

Alan & Nancy
Mason 1

NM: They had character

S: Sure did, I'm trying to think of where Oxford Street is, I can't

NM: Oxford's in south Providence and that's Thurbers Ave, but Island Hospital is on Eddy Street (Tape goes off for second) there was the big church on the corner, it was a big brick church with a great big high steeple and I think it's still there. I still see the steeple.

AM: Yeh it is and that was sitting on the corner.

S: Okay, so we can finally (tape goes off for a second)

AM: and really being concerned (BEEP) about there kids and (BEEP) um (Tape goes off for second)

L: Just give it a test yeh

AM: If you talk will it pick up, if I

S: No, why don't you just say anything and he can see how much

AM: Okay, is it, how close is it reading and what's happening with it over there?

L: Sounds great

AM: Okay

NM: Is this recording, now if I speak can you hear that?

L: Yes absolutely, sounds terrific.

NM: I have a strong voice

L: No, we're getting a good signal

AM: Okay good

L: Yes

S: So, maybe you can just begin by telling us ah, the origins of this whole project in Providence, how it came about and what your role was in that.

AM: The origins were the urban program of the national church where 4 or 5 dioceses were picked to begin to explore how to minister in the inner city. Rhode Island ah, I guess under dean Stenning, was basically picked to be one of those urban dioceses, right around the time that another deacon and I came out of seminary um, and the bishop ended up then assigning the 2 of us to different parts of the inner city and I went into south Providence. Um, as my supervisor being the dean of the cathedral and yet relating to the priest at christ church and working with that congregation.

S: Why were you selected or did you volunteer?

AM: Um, there were only 2 of us coming out of seminary that year and so it was not a volunteer effort at all. It was, "this is what you're going to do." (laughs)

L: See we were hoping to get some real insights into Colburn selecting these people because of their high mission in life.

AM: No

NM: Not Colburn, Higgins

L: Oh, sorry

AM: Yeh Bishop Higgins was,

S: You were married at that time?

AM: Yeh, yeh

NM: Of course the other thing is too is that at this period of time, Allen's seminary was very much into this social awareness movement. In fact when we were in seminary, we heard Malcolm X talk and that was an experience in itself. We with 3 other, I think 2 other couples. So there were 6 white people attending this, this um, talk by Malcolm X at a

high school. It was all black and it was an interesting experience because what they did was they had 4 prominent black people from New Haven on the podium and Malcolm X and they allowed Malcolm X to talk for 45 minutes before they went to the panel and by the time he finished talking the audience was in his hands. I mean, we began to become a little nervous.

AM: They could have said, "Do away with those 6 whites out in the middle of the place" and we would not be sitting here today. He was that powerful of a speaker.

NM: He was absolutely incredible to hear, he really was.

L: When was that?

AM: That would have been 63, early, early, late fall of 62 spring of 63

S: Just before this assignment?

AM: Yeh, just before.

S: So, here you are assigned to this and what took place? How did you get going in terms of the project and all of that?

AM: It began by working with the parish of Christ Church um, the people of the parish basically had lived in the area ah, it was kind of an English area, blue collar for the most part but they gradually, as the neighborhood had changed, they had moved out to the next row of suburbs which was basically Cranston. Most of them were in Cranston, Warwick maybe, mostly Cranston and they would just drive in on Sunday morning. The priest, Father Hemingway, really was, was attempting to minister to people in the neighborhood but the congregation would just as soon have the neighborhood kind of not existed to a certain extent. Um, in one, I remember one, one classic example of this was that we had a ah, a black teenage girl of about age 12 show up with 2 younger brothers for Sunday school, one week before Sunday School was to begin and so they came into the building in time for church and since I really wasn't needed in the service itself, I decided I would stay with these 3 kids and just kind of talk with them and talk about Jesus and see what happened and so we did that. Ah, and then it came time, the service was over and it came time to leave and so I walked this young lady to the door and ah, one of the older parishoners was standing holding the door open and so this teenager walked to the door, turned around on the doorstep to say something to me and this older woman let the door go right in her face. And I remember I went up to her and I put my arm around her and I said, "You know you shouldn't do that. It would give people the impression they're not wanted" and the response was "They're not!" And the next week, those 3 kids came back and they basically disrupted everything for the whole sermon. I mean they ran in one door and ran out another. I mean they were totally disruptive in the process. But that was my kind of initiation to, to what was going on down there um,

S: And then eventually you got a community center somehow. How did that come about?.....

AM: Well first of all, first of all we, as we started, I think we started in June and then in September both Harb and Jon joined us on weekends and they were living on the east

side as well. So we , we had them out visiting on Saturdays and then they were part of the parish on Sundays, probably maybe reading in part of the liturgy or teaching Sunday school in some way, shape or form. So they were there right from the beginning.

S: Do you know why they were selected or why they called they seminary to get Jon and Harbell?

