

St. JAMES CHURCH

KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

January 19, 1966

Women of Executive Board

Mrs. Bemis, Mrs. Fissner, Miss Anderson, Mrs. Foster, Miss Fritz
Mrs. Robertson Mrs. Williams

S: This is book that is hopefully going to be published--hope-
fully the manuscript will be ready in June, and the book itself
will come out probably just about a year from now--maybe March.
It just depends on how long the revisions and editings take, once
the manuscript is completed. It's going to be part of a biography;
it's not going to be a complete biography, in that we won't start
with birth and go through the very early years, but we will begin
probably with the high school years in Keene, then pick up at
the Virginia Military Institute--cover that period; leave out
the year at Harvard in English. It will be mentioned, but I'm
not going to try and do any detailed research into that part-
icular year. Then, the time at E.T.S. and Selma. I think it
will cover pretty much those four areas. A lot of the shape of
the book depends upon what I wind up with in material as a
result of this kind of thing.

The purposes are several. One, that Jon had a great deal
to say, and a lot of it he has said in writing which has not
yet been seen by the public generally; things that he has written
in letters, in papers, and other documents. And, had he lived,
these would have become more public all the time because Jon was

becoming a more public figure all the time, and obviously when he had entered the ministry, these kinds of things would have come out in sermons and various other ways. But he has said much, and he said it well; so, that ought to be communicated. Because he is physically dead is no reason why his ideas and thoughts shouldn't be presented as he himself would have presented them had he lived. So that's one reason.

Two: Because I think Jon was an important person. It's very hard to realize that a person that you know is an important figure, but he is. And I think that in reflection, historically speaking, he is going to prove to have been quite a significant person in the Church--for the Church. The longer you wait after an event, the less you have to present, because people forget things. So that we want to get it together in a document that will be there for people to look at and find out about years from now--not just now. So it's establishing a permanent record.

A friend of mine made a very small comment, but it was kind of interesting. He was talking about the hidden qualities of people and that during a person's life there is often a great deal that is hidden, but, after they die, it's often possible to allow this to be freely presented--not everything always--but a good many things. For instance, he was talking about Dag Hammarskjöld in Markings where many of Hammarskjöld's friends were very surprised to find out the kinds of things that had been going on in his mind, and they just didn't know them. But

now they're revealed, and he said, "I'm very glad they were because he provided a perfect illustration for a paper I was writing. And so there was kind of a mutual sharing going on through all this. I guess maybe that's another reason.

And then the reason for "Why do you ever write a biography about anybody?" Because we're people who live among people, and the most interesting things to us, I suppose, are other people. And so Jon as a person who, in a relatively short time, certainly in terms of his peer group, was not ordinary, is worth presenting maybe because I shared such a deep relationship with him that I would like to see other people have the opportunity to know him somewhat in the fashion that I did, and that some of you probably did and other people around these various communities did. That's about all I think I can say.

I didn't know him in Virginia. I knew a lot of people in Virginia that he knew very well. I had been an English major in college and naturally tended toward the English Department and always have wherever I have been. And Jon, of course, was an English major at VMI. So that when I was there the faculty people particularly whom he knew well I knew well also. And, in fact, both of us were largely influenced in our lives by the same person who was there at that time. He's not there now but he was there then. This individual put Jon and me in touch with one another. He also put us in touch with one another on a level that made our friendship much more rapidly--we didn't have to get to know one another. We really knew a great deal about each other

before we ever met. And when we did meet we kind of knew that we couldn't fool one another, very much, so we didn't try. It was a very honest relationship, for that reason.

No. (did not spend any time in Selma with Jon) The last time that I saw him in the South was in Montgomery, but I wasn't in Selma. We did meet at St. Jude's in the playground in the mud one day and had a long talk there. Then he went back to Selma, and I came back to Boston.

Well, maybe you can tell me your thoughts and recollections of Jonathan Daniels. Does anything come to mind?

I didn't know him intimately, but I did have the impression that he was very well liked by the young people of the town because, not only had he the interest in serious things, but he was a great deal of fun, and they liked to be with him. And my son, who went into the ministry just a few years before Jon did, knew him, not intimately but he was very deeply impressed with him as a person and as someone who had a serious purpose in life. He is now doing student work at Florida State University. And not many weeks ago he preached a sermon on Jonathan on that campus. He said, of course, that it got various reactions because it is a deep South area. But he said that there was tremendous interest in this and that he had been asked for well over fifty copies of the sermon. People wanted to know the values for which he stood in Selma.....

