



BLOOD ON BLANKET HILL:  
A MEMOIR OF THE  
KENT STATE SHOOTINGS

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*Gary Shepherd*

*I don't know a soul who's not been battered  
Don't have a friend who feels at ease  
Don't know a dream that's not been shattered  
Or driven to its knees . . .  
When I think of the road we're traveling on  
I wonder what went wrong, I can't help it  
I wonder what went wrong.*

*(Paul Simon, lyrics from American Tune)*

*Reflections from a 1995 interview conducted by Gary Shepherd with Gail Roberts, an attorney, in her modest frame home in a working class neighborhood in Akron, Ohio while conducting research on the 1970 Kent State shootings and the related topics of student radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s.*

Oh, shit, I thought, as I stared dumbly at the glittering, heavy looking Smith and Wesson 45 caliber handgun that Gail had placed on the coffee table between us and was now picking up. Gail was angry, depressed, and feeling paranoid. A divorce case she was currently litigating was going badly, and her law practice in general was beset with numerous other problems. But

mainly she had recently gone through a nasty breakup with an abusive boyfriend, and now he was constantly coming around to her house, harassing and threatening her. She would “shoot the fucker,” she said, motioning with the gun she now held. Or maybe she would “just shoot herself instead,” moving the gun slightly in her own direction.

I issued soothing words of sympathy and tried talking her down. Eventually she put the gun back on the table, and we shifted the conversation to other subjects. When I got up to leave at the conclusion of our interview a couple of hours later, Gail gave me a fierce hug. I wished her better days and promised to stay in touch. Once in my car, I made a beeline to the nearest phone booth and called Kassy in Kent. A recording of Kassy’s strong, confident voice sounded in my ear: “Not here right now; leave a message.” Shit, again. My own voice cracked slightly into the receiver: “Can you and Mark get yourselves over to Akron anytime soon? Or anyone else who knows Gail? She’s depressed and suicidal. I really think someone needs to be with her for awhile.”

*James Michener was a popular twentieth century American novelist with a long string of best sellers, including The Bridges at Tokori, Sayonara, Hawaii, Caravans, and The Source. He set up himself and a team of researchers at a Kent, Ohio motel across the street from the university almost immediately following the May 4, 1970 tragedy, and solicited interviews from a wide range of participants in and observers of the events prior to, during, and after the shootings. Many people—students, faculty, administrators, police, Kent officials, and Kent residents—proved eager to deliver their perceptions and opinions to the famous writer. The resulting mixture of stories, speculations, and facts—concocted under a tight and pressing publication deadline—produced a gripping but sometimes erroneous, distorted and even occasionally fabricated account. The following observations about Gail Roberts are excerpted from Michener’s book, Kent State: What Happened and Why (New York, Random House, 1971).*

“Researchers working on this book were able to interview every major figure with whom they needed to talk, except one, and this failure was galling, for this bizarre character was very

much part of the background to this story” (p. 46). Michener did gather some information about this person from various sources, including a Lieutenant Crawford of the Kent State University police. According to Crawford, the university had experienced a rash of obscenity-laced graffiti paint sprayings on campus buildings and sidewalks during the late 1960s, including such indelibly scrawled slogans as “Fuck the Pigs,” and “We don’t want your fucking war.” Crawford went on to relate that, “Late one night, as one of our professors was crossing the campus on his way home, he saw this figure with a spray can painting a slogan on the library. At last we had our man. He ran over, shouting, ‘You can’t do that!’ To his astonishment, a young girl turned to face him, spray can in hand, and said quietly, ‘Mind your own fucking business.’ Well, we tracked down who she was, and it turned out to be Gail Roberts, a girl with an I.Q. of at least 165. She was the daughter of a brilliant engineer who lived not far from Kent, and she had a good academic record . . . We arrested her, but the administration decided not to press formal charges against her . . .” At the beginning of each quarter, she would, says Crawford, “slam open the door of the police department, stand in the middle of the room and cry, ‘Well, I’m back on campus, you mother-fucking pigs! Keep your eye on me!’ ” (pp.46–47).

Michener adds this note from an interview obtained in the fall of 1970: “Her younger brother, Ned Roberts . . . is a frail nineteen year old semi-genius with an I.Q. at least as high as his sister’s . . . Ned says of his sister, ‘Far above average as a person. Huge circle of friends who trust her. I think of her as a high achiever. Could do anything she wanted to . . .’ He says Gail is now in hiding somewhere, maybe California, maybe Chicago . . . He says that he would always like to see his sister. ‘She’s a terribly vital sort of person’ ” (p. 47).

For her part, Gail says she has never read Michener’s book, which she characterizes as a “novel.” But she has heard elements of Michener’s account from others and deeply resents his portrayal of her as “not a very nice person.” Her own view of people and events follows.

*Consolidated notes from archival research and interviews conducted by Gary and Gordon Shepherd with Gail Roberts during the summer of 1993, some of them occurring at the Inn of Kent, the same motel where author James Michener had conducted his interviews over twenty years earlier.*

Gail Roberts was born in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1949. She was the second of three children and grew up in Wheeling until she was thirteen. Her father was an engineer, well-educated, intelligent, charming, even seductive. But he was also abusive; a wife beater. Her parents divorced when Gail was an infant, and she didn't see him until her parents remarried when she was nine. The interim had not curbed her father's violent tendencies, however, and all three of the children were subjected to regular beatings until another divorce, years later, liberated the household from his tyrannical reign.

Gail and her siblings, along with her mother, lived with their grandparents during much of Gail's childhood. Her grandmother was more or less accepting and loving towards her younger brother, somewhat less so towards her older sister, and markedly less so towards Gail. Gail was "the mouthy" one, she says, and her grandmother literally and regularly washed her mouth out with soap when Gail used bad words. Gail was always highly sensitive to people being bullied or unfairly picked on and would quickly assume a defiant defender or protector role when she perceived someone being treated unjustly. Such action would, of course, deflect the wrath of the power wielder (typically her grandmother in earlier years), or abuser (typically her father in later years), onto herself.

How many times can a man turn his head  
Pretending he just doesn't see?  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Blowin' In The Wind*)

But in spite of a disapproving coldness towards Gail and a humorless, stern moralism that made her a difficult person to be around, Gail's grandmother was racially tolerant. This was surprising for a woman of her generation in a place like West

Virginia during the 1950s. One of the bad words that merited a mouth washing in her grandmother's home was "nigger." "God loves all his children the same," her grandmother would often intone. Consequently, Gail was always shocked when she heard her friends casually say "nigger" in their homes in front of their own parents.

Gail's grandfather was also a paradox on race. As a young man, and following in the footsteps of his own father, he had been a member of the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920s. However, he was not a talkative person, and he never contradicted his wife's pronouncements about racial equality in Gail's hearing. He at least passively supported actual efforts on the part of local liberals to integrate then racially segregated public facilities in the late 1950s.

For Gail, now age ten, these efforts included going swimming with a Methodist Church-sponsored group to a large public park swimming pool at which church officials were trying to encourage and facilitate "race mixing" among children using the pool. Gail was not at all self-conscious about splashing in the water with black kids. But one of her white friends remained standing and shaking on the bank, refusing get into the water, wailing, "I can't, I can't!" Gail was utterly baffled. Then, finally, her erstwhile friend blurted out, "I'm not allowed to swim with niggers!" Gail immediately ended their friendship.