AM: Ron had graduated from ETS so my guess is that he had some contacts with Dean Colburn, I think it was Dean Colburn at that time ah, and probably asked if the dean had any seminarians that wanted to come down. Now how Harb and Jon were selected, I don't know. I just know the 2 of them kind of ended up kind of down there.

L: Yeh, Ron said that Colburn had called him up and said "I've got these 2 fellows, could you use them?" But maybe, I mean it still might have been initiated by,

S: Yeh, we don't know

AM: Yeh I don't that.

L: Well we'll talk to Bishop Colburn about it.

S: Were they eager to get there and everything, get going or what was there initially?

NM: I think they were as i remember

AM: Yeh they were ah, the 2 of them were quite different and I don't know whether you've talked to Harb, have you?

S: No

AM: You haven't talked to Harb Sanders at all, um, Jonathan was much more bubblely and open um, Harb was a quieter, reserved um, so they were kind of different. But Jon really, I think took to it. I mean kind of took to the people in that neighborhood and the kids on the streets and he was more comfortable with it I think than um, tha Harb was, at least initially um,As we began to work on there and with Jonathan and Harb on the weekends, it became obvious to us that we couldn't live on the fashionable east side and drive in and out of the ghetto. That just wasn't going to work ah, and so we brought that issue to the diocese and the diocese decided to purchase a house in the neighborhood ah, the one 3 houses from the church became available and they bought it, they fixed it up on the second floor for Nancy and I to live in and the kids. We used the first floor and the basement for programs and the third floor for staff, eventually stayed on the third floor ah, and Jonathan and Harb would have stayed, once we had the place, that's where they would have stayed, on the third floor as well. Um, and I guess that happened

NM: It happened between Christmas and New Years of 1964. Our son had been born in August of 64 and I remember spending New Years Eve exhausted because we had just moved. So that's when we moved down. You had run your first summer day camp the previous summer but all the staff of that had lived on the east side.

S: That's Christmas of 64, New Years of 65

L: Not 63?

NM: Not 63

AM: No 64 was when we moved into the settling house, yeh when we moved in. So it took from June of 63 to December of 64 before they bought the place, before we moved.

L: A year and a half

S: And so Jon, let me see, June of 63 to December 64, so Jon would have started in,

AM: September of 63

S: So he was with you for

NM: Before we moved down into the area, he was there.

Because he would stay in that old house, one of those houses built in the 1600s on Babbit Street. He and Harb had the second floor of one of those.

S: So how many months all together was he working there?

NM: It would have been during the school.

AM: Well he would have been there for his whole first year um,

S: And then not the summer

AM: Not the summer, my guess is that he, did he go south that summer?

S: He must have been, he went south in 65

AM: In 65

S: He was also doing some work in ah, upstate New York at Willard um, psychiatric unit.

AM: Okay, in that first summer. So the summer of 64 he would have been doing his field placement kind of thing in pastoral counseling or whatever they call it. Okay, so then he came back to us in the fall of 64.

S: Okay

AM: Um....and I don't, then it was kind of in and out as he went south, made a decision to go south,

S: That was March 9th or so, 65. So that was a good period of time he was there.

ANM: Yeh

L: Longer than we knew

NM: Yeh because it was mostly just weekends but, but that's when he'd be down. One funny story that I remember about Jon and Harb is that Easter Sunday they were there, it must have been that first year, and we had just bought a record of the Messiah and I remember coming home Easter Sunday and they came and they joined us for Easter dinner and we put the Messiah on and we turned it up loud and we just reveled in it because it was just wonderful and the next day I went outside and I met one of the elderly people that live next door, this wonderful old gentleman, and he came up to me and said, "I really enjoyed your music yesterday" (laughing) and he's practically deaf as a door post, you know, so I knew that we had had it very loud. They were very understanding there of us, they really were nice people.

S: So what were all the activities that Jon and yourself and Harb would be involved in, what were you doing?

AM: I think gradually, we began to develop a Saturday afternoon program at the church before, because we didn't have any place else to function um, and we began to invite Brown and Rhode Island School of Design students down to participate in that and I think we got more, I think it was more Rhode Island School of Design than it was Brown students and Pembroke students, initially because we did a lot of arts and crafts and ah, those kinds of activities with the kids. Um, so that would have been a big feature of Saturday um, and I'm kind of unclear as to where Jon and

Harb fit into that. Whether they were there for that or they were kind of in and out and then they'd be out calling in the neighborhood and talking with parents and um, that kind of thing. I'm just not

S: If they were out calling what would they be doing?

AM: Visiting homes, talking to parents, seeing how they were doing from following up on the kids that might be in the program um,

NM: We have that one picture of Jonathan and I don't know where it is, we can't find it, working one on one with a youngster.

L: I was hoping you could get that picture.

NM: I don't know where, we have hundreds and hundreds

L: Yeh, Stenning said that you had that. He specifically mentioned that picture. I was telling Bill

S: So it would be like tutoring or

AM: Yes yes

S: More tutoring than counseling?

AM: Yeh, that would have been a tutoring situation that he was in.

