FR. OUELLET

Selma 1+2
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Bill: Part of it was to try and get the D.A. to see it as a service related, because he was hit with scrapnel in the war. And so, as she said, they literally drove, Emily did, they drove Dr. Daniels around from hospital to hospital. This guy was suffering from this kidney dysfunction and, for a doctor who had given all those years in the service, seemed to me incredible that that should ever take place.

Ouelette: Mrs. Daniels was a very, very bright woman. A very determined lady. When she made up her mind on something, she was not easily swayed. She had a toughness to her.

Bill: She had an elegance to her too.

Ouelette: Didn't she? She was a lady. She really was. Very well spoken and very gentle in her way.

Larry: Emily said that after her dad's death, I guess Connie went back to school to UNH to get her certification so that she would have enough money to survive I guess. He was the kind of doctor, there aren't many any more, who just didn't charge a lot of money and often didn't charge anything.

Ouelette: He was very generous. She went back she was teaching in Brattleboro. She taught French. She spoke beautiful French. She really was good. She really enjoyed that. She enjoyed the students.

Larry: Are you yourself from a French family?

Ouelette: Yes I am. My parents were both from Canada. My father came from New Brunswick, my mother from Montreal. And we were nine children. We were all born in Saint Albans, Vermont.

Larry: That's a beautiful town.

Ouelette: Yes, and then I went to undergraduate school at St. Michael's and then joined the order, the Edmundites, when I was there.

Larry: How did you end up in Selma?

Ouelette: Well, Edmunites had been in Selma since 1937. We established a black parish there at the invitation of Bishop Tuland and at the time I was ordained in '52 I had always thought I would like to go down there and work. Tell me why I don't know. I just thought it would be exciting and I was really slated to go away and study. I was supposed to go to Cuba. This was before Castro, the University of Havana to study Spanish and teach probably teach Spanish and French. And then at the last minute, I happened in a conversation to mention to someone how I'd thought I would have liked to work in Alabama. Nobody knew about that. And so when my superiors heard about it, they said, "Is it true you'd like to work in Alabama?" because there weren't seemingly a lot of fellows who were willing to go and I said I would love to go and so I went in '52. I was in Alabama for four years then I came north again. I taught in western New York in the late '50's, then went back to Selma in 1960. And that again was because I wanted to go. I used to talk about it all the time. I had really liked working in Alabama and so they asked me if I wanted to go back. I said I'd love to. And so I went back to Selma again.

Bill: What did you find attractive about working in Alabama?

O: I had the feeling that you could do something for people who really needed your presence. I think my background, I always wanted to be the kind of priest who was more involved. I was not particularly interested in academic work. I wound up doing a fair amount of it but I wasn't attracted to the academic life in the sense that my father was a carpenter and I always saw myself as someone who might be in the missions and who worked with his hands as well as his head and always had the feeling for people who suffered injustice that I think came from my family. My father had been involved in unions, railroad unions a great deal. So our home was one in which justice was an issue and the care of the poor and so on. We were always taught that that was something worth while. Not that we had that much, we were fairly poor ourselves but so I was attracted to that for that reason. I always had a sense of adventure and the idea of going off some where and doing something like that. I went in '52 when I got there I remember being told by some of the older priests that some priests who came down were accepted and some were not. And that that was not an identifiable quality before you got there. And I got there and I immediately felt at home and they evidently felt very comfortable with me.
BOOK-MARK
I just really loved it. I loved the work, and I just felt very fulfilled and in be ing there.
We had the hospital, the school, the parish so there was a lot to do.

Larry: Were your parishioners largely black people?

O: They were all black people. Selma had a white parish and a black parish and we had the black parish.

Larry: This was true of the Catholic Church as well as the Episcopal Church?

O: Yes. The Catholic Church in Alabama was segregated. It was different in that black people could go to a white church and did in many instances, but were always very much of a minority. And Bishop Tuland way back had thought that the only way that he could help black people was to establish a black church and that he had done. He had set up black parishes and so that it was for that reason we had initially been invited to Alabama to set a black parish in a place like Selma which was where black people were notoriously poorly educationed because Selma was the center for an agricultural area, Dallas county, and so that they would not be all that well received in a white church although there were a few blacks, I heard tell when we went there in '37, there were a few blacks who came from New Orleans who were Catholic who went to the white church and that was done. But there were just only those three black Catholics in Selma when our priests went there, but then in time we worked very successfully with blacks in Selma and we had one priest especially who did tremendous with the youth so that we were averaging about 50 new Catholics a year in Selma which was pretty phenomenol at that time. So we have a very vibrant parish that was black. We had a few white people who came. Occasionally we would get a family out at the airbase who for some reason or other chose to come to our parish. So we always had a loose sprinkling of white people who came and who identified themselves with our parish.

Larry: Where was it outside memorize the grid of Selma after reading about it?

O: It was right on Broad Street.j

Larry: It was.

O: Yes. It would have been probably as you cross the Pettis Bridge jcoming into Selma, from Montgomery you go down past the business section , past what was then the railroad track and then at the railroad track pretty much it Davis Avenue and then the black section of town started. And even though there was a little bit of business area in there, there was some businesses, black businesses and white businesses, in fact just down the street a little way Mayor Smitherman before he became mayor had an appliance store down there. But we were situated right on the street, on the corner of Small and Broad Streets, which was right in the heart of the black community. It was St. Elizabeth's parish.

Bill: Is it a brown church?

O: No. It was a stone church. It is still standing, it's a chapel now. But it's stone and it's old brick. The priests had built it themselves.

Bill: I asked that because Jonathan had a lot of snapshots. I can't quite identify the churches. Brown's Chapel I recognize.

O: The church was overbaked brick. I don';t know if you're familiar with that. In the kiln you make bricks and if they get overbaked they get tossed aside and when they built the church they didn't have much money and they were able to get these overbaked brick very cheaply and it was still good brick. And that's what they used to build the church with.

Bill: What did the white treat you with both the Catholic and with somebody working with blacks?

O: When I went in '52, we were well treated and I think respected by whites and that had not always been so when the priests first went to Alabama they were very suspect, they really had a tough time because the whites didn't know what they were up to. But then when they saw the type of work that the Edmundites were doing and we really stayed in the black community, and concerned ourselves a great deal with the poor and with the physical health: we had a clinic and then a hospital and so they saw us as being good for the community. We hired quite a few black people and so I think we were respected and accepted . Those who probably, well I say that and at the same timej, I think there was always an undercurrent of suspicion which is going to be present whenever you have white people messing around with black people. You're always going to get it. And occasionally and I had instances occur when people would for some reason or other would call you a nigger lover or I remember one time being on the street and a little black girl from the school came running up to me and jumped up in my arms. A guy spit on me who was just standing there. I remember how horrified the little girl was. So, it was there and the suspicion was always there I think but it was again pretty much the mentality they had toward us were the mentality they had towards blacks. As long as you didn't get out of line, minded your business, and did what you were supposed to do, then they tolerated you. And I had that feeling, I don't know if I have a more suspicious nature than others, some of the priests were probably a lot more diplomatic than I am and probably wiser than I had

friendships with white people in town and because we became a significant economic factor in the town bankers and people like that were very receptive to the business we brought them and I never bothered I always felt that they didn't really like us or trust us. And I felt that that was justified and when all this occurred, when the civil rights movement occurred, the good will peeled off like a veneer. We became the focus of suspicion immediately. And then we saw what the true colors were and I remember I can't remember his name now, Mr. Baker, he had been police chief in Selma for a long time, and he was I doon't know appointed safety director or something like that during the time. He had known Fr. Casey who had been one of the founders of our mission down there and I saw him outside the courthouse one day and he came over and said, "You know you're doing it all wrong, Fr. Casey had the right idea. Don't stir these people up and that's what you're doing and you're going to get in trouble." But he was very hostile and the attorney who had been with us for years and years and was considered our very fine friend, as soon as this stuff broke took some suits and when I came to court one time he was prosecuting the case and he really tried to do a job on me. So that feeling for me was always there that so much so that I never formed white friends in Selma. I didn't have any. I stayed in the black community unlike most of the priests we had who did have white friends, I always had a feeling that it wasn't for real. j And I didn't like the way some of those whites who were supposedly our friends talked to black people at times. I always sensed that they didn't treat them well and that they were patronizing and I didn't like that. So I wasn't very surprised when the veneer peeled off.