Gail liked attending the Methodist Church. She was not pious, but it provided a refuge from family conflicts at home. She did enjoy some of the Sunday school lessons, especially the ones emphasizing prophet heroes from the Old Testament, who always seemed to be saving powerless people from the oppression of powerful, unrighteous enemies. She especially liked the church youth programs and the feelings of solidarity and meaningful group participation they invoked in her.

At the age of thirteen, Gail's parents, who had been remarried for several years, moved to Hudson, Ohio, a small all-American town near the larger university town of Kent and the industrial city of Akron. Before long, her parents split up again

as a consequence of her father's unrelenting abusive behavior. He agreed not to contest the divorce on condition that Gail and her younger brother, Ned, would live with him, presumably so that he could continue to exercise some degree of power over Gail's mother. But this arrangement did not last long. Gail's father was determined to subdue his resistant children, and his brutality soon resulted in Gail and her brother escaping their father's house and presenting themselves back to live at their mother's residence.

Both Gail and Ned were smart and good students in high school. Kent State University was just a few miles east from Hudson on U.S. Route 59. By the mid-1960s, Kent State had been hit by a baby boom tidal wave and was burgeoning into one of the larger institutions of higher education in Ohio, with a student population that surged from the low thousands in the 1950s to over 21,000 by the time Ruth registered there as a 17-year old freshman in the summer of 1966.

There's a battle outside and it's ragin'  
It'll soon shake your windows and rattle your walls  
*(Bob Dylan, lyrics from The Times are a Changin')*

One of the first things Gail encountered on registration day was an information table set up near the university book store underneath a banner that read: "End the War in Viet Nam." The table and literature spread across its surface was sponsored by the Kent Committee to End the War in Viet Nam (KCEWV)—what turned out to be the pre-cursor to the later organized Kent State Chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Gail read the pamphlets, talked with the KCEWV representative at the table—an older student by the name of Joe Jackson—and quickly formed an attachment to the infant anti-war movement and KCEWV. What they advocated seemed to make perfect sense and resonated deeply with her strongly held feelings of support for underdogs against arrogant and abusive authority figures and her accompanying moral conceptions of justice.

By the spring of 1967, Gail was deeply involved in anti-war

activities. KCEWV held regular silent vigils, holding banners, in front of the Student Activities Center on campus. They were recipients of much heckling and verbal abuse from passers-by. The student-led anti-war movement was beginning to gain momentum around the country by this time, but the great majority of Kent State students were still reflexively supportive of their government's policies in Viet Nam. On one occasion, campus police made a prominent display of going down the line of KCEWV people, grimly photographing each person.

A far different version of the graffiti slogan episode than the one reported by Lieutenant Crawford to James Michener also occurred that same spring. Gail was writing an anti-war message—"Stop the war"—on the east side of Rockwell Hall, the old library. But she was using chalk rather than paint, and it was in the afternoon rather than at night. A passerby yelled at her, to whom Gail yelled back, "Go to hell!" She was stopped from leaving by a library security guard and held until the arrival of two university police officers. The security guard and one of the officers favored letting her go, but the other officer insisted on calling campus headquarters. Because of her known (and photographed) involvement in prior KCEWV protest activities, the officers at the library were instructed to arrest her and take her to the university police station. She was read her rights, put in a cop cruiser, and driven downtown to be turned over to the Kent city police.

Gail was now just eighteen years old and, in some ways, still quite naïve. She had not considered chalking on the building an arrestable offense and was frightened and extremely upset about the prospect of going to jail. She had always conjured up scary imagery of prison confinement from vivid childhood memories of her grandfather showing her an old dark and menacing local jail in West Virginia that was accompanied by his cautionary tales of terrible things that could happen to you there. Now she was alarmed that she might be tortured or somehow killed. She also felt disgraced and ashamed—she had never known anyone who had actually been in jail before. She cried almost constantly for two hours at the station waiting to

be processed. She was allowed to call her boyfriend, and several police officers tried to calm and reassure her: "It's not as bad as you think; your friend will be here soon to bail you out," Gail recalls one officer saying.

Gail's boyfriend did bail her out, and eventually criminal charges were dropped by the university. Gail was summoned to the Kent City police station to be informed of this decision and received a stern admonition from KSU campus police chief Donald Schwartzmiller, who told her, "I want you to know this is against my advice, young woman . . ." The university did, however, press student conduct charges against her for the same offense. Gail requested an open hearing on campus, and a large number of supporters showed up, including several professors who were themselves involved in the anti-war movement. This showing of support braced and encouraged Gail. The committee hearing her case consisted of one administrator, one faculty member, and the Kent State Student Body President. This latter young man pointed out the university's sponsorship of "Gentle Thursday," a weekly sanctioned practice in which students were allowed to draw and color flowers and designs (chalk provided) on designated walkways and buildings. Gail's act didn't seem too far removed, sans official sanction, from what the university allowed other students to do. The committee debated further, then voted to dismiss charges.

Call it peace or call it treason  
Call it love or call it reason  
But I ain't marchin' anymore  
(Phil Oaks, lyrics from *I Ain't Marching Anymore*)

Gail continued her political and anti-war activities throughout the following year in spite of her traumatic encounter with the police. Why did she persist? "You don't choose to take a breath of air into your body or fail to blink when the wind blows in your eyes," is her answer. That fall of 1967 she was elected chair of KCEWV, and later threw in her lot with another radical student organization, the Young Socialist Alliance. At the beginning of the 1968 winter semester,



she had developed enough self-confidence to walk into the campus police office on an impulse to announce, “Hey, pigs, I’m back!” Officer Bill Hicks “laughed like crazy,” she recalls. On the wall, above Officer Hick’s desk, there was tacked a funny picture of two barnyard pigs. What Gail had said was intended as a joke and taken as a joke.

Events turned a little more serious later that spring when Vice President and presidential candidate Hubert Horatio Humphrey came to campus to deliver a speech. Humphrey, of course, was publically supporting the war and President Lyndon Johnson’s policies in Viet Nam. By now, a chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) had been formed at Kent and was absorbing most of the students who had previously been involved with the local KCEWV, plus adding new, more militant members. In addition, black students had organized their own activist group—Black United Students (BUS)—and were trying to adapt the national black power consciousness approach from the splintered national civil rights movement to local campus issues that they believed adversely affected a growing contingent of back students recruited to Kent State largely from the urban environs of Cleveland to the north, Pittsburg to the east, and Columbus and Cincinnati to the southwest.

Both black and white student groups were determined to protest Humphrey’s speech at the KSU Gymnasium. When the Vice President stood to speak, BUS students, sitting in a block near the stage, rose together and walked out of the gym. Gail was seated on the sidelines, higher in the bleachers, with a contingent of SDS members. She had hidden a large but scrolled anti-war and anti-Humphrey banner under an ample skirt (worn in place of her usual jeans). Gail pulled out the banner after the BUS walkout and passed it along to her SDS comrades along a line in the bleachers, who stood with a shout and unfurled it. “We brought the house down,” says Gail. In the din of yelling, boos, and catcalls that cascaded around them, Gail and her comrades clambered down from their perch chanting

anti-war slogans and filed quickly out a side door to elude detainment by authorities or attacks from shocked onlookers.