L: You didn't send that picture to Eagles did you?

NM: Well we're not sure. We tried to get in touch with him, he doesn't think he has it but he said he would look to see if he did.

L: He probably didn't have kind things to say about us ah,

NM: He didn't say much

L: Well we never have said anything bad about him. We are interested in having him help us in our project and he was impossible. I got a letter from him, he was afraid we were going to steal his work

NM: I think he is.

L: I mean we weren't going to steal anything. We found so much material that he could use. But we heard, we heard from someone in the south that what he's doing is actually creating an apolochia (?) for Coleman in the south and we don't want to be involved in anything like that. I mean Coleman is a scumbag and he killed a good man and what are we supposed to do, you know, I mean....I felt really uncomfortable in Hayneville, I'm sorry, maybe it's the beer talking. I'll shut up

S: Anybody could feel uncomfortable in Hayneville.

L: I've been there twice

NM: Yeh I don't know, you know, we cannot seem to find that photograph so, you know, we did get in touch with him in hopes that he might have it but,

S: Any stories, details about Jon working with the people do you recall? How he got along and.....

AM: Not really, no um, I'm pretty fuzzy on that um,

NM: He worked with the college students also I think. I think there was a relationship there with the college students because I remember some of the college students formed a bond, you know, with Jonathan. So there was, there was that working relationship and the college students were coming down and working with the youngsters so it was pretty much a group effort I think ah, with sharing between, you know, those students and

AM: A lot changed once we had the settlement house because

then we really had a bigger base of operations ah, and we could then do things during the course of the after school programs and so forth um,and so when Jon and Harb came down, they would come down, probably Friday night?

NM: Ahha, yeh, I think so.

AM: Friday night and be there all day Saturday, be there part of, through worship, on Sunday and then probably go back um, and they would interface with the college students and as Nanc said um, well we know one young lady in particular really took kind of a liking to Jon.

S: We have a whole list of young women who took a liking to Jon.

L: We've interviewed a lot of them

S: Its those friggin lovers (?)

AM: (laughing) That's right, those little, and this gal was really ah, his death really hit her very, very hard ah,

NM: But he was killed during the summer wasn't he? Isn't that when it happened because we had the summer program going on and this one particular person was working with us at the time.

L: If we turn off the tape recorder could you tell us her name?

NM: Sure (tape goes off)

AM: (laughing)

NM: So he more or less, I would say, fit into the just kind of blended in with the program that was there at church house and that ran, you know, and I remember he went down south and then came back and then requested a leave of absence from school to go back down.

S: Right, yeh

NM: So I do remember that and I think Harbell continued to come down. Harb continued to come down for the rest of that particular year anyway.

S: Would you say ah, you know, if you had to sum up the impact of that what do you think it was, what new do you think he might have found there and how, Jonathan that is.

AM: Jonathan found when he went south?

S: No when he came to you. Because I think, you know, he had had a, he grew up in a lily white town, he did go to VMI and there were blacks working at the place but it was an all white school and I'm sure he hit some segregation here and there when he was off campus. But,

NM: I think I would relate it more to, my experience personally, I grew up in a ah, suburban small town area, went to school in the city so I did have some exposure. But there wasn't a large population of blacks in my school um, worked in Providence but basically in white areas. When I worked in New Haven for a year I was in an all black area where I worked and I came to experience black families as just that. People, families, caring people um, and I think that's what happened to Jon. I think that Jon came down and worked out of the church but came to experience people as families, as people um, one of the pictures here that I look at, one of the boys is running. This is the family that I mentioned, the Manning family. Well there were 2 boys and a girl, father and a mother living in their own home um, and I think it would have been those kinds of experiences as well

as the experiences of, we had a family across the street, a welfare mother, the father was around but not really known to be there and yet it was a family and um, I think they had experience with the Martinez family also with the little children. I think it was just coming to know them personally.

L: How would that act itself out. Would Jon go over and introduce himself and knock on the door and say, these weren't parishoners necessarily.

NM: Some of them were. The Manning family was. Umhm, it would have started with some of the parishoners and they weren't all black. the Conway family were parishoners also, poor, mother was a single parent um, very committed, you know, and involved in the church as much as she was able to with 3 children. I think it was through that, you know, sort of a networking, you know the Mannings and then they know someone else and you meet them and. Jon was quite personable so it would have been easy for him to have met other people. Harb had a little more dificulty because of his reserve but, but he was able to also um,

