

DR. RICHARD SNOWMAN

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Snowman: Well, I'm not exactly sure what you are aiming at in talking with me tonight except I gather that you want some impressions from me of what I knew about Jon...

I, of course, first became acquainted with Jon when I came to Keene through acquaintanceship with his family--his father in particular. His father had a position with the same group where I was working. During the first years my acquaintanceship with Jon was rather casual. I would hear his father, Phil, come in and tell a story about what had happened to Jon today and so forth. These were times when Jon was in high school. Oftentimes they were rather humorous episodes, well related by his father, which led me to realize that this was an enterprising young man and also one who had gotten himself into a few minor scrapes. For example, the time he had to let himself out of the upstairs window and fell off the porch injuring his arm. I believe this was to keep a rendezvous with some friend..... but from these little episodes I became further acquainted with Jon very deeply, of course, when his father became ill. Our conversations were not long often. They were brief but very deep. At this time, we were all preoccupied by his father's illness, trying to fathom just how serious it was, and how long might go on. It soon became apparent that we were in a situation where his father was not going to survive very long. During

these two or two-and-a-half years--I forget exactly how long I saw Jon here at home and in the hospital on many occasions--had talks with him about the situation. Impressions at this time were that Jon was needing something quite real in a realistic manner. He was not one to be very verbose about discussing this situation. He was I think groping for an understanding of what it all meant and what it was going to mean to him as time went on. I recall that there were times when Jon had great feelings of depression which seemed quite real at this time in view of the circumstances, and he later on described these to me a little more vividly when I had an opportunity to talk with him in my office. I'm not quite sure of the time, but I believe it was within six months or so of his father's death...rather severe feelings of depression had overtaken him. This was all mixed up at this time with where he was going, what he was going to do with his life eventually. My timing is not quite accurately recalled, so I may get things frontwards and backwards here. I remember that Jon came in talking about various directions he might go in. At this time he was concerned about his further education and he had reached a point somewhere along the line where he was rather against the church and against--he seemed to lose faith a great deal....but there was a time, which you probably know better than I, when Jon felt this. He had no faith and was just

sort of a disbeliever. It was at this time, I think, that he was finishing up his work at VMI, and he then went on into--the scholarship--work in English. I recall still a couple of conversations in the office or here when things were still very much unsettled in his mind. He had sometime prior to this talked about going into the ministry and had talked about this quite freely with the church here, but by this time he seemed quite in doubt about this. And there was then a conversation in which he wanted to explore the thought of--the possibility--of his going into medicine. I don't know what motivated this particularly except that I think he had a feeling at this time that he did still want to do something for people. But he never expressed this any more deeply than this. While we were talking about this, he once again brought out the expression of depression, and I felt that it might be well for Jon to talk with someone in psychiatry, but I wanted him to do this without the exact knowledge that I was really sending him for psychiatric evaluation. And since he had mentioned medicine as something he would like to explore, I thought of a physician whom I'd had some contact with as a resident in medicine at my medical school, and I sent him to Dr. Romano and Dr. Engle at the University of Rochester with the express thought that he would be seen by them from the point of view of their getting a little insight into his thinking at this time, as well as try to help him understand what he was trying to explore as far as medicine was concerned. I don't recall any

explicit reply from them concerning him except that they had mentioned that he had been in. And Jon was quite taken by the interview with Dr. Romano, if I recall correctly. I don't know if he ever talked with you about this or not....

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S:.....

