

L: Test Test Test, (snaps fingers) we're all set.

B: Okay, maybe we can just begin ah, if you let us know what the life of an english prof was like and the relationship of an english prof to students at ah, VMI.

R: Well everybody had to take freshman english or rat english as it's called here, composition. So ah we had collectively contact with everybody at the institute and ah, at that time, most people took an additional course in literature, usually english literature, sometimes a general course in humanities, so we had some contact that way too. But ah, english majors were the ones, and history majors to some extent, took the upper class literature courses as they still do. Ah, our department head assigned us each several english majors as academic advisees and as usual, that didn't mean very much until the department head decreed that we must schedule meetings with our advisees. Well Jonathan Daniels was one of my advisees and so my contact with him was not just through the classroom but through that sort of meeting.

S: Could you sort of describe the kind of meeting you had with Jonathan or your memories of those kinds of meetings.

R: Well I remember one, I may have blended several meetings together in this memory I have, I had been reading something, I don't remember what, that was germane to whatever we were reading in American Lit at the time and I mentioned this book to him and he seemed interested. The next week at our compulsory meeting, he ah came in and said, "I read that book you mentioned last week" I was surprised. Usually when you mention a book to a student at VMI, he will look likely at you, I suspect not just the students at VMI, but John had read this and thought about it and wanted to talk about it. I began to wish I had read it more carefully ah, some of the points that he raised um, I think that is celestative of the kind of person he was. He was intellectually curious, he could talk to professors in their own language, which is not to say he was a stuffy sort of person, but he had a kind of maturity that not all people do, and he had a sense of humor too.

S: How is that?

R: Well I wish I, I can't remember a specific detail but ah, he was not a stuffy sort of person.

S: In terms of classes, he would, what classes did he have with you? Do you recall?

R: Um, Survey of American Literature, which I think ran for 2 semesters at that time and took up the canon of American greats ah,we spent a lot of time on Moby Dick and Melville and must have talked a lot about that. He talked, another distinction I guess is that he was good on paper but he was also good in the classroom. He liked to take part in class discussions and raise questions and get answers and,

S: How large were the classes? Just curious.

R: Small, they were, oh, between 15 and 20 I guess.

S: Ahha, and he'd kind of emerge as a leading person in class.

R: Yeh

S: Have any particular interests that you recall? or just,

R: Well I think he was intersted in big questions. His ah, his honors thesis, which I did not have anything to do with the directing. Ah, it was on a number of exsistentialist writers including Dos Dayefski I think ah, he was interested in writers like that, writers who raised the questions about faith and hope and the meaning of life, if that doesn't sound too sophomoric ah, and ah, so Hawthorne and Melville, T.S. Elliot were kind of writers he seemed to be interested in.

S: I noticed it when we were reading the valedictorian address again and we saw at least 3 illusions in there. One was to Elliot, another was to Marlowe and I think there was an illusion to Wordsworth.

R: Yes

L: He won a Danforth, right, to Harvard.

S: Yeh, do you remember anything about that? , how he got the Danforth?

R: Ah, lets see, he was offered a Woodrow Wilson fellowship to go to the University of Virginia but ah, my understanding was that he had always wanted to go to Harvard or at least our department head, Herbert Dillard, could not see why anyone would go anywhere but Harvard if you had a choice.

S: Is that where Mr. — ?

R: That's where he got his ~~Master's~~ ^{APPLIED} Degree, he went to VMI as an undergraduate, Dillard did, yeh, so ah, there's a letter in his file that I just saw recently in which writing, Dillard writing to the Danforth people saying the Daniels has this fellowship to the University of Virginia but he wants to go to Harvard and is there any possibility that he could. And he did.

S: Yeh I was wondering about that because we heard that he had the Woodrow Wilson but in the photo of the 4 award winners, that came out of the publicity office, it just mentioned the Danforth, so

R: Well I, I'm not sure whether he received an offer or a promise or what but ah, I mean Dillard's letter makes that clear.

S: That's good, well that helps us clear that up. Ah, tell us a little bit about Col. Dillard and what role he might have had with Jonathan?