When blackness was a virtue and the road was full of mud  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Shelter from the Storm*)

The spring and summer of 1968 marked one of the most violent and disturbing periods in American history. Escalation of the increasingly unpopular war in Viet Nam, the horrific twin assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, destructive riots in major cities across the country, and outbreaks of serious student rebellions on virtually every major university campus in America only highlight the main crises of that short time span. The bloody confrontation of thousands of police and thousands of youthful protestors in the streets of Chicago during the August '68 Democratic Convention seemed almost to symbolize a nation on the brink of revolution. Some of the Kent SDS members—although not Gail—were participants in the Chicago street riots and returned to campus in the fall of 1968 more radicalized than ever. Meanwhile, the national leadership of SDS had been taken over by serious revolutionaries who planned and organized a continuing series of provocative actions carried out by local SDS chapters on hundreds of U.S. university and college campuses.

Kent State SDS faithfully followed this agenda, beginning with a raucous joint sit-in at the university student activity center with Black United Students to protest Oakland, California police recruiting on campus. The sit-in and subsequent threatened suspension of nearly 300 protestors created an uproar on campus. BUS staged a literal walk-out from the university, drawing the great majority of hundreds of enrolled black students with them—along with a number of white student supporters—all vowing to withdraw from school en masse. With TV cameras rolling, a massive crowd of non-participating students watched and alternately cheered and booed the long line of departees as they walked across the length of the campus, with fists raised and packed bags, out into the streets of

Kent. University officials huddled but ultimately declined to press charges against ringleaders of the sit-in.

Kent SDS continued a campaign of opposition to university policies and practices, ultimately aiming to shut down the university as part of the national SDS office's hope to liberate hundreds of thousands of U. S. college students from their classrooms and convert them to become fully engaged revolutionaries. They researched, wrote, published, and distributed a pamphlet entitled, "Who Rules Kent State," an expose of KSU administration and Board of Trustee connections to a web of government, military, and corporate concerns. They engaged in spontaneous guerilla theater performances in public places and conducted recruitment rap sessions in student dorms and off-campus student hangouts during the evenings. They held rallies, sometimes featuring visiting SDS national leaders, like Mark Rudd, Bernadine Dohrn, and Jim Mellen, and generally made inflammatory speeches all over campus. An illustrative passage in Michener's book reflects the tenor of these speeches: "Joan Carter, the firebrand of the Kent SDS movement, had not been hesitant about stating publically, on February 27, 1969, that 'if the university does not stop politically repressing SDS they would burn and level the campus.'" "Later, on May 6, 1969, she appeared at another meeting: "Speaking to approximately 200 persons sitting under the searing post-noon sun, [Joan] called for the use of arms to end what she called the 'repressive actions of the administration.' 'Sitting on the grass in front of the administration building is not fighting!' she emphasized. 'They used guns at Cornell, and they got what they wanted,' she said. 'It will come to that here.'" (*Kent State*, p. 157.)

Early in the 1969 spring quarter, SDS executed another march on the administration building to present their new demands. These included abolishment of ROTC as a university program, cessation of military and police recruitment on campus, disarming of campus police, and closing of the Liquid Crystals Institute—a government, grant-sponsored research project perceived by SDS to have military applications for pros-

ecuting the war in Vietnam. The action this time led to physical clashes with opposing frat and jock conservatives and, more significantly, the campus police. Arrests ensued, and the KSU administration seized upon the opportunity to finally rid themselves of SDS as a disruptive force in the university. A number of leaders were immediately suspended, and injunctions were obtained that prohibited these individuals from setting foot on campus. SDS was denied its charter standing as a legal student organization at Kent State. However, two lower rung SDS participants were subsequently brought up on student misconduct charges, and their hearing was scheduled to be held in the sprawling, newly constructed Music and Speech building—then the largest edifice on campus. Banned SDS leaders Rick Erickson and Howie Emmer were allowed a one-time-only visit to testify.

Campus police had locked the Music and Speech building's many entrances to prevent SDS supporters from getting inside to stage a protest. The protestors battled conservative students, who ringed portions of the building, and managed to find a way inside in spite of strenuous efforts to keep them out. The encouraging yells of Rick and Howie carried to their on-rushing comrades above the clamor: "You're our brothers and sisters, come and get us!" Chaos reigned in the scheduled hearing room and adjacent hallways as the accused, SDS witnesses, and well over 200 of their supporters, discovered that the police had now resealed the one unguarded entrance, and they were all trapped inside the building. Here they were, trying to escape, while live news accounts on Cleveland television stations were reporting that SDS had occupied a major building on the KSU campus and couldn't be driven out. Arrests were made, and charges of riot, inciting to riot, unlawful trespass, and malicious destruction of property were variously doled out to participants. SDS leaders previously arrested at the earlier administration building melee, including Rick and Howie, were convicted of felony crimes and sentenced to substantial jail terms.

You don't need a weather man  
To know which way the wind blows  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Subterranean Homesick Blues*)

Early that summer, local Kent SDS members, such as Joan Carter, helped national SDS leaders Terry Robbins and John Jacobs draft the Weatherman manifesto, which called for young whites everywhere to join exploited people of color in a projected imminent third world revolution against U.S. imperialism, to be led by black American revolutionaries. This document became the ideological basis for a final splintering of SDS into warring factions at its own June national conference in Chicago. The Weatherman faction, including a number of former Kent SDS members, spent the remainder of the summer of '69 setting up communal, revolutionary cells in several large mid-western cities—including Detroit, Cleveland, and Columbus—preparing for armed guerilla conflict that was to commence with the highly touted “Days of Rage” in Chicago that fall.

This plan flopped when only a few hundred Weather people showed up from radical strongholds around the country rather than the thousands anticipated. There were nevertheless some brutal confrontations with police, and Weather revolutionaries trashed shop and car windows along a section of Chicago's posh “Gold Coast” area. A large proportion of Weather people, including leaders, were arrested over the course of several days' actions, and, although able to post bail and achieve temporary freedom for those arrested, the organization felt forced to go underground to avoid upcoming trials that would likely result in convictions and long prison sentences. Thus was born the fabled Weather Underground, which next came to public attention dramatically in February of 1970 in a powerful explosion causing the death of three of their own members, who accidentally blew themselves up in a Greenwich Village townhouse in New York City. These young outlaws were making bombs that they planned to set off during an army function at Fort Dix, New Jersey. One of the fatal-

ities—Terry Robbins—had been intimately involved in organizing and guiding SDS activities at Kent State University.

Gail stayed largely aloof from the revolutionary extremism of Weatherman. She was sympathetic to most of the larger goals of the group but rejected the violent tactics they advocated and were all too willing to implement. With SDS banned from campus, and many of its Kent leaders either in jail or underground with the Weathermen, serious student radicalism at KSU seemed to have been abruptly eviscerated. Gail continued taking classes, meeting and discussing political tactics with her Young Socialist Alliance friends, and engaging in impassioned opposition to the war in whatever ways she could. Meanwhile, the country took a hard turn to the right in spite of (or more likely because of) the raging of the anti-war movement and the beatific craziness of the youth counter-culture. Richard Nixon was elected president in November, 1968, and the war dragged on. News of the Weatherman townhouse explosion in February of 1970 was hard to absorb and only served to underscore the apparent futility of all the passion and effort that Gail, her friends, and hundreds of thousands of other young people had poured into promoting social justice at home and peace and an end to imperialism abroad. Gail had enrolled for classes in the 1970 spring term but then dropped out. School didn't mean anything to her now; "there was nothing to place a value on," she recalls.

