

Gene Felch

5/21/14  
Det. L. BENAVIST

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Did you read Eagle's book by the way? He's going to be in Keene.

I haven't yet. I have such a pile of stuff by my bed that I haven't read that <sup>HAVEN'T</sup> even bought the book.

Our focus is different than Eagle's. Eagle's is focussing more on the legalistic implications of Jon's life. We've got a lot of that in there.

Last summer I interviewed an ACLU lawyer, Charles Morgan, about five days after Jonathan's death brought suit with Mrs. Daniels against the state of Alabama and to get them to integrate the juries along the basis of race and gender and won the case but that didn't happen <sup>TILL</sup> to February long after Coleman was found innocent by friends of his. So we —

Is it true that he was deputized immediately after the shooting.

That's what the FBI said <sup>IN THEIR REPORT</sup> before. But he didn't have a license to carry a weapon and the only reason he could have a license to carry a weapon was if he had been operating as a law enforcement officer in the <sup>COUNTY</sup> company but the sheriff denied that he was a deputy because if he had been he would have killed Jon under <sup>COLOR</sup> cover of law which would have been a really serious offense. Quite different from what happened.

Even though is was quite extraordinary and were pretty smart people.

6 But And of course you're probably aware of this, the following summer I think it was the following summer, there was a murder in Keene where a black man killed a white man and clearly the black man killed the white man and he was acquitted in Cheshire County Superior Court and I don't remember the details of it but it's an interesting contrast and well I think if you went to the *Sentinel* and went into the morgue.

We've got the *Sentinel* at the college. Do you remember any names?

①

No I don't but there were so few murders. When I grew up in Cheshire County I would doubt that there was a murder a month in the state. It's nearly a murder a week in the county.

**There are a lot of people getting bumped off. How did that resolve itself?**

He was acquitted and I wish I'd remember the details but I just remember the event. I'll get a student on it.

But I would think it's sufficiently rare that just doing a search under murder would find it.

Well you know in one of the interviews done in '66 Sally says that she and Jon were talking and Jonathan said "You know Gene and I used to go to the movies at the Latchis Theatre, a black man there named George Miller and George always wore a suit and he would always greet us at the door and address us, "Good evening Mr. Felch. Good evening Mr. Daniels" and we always greeted him, "Hello, George." Sally says that in the '66 interview. I realize now that was pretty presumptuous and racist. <sup>AFUS.</sup> That's an interesting observation that Jonathan would make.

— Well that was the anecdote I was going to tell you, because I can tell you where that originated. It was the summer that I got married it was a few weeks before the wedding and Jon came to our, I was staying at my parents' house at the time and Jon came one night. And I think he didn't get there until 9 or 10:00 and I remember that night my father coming to my room at 2 or 3:00 in the morning and saying could you guys save a few of the world's problems until tomorrow. And but one of the things that we discussed that night was that very thing. We were so damned proud that we didn't have any prejudice and we were white northern liberals. Now I consider myself to be a conservative and I want to define the term. A conservative is one whose basic principles are respect for his fellow human being and respect for the



environment. And so certainly liberals could accept that as a working definition and many who call themselves conservatives are probably never had it occur to them. But at any rate we were proud of being quite northern liberals in quotes at that time. But we talked about and we would say we know a black man and he's nice. But we spoke of George Miller who was a gentleman a fine gentleman, and the fact that he called us Mr. Felch and Mr. Daniels and we called him George. And we realized that we had he been white even though he was the really the ticket taker at the theatre, there's a lot about George's life that is not known, but we probably would have called him Mr. Miller if he'd been white. And, but it never occurred to us that that was a prejudicial thing. And so I think we have two kinds of prejudice really, we have the unwitting prejudice and we have the intentional prejudice.

Do you recall any other incidents <sup>LATERS</sup> of ~~his~~ or anything else with Miller.

We tried to talk with Ruth Miller. I talked with her on the phone about three years ago and she won't.

Ruth Miller?

His daughter.

No. Gracie.

Grace? I thought it was Ruth.

I know of only one daughter that being Gracie and after my father died Gracie came and. No her mother Thelma came and George had had a pocket watch that he treasured and he had wanted my father to have that. I guess it was Thelma ~~that~~ came and gave that watch to my father and after my father died and before my mother died, we were going through his things and my mother said that Gracie Miller ought to have this watch. So, I somehow got in touch with her and I think I know how I got in touch with her <sup>TOO, I GOT IN TOUCH WITH HER</sup> through George Hanna who had been George's attorney and so she came to see me one day or I went to see her. She lives in New York and is in Keene rarely and.

She has property in Keene.

Yes and so anyway we got together and I gave her <sup>BACK</sup> her father's watch.

I spoke with Ruth and asked her about her father and Jonathan and she refused to be interviewed but she did say that when Jonathan died, her father said knowing the south and knowing Jonathan it doesn't surprise me he was killed. So I asked if she would say it on a taperecorder and she said no she didn't want to be interviewed.

Well Jon wasn't surprised either. In May of the year that he died I had to go to Boston on business, this is probably in the Snyder interview, you've probably heard it. But so I contacted Connie to find out what Jon was up to and I said was really hoping he'd be home for the summer and she said, "Look, <sup>HERE'S</sup> ~~he's~~ how you get in touch with him and why don't you try to talk him into coming home for the summer because I would like him here." And so I got in touch with Jon and I was going to be in Boston for two days so he said spend the night at ETS and so we I got there at some point and he and I some <sup>OTHERS</sup> seminarians went out and had <sup>PIZZA +</sup> ~~pitchered~~ beer and talked and one of the things Jon talked about that night was the fact that he had Volkswagon Beetle that I think was loaned to him by somebody down there and he said that car gets followed it's getting known and I <sup>HAVE</sup> ~~had~~ to switch cars and so he was aware that he was known by his adversaries and that he was at risk and yet the results of the evening was probably that he came closer to convincing me to take some time off and go to Alabama with him then me convincing him to come back to New Hampshire for the summer.