AM: Most of our contacts with the adults would have been through the children who were just kind of in the neighborhood and all over the place. So as we ran our programs and these kinds of programs and the kids came in, then we'd begin to try and make some contact with the parents ah, and what you had in south Providence at that point in history, you still had some of the older English people who, most of whom had moved out, but you still had a few um, you had some ah, a number of irish blue collar who lived in the neighborhood and who attended, there was a very large Roman Catholic church down the street from us. So they would go there. Then you had some, the blacks moving in but you also had a number of just poor whites. Either they were divorced with children, I remember one family in particular, just mentally retarded and I remember this mother coming and um, and telling me they had taken away her new baby. The state had done that and I couldn't figure out why they had done that and I finally got the story straight that the stae had taken the child because that was a normal child and they wanted to take it out of the home to give it a chance to grow normally because this mother had 2 other children. Both of whom were retarded but the son was brighter than mother was so he could manipulate mother and it was ah, it was sad, you know, to see that kind of thing. Um, and I think these kids came to church, so Jon would have had that kind of ah, but you had, that family, for example, got a puppy at one point and didn't know how to train the puppy nor did they bother to take it outside. So the livingroom was just covered with dog doo all over the place and one of the things that we were asked to do at one point was train peace corp volunteers that were up at Brown. So one day in that training process we had arranged with this woman and we sent 3 or 4 of these people over this woman's house to go, she's got a few cleaning problems. It was a cultural shock for most of them um,

L: How did it act out with Jonathan and these people? Did you ever actually watch Jonathan working with some of these

people?

NM: I'm not sure that we saw the interactions in the homes, Allen didn't go along. It would have been more the interaction with the children. He had a warm natural, way with children and,

L: What would he do actually? What if a shy little kid came in, what would Jonathan do? What would happen?

NM: I think he would probably, my sense is that, that the child would feel welcomed and um, most of the time when children came in they were coming for some type of program ah, and so it would have been part of that, you know, certainly recognizing them and welcoming them.

AM: I think what, yeh

NM: I think what happened was, especially once we had the settlement house, things were going on all the time so that when they would come down it would be more or less feeding into what was going on around them basically. We would be having the tutors come in, we would be having the students coming down to do the sewing class or the ceramics class or that type of thing. So it would be just being part of this ongoing program.

AM: I think another facet of this for both Jon and Harv but perhaps a little more for Jon, um, was that we had a number of college students coming through the place all the time and a number of them went on to be priests and I think part of that was our interaction with them but I think a part of it too was Jon and harv interacting with them as college students and they could look up to Jon and Harb and see what was going on and that was a real influence. Now we really had a number of um, college students come to us to work for the summer who then went on to seminary.

L: That's very interesting. We've been reading some of William Stringfellow's books ah, My People is the Enemy is one, we know Jonathan passed these on when he went to Selma, he had given them to parishoners at St. Pauls the paperback volume and we were wondering if he ever um, according to Ron Stenning, Stringfellow met Jonathan once at some meeting in Providence. Did he ever talk about that aspect of, that kind of christian outreach aspect of episcopal,

S: Or the whole question of street priest verses theologian ah, we know in the abstract, that whole, because there's some indication that that was attention for him during seminary school. you know, do I go out and serve people or do I become an academic priest? How am I best able to serve people? That seems to be a question he had. I don't know if that worked it's way out. I'm sure the experience made it more concrete for him, I don't know, did he ever discuss any of that? Stringfellow would be a model for that,

AM: As you talk about, as Stringfellow's name comes up there's a vague recollection of having, at least Jonathan bringing his name up with us around the settlement house and maybe there was some discussions there. Ah, he certainly wouldn't have been passing out any of Stringfellow's stuff in the neighborhood.

L: Not at that point

AM: That wasn't certainly going to fly

NM: Now we at that time though, I just remembered having lots of books that we were reading and I don't know whether some of that began even in seminary, did it? James Baldwin's books and,

L: How about Malcolm Boyd Are You Running With Me Jesus?

NM: Malcolm Boyd, Malcolm Boyd was another. I think he was maybe someone in seminary. See I think that Alan had a certain amount of that tension himself in terms of the whole um, social gospel verses, you know, the um, the more ah, not social gospel I guess um, in fact, when Alan finally finished at the settlement house, his sense was that the church could have done more if they had had a plan. I mean they obviously didn't have a plan when he first came and so at that point he chose to go back to seminary, back to school to get a degree in community planning basically thinking in terms of that. So there was, so there was that tension that you were struggling with um, which I'm sure that, you know, we had, I remember sitting having conversations with Jon and Harb and I really couldn't tell you what they were but I know that we were all wrestling with, with,

AM: Well we were not only wrestling with that, I think, we were wrestling with the same issues that Jon was which was, we had come out of lily white America and here we were sitting in this ghetto and what does all of that mean? kind of thing um, and our assumptions, the assumptions that we found society making were often so erroneous um,

S: Such as?

