

STUDENT REVOLT IN AMERICA

Marc Seifer

mseifer@verizon.net

© Copyright 1970/2025

Fifty years ago, almost to the day, American forces illegally invaded the neutral country of Cambodia. As soon as news of this event was released, the students of Columbia University went on strike as a protest. Within a day or two, scores more universities followed suit, and by the end of the week over 100 schools were effectively shut down. This event made such an impact, that Marc chose to document it as it occurred. Keep in mind that this essay was written by a 22-year-old senior at the University of Rhode Island, scratching the first draft out in his notebook on the kitchen table in his rental off Knowles Way by Scarborough beach in late May or early June, 1970.



I could actually see it all develop as it was happening. Everything fit into the puzzle right down to every single person I know at school. In a strange way it came to its proper conclusion, the beginning, middle and end of my undergraduate life seemed almost to boomerang when the anticlimax finally arrived. I can remember a bewitching phone conversation with the enticing Linda Barton, four years ago to a conversation two years ago when she told me she could never stay married to the same man for more than five years, and then a chance meeting with her at a nightclub, just two weekends ago when she said, "I'm giving it all up, Marc, (the trip to Europe) so that I can help the strike committee." To today when she said, "I don't know, I'm not involved in it anymore." I can remember back two years to a Jack Garrett when he had a full curly beard and six books under his arm to last year when he shaved his beard, and dumped the books to help lead the October 15th "End the War in Vietnam crusade" to Washington. I had attended that meeting and happened to bump into Inga. She used to remind me of my 70-year old aunt Dora. She had been precious Peggy's roommate. Peggy and I were in a play together, *The Visit*. I loved her. But, Inga was jealous of sweet Peggy. After Peggy married and went south, Inga rebelled by dating began a student of color from Providence and becoming active in the anti-war movement. Handing out antiwar leaflets to students, she even picketed the FBI when they came to campus. But that wasn't enough. She needed an another move to raise her status among her 'radical' peers. I saw her again last week at Edwards Auditorium. Inga, who once had been a straight arrow had turned into an acid freak.

Then Jack Garrett popped up again at the URI/UConn basketball game—a championship match. In fact Inga was there, too. He led his people with bright red cardboard placards reading "Peace" as they marched out en masse while the game was still in progress a few minutes before

halftime. At the time, it seemed just a ploy for attention, however, now I see it differently.... to Jack Garrett a month ago—one week before the nationwide strike at the Santana concert.

“Brothers,” he shouted, “if we believe in freeing the Black Panthers, then we must go to New Haven this weekend.” There was little applause. I was almost totally ignorant of specifics when it came to such issues as the Black Panthers. I was waiting for Santana to play ‘Evil Woman’ ... to Jack Garrett last Monday, the day of the strike when he ran up to the microphone that was set up on the Quadrangle by the strike committee where he gleefully rasped (he was out of breath), “We have three speakers here from New Haven.”

Coincidentally, I had driven through New Haven that weekend... had passed what seemed like hundreds of army trucks lined along Route 95. With headlights shining in broad daylight, they looked like a strange funeral procession. Jack went on, “We have Ken Mills and two people who were cutting cane in Cuba this past season.” What’s this bull about Cuba?

It was only Monday morning, but already the strike was rolling full steam. I had been oblivious to that reality up until that very moment. I had had a term paper due the same day, in Finance, but had said “Screw it” the night before, “I’ll hand it in Wednesday.” I reasoned that since I ‘only’ had a full semester to do the damned thing, it wouldn’t matter if it was one class late. I knew it would matter though, but I couldn’t keep my eyes open past 2:30 AM and I needed about two and a half more hours to complete it.

While driving to class the next morning, the thought occurred to me that Marvin Pitterman, my Finance teacher, might not accept the paper late; or, if he did, he would lower my grade, which wasn’t going to be that hot anyway. The front of Ballentine Hall was surrounded by students, all adorned with red armbands. Even Robert Redford Roger had a red armband; but he’s another story. They were protesting the war and most recently Nixon’s move into Cambodia. Columbia and the other ‘radical’ schools were already on strike; they wanted it to be nationwide.

As I walked into Pitterman’s class—there was no way I was going to cut; I already had about three cuts and he hinted that he was going to fail me if I cut again—a girl walked up to me. “You’re not going in there, are you?” She motioned to the inside of the building. I smiled my “I’m sorry but ‘yes’” smile and moved in and up the stairs.

My head raced with thoughts of Pitterman. From the first freshman semester to my very last few months, my teacher, Dr. “Starvin Marvin” Pitterman, had interspaced his true genius concerning financial wizardry. My first encounter with it was in Econ 25, three years ago. I had asked him a question of the strategic disadvantages to an ancient walled city and his reply was, “Does anyone here have a \$5 bill?” As he asked this he reached into his pocket and pulled out a \$1 bill. He looked at me. I still wasn’t sure what was up his sleeve. “Which would you rather have?” he asked directly. I knew he had me; there was no escaping. “The five,” I winced.

“There you see,” he said as he turned around and walked back to the podium.

Pitterman became an enigma to me. As the years went on he began to take the whole Finance class under his fatherly wing and continue on with his ‘subtle’ irrationality. There was the time I got one question right on a test by stating that in order to save for capital formation one must consume less than he produces; and on the very same test got one question wrong which stated, “in order to build capital formation one must produce more than he consumes.” I demanded either they were both right or both wrong.

“No,” Dr. Pitterman said. “The book says this one is right and this one is wrong.”

“But what is the difference?” I persisted. “They’re both the same.”

He pondered for a moment. I thought for sure I had him. The battle had waged for over two years and I was going to win. “Ah,” he declared triumphantly, “this one is build and the other one is to save.” His chicanery had rescued him again. There was no beating him because he would not admit defeat. He could not. His irrationality would not allow it. I fantasized him playing Capt’n Queeg for the *Caine Mutiny*. He was perfect for the part.