That was in about May or June of 1965.

That would have been May of 1965.

Because he did come back to Keene twice. Once right after the march from Selma to Montgomery and I think he drove back with Judith later in March and then came home in May, stayed here for about a month



and went back. I guess part of the time he went to an Episcopal weekend.

Did Judith come with him when he came in May?

No. She went back to St. Louis.

I have a recollection of Jon coming of seeing Jon about that time.

Well maybe I spoke too soon for all I know she drove him up and then drove back. But he kept..... her little Volkswagon. When he went down there, Stokely Carmichael had a 1965 Plymouth Fury red with a special toggle switch to turn off the tail lights and he and Jonathan used to use <sup>THAT</sup> so they could turn off the tail lights in case they were being followed.

Well, by the late '60s or early '70s there was more progress being made in the legal arena on civil rights. The American Nazi Party was just about dead. I happened to be at the home of the Arlington Virginia Medical Examiner the weekend that George Lincoln Rockwell was shot in Arlington, Virginia. His son was a college classmate of mine. I think I have to call him tonight. And but the American Nazi Party was dead. The Ku Klux Klan appeared to be all but dead and one of my perceptions at that time was we're finally rising above this kind of thing now. I guess to look at it in 1994 if you say what disappoints have you had from your own experience with your little brief framework of history the fact that it didn't die is one of the shames of this time. I think I know this is a naive view, but having kind of watched economics and other things prejudice and violence rise when times are bad.

That's true.

It's because people say, "Ain't my fault." I remember a banker I worked with for three or four years in Washington, D.C., he and I served together on a committee of the American Bankers Association, and this guy was from Tennessee and I remember one day we were discussing a particularly tacky problem this group was an amazing

group. Had diverse representation, geographically through the country and by type and size of institution and we were supposed to reach consensus on issues that were sometimes <sup>VERY</sup> ~~really~~ difficult. And I remember Kim getting up in the middle of a discussion and deciding he's going to go and have a drink rather than sit there.

"Damn it! I'm a national banker. I'm a Democrat and I'm an Episcopalian. None of this is any of my problem." And I think that that reflects <sup>AN</sup> ~~on the~~ attitude, whatever the problem, they're not mine. If they're not mine they must be somebody else's and that somebody else must be different from me. Let's look around and point out whose different. Well obviously people whose color and facial features are significantly different from ours are different and it must be their fault and it's unfortunate. And I think unfortunately one of the problems we are looking at today also have their roots in some of the alleged solutions to those problems that were developed in the '60s.

I've heard other people say that as well. In looking through Jonathan's yearbook I saw a picture of an African American woman named Sarah O'Neill. Did you know any of the O'Neill family?

No. I didn't. I may be wrong but I don't think there were any African Americans or Blacks whatever is the politically correct way to say it in my high school class.

Was that the same as <sup>CARLTON</sup> ~~Scarlet~~ Russell?

Yes. '56. Jon was '57.

We talked to Carl. He just recollected a couple of times when you and Jonathan went out. .... the evening which is very interesting. You were <sup>part</sup> of that group that got underneath Jonathan's crawl space where he set up an altar.

No.

That must have been younger. That was Bob Perry.

Yes.

**We found that altar, I filmed it. We crawled under.**

No. I never saw that. I think that I was probably 11 or 12 when I met Jonathan.

**Was that in Junior High School?**

No, that was. I'll tell you how we met. Originally we were both involved in something called the Keene Children's Theatre.

**Oh yes.**

Jon was primarily an actor. I did a little acting but I was the lights and sound guy.

You probably at some point been able to interview Susan <sup>OTT</sup>~~Oak~~ Faulkner.

**No. Is she still alive?**

I don't know but I could find out.

**Could you? I'd like to talk to her.**

She is an amazing lady. She would have some interesting recollections of Jon. I'll try

**Do you think she might still be in the Keene area? We did find a picture. We found two pictures in the Sentinel of you guys in plays.**

**One was called The Land of Magic.**

I was the sultan.

**And Jonathan in blackface was the magician.**

Yes.

**And another picture I don't know if you were in this production. It was of Huckleberry Finn.**

No, but I remember Jon in that.

**We found that picture and Wayne Miskelly was Huck. Jon was Tom Sawyer.**

And I think that the his participation in that play was probably more of an influence on him than the other. I remember him being very fond of it and being and alluding to it occasionally. ✓



**In what way?**

Yes. Jon had a very fine sharp sense of humor. And he also as you know had a amazing command of the English language and he put the two together often and had a lot of fun with it.

**Did you know the Johnston family at all, Dr. Johnston and the children?**

I knew them by sight. I knew who they were and where they lived but I didn't know them on a personal basis. I'm trying to think if the Johnston story came out after Jonathan's death. Did it not or was it before?

**The book *Lost Boundaries* was published in 1947.**

So it was. I didn't remember whether I knew that story growing up or not but that was also an interesting story.

**You would have been 11 years old when the book came out in Keene in *the scenic* theatre. Do you remember going to see it?**

Not off hand.

