

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Kent State Shootings Project

Kent State Shootings

O H 1686

CAROL-LOU LITTY

Interviewed

by

Mickey Huff

on

July 6, 1995

CAROL-LOU LITTY

Carol-Lou Litty was born July 17, 1950, in Youngstown, Ohio to William and Luella Wolverton. Her parents were Republicans when she was growing up but she described them as very open minded. Carol's interests included literature and the arts. Her mother was a pacifist and she eventually opposed the war Vietnam, while initially supporting it. Carol graduated from Boardman High School in the late 1960s and spent some time at Hiram College during the Kent State Shootings.

Carol was a friend of Sandy Scheuer, one of the slain students, and also knew other people at Kent at the time of the shootings. The event at Kent changed her opinion about the military and the United States Government dramatically. To this day, she is uncomfortable talking about that tumultuous period of her life.

Carol married out of high school and had one daughter. She earned a B.S. in 1993 and her Master's degree in History in 1995, both from Youngstown State University. Carol was a graduate assistant for two years at YSU. She is presently teaching limited service at Thiel College and is currently separated from her husband. She is a member of Phi Alpha Theta, Golden Key National Honor Society, and the Central Christian Church. In her spare time Carol enjoys sailing, reading, and gardening.

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INTERVIEWEE CAROL-LOU LITTY

INTERVIEWER Mickey Huff

SUBJECT Kent State Shootings

DATE July 6, 1995

H This is an interview with Carol Litty for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Kent State Shootings Project, by Mickey Huff, at The Beat, on July 6, 1995, at 4 30 p m

To start off the interview could you tell us a little bit about your background, where you grew up, what your parents were like, the atmosphere you grew up in?

L I grew up in Boardman I graduated from Boardman High School in 1968 I was very interested in art, music, English I had a fairly normal childhood My mother had experimental heart surgery, and a severe illness It was a very close, nurturing atmosphere My parents were very liberal They did not have trouble with their jobs My father was in sales, my mother a homemaker They did a lot of volunteer work with the church, PTA, Girl Scouts I guess you would say the normal 1950, 1960 suburban kind of life

H Any brothers or sisters?

- L No, they lost four children due to a heart condition that my mother had
- H You said they were fairly liberal?
- L Yes, they really were
- H Were they politically involved?
- L I would say that my parents voted Republican many times during those years because they did not like the Democratic political machine in the Mahoning Valley They felt that many of the ethnic and older people “bullet” voted They did not vote for the candidate, they just voted per what the church or union boss advised I know my father voted for Franklin Delanor Roosevelt when he ran for the first time
- H As far as Vietnam and all that, what do you remember about that? When do you remember hearing about that?
- L I remember that many of the kids I went to school with decided to go into the Marines, fight, fight, kill, kill Two of them now are Boardman Policeman, Jerry Patterson and Jeff Heaver They were wonderful guys, enjoyed sports, very active When they came back they were different They were withdrawn, angry I know that they got some counseling through family or friends, maybe people from our school They ended up on the police department It seemed a way to channel their aggression
- H What do you remember of your parents?
- L As far as my mother, she was against the war, any war She had a brother that was very badly injured, two of them in fact on D-Day in World War II My father, because he grew up in the depression and served four and a half years in World War II, felt that if you were drafted it was your duty to go My father did not understand Jane Fonda In his day, it was your country My father did not understand at the time He does now, that Vietnam was different from World War II It was not threatening American shores It was a different kind of war, a political action He was not Pro-Vietnam He really thought that Kennedy and Johnson escalated it over there and thought our boys should be home. He did not agree with burning the flag
- H What kind of affiliation did you ever have with Kent State?
- L When I was a senior in high school, people that had graduated in 1967 were among my friends We would go up on weekends because there were a lot of parties Then in the fall of 1968 I went to Hiram College Hiram is dry You cannot have a drink in Hiram, so if you wanted to party and have fun and drink your 3 2% beer and get crazy we got in

the cars and went to Kent. In those days most of us did not have cars as freshman, but some older upperclassman took us. I spent a great deal of time at Kent.

H What was your impression of the community or the campus?

L I thought it was beautiful and was a lot of fun. At that time a lot of us were into the folk music and art. I was into Art and English. So, aesthetically Hiram was the ideal. When you went to Kent, at first you thought you were living in the 1950s and the 1960s where they emulated building everything that looked like factories. That is what we thought. We thought we were in a larger version of Boardman High School, or the new malls that were going up. As far as things to do and the people, there was a great diversity at Kent. They were very conservative people, and very liberal people.

H Did you notice any kind of disturbances or protest there prior to 1970?

