

Twenty years after campus protests against the war, students return to Stanford to talk about activism



Stanford University News Service photo

In the spring of 1969, Stanford students formed the April Third Movement to protest the war in Vietnam and classified military research on campus

A RADICAL REUNION

By Kathleen Donnelly
Mercury News Staff Writer

ON A quiet Sunday morning, Lenny Siegel stands in front of the Applied Electronics Laboratory at Stanford University, site of the April Third Movement's greatest hour, and possibly Lenny Siegel's, too.

Things have changed since the last time Siegel, a former leader of student protests, took a group like this one to the lab. Then, it was April 1969 and the group following him was planning to occupy the building. Today, the group following him is touring sites significant to the anti-war movement. As former protester Sue McKevitt laughingly points out, this time they don't even carry rocks to throw at the windows.

McKevitt is one of some 200 former Stanford activists who returned to the campus over the weekend to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the April Third Movement, the student protest that consumed them during the spring of 1969.

On Saturday, they took part in panel discussions about today's activism and on why they did what they did and what the future holds. That evening, they restaged a guerrilla theater piece ("Alice in ROTC Land"), which originally starred Sigourney Weaver, and watched a PBS documentary on the Vietnam War protest on the Stanford campus.

On Sunday, they toured campus sites and reminisced. Siegel, the 40-year-old director of the Pacific Studies Center, a research center on elec-



Michael Rondou — Mercury News

Siegel organized the reunion; McKevitt investigates housing discrimination

tronics and defense issues based in Mountain View, organized the reunion.

On April 3, 1969, about 800 students met to vote on the demands they had for the Stanford administration, foremost among them no more classified military research on campus and no more counterinsurgency work at the Stanford Research Institute. The students gave the administration nearly a week to act on the demands. Then, on April 9, they marched to the electronics laboratory and began a nine-day sit-in that ended in the university's promise to stop secret research.

On May 16, 1969, about 500 students

blockaded the street in front of the SRI building in the industrial park next to the campus, smashing the windows with the same tear gas canisters lobbed at them by police. Sixteen protesters were arrested, but SRI's work continued.

Since then, the "Big Chill" — a feeling that former radicals have compromised their beliefs in exchange for comfortable lives — may have hit some ex-activists. But if it has, those people didn't come to this reunion to talk about their angst. Those who came back for the reunion aren't squeamish about what they did

in the '60s and how it jibes with what they're doing now.

Four days before the reunion, Harry Cleaver says, he was on the University of Texas at Austin campus where he teaches economics, "shuttling between grad students protesting wage cuts and black students who want more minority faculty."

"Obviously," he says, taking a bite of the tofu and vegetable combo he's ordered for breakfast, "it's in the interest of the black students that the grad students are highly paid, since good grad students attract faculty."

It is from such thinking, Cleaver says, that coalitions are born. He wipes a bit of tofu from his beard.

Cleaver, 45, was a graduate student in economics at Stanford during the April Third Movement. He's still so involved in student movements that the University of Texas student newspaper recently called him a "radical prof." It's a term he relishes.

"Hell, no!" says Cleaver when asked if his past as an activist has ever harmed his academic career. "It's helped. The job I've had for the last 12 years I got through student militancy."

When Cleaver came to the Texas campus to give a talk, actually a try-out for an open position on the faculty, he says a group of students met him at the airport and "grilled me till two in the morning on all kinds of questions. And they liked what they heard."

So, he says, they put pressure on the

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Cover Story

Many student activists still fight for a better world

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derground." Six months later, George got a telephone call at her dorm. It was the police. She turned herself in and was put on probation.

"That was the end of her activism for almost 10 years."

"I didn't get active," she says. "I had this feeling that was something you did as a student."

"Then in '78, I was driving through Idaho and I saw this sign that said, '18 miles ahead — world's first nuclear power plant' ... After I said I know exactly what I want to do with the rest of my life. I want to be in the anti-nuclear movement."

For years she traveled in a 1959 panel truck, putting on a one-woman show called "Everything I Always Wanted to Know about Nukes But Was Afraid to Ask" in towns from Lubbock, Texas, to Ann Arbor, Mich. Now, George lives in Redwood City and works for a coalition opposed to the home porting of nuclear warships in cities across the United States, including the plan to bring the battleship Missouri to San Francisco.

"This was the best blockade," she says.

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Barbara George, in a corduroy skirt with a string of pearls at her neck, flips through the piles of police photographs at a Friday night reception for the former activists, looking for the shot that got her arrested in 1969.