B: When did that all begin?

Fr. Oulette: It all began at the time of the first, when SNCC came to town which would have been in the later part of 1961 or early part of 1962. Bernard Lafayette who was with SNCC came to town. Dr. King had already been to town but they had determined that nothing would happen in Selma. That blacks in Selma were too much under the thumb of white people. SNCC decided to undetake it I guess and Bernard Lafayette came to town to start the voter registration movement and within a couple months of his arrival of course his presence was noted and he was severly beaten one night and the white community became very suspicious , of course, they were in a uproar over what was happending in Montgomery and other places, Birmingham and Atlanta and so that when JBernard started gathering the people together after he'd been there a couple of months he called a mass meeting and John Lewis, who is now a Congressman from Atlanta, was supposed to give the talk. And he couldn't show up something had happened. And so Bernard asked me if I would give the talk that night and I did. It was the first talk given at a mass meeting in Selma. And it was in the First Baptist Church. Brown's Chapel at this time was just not involved at all. And I did that at the Baptist Church and the reaction to that was really strong. Of course the newspapers were there and so it the police got the information I guess and just got very suspicious about what was going on. We came out of the chapel and there were supposedly white citizens council people, I think they were a Ku Kluxers without their hoods, had all been brought in by truck and they were lying on the sidewalk. They had guns and billy clubs and so on. I guess they thought we were going to start a revolution or something. And then some of the stuff I had said was quoted in the paper. And as best we could determine, the belief was that, which is the myth that existed then and probably still exists in the south that black people were very content with the way things were. And they would only questions if

someone was stirring them up and I was the really the only visible white man who could be pointed to as stirring them up. You know people would be seen, people in SNCC and so on, were seen coming to my office and so on and we had made available to SNCC a hall right in back of our church where they trained the high school students on how to fill out the voter registration forms. So that those students in turn would go from house to house and try to encourage people to vote and show what they must do. And so that was viewed as very suspicious that the secret meetings were being held and so that was the general assumption, I guess, that somehow I was some sort of communist that was really at the bottom of this whole thing.

L: When this all began, was there a slip in the courage in the Edmundite order as to how to or what level of involvement the Edmundites should take in Selma?

Fr. Ouelette: I suspect there was some question about it. I tended to be a little more daring or foolish. I remember when I started getting involved in it my immediate superior at the time said, "You're getting involved and we better let the bishop know what's going on." My response to that was, "Should we do that, because if we start asking questions we're going to get nos. So let's just go ahead and do it." Well he prevailed on me that that wasn't the wise thing to do. He told me it wasn't. So we went to see the archbishop and surprisingly the archbishop then said, "I don't see any problem with that. If that's what you're doing, people ought to have the right to vote and if they're being denied, be involved, sure. You can encourage that. Don't get involved in any demonstrations." He was strict about that and I honored that and the people knew that I wasn't supposed to be involved in demonstrations. And I was the pastor of the parish so the idea of there were other priests about but in a black parish the pastor is the shephard. He's the one they'll listen too and so just by the fact that I was pastor, what I would say was generally more followed by the black community. Not that I didn't stir people up or anything, I just encouraged them to go ahead and do what they had to do so that they knew that they had not only my support but the support of the rest of the parish. The sisters were there and were very supportive. So everybody supported the notion we weren't reviving on that we knew what we were about. The fact that I was pastor meant that I was the more vocal spokesman and the one that people would look to in the broader community. I was kind of surprised that the reaction that I, I didn't think I was doing anything, you know, to encourage people like when Bernard came and said can we use your facilities and so I didn't see any problem with that. Sure, we let all kinds of people use our facilities. THat's what we were there for. So I didn't see any problem with that. And I was genuinely surprised by the reaction of the white community. That suddenly they felt we were in some kind of secret conspiracy to stir up black people to cause trouble.

Larry: Maybe they had a better sense then others of the new social changes that was over the horizon. You know maybe they just saw that it could happen.

Fr. Ouelette: I think they did.

Larry: More maybe than someone of a more liberal persuasion.

Fr. Ouelette: That's right.

Larry: Gary Lapierre came to Manchester to speak last October and Bill and I

I wished we had gone. I wonder if he was in Selma at the time that Jon was there.

Fr. Ouelette: I don't believe so. He kind of, Bernard's work was primarily the first two years and then a lot of things happened and SNCC kind of pulled back for some legal reasons. They were all under peace bond and it was a real troublesome period. Then when Dr. King came, SNCC came back but Bernard was not that involved at that time, it was more John Lewis came back but Bernard, I don't know if he had moved on to other things but he did not return.

Bill: I was going to ask you

Fr. Ouelette: He's an extraordinary man by the way.

Larry: John Lewis?

Fr. Ouelette: No. Bernard Lafayette.

Larry: I don't like the man.

Fr. Ouelette: Oh. Nobody ever mentions him. But there would have been no Selma movement with Bernard Lafayette. He's the key figure and nobody seems to know that and nobody seems to appreciate it.

Larry: Do you have an address that I could write to him?

Fr. Ouellette: I don't. I lost contact with him. I don't even remember the name of the. He got his doctorate and he was teaching something Mellon University.

Bill: Carnegie Mellon?

Fr. Ouellette: I think he might of been tied up with them. But that's the last time that I, when I had not seen Bernard since that time.

Bill: I was going to ask you... That talk you gave that was pretty important too. What did you talk about that night and who was your audience.

Fr. Ouellette: The audience was the black community. There were about 750 people there, which was sizeable for the black community. And I do recall that I spoke about the right that people had jto be equal and certainly the dignity to whcih they had a right and talked about voting and the fact that they did not have the right to vote. That somebody who say jopposed the United States during World War II could be in this country and have the right to vote and there ancestors had been here for generations and that someone who had been in the military, had fought for his country, could come back to Selma and be denied the right to vote. And I remember quoting statistics on how many voters there were in Selma which was about 275 out of a potential 15,000 I think in Dallas County of blacks and how they were being denied that right by unfair practice and this is something we all had a right to speak about, that I had a right to speak about because I was pastor of a church and we weren't just jto preach pious platitudes but to speak of justice. And that this was patently unjust and that while I had heard that my speaking out would not be acceptable and that I would refuse to be quiet about it. I'm sure I said a lot of other

things. That was kind of a general

Larry: As a result of that did anybody ever threaten you or attempt to harm you in any way.