“99% of you don’t think,” he would shout at the class. “And you,” he pointed to me, “you don’t use your head at all.” There were three of us whom he picked on all the time. It was all part

of the show. He even went so far as to say he loved us one weak moment. And I know that he really did.

Finance class was not a class at all; it was a ritual that all of us Finance Majors had to endure in order to graduate. Nothing about hardcore finance was ever learned there. But perhaps something intangible about life was.



Two URI anti-war activists with Ken Mills at right. Composite photo.

I walked up the stairs and grimaced as I was about to enter class. With the antiwar picketers outside, I felt guilty and somewhat conflicted as I approached the door. Arnold Krell was in the hall and he was cutting! Cardboard spine Krell was cutting! My mind was clicking. I turned around and headed downstairs. I had a free cut and a chance to go back and finish the paper and get it in on the due date. Maybe not on time, but on the due date. After finishing up the paper and turning it in, I walked over to the quadrangle just in time to see Jack Garrett announce Ken Mills. There was a crowd of about four or five hundred mostly seated around the Quad. I looked for a friend and proceeded to sit down next to Bill Niven. He was a one-legged ex-Marine who had been in my last semester's English class. I almost never saw him out of class except once when I visited him with one of my old roommates Jay. Jay had just had a nervous breakdown and was now at Butler Hospital, and so had not experienced this crisis but rather quite a different one. Jay had taken out the girl Jack Garrett was now going with. But that was three years ago when she was a flirty freshman. I could tell she had changed, though; her physique had greatly improved.

A tall charismatic African American man dressed in a blue jeans outfit approached the podium. His dungaree jacket had its collar turned up, Brando style. The Black's blue appearance was cut by a shocking red kerchief tied around his neck. Large dark glasses obscured a significant portion of his face, the effect heightened by long bushy hair brushed up and back baring a prominent forehead. He spoke slowly and deliberately. His accent was almost a British one. Bill looked at me and nodded.

"What's his name?" I asked.

"Ken Mills," Bill said.

"Did you ever hear of him?"

“No.”

We sat and listened as Mills proceeded to describe the plight of the Black Panthers as everyone’s fight for freedom. He footnoted that part of the speech by saying that he didn’t agree with everything that the Panthers had done... Going on, he discussed the psychological repression in our society, which was caused by such things as the technological advances that depersonalize the individual... and he also criticized the university in stating that it is a supposed neutral womb far removed from the real world. Mills’ eloquent speech went on for an hour. He talked without notes and he did not pause even once. His tone throughout was the same measured, deliberate one he started with. I began to realize how oblivious I had been to the injustices in America as well as how little I really understood about the nature of the society. Dick Gregory’s wit had pierced me; I had seen him at Keaney Gym, Art Buchwald’s satiric humor had bitten into me, Adam Clayton Powell’s theatrical performance had won my admiration, Ravi Shankar’s magical sitar had triggered my metaphysical spirit, Dr. J’s athletic prowess during a UMass basketball game had taken my breath away, but Ken Mills had reached my intellect. He pinpointed to the problems in our society and grouped them under a psychological repression that was on a collision course with advancing technology. He asked why so many people have hang-ups and don’t even know why. I thought of Jay. He mentioned that the money spent in Vietnam could have paid for ten million families to own outright their own apartments! That was virtually every run-down town in America.

Bill turned to me, “I feel bad for the guy that has to follow him,” he said with a grin.

“Yeah,” I agreed.

The next speaker, a bearded surfer looking man, talked enthusiastically about his experiences harvesting sugar crop in Cuba. “While Nixon and thousands of Americans are in Vietnam,” he added, “Castro swings a machete in Cuba!” He proclaimed that Castro had helped the overall population tenfold (although at the expense of the rich landowner) and I relearned that our Government had planned the attack on Cuba, thru the Bay of Pigs invasion, in order to institute another government such as Batista’s dictatorship, for our own economic gain. It was all starting to make sense. Everything was happening so quickly. I stopped. Questioned, requestioned Mill’s speech. There had to be “violent revolution” behind that speech...somewhere...but I couldn’t find it. His speech was brilliant but I was afraid to trust him. Why?

Already hundreds of my fellow students—students who had never moved their asses before—were all of a sudden cheering and moving together. Thoughts about the psychology of large flocks of people... thoughts about hunger for freedom... thoughts about revolution.

I felt that my fellow classmates had similar visions. I tried to think back to my freshman head.... Would I have realized the significance of what was happening? Has Garrett’s girlfriend’s mind developed along with her shape? I thought not.

When the speeches were over, everyone migrated to the Union. I approached Mills. He was loading a pipe. There was a deep twisted scar, probably years old, across his lip. “Excuse me,” I said. He looked down at me as we walked. “How could the giant corporations be taken over peacefully?” He hadn’t mentioned socialism in his speech but it seemed to me that Mills’ collision course was going to collide with capitalism.

“Who said anything about peaceful?” We reached the Union.

“Then will it be violent?”

“Man... you gotta realize...” he stared into me. I could see his eyes through the sunglasses so I held his gaze, he moved closer, I stood my ground. “...Some people just aren’t going to like it.”

We dispersed and walked into the ballroom. I watched Mills walk away and I thought about Garrett’s rise to a role of leadership at the University of Rhode Island. Could this be Mills’ climb? I wanted to find out more about him. The stage was filled with the usual SDS members. There was one radical who sat in front of me at Art Buchwald’s lecture, and he had laughed exceptionally loud at certain jokes. He reminded me of Tom Courtney, who played the revolutionary in the flick *Dr. Zhivago*. His hair was swept gracefully back and his military glasses

added to the caricature. Mills posted himself on the side, standing by the tall curtains; he puffed away leisurely at his pipe. One of the red armbands announced that an honors colloquium needed the ballroom so we should move to Green Auditorium. A war was raging in Vietnam. Hundreds of students on virtually every campus across the nation were putting their feet down and saying, "Stop this insane war," and we had to move to Green Auditorium because there was going to be an honors colloquium! Something Mills had said about priorities registered in my mind. After reassembling in Green I stepped out from the current movement once again and tried to view what was happening as objectively as possible. We seemed revolutionary. We looked revolutionary, the large majority of us, barefoot in sandals hippies with long, free-flowing hair.