**Jonathan talk about it at all?**

The film per se no that I can recall. I guess I would there's nothing that I remember about that film or the Johnstons that I remember in connection with Jonathan. Now I guess given his interests and such.

**Well your dad mentioned he said that he knew he got this from Jonathan or from Dr. Daniels but the subject of the Johnstons was discussed at the dinner table.**

Yes.

But Emily had *NO* a recollection because she was just very young. We have a nice picture with Dr. Daniels and Dr. Johnston standing next to each other.

I believe I can't remember when *Dr* Daniels came to Keene.

**'38 or '39**



Okay. But he also was a gentle man and he would have been intolerant of the intolerance toward Dr. Johnston. I had my appendix out when I was 19 and I woke up one morning and I had a terrible pain in my stomach about six o'clock and at ten thirty they were removed<sup>- 126 IT</sup>. And Dr. Daniels was not our family doctor but he heard I was there in the operating room and he was a very busy guy, he didn't have time to do this, but he came into the operating room and proceeded to describe the operation to me because they'd given me a spinal because he knew I would be interested. And he was a very generous man and a very compassionate man and a very hard worker.

**Where did you live at that time?**

I lived near the Wheelock School, you know where the Westwood Nursing Home is? If you walked straight through that building into the field in back and continued you would come to a little court, Adams Court. There's a brown house on the south side of that street right in the middle and that was where I lived.

**The hospital was practically right across the street from you.**

Yes.

**Keene State must have been very, very small.**

It was but it was I think still a school of substance. Lloyd Young was president.

**You were friends with his son, weren't you?**

Yes and Max was a<sup>6000</sup> friend of mine and was sometimes involved in groups with Jon but not always. There were several of us that were friends where the friendship was based on certain interests. Max played the trumpet, Carlton Russell played the piano and organ, and I think at some point took up saxophone but he played the <sup>6000</sup>soosaphone in the high school band. And there was a fellow by the name of Vern Coleburn and John Eaton and

**John Eaton would he be Dean Eaton's father?**

No. John Eaton was a classmate of ours and he has since died and well there was several. Max would be with that group when we were playing music. Jonathan

would apt to be with the group when it was singing. Jonathan, Carlton, Gary Howard, and I had a barbershop quartet and one of the things we did was do a entertainment program for the Rotary Club and

Friendships were more based on <sup>GROUP ACTIVITIES</sup> ~~proclivities~~ in a sense which probably cross class lines.

Definitely.

Because we interviewed Henry Parkhurst. What's really interesting Gene is that it's been my experience being brought up in a lower middle class family in Buffalo, New York that the people further down the economic scale tend to be far more aware of class distinctions than most people. When we <sup>INTERVIEWED PHYSICIANS</sup> ~~of~~ Keene, <sup>IN</sup> ~~there's~~ <sup>THEY SAY</sup> no class distinction.

Even down the library, people like Carol and Henry and others like that were very aware of it.

Yes. There's no question that there was and have you interviewed Tony Redding. Can't find him. Don't know quite where he is.

I think I can find him for you.

If you could find Tony —

— But do you know his mother's name?

— No.

— His mother's name is Ruth Wade. I think she is in Keene. I think she's in the phone book. Did you ever hear of Ozzie Wade?

That name hasn't come up.

It wouldn't have in this context but it might have because he was a nationally known radio personality who broadcast over WKNE and woke people up in the morning for thirty or forty years. And there is a subject for you, Ozzie. Tony's mother married Ozzie and the last time I heard, I haven't talked with Tony in several years, every once and awhile I think of it and I think I've got to find him and talk him but the last

I heard he was in Vermont. Now, Tony's family was not near the socio-economic high end of that spectrum in I think there was a diversity of the group and I think maybe the diversity of the group helped us all recognize that the essential properties of a person were more important than the accidental.

Would you put yourself in the same socio-economic group as Jonathan's family, <sup>which</sup> were ~~they~~ lower, the same?

Hard to say.

what your father did for a living.

My father was a banker.

That would be about the same in Keene, I would think.

Connie was a very social person. My mother was not. So they really didn't travel in the same circles. I think there were many family influences that would be the same in terms of values and education and the kinds of things <sup>they wanted you</sup> ~~you want~~ to learn.

My recollection in the '50s is many of my friends were dentists, some were in projects where there were no fathers at all. It was really a screwed kind of pattern but it didn't matter to us because, like in your case, the interest groups are what helped us get together.

Tony was one of the people and if you wanted to take this group of maybe eight or ten people who shared various interests. I was close to Max but our shared interest was science. Carlton, Tony, Jon and I were often talk about theology or philosophy and things of that nature. And certainly I can see our views, our individual views all of us changing over the years. And so there was this superset of subsets of people.

Now you were not a Congregationalist?

I was a Catholic and as you may know from interviews with my folks, Jon was interested in religion broadly and I think that my mother was one of the first people he talked with a lot about Catholicism. And in fact I remember <sup>would</sup> ~~he~~ discussed books



with her that I had not read and that sometimes their conversation would go over my head.

Did she mention titles of books? Do you think there is a chance that after these many years it might come back so that we could know what he read?

I can remember two right away.

I can mention *The Chalice, The Robe*, that book had a tremendous influence on him <sup>THE CHAIN</sup> by Paul Welman about a young Episcopal priest that was in the mythical town of Jericho Kansas. A priest, a young intense man who comes to save the social breaches <sup>THAT'S</sup> occurring in the wealthy Episcopalians and the poor of that parish. He really liked that book. I am sure there are others.