Fr. Ouellette: Yes. There were kind of any number of incidents. It was a sort of thing you lived with you became quickly aware that you were in danger. And I remember one afternoon talking with a black minister about it and we kind of made a pact that afternoon that we wouldn't just act out of fear. That we would look at in the face and say if we're going to do this, our lives will be in jeopardy and if we were going to be concerned about that all the time it would hinder our ability to act. And so that we would accept that fact and try to be at peace with it, and then take an attitude which said that is not a factor. If I lose my life, I lose my life, not that I want to, but that's not going to be a factor in the way I behave. And so just kind of put on the back burner. You knew it was there and you went on and did your business. We were careful. I was careful. I didn't go out at night, I always watched my rearview mirror. I remember, I was going up to the black elks club one night and I was on Washington St. and a couple of guys, three men, came out of a storefront after me and I was 37 years old and pretty speedy at that time. So I beat them up the street and got into the Elks Club. I got threatened any number of times on the street people would approach me and threaten me and then I used to get a lot of threatening phone calls at night. I remember one, this lady called up and she started out by saying, "Are you that white priest that is causing all that trouble." I said, "Well, I guess so." And she said, I still remember the words because of the way she said them, she said, "I hate you." She said, "But I'm a Catholic and I don't want to see something happen to a Catholic priest." She said, "My husband and two other men have been in my kitchen talking and they're going to get you and I just thought I'd better tell you to be careful." And I said, "Well, lady," I remember I had gone to bed early, it was about 10:00 PM at night," there's nothing I can do about it." I remember I hung up the phone and turned around and went back to sleep again. As I think of it today, but you just got inured to it after a while. And then they, one night my superior woke me up and said that the mayor and the town council wanted to see me. So we went up and they had my phone tapped so I had some conversations with SNCC in Atlanta and so they were accusing me basically trying to bring in white forces from Atlanta to start a violent revolution. I didn't know what they were talking about. They were very paranoid. Every little thing they would hear they would put an interpretation on it and it just got bizarre. But I remember sitting there that night in the mayor said, "Well, you know things are getting pretty rough around it. I think it would be better both for white people and black people if you went on vacation for a little while." I said, "Well, I've already had my vacation. I have no intention of leaving." And they went on in a very nice way. They were very polite and trying to say suppose you were reassigned somewhere else for a while and let things cool down. And then finally there was a guy sitting at the end of the table, I had never seen him before he looked like a farmer or rancher, and I remember him looking down the table, a great big guy, and he said, "Well, I'll tell you nobody else wants to tell you. Somebody is going to blow your God-damn head off." So I said, I got angry then, and probably more out of my fear I got brave but I remember saying to him, "Well, you tell the guy that takes a shot at me he better get me because I'm a Vermont boy and I was raised with a rifle too. If he doesn't get me I'll get him." I was just kind of at the end, I was angry, our kids had been in jail and I was just really exhausted

for one and thing and I was really angry. It was my mouth shooting off. It was not something I would have done. I was kind of horrified after at what I had said. But the threats were constant.

Larry: It was most interesting what you should mention about acceptance of the possibility of death because who did we talk to on our trip that said it was Jonathan's?

Bill: I would imagine that it would be anybody's. That you have to confront death. If you were working down there.

Fr. Ouellette: If you really involved in it was very much a reality. And speaking of Jonathan, at the beginning that was one of the things I talked to him about, because he didn't have that realization at all. And I remember him telling me a story because when I met him and he used to come to the rectory once in a while, we spent time talking.

Bill: When did you first meet him?

Fr. Ouellette: It was in the summertime. I don't know what year he came down.

Bill: 1965

Fr. Ouellette: 1965. It wasn't '64 was it? He came in '65.

Bill: He came after Bloody Sunday. When King got on the radio and asked for volunteers.

Fr. Ouellette: So it must have been spring then because he was standing with the Wests. He had come to town and was staying the Wests over in the project and he came to mass one Sunday with the kids. And that's where I met him. And so I invited him over to the rectory and we had breakfast together and talked. And I had offered him hospitality which I did with a number of people. And we seemed to hit it off. I liked him, and I think he liked me. We became good friends. And we would spend hours talking and because I had been there for so long I think he liked the idea of asking me questions and I knew a lot of people and I think he relied on my judgement somewhat because I know in one of his letters , I forget his mother had shown it to me, where he said that he kind of regarded me as his shephard because he didn't feel accepted at the Episcopal Church in town which was a white church. And of course he was immersed in the black community and we were the black church so he used to come to mass fairly often at our place because the Catholic and Episcopal services were very similar and so he felt very much at home at our church. And I liked having him around he would come and have dinner jwith us and I had told him whenever you get real tired and need a jplace to rest just come over here and we had extra room, we have a room here, and he did that several times. He'd just get very tired and he would come to our parish and just hang jout for a few days and recharge his batteries. So we had some interesting conversations but I remember one time talking to him and he was with Judy Upham and he and Judy were at the house it was one evening and he was telling me a story about how they had been driving down and he had stopped and I don't know what town it was it was a little one-horse town somewhere in Alabama with one gas station. And he stopped to get gas and there were fellows hanging around the gas station and they saw his license plate and all of that so they started asking questions

and he was talking about it and kind of laughing and people I thought of it in light of what happened to him later, they started making some remarks about him you know being a Yankee and what are you doing down here and he took them on. He started asking them very pointed questions and I thought to myself at the time that was very naive and remember scolding him and saying, "You know that's not a wise thing to do. Do you know who you're dealing with. They're not interested in your logical reasonings at all. You're going to get yourself hurt particularly if your driving around with Judy, think of the jeopardy that you put her in." And I think he was kind of impressed with that that night. Not completely, because Jonathan had an innocence about him. He didn't, couldn't seem to believe that people were the way they were. I had been there long enough, I knew you could get hurt and that I had to be very careful. As I said I didn't go out at night. Jonathan was wandering around there like he was in Keene, you know. And I htought that that was very dangerous. And he would listen to me but then I think he get back out there and I'm not going to say that he was naive I think his notion of the gospel was so strong, like I know he was determined so determined as far as the Episcopal Church was concerned to engage them in conversation. To engage them in a dialogue because he felt if he did that they he could change their minds and I just thought for somebody who had been in the south for such a short time and who understand so little at that time about southern mentality that he wouldn't get much of a hearing. But there was a kind of a awful beauty about the fact that he had that sesnse of mission that that's what he was there for and that if he were honest, and spoke out honestly, and forthrightly that that would make a difference. He was very much determined to do that.

Larry: You began to talk about it a few minutes ago he didn't have that sense of

Fr. Ouellette: Didn't have the sense of the danger he was.

Larry: Not only that he didn\'t seem to have the resignation to the fact one had to accept the possibility of maybe getting seriously hurt or even killed .

Fr. Ouellette: Yah.

Larry: like you need it.

Fr. Ouellette: Yah. You had mentioned earlier that it seemed to you that anybody that was involved in that kind of work would have to come to terms with that. And we thought it all out and I know I did it with a great deal of apprehension and probably some heaviness of heart. He kind of did it joyfully. I know that night when I told him you can get hurt. They could leave the two of you for dead that's what I told them and nobody would ever know what happened to you. You'd just disappear from the face of the earth, in some back woods. And while he listened to that I think he was more concerned about the danger that he had put Judy in. But I think for himself he either accepted it so easily that it didn't seem to affect him at all or he didn't really think it would happen. And I can't tell you which. I don't know.

Bill: Did you ever discuss John Reeves death or ?

Fr. Ouellette: No I don't recall that I did because by the time that occurred, I was getting to the end of my rope down there and I knew that I was going to

be gone and what had happened with the movement itself, I don't know I had a sense that my work was done. You know Dr. King was there. I had been kind of a inniator and I can remember sort of backing off. I know during the demonstrations and so on I concerned myself a whole lot more with trying to protect people who came down from the north. Trying to find housing for them,. feed them, and do what I could generally but I thought the time was there. Black people were in charge. They were doing. It was no place for me. And I just backed off. And did my regular things. And Jonathan then had gotten very involved with SNCC Stokely Carmichael and so. And I had been close with SNCC at the beginning with Bernard Lafayette, Julian Bond, Long, John Lewis, but Stokely Carmichael and company had suddenly taken over the movement and I had a big fight at Brown Chapel one day where the line had been formed opposite the police and I got wind of the fact that they were getting some sisters lined up and they were going to put them in the front row and they were going to stand in back of them and push them toward the policemen with the hope that something would happen. And I guess the headlines that some nun getting her head caved in, I thought it was unethical. I was madder than a hornet. I went to them and I said you will not use the sisters as cannon fodder. There was a Jesuit priest there that I knew and he was close to a lot of the people that had come in. He was great big tall guy about 6 foot 6 so that everybody got to know him, white haired, got to know him real well and I went to him and I said, "Get the sisters out of here. They're going to get hurt." And SNCC got livid, they were really angry at me. I told them that, "If you want to put your body on the line. You go ahead. But you have no right to do that to people who don't even know what's happening to them." So they were real angry with me. I didn't like the militancy of the new SNCC and I tended, I liked what Dr. King was saying very much. I think Selma would have been a disaster without him. The whole concept of non violence and I thought SNCC was going against that. And they were ridiculing King at that time and I didn't buy it. But Jonathan had gotten more into that area. He was living around that in the project near Brown Chapel and so on. So in those last days I didn't see a lot of him and then I had gotten word that I was going to be leaving and so I had to deal with a lot of things in connection with that, with my own parishioners and so on. So I didn't see much of him at the end.