R: Col. Dillard was very good at spotting potential in cadets. Sometimes he spotted potential that nobody else ever did find including the cadet himself but he preferred to err on that side in the hope of really bringing out the hidden qualities of cadets who tend to want to submerge themselves in the middle of things. One man came to me once to, for a recommendation for a job and he said he knew his record wasn't very good here but he always tried to get a sort of C level because he didn't want to stand out as bad and not graduaute, but he didn't want to stand out where he would be called on either. Well, Dillard did not like that attitude. Who does? But he fought it aggressively. He told the english majors they were an elete at VMI, that there mission at VMI was to civilize the place and to show engineers and militarists that there is more to life than what they believed in and ah, he would seize on individuals to be the elete of the elete I guess. To ah, encourage them by challenging them with books to read an ideas to write

about and by being around and available and ready to extend himself in any conceivable way to ah, enhance a cadets education. Sponsored trips to Europe in the summer time for instance. So I think that ah, certainly his influence would have encouraged Jon in the direction that he had a natural bet for, intellectual curiosity and the rest of it, but Dillard certainly saw that VMI didn't hold him back by its counter irritants

S: He lived on Campus?

R: Yes, yes

S: And so his house was open to students who might want to come and chat with him?

R: Yes and he was in his office in the evening a lot of the time. Not many of us make sacrifices like that I'm afraid. But he, he was ah, you know, you were in the building, it's almost impossible to study in your room in your barracks so you go in the library or you find a corner in one of the academic buildings and you study there nad some professor who is sitting in his office at that time is available when a cadet comes out of the corner where he's reading, looks around and here is somebody to talk to. So Dillard was very ah, successful in meeting the cadets where they were, literally.

S: That's interesting. You yourself, do you have any particularly sharp memories of Daniels as a person or do you remember what you thought of him at that point?

R: Oh I thought very highly of him, I admired him. I suppose he was one of the 2 or 3 best students I think that I ever had, all around. I didn't know him closely as a person, I regretted that, well I wasn't in my office in the evenings I guess ah, but ah, one of the sharpest memories I have is when he came to see me, I must have had some impact on him because he sent me a Christmas card from the seminary his last year there in which he said how he loved what he was doing and he used the phrase again and again "He leads us (He meaning the lord) leads us out of Egypt in unexpected ways" I later had reason to believe by Egypt, he meant VMI but I'm not sure. Ah, I think there were other things, of course, involved too. But ah, he ah, he came to see me on the way south in the spring or early summer of 1965 and he went to Dillard's house which was just a few doors up the street from mine and then came to our house and sat and talked for awhile and ah, he was very full of enthusiasm for what he was doing. The seminary was fine but even greater was the opportunity to go and do something in the civil rights movement and he said ah, ah,well....the deeper I get into this civil rights, the deeper I get into applying my beliefs in the world, the more convinced I am of the truth of christianity and he leaned forward and emphasised it, "All of it" he said. Um.....another part of that interview, interview (laughs), that talk we had ah, perhaps earlier on, we had been having the required academic self study that colleges have to go through every 10 years and had sent out a questionnaire to english majors about their experiences and ah, got a lot of replies but not one from Jon. So I twitted him a little about that and he said, "Oh I don't think you'd want to hear anything I have to say"

and I said, "Well, we could perhaps profit by it and improve things. What would be your advice?" He said, "Raise it to the ground".....I think he was, perhaps exaggerating a little, but, to those who would say his affect, the affect on Jonathan of his working against adversity at VMI, that's supposed to be one of the theories I guess that, of education, make it really hard for a person to accomplish things ah, regulate his hours, regulate his clothes, send people to harrass him and return and if he has anything strong in him he will come through and strenthen his character against these things. So one is tempted to say that VMI perhaps, even though he seemed to be denying it in what he said to me, that VMI had some impact on him of that sort.

S: Were you surprised that he went into the seminary? Was there any evidence here that that was the future for JOn?

