

Starts off with a lot of noise, somebody says test test through it all.

F: Can you edit this thing hopefully

L: Oh yeh.....so we're just going to sit and talk like we did before but this thing will pick up what you're saying too

L: Okay

L: All right, Mrs. Fontaine could we just talk about how you met Johnathan and the circumstances by which you came to know Johnathan, and don't worry about this machine, just forget about it.

F: Ok,ah, Johnathan joined the choir at the first congregational church when he was 7 years old, the youth choir.

L: Would that be in 46

F: I, probably.

L: Yeh

F: And he stayed in the choir right through high school until he got ready to go away to school. It was a large choir and singing in four parts. I had Johnathan from the time he was 7 until he left, when he was probably 17. He developed into a fine tenor soloist who took directions very well and we did very good work with Johnathan in the choir. There were other soloists as well. We had quartets Johnathan sang in and we did circular music sometimes and went to rest homes and ah, South Pacific was very popular at the time

L: Oh that's right yeh,

F: and we did songs in South Pacific and went around to PTA meetings and things like that, had a really good time.

L: Did you have any piano accompaniment or anything like that?

F: Had marvelous pianists, I had the best pianist available um, year after year.

L: So it wasn't a capella often.

F: we did some a capella, Johnathan was very good with a capella and when he went into high school he was already, for their music program there, as a matter of fact, Mr. Cook who was there at the time lived across the street from me.. We were very close to the Cooks and Bob and I were great friends and he said that the young people that came from my choir required very, you know, very little discipline and extra training, in his class they were already prepared. And so after that I was able to work with Bob knowing what he needed so that the majority of students in my choir who graduated from 7th and 8th grade were accepted into the high school a capella choir which was a fine place to be.

L: Now Johnathan also played an instrument.

F: Johnathan played french horn.

L: Yuh, that's right, french horn

F: And uh,

L: Was he as good on the french horn as he was singing do you think or?

F: I really don't know. He was very good in dramatics, very very good.

L: Oh we, that's what we've heard, you're ???helped us out a grat deal to experience.

F: Yes, that brought out a different side of Johnathan. I'll tell you a typical story uh, Johnathan came to me one day, my choir discipline was very firm. Our rehearsals started at 4:00. If they were going to sing Sunday they better be there on Friday at 4:00, never mind quarter past, 4:00. If I could get there at 4:00, they could get there at 4:00 and they wanted to be there at 4:00. It was no problem. One day Johnathan came up to me just before rehearsal and he said, "Mrs. F" which is what they all affectionately called me, "I have 3 places I'm supposed to be right now. One is here with you, one is at band rehearsal at the high school and one is with Mrs. Collin's the dramatic club rehearsal at the high school and I don't know what to do." and I said, "Well Johnathan, I know you know the music and you know me well enough to know I'll excuse you. Now what you are going to do with the other two I don't know but thank you for telling me." and he ran off to the high school to make his peace with, over there and I don't know what he ultimately did. I'm sure however, that he didn't skip the dramatic club because he wouldn't have had a very happy time of trying to get out of that one.

L: No probably not, that's pretty consistent with what we heard he was doing down in Selma. He was always doing three things at once.

F: And he, but it's typical of Johnathan to have come and told me. He knew that I would excuse him. He didn't need really to make that trip from the high school over to the church but he felt the responsibility to do that. Johnathan was very close to my mother and um, we lived about a mile from the downtown area in Keene and Johnathan used to walk up and see my mother quite often after she got to the point where she couldn't get out, they called each other Stanley and Livingston and they, that was their typical greeting. Mr. Stanley and Dr. Livingston or visa versa, whichever way it goes, and then when my mother had a stroke and uh, went to the hospital, ultimately died there, I had some things to do before I went to the hospital and by the time I got there Johnathan was there. He had brought a large bouquet of chrysanthemums and he was holding my mother's hand and was talking to her and my mother hopefully knew Johnathan was there. Johnathan was completely composed, he was with somebody he loved and he just talked to my mother and I finally went home and went to bed and Johnathan was still there, talking to mother. Of course he talked to me while I was there, and mother had another stroke that night, in the night and died, but Johnathan, I don't know how many hours he stayed with my mother and uh, he might have gone home earlier if I had stayed but that's, that was Johnathan, the way he was. Also when he was in high school, we had the Fuller-Bartlett Fund concerts in Keen which you've probably heard of, and Johnathan would quite often take an older lady as his, he would escort some older lady to the concert in a very gallant manner. Not showing off but just, she got his attention for the evening, and he would take her home again afterwards and he dated high school girls as well, but he was very attentive to some older people who had a need. Johnathan had a great, a great, really a christian conscience. I've never felt that he was an episcopal martyr

anymore than he was a martyr to his christian faith, which of course is all encompassing and doesn't make distinctions.

