



ANTHONY RUSSO

# PEOPLE'S ARMY JAMBOREE

BY DORY HYLTON

*Dory Hylton earned her Ph.D in part by writing her doctoral dissertation on the Portland State University student strike of May 1970. What she found as she interviewed participants and observers of the strike was that many people wanted to talk about the People's Army Jamboree. This article is a sample of some of their voices.*

On the Road to Watergate, Richard Nixon passed through Portland, Oregon in the summer of 1970. To put it more accurately, because Richard Nixon was unable to pass through Portland, Oregon, he began his journey down the Road to Watergate.

I believe this is true because I have read some documents that trace the chronology of Nixon Administration policy developments vis a vis the antiwar movement. And I have listened to the stories of nearly 200 people who recall the spring and summer of 1970 on the streets and behind closed doors in and around the city of Portland. Their recollections begin in the South Park Blocks of Portland State University.

On Monday, the 4th of May 1970, student antiwar activists at PSU met to discuss plans to answer the call for a nationwide student strike. The call had been issued to express and crystallize the outrage many young people felt with the unexpected announcement that the United States had invaded Cambodia and resumed bombing North Vietnam. While the newly-forming PSU Strike Committee was assembled, news came that four Kent State University students had been fatally shot and nine others wounded by Ohio National Guardsmen. On Tuesday, antiwar activists sounded the call to shut the university down. By Wednesday the campus community, split between strikers and antistrikers, was in turmoil.

A dramatic procession of events gripped the campus community. At the cross streets in the city-owned South Park Blocks that were the geographical core of the PSU campus, spontaneous collectives sprang up where students had constructed barricades to block vehicular traffic, originally for the purpose of holding rallies and demonstrations, then manned 24 hours a day. In the center of the Park Blocks, a large first aid tent was erected like a field hospital in a war zone. The Park Blocks resonated with the sights and sounds of factional fighting, rallies, marches, dances, speeches, music, and, eventually, a violent police action that galvanized the campus community as a unit once again.

When riot police wielding 42-inch batons inflicted injury on 31 young people, many who witnessed the violence found themselves not only sickened, but changed. They speak now of a loss of innocence, of the war coming home to Portland, of the chilling realization that the Nixon Administration with its *college kids are draft dodgers and bums* rhetoric had set the tone for the country. It was okay to kill the little bastards.

**JIM WEATHERS  
CARPENTRY**



IS# 55964

**436-1885**

LICENSED-BONDED-INSURED

At the end of spring term, strike organizers looked for their next salvo against the Vietnam War. They decided to organize a series of demonstrations to coincide with the National Convention of the American Legion to be held in Portland from August 28 to September 3.

At the same time, four students who had opposed the strike went to Washington, D.C. to meet with the Oregon contingent and youth coordinators of the Nixon Administration. Their goal was to plead for dialogue between the administration and the nation's youth. One of the young men was driven to the Pentagon one morning, where he was escorted through the labyrinth to a small room where he waited for — what? What was he doing here? The door opened and a uniformed man strode in, planted his foot on a chair, bent over the youth and demanded, "Tell me what you know about the People's Army Jamboree."

Back home again, that young man, who had served in Vietnam, was called to Fort Lewis to train Oregon National Guardsmen in riot control. During the PSU strike, he had also become acquainted, and even friendly, with strike organizers, the same group who were now organizing the People's Army Jamboree. One evening when he reported for duty, an officer

confronted him with having been seen at PAJ headquarters. Although on that particular occasion he had not been there, he now discovered that PAJ headquarters was under surveillance by the military.

Surveillance of civilian groups by the military belonged to the Huston Plan, which had been briefly implemented by Richard Nixon in June of 1970, then scuttled as illegal after a red-faced FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover refused to become involved with interagency intelligence gathering. Officially, the Huston Plan was nixed, but here in Portland was evidence of part of the plan in effect.

Early in July Governor Tom McCall was informed by the FBI that 50,000 antiwar protesters were planning to descend upon Portland to disrupt the National American Legion Convention. They would call themselves the People's Army Jamboree, and would be hell-bent on destruction. The FBI reported that bombings, assassination attempts, and other atrocities were in store.