AM: Well.....the black people don't care about their kids and they're totally irresponsible in that everybody on welfare is black and, and those kinds of assumptions um, and what we discovered, and I came into the ghetto with those kinds of assumptions ah, and I think I also discovered that anybody who showed up and said, "Well I'm not prejudice" was lying through their teeth because their whole white culture brought that with them and, and I think to this day, I have to fight against that. I mean I, you, it's very easy even after all this time just to fall back into it. So you really have to work at it and I think we, we found that and Jon found that and you really had to work against that, the system, the racism that had been built into us from day one. Ah, an example of that is if I went home to Cumberland and I would tell a story, my dad would say to me, "White or black?".....and I finally said to him, "Does it make a difference?".....and he never asked me the question again. But obviously it did (laughs). Um, the other interesting thing that I would do, which I guess was a really kind of a dirty trick in a way, I would go to many suburban parishes to tell a story to recruit tutors, to get money donated to our program and so forth and....and your on the horns of a dilemma in terms of using the people in the ghetto, if you will, to raise money by telling their story, to raise money so you could minister to them. That was always a little kind of dilemma for me.

L: It's like bringig out a poulsrty(?) shop for polio, supporting the person by the very fact that you're trying to help them.

AM: Correct, now, but one of the things I would do is all of

the examples I would use were all white families and of course the assumption of the audience was the opposite and would inevitably fall into the trap and say something about "Isn't awful about how all those black people do this" and I would just smile and say "All the examples were of white people" (laughs)

L: They must have hated you

AM: And so we were wrestling with that and Jon and Harb, you know, all I think many of the, I won't say all of the college students, I think some just came and went. But there were a core of college students, some of whom left college to come and work full-time at the settlement house um, that were wrestling with that. That the people, the poor people, the black people really did care. They really did love their kids. They weren't sure how to do it, they didn't have a lot of financial resources to provide for them um, but they would spend the rent money, the food money and everything else at Christmas time to buy the toys that the kids out in suburbia were going to get. I mean, this was,

NM: So I think, you know, to answer that question, I think that as Jon wrestled we wrestled. I mean we were in the middle and I'm thinking back at that time and I'm thinking this was a house in the midst of all of this, in the midst of all this turmoil of the 60s where people who were wrestling with issues could come and there was a safe place where they could function from and you didn't have the dangers that you have now in the cities, with the violence, with the guns, with the drugs um, and they could come and interact with people whom they had never been able to interact with before to see progress, to see accomplished things um, to see themselves as bringing rays of hope in. How much we really accomplished...we were there 5 years

L: Yeh, I wanted to ask a question pretty similar to that Bill is what, I mean if one of our students were sitting here right now, some 21 year old kid from Keene State College, there question would be why did you, it would go something like this, "Why did you put your career lives on hold by helping out these people and spending 5 years of your lives living in uncomfortable ah, dangerous circumstances? What was, why did you do it?" I know they'd ask that.

AM: Well, I mean, one answer was that as a priest in the episcopal church, one is under the authority of the bishop and so the bishop said "This is where you're going" um and so you said "okay" um,the other young man who came out of seminary with me and was assigned to the northern part of Providence rather than the southern part, I think he stayed for a year and a half to 2 years, didn't kind of do the same thing, didn't get into the same kind of ministry ah, for a variety of reasons and then left and became a curate someplace. So the question would be why didn't, after a couple of years, we bail out ah, and go, kind of follow the same route, I think it was because we felt we were doing something and it was exciting and things were happening. I mean we um, we were tutoring 60 kids one on one using tutors coming in from the suburbs, we were running a 6 week summer camp in the suburbs bussing the kids out to the suburbs um,

and there was a lot of kind of side benefits to that. I mean Barrington, Rhode Island ah, at least at that point in time, was a lily white, upper-middle class suburb and it was, that was the episcopal church that invited us to realte with them on a summer program and so we bussed our kids into Barrington and the rector of the parish made arrangements for us to use the Barrington Town Beach. Well the first time that bus pulled up at the Barrington Town Beach and our kids got off of it, the phone in town hall rang off the hook (laughs). You know, so we, in effect, we integrated the Barrington beach that summer.

L: Were you aware at the time you were really taking the fore front of social change in a real sense. Was something that you talked about saying "gosh we're the fore front"?

AM: No I really don't think so um,

L: But you were.

AM: Yeh

L: Looking back now

AM: Looking back on it. I mean the other part of what we did was we were involved in the settlement house ministry but we were also involved in community organization work and it was, that was a lot of social change. And I remember, I would do a lot of that and then the Tv people would come knocking at my door and so forth and I would just be out. I just didn't want to deal with that at all in terms of being on the evening news and so forth, so I would just duck it.

NM: I think to be honest too though, you have to look at the 2 of us personality wise. Um, I would describe myslef back then certainly as being a wonderful, wonderful codependent type of person. A person, I mean, what's my role and since I am a nurse that's what I chose to be, you know, you choose to go out and you're going to help people and you want to be needed and absolutley that's what that was and on top of it, you've got, you've got a structure that you're functioning within that's old and it's established and it's well, you're working, we weren't some pentacostal fringe group, we were part of the episcopal church of America and we had bishops coming to visit us. I mean, I remember Bishop Leon Williams from England coming to visit and soend time with us, I mean us, and where were at the time, in our 20s early 30s. I mean some of this was awesome in a way um, and we had, we had friends who were coming to help in the program who were dynamic individuals um, interested in lots of things. It was a very exciting time. I had 2 little babies at the time and I had activities going on all the time. Now how many women sitr at home with 2 little babies bored to death and looking for some adult to talk to, i mean I never lacked for adults to talk to. they were living upstairs, they were downstairs, they were in, they were out. Um, I look back at that time as being one of the most rewarding, exciting times and we met wonderful, wonderful people. Jonathan being one but lots of other wonderful people that we met.