L: I agree. I think, we interviewed a Father Willett, A catholic priest who worked with Johnathan in Selma and we asked him, this was last year, what he thought and he said, "If it were up to me I would have Janet and Johnathan canned on ice tomorrow" in other words, not that Johnathan should be a saint or anything like that, but that whatever qualities he had seemed to go beyond the boundaries of any specific relation. We interviewed Rabbi Harold Saberstein last month in New York City and he said the same thing. So, what do you think this is about him with adults before how he is, seeing he had a special relationship with adults and I don't really know what to make of it other than to accept it and say well that must be the way he was, but I wonder why he was that way.

F: Well he may have had a large measure of his father's compassion for people.

L: His father was incredibly compassionate.

F: His father was incredible in every way.

L: We've heard stories about him going out in the middle of the night.

F: Oh, any time, any time.

L: Dr's just don't do that anymore

F: He was always available and it didn't matter who the person was or where they lived or whether they could pay him or not, if you called Dr. Daniels, you better believe he was coming. You could depend on it and you would get the best care. After Dr. Daniels came back from the service, speaking of compassion, my son was married then and had his first little child and they had come to stay with me for some time. So we took the baby down to Dr. Daniel's at the clinic because it was time to have the baby checked over and Phil of course wasn't well when he came back at all and I said, "Well Phil I didn't know whether to bring my grandchild here or not because I didn't know how much you were doing." and he said, "Shirley I would always want your grandchildren"

L:That kind of compassion takes its toll on you.

F: Oh it did, it did

L: But I can see where Johnathan,

F: Yeh I think that's probably the key there to Johnathan's attentiveness to older people.

L: SO I, you didn't teach then at any of the schools, you ran the choir at the,

F: At the church

L: At the first congregational

F: Yeh for about 23 years and ah it was an autocratic position, nobody, I did, that was my choir and we traveled around the state quite a bit and ah, whenever we were asked to appear at a conference, a church conference or something and take the choir, all I had to do was ask and I had any amount of transportation. People that would take care of the choir robes, people would see that the music was transported ah, everything arranged. I didn't have to do a thing. That choir was just the churches number one project.

L: Was that because of the excellence of it's performances of people ?????

F: Funny you should ask. That's a rather unnecessary question don't you think?

L: Yeh I think so but I don't think that not every church gets those invitations.

F: Oh they don't and I did have a um, I did have a lady that moved into the area, just outside of Keene and she went around um, listening to the choirs, which of course I wasn't aware of at the time, and then she went to our church people and asked for that choir. Of course she didn't even have a chance of getting it, she didn't even get it after I left.

But um, it was good.. I had a lot of um, a lot of people used to come in and observe because they couldn't ah, imagine how, I guess how I did what I did, well anyway.

L: Well you know music, I'm beginning to realize, we've realized in the last year how essential music was to Johnathan's life and we're wondering about soundtracks for that film. So let me tell you what we've got...um...that ah, we've got funeral service on tape, the organ music from that, we have um, music from the dedication of the icon at the Episcopal theological seminary last November, beautiful organ and choir music from there we've taped, we have music from the south, from Browns Chapel and from other churches that Johnathan was at from 1965, we found the original tapes taken from when Johnathan was there. In fact we have Johnathan's voice on tape, 2 hours of it, we were lucky to find that.

F: Oh yes

L: So we've got southern music which tends to be more black roots, kind of more gospel music and then we've got the higher more I don't know what you call it, church music of the north I guess you would say. UM, and so Bill, I Let's see, Johnathan experience ?????in his letters an experience to a religious conversion. He decided he was going to dedicate his life to god and become a priest. On Easter Sunday 1962 at the church of the Advent in Boston right on Beacon Hill. So we went down there last month and the lady who was the librarian there, was the librarian since 1951, wonderful person, and she came out with the original program that would have been given to people on that Sunday and there was the music and the doxology and the gospel and so we're going to try and get some of those songs, but what would be interesting if, maybe we could write to you and you can come up with, a list of some of the songs that Johnathan would have sung, or do you really think maybe we should try and get recordings of some of that.