One of the red-arms, a heavy-set blonde youth wearing a sports jacket, approached the front. "Everyone here must be totally committed to an indefinite strike or leave right now." He was blunt to say the least. I knew damned well very few of us were 'definitely committed' to anything, let alone a strike. No one left.

Mills stood up. "Now you gotta understand," he started slowly, "that this is serious business. If you're only going in halfway then forget it right not. You've got to use strategic thinking and arrive at a plan of action. You can't talk about it, you have to do it." I first began to realize that only about 20 to 30% of the school was on strike. I leaned forward to a friend who was in the same situation as I was—a hippie Finance major from NY. He was in Pitterman's class with me.

"Harve," I whispered, "that means we might not graduate."

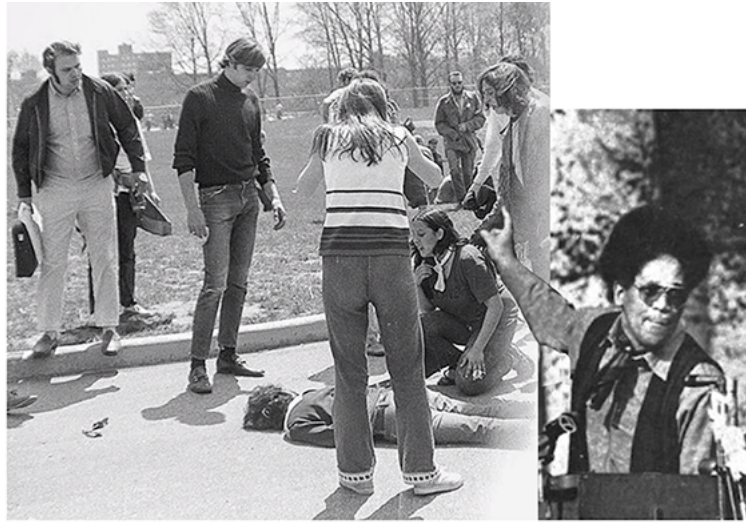
"What do you mean...might not graduate!" he frowned and turned back toward the speaker. My intuition was right—there were a few who realized the importance of what was happening. To some a collision course with graduation was absurd.

As Mills continued, a sense of unity began to pervade the room. I had a good feeling in my bones. There has been only one other time I had ever felt at one with the 'strangers' around me and that was on a hillside in Woodstock when 350,000 of us so-called flower children showed the world that peace and love were not merely words. It was unexplainable but it was real. There was no psychological repression with this feeling—it was just a feeling of closeness. Real freedom...a taste of the potentiality of an ideal of the New Age to be.

Besides discussions on how to organize the strike, there was more talk about Cuba and how much Castro has done for his people. While the talk continued a boy walked up to the front. A former citizen of Cuba, he had fled the country after Castro took over his family's land. He was about to begin his enlistment in the U. S. Army. After the revolt his grandfather had died from lack of insulin shots. Insulin is rationed out now and so the old man didn't get any. The point was that under Batista he would have received the lifesaving drug because he was rich enough to afford it. This Cuban was against Castro and once could see why; but one could also see why a peasant who would have died in the same circumstances under Batista is alive today.

The speakers ended by stating that every one of the 400 of us should go out and bring back three or four people to the meeting tonight (Monday) at eight in Edwards Auditorium.

As I left Green, I met Paul Brewer, an old crony from freshman year. We had dinner together at Iggy's, the local bar. Paul had been to New Haven during the past weekend and had seen Mills there. He told me that Mills was a native of Trinidad, which accounted for his British accent, and that he was a professor of Philosophy at Yale! This was an interesting surprise. Both of us were amazed at how quickly the radicals had mobilized, how organized they were and how rapidly counter-culture speakers were brought to the school. Our conversation shifted to the mood on campus. Paul sensed the same intangibles about the recent occurrences and also expressed apprehension about Mills. We both felt that he had the crowd in the palm of his hand and that tonight we would see him without his fig leaf. The TV at the bar was blaring the account of the four Kent State students that were shot to death by the National Guard. As Kent was a college campus, just like ours, this incredibly disturbing news really hit home. I saw pictures of National Guardsmen firing blatantly out into the crowd. Three crew-cutted fat men sitting at the bar were discussing what was before our eyes on the screen.



**Kent State iconic photo, where four college students
were gunned down by the National Guard.
Ken Mills is at the right.**

“Why are the students running away from the guardsmen?” one jeered. “Are they afraid?” He had a big choking laugh. Another blubberhead continued, “They should not be shooting the students, they should be shooting the professors, ha, ha.” Psychological repression rang in my ears as it vomited from the mouths of the men at the bar. I felt sick inside as we left. Having disrupted campus life, society had become bifurcated, the lines neatly drawn.

When eight PM rolled around I walked up to Edwards Auditorium. Inside was another world. Every seat was filled, as were the aisles. Even the windowsills housed more of my bushy comrades. More people were outside. Garrett asked the people in the aisles to sit on stage so that the people outside could come in. Utilizing the extra space on stage was a sensible idea. An ex-Marine spoke. He talked of the killers that the Army was producing. Eighteen-year-old sons of American mothers now had to be detrained just to come back from the war so as to readjust to ‘civilian’ life again. “Once you have killed, you are never the same,” this ex-military guy said bluntly. Mills was sitting behind him puffing clouds of smoke from his warm wooden pipe. I thought of Anthony Quinn stealing a scene from Gregory Peck in *The Guns of Naverone*, as he, too, fooled with his pipe when attention was meant to be directed elsewhere. Mills reached into his vest pocket for some more tobacco and lit up once again, his dark face eerily illuminated by the flame.

