

# What a Long Strange Trip It's Been: How the Kent State Shootings Affected Juniata

by Dotti Huss



In facing the current crisis of a worldwide pandemic, a failing economy, and significant unrest, one sign of hope keeps cycling and recycling in my brain. As I contemplated this strange optimism, I realized that it was rooted in what happened a long time ago, mainly the protests of the late 1960s and 70s over the Vietnam war and racial injustice. It was because of this blast back to the 70s that I proposed writing this article for our Juniata Class of 1971 newsletter.

I begin by explaining that I was not on campus at Juniata on May 4, 1970. In fact I was not at Juniata that entire 1969-70 year. I was in Strasbourg, France, participating in Juniata's Brethren Colleges Abroad program. My interest in exploring this period in Juniata's history is reinforced by the fact that I was absent and experienced none of it myself. At that time, of course, there was no internet, texting or even telephone calls. In order to make a phone call, we went to the PTT or post office and made the call there. This process was not at all conducive to successful or frequent communication. Therefore, I heard bits and pieces about what was happening in the US through news reports on TV, newspapers, and sporadic letters from friends and family. What I heard was very frightening. What? My College was shutting down? There were murders of students at Kent State University? I genuinely imagined that I might not even have a country to return to. Thus, here is another reason for my inquiry into that fateful day and time in Juniata's history.

Although I only received nine responses from my Juniata classmates to my request to submit memories of this period of time, and particularly from the day of May 7, 1970, I saw in those responses a huge disparity in the degree to which that event impacted the lives of all of you, my classmates. I also noted that several of you, in addition to myself, stated that they had actually thought about that time of the 70s more recently, because of the types of unrest that is occurring now on so many fronts. All of this leads me to hypothesize that perhaps this small sampling of our class, because of the diverse recollections, might actually represent the class as a whole, but you be the judge.

In summary, all respondents remembered the day of May 7, 1970 as the day that Juniata College abruptly and unexpectedly closed its doors and sent students home. Everyone was supposed to be gone by the end of the day. Most respondents described the scenario of being woken up early on the morning of May 7, 1970, by the Dean of Women, stating that Juniata College was closing and everyone needed to leave campus immediately. One classmate, who happened to be a hall counselor, experienced a visit from the Dean of Students the night of May 6, 1970. Those dorm students met later that night to discuss the school closing and the need to vacate campus. Other classmates reported that a notice was pushed under their dorm room door in the morning, stating that the campus was closing. All expressed shock and concern, for many concern about their grades and how they were going to finish their class work.

Others of you, my classmates, delved into events prior to the closing of Juniata College. Most were aware that there had been violent protests on the campus at Kent State University, and most knew that four student protesters were shot. A couple classmates remembered that there were also protests at Penn State. Juniata apparently had some small protests, peace signs were all over campus, and students wore peace buttons and caps. Someone remembered that students from Penn State tried to work with Juniata students to organize a demonstration that would have blocked Highway 22 and blown up some train tracks, but students from Juniata refused to participate in that kind of violence. One classmate remembers that a protest coffin was placed on the lawn in front of Good Hall. Several of you described watching the birthdate lottery selection for the Draft on the television in Tote. A lot of anxiety was expressed as to who was going to be selected for the Draft.



I found it very interesting to examine all of the reasons that were remembered for the closure of campus, and it struck me that most of you were somewhat uncertain about why the College took this extreme action. One classmate recalls that the reason for the closing of Juniata was that the College could be targeted by the people in Huntingdon, who thought of Juniatians as hippies. Another alumnus reported that she remembered Juniata closing because there had been some trouble at Penn State, and the College was closing out of concern that the trouble makers would come to Huntingdon. Another one of you stated that Betty Ann Cherry shared with him that the administration at Juniata underestimated the degree of student unrest and organization in the community.

I personally am not sure whether that unrest was perceived in the towns people, or in the students on campus, or in the students at Penn State. Another one of you also recalls that the townspeople of Huntingdon were upset about the protests on campus, and the Administration closed the campus in order to let things cool down. I was able to get a copy of the letter written by Juniata President John Stauffer to students on May 7, 1970, closing the College. He writes: "This action is found necessary for your safety in the light of some potentially dangerous developments here in response to the national and international situation, and specifically in relation to Vietnam and Cambodia." I personally can't imagine a much vaguer explanation for the campus closure than President Stauffer's statement. No wonder that many of you did not have a good understanding of why the College closed.



In conclusion, my research into the response of the Class of 1971 to the Kent State shootings and the subsequent closure of the Juniata campus reveals that, although almost everyone recalled the closure of campus on May 7, 1970, there was significant confusion regarding the events prior to Juniata closing, as well as to why the College was closed. To be fair, some of the confusion may be related to the amount of time that has passed and the fact that all memories fade as we age. However, I think that some of the confusion also stems from the vague way in which the closure was explained to students at the time.

Another conclusion is that there was a large gap in the importance given at that time to the political events occurring in the 1960s and 70s, in that some students report that they participated in some of the anti-war movements on campus, and others were barely aware that those events were taking place.