See Jon was interested in the church from the time I first met him. The church whatever church that might be but in the beginning it was the Congregational Church.

**The church of his parents.**

Yes. And he thought that the ministry might be his career as far back as I can remember <sup>Him -</sup> But his reasons changed. In the early time when he was thinking about this he liked the liturgy and the music because of his love of music and language he liked the mythology of the church. He was just beginning to understand that in addition to the mythology every religion has a theology that it was trying to deal with and understand that. And he liked the role of the minister in the community.

**The church about how broad would you define that?**

Yes. Now later so that the social aspect of the church was one of the things that attracted him to the church. Now later the social aspect of the church was also something that attracted him to the church but it was the social aspect in a totally

different meaning. Not the role of the minister in the community but rather the role of the church in creating a fair, just, Christian society.

Where do you suppose he made that leap? His life experiences? Or VMI?

Oh. Well he hated VMI.

I've copies of letters he sent <sup>you</sup> where that's pretty clear. "I hate this place, the rat race."

Hell hole he used to call it. I remember him <sup>DATELINE</sup> ~~writing~~ <sup>11</sup> a letter hell such and such. And there was a weekend, well I mentioned this college roommate in Arlington, Virginia whose home I was visiting at that time of Lincoln Rockwell's assassination. Well Jon called me one night which was very rare and said I hate this place. I've got to get out of here. I said look I'm going to Washington this weekend with John Juddson, why don't you come meet us there? So he did and he got out of VMI whatever time he got out of VMI and took a bus to Washington and we met him at 9:00 at night. We went out and had pizza and beer and talked all night. Went to church the next morning and he had to be at VMI

Which church by the way?

Probably was a Catholic Church. And Jon had to be at VMI at 6:00 pm or he was in deep trouble. And so we decided the only way he could get there was that we would drive him and we drove from Arlington to Roanoke and we delivered Jon at the gates of VMI at 5:59. And then we turned around and drove back to Philadelphia. But I used to kid him, I said <sup>11</sup> boy, some guys will go to great lengths just to get a pizza and a beer. <sup>18</sup> Now we've heard many different <sup>VARIATIONS</sup> ~~reasons~~ of why Jonathan went to VMI.

They say he did it because of discipline. Some people say it was his parents idea, <sup>NOT</sup> his own. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Well he told me when he picked VMI which was a surprise, that he was going there because he felt he needed the discipline. At least at that time that was very clear in

his mind and within 90 days he was pretty damn sure he didn't need so much discipline.

Do you know what just arrived at my house in the mail from VMI was Jonathan's uniforms.

Really.

Colonel Keith Gibson, Curator of the VMI Museum, <sup>was here</sup> October and I invited him to look at our materials and so forth. I took him on a Jonathan Daniels tour of Keene if you know what I mean. I think he wants to go to the school. I better call him. Slender, tight, Jonathan must have been 5'9".

I would say that he was a little taller than I, 2 or 3 inches probably and was quite trim and I was thinking of this the other day when I was listening to all the stuff about the news about the Citadel, and I assumed from that report that VMI must now be coed.

It hasn't happened yet. They're still fighting about it.

Well maybe VMI is not publicly funded. I thought it was.

What they are trying to do is give the solution would be to pay for a young woman to go to another school. They are really doing all. You know something I have mixed feelings about this.

I do too.

My daughter went to a girl's prep school in Brookline, Mass. I think it gave her confidence. Not brow beaten down by guys yelling. Let them find their way.

The greatest strength of this country and it's greatest weakness is its pluralism. Now they are saying. And under a pluralistic system one has choices, but the government is now saying there are <sup>CERTAIN</sup> choices we no longer going to allow to have. You may not go



to an all male school, you may not go to all female school, you may not go to an all black school, you may not go to an all white school.

**You still could but they are not going to fund it.**

Yes and they are trying to arrange everything in such a way that without federal funding you don't exist.

**It's getting that way.**

So we go back to the '60s and one of the cries of the '60s was power to the people. And it sounded wonderful. My perception of it looking back today is that they weren't saying power to the people, they were simply saying power to the government to do what we want. And in fact I still agree with the notion of power to the people but I don't believe it comes about by giving government more authority and responsibility.

**That would fit in with a conservative ethos ~~church~~.**

Yes

(BREAK)

*GENE* I'll tell you of a book I read ten years or so ago and it was written by a Jesuit in a particular point in this book he refers to somebody he has known as a holy man and given what had preceded this it surprised me a little. So I went to the dictionary and look up the word and I find it interesting thinking about it since we have a word "whole" which means whole, complete. We have a word whole. We have "hole" which means something that isn't complete, it's got a hole in it. And the almost what is the word for those antonyms. Words with opposite meaning. We have the word Holy which is spelled as if it were derived from the word "hole" but in fact is derived from the word "whole."

**Oh I see. To be complete.**

To be complete. So what is a holy person. Complete. Why do they speak of having the patience of a saint. How do you have patience by being complete. I have somewhere on a wall, some friends of mine brought me a wall trivet from Israel that says on it

"Shalom" in English, Arabic, and Hebrew. And I asked them I said, "Doesn't it mean, does it have a meaning similar to our word peace in the sense of a peaceful person." And they said, "Yes. But it also connotes completeness." Why do I bother you with all this because I think that Jon was a holy person in that literal sense <sup>OF THE WORD,</sup> He was a complete, whole integrated diverse person. Not in the sense of somebody being pious, which is the more common understanding of the word holy.