The ex-Marine finished and Mills stood up. I looked over the crowd. I saw my best friend, Rollo, glassy-eyed on the stage. It was impossible to get to him so I planned to speak to him later. I continued my trip through the faces. It seemed as though I knew almost everyone of the 1,000 plus in one odd way or another. I saw Paul Brewer and we nodded at each other as Mills got up to speak. Still in a well-worn pretty cool blue jeans outfit, his appearance suggested an African American Hell’s Angel with possibly just the right combination of qualities to become politically powerful within the next few years.

Mills started off slowly but he built up. There was no repetition of the morning’s speech, but another logical argument that reached the intellect. “Ask yourself what is happening to our freedom when Black Panthers are jailed at \$100,000 bond and white men are jailed at \$25,000 bond. Ask yourselves why the nation becomes outraged when four students are gunned down at Kent State but that there was no outrage last year when students were shot at a black school. Ask yourselves why Barry Goldwater lost the election for saying he would bomb North Vietnam and

what Johnson did when he got to power.” His voice became louder as he talked faster. His arm emphasized each point. “You gotta realize this and you gotta realize that.” Fervor had built up. It was another brilliant 45-minute oration without the aid of notes. During the applause I caught Paul’s eye. We were both impressed.

When the assembly was over I strolled over to the Union pub with my two roommates. We talked the day’s events over. Goz was genuinely concerned about getting involved. Bob was serious, too. I was thinking about the possibility of not graduating and so decided to call my parents. “Mom, you should have heard Mills, etc. ... etc. ... I may not graduate.” My father was cool but my mother became emotional. What was new to me was not all that new to my parents. I started remembering that there had been movements similar to these in the thirties as well as throughout history. Everyone had a different kind of perspective, but I still foresaw snowballing of student riots and war demonstrations and ecological crises and black-white conflicts. The future seemed doomed to fighting not only an external war, but a violent internal one as well. I was scared. I told them I’d call them later in the week.

We went upstairs and were about to leave when I saw Mills talking to a few people on the veranda. I walked over. He stared down at me. I was going to ask him to remove his sunglasses, it was ten thirty at night, but I chickened out. I felt it was significant that they were still on.

“Suppose this revolution...”

He cut in. “This is not a revolution,” he said. “A revolution is a violent overthrow of the government.”

“Couldn’t revolution be defined as a fast change?” I asked.

“No.”

“Well suppose this student rebellion continues and the rioting continues in the poorer neighborhoods across the country. If this keeps up, couldn’t all this snowball into chaos in five years?”

“You’re viewing this as if it were a movie,” he said. With every point, he tapped me on the shoulder with a matchbook. I found it annoying. I gently, but obviously, slapped him back on his shoulder and said, “Don’t tell me what I’m doing, just answer the question.” He stopped the matchbook play.

Becoming rather succinct, Mills said something to the effect that one can’t predict the future. “One must improvise as it’s happening.” Strategic thinking triggered off in my mind. I persisted for an answer and he became irritated. He began rapping about philosophy and how I didn’t understand the problem. He lost me somewhere and I said, “You are talking above me, talk to me.”

Someone interrupted. I was getting mad because I couldn’t get an answer to my question: What was going to happen? He left, stating that the conversation had become sterile. (He pronounced it ster – Ile.). From his point of view I was inferior intellectually and there was nothing I could do. The people that were watching us did not observe him as carefully as I had. They couldn’t have. They looked at his appearance and heard his accent, but they didn’t listen to his strategic thinking which I saw as leading us to chaos. I asked my roommate Goz if anything was accomplished. He said I had been made a fool of. I left pissed.

The following morning I thought over the occurrences of the night before. It was hard for me to admit it, but I decided that Mills had been right. It was impossible to predict the future. There were too many variables. But, Mills had answered my question in the wrong way by relying on his intellectual superiority. Having reverted to a power play with me in conversation, I wondered what he would do if he could sustain the part he was traversing. I had reacted negatively to Mills the Yale professor, but positively to Mills the speechmaker. Today would be the crucial day; the strike would either succeed or fail. The overwhelming support of the student body had to be won. Then hopefully the faculty would follow suit. I arrived at school at about 11:00 AM and walked over to the Union.

As I was paying for my coffee, someone goosed me. After apologizing to the cashier lady

for staining her uniform, I turned around. It was my comedic friend, Bob Shaw. “What’s so damned funny?” I said. He was laughing hysterically.

“Don’t worry about the washing machine, worry about your immortal soul,” he said.

I laughed, as that had been a ridiculous line from the play “The Visit” that we had both been in three years ago where Bob had played the lead, and the lady he would marry, Sue Berger, played the female lead. Due to the absurdity of the play’s dialogue, it had become a private running joke between us. “I have a gig Thursday night in the pub,” he said.

I didn’t let him finish and said, “Good,” as I walked over to a table.

“I’m serious.”

“Since when?”

He went on. “Could you help me write a monologue (comedy routine) for Thursday night. I won’t get paid this time, but if I’m successful we can split the take for next time.” We were always discussing comedy and comedians. Bob had tried unsuccessfully to meet George Carlin when he had been on campus, and now there was a chance to put our wit to work.



My three college roommates, Bob Schaffer, Ken Gozdowski and Lee (Smalley) Smolovitch. We shared a house off Knowles Way at Scarborough Beach. Bob Shaw is at right. This photo taken by Marc Seifer in Usquepaug, Summer 1970.

“Bob, I’m really not in a funny mood.” What could I do? My best friend had a chance to begin his burning ambition to become a comedian and his best friend was going to let him down to work with a strike...a strike whose goals were still obscure. Mills had said something about priorities; why couldn’t he give answers instead of just posing problems? Bob was looking intently at me. I couldn’t let him down. It meant forgetting a war in Southeast Asia, it meant forgetting the murder of four students at Kent State... at least temporarily. “Did you see Mills last night?”