R: No, I wasn't surprised really ah, we had been told when he, although I did not ever discuss it with him, but I guess

Dillard passed it on, that he was headed to the seminary when he came here ah, and , like many young men of college age, he used properly his college ah, life to raise questions about his earlier committments and so it's not surprising that he was not active in the church in Lexington while he was here, as some cadets were ah, he raised questions. You'll see that in his preface to his honors thesis, that's why he took the existentialists to write about. Ah, there was one man on the faculty, um, Joe Pierce, who was the band director at the time. HE too had an office near Dillard's as it happened Scotship Hall and like Dillard, he was often there in the evenings and ah, the story is that ah, he asked Jon one evening, not really knowing him at all, what his plans were for later life and Jon said, "Well I plan on going to the seminary and become an episcopal priest" and Joe said, "Why do want to do that?" ah, and apparently no one had asked him a question like that, at least in those circumstances ah, before and ah, it was said, whether by Jon or whom I don't know, that ah, that started his thinking that maybe he didn't want to go to the seminary and, soon, we heard that his plans were to go to graduate school in english instead. BUT he always had a concern with the things that religion is concerned about. So it wasn't a surprise that he finally returned to that.

S: How about your reaction to his work down in the south as a civil rights worker, was taht a surprise?

R: Yes it was. Although after my conversation with him on the way there, it wouldn't have been so much but ah, I guess I thought of him as being a more contemplative sort of person rather than an active person, but clearly I was wrong.

L: I have a question. Col. Roth, did he on that last trip through seem to have any idea of the danger he was in? We've heard from several people, his mother told him not to go back, his sister, couple of colleagues, even a catholic priest all warned him. Did he know bad things were going to happen?

R: I think he did, I think he did ah, he talked about how

committing yourself to a cause sets you free from everything else and nothing else mattered and I'm afraid I made some remarks about family and commitments of that sort and wives and children and he said well at least he didn't have wife and child so he didn't need to face that dilemma but I think he did feel that he was going into something dangerous and I think he felt his religious faith was something that would sustain him through all that and as he said, nothing else mattered.

S: Could you explain that little phrase there, at least your interpretation of it "a cause set you free" what he might have meant by that?

R: Well free from worry about your life as well as free from worry about what your next meal was coming from or what book you were going to be asked to read next or if you were still a cadet, who was going to persecute you in the rat line ah, yes free from the world.

S: That's an interesting idea. Come back a little bit, there was nothing here that you recall, that would ever suggest that he would become an activist in this way? Some, Schneider makes some point about his role with the paper and his defense of rats that might have been harassed but, did you see much of that?

R: Well I didn't see much of it but I wouldn't deny that that's possible yeh, and perhaps in his valedictory address there is some prediction one could see.

S: Where do you see that?

R: I'm relying on memory of my impression rather than on the text.

L: We have a copy here.

S: Yeh, we're just curious because you can interpret that better than we can.

R: Well, I just had the feeling, the valedictorian at VMI, as you may know, is elected by the students, not automatically thrust into the position ah, and that implies that ah, he feels a kind of duty to speak for the core and usually or quite often, the valedictory address is devoted to attacking VMI roundly. VMI cadets hate VMI for 4 years until they become alumni and their whole goal in life is achieved and from then on, no one can say a word against her, but at any rate, his was not the negative sort of thing that many of those were, as I recall it. BUT it seems to me that he (sighs) I don't know, called for some sort of commitment and action other than indulging in rosy thoughts of the past and the life of barracks and whatever.

S: That's kind of interesting because we read it, not knowing the tradition as you just said, we read it as an ambivalent statement. Like in our tradition, it would be the "I'm sorry to leave you" kind of speech, "These were our best years" sort of speech. To come across his which struck me as ambivalent, that's almost a negative of him.

R: Yeh, that's right, that's ambivalent, I wish I had reread it before coming here. Yeh, well, measured against some, I mean there was a point where their superintendent appointed Dillard to censor the valedictorian addresses, it wasn't called that but that was the idea. He was to go over it and make suggestions and see to it that the valedictory

address did not embarrass the institute.

S: Sounds like he may not have been the right person to perform that duty.

R: Well, it sounds that way, but no, he was the right person.

L: Tomorrow, I think we're going to speak to his widow. I hope she was malagible about some of these things, so and it was sitting when Jonathan if she can help us out. We hope so.

R; Well dillard was, one of our colleagues was fired by Dillard, how can I put it, anyhow, he was called in, his contract was not to be renewed and Dillard decided that he was, you know, he just didn't seem to be the person he wanted to continue in the department and the guy came out and he said, I saw him later and he said, "That Dillard, I was half way down the hall before I knew I'd been fired. Before I realized I'd been fired" and ah, so, apply that to an unfriendly valedictory speech you see and he could work a person around to saying perhaps something the institute would like.