Was he ~~this way~~ <sup>THAT WAY?</sup> from your earliest recollections or did he become ~~this~~ <sup>that</sup>?

Well, there is a principle in metaphysics being is the process of becoming. I never really understood this until I started working on this house. Yes I would say he was but it wasn't a static thing. It was a dynamic thing with him as I think it is with everybody.

So looking at it from that point of view, some of the signature events of his journey might <sup>BEGIN</sup> ~~be built~~ with the death of his father.

yes. It would.

In fact if there's a flaw in Eagles' book, it's that Eagles emphasizes Connie over Phil in the shaping of Jonathan's personality and that's not my reading. I think she was important extremely important, but she is not who he emulated, <sup>DON'T</sup> I believe.

I would agree with you and I'm going to go a step further. I would say most people didn't know Connie before Jon died.

Can you explain that a little bit? I heard the words but —

In other words I don't mean most people who knew Connie but you didn't know Connie before Jon died.

So if you knew Connie, you knew her after Jon died?

May have. I don't know whether Bill went back. Wasn't Winifred there with Connie the night Jon died? We haven't talked to Winifred yet. Because Connie was playing bridge and Theresa <sup>ROBERTS</sup> ~~Robertson~~ was one of the people. I can't remember who else. But



I would not only disagree with Charles Eagles on this, I would say that Jonathan influenced Connie's development. Connie changed after Jon died.

**She joined a charismatic group at St. Bernard's church?**

She became very eccumenical. Which was not, let's go back to the '50s in Keene, NH. Now I grew up with the experience of some prejudice because I was Catholic. That was not something that a young ~~man~~ person growing up today would experience, I don't think. And certainly the degree of prejudice that I experienced because I was Catholic was minor compared to what many people had experienced. This was more <sup>A</sup> social thing than a religious thing. The Protestants were the ones who settled this country and eventually they built factories and they hired the French, the Irish, and the Italians and the Polish who were Catholics to come work in the factories. And so it certainly wasn't a theological basis for the prejudice even though sometimes they would say they were Papists, they are loyal to the Pope and they are not loyal to the President. But there was a social stratification based on religion. More than once I had the impression that, I've never said this before, publicly anyway, that Connie was not terribly excited about Jon's friendship with me because I was Catholic.

**How did that manifest itself to you? Or was it just a feeling?**

It was a just a feeling. There were certainly specific instances but that's forty years ago and my wife says I have a good memory but I'm not going to try. Carol Jenkins, (Sip & B) - Pete Jenkin's... <sup>As time went on Connie and I became friends and</sup>

**So you continued to drop around and see her?**

Yes as a matter of fact two nights before she died. Connie died was it late December or early January?

I think it was December of '84.

yes. So it was just a few days before she died. It wasn't Christman Eve but it was <sup>the night</sup> before Christmas Eve.

The same time that her husband had died.



Yes. My children and I and three or four other friends went to Connie's house Christmas caroling and Connie had a bad cold and she said I would invite you in but I've a terrible cold and but she did invite one of us in and that was my son Jonathan because she had a present for him and.

**Were you invited in as well?**

No. Just my son that night. But I mentioned earlier that the time actually Connie came with Jonathan when Sally and I were married which was in Pennsylvania. And Jonathan would have been best man except that we were married in the Catholic Church and I wasn't marrying a Catholic but I certainly couldn't have a Protestant for best man. But we did pull a little fast one, we asked Jonathan rather than the priest to give the invocation at the reception and of course he did a marvelous job. I imagine. That's quite a drive must have been a pretty good committed friendship. Connie went along. Emily I take it didn't. She was married and living in New York City at the time.

Yes.

**That was in the summer of '64 wasn't it?**

Yes it was.

Jonathan during that summer worked at the Willard State Psychiatric Institute in Willard, New York for twelve weeks. I've been there, I've interviewed three people on that program, I found them by luck and fishing through their archives found two folders full of random pictures just in files. I found this beautiful 8 x 10 of all the members of the group taken in August of '64 and there's Jonathan. Boy was I glad to find that picture.

Now did Jonathan spend one summer there or two?

Just one.

Did he ever go back there at any time to work to your knowledge?

No not that I can find out. No.

Let me talk about that a little bit. Because you asked earlier about his decision to go into VMI and what affected it and I don't think he ever wanted to be a military officer.

85% of the graduates at VMI <sup>DO NOT</sup> go on into the military.

Tony Reddington went to Norwich University, full scholarship and Tony was bright as hell and Tony was the student commandant of the corps which surprised us all because the requires a leadership that we hadn't seen in Tony. He was also valedictorian or salutatorian. During his senior year he was walking down the hall in his dormitory and a student was cleaning a gun and the gun went off and the bullet went through the dormitory room door and through Tony. They took him to Bellows Falls. No they took him to a local hospital and transferred him to Mary Hitchcock thinking that he wouldn't make it alive to Mary Hitchcock. And Tony was therefore two or three months and he said he had tremendous respect for the surgeons who worked on him and of course he pulled through. He then got involved in Catch 22. Injury was sufficient that they decided that he could not receive a military commission. He would have otherwise upon graduation entered the service as a <sup>SECOND</sup> lieutenant I guess. They then turned around and were going to draft him as a PFC.

That's really rotten. Where was he hit?

Bullet went in one side and out the other.

What kind of weapon?

It was a 45.

He's lucky he is alive.

Very lucky to be alive.

What did they do to the kid that did that?

I don't know. I don't remember that. I guess I was not particularly concerned with that.

**Did Jonathan know all about this?**

Oh yes.