Bill: So you probably saw him, if chronology is right, like March and April.

Fr. Ouellette: March, April. I left July 1. June and July I knew in June I left July 1. I probably knew in May that I was leaving. So I had to get my own house in order and deal with my parishioners and so on. So probably April probably some into May.

Bill: He left in May to come back to take his exams for

Fr. Ouellette: Oh yes and I remember that. And then he came back but I didn't see much of him after that.

Bill: When he came back?

Fr. Ouellette: He may have been over to mass but I really

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Bill: Father Matthews

Fr. Ouellette: He was the pastor then.

Bill: THen Bishop Carpenter in Birmingham

Fr. Ouellette: I didn't know a lot about that. I know that he had been up to St. Paul's and all I would have a conversation with him and I remember that he was kind of stunned at their reaction to him. He couldn't believe that they could be that hostile to him. And the idea was they can't be that way. If I can just talk to them, just engage them in some dialogue they'll start seeing things differently. It seems to me that he was too old that he was not welcomed at St. Paul's anymore. Because he had brought some black kids to the Episcopal Church. But that's as far as I got on that. I don't know any more about than that.

Bill: What you say it sounds like he had this conviction that reason would prevail over deep-seated emotional responses.

Fr. Ouellette: Reasoned faith I think. He just felt that if they were a religious community that they couldn't possibly be that unreasonable or that unfaithful really. For him coming out of the setting that he came from, it was just all so illogical as racism is. It didn't make sense and certainly didn't make sense in the light of faith. And he couldn't believe that they could be that way. And I knew they could be that way because I knew from my experience with the white church in town who were probably my bitterest opponents, who were going to the Archbishop asking to have me removed, and I can understand how they were. They were southerners first and their faith was there and they considered themselves good Catholics. But don't mess with their lifestyle, their cultural background. They saw no paradox in this. They saw no contradiction in their behavior. They went to communion very faithfully and it never occurred to them that while they were doing that they were denying the right of a black person to receive the body of Christ. It just didn't seem to enter their minds.

Bill: Did Jonathan ever come to any conclusion about that? His conception that ?

Fr. Ouellette: No, except that he couldn't seem to believe that that's what they really thought. That somehow it wasn't so. That they really didn't feel that way. That maybe it was the pressure from other people and I think because of his loyalty to his own church, that he felt a sense of mission to that. That if he could speak the truth to them that they would listen. They would see the truth of what he was saying. And he was running smack up to the irrationality of racism. And of course it doesn't make sense. But he felt badly about that. He felt, it hurt him that the church to which he belonged was practicing that kind of racism.

Larry: The church historically future there were few churches that didn't form a southern branch.
churches some tremendous upheaval there's a conservative splinter group that wants to set up its own existence.

Bill: in Massachusetts.

Larry: But they don't want this becoming a church historically doesn't have a northern branch and a southern branch. What is this? I never heard of two Episcopal Churches? Maybe if I can go in and show them the reason that, the faultiness of their reasoning.

Bill: We heard a few times that Jonathan was seriously considering to be a Catholic.

Larry: The Catholic Church really interested him.

Fr. Ouellette: I wasn't going to bring that up because he talked to me about it and I'm sure when he talked to me about it wasn't that I would talk to other people about that. He spoke to me privately and I.

Larry: Would you like me to turn off the machine?

Fr. Ouellette: No. I think in the light of things and the fact that you know that it was no great secret about it. He wasn't trying to make a secret about it. I just didn't want in any way to hurt people. I never spoke to his mother about it and I got to know her real well. I never brought it up. And she never brought it up so. But I guess my own attitude towards religions is leave people alone and I made no effort to encourage Jon to do that. I listened to him. I still remember the phrase he used with me when I said what making you think of this. It's unavoidable. If you do any real study all roads lead to Rome. It's inevitable and I know that. For him as he discussed it with me, he wanted very much to be a priest and the problem was the idea of celibacy for the Roman Catholic priests. Had it not been for that, I think he would have made the move. And he still in my conversations with him, he still was not, he didn't make a real decision on it. It was still on his mind and what he would have done in the future I don't know.

Bill: What did he mean that all roads lead to Rome, do you think.

Fr. Ouellette: I think that he felt that scholastically speaking that he saw or historically and theologically I think he just saw that inevitably any church was connected with Rome. It had its origins from Rome. I don't know, I think that's the phrase that's taken from Cardinal Newman. And I think that that's who he was quoting. And it's kind of like it was a theological conviction of his. It seemed to eminate from his theological study. That there was just no other way.

Larry: You know his mother may have ended up feeling the same way because she in the the mid 70's joined an interdenominational group that had its center in the Catholic Church.

Fr. Ouellette: We just mentioned it briefly and his sister Olive who was part of it, they became very close friends. We wouldn't, I told Bill I would go once a year when Jonathan's anniversary rolled around. I would always go and visit her. And we would always say mass together. I remember doing it in the Cathedral of the Pines once. The two of us up there by ourselves said mass and she felt very comfortable in the Catholic Church. But I'm one of those people I'm not a great evangelizer. I respect people where they are. I think if someone wants to do something like that . With her we always shared communion. I figured it was something that I wouldn't run and tell the Bishop about but it

was something very private and I knew it had a lot of meaning for her just like I weent to the Congregational Church with her on a couple of occasions where there were services in memory of Jon and I attended with her. But she felt very comfortable with that, but I never said would you like to become a Catholic. I just would have thought that in horrible taste.

Larry: Did you get to know her at the funeral?

Fr. Ouellette: No. I didn't get to the funeral. I was sick. I had had a kidney operation. Lost a kidney and I was very sick at that time and I wasn't able to get to the funeral. But I had received word from her. She had sent me a note on some things that Jon had said to her about me. And she said I would like to meet you some time. So I was giving a talk in Keene. I subsequently, probably six months or so after Jonathan died, I gave a talk in Keene. There was a father Kenny who was very involved in that Ecumenical group I think. And he invited me to give a talk and I did go to Keene and that's where I met her. I remember she had crutches. She had broken her leg and I met her and it was one of those things she talked about it later she was grieving very much at that time and looked very down and so on and we got some time just to sit down and talk together. And she just seemed to, I don't know if she identified me with Jon or what, it was something very personal and very close. I always felt that she made some kind of link there. And she knew Jonathan liked me and I guess in her mind, she felt I had tried to be good and cared about him and we communicated, often wrote letters and we saw each other three or four times a year. She would come to Burlington or I would go to Keene. So it was a good relationship.

Larry: You were in Burlington from the summer of '65 until.

Fr. Ouellette: No I came here to Connecticut from '65-'69. Then I studied in Chicago for two years. And then in '71 I went to Texas and I was there until '74. I taught at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas. Then in '74 I came to St. Michael's College and I stayed there until 1985. And then I got sick again and had to have some surgery and had to take about two years of just kind of taking it easy. Then went back after that and took a parish in Swanton, Vermont. I was there two years and my disease flared up again. That's when I kind of semi-retired around here.

Larry: How's you health now?

Fr. Ouellette: I'm the best I've been in quite a while now. But the disease is there and it flares up. So I'm limited. I can't always tell how I'm going to feel. You could have come today and I could have been really sick.

Larry: The reason I ask a few years ago, born with one kidney. I would tend not to do things like ride motorcycles. When you were in Chicago, did you by chance call Father Richard Morrisroe.

Fr. Ouellette: Richard at that time was in the process of leaving the priesthood.