S: Was any of that in a political context? I guess I'm following up on Larry's ah, question. I mean, did you discuss in 64, the election or did you discuss Kennedy or, was it all coming out of that real concrete experience or was it somehow also related to larger somewhat historical questions, political questions?

AM: I think for.....my sense is that Nanc and I were more narrowly focused. I also have a sense that when Jon came, our universe got expended, that he did bring in those larger national issues with him in some of those discussions. Um, and so I;m sure that some of that stuff got talked about on Saturday evenings or during Saturday with us or with others because Jon just kind of had that concern.

NM: But, you know, you also had, you had Gordon and what he brought and you had Mark Hopkins and his interests, you know, which were much wider. I mean, you had,

AM: Yeh, we had a wide spectrum of people um,

NM: Right

S: But your memory is that Jonathan was all ready politically engaged at that point. I mean it wasn't like he was coming in and, and completely had his eyes open to a new worlds or something.

AM: Not politically, I think he had his eyes open to the new world in terms of how the poor lived and who the poor were ah, but I think in terms of other issues um, he had all ready begun to kind of encounter some of them. One of the things that is in the back of my head to kind of bring up isthat once Jon went south then he became our connection with the whole civil rights movement because at that point in time, you really didn't have much going on in terms of civil rights in Providence. Well there was a little talk here and there but certainly nothing big going on. So that by Jon being in the south and sending us back information and us, we would ah, whatever the clippings were of the various marches and so forth, we kept a big bulletin board in the settlement house of all of what was happening in the south um, and I think that the um, the question came up, and I know myself in terms of, well do I go um, and I guess the answer to that was no I don;t um, although when the issue came up on the march on Washington, ah, i did make a decision to go to that and um, I remember, I just got the sense that nobody knew what was going to happen in Washington when everybody got there. There was a real sense of apprehension, at least certainly as you got on the bus, that whatever morning it was, as to was it going to blow up, was there going to be fighting in the streets of Washington or what, was it going to be a peaceful march. There was that kind of apprehension there um, (END OF SIDE ONE)

L: Christmas of 1963 and he all ready had almost a street awareness, where did he get that from?

S: See we don't know, he all ready had card so,

L.: We're really, we're still ???? I mean we're dealing with someone who went from VMI, graduated a valedictorian in 1961, won a Danforth to Harvard, attended there a semester and a half, dropped out, clenched and had a religious experience with the church of the Advent on Easter Sunday

when he decided he was going to become a minister.

S: Went back home

L: Went back home, dropped out of school, his sister was experiencing psychological problems, he worked a couple of places in Keene just to make some money, applied to the seminary and with the support of um, the pastor in Keene and the bishop enrolled in September of 63

S: And showed up,

L: And then showed up with this knowledge.

AM: With which knowledge now?

L: He seemed to have a savvy about, he didn't come in ringing his hands apparently saying "Okay what can I do here, do I do the dishes" he seemed to have really known what he was going to do.

S: He seemed to have some clinical awareness of national issues, I'm guessing.

AM: Yes I think

S: We don't know where that all comes from I guess.

L: Because there's no mention of it anyplace before except for an NAACP card and other conversations we've had with a lot of people.

AM: Which he wouldn't have picked up say at Harvard say when he was studying at Harvard.

L: I don't think he would have picked it up at Harvard.

S: Well it could be, could be, I mean that's

AM: Being in and around the Harvard community

S: Yeh, Well Bill what's his name

L: Schneider

S: Bill Schneider talks about that a bit, maybe just coming from Keene and coming from um, VMI out in the boonies in Virginia, that coming to Harvard and Cambridge must have been kind of eye opening for him, hearing a lot of things he probably had never heard of before um, just being in graduate school in Harvard I imagine has quite an effect. That's the one area that we kind of have, later turned him into a 60s kind of person.

AM: Well, then I think coming down into that whole Providence experience

NM: Put a face to the issue

AM: Yeh, would have then

NM: Now it's not an intellectual exercise, it's not ah, it's people, now I'm meeting people and he did realte to people so he would have, and I think very quickly, just like when he went south, you know, he very quickly became very involved. I mean, Harb would be an interesting one to talk with actually, if you could ever get hold of him because he spent those weekends, he traveled down and he was very diiferent and he had some very definite opinions about Jonathan and I think he felt Jonathan tended to be a little to emotional I think because he was such a reserved person that he would have a perspective based on having worn through those experiences with him.