**It must have happened in '63 or something like that.**

I wrote Jon a poem which I wish I could find because I know he returned it to me. It was the longest poem in the English language. It was typed on a roll of adding machine tape. And I remembered he kept it and gave it back to me several years later. This was when I was at Villa Nova and he was at VMI. At any rate he went to VMI not to become a military officer and there's no question in my mind that that decision was because that which you've heard before he felt he needed the discipline. He talked to me about it in enough depth. I don't remember the details but I remember the strong impression that this was why he was doing that crazy thing. At some point during his time at VMI he made the decision that he wanted to go to Harvard and get a master's degree in English and probably teach. And my recollection is that he did in fact spend some time at Harvard.

**Almost two semesters. His sister's psychiatric difficulties together with his mother's financial difficulties and his own growing disinterest and application.**

Some of the orders of events are out of whack in my mind. It was after that that he went to Westbrook, the hospital? Was it after or before that?

**Well he left Harvard in 1962 came back to Keene worked at a couple of jobs realizing now that his interest in the priesthood. Entered ETS one year and three months later, September '63. And in the summer of '64 between his first and second year, went to Westbrook State Hospital.**

Okay.

WILKINSON



So he Harvard seems to have been a turning point for him in terms of his need to clarify his thinking. Yes I want to serve my fellow man in fact he talks a couple places about going to church <sup>WESTBROOK SYNOD</sup> in 1962 at the Church of the that's when he realized.

I remember that for some reason. I see too the Harvard time as a transitional time. But I also see that him at Westbrook as Willard. I'm going to get it right sooner or later. I also see that time as instrumental in. See he developed a perception of Christ and Christian living that probably flows if not from completely in the spirit of what so ever you shall do to the least of my brethren you shall do to me. And I think experience at the hospital caused him to focus on that in some way.

Now what was the <sup>DATE</sup> ~~state~~ of your when were you married? The reason I ask I'm want to put in perspective at what point Jonathan was at that summer when he came down.

That was in September.

You were married in September?

My guess is, this is terrible, I can't remember the date. But it was immediately before or immediately after Labor Day weekend and in fact it may have been Labor Day weekend.

Because the program <sup>ENDED</sup> ~~said~~ around August 15 or 16 of 1964 almost a year to the day. So he didn't drive down from Willard to Pennsylvania. He must have driven down from Keene.

Oh yes I believe that to be true.

Did he talk at all about the Willard experience?

Not that weekend, but I don't remember the details

We know he was going with a woman then, an older nurse because we spoke his roommate in the program and believed Jonathan was in love with this nurse named Lorraine was her name.

Alright and can you describe her?

Jonathan had. Women liked Jonathan you can tell that and that's plus a lot of them have been a source of information.

Have you talked with Abby <sup>How D</sup> ~~Harlan~~ McDonald.

We talked to Elizabeth McNaught <sup>ON</sup> and Carolyn and a nurse whom he became involved with in Selma <sup>- AFRICAN AMERICAN</sup> ~~after the American nurse~~. This woman Rev. Stickway disapproved of because she was older but she had her own car. Stickway is an interesting interview. A wonderful man. I think in some ways he disapproved of kind of his rowdiness.

Again I'm trying to place certain events but this is before I was married.

Watkins Glen. Did you go to Watkins Glen?

No.

Because he talks about going to Watkins Glen which is just about 20 miles from Willard. Go there to the races. And he went with this young woman. He would write these long and think rather explicit letters to his mother. I wouldn't.

Jon was explicit.

Not about anything except his feelings. But that's good I guess. It reflects a different relationship with his parents than I had.

Well there was a reserve about Jon that was an enigma. Because there would be certain reserve perhaps deference would a better term in his relationship and treatment with others but there was not a reserve when it came expressing his feelings and beliefs. I am pretty sure that just before I was married, remember I told you about the all night conversation in my parents' home that summer of '64. He was killed in the summer of '65. This would have been the summer of '64.

And also in the summer, I'm pretty sure it was the summer of '64, the first one took place very early in the summer. I think he was here very briefly early in the summer. Again, what summer was he at Willard.

**'64 the summer of before he went to Selma and worked in Lowndes County. It was a twelve week program. It was so long.**

That makes sense. I'm going to guess that this was May or June of '64. That that all night conversation where we talked about George Miller took place. He then came to my parents' house just before I was married within a week or two. And he had with him a young ~~woman~~<sup>LADY</sup> from this hospital and the only thing I can remember about that is having the distinct impression that these two people were wildly in love and Jon certainly was in love with Carolyn in a very different way for a number of years.

**Puppy love kind of stuff.**

And I have a picture taken of Jonathan at the party where he and Carolyn broke up. Really.

Unfortunately I have been unable to find it recently because I have looked for it. It was taken at my folks' summer place on Silver Lake.

**Was that Carolyn's in the picture. They are looking at each other.**

There may be another one with that but this one was Jon alone. I was a newspaper photographer at that time.

**If you could find it that would be wonderful because we don't have any moving pictures of Jonathan.**

No this is a still.

**Any pictures that we have have to do**

Do you have somebody who could retouch.

**Oh sure.**



At some point there was a scratch in the negative. I can tell you what camera it was taken with. It was taken with an old Lika 3F with a 3.5 elmar lens on it. I've looked for the negative and I can't find it.

**Positive of it either?**

I think I can find a positive with a scratch.

**That would be great.**

But I have looked for it in the past year because I looked for it for Charles Eagles.