F: The first solo that Johnathan, well he did the solo part and that I recall but whenever we sing in church I just identify it with Johnathan, is Praise to the Lord Almighty of the King of Creation and what I did with that was to have Johnathan hold the last note of every line instead of doing it, you know, the meter of the song and cutting off at 2 beats or whatever, I had him hold that and let it die at each line and then when the choir came in later then we would do it in the actual time. But whenever Johnathan sang a solo I used more of a free form, or type with johnathan,

well with others too. I had a soprano soloist and then sometimes I would do that with the entire choir. Like in the um, one thing that's unforgettable in Keene, people keep writing to this day, they don't even wait for Memorial Day, I keep getting letters every time, once in a while from someone who hasn't, "Gee Shirley, just happened to think, you know, I just happened to read through the hymn book or something um," the Battle Hymn of the Republic is the one song that sticks in my mind and everybody else's what we did with that.

L: Did Johnathan ever sing that.

F: Oh I'm sure Johnathan was there when we sang that.

L: See that's an important song to us because Johnathan's been described as a soldier by many people who knew him. A soldier that some people over in Vietnam were fighting and then Johnathan was doing what he was doing.

F: Oh yeh

L: You wouldn't happen to have any recordings of these songs.

F:

F: No, you know I broke them all. I, well we had a lot of choir recordings done at the radio station in Keene and I thought they were absolutely horrible, every one. It was better in my head. I don't, this isn't critical, it was better,

L: Do you know if any of them are around or anything.

F: Oh good heavens no. Not that I would know of, I don't know if any of the kids that sang bought them or not because I got complimentary copies and I thought they were terrible and I thought these people don't know what they are doing down there. So our church services were also, were ah um,

L: Broadcast

F: Broadcast on Sundays and um, whatever happened to all those I don't know.

L: So they were broadcast from the mid forties to the mid fifties do you think?

F: Oh yeah at least, at least, and particularly the years that Johnathan sang and Edward Murray was there, was our pastor. Those were all broadcast but whatever came of all those records, oh good lord they were horrid.

L: You know I've never done this in an interview, I've got to stop and go to the bathroom, that's on tape. You don't mean an observer in the sense of watching him not doing anything,

F: Well this is a very small story but it does give a little insight into Johnathan, when he was in the first grade I was often visiting in the schools and ah, it was recess time in the winter and you know the children had all those winter clothes to pull on and Johnathan was so busy watching the rest of them get their things on and talking to them.....and he wasn't getting his own things on, he was supposed to be and probably had an overshoe in his hand or something and finally the rest of them were ready to go out and Johnathan, they went and Johnathan had hardly started and the teacher smiled and she said, "Well that's Johnathan" she said, "He just enjoys watching all the rest of them." and he wasn't in any hurry, apparently, to get outdoors, he

just enjoyed the whole process. Talking to his friends, and split mittens they wore today and whatever.

L: You know Henry said that the other day ah, Henry said some very interesting, started me thinking along other lines but Henry pointed out that his dad was a mill worker and then he wasn't, a working class family, didn't have a telephone or a car for years and then Johnathan's family was, not wealthy but you know in Keene it's still that way. You've got doctors and lawyers and dentists up here and everybody else up here including college teachers. But he pointed out that that didn't seem to mean anything to Johnathan.

F: No it didn't

L: That he, although Henry said that he didn't frequently go over to Johnathan's house um, and that's been, other people have said that too, but the drama club seemed to be common ground for people who had common interest regardless of their class background. I wonder if you remember anything about Johnathan's acting career, you could mention someone I should talk to. Someone said Susan Ought is someone I should talk to.

F: Yeah, she was children's theater, probably Henry mentioned her. Henry by the way is one of my favorite people.

L: He gave us a great interview,

F: There is a self made man.

L: I saw him playing in Arsenic and Old Lace, he was the crazy brother, he was wonderful.

F: He is wonderful yes.

L: Just "CHARGE!" it was great.

F: That was born in Henry, He's a self made man.

L: He's a good teacher too.

F: He's a wonderful guy, yeh, I hope he gets out here. He called me the other night to see and, I hope he gets out here in August. Well anyway um, Johnathan yeh, I never missed a high school drama presentation. Not just because of Johnathan, because there were many, I was always amazed at the caliber of acting. They had a good teacher, a good coach there and she brought out the very best in them and she used to, she was a task master.

L: Is that Ms. Ought

F: No, um, MS. Collins, yeh I can't even think of her first name.

L: That's all right.