Of war and peace the truth just twists  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *The Gates of Eden*)

Then, on April 30, Nixon announced on national television that U.S. troops had crossed into Cambodia, thus enlarging the war rather than winding it down, as his election campaign had promised, and all hell broke loose.

Two days earlier, Gail had driven to the Portage County Jail in nearby Ravenna to provide a ride for Rick Erickson, who, along with Howie Emmer, had just completed serving their sentences from the previous spring's SDS clashes at the university. Their return trip to Kent was not dominated by po-

litical talk but rather featured discussion of the recent release of new albums by The Young Bloods and Crosby, Stills, and Nash. Rick stayed that night in the house where Ruth currently lived—just east of Water Street—the home of two married professors of Russian language and history at KSU, who permitted young radicals to take up temporary residence with them.

But Gail also frequently stayed at another house, even closer to campus, on West Elm Street. Michener focused on this house, in the background narrative of his book, to illustrate the youth counter culture of the time without realizing Gail's connection to it and its denizens:

In Kent, there is a house on Ash Street [Elm Street; a pseudonym was used for legal reasons] . . . which epitomizes this new lifestyle. . . When you enter the front door the first thing you see is an enormous American flag, big enough for a skyscraper or a battleship, suspended from the ceiling . . . The walls are decorated with posters . . . Che Geuvara in brave uniform; two rhinoceroses copulating and accompanied by the legend Make Love, Not War . . . Who lives in the commune? Ten young men and seven girls . . . From this house have come some of the plans for the various disruptions that have upset the university in recent years . . . Political activity at the house on Ash [Elm] Street is intense and interminable (pp. 69–78).

Gail was watching television on the night of the 30th at the quasi-communal home of her radical friends on Elm Street when President Nixon made his announcement. The invasion news enraged Gail, filling her with “white hot anger.” She says that she and just one of the younger guys at the house immediately went to a store and bought two cans of spray paint. They scrawled anti-war messages (“Stop Imperialism!”) on a number of downtown Kent buildings, including the large bank at the corner of Main and Water Street. Pictures of the messages appeared in the next morning's, May 1st *Record Carrier Journal* in a sidebar story, headlined “Vandalism,” about reactions to the president's speech.

Tension and intimations of further action were palpable

in the warm spring air. Gail learned by word of mouth that history graduate students, who had waggishly formed an organization with the acronym “WHORE (World Historians Opposed to Racism and Exploitation), were going to hold an impromptu rally at the university commons to “bury the Constitution.” She sat on the grass at noon with a crowd of others around the old victory bell, listened to the speeches, and watched the graduate students dig a shallow hole in the yielding sod and literally bury a photocopy of the Constitution. BUS held its own rally later in the afternoon, but Gail did not attend. Black student leader speeches were fiery, but addressed current grievances at the university in the assertive style of black power advocacy rather than focusing on escalation of the war into Cambodia. But they did foresee trouble coming to Kent: “When Nixon came on TV to announce the war in Cambodia, we took bets as to which unit of the National Guard would be on campus first . . . And we decided right then, ‘No blacks visible if trouble starts.’ . . . We know that when a white man has a gun, and he sees a black . . . he has a compulsion to shoot . . . It’s easy for blacks to stay indoors when whites are running around with rifles.” (*Kent State*, p.33.) White students, however, took a different view. Rumors were flying. “Shit is going to happen,” was the word on the street, Gail recalls, “Tonight on the strip, at eight!”

There was music in the cafes at night  
And revolution in the air  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Tangled up in Blue*)

The strip was a succession of bars on North Water Street primarily patronized by large numbers of students on weekends. Ruth strolled over to Orville’s Bar early in the evening. She saw Rick Ericson coming through the door a short while later and got up to stop him: “You can’t be here! Get out of here!” Ruth urgently confronted him. “I know,” he said, “I’m going,” and bent over to kiss Ruth on the cheek, saying “Good luck, goodbye.” According to Michener’s second hand account of what happened next, someone “saw this little, skinny, puny



bitch, and she smashed her beer glass against the table and shouted, ‘I want some action!’ She stormed out of Orville’s with a can of red spray paint and went to J.B’s and wrote on his wall, Fuck the pigs.” (*Kent State*, p. 190.) Another Michener account next has “Gail Roberts and [several young men] showed up wearing red armbands. . . Tavern owner Joe Bujack [who claimed to have seen Gail spray painting his saloon with slogans the previous night] spotted her in the crowd Friday on Water Street—slight, short, her stringy hair in ponytails. He said to her, I know you’re Gail Roberts . . . She turned on him and called him a ‘capitalist pig.’” Bujack went inside to call the police, and Gail and her companions melted back into the crowd. A short while later, “A police cruiser came by, somebody slung a bottle, and the riot was on.” (*Kent State*, p. 48.)

Gail’s own account makes no mention of a paint spraying sally from Orville’s to J.B’s or an encounter with bar owner Bujack. But she does elaborate on her activities during the initial moments of the street riot that would escalate and eventually provoke Kent’s mayor, LeRoy Satrom, to first declare a state of emergency and later make a request of standby alert to the Ohio National Guard. Gail says she left Orville’s after Rick had departed, when it started to get dark, and stood around with an old friend waiting “to see what was going to happen on the street.” The crowds were thicker than usual, louder. A police car periodically drove slowly along Water Street, checking things out, and would be heckled by students along the sidewalks and overflowing onto the street. Gail noticed a couple of empty Coke bottles lying on the curb where she and her friend were standing. On an impulse she picked one up and heaved it at the cop cruiser as it passed by. (Gail had played shortstop in a softball league when she was younger and had a pretty good arm.) The bottle smashed into the car’s windshield, and Gail stepped quickly behind her friend, so that no one could see who had chucked it. Instead of stopping, the cruiser picked up speed and, as Gail puts it, “shot the hell out of there.” Cheers and other noisy expressions of approval erupted from the street throng when the Coke bottle splattered against the

windshield and the cop took off. More people poured into the street and “took it over,” says Gail. She suddenly experienced what she calls “the liberating effect of violence” that Franz Fanon talked about occurring “when oppressed people fight back.”

Things subsequently became “wild, fast, and weird,” as Gail recalls. Someone started a bonfire in the middle of North Water Street. The crowd began moving south, towards Main Street. Gail remembers hearing the almost beautiful crystalline sound of shattering glass, but says she didn’t herself participate in window smashing. A number of people were artfully employing cans of spray paint to decorate building walls with anti-war messages. Gail had by now joined with a number of other acquaintances [whom she refuses to identify]. Suddenly a large man lurched out from a bar and attacked one of Gail’s friends. Gail and several other friends jumped into the fray, pinning the attacker to the pavement and freeing her friend; then all of them escaped up the hill and onto the KSU campus. Gail’s recollections of the rest of that night’s events are hazy. Kent police were mobilized, and Mayor Satrom “read the Ohio riot act” through a bullhorn from a police cruiser near the concentrated center of the crowd. Police in riot gear entered bars along Water Street and ordered them all closed forthwith. Hundreds of angry patrons, unable to finish paid-for beers or watch the end of the Lakers-Knicks NBA finals game playing on bar TVs, spilled out into the streets, adding to the confusion. The police formed a line and, aided by firing of tear gas, slowly pushed the crowd up the same U.S. 59 route earlier taken by Gail and friends onto the sanctuary afforded by the campus.