**I don't want to bother you about it but whatever you can find. Carolyn says you may also have some letters.**

They are undoubtedly, I can picture the box they are in, and they are in the same box with the picture and I've been searching for it.

**She was actually hoping that if I ever came to see you. I haven't spoken to her in months about this so this has not got anything to do with anything because if I were here I thought I'd ask you about them.**

I remember trying to get them back to Carolyn before I moved here and when I moved here I moved three houses into one house <sup>IN A VERY</sup> period of time and I'm sure they are but because you should see my shop downstairs. I never throw anything away. Someday it might be useful.

**Well if you find them, Jonathan's <sup>RELIGIOUS</sup> text,**

I know because it has come into my possession only within the past two or three years.

**Whatever you find. Because it would be just nice to have another visual.**

It would not leave your house at all. In fact I used to carry a copy stand with me. Well this has been very interesting what I'd like to do unless you're dead set against it is to think about this and maybe you could think about even though the direction of my questions. So maybe in a couple of weeks we could talk again if you'd like to.

I'm certainly willing, *LARRY*

Meanwhile I'll mail you a photocopy of the interview with your parents

— And I want to go back also and because you asked a question I got off the subject I think but it was about the books and definitely *The Robe* and *The Chalice* were both books that Jon discussed with my mother. I'm pretty sure of that.

He seemed interested in that at that point you would call him a sentimental approach to religion effecting life. Later on when he went south he was giving away copies of a book by an Episcopal lay author by the name of William Stringfeld and this fellow died in the late '60s. In fact talks about Jonathan in one of his last books. He and Jonathan were friends. He wrote a book *My People Is the Enemy*. He moved into Harlem, was a lawyer from Northampton, Massachusetts, and worked with Blacks in Harlem helping them with their legal problems and so forth. And it was a kind of street approach to Christianity that you could tell Jonathan. It probably was there that Jonathan developed his concept of witnessing eternity.

Well wasn't Christ kind of a street person?

Yes you wouldn't know it though from a couple of more recent interpretations. We can continue if you want to because as years go by it's hard to remember details. There were areas of interest, Jonathan was developing attitudes toward religion we kind of touched on that. And Jonathan was there anything in Keene that would have assisted Jonathan. That's a very superficial approach to a very complicated problem but that doesn't mean it's a total dynamic. Was there anything in Keene that would have assisted Jonathan in his desire to help specifically Black people? I don't think we need that. He just was a

I don't think there was. I guess I would comment what was there in Keene that would help me and Tony and Mac and Carlton and that was we shared one thing in common and that was an inquisitiveness. We didn't happen all to be inquisitive about the same things but while Jon was attracted to the church his inquisitiveness caused him to continue to want to know more about the whys. And certainly first reaction to the church was that it was a nice place to go every Sunday. You praise God you sing hymns and it's nice and it's fun and it's <sup>VERY</sup> pleasant. But then and of course he sang he was a marvelous singer. He got stopped for speeding one Sunday morning on the way to a sunrise service at the Cathedral of the Pines where he was going to sing.

Was that when Doug <sup>SWEET</sup> ~~Sweet~~ was in the car?

It could very well have been.

Doug told me he was

Where is Doug.

He's a lawyer in Boston.

Is that right? I would love to talk with him again some day. I'm glad to hear that.

Doug is married to a very sweet lady. She's really nice. She's

You see Jon, I think one difference between Jon and some of the rest of us the rest of us probably saw Doug Sweet as a blind person. Jon saw Doug Sweet as a person who happened to be blind. So he kind of got the order of priorities straight maybe before some of us did. ✓

That's almost like those drawings by Escher. You look at a field, you look at the stairs going up. Because we've interviewed Black people and they said the same thing about Jonathan. They never got the sense that he was staring at them because they were black. There was an interest in them for some other reason.

See I don't like tee shirts with pictures on them but the only one I have is an Escher.



A lot of people get that way. Stokely Carmichael said that Jonathan on April of '66 that Jonathan over and over again in the context of his friendship with Daniels. Daniels saw through the surface of things and saw he was suggesting kind of a southern economic issues based on race.

Let's go back. How do people get that way? I assume by that you mean to say he's a person who happens to be blind rather than a blind person.

How do you get the breadth of?

Well I think that's the wrong question. Well I'm going to go back to the story that I told you about, the poster I saw in Philadelphia, they haven't been taught to hate yet. I'm going to suggest that we start out that way and we are taught to be the other way and we have to get back to it.

But getting back to it is almost impossible. Most people can't do it. I mean I was raised in a racist marriage. My father doesn't like blacks. He doesn't understand why I'm working on this fellow and my mother is much better. What I have to do I discovered every morning of my life is reconstruct myself, my attitude towards the world to make sure I'm on the track.

Well you heard about the black saying to his friend "What's a whitey?" "Whitey's a guy who goes out and lays in the sun trying to look like you." I guess you've read about the experiments done one famous one school they said all the blue eyed people are bad and all the brown eyed people are. It's amazing what happens when the group of people start to accept a particular premise and behave in accordance with that premise. In the group becomes a living thing that has life that overrides the individuals. Institutions are interesting. In thinking about economics as I have been for the past few years now that I'm no longer involved in on a daily basis, in trying to look at our economic system and see what good and bad and indifferent

about it because I'm convinced it's in serious difficulty. It occurred to me that we have these things called institutions, some are formal some are informal. And that's one of the ways that we differ from other creatures both bees and ants well known social, economic structures that are inherited that each bee and each ant are predestined for its particular role but one of the differences between us and them is that we get to create our own institutions and we think of ourselves as almost God like and we think our institutions must be perfect. But we create our social and economic environments and others as well. That's one of the differences between us and other cooperative species that we don't have an inherent economic system. We create it. And we have a propensity to screw it up.