F: She was a task master but I could hardly believe the caliber of work she did there and I remember specifically, not that Johnathan was in this but um, the Earl of Essex and Queen Elizabeth, Elizabeth and Essex or something. It was incredible. It was as if you were in the Scottish royal court, absolutely transported. What she was able to do with background and high school talent. So it was a wonderful experience for Johnathan to work with her.

Johnathan had ah um, the ability and certainly, I'm sure, she got the very best out of him and musically, Bob Cook, wonderful with his high school a capella choirs. They were superb.

L: So Johnathan was both in that choir and he continued in

yours.

F: Oh yes

L: So he was in yours until he went off to VMI.

F: Yeh and all the girls stayed, see our church had a large number of the, let's say, more well to do people, and the people that I worked with there, for the most part, were all headed for colleges um, and there would have been opportunities for some of them to do other things and I used to be approached about that and I said, you would only have to talk to the parents but those girls are going to college, that is basic and uh, they all did, you know, almost all of them went on to college.

L: Did the kids ever talk to you about their college plans or their.

F: Oh yeh

L: Did Johnathan just come in and chat?

F: No, oh Johnathan, see he was just like one of my kids and uh, he was in and out of the house because I lived right near my mother and he came to see my mother so often. But ah, no, I was, when Johnathan decided to go to the episcopal church he didn't discuss it with me or anything and I was quite surprised you know and I've never known exactly why he made the switch, and I didn't care but you know, people's convictions they are entitled to and ah, I would never try to change them anyway, and I've never known what it was that motivated Johnathan to change to the episcopal church.

L: Well just as an aside, we think that he was becoming interested in the sacramental religions like catholicism and episcopalianism where there's a little pomp and circumstance and ceremony. We found scetches and drawings he did when he was in the 3rd and 4th grade, communion chalises and bishops caps and all that. He seemed to have gotten interested in that kind of approach to religion. We thought he was waiting until he was old enough to,

F: To make his own

L: Yeh to make up his own mind.. We found his babtimal certificate at the age of 18 in 1957 um, Fritz Gellar, Candler Macarty, people like that were all involved in it. What would he talk about when he'd come over? Do you recall, do you remember just generally speaking?

F: No, just mostly music.

L: Was it?

F: yeh and uh, he was, because he wasn't my sons age or anyting and , but he talked to my mother about anything. My mother was very well educated and self educated and uh he could talk to my mother about anything and he and my mother were really close.

L: Yeh, that relationship he had with Adelis was really amazing. Most kids aren't like that at all.

F: No, my son has that same

L: Does he?

F: Yeh my son is like that. Your children are like that too ???

F: That's a fine thing in a young person.

L: I think so too. It shows an appreciation for other generations.

F: There's such a difference now I notice when I go out,

some people um....gee I have all my faculties, I'm 77. Some of the store clerks look at me almost pityingly, you know like, oh here's this poor dear lady trying to find her change and I left something in the store the other day, a little package of cards, note cards I'd written and I'd just walked a few feet and I remembered gee I put my purse away and forgot to pick up the notes and went back and the girl was saying, "Did you come for your cards?" like she knew I was going, and I thought ????? (laughing) oh dear.

L: Now Johnathan, we've heard stories about how Johnathan would escort elderly people across the street,

F: Oh yes

L: You know and hang out down town and kind of do that.

F: He ah, he did enjoy um, he did enjoy the lime light he did enjoy um singing solos, he enjoyed his acting, he would have enjoyed, he enjoyed life. He enjoyed people and he wouldn't have minded if anyone saw him, nobody would question Johnathan helping an old lady across the street. Nobody would have, and he wouldn't have done it out of pity he would have done it because he wanted to do it and because he really liked this lady and wanted to see her safely across the street, would have been his only motive you know, altruistic, very great guy. But he got a large measure of that from his dad I'm sure.

L: Well, what I know about his dad, I picked up a lot from that diary, he was a very astute observer himself, very smart man, very smart man.

F: I have a very nice christams picture of the whole family which I could show you. I have Johnathan's graduation picture, I'm sure you've seen that.

L: I may have that

F: His high school graduation picture

L: Is it a picture of them standing in front of their mantel?

F: Yeh I think Johnathan had his french horn with him.

L: Yes I have that.

F: Do you have one of those.

L: That was a wonderful picture,

F: Yes it is.

L: that was in 1954 or something like that. Um...it's funny, I think that uh, I can't think of anything else specific I mean I'd like to know more about Johnathan's singing and so forth but what you could do is just describe anything you have.