Rumors were flying ever thicker and faster the next morning, Saturday, May 2. In Kent, residents and officials were hearing tales of outside radical groups pouring into town to engage in a range of revolutionary depredations: Carloads of armed Weathermen had supposedly been spotted driving towards Kent; Black Panthers were going to burn the town down; Yippies were going to pour LSD into the water treatment plant

that supplied Kent. And so on. KSU students were abuzz about FBI agents searching for evidence of revolutionary conspiracy in the riotous events that had transpired the previous night on Water Street. According to Gail, “Everybody knew” that something was “going to go down on the campus commons that night at 8 p.m.,” the curfew hour under the state of emergency proclaimed by Mayor Satrom.

Gail arrived at the commons with friends [whom she again will not identify] a little before 8 p.m. She reports that a large, diverse crowd was already there. She recalls some frat guys sharing a joint, another guy swigging from a wineskin. Her memories are otherwise fragmentary. There was a march from the commons to recruit more students from the Tri-Towers Dorms and other adjacent student residence halls: “Join us! Join us!” was the clarion call issued by the marchers across campus. The much enlarged crowd, estimated to now number around 2,000, returned, streaming down Blanket Hill to the commons below, the victory bell clanging wildly in its solid brick encasement on one end and the old, wood framed ROTC building—an inviting and much maligned target—anchoring the other end of the common’s grassy expanse. The crowd surged past the bell housing and on toward the ROTC building, roaring “Down with ROTC!” Barbara Agte, an English professor Gail knew, was standing nearby, very upset. “Can’t you see, someone’s going to get hurt!” Professor Agte implored futilely as students ran around her.

Come on baby, light my fire  
Try to set the night on fire  
(The Doors, lyrics from *Light My Fire*)

A number of people dashed up close to the ROTC building, heaving rocks at it, Gail remembers, but the windows had heavy, protective screens that shielded them. Some guys were trying to push an old car from an adjacent parking lot and ram it into the side of the building. Michener solicited a first-hand account of a student bystander toting a camera by the name of Nick Haskakis, “a huge, muscular fellow,” whose parents were

Greek immigrants. According to Haskakis, “A student whipped out a flag and set fire to it . . . I took several great photographs . . . but about a dozen men surrounded me and began cursing and shouting, ‘Get that guy with the camera!’ and they knocked me to the ground and began kicking at my stomach . . . But I rolled over on my belly and hid the camera, and they really began working me over.” Haskakis thought at first he was going to be killed, but then relates that, “I was saved by a girl who threw herself on me and pleaded with the men to stop kicking me . . . She wore granny glasses, wire-rimmed, and had pigtails. She told me, ‘Be sensible, give them the camera . . .’ When she saw I wasn’t thinking too clearly, she took the camera away from me and handed it to one of the men . . .” (p. 206). Michener adds an additional claim that “Professor Glen Frank [a professor of geology] leaped into the crowd, trying to rescue the beleaguered giant [with the camera], but two men grabbed Frank from behind in a stranglehold, and he had a bad time until Gail Roberts shouted, ‘Christ, it’s Professor Frank! Let him go!’ She led him to safety.” Michener then adds a confusing and inaccurate account of “An older man, who pushed through the throng and said calmly, ‘The smart thing is to destroy the film.’ Someone knelt down, took the camera, expertly slipped open the cartridge area, removed the film, exposed it, then almost apologetically returned the camera” (p. 194).

Gail does acknowledge her pivotal involvement in the photographer fracas. She heard screams all around her, “He’s taking pictures! Stop him!” He was a big guy, Gail concurs, an undercover cop, Gail believed at the time. Several people had him on the ground punching and kicking him. “What can I do for this to stop?” he implored. Gail—the young girl with hair in pigtails, not some older man— knelt down to him, and said, “OK, give me the film.” Instead, confused, he handed her his glasses. “Nope, gotta give me the film, man,” Gail said. Once he finally complied, everyone backed off and let the guy up, but someone grabbed the film roll from her hand and disap-

peared. She has no recollection of intervening to save Professor Frank from being roughed up by angry protestors.

Michener, presumably drawing from several eyewitness reports, says that many failed attempts to set fire to ROTC were made by various individuals before success finally occurred when two blazing rail road flares were tossed through a broken window that had not been adequately protected by a screen (p. 194). Gail recalls none of this, and in fact says that no fire occurred at all while the crowd was initially attacking ROTC. According to her, the greater part of the crowd initially dispersed when university police were observed around dusk stationing themselves in a line well to the rear of the besieged ROTC building. But the police never did actually attempt to intervene in the crowd's activities, a fact confirmed by other eye witness accounts reported by Michener. Eventually, says Gail, "thousands" of people returned to the ROTC scene from various other anti-war activities occurring elsewhere on campus, and Gail, from a more distant vantage point on nearby Blanket Hill, heard screams, "It's on Fire! It's on Fire!" and then saw the glow of flames from inside the antiquated ROTC structure.

Michener's account of the fire has city firemen arriving to put out the blaze only to be turned away by the determined resistance of students and the lack of police protection. Gail remembers the firemen being intercepted by crowd participants as they dragged water hoses towards ROTC from their parked trucks. "Grab the hoses!" she heard people yell, and then saw students fighting with firemen for control of the unwieldy canvas tubes. Greatly outnumbered, the firemen retreated back to their trucks and drove off campus. Huge flames began shooting out from the top of ROTC, unimpeded now by any fire-fighting efforts. Gail says she stood and watched the fire burn "for a long time." Meanwhile, a convoy of trucks, armored personnel carriers, and jeeps, carrying troops of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 145 Infantry, Ohio National Guard were already rumbling into town and onto the campus of Kent State University, their vehicles, steel helmets, and bayoneted M-1 ri-

fles illuminated by the red glow from the ROTC flames shooting up against the black sky.

The rest of that night seems “surrealistic” in Gail’s recollection, “a night of surprises.” She remembers helicopters whumping overhead with spotlights beaming down to illuminate fleeing groups of students. Clusters of armed guardsmen were roaming around campus. Sometimes she and her friends found themselves trailing behind a guard patrol, conveying to her a sense of “being behind enemy lines.” Nevertheless, she didn’t feel in the least threatened; the atmosphere was more like a carnival. They wound up escaping into the huge, newly constructed Tri-Towers dorms along with many other participants in that night’s events. Following an uncertain wait in the dorms a bullhorn announcement could be heard granting a 30-minute grace period for the non-dorm students using Tri-Towers as a haven to leave unimpeded and return to their own residences. Gail and a number of her friends quickly found their way back to the Elm Street abode near campus. “Someone’s going to get killed,” noted one of her friends.

Where have all the flowers gone . . . Gone to graveyards,  
everyone

(Pete Seeger, lyrics from *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*)

Sunday, May 3rd was a day of contrasts. The unseasonably warm weather continued, and the scene on campus seemed, during the morning hours and on into the afternoon, almost serene. Guardsmen were bivouacked in the university gymnasium as well as in tents clustered at various points around campus. The helicopters that had clattered over the tops of student dorms the previous night were parked neatly on the grounds of a nearby high school football field. Small contingents of troops stood at casual guard around equipment and other defined strategic points. Throughout the day large numbers of people, including residents of Kent and nearby towns, poured onto campus to gawk at the military presence and the charred, smoldering ruins of ROTC. Friendly exchanges occurred between civilian onlookers and Guard personnel. One vivacious

young woman—freshman Allison Krause—inserted a small yellow flower into the barrel of a Guardsman’s rifle and declared to him that “Flowers are better than bullets.” Meanwhile, at city hall in downtown Kent, Republican Governor James E. Rhodes had flown in by helicopter and was conferring with officials of the National Guard, city, and university. The result of this meeting, bellicosely announced at a press conference immediately succeeding the meeting, was the governor’s decision to declare a state of emergency, impose martial law with an evening curfew, but keep the university open in spite of requests by some officials to close school in order to avoid further violent confrontations with students.