Larry: We've been in touch with him.

Fr. Ouellette: Have you. I never met the guy. Isn't that something. He was

in Selma and he never came to the parish that I know of. Now he could have been there. A lot of priests came in all the time but they came and left very quickly. He stayed. But I never saw him. Jonathan came to visit us but Morrisroe never came. Mrs. Daniels, one time, I was supposed to meet her in Keene and he was supposed to be there and she somehow just wanted to get us together. At the last minute he had to cancel so I didn't get to meet him there either so I've never met the man. Never met him.

Larry: Well we find him not elusive exactly but we wrote to him a few months ago and I think we have to write again. We're hoping that he can come.

Bill: We got some kind of topics going and maybe you...

Fr. Ouellette: I tend to go off

Bill: No it's been great. We're learning an awful lot that we didn't know. Did Jonathan talk about his father with you?

Fr. OUellette: Yes. I'm not, I don't recall a whole lot that was real specific. He told me who his father was, and how hard it was when his father died. But really didn't go into any, I guess he didn't talk a lot, I guess he mentioned him and I knew about it but I don't recall anything specific he said about his father.

Bill: Was he still grieving do you think about his father at that time?

Fr. Ouellette: I didn't get that notion. No. Not in the sense of intense grieving where he was experiencing depression because of it and so on. He certainly spoke of his father with a great deal of feeling and admiration. But I didn't sense. It's like he had accepted it and certainly, I think, his life was touched by it but it didn't it wasn't a source of deep discussion that he was work anything out in regard to it's like he had accepted it and life was moving on.

Bill: Did you get a sense of how his father's life might have touched him?

Fr. Ouellette: No. He didn't mention that. I'm sure it did but he didn't mention it.

Bill: As best we can determine, it was really intense in '62. So between '62 and '65 he found a way of working it out. Probably coming into the church was part of that.

Fr. OUellette: Part of the answer I think for him. But I never got a sense from him. I always found him upbeat and very positive. Certainly he didn't impress me as a man who was walking around carrying a heavy load of grief or bereavement of any kind. No. I found him very positive, very enthusiastic always and joyful. One thing I regret is that, he wrote to me several times, and I don't know what happened to the letters. I was, problem with me is I didn't know anything that great was going on. I was just being pastor of a little parish and I had no idea of what we were into. Even like threatening letters from the KKK and that kind of stuff I didin't save any of that stuff and I should have. But I remember being struck so much by the beauty of his writing. Lord he could write. I was thinking of it today, I hadn't thought of

it in a long time, I remember he gave me book and I can't remember the name of the book and he had written at length on two sheets of the flywreath of the book, both sides, he had written something. I remember when I read it, I said Lord that's beautiful. Can that fellow write. He just wrote beautifully and had tremendous command of the language. He was very poetic and deeply spiritual. I often got the impression of people sometimes that were half-baked in that they were off on a social crusade and I got the sense that for Jon this was rooted very much in a sense of justice and his sense of the spiritual and emotion of God's plan for his people.

Bill: Can you explain that a little bit working with that theme or whole idea of calling and what that means when somebody has a sense of a calling.

Fr. Ouellette: He had that very strongly from the seminary. The fact that he was sent by the seminary was for him very much a calling. That he was there as an emissary. He didn't see himself as an isolated person who was coming down there to crusade. He was representative of a group of people and that they had missioned him to do this. So he wasn't working in isolation it was a sense that he represented a community of people and that he represented his church. I think that's why the whole thing was with St. Paul's was a stumbling block for him. Because he saw them at his church as his church expected to be received by them joyfully, and found himself rejected and I think it caused him a lot of pain. But it was a sense of mission.

Bill: You say the responsibility is to the church. Is there a theological level to that too or how does that work?

Fr. OUellette: Yes because I think just the fact that he had talked about becoming a Catholic, becoming a Cahtolic priest, I don't think that Jon came down just with a sense that well I'm being sent by the Episcopal community in Boston to come down here. He was a well educated man and he had a sense of the church and I think saw himself more as living out his mission as a Christian. So it was broader than just a kind of a denominational thing. And I think that the whole notion of racial justice for him was based in a theology and not, call it a social gospel or whatever, but wasn't in a narrow sense being sent by the church and therefore I'm going to go and do this mission. I think it was far broader than that because he was thinking in broader terms than theologically. He wasn't limited much by denomination I don't think.

Bill: Does it enter into any kind of experience? I mean is that part of it or is it. . . . We are not the two best in the world to be dealing with religious calling. I'm really trying to find out what all that means.

Fr. OUellette: Let me tell you something that happened this year and I don't know why. It was right after Christmas, we had the feast of St. Stephen who was the first Christian martyr. And the scripture around that time is kind of heavily ladden with fear of the apostles, the confusion in the apostles following the Resurrection. I'm sorry. I was wrong. It was after Easter, the feast, no after Christmas. Isn't it? But anyway the scripture of that time is the apostles just learning from Christ and being confused and not understanding and then Christ is crucified and the apostles are scattered and all of a sudden the St. Stephen, who is the first Christian martyr, who seems to be a young disciple of Paul, who comes out of nowhere, gets himself marked off. You know he becomes the first Christian martyr. The way he's speaks of his martyrdom or

he's quoted in St. Paul, in the Acts of the Apostles, he seems to be an innocent among wolves as if he is absolutely fearless that he was moved by the religious experience that was his, there was no hesitation in his mind, with a clarity of vision on what he should say regardless of the consequences and I thought of Jonathan. He just seemed so clear to him. What was just ought to be followed. And I think that's the way he went at it. It wasn't a real complex thing. But there wasn't any ego tied up in it either. He was not, he didn't have a big ego. It was kind of a refreshing simplicity to a man who was anything but simple. He was a very complex and very bright, bright intellectual person who thought things out very well and really was trying to live the Gospels I believe in a way that most of us don't. He never, what keeps popping into my mind is I want to use the word naive but I don't use it because it's not right. There's a difference between naivete and innocence and innocence lends itself to a lot of meanings also. THere was a genuiness, a kind of purity through the man's vision. It's a little bit reminiscent about the vision that the apostle's had after Pentecost after they received the Holy Spirit and they go out and do things so different from what they had done them before they almost seem on some kind of a religious high where they are just fearless, they're are very clear in what they want, they're very kind, they're very giving, and that's the way. I now don't know where that came from. We didn't discuss that at some length. Whether with that had something to do with his father's death. We never spoke of his childhood. I don't know how deeply religious he was as a young man.

Bill: He had an altar in his room as a young boy.

Fr. OUellette: So evidently it wasn't a new found thing with him.

Bill: But on the other hand it wasn't always consistent either. He wrote when he was at V..M.I., he wrote his senior thesis on Kamoo and it pretty much dwells on the concept of . At times he had deep spiritual doubts. But from what you say, the vision was present when you first met him.

Fr. OUellette: And so the experience seemed to intensify that for him. He seemed to have found a place where he could concretely express the vision that he had.

Bill: Why would Selma be such a place?