“No,” he said. As he was literally living as man and wife and worked a night shift to pay his way through school, Bob did not have the time that most of us other students afforded. His responsibilities were more tangible than my own. How could he know that I had stepped out of our cozy womb in one brief day to tune into the hard realities of the world around us? How could he know how powerfully my conscience had been jolted in so short a span of time? Yet, on the other hand, more so than most, Bob had been quite vocal about the immorality of the Vietnam War. He was not socially and politically unconscious. I felt caught in a psychological trap (i.e., humor vs. sacrifice) and fought to compromise the situation. I was thinking in extremes and felt guilty dealing in the luxury of laughter.

“Why don’t we do something like Mort Saul,” I said, “Take our material from the headlines.”

“How about this one,” he responded, “100,000 Marines beat off 25,000 Viet Cong.”

In spite of myself I laughed at the pun as Bob smiled back.

“Let’s go to your place and get started.” As we walked I attempted to sort the priorities in my minds.

We worked hard for the rest of the day. “How’s this, Dr. Spock will have a debate with Vice President Spiro T. Agnew dealing with the moral issues surrounding the Vietnam War. Only to even it up, Dr. Spock will be gagged and tied!”

On we traveled, past dinnertime, and Dandy Andy’s Electric Fan that blew air where you wanted it to and circulated conversation, through a smiling statue of the URI ram with a ‘strike here’ painted (by a radical) on its rear end.

“What time is it?”

“I’ve got to go.”

“Break a leg,” he jested as I slipped out the door and rushed over to Edwards Auditorium. It seemed as though I was traveling from one fantasy to another. Where, I wondered, was reality? The arena was jammed full. Again, up and down the aisles and across the stage we crowded. I somehow found a seat next to two girls, both of whom I knew. One was my off and on girlfriend, Ryana (sorry, Bob) and the other was a bodacious gal who sat in front of me in Business Education. I tenderly touched Ryana’s shoulder. She smiled. I looked around. Mills was gone.

All the red-arm bands up on stage were the old familiar radicals. Meandering through the strikers the Dr. Zhivago character floated by. His Bolshevik appearance was enhanced by a trench coat that he wore like a cape. He approached the microphone, pausing just a moment too long, he said, “I hope you all had a good day. We have a surprise speaker with us tonight. He’ll announce himself when he comes to the microphone.”

“What’s the point of all this?” I asked Ryana.

“I don’t know,” she answered. As Zhivago was talking, a hat was passed around the crowd for money to finance the strike committee. It seemed we needed the system to fight the system. With her million dollar smile, Miss Bodacious grabbed the hat and began to walk through the extended hands of charity. She came back afterwards and told me that she had collected over \$30.00. “Not bad,” I said.

The surprise speaker was announced. “My name is Bruce Whitefield. I’m a student at Kent State. Instead of giving a speech, I will just open the floor to questions.”

For a moment the crowd sat stunned. Humbled by his presence, he looked like any other student. We all felt that it could have been any one of us up there instead of him. I wondered what emotional changes had taken place to a boy who had seen government sponsored murders. How had his mind been altered? I listened with the third ear.

“Were the guardsmen kneeling or standing when they fired?” someone asked.

“I didn’t wait around to find out.” With a cutting tone to his voice he continued. “Would you have?”

“Was there a sniper shooting from a rooftop?”

“Do you think there was?” Whitefield seemed to be trying to get a laugh. I couldn’t understand it. His arrogance intrigues me up until the next question.

“Did you know anyone who was killed?”

“I was talking with a girl when she was shot.” He paused, “I went to the hospital with her.” I felt that even now, the reality of the situation had not hit him.

“Do you believe in violent revolution?” a girl asked.

“Yes.”

There was a gasp from the audience, the girl continued. “Do you really think we should violently try to change the system?” Her question was annoying Whitefield who seemed strained by all that was happening.

“You have a mind. Decide for yourself.” It was a tactical answer. I saw my chance. “Would you have given the same answer a week ago?” I asked.

"I wasn't sure a week ago." I was hoping he would open up, and he answered looking directly at me. "I went to Washington on October 15th to protest the war; I've been to other demonstrations. At first I believed non-violence might be the answer; but peaceful tactics don't work. They don't impress the men in power. And after what happened, I felt that violence is the more potent offense."

Before more violent revolution questions were asked, someone led him away from the microphone. Everyone stood and applauded in a gesture of "Thank you."

I walked back to the Union with Ryana. There were no empty tables so we sat where there were two empty chairs... it did not matter whether or not we knew the people we were sitting with. Quietness pervaded the room as we sat pensive considering the Kent State massacre. Yet also, there was another intangible feeling, a feeling of brotherhood. Thoughts of Dylan's *The Times They Are A Changing* flowed through my brain. Four of my fellow students were dead, but from their deaths, a goodness was emerging. I felt a togetherness with students everywhere. It was a simple feeling and because it was so simple, it seemed ironic that its price was so dear. We didn't talk much. More was being said without words.

Wednesday's schedule included the all-important faculty senate meeting, workshops and the eight o'clock townspeople's meeting. My own schedule also included a mandatory Finance class (he would flunk me if I didn't attend and this would insure not graduating), a comedy routine that had to be polished up, and Business Education class—a course I wanted to sink my teeth into. I had a feeling that the class had not heard about the strike and I wanted to tell them.

Finance class would go on as usual. There would be no mention of the strike, no mention of the war, just talk of the Dow Jones' Industrial Average and student readings of their term papers. Possibly a few students would try to open Pitterman's head up, but I would not attempt it. It had been fruitless for me for too many years. There could be nothing accomplished—only further aggravation.

Everyone was there. We all needed this class to graduate. It seemed senseless to postpone the end for another semester; today Pitterman had the power. He was already yelling at some students who wanted to discuss the war.

"Anyone who wants to leave can go right now," he pontificated. "I'm not stopping you." (Awfully bold statement). "Well...go ahead."

No one dared leave. The price was too dear. We all stewed to a 50-minute drag on stock analyses. I thought the Sun would set before class was up. I always would wonder why no matter what time it was there was always 25 minutes left to go. *Rrrring*, finally, we were free!