By evening, however, the mood began to change. Another large crowd of students had formed on campus, summoned again by the sonorous clanging of the old victory bell on the commons. A throng estimated at several thousand began to move towards University President Robert White’s on-campus home but were stymied by a National Guard detachment firing tear gas canisters that scattered them in various directions. Several minutes later a smaller crowd reformed and occupied the center intersection of Main and Lincoln directly adjacent to the northwest corner of campus. Following a tense standoff, Guard troops affixed bayonets and, amidst clouds of tear gas, moved upon the sitting students and standing onlookers and drove them onto and across the campus. Some students sought refuge in the nearby old library but were pursued inside by ominous appearing men in full battle gear and gasmasks; at least seven students sustained bayonet wounds. Once again, helicopters swirled around campus dormitories and other potential student hideouts with bright search beams probing for resistant activity.

Gail Roberts, however, had not been present for this day’s events. She and her friends had slept later than usual as a result of their early dawn bedtime the night before. When they did awake, they drove to yet another friend’s residence in Gail’s own town of Hudson to discuss the implications of the National Guard arrival on campus and the freshly radicalized,

confrontational spirit manifest by increasingly large numbers of previously apathetic, non-political students.

There's something happening here  
What it is ain't exactly clear  
There's a man with a gun over there  
Telling me I got to beware  
I think it's time we stop, children  
What's that sound?  
Everybody look what's going down  
(Buffalo Springfield, lyrics from *For What It's Worth*)

Thousands of students attended their regular classes on Monday, May 4th, in spite of the presence of around 600 Ohio National Guard troops scattered around campus, including armed guards stationed at classroom entrances. The governor's declaration of martial law forbade the congregation of more than a half dozen people at any one time, but most students were not aware of this restriction. A few minutes before noon, just as classes were ending and large numbers of students were exiting classroom buildings, the doleful tones of the victory bell were once again heard issuing from the commons area. And once more a large group of students gravitated towards the solemn sound of the bell. A line of 113 Ohio National Guardsmen stood in front of the blackened remains of ROTC, directly facing the rapidly swelling body of students arriving from all corners of the campus, eventually forming a virtual massive ring around the Guard, the commons, and the clanging victory bell. The majority of these students came as spectators to watch what would prove to be a deadly game. Several hundred of them became active participants in an impromptu rally that featured loud anti-war chants: "One, two, three, four, we don't want your fucking war!" and jeers directed at the Guard—"Pigs off campus!"

No one budged when a Guard jeep approached the demonstrating students clumped around the victory bell, and an officer with a bullhorn declared their rally an illegal gathering and ordered them to disperse. Subsequently, at twelve o'-



clock noon, General Robert Canterbury gave the order for his troops to move out and, preceded by a barrage of high arching tear gas canisters, marched toward the victory bell to clear the commons and surrounding hillocks of defiant protestors. The initially shot gas canisters fell short of their mark and were seized by face-scarved demonstrators, who threw them back at the advancing guard, the smokey tails of the canisters billowing behind them as they flew through the air. As the long line of troops neared, the students frontally facing them grudgingly retreated up the west slope of Blanket Hill and down the north side. The Guard pressed forward, moving toward a practice athletic field at the bottom of the hill. Large numbers of students simply parted to the sides of the hill and adjacent areas, like the waters before Moses, then filled in again behind while the Guard advanced forward in pursuit of a smaller knot of the most prominent protestors, who were throwing a variety of rocks and other missiles at their pursuers as they ran.

Abruptly the Guard came to a halt on the practice field, their progress obstructed by a chain link fence, which the students they were chasing had avoided by veering away at the last moment and were now arrayed in a side parking lot, taunting the stymied Guard and hurling more rocks. Following a few moments of confused consultation among sergeants and officers, during which time some guardsmen knelt and aimed their rifles at jeering students in the nearby parking lot, the Guard reconfigured into a wedge pointing back up Blanket Hill. The large number of bystanders packed along both sides of a broad isle, joined by newcomers still emerging from classrooms and dorms—all of whom had been witnessing this spectacle—emitted a roar of elation: “They’re leaving! We’ve won!” The Guard struggled back up the steep north slope of Blanket Hill in the hot noon sun, sweating in their eye-fogged gas masks. As they reached the crest, beside a ponderous but distinctive cement pagoda structure, the recent handiwork of university architect students, the right flank of the Guard line halted, turned in unison, and unleashed a sustained volley

aimed back down Blanket Hill and into the adjoining parking lot. The fusillade lasted for approximately 13 seconds.

Tin soldiers and Nixon's comin'.  
We're finally on our own.  
This summer I hear the drummin'.  
Four dead in Ohio  
(Crosby, Stills, and Nash, lyrics from *Ohio*)

Jeff Miller—a transfer student from Michigan State whose image is captured in numerous photos of the rally at the victory bell giving the finger to the Guard with both hands—lay sprawled in the middle of a small asphalt lane running between Blanket Hill and the practice field and parking lot, almost 100 yards distant from the guns, a portion of his head blown away. An expanding pool of blood streamed away from his body under the feet of Mary Vecchio—a large, black-haired girl with an expressive face—who was kneeling over Jeff, screaming in anguish with outstretched arms in an unforgettable portrait that appeared the following week on the cover of Newsweek magazine. Allison Krause, the young flower girl of Sunday's poignant exchange with an equally young guardsman, lay another 100 feet further below Jeff behind a car in the parking lot, dying from a chest wound while her boyfriend frantically tried to give her mouth-to-mouth respiration. Sandy Sheuer, a quiet but dedicated speech and hearing major, who had just emerged from a nearby dormitory and was on her way to a 1:10 class, also lay dead even further back in the parking lot, a friend hugging her close for protection, not realizing that a bullet had already pierced her neck until he saw her blood seeping into the pavement underneath them. Bill Schroeder, a top student, athlete, and head of his ROTC class, had just completed taking an ROTC exam on war tactics when the noon rally began. He had strolled over to the commons with a friend to observe the scene, got caught in a crush when students on Blanket Hill were trying to evade the oncoming Guard, and was walking through the parking lot when gunfire ensued. He collapsed to the pavement only a few feet away

from Sandy Sheurer when a 55 caliber steel piercing bullet from an M-1 rifle crashed through his lower back, shattered a rib, exploded a lung, and exited out his shoulder. He maintained consciousness for several minutes but expired before medics could rush him to the nearest hospital.