I think his influence with young people not only was very great during his life but is growing now because it's a stand such as he took that impresses his own generation...and the younger generation. So that any record of that will be of value.

S: What do you mean about 'fun?'

Well, he liked a good time. There wasn't anything goody-goody about him. He was involved in whatever was going on in the lives of young people.

S: Do you think that was true when he was in high school?

I didn't know him well enough for that. I just heard little things about what he was interested in and up to in high school. I should certainly think that would have been true in high school.....

He always came here to the Church all that...

Well, through his growing up years he had no connections here whatsoever. He was raised a congregational. It was after he went to Virginia, I think, that he became interested in us. So that, you see we didn't have the contact with his Church life, you see, that they would have over there.

S: Yes, but I gather that when he came here he came here quite actively; that is, he participated--I understand he sang in the

choir...

...and he preached a couple of times, and he read the Christmas service one time.

I think he had a Sunday school class one time.

S: So you really as a group of people kind of have the impression of a likeable kind of fellow in the community. Were you surprised when you heard that ~~Jon~~ was in Selma?

No. Because of the type of his dedication. I think he...the depth of it...the feeling that there was something to be done...he'd be there doing it...as an eyewitness. I think that the sermons that he preached in our Church indicated this very definitely and the talks he gave...

I would say that from the time that he spoke here on Theological Education Sunday--it was January--to June, he had become a much more--mature isn't the word but--even more dedicated to the needs that he saw.

Yes. I remember when he told me how tremendously interested he was in the work he was doing in Hartford, was it? While he was in seminary....Providence. That had really given him a new idea of the place of the Church in the social situation, and I wasn't a bit surprised after that that he'd gone to Selma.

S: Do you recall any more of that conversation?

No, it was very brief. I never saw Jonathan for any length of time. I knew his mother very well for a number of years and I used to see him coming and going. But the last time I had anything to do with him was we were discussing getting some books from a study group that we had here in the Church that he was trying to get for me in Cambridge, and we were discussing that. And I was just asking him how seminary work was going, and he told me about this particular interest in his social outreach in this work in Providence. He wasn't able to get the books. The bookstore didn't have the books.but he tried. He was head of the bookstore there. He did his best. He was very helpful by nature.

.....

He had a very penetrating mind. He went to the heart of something, just didn't bat around the surface.

I think this was true of his remarks. Not only his mind was thinking, but his remarks were very pointed, even to the extent of possibly involving him. I don't think he minced any words. When he wanted to say something, he said it, and he was willing to suffer the consequences.

S: That was a tremendous response, I understand, to the memorial clothing drive that took place.

twenty tons...

S: Which would indicate some feeling in the community I would think.

There's no question about it. It was a community response at the time of his death. I was unfortunate enough not to be here in time to be seated in the Church so I was seated here in the Common Room, and I would guess that there were well over a hundred people here, and I would say as I looked around this Room that I could count on one hand practically the number of Episcopalians that were in this overflow. Now I suspect that this was representative also of the Church attendance. This was deeply felt by the whole community. There's no question about it. And I think this is another reason why the response to the clothing drive. I had a young man from southern France, 22-year old boy who was staying with us for about six weeks prior to going down to Bowdoin College to teach conversational French and take some courses in American Literature. Much to my surprise, I was getting ready to come up to the services...and he indicated that he wanted to come along too. He was very concerned about just what this situation was in the South that had taken Jon down there and result in the sacrifice of his life. This young man happened to be a Roman Catholic. ...even....standing--he stood through the whole thing out here--and getting this whole thing second hand, he went home terribly impressed with the response

of the community to this young man. Again, I'm in the same situation as Mrs. _____, I've been in the town only almost-- two and a half years, so I did not have the privilege or opportunity of knowing Jon Daniels as a young man. I did here him the times he preached on Theological Education Sunday and had a chance to chat with him the night of our annual meeting, just because I was sitting beside him and was throwing questions at him.

S: Do you remember any of the questions? Answers that you got?

No, not directly. I definitely got the impression at that time that he was--his mind was not made up as to whether he would go back to Selma or not. Definitely not made up was my impression. He wanted more time to consider whether this was a true calling or not, and I'm sure....This was in June....I'm sure that because he went back.....