S: That's interesting. Yeh we hear the story about Dillard's death teaching Shakespeare.

L: At which point was he reading when he had the coronary? I'd be anxious to know. I taught Shakespeare last semester so I can stand a warning.

R: I don't know.

L: That's a frivolous question

R: Well it's part of the legend I guess and he served by finding out, in fact, I think I've heard various thing. One play was mentioned and I had thought, how could they have been reading that play at that time of the year because I knew what the syllabus was but ah, I really,

S: Well is there anything else about Jonathan that you can recall that we haven't talked about, or any other areas that you might want to open up that we haven't

R:.....No, I think from my point of view, I mean there are a lot of things that first hand people, if you could talk to some of the cadets that were interviewed shortly after he died ah, Breth Wates.....

S: We have a letter that he,

R: Yeh, in my file, there's a newspaper clipping I think that, where a number of people in his class were interviewed and their names, it would be worth making another tour perhaps and talking to some of those.

L: We'd be corresponding anyway, we'd like to send you a brief letter released to use a couple of sentences in the film, we forgot to bring them with us, but maybe through the mail you wouldn't mind corresponding.

S: Okay, we going to film a little bit?

L: Whenever you're ready. Um, I think you should decide what section you would like Col. Roth to go over again and ah, take our time with it.

S: Yeh, I think maybe, we're just going to film part of (Tape goes off).....teacher Dillard was in terms of excelling and then maybe in more detail, the new Jonathan that you saw when he came through and was so committed to what he was doing in terms of social calling, the christian

distance that you mentioned and the ah (Tape goes off)

L: Apologize, it's because the lights go to you and not sound. Start it again. Col Roth Take 2

S: Tell us about his advising session

R: Ah, Jon Daniels was a different sort of person from the usual advisee ah, mosy cadets and students of any sort that I have encountered, are not really interested in hearing the names of books that they might have to read in addition to anything else but JOn was not like that ah, he came in for his session for required academic advice and ah, I had been reading a book on a subject somehow related to something we had discussed in class and I was impressed by it and I mentioned it to him and he wrote down the author and title ah, I thought nothing more of it but the next week when he came for the next session, he said, "Well, I read that book you recommended" and preceded to ask questions about it and ah, engage me in discussion. I wish I had read it a little more closely ah, and that was typical of him. He had intellectual curiosity, he was willing to take time and take pains and get ah, involved in intellectual matters beyond the call of duty as we say at VMI.

S: CUT, good

L: Well that went well once I turned on the sound. See these are not the hands of Speilberg here.

R: (laughs) I thought that's who it was

L: We were doing a silent film there for a minute. We've got plenty of film left. I starting to relax, Ive taken the Zen approach to filming.

S: Why don't we do the ah, when he came back and visited you in 65

L: Let me make sure it's allright.....yeh that one's very nice okay.....let's move this light just a tad. This things still cruising along. I just want to make sure everythings's running allright. Col. Roth is still there. This is going to be Take 3. Col. Roth Take 3

S: Col. Roth could you tell us about ah, Jonathan's new committment when he came back in 65 to visit you?

R: Yes, I hadn't heard much from him after his graduation in 61 although I did have a Christmas card from him after he had gotten to the seminary, in which he was very enthusiastic about what he was doing there nad learning and in the summer of 65 he passed through Lexington on his trip, on his way to ah Alabama and ah, stopped at my house. We talked about various things ah, he said that he was enthusiastic about what he wasdoing in the seminary but he was even more enthusiastic about his work in the civil rights movement. Not that he saw them as two seperate things in fact, he said, "the more I get involved in this movement, the more convinced I am of the truth of the christian religion" and he leaned forward and said, "All of it" um, he said "You feel liberated, you feel free, set free by committment to religion and to the civil rights movement. I suppose he meant, well I raisedthe question, not very kindly perhaps, of the committments that might conflict with that, such as my family were sitting around, wives, children and so on, and he said very nicely, well he didn't have that to complicate things but the principle was there and he felt

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it very strongly.

S: CUT....good, thank you

R: All right

S: I'll take these lights off for you so