Snowman: I was trying to think as you were talking here about the conversion experience about when this may have come in Jon's sister's illness. And I'm sure that it must have come at some time when she was still fairly ill herself, and I have often wondered if this had any influence or bearing on any decisions he might have made. He and Ann in many ways were very close. They could sit down, I suspect very much like you and he could sit down, and chat back and forth...Jon seemed to understand a great deal of what Emily was experiencing. I think maybe as I've tried to analyze, Emily was experiencing very much the same thing that Jon was. A mixture of depression--situation of depression--guilt feelings, about the loss of their father at that particular times in their lives. And I wonder if part of this hadn't been contributed to by the fact that Phil Daniels was such a devoted person to his patients that he had little time that he spent with his family. And they always wanted him, but he was unable to give to them as much as he might have had he been a different kind of person. Maybe they--I don't know this--sort of grew away from him as the years went on as he continued to do this kind of work. They became adolescent and then adult, and then, maybe they began to feel, as we became this, adolescent and then adult, maybe he should have put more effort into trying to get to him rather than expecting him to come back to us.

Little thoughts that have gone through my mind over the years as I have thought about these two children.

S:.....

Snowman: It seemed to me that once Jon got to seminary and started his work there, there was very little that seemed to be turning him away. I can't be absolutely sure, from my own experience, when he really was convinced thoroughly, completely, that this was where he belonged and the direction he should be going. In the seminary and from there on. I think by the time of his second year in seminary that there was very little doubt in his mind about things. I think maybe the first year there were some doubts, I don't know. Maybe you'd know differently. Because I certainly never had any extensive conversations with him about this. By the time he had gone to Selma, there was no question in my mind as to just where he was going, and I could sense this in everything that he talked about when I'd see him on chance occasions. One occasion, after he had been there and come home for a brief visit--I don't remember the exact time, but it was when he was very much involved in trying to get negroes admitted to churches, and the episode of allowing them to sit in the back pews. I remember talking with him in the entryway of our church over here, and there was a conviction in his expression and his countenance which--as well as in his words--that I had never quite heard as strongly or seen as strongly portrayed

as at that time. I don't know quite how to say this. This was a different Jon. As I saw him standing there and heard him say this, there was a clarity about it that I'd never quite heard. As you say, Jon had a capability of talking quite a different language sometimes, and I would scratch my head, as you have sometimes, and say well I just don't understand exactly, but there was no question about this at this time. I realized this, and we all, of course, realized the danger of the situation. I'm trying to recall his exact words. Maybe you've heard them yourself. Someone had asked him if he didn't fear for his life by doing this, and his answer was very clear-cut and straight-forward. Of course he knew the danger of the situation, but his life was no longer his own, and it was very clear to whom it belonged. From this time, and I think it must have been fairly close to the time when all of the rest happened, I don't think I talked with Jon again. This was, I think, the last meeting I had with Jon again. We talked about trying to get together during that weekend or that week that he was here, but he was off elsewhere, and I was busy in practice and we just never did sit down and chat anymore. And, of course, the next thing that we all knew...

S: Were you surprised to find out that he had gone to Selma in the first place?

Snowman: Not really. I thought it was consistent with his person by the time he had gotten this far along his course of thinking. I think this was consistent. In previous conversa-

ions in my office when he brought up the subject of medicine and the thought about doing things for the people and so forth, there was an inkling that somewhere along the line he was going to do this from whatever point of view I didn't know at that time.

But this was consistent with what I talked with Jon about. I was about to say that I think he had spoken of wanting to take a position for the underdog in some ways, but I'm not sure that I'm right in saying this. I'm not sure that he ever expressed this particular...But he had a tremendous sense of justice for his fellow man, and he gave indication that he would go to battle for the fellow who was not being treated justly. He

as able to see both sides of a situation in a rather interesting way that I think a good many other people wouldn't be able to do. There were times there when you felt that there was a certain amount of ambivalence in his feelings about certain situations, but then he would always...as in this situation in Selma...he would always take a stand and follow through with his conviction about it.....Is this the way you saw him?

S: I think Jon was a very troubled person. It was the kind of thing that you never wanted to sit and say, "Oh, come on Jon, you'll get over this." Because it always seemed to be a creative kind of tension. The kinds of things that troubled him were sort of the right issues on which to be troubled.