F: I can hear him, I guess I was telling your sister that, I can hear these voices, any of the soloists I had, I can hear the entire choir because I did their musical arrangements for everything they sang. I rearranged the music and I do have the capacity of hearing their voices and I think that's a wonderful gift god has given me. I can hear Johnathan, I can hear Diana, I can hear these voices, it's wonderful.

L: Do you suppose even though you broke the records and all that stuff, if there were, that uh, people in Keene might still have those records. Just to have a sample of how his voice was at that age. Well I can ask around, maybe members of the congregational church, maybe they've kept the records, recordings.

F: They might have.

L: Did you know a man at the congregational church, a Reverend Smith?

F: Yes

L: Did you know his daughter?

F: Yes

L: She became a famous movie star

F: June Vincent yeh

L: Yes I have a couple of her movies on tape. I spoke to her on the telephone.

F: Ah yeh, Willis was, well.....Willis was a close to us as anything. He's been here, he's been , since we've moved here, he and Dell came to visit us and we were invited to their home in California.

L: Willis is her husband

F: Smith, that's Reverend SMith Willis. June's husband is Bill Sterling.

L: Yes but the pilot. Is willis still alive?

F: No, he and Dell both died a fewyears ago, not long after their anniversary they died.

L: June Vincent is an incredible actress. She wasn't born in,

F: She was, no she wasn't born in Keene. She was a fine actress but she wouldn't compromise her principals.

L: I think that's what happened, she may have, I counted about 20 films and she did a lot of TV work, she told me on the telephone and I had asked her if she'd come out to Keene if we had a film retrospective and she has arthritis and she said she doesn't fly very well these days. She said she had prints of some of her films and she'd send them to me and we had a nice talk.

F: MMM she's a lovely person. Her father and mother were great people.

L: Now he...they moved to Keene.....in 38 I think or something like that.

F: Yeh I don't do to well with dates.

L: You were directingthe fire by then

F: He baptised all our grandchildren that we had at the time, no Ed Murray baptised the grandchildren, Willis baptised Lynn and Dennis though, both my children.

?: Willis baptised Dennis

F: Dennis and Lynn yeh

L: It's funny, it just occured to me congregational church, Smith, June Vincent and what a great actress she was.

F: It's funny, when I was up with my sons in Los Vegas not long ago, we were looking at old pictures and June had given my son one of her studio portrais, he's a bit younger than she is, she's, gosh, she's got to be 60 now.

L: She said 70 on the telephone.

F: Well she could be but I wouldn't think so, but she'd given him one of her big studio portraits and he still cherishes that.

L: Beautiful actress

F: She's a lovely girl. The Smith's were just first class people.

L: Well I can't think of anything else, is there anything else that you would add if you were, any suggestions that would help.

F: No, I would think his, my viewpoint is probably a little more adult. I thought you would have everthing you needed on Johnathan from talking to his high school, you know friends. But their viewpoints would be different, their experiences would be different.

L: See you've given us information that we didn't have and we have talked to anybody that sang with him. We've talked to people that acted with him, but we haven't talked with anyone

F: Oh, Ellen, Ellen Fox sang in the choir with Johnathan. She also played for me for about 4 years. Ellen was an excellent pianist. I have pictures of my choirs, you can watch Johnathan go from here to there I have pictures of John in my choir when he first statred and then as he got older but um, yeh, any of those older choir people um, did you ever talk to Bonnie ??? yes but you know, when we interviewed Bonnie and Ellen Fox, it was a group interview we set up in June of 89 and what happened was, the dynamic of the group, Bob Curry was there, Caroline Sturgess, Pierce, Caroline Pierce, Bonnie and Ellen, they talked more in general terms. I wish now we had interviewed Bonnie and Ellen seperatelt. I think we would have learned more, and we can still do that, we can still do that. Ellen would come up again I think.

F: Ellen's going to ne in New Hampshire this summer. She's going up to the lake in Stoddard, the Pricest Camp in Stoddard for a few days, she and her husband and Bonnie will be down there at the time.

L: Yeh she's divorced Bonnie

F: Bonnie no

L: Well then she's met someone hasn't she?

F: Yeh,

L: She was married to a black man and they got divorced is what I heard.

F: Well I don;t think so. Well it's possible

L: Who told me that? ?????told me just a little while ago Mrs. Fontaine

F: I don't think so, I've always thought they would be and I think they probably will be but I don't think they are yet

END OF INTERVIEW