These four were the May 4th fatalities. Nine other students were wounded with varying degrees of seriousness, ranging from a relatively minor flesh wound to severing of a spinal cord resulting in instant and permanent paralysis. Included among the casualties were two newly minted young radicals who had only begun showing up among Gail Robert's circle of political activist acquaintances since that past winter semester. One was Tom Grace, a serious minded history and political science major, who had gradually arrived at the conclusion that the Viet Nam war was morally wrong. He had tried to make himself as small as possible behind a skinny tree about 20 yards further up from Jeff Miller, on Blanket Hill, directly in the sights of the Guard when they began firing. A bullet nevertheless shattered his right ankle. Tom's friend, Alan Canforra, was a more visible target, with his long blonde hair, red headband and black, waving flag in hand. The slightly larger tree he was hiding behind, almost parallel to Tom Grace, absorbed several M-1 rounds zinging down the hill in the barrage from the pagoda area; a single bullet found a fleetingly exposed forearm and went cleanly through Alan's left wrist.

There's a black Mercedes rollin' through the combat zone  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Angelina*)

Glen Frank, the geology professor acting as a faculty marshal throughout this crisis, had stationed himself near the Guard troops lined in front of the ROTC ruins at the start of the noon rally and remained in that area to talk with military and police officers who had not moved out with Charley Company, the Guard contingent that attempted to break up the rally. When, some 23 minutes later, he heard the roar of gunfire at the top of Blanket Hill and the screams of shot and panicked students, Frank immediately called for medical help and

rode in the grass up Blanket Hill to the massacre scene in an emergency ambulance. Pandemonium reigned; Frank tried to calm and organize dazed onlookers to assist in attending to the wounded. But within a short time, a new crisis emerged. As many as 500 shocked and highly emotional students began to congregate in a mass on the commons facing the Guard troops, fifty yards distant, who had come down from the crest of Blanket Hill and reformed into an attack line in front of the burned-out ROTC. An additional line of troops silently appeared on the hillside above the students, bayoneted rifles at the ready, waiting for further orders.

Several tape recordings, made by journalism students and reporters from a local radio station, captured the dramatic sounds and contending voices that vied to shape this tense stand-off. Some students were crying, some were singing and chanting, and some were shouting out: "Let's finish it!" "If they want to use their goddamned guns, let them splatter us now!" Other similarly desperate exclamations resounded from the throng. Frank, two other professors (Seymour Baron, a psychologist, and Mike Lunine, a political scientist), and a history graduate student (Steve Sharoff, who had been one of the leaders in Friday's "burying of the Constitution") shuttled back and forth with increasing anxiety between the grim Guardsmen and the equally grim students, trying to detain General Canterbury's determination to move his troops against the students while also trying to get the students to break up and leave the area.

Finally, Professor Frank grabbed a bullhorn and, in an emotion-choked voice, pleaded in front of the students, "I don't care whether you've never listened to anyone before in your lives. I'm *begging* you, right now. If you don't disperse, right now, they're going to move in, and it can only be a *slaughter*! Would you please *listen* to me?! Jesus *Christ*! I don't want to be a *part* of this!" A few students began to stand up from their sitting positions. Steve Sharoff seized the moment to cry, "Here's a way out, follow me!" and began motioning while striding away through the crowd in the direction of adjacent

tennis courts lying between the parallel Guard lines. Suddenly the angry and frightened clot of students dislodged from the west base of Blanket Hill and moved after Sharoff.

Where was Gail Roberts during these dramatic events on campus? She spent the morning of May 4th tending the three-year old daughter of the friend whose home in Hudson Gail and other friends had retreated to after the Saturday night burning of ROTC. Around noon, Gail and two of her friends—Larry and Robin—drove together towards Kent to find out what was happening. They pulled into a Sunoco station on Highway 59, near campus, but the attendant said he couldn't sell them gas because of the imposition of martial law, which had gone into effect the day before. But Larry knew the guy and, after some slight cajoling—"Come on, help us out a little here"—they were able to gas up. As they pulled out of the station, Gail turned on the radio just in time to hear the original, incorrect news bulletin that two guardsmen and two students had just been shot at Kent State University. "Oh my god!" exclaimed Gail. Were students armed and fighting the Guard? Had a revolution begun on the bucolic campus of their own university? "We couldn't believe it," she says. They instantly concluded that proceeding onto campus would be a bad idea. Would the cops and other government forces be rounding up all known radical dissenters? Seconds later they could see and hear police cruisers roaring up to the university. This terrified them; momentarily they thought the police were coming directly after them.

After the police passed them by, they raced away from campus in their car to make several frantic stops at people's respective residences to snatch up whatever clothes and other necessities were available. On their zigzag route, they encountered an alarmed doctoral student they knew—Kasmi, an Indian national, who was trotting anxiously down a sidewalk on a residential street. Kasmi was a PhD candidate in chemistry and taught some classes at Kent, but he was also a political radical who had participated in some of the activities and planning sessions of the Socialist Alliance; he hopped into the car to escape with

them. Larry thought he knew a way to get out of town without being stopped: through Fuller Park to Monroe Falls on Route 91 in Summit County. The area they started to pass through seemed deserted. Suddenly a police roadblock appeared as they slid around a turn. Robin, who was driving, slammed on the brakes. Several officers approached the car and leveled shotguns into the back seat at Gail and Kasmi's heads. They were dumbstruck. The car had careened to a stop adjacent to a ditch, and Gail felt certain they were going to be shot on the spot and their bodies kicked into the ditch. Everyone exited the car, so scared they couldn't speak. One of the officers opened the trunk, searching for weapons and other incriminating evidence. Unexpectedly, Kasmi saved the day. He had pulled himself together and calmly identified himself as a professor at KSU, who had just finished teaching his last class and, along with some of his best students, was trying to avoid the troubles happening at the university. He produced a faculty I.D. card to prove his identity. Larry then piped up, "We just want to leave." Astonishingly, the police let them go. Gail, meanwhile, had "pissed herself" from the terror of those excruciating few moments.

Robin knew someone in Portage Lakes who provided a temporary refuge. They stayed there until dark, then Danny, another acquaintance they had contacted, drove Gail and Larry towards Cleveland, where they hoped to hook up with yet other friends they assumed would be hiding there. The two of them hid underneath "piles of stuff" in the back of the van they were riding in. But before they could get far, their driver spotted National Guard jeeps forming another roadblock on the route in front of them. Gail almost fainted. Somehow they managed to elude the Guard and drove back to their temporary refuge in Portage Lakes. Meanwhile, Kasmi and Robin had decided to take her car and try their chances together somewhere else. Before splitting, Kasmi gave Gail twenty dollars and a hard farewell hug. Later that night, Gail and Larry managed to make their way to a bus station in Cleveland Heights and bought tickets for a ride to Whitewater, Wisconsin, where still more radical friends from Kent had fled to hide.

The hideout was a walkup apartment above a grain store on the main street of town. It was owned by Marti Lough, the daughter of KSU sociology professor, Tom Lough, who was sympathetic to radical causes. Much hugging and expressions of relief greeted them as Gail and Larry came up the stairs. Their arrival increased the number of hideaways in the small space to seven. Nevertheless, they were glad to still be alive and to have each other for support.

Nightsticks and water cannons, tear gas, padlocks  
Molotov cocktails and rocks behind every curtain  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Jokerman*)

Exhausted, they slumbered deeply on the floor after talk finally ceased. They had barely awakened and begun thinking about finding food when, as Gail puts it, “Suddenly a fucking riot started happening downstairs on the street below our window.” Whitewater is a college town, and, incredibly to Gail and her friends, students were rampaging in the streets below, protesting the Kent State shootings and the Cambodian invasion. One of the student leaders bounded up the stairs to their apartment and pounded on the door. Somehow, he knew they were there and who they were. “We know you’re from Kent State; you know what to do!” he exclaimed, and demanded wet rags to protect against tear gas and urged them to join and lead the students in the fray with riot police. Gail and her friends ignored these pleas for help and immediately lay flat on the floor, away from the windows, fearing that police would appear any moment to blow them all away.