I rushed to Edwards Auditorium where the Faculty Senate meeting was taking place. By the time I arrived the room had filled to capacity. I was sardine standing in one of the aisles. The President of the university was announcing the possibility of utilizing Keaney Gymnasium, as it would house more people. I looked around and felt good. A few students were chanting, "*All we are saying is give peace a chance.*" It was low and melodic, but the John Lennon/Plastic Ono tune was catching on, and in a few minutes the entire audience was singing, "*All we are saying is give peace a chance.*" However, it puzzled me that no one standing up along the aisles, including myself, was singing. I knew that had I been sitting I would have been singing, but why should it have made a difference? It was a strange subway I was on. Mills had said something about psychological repression that screws us up in ways we can't even understand. I was witnessing that kind of neuroses right then. I could view it, be a part of it, but have no control or understanding of what was really happening.

It became a 'happily ever after' trip, though, because the crowd sensed the discord. Everyone began standing up and then we all began to sing, "*All we are saying is give peace a chance; All we are saying is give peace a chance.*" The singers had been aware of the discord. My body shivered. I began to sing. University President Werner Baum walked to the microphone and as he spoke the song ended. "Because of the number of students that want to hear us, we will go out on the Quadrangle." The crowd cheered and out we went.

The wind was blowing so I wanted to sit in the middle where it was warm. All of the Faculty Senate sat up front on the lawn. Even Ma Lees sat on the ground. They voted to get an ad in the paper saying, "Nixon, our students are not bums!" signed by URI faculty. The ad would cost \$1,250 so a hat was passed. Much to my delight, the girl from my Business Ed course decided once again to walk through the crowd with her outstretched hands carrying a deep hat in which to place coins. It gave me an odd sense of connection. It was ironic though that money could be collected so easily for a selfish ad but so difficult for aid for others.

The Faculty Senate also voted to give students four options. They could take their grade up to May 4th, they could take a Pass/Fail up to May 4th, they could finish the course or take an Incomplete. Everyone was cheering, but I was mad. The strike had lost all its potency. What were we sacrificing now to protest the invasion of Cambodia? As far as I could see, not a thing. Somehow it lost its punch, and further, not a single thing had been mentioned about the war.

I decided to look for Garrett. I found him by the podium, smiling and watching the speaker. I tapped him on the shoulder. "I thought we went on strike to protest the war and there has been no mention of it so far."

His brows lit up. He turned and was lost in the crowd. I circled behind the crowd and spotted Bob Shaw. Elton Rayack, a left-wing Econ teacher was on the podium spouting off about the strike and the war. Shaw turned to me. "Did you hide the rifles in your trunk or under the seat," he shouted at me. We left to polish up his routine. We walked into an empty classroom and proceeded.

"Throughout the strike our dear University President Dr. Baum has been quoted as stating that he would be maintaining a middle position. His wife was heard mumbling, 'But, Verner, I always thought the horizontal position was more effective.'"

We added a few jokes, subtracted a few and all in all wrote a pretty decent monologue. "There are many ways to comment on man's insanity," Bob said. Events had moved so rapidly and I, still thinking in extremes, was too caught up in the "strike" to truly appreciate his comment. We finished in time for me to head over to my Education class, a course designed to teach filing and proper business protocol. I had decided to blow a few minds.

It was 100% attendance. As I sat down I winked at Lois Pazienza, the girl that sat behind me (and fifty years later, we've been together ever since!). She was my only crush of the semester. The first 20 minutes of class were devoted to handing out individual assignments. I couldn't believe it. My mind traveled back to the greater reality; Nixon's unlawful invasion of a non-warring country. Mills had described the university as a supported neutral womb that in actuality had to be biased simply by the fact that it was supported by states and large corporate grants. And, why should the university divorce itself from the real world? I was completely alienated from that classroom. It was a cartoon world where death meant an F on a test. I was the invisible man about to put on his tuxedo and chapeau. I raised my hand.

"Yes," Miss Smith said.

"I was wondering if we could discuss what is happening outside this classroom?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Could we save five minutes at the end of class?"

"I'd rather we didn't."

"Oh," she said, slightly puzzled.

I proceeded to describe the very alienation that I felt right at that very moment, coupling it up with a capsulized version of Mills' speech. There were questions asked and everything went smoothly. I was surprised at how many of my classmates supported me. I summarized by suggesting that no one need take my word for it but that they could see and judge for themselves by going to the workshops and Edwards Auditorium at eight that night. After class four or five people came over to congratulate me. While I was basking in my ephemeral glory, I decided to take advantage of the moment, so I walked up to Lois and asked if I could see her that Saturday night. Before she answered, sensitive Ron glided over to us to suggest that I was "magnificent."



**Lois Pazienza and Marc Seifer
Summer, 1970, Queens River, Usqepaug.**

Lois said, "You should have heard what that hypocrite said about you in shorthand."

Surprised, I asked, "What did he say?" I was amused that I made their daily gossip. Most of the class were in the same courses throughout the day.

"Oh, that you ask questions just to be antagonistic. He's an idiot."

"Can I see you Saturday night?" I looked into her curious eyes.

"I don't think so. I told you before."

"But I'm graduating soon," I persisted, "I may never see you again."

"I tell you what," she answered, "I'll ask you out sometime, okay?"

"When can I call you to ask you to ask me out?" I questioned. Her smile lit up my world as we departed. I felt cozy inside as I headed to the Union.

As I walked in it occurred to me that today was the Knicks-Lakers championship basketball game. There was a color TV up on the wall and everyone was crowding under to see it. Most of the crowd were non-hippi types. And almost all of the URI basketball team was there, five of them African American. That was about half the entire black population on campus! They were watching basketball while the Black Panthers were jailed and people were out striking against the repression in the society. I sat next to Hal, a fraternity brother. He's a 230-pound graceful lump of flesh, nicknamed Bulk.