Fr. Ouellette: Selma had a way of doing that. Selma just stripped away all the garbage. You saw life in very simple terms. The goodness, this is very hard for me to express, I don't know how to do it, there's probably a way of showing it I've never been involved in ecumenism. A Vermont Catholic brought up to be suspicious of Protestants as they were of me. I didn't have any real ... I can remember experiencing the fact in Selma that suddenly all religious lines just disappeared. When you place your life on the line with other people it creates a bond that is different than anything else. The only thing I can think of comparable to it men in combat, who bond in a way that's lifelong. Because you're dependent on each other and I feel a bond with some of those SNCC people I mentioned that persists to this day. Bernard Lafayette and Julian Bond I just feel a real closeness. They're brothers in a way and though, I met Julian once on a plane but I don't stay in touch with them. Those are very special people in my life and Selma just had a way of stripping away all differences and reducing life, taking all the trivial out of life. It

took it all out. You didn't have time for the garbage, the crap or anything else. What you were dealing with was life itself and reducing life, I think you were purified by what you were involved in. It enobled you to be part of that because people have in moments like that, like we all do, we can be ignoble or noble and there are moments in our lives when we become noble and my sense was that I was noble in those moments beyond what I am in reality. And it's the time and it's the people that you are involved with that raise you, just like when you meet a person sometimes, a real good person, you feel that in the presence of that person, you become better. The same way that you're affected by literature. You read a marvelous poem that just you're transformed by it and so it was with that, that that had the ability to transform you. People who would have been very violent by temperament and by inclination and desire were suddenly transformed into people who were very nonviolent, who were willing to embrace their persecutors, people who wanted to kill them. So that's entering into a dimension that I'd never experienced since in my life and I don't think I ever will. The nobility of what you were engaged in raised you up and I think he was touched in that way by the people. I know the people touched him greatly. There acceptance of him astonished him. It astonished a lot of people. But how black people in Selma accepted white people who came in. Opened their doors to them, let them stay in their homes. People couldn't believe that they were that receptive, but they were. That was their grace. I think Dr. King used to say to them and they took it as gospel from him he would ssay you're the only ones who have the power of redeeming those who would persecute you. Their salvation is in your hands. You're the only ones that change things. And they believed that and so they were extremely acceptive to everyone and I think Jon was very much touched by living in the project and being in daily contact with those people and the way they received him. We experienced that all the time living in black community and as white men being accepted as we were by the black people, you asked me a long time ago why did I like it so much. I think it was one of the reasons. I was accepted there probably more than any place I had ever been in my life. They wanted me there. I felt wanted and it motivated me to give myself to give myself more and more. To respond to what I felt was their love for me which was gratuitous. I had nothing to merit it. I think black people have a great ability to love because of the suffering that's in their history. And tremendous capacity for it and I think Jon was touched by that.

Bill: I was going to ask you about the whole concept of Christian love and Emily told us when Stokely Carmichael came to the funeral. He said to her, it's kind of interesting after what you said Carmichael was doing to SNCC, that Jonathan tried to teach him how to love and there is some letters of Jonathan's writing where he talks about being in danger of hating the oppressor but then having to turn to love the oppressor. In fact it was kind of interesting when he came back for graduation from what I can gather there were some southerns who had children graduating from the seminary and they were isolated. These were white southerners. Nobody would and Jonathan went over sat with them. Does all of that come from you. Do you feel that you expressed it. Most of that comes from King or from the Bible or what's the roots of that.

Fr. Ouellette: I think it's rooted in black people. King was a marvelous expression of it. Both in his life and work. But being the gifted speaker that he was he could do it. He could get up and touch that thing that was in the people. And raise them up so that they could love their enemies. I was astounded by it. I remember a kid, a very violent kid, I known in the early

'50's when he was a football player, and I saw that kid one day when he had gotten hit real hard by a tackler. He was a good running back this kid. And he got creamed and he got up from being tackled took his cleat and just mashed the kid right in the face, the kid that had tackled him. He was a vicious kid. He could hurt you. And I remember a talk by Dr. King where he talked the whole talk was to the people was loving your enemies. They were to be the ones who would save those people. And that same kid who was now in his late twenties or mid twenties anyway, coming into my office after being at a sit in with two big gashes in his head and saying to me I didn't even hit the guy. And it was King that had touched this violent kid, this kid that was known by all the other kids as being uncontrollable. He had gone out and got himself hurt badly and got his head gashed and everything and really was telling me how he felt that this was what he had to do. That he was helping the cause by doing this and helping the white people to understand. So for King that notion for King comes out of his black experience and with his gift he was then able to vocalize and to express in marvelous for them what was already part of them and to bring it an awareness for them and get them together so that they just went out, totally nonviolent, and ready to love those that hated them. The notion was that all suffering was redemptive. Black people can understand that in a way you and I will never understand. It's in their music and everything. They had to have that to survive in slavery days. That somehow it was redemptive, their suffering was redemptive. We as Westerners we don't have anywhere near the notion that they have of that. And so it's in touching that. Well, if you're in with people like that, I always feel that my experience in Selma I hope I gave something but Lord what I got was incredible. Life is, I knew when I left Selma could never be like that again. The feeling, the experience of being there and being touched by that and seeing masses of people touched by it is unlike anything I've ever seen anywhere. And if you were then part of that and entered into the black community and if he is a white man you were accepted into that black community then you could share in that experience. And it was their gift that you were sharing because I don't think we have anything comparable in our, I don't have it in my makeup, I'm a hardnosed little French kid from Vermont whose, if you do something to me I'm going to punch you one. That was something new so that I always had the feeling when I was down there that I was really very insignificant and how lucky I was to be there quite by accident and be part of this. I always felt that they gave even the black people gave me a lot of credit that I didn't deserve. It was from them. They were the ones that were doing everything. They were pulling me into it but I think because of the whole attitudes towards whites, seeing whites sometimes as better than themselves, just the fact that I was willing at the beginning when everybody was frightened, to say this is what we ought to do. Well it was Father who was saying it and Father was the Catholic priest was the most trusted man in any black community, black or white. Newsweek did a study on that and survey and the most trusted man in any black community was the white Catholic priest. I think we were trusted more even than black ministers. And they sort of, they knew we were white but they accepted us because we shared their lives I think they accepted us in a diffferent way. And because we were white and they always looked up to whites, that somehow they believed you have something they didn't have. So what they were doing themselves, they sometimes gave me credit for. It was their courage not mine. I was more encouraged by them. So I think Jonathan or anyone else who had the privilege of being involved, myself or anyone else, involved in that you felt that you were drawn to behavior which was beyond your own ability. And I think it came from the people. What you observed in them. And what they expected of you I guess.

They saw you as better than you were and you tried to live up to it I suppose.

Larry: I was reading in a book called Selma 1965. In a chapter the author talks about this outside of Selma a 6,000 acre farm where there were black families that never left the farm. They had there own script . THey owned their own money that they used. It was still going on in the '60s. I wanted to know more about that. I thought it had something to do with Jonathan Daniels in a sense, but was that true?

Fr. Ouellette: Yes. There's a fellow by the name of F.D. Reese, does that strike a bell with you? He was the fellow I talked to you about the piece of dying. We got to be pretty good friends. I think somewhere in his background, through his grandfather or father even, came from that place. I never saw it but I heard about it. That they worked that land and were given script that they could only spend in the company store or whatever. There was literal enslavement. In Dallas County, Miles County too, Miles County is notorious but I've been out on some of those farms where they had the little shacks and they would get money to plant the crop and then they had to pay it back when the crop came up. But they were completely dependent on that white employer if you will. He owned the land most of the time. They were sharecropping. Selma was the escape. They would come to Selma and try to get jobs to escape that kind of thing. Their parents wanted so much for them to do that. Parents would save and scrimp for that day when they could move off that farm and get into Selma so that their kids could go to school. So Selma became a stepping stone. A lot of them went from their North. But that was the way it was run. And the poverty on those places you wouldn't believe. Shacks with newspaper lining on them to keep out the wind. Incredible poverty.

Larry: Jonathan has some photographs of that. Did you keep any photographs from those days Fr. Ouellette?

Fr. Ouellette: I don't have much. I've got some somewhere in my stuff. But I never did take many pictures for the simple reason that I didn't want embarass anybody. I was very hesitant about taking pictures.

Larry: Last year when we started to research this. I came across a film Father Hammond Foundation which was a liberal foundation started in the first year of Roosevelt's administration. They went around the country filming the experiences of women, Third World people and blacks. And they in 1939 and produced a little black and white film in 1940 about the Calhoun School. A school run by two white people of, a man and his sister, that educated just black children. My copy is a lot of that footage that would have been the year Jonathan was born or the year after. The photography, then Jonathan has in his collectin of photographs that he took in 1965 it's the same thing. Nothing has changed.

