

## **Sometime Around Midnight** **By Brendan McNerney**

*“It was my junior year when the Rodney King verdict came out and there were uprisings... What was happening in the City of L.A. was a really big deal and it caused a lot of conversations, I would say, to start happening and dialogue to start happening in a new way about what does it mean to be a Catholic Jesuit school and to engage in our community and to treat everyone here with respect.”*

*Kristi Gonsalves-McCabe, LMU Alum, on The Rodney King Verdict*

*I think that the African American students had concerns. I remember being in St. Roberts auditorium and Lisa Piumetti was there and we had a whole conversation about how can we respect and protect each other in this setting...*

*In fact...*

It was sometime around midnight in late April, 1992. The air was crisp and cold as Los Angeles plunged into the darkness of night. Yet the sky still glimmered with the light of a hundred indignant fires burning in hearts and buildings throughout the city. Glass shattered and wood crackled; a legacy of violence following the unfathomable not guilty verdict handed down to the four police officers involved in the infamous Rodney King beating. As the world around them erupted, a group of confused and anxious students watched from above, on the bluff of Loyola Marymount campus.

*...A bunch of us were really upset just knowing what was going on in L.A. and feeling concerned and confused and anxious about what was going on and all the violence that was happening...somebody had the key to the clock tower....*

So Kristi Gonsalves-McCabe, a junior English Literature major at LMU, and her group of friends, climbed to the clock tower of Sacred Heart Chapel, standing like knightly sentinels of a different era, as chaos erupted below. Safe in their refuge, they had nothing to do but watch and reflect on what had brought them there: not just to the pinnacle of the chapel, but *here*, to this very state of things. Even with their years of education, they couldn't quite grasp it. Perhaps nobody ever truly would.

*I personally wasn't all that engaged over what was going on around us, at least in retrospect. The Rodney King verdict and the uprising that followed were certainly an exception to that.*

As they talked and waited for dawn or the world to end, their whispered theories and shouted fears carried out over Sunken Gardens and drew the notice of the Public Safety Officers. Since the outbreak of violence in the city, security had been increased in Los Angeles as well as on LMU's campus. Eventually, the city, which would experience six days of riots, required the National Guard, the U.S. Army, and the U.S. Marines to restore order. Not surprisingly, then, security on campus was also significantly ramped up. Unaware that students had climbed into the clock tower, Public Safety Officers began to fear that the group was a band of snipers attempting to bring the problems of Los Angeles to bear directly on the student population.

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*They thought there were snipers on top of the chapel and it was just this group of student leaders crying and really upset about what was happening in our city.*

Comprehending how quickly this misunderstanding could turn from humorous to dangerous, Kristi and her friends came down, humiliated, but safe from their sanctuary. Their guardians were undoubtedly grateful to find only worried students hiding out in the clock tower but nevertheless, they put on quite a spectacle of anger.

*Dave Trump who was the VP for Facilities, and Ray Hilyer, the Head of Public Safety, were there. All these bigwigs were standing at the bottom of the stairs so angry. . . . they knew all of us and they were calling us by name like disappointed parents saying 'how could you do this to us?' It was the President of Gryphon Circle, the President of Crimson, and the General of the Student Workers who was my roommate, and just all these people.*

Over the next several weeks, the students and their professors and fellow staff would go back to their normal routines, but the brief stint in the clock tower remained fresh in the minds of Kristi and her friends. While Rodney King would fill the news cycle for weeks and months to come, there would be no article in the newspaper about the clock tower incident. But Kristi remembered everything anyway and her final words on the night described experiences, not just her own, but of a whole city, clashing nonsensically with itself:

*We felt so bad. Of course it wasn't malicious; we were just trying to console each other. That was bad. There was never any major consequence to that. Maybe there should have been...*