"Who's winning?"

"Lakers."

"Score?"

"Shhh...ah, shit, did you see that shot he missed!"

The Knicks big man Willis Reed was not playing due to a knee injury and Wilt the Stilt Chamberlain of the Lakers was dunking the ball left and right. Our basketball team shouted with glee every time Chamberlain's hands smashed the ball down through the hoop. Big deal, 7' tall, there just didn't seem to be any skill in that maneuver.

"Let's go," Bulk growled.

"Okay." We walked up to Edwards. The speaker was Bill Baird, the advocate for legalized abortion laws. I couldn't believe it. The total absurdity of the whole night.

"How many people saw me last time?" Baird asked. There was a large show of hands. "How many of you who saw me wrote to your congressman to change the abortion laws?" Six people raised their hands.

"Do you know that more girls die at the hands of quack doctors than men die in Vietnam?"

Could he really have been right?

He then proceeded to show us every means of contraception, stating that the most effective means of birth control besides the pill is a condom on the male and foam in the female. He seemed to really take the fun out of that kind of intimacy! And I figured there had to be a joke there for Bob.

After the lecture there was a quick meeting. One of the revolutionaries held up an atrocious red flag and stated that he wanted it to be the "Strike Flag."

Most of us were appalled.

"Why red?" someone shouted.

"Because the armband is red," he retorted. Then we all started shouting, "No flag, no flag, no flag." As he dumped the flag, we all applauded.

I walked backstage and approached another red armband. He must have been a general because he had two armbands, one black and a red headband. That would have only made him a colonel but his straggly Ho Chi Minh beard placed him in the five-star category. He looked tired and I knew he had worked hard the past few days.

"Possibly we could send people into different classrooms," I said to him. "Believe it or not some people actually are afraid to attend any of these functions. They really don't have any idea why we are on strike."

"Look, we're working as hard as we can and anyhow we are sending people to the dorms." He was brushing me off and I disliked it. I left figuring or hoping that he was just overworked.

Thursday morning, the 4th day, I arrived at school. The strike committee had desks set up outside the Union for different workshops and other desks for people to write to Nixon.

There was a workshop on the Quad about imperialism, communism, socialism and capitalism. Here was more material for Bob's routine because Vietnam was at Edwards, draft evasion was at Pastore, and Women's Liberation was at Independence. I stayed for awhile and then took my car up to Bob's place, an old Chevy bomber, to help brush up the gags. The material was good, but the audience that night at the Pub was going to be tough. Would they laugh? A good comedian must bob and weave to the feel of the audience but tonight Shaw would have to knit a whole shirt. After the briefing I returned to the car.

I had left the headlights on and the car wouldn't start. I ended up hitching to campus. I began thinking that if I couldn't determine whether or not I turned the lights on, there might be hundreds of things that hundreds of people do every day that they're unaware of. This kid that we called Keilbassa, picked me up. He is an overweight rich New Yorker with a ridiculous red armband tied around his head. The absurdity was heightened by a light green two-ton Cadillac that he picked me up in.

There was an economist speaking in Independence at eight and a black speaker at nine over in Edwards. When I arrived, there was a foreign movie playing on the screen. It was in black and white and had subtitles. To add to the strangeness of the moment, some people were laughing and I never found out why the movie was shown. The University was still in an in-between realm of school and strike and I too was caught betwixt and between.

As the movie attendees filed out, and the students filed in, an African American speaker named Harry Edwards took center stage. He had become nationally known after organizing the black boycott of the Olympics. I found a seat up close and watched how a few minutes into his speech, about 15 of our fellow black students came strolling in, purposely late, down the far aisle and up the stairs onto the stage. After his talk, another VIP was slated to go on, but my priority was the Pub.

Leaving would mean I would have to stand up from the middle of the second row to move all the way across the aisle and walk out. What would my fellow students think? I decided the smartest way out was to leave during a standing ovation. But I had to settle for more staid applause. As Harry exited the stage, I went as well. While rushing out I crunched my knee against a door and ended up limping to the Union where the Pub was. My leg would be black and blue

for many days to come. Hank, yet another crony, was by the bar finishing a beer.

"Marc, how 'bout buying me a beer; I'm broke." He had a crazy perspiration-soaked blue headband around his corpulent curly forehead. He looked somewhat like a psycho-killer, but actually he was quite loveable. In fact, competing all night card games, literally fought with each other to have Hank play in their game. I've seen him lose \$125 in one night, two or three times the amount of a big loser. Jacobs used to get Hank to his game by offering free frankfurters and soda. It never failed. Hank was a sucker for hot dogs. Jacobs knew all his weaknesses.

I bought him the beer. While we were sitting, in walked Bob's wife, Sue (Berger) Shaw, with a preppy couple. The guy, a grad teacher, was dressed in a brown suit, red socks and brown penny loafers. His sideburns were neatly clipped, two inches above each lower ear lobe, and his girlfriend was actually wearing a dress! She was quite pretty. I asked them to sit with us. Sue introduced me as the co-comedy writer. (Also one of Hank's friends had joined us.) Our group now consisted of this younger kid, the pudgy gambler Hank, Seif (that's me), Sue who had become an English teacher, and Mr. and Mrs. (to be) ideal American couple. Dapper Dan called over the waitress and ordered a pitcher of beer for the table. Hank's eyes lit up. As Dapper poured everyone a round, I spotted Bob near the entrance. Having looked over the crowd, he stood patiently, too nervous to come over to us.

Dan was politely asking me about school while gently flirting with his date, I'll call her Mary-Anne Jane. After downing his glass and smacking his lips, Hank and the kid took off. We nodded adieu.