L: There was, we have from one source that um, Jonathan cut Colsell(?) the writer, um, was the next person after Jonathan at a settlement house in Roxbury in Boston. Now when we interview Cosell, we're not sure yet, but do you know anything about that at all? Because that would have been an intro, if that happened in September and October and November of 63, which we don't know, ~~then would have been~~

because I found some articles looking through newspapers in 64, 65, John Nichols (?) got thrown out of a school in south, in Roxbury for reading blacks poetry to the students. They just tossed him out on his ear. So um, if he was where Jonathan had been, that, we're trying to understand why this happened. I mean maybe a bolt of lightening did hit Jonathan or maybe I don't know. We tend to look for causes here.

NM: Yeh, I think Jon kind of jumped in on both feet, you know, when he, when he got an idea nad got a concern, he tended to jump in and kind of looking at him at this point through Harb's eyes as I reflect back on it a little bit um, that he wasn't one of these people that sat back and thought about it and you know, if he got a conviction he jumped in. It would be like the religious experience. He would be that sort of a person who would have, he would be open to that sort of a thing um,

L: That's consistent with the way he was in jail. We talked with people who visited him in jail and he wsa running around abd boucing off the walls talking about it in this existential way, that is, here's a new experience that is absolutely real, that um, that's just as real as not being in jail. It was disconcerting to a couple of poeple that we interviewed, until they saw that Jonathan was um, was authentic. He wasn't just being dilatant about it.

S: Well, we better film, but I just had one other theory, anything personal you might, about private life, like just before he joined the seminary he had a lot of problems um, problems with his sister, problems with his father's death which he hadn't really dealt with openly and fully at that point. he was really had to go see counselors and so forth in that year of 62 and he has a history a lot of times of picking out people to talk to um, sort of father figures here and there all through his life he seems to have done that. I don't know if there's any private side to Jonathan that you can recall. You talked about the public issues but,

AM: I....my sense is that I wouldn't have been one of thsoe father figures. Now maybe if he was sitting here, he would say differently, he would see it differently. Um,and I guess one of the reasons that I say that is that as I look back on my, that period of history, I also was a perpetual motion machine. I mean I never stopped um, yooou know, Nanc sayd she was surrounded by adults, she's correct but often times that adult wasn't me. I was, you know, upstairs, downstairs but never in the middle (laughs) um, and so I was always going, always relating, there was always somebody else to talk to and so forth. So i'm not sure that um.....that he and I would have had a lot of time alone to do that kind of thing.

NM: He would play with our sons. I think, I remember he and Harb bought Andrew a sheep skin when he was born and they bought him a set of blocks at Christmas time. they more or less when they came down became a part of our family I would say um, and....we would talk probably more about the individuals that we were coming in contact with and you

know, share our sense, it was really more of that. I don't really think that um, Jon's personal, any struggles that he might have been going through, I mean, he seemed to really be quite comfortable in that setting and seemed to um, well just that, be comfortable and ah, so I would say more, that it was more family talk, more um, sharing of experiences and we did enjoy some commonalities. You know, the music was one thing and um,

S: You both like classical music?

NM: yeh, yeh

L: He didn't like rock and roll much

NM: We didn't either (laughs)

L: I'm going to go ahead and use the bathroom so just keep going

S: We'll take a couple of shots

L: Want me to turn it off

S: Yeh, we'll take a break (TAPE GOES OFF).

S: Yeh preconceptions and what it's like for white to come into this.

AM: Oh, okay, okay, are you going to ask questions or am I just going to talk.

S: Yeh you can just look at me

L: Just like we did before, I'll just be over here

NM: (laughing) pretend you're not there.

L: Let me make sure everything is working all right.

AM: How do you end up shooting in 16mm with, with all the gadget of video and so forth.

S: Yeh, well this is, nothing beats 16mm. I mean they can't and I a lot of TV shows won't take it on video um, but they really want a 16mm print of it. The quality is that much better.

L: Yeh, it just looks great

S: It's got more detail and

L: We can enter it in festivals if we want to. European distribution if we're interested. We don't know where this will go, the British, British and Germans and Japanese for example are very interested in things of American um, civil rights. social issues. And so we'd like Jonathan's story to be told all over the place. We've both made films before, we never don'e anything as ambitious as this and I don't want to say we're in over our heads but sometimes

AM: Sorting it all out heh

L: yeh

NM: I do think though if you wanted to find

S: Couple of things I'm going to ask you right now if you'd think about what it was like for you and probably Jonathan coming from an all white (BEEP) kind of community with you;re ideas and how that worked out as you actually had the experience of working with the poor and black people

L: Rolling

S: So, take your time

AM: Okay, Um, I think coming into the ghetto for the first time as both Jonathan and I did and Nancy as well, um, we came in with a certain amount of racism built into us ah, we viewed blacks as different as us in a variety of ways and I think we made certian assumptions about how they functioned verses how we functioned. It isn't until we got into the

ghetto that I found and I'm sure Jon found as well that the people in the ghetto were just like us um, they loved their kids, um, they were concerned about what was happening in the neighborhoodthey would love, they would fight, they would have all the emotions that everybody else had ah, and they were especially concerned about what was happening in their lives with their kids and often times they just didn't have the where with all, the financial resources to provide those things that they really wanted to provide for the families. And I think that ah, that was an awakening certainly that I had and I'm sure Jon had it as well in terms of looking at that and interacting with the families um, that he came in contact with um, pretty much through the kids as he, we interacted with the kids in various afternoon programs, you know, whatever and then we would go and um, or he and Harb would go and visit the parents and talk with the parents and so forth and get into the houses and see what was there and um, and find that most of them were well kept up and clean and neat and so forth and counter the image of kind of what you came into the ghetto with.