To make a long part of this story short, Governor McCall signed on to a plan brought to him by his assistant Ed Westerdahl. Westerdahl had been approached by The Family, a group

## THE REST OF THE STORY

BY ARTHUR HONEYMAN

History begets history. Experience is the best teacher. If we don't study history, we are condemned to repeat it. All of these are maxims that I have long revered. But now I am faced with the task of discerning how the antiwar protests at Portland State University in 1970 have influenced my life, and I am hard put to come up with anything concrete. I have decided to write this short essay as a brief sifting of old ashes, and in so doing ask the question: Where would I be if the protests had never happened? (This sounds like the film classic, *It's A Wonderful Life*; but then, mine has been a wonderful life.)

No PSU protest strike! No "Bloody Monday!" No protest rally at City Hall!

Possibly no visible need for police reform. Probably no Vortex. And for me, no line of poetry referring to the incident in *Nemo In Search Of Utopia*, which one writer friend teasingly calls "Honeyman's Magnus Opus."

But in a sense the above statement of the obvious is too concrete and is my way of begging the real question, to which I am not sure I can supply an adequate answer from a historical perspective. Perhaps I am overlooking something but in all honesty I cannot see any "diverging path" in my present life's activities that stems directly from those seven days in May 1970 at PSU. However, I do believe that if those seven days of PSU protesting had never occurred my resolve to follow through with the activities I was profoundly involved in at the time might have fizzled to a halt. If I lack the support of others, I have a tendency to back off. What those seven days of PSU protesting did for me was to affirm that I was not alone in my conviction that we who live on this planet need to focus on issues that expand the possibilities of long-range global survival for everyone instead of singling out pockets of life to be more deserving than others (such as: the people of the U.S. versus those of Vietnam; races versus other races; people who are capable of functioning "normally" versus those who are not — or, regarding the cause to which I dedicated most of my efforts: the handicapped). Grassroots protesting begat in me a sense of solidarity which I needed and which remains with me 25 years later, despite the fact that we have all branched out in different directions. It is also possible (by way of more conjecture) that, had I not participated in that protest incident, I would not have been arrested (with 96 or so other peaceful demonstrators) in 1977 for trying to

close the Trojan Nuclear Power Plant. Just as the Vietnam War eventually stopped, so, too, Trojan shut down. Also, unless I am mistaken, 1977 was the same year in which I (along with my wife JoAnn) marched 45 miles down I-5 to Salem with a few other disabled radicals for the purpose of demonstrating in behalf of wheelchair accessibility in mass transit vehicles throughout Oregon. So far, the results of that march have been only partially successful.

"You made your bed; now, lie in it!" are words that haunt me. When I occasionally get hit with the realization that my radical politics have a negative side in the sense they may turn old friends against me and effectively obliterate old sources of support. As an example of what I mean: back in the '70s I sought funding from a wealthy friend, who five years earlier offered to finance my way through law school, for the publication of a book. As I half expected, she turned me down on the grounds that she didn't like my politics. I never saw her again.

Although it wasn't until my father was shot to death with six bullets in his torso in 1978 that I became a bona fide pacifist (in the Gandhian sense), my initiation began at the 1970 PSU protests. There's not much of importance that I specifically recall about my presence there, but my befuddled memory clearly echoes these words by Michael McCusker, who was a medic at the PSU strike: "I hope the cops don't come (They always do) and I hope these kids don't try to glorify this thing by violently resisting." The next day was Bloody Monday and McCusker was one of those police attacked for non-violently blocking the Tactical Squad from tearing down the protesters' medical tent. But I had gone home the day before and remained unconvinced about non-violent tactics as an effective means of resistance. Nonetheless, the seeds were planted.

Had the PSU incident never occurred it is possible that I would have reacted to my father's violent and senseless murder by becoming a staunch supporter of the right to bear firearms. I might have reacted with violence. As it is, I not only strongly advocate gun control (You can't shoot anybody without a gun!), I also advocate pacifism as the salvation of *Terra Firma*.

Arthur Honeyman's earlier appraisal of the PSU Strike (*Dubiously Involved In Important Matters*) appeared in the May '95 issue of the NCTE.