to the events, he was a leader of the national student strike that followed the massacre. Alewitz was excluded from speaking at the annual commemoration of the massacre for 35 years.*