A few students remembered that certain faculty members were also involved in the anti-war protests. Some alumni seemed to be more concerned about the Draft, but it appears that almost everyone was uniformly scared about their classes and their grades, and how they would be allowed to make up their work.



Lastly, I find it significant that many of us, whether we were concerned at the time or not, reported that we do think about those events now, as we face the crises of our day. For myself, the optimism that I feel regarding racial injustice is rooted in the belief that there is more recognition today, in the general population, of racial and social injustice and its importance. Therefore, for me, there is more hope that we may finally see progress in an area where we have not seen progress for a very long time. Perhaps the efforts that were made in the 60s and 70s may finally find some reward?



*Would you like to see copies of the **letters that Dr. Stauffer sent to all students** about the closing and subsequent reopening of Juniata in May of 1970? Keep scrolling!*

# JUNIATA COLLEGE

Huntingdon, Pennsylvania 16652

JOHN N. STAUFFER, PRESIDENT

TO ALL JUNIATA STUDENTS

It is my unpleasant duty to inform you that we are closing Juniata College immediately as of your receipt of this letter and until further notice. This action is found necessary for your safety in the light of some potentially dangerous developments here in response to the national and international situation, and specifically in relation to Viet Nam and Cambodia. We ask you to take suitable steps immediately to find transportation to your home. A copy of this letter will be sent also to your parents for their information.

Please see Dean Charles W. Schoenherr, or one of his associates, if you need assistance in getting home. Dormitories and other college buildings will be closed for the duration of this emergency beginning at 7:00 p.m. today.

The determination that this regrettable action must be taken in the best interests of Juniata students was reached through the joint consultation of the Faculty Council, the Student Personnel Staff, and several additional concerned faculty members.

It is anticipated that after consultation with the faculty, we will notify you at your home when classes are to be resumed. Ample time will be given for you to return to the campus. We hope that this may occur some time next week, or in any event, not later than the regularly scheduled final examinations. We suggest that you take with you your various course materials and a copy of the final examination schedule so that you may prepare for your examinations at home.

The Faculty Council has authorized me to assure you that loss of class time under these circumstances will not in itself jeopardize credit for the courses in which you are now enrolled.

As you leave for home, I trust that you will realize how fully I share with you a deep abhorrence of the violence within our nation during the past critical days. The Juniata College community together has given expression to its concern for our nation and its role in the world. At a later time, when we come back together and the gravity of our national situation is better understood, I trust that we may continue to work for peace and justice in all that we do.

Sincerely yours,



May 7, 1970

# JUNIATA COLLEGE

Huntingdon, Pennsylvania 16652

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Dear Student:

I am greatly pleased to be able to inform you that the Faculty Council has recommended the reopening of the College. Please consult the enclosed schedule for details about the resumption of classes and the reopening of facilities and services.

As you will see, the residence halls, dining hall, laboratories, and libraries will reopen at noon, Wednesday, May 13th. Classes will resume at 8:00 a.m. on Friday, May 15th. The latter time has been chosen to insure that virtually all students will have adequate time to receive this notice and to travel to the campus.

We have confidence that potential dangers thought to be present last week have subsided. I know that you join with me and with other members of the college community in hoping for and earnestly seeking after significant improvements in the national and international situation.

May we all, as we come together again, work earnestly for a better college community and a better world. It is my prayer that, through the lives of each one of us on this campus, Juniata may be an instrumentality for peace and justice both at home and abroad. The need for this commitment has become more apparent than ever in these recent dismal days.

Sincerely yours,



May 11, 1970  
Enclosure  
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JUNIATA COLLEGE

Schedule for Reopening of College

Effective May 13, 1970

Wednesday, May 13

12 Noon Residence Halls and Dining Hall reopen  
Library and Laboratories open

For the convenience of those who wish to  
return to campus

Thursday, May 14

Facilities and services mentioned above open on regular schedule

Faculty members are urged to be available in their offices or in Ellis Hall during the day

2:00 to 5:00 p.m. Student-faculty discussions on both group and individual conference basis on matters of current concern on the campus and in the nation -- Ellis Hall

5:00 to 7:00 p.m. Dinner and further discussion for students and faculty -- in Ellis Hall

7:00 p.m. All campus Assembly -- Memorial Gymnasium

Friday, May 15

8:00 a.m. Regular Friday schedule of classes and laboratory sessions will begin

For Friday and Saturday (See below)

The following may be included in class discussion:

- a. Regular course material
- b. Information about final examinations and course requirements
- c. Other items of concern

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Extended library hours will be arranged for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Please consult announcement on library door.

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7:00 p.m. Annual Senior Convocation -- Oller Hall

Saturday, May 16

8:00 a.m. Regular Thursday schedule of classes and laboratory sessions

Please note: The full Thursday schedule will be followed both morning and afternoon.

Monday, May 18

to Tuesday, May 26 - Regular schedule of final examinations will be followed