Whether they were personal things or whether they were things directed at external issues--I don't mean that they aren't personalized

too--but what I mean was questions of say about his own motivations as a personal thing. What are the real reasons why I'm doing this?...Who am I really? And he always had enough integrity to be willing to face that kind of question. Obviously, in certain situations you can't present yourself that way. If you are speaking before a group of people about something, you have to be fairly position-oriented and communicate yourself that way. But he never sat down with me in that fashion with that kind of an approach. He always sat down with me and raised--about me too. I mean, he'd ask me many questions that made me answer in terms of self--the answer was a self-evaluatory kind of answer. And, I must confess I did the same thing to him, any number of times. But I think he had a lot of unanswered questions, but he was always in the process of trying to find out what the answers were and not willing to take easy answers as the answers unless they really proved perhaps on occasion the easy answer to be the real answer...might go along with it. In one sense, we never rested easy with one another. I never rested easy. I never felt when Jon left that...that was really a nice closed conversation. And we usually came back to one another to assure the other one that it hadn't been closed. We've got to talk more about this. I don't know. I have a lot of intuitive feelings about what this year withheld if Jon had come back. Nothing that could ever be documented...Just feelings, but I think that they probably

aren't so far from wrong....But this chapter was closed in terms of direct action for Jon. I think Jon was on his way home to stay. I don't think he would ever have gone back after this trip which is one of the things that saddens me most, because I think that's true and that this was a very flukey thing that happened. He wasn't even planning.....That was just a flukish thing that happened at the last minute. And yet, can you really ever say that, because he was there, and he did get involved... flukey though it may have been. If he had been somebody else he might not have, but because he was Jon Daniels, he did. And, in that sense, that was part of what he had to carry. He had to carry the fact that he was Jon Daniels, and I think he knew that by this time. I think he would have had a gruesome year at the seminary this year. I think it would have just been incredibly hard for him, because of the experience he had had and being with the people that he would have had to be with. Not that he wasn't tolerant. He was very tolerant, and he was more than that. He would have been patient, but he would have suffered. He would have suffered gravely, because the fact of the matter is that these white people at the seminary aren't all that different from those white people in Selma. That was coming home to him, and that's a bitter thing to have to learn. And, furthermore, Jon posed an enormous threat to a lot of people. And he would have been greatly resented by a lot of people for this. I mean they would have been doing a great

deal of transferring and a lot of projecting onto him...all kinds of things in themselves. You can't imagine what it's like now. Of course now, you see, it's guilt. Had he been alive it would have been resentment. And this is part of the problem that they can't ventilate in those terms now. At least they don't think they can. And so it's taken another form. I see it all the time because I'm in a position where I can walk away any time I want to.....But I get some of this myself because I'm doing this there is identification made between me and him in this. And I've seen a very small glimmer--a glimpse--of what he would have had to face this year. I think he would have faced it very well as a matter of fact. But it would have been a fair pill to swallow. It was one of the things that I tried to talk with him about to a certain extent before he went back to Selma. We had a very very long talk before he left the seminary. I didn't see him between the time he left the seminary and came back here and went down. But this was our last talk before he went back. And I've tried to open this up because I saw it coming, and he wasn't ready for it at that point. There's no reason why he should have been. He was too involved in it, you know, to be able to stand back and look at the implications of it for later on particularly in terms of the seminary which at that point was pretty remote. He had much more pressing things to think about this year at E.T.S.....

Snowman: I feel that there are things that I have wanted to

know more about.....

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S: I think that the people who would have stood with Jon this next year would have surprised him, and I think that the people who would not have stood with him this next year would have surprised him. And I think I'm right about that. There was a lot of hiddenness in Jon too. Jon was kind of a hidden person in a lot of ways. There were a lot of people that he was moving around with at the seminary, and his presence this year was going to expose a lot of people. They just couldn't remain with this much of a catalyst in their midst.....

There was going to be reaction--overt reaction--and, as human beings being what they are, he was bound to react too. So the law of the hiddenness wasn't going to be so hidden this year. And this probably would have been good, because everything would have been more honest....