

## COMMENTARY

## May 4, more than just a memory

The writer is the mother of one of the four students killed at Kent State on May 4, 1970. This commentary was distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services.

By Elaine Holstein

**NEW YORK:** This week is the 30th anniversary of the killing of four students - including my son Jeff Miller - at Kent State University by the Ohio National Guard.

At a few minutes past noon on May 4, I am once again observing this anniversary - an anniversary that marks not only the most tragic event of my life but also one of the most disgraceful episodes in American history.

Thirty years! That's 10 years longer than Jeff's life. He had turned 20 just a month before he decided to attend the protest rally that ended in his death and the deaths of Allison Krause, Sandy Scheuer and Bill Schroeder and the wounding of nine of their fellow students.

That Jeff chose to attend that demonstration came as no surprise to me. Anyone who knew him in those days would have been shocked if he had decided to sit that one out.

There were markers along the way that led him inexorably to that campus protest. At the age of 8, Jeff wrote an article expressing his concern for the plight of black Americans. I learned of this only when I received a call from *Ebony* magazine, which assumed he was black and assured me he was bound to be a "future leader of the black community."

Shortly before his 16th birthday, Jeff composed a poem he called *Where Does It End?* In it, he expressed the horror he felt about "the War Without a Purpose." So when Jeff called me on the morning of May 4th and told me he planned to attend a rally to protest



MARK DUNCAN/Beacon Journal file photo

Elaine and Arthur Holstein last fall at the Kent State marker for her son, Jeffrey Miller

the "incursion" of U.S. military forces into Cambodia, I merely expressed my doubt as to the effectiveness of still another demonstration.

"Don't worry, Mom," he said. "I may get arrested, but I won't get my head busted." I laughed and assured him I wasn't worried.

The bullet that ended Jeff's life also destroyed the person I had been - a naive, politically unaware woman. Until the spring of 1970, I would have

stated with absolute assurance that Americans have the right to dissent publicly from the policies pursued by their government. The Constitution says so.

And even if the dissent got noisy and disruptive, was it conceivable that an arm of the government would shoot at random into a crowd of unarmed students? With live ammunition? No way!

The myth of a benign America was one casualty of the shootings at Kent State. Another was my assumption that everyone shared my belief that we were engaged in a no-win situation in Vietnam and had to get out.

As the body count mounted and the footage of napalmed babies became a nightly TV staple, I was certain that no one would want the war to go on. The hate mail that began arriving at my home after Jeff died showed me how wrong I was.

To most people, Kent State is just one of those traumatic events that occurred during a tumultuous time. To me it's the one experience I will never recover from. It's also the one gap in my communication with my older son, Russ: Neither of us dares to talk about what happened at Kent State for fear that we'll open floodgates of emotion we can't deal with.

Whenever there is another death in the family, we not only mourn the elderly parent or grandparent or aunt who has passed away; we also experience again the loss of Jeff.