**That's why I wonder if Jonathan would have stayed in the organized church had he lived. Who knows.**

Well would he have stayed in it and tried to change it from within or would he have gotten outside of it.

**I think he would have graduated. All indications were that he was planning on going back to school in September. That was his next step when he got out of jail.**

I don't think there was any question that he would have finished the seminary and gotten ordained. And I think that Jonathan's death was a turning point in Carlton Russell's life. Because Carlton, we were in high school together, would refer to himself as the nihilist.

**Carlton told me that he became a Christian                      Jonathan. I met a priest in Phoenix an Episcopal meeting when they put Jonathan on the calendar in 1991 said he became an Episcopal priest because of Jonathan. He sought me out because he heard we were working on this film and wanted to give me this information. I met a woman , a minister from Texas the same thing. She told me an amazing story about when**

Jonathan was killed she was at a women's group meeting. She at that point was not a minister. But it was some other church and she was talking about how awful that this young man would be killed helping black people in the south and these women said what was he doing meddling with their affairs anyway. He probably got what he deserved. She realized then the hideousness of racism. Quit then. She said it was because of Jonathan. But so many people. legal front we can track what happened in 1966 after Jonathan's death. It's too much. It was more than President Johnson could take. I got in touch with the LBJ archives in Austin, Texas. They sent me all the information related to Jonathan. I have a film with Johnson's own handwriting notes on Jonathan's death. I got a copy of the telegram he sent to Connie. We thought it was lost but thank goodness it wasn't.

You mentioned that your work in contrast to Charles Eagles. You described his work as focussing on the socio-legal aspect.

He spent some time talking about Jonathan's developement. But to be fair to him he couldn't spend that much time in Keene.

What's your focus?

Our focus is what is it that makes a person follow a path from a privileged all white comfortable upper middleclass family in a Yankee town to end up in a situation where on the streets for in central Alabama. What decisions does a person make, what do you do. How does that construct? That's what Bill and I have soon discovered. WE think

It's a focus on the person. And that's what I think it should be and I guess I'm going to say that if you take Jon's early perception of, attraction to the Congregational Church and then Jon's perception of and attraction to the Episcopal Church or the



ministry and I think I would take the ministry and put it first and then say the church in which he was going to be a minister is probably a secondary thing. And how that transition occurred. And Stokely Carmichael gave you the answer when he said Jon <sup>68-69</sup> ~~was~~ deep. He didn't take the surface religion that he first learned as being the end of it. He didn't take the liturgy and ritual which he loved as being the ~~V~~ <sup>essence</sup> ~~essence~~ of it. There's more. Certainly one of the things that influenced him I know was the Sermon on the Mount.\

That's interesting because I wish Jonathan had put that in one of his sermons or letters. It probably was something that evolved in conversation or his sermons, letters and papers we get Isaiah, we get the Magnificat, the Son of Mary, but we don't get that. The Sermon on the Mount makes a lot of sense because of

Do you get Saint Paul in the letters? Because Saint Paul was kind of a hero.

Yes. But after the death of his father Fritz Geller told us that he ran into Jonathan in downtown Keene a while after his father died and Fritz had been his teacher when Jonathan was becoming an acolyte into the church so Fritz and Jonathan were kind of closer but knew each other.

Fritz is like 77 years old anyway Fritz said "How are you doing Jonathan?" He said "All right but I feel disconnected from religion. Since the death of my father I've lost interest in it." Fritz didn't pursue it with him. It was very clear the relationship between Jonathan's father. Jonathan was at VMI at this time and his disengagement from religion and we get from Jonathan's letters when he was at VMI he was going through a period from 1960-1962 of despondent, for religion was something that it grabbed him by the collar and pulled him back up in April of 1962. There was that period in there where I don't know if you recall anything of it. If I was to graph Jonathan's religion that seems

to be when he was . God drags people to faith I've heard. I actually talked to one man who was friends with Jonathan at VMI who is now an Episcopal minister who said that I resisted but it's hard to explain but you read about these medieval mystics who actually wrestle with God and get thrown to the ground and wake up bruised and stuff like that. It was like that with me. It was like that with Jonathan.

Well I mean Jonathan was interested in a life and teachings of Christ. There was part of phases <sup>2</sup> too. Phase one was still the church. Phase two begin to be who is this Christ <sup>we</sup> are praying to and praising and even Christ had moments of despondency. And it's not surprising that , because I agree with your perception, that Phil Daniels was more the influence of Jon's person than Connie. I believe later Jonathan influenced his mother before and after his death, but after Phil's death. Jonathan influenced Connie much the same way as Phil had influenced Jonathan. That's the way I would see it. But it's not surprising. I graduated <sup>one</sup> didn't tell one's teachers, parents, or friends like this when we were growing up. I graduated from St. Joseph's School an atheist. Now how does one graduate from a Catholic School an atheist. It was very easy if one has questions and the answer to most of them is either you don't ask that question or you accept that on faith. Or it's so because sister says so, who says so because father says so, who says so because the bishop says so, who says so because the Pope says so. That is not a satisfactory response to an intellectual curiosity. And it can destroy a faith. Now interesting enough it was two Protestants who rekindled the first time my response. It was a Catholic college that destroyed my faith the second time. And it was the priest mentioned to you who rebuilt it.

*END of INTERVIEW*