Fr. Ouellette: It hasn't really changed. You can still go down there and find it hasn't changed all that much. I'll tell you. Not in those places it hasn't. Have you been to Selma yet?

Bill: Not yet. We are getting ready for that.

Fr. Ouellette: When you go on Broad St., our mission is still there. I'll give you the address of the priest you should talk to. That's our headquarters

for our missions and we had a priest down there who was a photographer, a real pro. He was down there for a lot of years and they have pictures coming out your ears all in books. They've got everything. All you have to do is go over and see them and they will make all that stuff available to you. I think it's probably a source of photographs unlike anything you'll find anywhere else. And this priest, Fr. Rivard was great for going around snapping shots of people. They're classic photographs. They're not just candid shots. He was a master photographer and he's got some pictures that will knock your eyes out. Rivard was his name.

Larry: Is he still there?

Fr. Ouellette: No. He has died. He died about four years ago. At the age of 82 but his stuff is all there. And not only his but pictures that other priests or people have taken over the years. They've got all the stuff there. And they've kept scrapbooks since '37, journal type things. There's material there that you wouldn't believe.

Larry: Do you think the Edmundite order would mind if we looked through?

Fr. Ouellette: No. You'd have no problem at all. They'd be delighted to. You go over there, they'll give you an office and make that stuff available to you.

Larry: See we have the funds to write the script which is due at the end of August and we've been

Fr. Ouellette: No funds for travel?

Larry: Not really. What we did was both apply for travel funds from the college and that's how we funded our trip to Virginia and West Virginia. What we did with the script money, Father Ouellette, was, I don't want to say divert, cause that sounds so unethical, it wasn't that at all, but if we were going to go talk to people it seemed foolish not to bring our taperecording and filming equipment. And not duplicate our efforts. So for example we brought not only our taperecorder today but our camera. Not that it's important that we do anything like that. In other words, we're not prepared to record all this stuff so we don't have to get into production later on, we're prepared. But we need, we'll have to look for completion funds.

Bill: That's great about . That's wonderful

Larry: I hadn't heard about that.

Bill: That will really be a big help.

Fr. Ouellette: It would be a tremendous resource in. Also they kept all through the civil rights movement they had the newspaper clippings, all that stuff is in books. The whole history is there of the thing. You don't have to go up to the library and start sifting through all that stuff. They've always done that. They've always kept very good records of what was going on. It's a tremendous amount of material that's there.

Sides 5+6

Fr. Ouellette: Really I don't think I told you what I know. I guess I refer to was his evident spirituality. I've talked about that in an indirect way but he was a very prayerful man and I mentioned that he was really trying to live the gospels. It was a kind of a purity to that and it was not a if I could use the word kind of a charismatic thing. It wasn't kind of like a new found enthusiasm that was going to burn itself out, he was too bright a man for that. He was really well roote din Scripture and read a lot and was I think in everything he did he moved prayerfully and out of a spiritual sense. And that was kind of singular in that I found a lot of people who came to Selma and some of them were religious types, if you will, they had this overriding social concern which was not often very spiritual I guess. It was a kind of dogooder attitude, coming down to help the poor downtrodden. It was kind of a trip. And with Jon you felt that Jonathan was there for the term. He wasn't, I know that going back was hard for him, when he had to go back he found that hard, he didn't want to leave. And so he was committed more and more as he went along he found himself more and more committed to what was there; but it was balanced he thought things out. He felt he was doing what he wanted to do and he wasn't on any . People do this sometimes because of their needs, he didn't. And you'd be surprised at how unusual that was. There was so many people who were there to meet their needs and he was not at all, I don't think. It met a need in him I'm sure as it did in all of us, but that was not the predominate theme. He was there to serve. And he was very balanced in that.

Bill: The question we always ask everybody is where were you when you heard of Jonathan's death? What were your thoughts and reflections at that time?

Fr. Ouellette: I was in Mystic, Connecticut, and I had just been sent there to be head of our formation program which was training seminarians. And which was kind of unusual assignment to be given the fact that I had just been thrown out of a diocese and so on that my community should see me as a person whom they thought would be a model for youth who were studying for the priesthood. It came as kind of a surprise for me because I left with a very heavy feeling inside me and a feeling of rejection and so on. It was a very painful time for me and I was still grieving in Selma, I had expected to spend the rest of my life in the South and so I had just gotten there to start my term as head of that program and I was going to give a sermon the next day because the young fellows that were entering the order were going to receive their habit for the first time, their garb, and begin there training. And I heard it on the news that he had been killed. It shriveled me up. It seemed like there was a succession always of deaths that were occurring. And it depressed me, I was angry. I know that in that sermon the next day I talked about him and how he had given his life and held him up as an example to these young men who were starting out of how he gave himself and that was a model for them to follow. It was very, very, I don't know. Kind of like when my brother got killed. The same feeling. Really sad. He was so full of promise and such a brilliant young man and so on and anger that some nut had to take a shot at him and kill him. It just seemed so and the way he died, I know what a shotgun will do to something or someone, I just really.

Bill: What about today, you're feelings about Jonathan?

Fr. OUellette: A shining star that goes by very quickly. As I told you when you called that I don't talk about this stuff as a rule.

Larry: I know. We were honored that you would have us. We thought about that.

Fr. Ouellette: I've refused a lot of interviews and stuff but as soon as you said Jonathan, yah, I'll do it because I just think he's a special person and I think he can be such a model. I think he's an example of the fact that if you just do the right thing, people are always wondering what the right thing is and they look in every direction to see if I should do this or should I do that or how's this going to advance my career and so on. To see somebody who just disregarded all those things and said I live in this time and this is something I can do and who with great courage goes ahead and does it. You kind of get the feeling of what a waste in a way that probably your first reaction, but I think to give your life for something like that is very wonderful. My own feeling, I hesitate to say this I guess. After the whole succession of that stuff and the assassinations, I guess my own feeling was that it would have been easier to die than to have continued. So in a sense I feel, I could never have said that to his mother or whatever but if your life is going to have worth and so on and you give it for something like that, I think that is about as good as you can do. I can't imagine tomorrow. I would. I think he deserves that. I think he represented the best that can be in a young man who is willing to give everything. And he did it. You don't get any more noble than that.

Larry: That's the approach we're taking, I guess. We realize what a remarkable career for a person and with each interview with each batch of letters it becomes more charasmatic, there's more to it. To do justice to someone like Jonathan in 60 minutes is going to be very difficult. I think we've very sad .

Fr. Ouellette: The reason I would I wanted to go along with it is that I just think what great good it can do to do that, to tell it. I just think that can touch a lot of people. Educate a lot of people, move a lot of people more than educate them and so I think what you're doing is tremendous.

Larry: People put down the 60's and idealistic time there were lovely spots in them that should be. Look what's been going on the last twenty years.

Fr. Ouellette: It angers me when I hear that. I want to blow up when they start going in that line. Sure you could point the finger all you want but to have seen those young people and of all shades and stripes and not always noble but so willing to give it was incredible. It was an incredible time, just an incredible time in our history.

Bill: I think one of our problems will be trying to make that comprehensible to an audience, a young audience that is so foreign to that kind of existence. How do you do that?

Larry: What's this all about a BMW?

Bill: It's not going to be an easy task.

Fr. Ouellette: In Selma itself, the older people didn't move at the beginning. They just couldn't move. It was the young kids that

Larry: Rebecca West's. Did you read Selma, Selma ? The little book by the two little charming. A charming beautiful book.

Fr. Ouellette: So it was really out of loyalty to them too that I wanted to stay and I knew I had to watch my Ps and Qs and not aggravate him. So I minded my own business and didn't go against his orders or say anything inflammatory but I was an embarrassment to him and there were white people in the diocese who were beginning to. They were not giving, it was beginning to hurt the pocketbook, I guess. They were holding back their offerings. So I don't think he personally ever disliked me. I always had the impression he admired me a little bit. Cause he was a hardnosed cat and I think he saw me as a young guy who wasn't going to back off and I think he admired that. But for him it wasn't personal. It was, it just had to be for what he thought was the good of the church in Alabama.

