

MR. RALPH NEWELL

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KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Newell: Of course, I have known the family for a good many years when they first came to Keene. I've always known Jon and his sister and followed his career in school here with some interest. And, after he went down to VMI in Virginia, I used to follow his achievements down there. He was head of his class. You know all that. He had quite a time I guess deciding what he wanted to do....English award...scholarship...was down at Harvard for awhile. I guess he'd thought about being a doctor. He wanted to be an English teacher, he told me. He finally made up his mind his calling was in the ministry.

S: Did it surprise you that he went to VMI?

Newell: No, it didn't. I think the family sent him down there for discipline. He was sort of a happy-go-lucky guy. High IQ but just wouldn't apply himself around here, and they probably thought well, put him down there and...My wife--he was in the same class with my wife's sister's son, Hart, from Richmond, Virginia, so...some contact that way...It's sort of a tough school I guess...status symbol...prestige. Go through VMI, you know, that's tops.

I could just describe in a very general way. He was always a very friendly sort of person, concerned with the welfare of

others, full of fun, willing to enter into any activity, very brilliant. Of course, he sang in the choir, so I got to know him pretty well here because I'm in the choir.

S: Did he ever write anything for the newspaper?

Newell: I don't recall that he did? I know that he was quite active in a lot of high school activities.

After he was a candidate for the ministry, he came back here a couple of times from theological seminary Sunday and preached. All you had to do was just listen to him, and you knew that he had a great future. He had poise; he was sincere; he would have made a heck of a good parish priest. After he got on to that civil rights matter, you know, he was really all wrapped up in it. After he came back from Selma for the first time, he spoke to Mary's, one of the auxillaries here, church women, and I guess he could talk for hours you know. He was so interested in it...all wrapped up in it. He was very sincere.

S: I wonder if there are any copies of that talk.

Newell: I think so. Awfully pleasant fellow, very accommodating.

S: Were you surprised that he had gotten involved in Selma and that he was going back there?

Newell: well, not if you knew him, you wouldn't be. His concern for other people. He thought it was the right thing to do. I

don't think he really liked it down at VMI. But he stayed and stuck it out. I noticed the other day that Memorial Library down there...from the English standpoint he was an outstanding English scholar...named after him.

S: Do you recall any conversations that you had with Jon, any things that you talked about in particular?

Newell: Can't say that I would. I talked with his mother when they had their first trouble down there, you know, when he was refused admittance to the Episcopal Church...celebration...She talked with him on the telephone that day. So, I talked with her the day after. We ran a lot of news stories about the situation, about his being involved...But I don't know as I can give you what you are looking for....

Well, he was very well thought of. Of course, the whole family...his father was a doctor here for years...personal physician...very much beloved. That may be one reason why at one time he was thinking about entering the medical profession.

As I recall, he sang with us for the midnight celebration last Christmas. That was about the last time he sang in the choir.

You know about the Mississippi Mission in his honor...Well, he was so well thought of...That's why there's such a darn good response...