L Only that I felt that there was an active group of SDS there, more so than at small colleges. I think part of it is that at a small college where I was, you are kind of withdrawn. You are away from everything. Hiram is not a commuter school. Kent is a commuter school and you get people from all over and outside influences which is good. I think the students at Kent were much more aware of Vietnam than we were at Hiram. Through my friends at Kent, I had a very good friendship with Tom Torsney that went to Kent for four years. I would see Tom all the time. Tom and I both knew Sandy Shower.

H Did you hear anything about the protests May 1, 2, and 3, 1970?

L Yes we did.

H Were you out there at all?

L We had friends that were going over at that time. That whole weekend and a couple days that took place, I cannot tell you exactly where and when, but I was at Hiram visiting my roommate from the year before. I do remember this. The phone rang and it was my father calling my roommate wanting to know if I was in the dorm. I said, "Yes, why?" He said, "I saw a picture on the news of students protesting and it looked like you. Stay at Hiram. They put the campus under Marshal Law." That was the last I heard until the news about the shootings.

L What were you doing that day of the 4th when you heard the shootings?

H I think we were doing stuff up there. It was a time when we were getting together. People from last year, talking about the future, going over studies, things like that, and talking about the crime in Vietnam. There were some people that were flunking out of school that we knew, Kent, Ohio State, Akron, Hiram, any school. Guys that at that time

had flunked out immediately and they went up to 1-A. It escalated their draft status.

H What do you recall about first hearing about the shootings?

L Actually, from the news and the media. Then when I got home I immediately called my friend Tom in Kent. He was crying on the phone. He was just devastated. He and I both knew Sandy. We were a year younger, but Sandy was very active in the Boardman band and well known. We were all very active then. This was the days you did the pep club no matter whether you were a geek, a nerd, whatever. You supported the Boardman band because they were fantastic. You supported the school. She just seemed like a really nice person, always very nice to me. We did hear rumors though, it started right away. The conservative people in the community started the rumors flying. "She had turned into a hippy. She belonged to the S D S." The thing that we said was, "It does not matter. Why did she deserve to die? What could she have been doing?"

H In fact, she was not really involved. She was just walking to class. Note classes were canceled--Sandy may have been simply curious.

L I believe that is true. Our attitude was that even if people were involved, it just got out of hand. Our impression was that a lot of the guardsmen were young, inexperienced, and had sergeants that were telling the kids the same thing Jerry and Jeff were told, "Kill, Kill." This was drilled into people at that time. They were taught to react that way and the kids were throwing stones and pieces of glass. Maybe that was wrong, but I do not think they had to use guns. I think they could have used clubs or whatever. I do not think they should have used anything at all. I think they could have avoided the use of guns. I think it was a tragedy and has tainted Kent State University ever since.

H How well did you know Sandy?

L I knew her through pep club, boosters, y-teens organization, and because of being involved with our band.

H Did you know her family also?

L Just to see them at things. They just seemed delightful, really nice, normal people. She was not a monster. I just cannot imagine her hurting anybody.

H What happened at Hiram following the shootings?

L It was unbelievable. Everything was dead silence, the student union, everything. Everyone just kind of sat and talked.

H Were classes canceled for the day?

L Yes

H That is the closest campus to Kent.

L And we kept watching That was the days before cable and CNN, but they did keep showing it on local news and recaps You just sat and watched We were mesmerized They went on the local channels, showed the slain students, showed the other family, showed the funerals taking place All I can tell you for sure is that my friend Tom went through a terrible time after that It devastated him

H Where is he now?

L He is doing fine now He is living somewhere in the south For years he stayed in Kent, but he became very anti-establishment, antiwar He told me that for a while, months after the shootings, which he saw, he took anything that he could get his hands on, LSD, pot, anything Tom was not into drugs before He just wanted to escape He felt that the world was going down the tubes if something like this could happen to young people He was a very sensitive, sincere guy It really devastated him

H What happened in the years following Kent in the early 1970s? Were you involved in any of the commemoration efforts? Would you go there?

L I went to one that they had at my former high school

H What was that like?

L I was extremely sad Everyone was crying Even high school teachers, possibly were very conservative, were very solemn because you read and hear about tragedies, but somebody from your own school that was a good student and a nice person makes a difference In fact, Dr Domonkos in our history department said that Sandy took a class from him before she went to Kent I do not know if it was that summer program or whatever, but he said when he heard about it he was totally shocked

H What else did you do in the first decade following the shootings? Did you go there again? Were you involved in any way with the gymnasium annex? Were you aware of any of that stuff going on?