S: Okay thank you

L: Cut

S: Good, great

L: That's a good introduction in Jonathan's introduction

S: What's the next take about?

S: Ah, Nancy's going to talk about ah,

L: Oh good

NM: Now I don;t know how to get you there as far as, you know, his relationship with our family

S: No I meant with um

NM: Oh that one family of this youngster, yeh

S: Yeh

AM: You need this

S: No

NM: Um, tell me again then, you would like my emphasis to be more on

S: On how he related to this family, um, how this came to him as a um, as a reality that he was dealing with. I'm trying to think how you expressed it the last way. You said something about he might have, maybe we can begin in this way, he might have come in here with certain political awareness but, it wasn't made concrete

NM: Oh, okay and put a face to

S: that sort of thing (BEEP BEEP) and then maybe you could relate that to for example, when he met this young man

NM: This particular family

L: Rolling

S: Take your time

NM: As I think about Jonathan I think that um, that when he first came to us that he may have intellectually understood about the problems that existed in um, the whole atmosphere related to the racial situation. I think that what happened when he came to south Providence was that he was able to then put a face to what he had been learning about what he had become aware of perhaps on an intellectual basis. Um, through working with the children and visiting families um, I think of this one particular family, I have a picture here

of this youngster, this would have been during summer camp ah, but he would have, this was a youngster in his family who attended the parish church that Jonathan was assisting in ah, as well as the settlement house and um, it would have given him an experience of an intact family. there was a father and mother and 3 children and really quite ah, a functional family. Nice people and I think that those type of experiences ah, would have been valuable to Jon to come to see the reality of families in that area, black families. this family in particular had their own home that they owned on a street just down the road from is and the children were quite active in programs so he would have gotten to know them quite well.

S: Okay thank you, cut

L: Great

S: Okay

L: Anything else, I hate to sit here with all this film in here, we could use it up. Anything else you want to,

AM: Well I guess I was thinking whether we want to say anything about um, Jon's perhaps influence on the college students that were in and out.

S: That's a good idea yeh

AM: Let me just think for a second, oh boy.....

S: How about influence in general, college students, the young that he was dealing with, the families or

L: Or that enthusiasm, you mentioned that he seemed to have a hallmark, not to cram too much in there

AM: Yeh um, well ask the question and we'll see where it goes (laughs) I mean you can always edit it right?

L: That's true.....Well we're not getting any reflection off the glasses, thanks to my expert lighting..

S: Nice and quiet with the hood on today too.

L: I know I should use that more often

S: Okay, so we're going to think about Jonathan's (BEEP BEEP BEEP) influence on people he worked with, the college students ah, his ah, people who came into the house or the church.

AM: Now do we need to give some background to that?

S: No

AM: No okay.....

L: We're all set

S Yeh

AM: In terms of Jonathan's influence on the number of college students we had at the settlement house at various times and we could have as many as 8 or 10 students from Rhode Island School of Design or Brown and Pembroke around on a weekend um, I think Jon's enthusiasm, the questions that he was asking himself in terms of what's happening in society and how does this relate to me um, he related those kinds of issues as well to the college students um, and I think he had a significant impact on a number of students in a variety of ways and I think in the course of the settlement house's history, we probably had at least a half a dozen college students go on to seminary and become priests at one time or another and I think Jon was instrumental with at least in opening up their minds and engaging them in some meaning for dialogue and getting them

to think about what they were doing within the community. you know, what were the issues involved between the gospel and ministering in the social context and it was that kind, that dichotomy I guess, or that, I think we all wrestled with ah, how did jesus fit into all of thta. I'm not sure that we ever answered that question ah, but it was a question I think we began to at least ask ourselves and as I look back on my experiences there ah, I don't think I had a real good answer for that at that point either. But it was there as an issue ah, for all of us to, how do you relate the gospel to the ah, to the poverty, to the suffering, to the needy that are living in an area such as south Providence um, and Jonathan obviously took those questions one step further when he went south and in going south he then became our link in south Providence with the whole civil rights movement and we would keep in contact with him, keep a bulletin board of what was happening in the south and I think this helped the people in our neighborhood to become more plugged in and aware of just what the whole civil rights movement was all about um, and I think that was very beneficial, to all fo us.

S: That was very good

L: I think so too, good last take. I think that's it

S: Yeh

END OF INTERVIEW