But the riot faded down another street without further incident for the Kent refugees; they kept a low profile, trying to sort out what to do next. The following morning the phone jangled everyone awake. Marti Lough picked it up, then handed it to Gail—it was Howie Emmer, calling her from the Milwaukee airport. Howie, like Rick Erickson, had completed his term in the Portage County jail just days before the May 4 shootings. He had high-tailed it out of Kent like the others,

knowing that blame, however erroneous, would immediately be thrown on him and Rick as prime suspects in stirring up the trouble that precipitated the May 4 calamity. Howie said a cop was standing right outside his phone booth and, though he didn't want to sound paranoid, that he might be tailed, or at least easily tracked, if he proceeded to his sister's house in Madison. Gail's impulse was to help a comrade, to give support and reassurance. Maybe Howie could come to join with them in Whitewater instead of going on to his sister's. When she hung up and tried to explain to the others in the apartment, everyone was upset. "God damn it, she told him to come here!" George blurted out. They were solidly against the proposal, telling her that she had risked everyone's security; Howie could not come, and she would have to leave.

How does it feel  
To be on your own  
With no direction home  
Like a complete unknown  
Like a rolling stone.  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Like a Rolling Stone*)

Gail was now a cast-out, alone and terrified. Where to go? For two weeks she found temporary shelter during the nights at local student communes and survived during the days eating raw potatoes. Finally, she took a chance hitchhiking to Madison. She carried her clothes in a Kent State University book bag that was turned inside-out to hide the logo. Stray dogs snarled and snapped at her ankles while she walked on the highway in between lifts. She finally found Howie's sister's house in Madison, and hid there for four days with Howie; all the windows were covered and taped from the inside. They decided it best to split, and Gail found a "ride bulletin board" on campus at the University of Wisconsin. She made contact with two guys and a woman who advertised that they were driving west to Berkley, California. They accepted her as a travel companion, no questions asked, and she gave them what little remaining money she had to help with gas and other expenses.



The cross-country trip to North Central California affords some beautiful scenery en route, but Gail was too distracted by her thoughts and fears to much notice. She spent a damp and shelter-less first night in Berkley, then hitchhiked across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco the next morning, searching for an old address of Kent State anti-war activists who had moved there several years earlier. She managed to find a married couple, but they knew she “was on the lam from KSU” and only agreed to let her use their address to receive mail. She bounced from apartment to apartment back in the Berkley area, working nights as a barmaid at a “hooker bar” in Oakland. Finally she discovered a big, old resurrected ruin of a house on Walnut Street that rented individual rooms to a collection of odd characters. The couple who operated the house were “hippies to the max,” says Ruth, and casually accepted Gail as a tenant. After several weeks the couple “went away for the summer,” and more or less left Gail in charge of managing the place. This proved not such an easy task, considering that other boarders in the house were engaging in various illicit activities, including shooting heroin. Gail insisted on three basic rules: “Clean up dog shit, clean up dirty dishes, and pay rent on time.”

Try imagining a place where it's always safe and warm  
(Bob Dylan, lyrics from *Shelter from the Storm*)

Gail stayed at the Walnut Street house until September, then moved to an apartment near the legendary Fillmore Theater in San Francisco. Thinking she would be closer to old Kent friends, Gail once again wound up being alone and terrified. “All kinds of shit was going on in the neighborhood,” she recalls. Her building was virtually abandoned and had no water. Small fires would flare up from time to time; “It was outrageous,” Gail adds. Her immediate neighbors were a black family of three. The father was a druggie and the mother a prostitute. Gail felt sorry for the little girl, who was neglected, and attempted to shoplift some clothing articles for her. She was apprehended by a store detective, a big black man. He interrogated her rather than simply call the cops: “Why are you

stealing little girls' stuff? Do you have children of your own?" Gail explained the situation. "Have you ever done this before?" queried the detective. "No, that's why I'm not very good at it," Gail replied. "OK," said the big black guy, "now if this were Penny's, you'd be in jail, right now. I know those guys—they'll turn in senile old ladies who wander out of the store with a package of buttons in their hands. I'm going to let you go, but I never want to catch you in my store again."

Gail made the best of things in her dreadful dwelling until mid-November, when it started to get cold and rainy. Then she made contact with yet another old Kent radical friend, Mike Rolm, who had also migrated to San Francisco and was living in a place in the Haight on Ashbury Street as a fringe member of the Weather Underground. She stayed with Mike until early January, 1971. She had seen news announcements on TV in December about the "Kent 25" indictments. Her name was on the list, and she was further identified as a fugitive; other friends back in Kent wrote to her advising that she not come back. Mike, however, finally convinced her that returning to Ohio was the best thing to do. It would get publicity and perhaps shift the focus back on the miscarriage of justice in Kent, where guardsmen who fired on students were being absolved of wrong-doing while students who had participated in various protest activities were facing criminal trials. Gail missed her mom, brother, and friends who had stayed in Kent. She figured it was just a matter of time before authorities would find her anyway—better to turn herself in at home than be arrested in San Francisco.

Gail caught a ride back East from an advertisement on the San Francisco State University "ride board." Her traveling companions were a woman and the great grandson of Oliver Wendell Holmes. She disembarked at Akron, Ohio and spent a couple of days at Paul and Marilyn Probius' home—former Kent SDS members. Paul was now a law student at the University of Akron, and he plotted legal strategy with Gail. He and Marilyn also helped calm Gail's fears and reorient her to what

had been going on in Kent during her absence. When Gail and Paul showed up unannounced at the Ravenna City Police Station to surrender, the police, according to Gail, “Shit themselves; they flapped around and weren’t initially sure what the fuck to do.” Finally they read to her the Portage County Grand Jury indictment and fingerprinted her. One officer, Gail says, commented that, “You have such little fingers.” Gail had dreaded the prospect of being put in jail to await trial, “If they can, they’ll kill me,” she thought. But Paul reassured her that she would be released on bail, and, to her great relief she was. Several months later, all 25 charges against Kent State students, including Gail, were quashed.

Meanwhile, James Michener’s book on the Kent State shootings was already in press— too late to add Gail’s story to his powerful mix of accounts. Gail wouldn’t have given him an interview anyway, she says.

Gail seemed happier the last time my brother Gordon and I saw her—at Mike Brock’s funeral in 2002—more relaxed and accepting of things she can’t personally control. But this is no doubt only true after she’s certain that all personal resources to make change happen have been expended. We get occasional greeting cards from her. I’m pretty sure she blew a gasket over Iraq. There were anti-war demonstrations in the streets of Kent once again, but no one was shot, no heads cracked, or even arrests made. Gail’s name was nowhere to be found in the local news accounts. She’s probably not too happy currently about the slow pace of military withdrawal from Iraq now favored by the Obama administration, not to mention official reluctance to pursue the prosecution of potential war crimes. But she endures.

We come on a ship we call the Mayflower  
We come on a ship that sailed the moon  
We come at the age’s most uncertain hour  
And sing an American tune.  
(Paul Simon, lyrics from *American Tune*)