L Yes I was aware through Tom because I kept in touch with him He was there until I believe 1971 I would still go up and visit him and my friend Rosemarie We would walk around the grounds I went back up once after that to see the statue All that I could tell you is when my daughter was in high school and deciding where to go to college, I said, "Do not even mention Kent I do not want you to go there " It left such a bad taste

in my mouth I never wanted anything to do with Kent Sorry, I just do not I was accepted into a master or library science program at Kent, and I am hoping that I do not have to do it I would rather go to Pittsburgh to do it

H Have you had any type of contact after that with Kent or anything after that in the 1970s or the 1980s?

L Only that during that time any time we would read publications We would get alumni newsletters They were still dedicating things to Sandy Every year the school does something They usually announce over the loudspeaker for a moment of silence Also, the local news stations have done follow-ups on her

H Was there any other contact that you had with her, her family, any of her friends or specific instances you remember?

L I remember a year or so after that I met someone through a friend of the family, and they were a Jewish family in Boardman that attended the same temple as Sandy's parents They were saying that her parents could still not accept that fact that this had happened Her parents were not mean and bitter, but they were trying to work very hard to change our military structure in this country, where national guardsman if you think about it, go on the weekend and really do not have a lot of training, not a lot of courses in psychology, sociology To be given weapons that could do something like that is appalling I hope we have something like that, that will never happen again Everyone I know, everyone that I talk to that still lives in Boardman or that I have kept in touch with, most of us do not want anything to do with Kent State It is really not fair to blame the administration totally We just do not understand how they let it get to that point

H Did you know John Darnell, the guy for Boardman News?

L Yes, his sister graduated with me and we were really good friends

H Did you know about his involvement at all?

L I really did not at that time because I went away to Hiram, his sister Sue went away to another university far away I saw John from a distance one time when I was up there in a bar, but it was not at the time of the shootings With his involvement with his father owning the Boardman News, it is possible that he did exposes on it I just do not remember

H Is there anything else that you recall that I have not talked about, anything else concerning Kent, the shootings, Sandy, any kind of commemoration? Anything about Boardman High School?

L I was extremely proud of the teachers, the administration at Boardman because I had expected that since it was a conservative suburb that they would come out in defense of the guards and they did not. Every teacher interviewed to my knowledge spoke very highly of Sandy Shoyer and talked about all four of the shootings in general, that it was a tragedy that should have never occurred. People have the right to protest.

H Anything else that I have not discussed that you know about?

L Just that I think that many of the people of the time, I remember hearing everybody in the community talk about it. You go to the grocery store, do this, do that. It was all you heard. I remember hearing so many people say that they should not have shot four, they should have shot 400. People said that if it is marshal law they should have been in their rooms. The kept blaming it on outside influences. They would say that there were groups of S D S there from the outside that had no business being there. That may very well have been true, and maybe it was not right, that people came in and agitated that way. The bottom line is that four people are dead that could have had productive lives and have been my age and never had time. I did not agree with people who said that you should have been shot. I thought that was an awfully cruel thing to say. I do not know if you interviewed anyone that has told you that, but that is what many people were saying.

H Anything else you want to add?

L Just that after that, that is when I remember most of the people I know were vocally taking an active stand against the war in Vietnam. I had a friend that I wrote to in Vietnam. I kept writing to him to get the hell out of there and get home. Kent turned me against the war. It also turned me against the military. In a way, I guess it made me not want to be as conservative as I had always been. I guess I really got into the flower power. I guess we all thought if your life could be snuffed out like Sandy's very quickly, you might as well enjoy life now. There is no tomorrow, so that is what I did. I think it affected a lot of people in small ways that we do not hear about.

H Do you still think about it today, any of your friends?

L When I went to Kent a few months ago, I had to go and do some research at the library. Every time I think about the shootings I get goose bumps, because it could have been my friend Tom. It could have been me. I could have been there. It is really sad to say, but we have someone in our G A program in the history department that is wonderful, but when I first met him and found out he was in the National Guard I was hesitant to become his friend because I have no use for the National Guard. He is nice. I will say that he is an exception.

H. Any other thoughts or comments?

L No, but I think Dr Friedman would have said it is obedience to authority I do not think we can totally blame the guardsman because if you read Stanley Milgrim's Obedience to Authority, and study the Nazi's and why the people followed them, people can be trained to follow their leader Those young guardsman were doing what they were told to do It is the administrators and higher ups that needed to be blamed at the time, more-so I guess if you are going to prevent Kent State, you have to change the structure from the top down, not from the bottom up Does that help you?

H Yes

END OF INTERVIEW