Bill: What year did they integrate that?

Fr. Ouellette: I think it was about three years after I left. Two or three, I think about three years after I left they brought the two churches together, which I did not favor. I didn't think it was a good idea. I thought that the black people would be swallowed up by the white parish and that's exactly what's happened.

Bill: So then the St. Elizabeth's became not a church anymore.

Fr. Ouellette: That's right. It just closed down. The schools were integrated and pretty soon there were only black kids in the school. The churches were integrated, but integrated at the white church so the black people thought they had lost their parish, their church was taken away from them and now they were going to the white church. Well, they would never feel at home in that church. They shoudl have at least built a third church or something to make it neutral. But they made them go to the white church and it has never really jelled although I think they're doing something. It's been very painful particularly for the black people, but also for the white people to try to work things out to live in harmony and so I'm sure it's doing some good but the black people felt betrayed by the loss of their school and then the loss of their church. And the proof is that the black Catholics in Selma are Catholics who were Catholic back in my time. They aren't getting any new people. They haven't for a long time.

Bill: Did they integrate as a gesture of a new age or ?

Fr. Ouellette: It was felt that, I think the Bishop at that time was Bishop May, felt that the church ought to provide the Catholic Church ought to provide an example of an integrated community and if it could be done in Selma, wouldn't that be an example. And so based on that with the very best intentions, I think but, again it's the old business of nobody really asked the black people.

Bill: They decided what was best.

Fr. Ouellette: I think they made a mistake. I think it might have been done later but I think that the black parish had to get over its hurt because when I was removed the reaction of the black people of having their pastor, their

shepherd removed that was like I had died. I mean they wept openly. They felt that they have been betrayed by my removal. That I was the only one who really cared about them and here I was being pulled out. So it was kind of a black eye to the church when he did that. They took it personally and really gave my successor a terrible time. They gave it to him. Because and it wasn't... He was a nice guy, but it was just that he wasn't me and because black people are very loyal to their pastors. So that was a deep hurt for them.

Bill: Did you have a lot of relationships with the other churches at that time?

Fr. Ouellette: No. I that time. Before that time we didn't have any relationship with the black churches because they always saw us as a threat. We were always getting converts and particularly with the youth and they had a fair amount of animosity towards us and what really surprised me is when I got involved all of a sudden the animosity dissolved because they didn't say anything. They didn't come to the front, the ministers, at all with words. And it was only when Dr. King got there and everything was going pretty well then they and I don't blame them for that because they're much more vulnerable. I wasn't because I was a white man. And economically their churches could have been just destroyed by the manks or whatever and so I was free to do a lot of things they were not free to do. But I was surprised at their friendliness once I got involved then they really received me well. And I belonged to an organization, a black organization, a leadership organization, most of whom were ministers, a few business black businessmen, and I was the only white man on it. But they were really quite deferential. And it was genuine. They trusted me and you know appreciated what I had done I think.

Bill: Was it because you make yourself vulnerable, like they were vulnerable?

Fr. Ouellette: I think so. They knew, like a lot of people didn't know, the risk, like I didn't know the risk that I was taking. They knew it very well. And I think they appreciated that.

Bill: I thought maybe a couple of questions. Maybe one would be about the impact of the black people on Jonathan in terms of your talking about how he might have learned from them. Jonathan's, we use a few words, simplicity, innocence, vision and the idea that he wasn't doing it for himself, his own needs. Whatever you think characterized his.

Fr. Oullette: Don't hesitate to point me in the right direction. You know what you want me to say. Ask the question you want me to answer.

Bill: It was funny down at VMI they knew they were going to be filmed and we interviewed this widow of the teacher that Jonathan had and so she wore her best yellow dress for the filming. She kept wondering is this the best color.

Larry: She was a real southern bell.

Fr. Ouellette: Aren't they great. That's a kind of thing.

Bill: We were trying to communicate and I think we needed a translator. I had my Providence accent and she had this Kentucky southern drawl. We had a little difficulty.

Fr. Ouellette: I used to have that difficulty when I first went to Selma with black people particularly. It's more than just southern, it's their lingo as well and there's a lot of things they use that are not familiar to us and boy the first few months I was there, I used to really have to listen, especially with kids. I couldn't make out what they were saying half of the time. I noticed after a while I began to talk the way they did, but it's a different pattern of speech.

Bill: I was going to ask you about when Jonathan went and lived in the project with the West family and what he might have learned in going there and he might have been influenced by that.

Fr. Ouellette: I think that's one of the best things he could have done because it provided an education for him. Living with black people in their setting first of all, the fact that he was willing to do that, conveyed to them immediately the fact that he cared about them. That he was willing to do that kind of thing. But then I think his living there then provided him with a base from which he could learn because he could observe people , he could engage in conversation with them, and listen to what they were really saying, which he couldn't have gotten say had he been living outside of that community. And I think that he would have learned also from I guess the vision that they had of what they were doing because they were very much motivated by a vision of nonviolence, kind of a theme that expressed itself in their lives which said there's only one way that we can achieve what we're doing, we're on a mission, we're doing something noble for ourselves and for our country for everybody in the country by doing this. And so he would have been privy to their conversations and he would have led by way of immersion, their spirit and their spirit was so wonderful that I think that that probably ennobled him. Like I know for myself, my living among black people ennobled me and had me, and taught me things that I could have never learned otherwise. And I think that was so for him. He came with an open heart and I think being with them was a real education for him because he got their spirit, listened to their yearnings, knew about their attitudes and I think began to

Bill: Can you tell a little about how Jonathan was unique in terms of his motivation for coming South and how he acted down there?

Fr. Ouellette: I think probably one way to characterize it would be to say that he came not because of a need that was in him but because of a need that he saw existing outside of him. I think it's so easy in such movements for people people to come for do-gooder reasons or with a Savior complex. And I never got that from Jon. He was not an egotistical person. He wasn't there to do something for himself, but to do things for others. And I think that that reflects on the spiritual dimension of the man that he came out of his own spiritual convictions, out of a gospel sense, out of a wanting to see justice, which, and all those things reflected the quality of the man that he was. And I think that he brought a certain nobility of his own personality, incisiveness of his own thinking, all of that he brought to his presence there. I think he was genuinely well motivated.

Bill: Fr. Ouellette can you tell us about the role of SNCC? It got started in the early 60's.

Fr. Ouellette: From my point of view, SNCC in many ways was responsible for

the good that happened in Selma. SNCC and the people certainly. When SNCC came the quality of their personnel was excellent. They came with great enthusiasm and with the intent of getting a grass roots movement going with the people of Selma themselves would be saying what they wanted and how they wanted to do it. And I think they made what eventually happened in Selma possible. Certainly Dr. King coming in 1965 as he did with his great organization made what happened there happen. But it could have never happened without the ground work that was done by Bernard Lafayette and John Lewis and Julian Bond and Worth Long and people of that calibre who first came to Selma and worked with the people. They got the people motivated so that when Dr. King came the situation was ready made and he was ready to move. But they had done all the work. They had to in late '63 I think move out of Selma because peace bombs had been attached to them and they were pretty effectively crippled. SNCC changed in time, at the time that Dr. King came Stokeley Carmichael and others had taken over SNCC and they were much more militant. Bernard Lafayette in the earlier members of SNCC were an offshoot of Dr. King's organization and were very much committed to nonviolence whereas in the latter days some of the SNCC workers were saying violence for violence. That was not the SNCC that I knew. And I think that the movement in Selma is imbedded in great measure to the greatness of the young people who came from SNCC at the beginning. Tremendous vision, tremendous dedication and enthusiasm and a level of sophistication that was pretty astounding for people their age, who came and got the movement started. And Dr. King reaped the benefits of that, but it was SNCC that got the little people involved and the little people were the ones who made Selma happen.

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