Amidst the hubbub, a young lady took over the microphone. "I would like to present to you tonight a very funny man, Mr. Bob Shaw." Two people and our table applauded. The rest of the crowd were immersed in conversation. One of the other applauders was a girl named JJ. Bob had told me a story about her:

"She laughs at anything I say," he said. "I remember one day I saw her in Independence Hall, and said, 'Hello, JJ,' and she burst into hysterics. I said, 'What's so funny?' and she said, 'Oh, stop, stop it, Bob.' After about ten minutes of incessant laughter I again persisted as to what was so funny. She finally calmed down and I said, 'What?' and she replied, 'I thought you weren't being funny on purpose.'" It was reassuring to know she was in the audience.

As Bob stepped up to the microphone, I began to scrutinize the audience. There was a hell of a lot of noise—the table behind me was engrossed in a card game while to my right and back on the other side, groups were joking and laughing—just another typical night at the Union Pub.

Bob began the routine anyway..."During the strike, President Baum said he would be taking a middle position. His wife said, Verner, I always though the horizontal position was more effective..."

At this point, Dapper Dan suggested we move closer. We did our best, but to our great disappointment, no one was listening to Bob, no one. Suddenly I heard a few laughs and turned to my right, two groups of girls were laughing. They were drunk. It was exasperating though because even though they were sitting on top of him they were having trouble hearing him over the dull roar. Finally one of the girls walked over to Bob and asked for the mike. "You're being very rude!" she shouted at the beer bums. "He's very funny if you just give him a chance."

It didn't work though. Bob talked for a while—I was sweating with him—I wanted to turn over a few tables but it all seemed in vain. He finished quickly and came over to sit down. The girls at the other table clapped. They had missed most of the jokes but they were trying to tell him they understood. I was particularly upset because the possibility of this kind of catastrophe had never occurred to me. We weren't even going to find out whether or not the material was funny. It would not even be tested. There was no reward. Not even punishment, just an empty vacuum for a response.

As Dapper ordered another pitcher, Bob sat down and just shrugged at me. There was nothing to say.

JJ came over and apologized for the lousy acoustics. She smiled to make it sit easier. Her

smile could do that. Bob motioned to Sue and they said goodbye and followed JJ out. Mary-Anne Jane began shaking her leg nervously. Dan took the hint and said goodbye to me, and to my delight, handed me the rest of the beer.



Nancy handing Marc a flower at graduation, front Page of 5c Cigar, June 1970.

Bloated, I walked out and stumbled to my car, which had been recharged during the day. It was close to midnight and it was starting to rain. As I forged through the downpour, strange sensations were enhanced by the feeling of moving along a roadway that was blind behind me and blind in front of me. All that was visible was the very immediate future (about 10 feet) and the present. I was a shooting car in a universe of blurs.

Friday morning still contained the mist from the previous night's downpour. I stepped out on the downstairs porch, stopped before walking to my car and looked out, as I always did, at Scarborough Beach. At my feet were scores of worms. They had crawled up onto the pavement to escape the waterlogged ground. But it didn't matter. Most had dimply drowned in the myriad puddles. Others were doomed to bake in the Sun. There was no escape. They had no home to retreat to.

As I entered Finance class, it occurred to me that probably most of the worms die above, rather than below the earth.

Pitterman was in an uprage. 75% of the class were demanding grades as of May 4th. Arnold Krell's eyes gleamed in victory. There was no escape. Pitterman had to pass them all. They all left smiling, but I became somewhat sentimental. I understood Krell and I understood Pitterman. The spineless backbone had used the strike as an excuse to clear out as soon as possible to get to his home in northern Mass. The strike meant nothing to him but a few extra weeks of vacation. Others were doing it to screw Pitterman. They were also doing it to get out of the final and left in haughty triumphancy. The old professor fought valiantly, and I knew he was only fighting for his class. I didn't hassle him; I decided to stay to the end of class and then hand the slip in. Although we were opponents, we were also friends.

The following week saw a vast reduction in the student population. Already the strike had lost its punch. Many of the workshops had gone well though and the movements into the town to reach the townspeople were somewhat effective. But the summer was approaching too rapidly.

Jack Garrett and his chick would remain most of the summer; Linda Barton would see Europe and Arnold Krell would have a month added to his vacation. I would walk in cap and gown to get my diploma with the rest of my class on the Quad with my parents there a few weeks later. Mills would return to give a lecture on revolution, but this time as a professor, not as a political figure. Life was returning to status quo. There seemed no escape.

NOTE: *Some names have been changed for reasons of privacy. This account, however, is completely true, slightly edited 50 years after it was initially written as it happened.*

Ken Mills -- Kenneth Ian Leighton Mills. Born in Trinidad, Mills had obtained a scholarship to Oxford where he had booked a young group called the Rolling Stones for a graduation dance gig. At Stanford University, he taught courses in Philosophy and Black Liberation before teaching at Yale. When it was discovered that Mills was simultaneously lecturing at Stonybrook, which was not allowed, his job at Yale was curtailed. Married to Francelle Carapetyan, a teacher at Choate Boarding College, a Connecticut prep school, Ken Mills would pass away after a long illness in 1983. He was only 46.

Bob Shaw – After graduating, Bob moved to New York to begin his career as a stand-up comic doing his thing at the Improv and Catch a Rising Star. Starting out first in Boston with Jay Leno, Bob would go on to write for the Jerry Seinfeld show, appear in a few segments, and become a screenwriter for such movies as *A Bug's Life*.

Professor Marvin Pitterman – The last time I saw Dr. Pitterman he was literally on the ground on the third floor of Ballantine Hall wrestling with a female student who was trying to grab her final from Pitterman's hand. A senior at the University, for four solid years she was a Straight A Student, but she had 4 cuts in Pitterman's class so he was downgrading her to a B. She wanted to take her final to the Dean and he wouldn't give her the test.

Marc J. Seifer, Ph.D. Retired from the Psych Department, Adjunct Faculty, Roger Williams University, Marc is the author of *Rasputin's Nephew*, three other novels, and the acclaimed biography *WIZARD: The Life & Times of Nikola Tesla*. With appearances on Coast to Coast Radio, the BBC and NPR, Marc starred in the History Channel mini-series *The Tesla Files* now out on Hulu.