George, 42, was a senior at Stanford when she and a bunch of friends headed over to the student movement's blockade of the Stanford Research Institute building.

"There were all these photographers up on the buildings taking pictures all day long," George remembers, chuckling slightly. She knew they were police photographers, taking pictures to be used as evidence in court.

"Yeah," she says, "The whole thing about getting arrested was pretty scary, but at the time there was a lot of romanticism about going underground, so I just laid low and considered myself as un-

with the rest of the activists in house in New Hampshire," she says. She laughs quietly. It feels good talking about this, she says.

"For years, McKevitt, 45, didn't talk about it. A divorced mother with two children to raise, she says she knows why even the most dedicated activists may not be eager to talk about their pasts.

"Really, for most of us it was a high water mark in our lives, something we are proud of," Weiss says of the April Third Movement. But he's also proud of his military service, which he volunteered for at the end of the war, in 1974. "My objective was to get the U.S. out of Southeast Asia," says Weiss, who lives in Cambridge, Mass. "After I saw that was happening, I actually decided to serve two years in the Army... I felt I had two years to give my country."

Weiss worked at the Pentagon, serving as a movie, theater and restaurant reviewer for the Pentagon's newspaper.

"The thing about being in the Army is it got me in touch with a lot of people I wouldn't have met," he says.

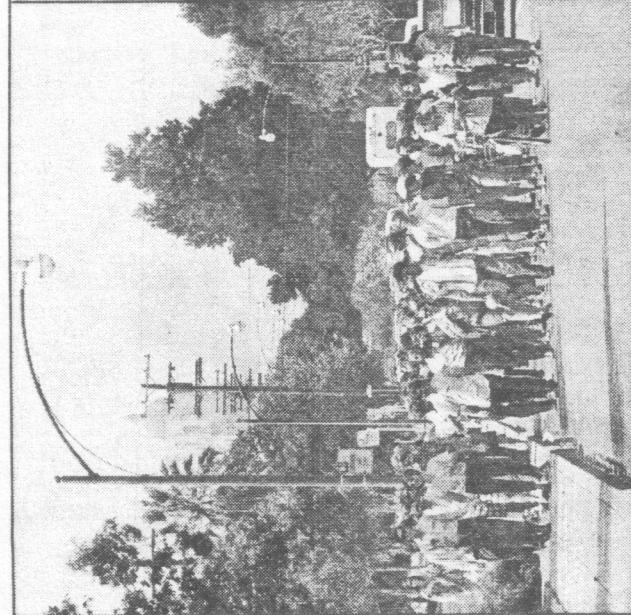
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Stanford students marched through the industrial park in April '69

"I put that on there only in the last year because of the whole Dan Quayle thing," says Weiss. "I'm a liberal, and I think what's happened is we have a bunch of conservatives now who are gung ho (about defense) but who've never been in the Army."

If someone asks about Weiss' activism, he'll readily talk about it, he says. "But you wouldn't put that on a bio," he adds. "It happened 20 years ago. You only put on things that are relevant."

On paper and in person, Weiss, 38, looks like a get-ahead guy of the '80s — clean-cut, black jeans with a red knit golf shirt, matching red socks. He was a housing policy adviser for the Dukakis campaign. He helps encourage banks to lend money to low- and moderate-income housing projects. He sat-in



Stanford University News Service photo

April, 1969.

"I think what happened to people is they had to start thinking about what the consequences were," she says. "Nobody knows about it," she says of her activism at Stanford, where she was a faculty wife in 1968 and '69. "My résumé has a gap."

It's not that she hid her past, McKevitt explains, but while she looked for a job in the '70s she didn't exactly bring it up.

But not talking about what she did bothered her, McKevitt says. "You can have your belief system and you can also do what you have to do to live and you wonder if the two will ever meet again," she says.

They did for McKevitt. As deputy director of the New Hampshire Commission for Human Rights, she investigates charges of discrimination in housing and employment. She is also involved in a statewide women's lobbying group and in a group researching solid waste disposal in her town. And she's not shy about bringing up the '60s anymore.

When Sue McKevitt moved from California to New Hampshire in 1974, she followed the FBI. In 1974, she says, half-way to herself. "I guess I feel like I can now."

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"They parked a car outside the



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looking down at the grainy photographs from 20 years ago. "It was the best blockade up until our blockade of the Missouri in '86."

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In the back of his rental car, Marc Weiss keeps photocopies of his press clippings. He digs them out, along with a copy of his book, "The Rise of the Community Builders." He throws in a current blog entry.

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