Interview with William Phillips

Interview Date: January 17, 2013
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DEUTSCH: It is January 17, 2013. I’m with Bill Phillips at his home. And, Bill, why don’t you start by telling me how long you’ve been on Capitol Hill and how you came to live here.

PHILLIPS: Well, I’ve been on the Hill since, what, April of 1987. So, that’s whatever that is, 24 years, something like that. And I came to the Hill to be the legislative director for a member of congress from Birmingham, Alabama. And I had worked in a lot of political campaigns and coming actually to work in Washington for a member is somewhat of a lifelong goal that I had at that point in time. So.

DEUTSCH: What was the member’s name?

PHILLIPS: The member’s name is Ben Erdreich and…

DEUTSCH: E-R- …

PHILLIPS: E-R-D-R-E-I-C-H. And Ben is a very interesting person. You have to realize that he was first elected in 1982, which, in Birmingham history, Birmingham, Alabama, history, isn’t that far from what’s called “the unpleasantness” in Birmingham. But, Ben’s kind of unusual. He is a Democrat and there had been a longtime, been like a 20 year, Republican member from Birmingham prior to that time. And we won on redistricting—1982 was the first election after the 1980 census and the redistricting that took place as a result of that. And, anyhow, Ben is a Jewish labor lawyer. So, the good people of Birmingham, Alabama, elected a Jewish labor lawyer to Congress [laughs] in 1982. And, you know, he’s a very—he was a county commissioner for a long time before that. So, anyhow, I worked in his campaign. I’ve worked in a lot of campaigns which we’ll talk about I’m sure as we go along, but …

DEUTSCH: Okay.

PHILLIPS: In any event, he needed a legislative director. So, I came and was his legislative director for, I don’t know, a year or so. And, then, was—he got an opportunity to be the chair of a banking committee subcommittee. And, so, he won that election. It’s an election within the committee, within the caucus of the committee. And, anyhow, he won that and I became the staff director of the subcommittee. So, he just wanted me to go down and run the subcommittee, which I did. And, so—it’s a very interesting, very interesting job being staff director of a subcommittee because you … You’ve heard everybody’s wisdom that, you know, you go to a—where you want to be is on a committee and what want to do is this and you control everything. Well, it’s absolutely true. You do control everything. The majority does control everything. And it’s a very interesting position to be in.

DEUTSCH: Let’s just stop there for a minute. [No sound on tape for a short while]
DEUTSCH: Okay. But, you did not—you are not from the South.

PHILLIPS: No. I was born in Baltimore.

DEUTSCH: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: And spent the first 15 years of my life, actually, in Baltimore. And my father was an engineer for Glenn L. Martin Company, which is now Martin Marietta. And they had opened a new plant in Orlando, Florida, in the 1957-58. So, in 19—I was 15—so in 1959 we moved from Baltimore to Orlando. And Orlando in 1959 was a very nice small town. Quite different from what it is today.

DEUTSCH: No Disney World back then.

PHILLIPS: No Disney World. Disney opened in October of 1971. So, in any event, we moved there, to Orlando.

DEUTSCH: Was that hard for you as a kid?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, because I was in 10\textsuperscript{th} grade, I was a sophomore in high school. And we can get into what happened after that. But, now, we were in Orlando. For a while I went to school in Orlando. We left in, like, November, so it was the middle of the school year and all of that. So, in any event, we were there and then—but then after that I actually came back up here. I came to Beltsville and I was in Beltsville for—finished high school in Beltsville and, then …

DEUTSCH: So, your dad came back?

PHILLIPS: No. No, no. They were there. What happened was I joined the Christian Brothers, which many people don’t realize. But, anyhow, I was a Christian Brother for five years and …

DEUTSCH: Can you tell me a little bit about …

PHILLIPS: Sure.

DEUTSCH: … what that is?

PHILLIPS: The Christian Brothers are a—it’s a religious order founded by St. John Baptiste de La Salle in France in 1650, 1660. The Brothers were founded to educate poor children, specifically poor boys, in France at that time because there was no, there was just no educational system for the poor. So, the Brothers to this day educate poor children. And that’s one of the other things that I do which we can get into, too, as we go along. So, I joined the Brothers. At the time, this is, you know, in the 50s, late 50s, early 60s, and at the time what’s called the formation process, how one became a Brother, was different
from what it is today. But, at that time, kids in high school could join the Brothers. And you joined what’s called the junior novitiate, finished high school, and then made your novitiate. And novitiate year is a very interesting year. It’s a year of formation. And it truly is a year of formation because what happens is the year after you finish high school, for most people at that time—and that year after high school one is very pliable, one’s very questioning, one’s asking himself or herself all kinds of questions. And, so, you begin this process, and it’s a spiritual formation process. And, it’s also, you know, you learn to live with other people. You learn what it’s like living, in my case, what it’s like living in a community with—we had 35 guys in our novitiate class, which was 50 years ago last year. We had our 50th anniversary last year.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

PHILLIPS: But, in any event, I joined the Brothers. And you become a person that you probably wouldn’t become otherwise. So, after novitiate year, I went up to La Salle College in Philadelphia and began with the …

DEUTSCH: And La Salle College, I assume, was founded by the Brothers.

PHILLIPS: By the Brothers. Right.

DEUTSCH: Yeah. Can I just ask you, how did your parents feel about this?

PHILLIPS: They were supportive. Yeah. They were very supportive of all of that. And we have a history in Baltimore where I was. I went—the Brothers school in Baltimore is Calvert Hall, the Brothers school in Washington is St. John’s. And I had gone to Calvert Hall my freshman year and whatever year I had in my sophomore year, time I had my sophomore year. And my family had a long, long history with Calvert Hall. My great grandfather, for example, was on their board for 30-some years. So, we had a long history with the Brothers. And, so, my family was supportive of all of that.

DEUTSCH: And I assume when you join there is an expectation that this will be a lifelong …

PHILLIPS: Right, yeah. You’re in theory making a lifetime commitment. So, in any event, we left Beltsville. The place name in Beltsville is Ammendale. It’s Ammendale Normal Institute.

DEUTSCH: How do you spell that?


DEUTSCH: Normal Institute?
PHILLIPS: Normal Institute. And …

DEUTSCH: And that’s a specifically …

PHILLIPS: That’s a …

DEUTSCH: … La Salle Christian Brothers.

PHILLIPS: … a specific place. And the Brothers have had that land since the 1880s and we’ve now, we’ve since sold off a good bit of all of that. It’s now—if you go up Route 1 and you go past Powder Mill Road, up a little bit more where the state highway runs, we used to own all that land once upon a time.

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: Sold it, unfortunately, and used the money to pay for retirement costs. But, in any event, so, I went up to La Salle College in Philadelphia first two years of college. And, then, at the end of my second year of college I felt that I really, you know, didn’t want to continue. So, I left the Brothers then, after five years, essentially.

DEUTSCH: Was that a traumatic kind of thing?

PHILLIPS: Yeah. Well, it is, because you have this … You know, you’re with all these people that you’ve known, in my case some of them for a long time, and so you kind of, you know, go your own way. But you make that decision. I mean there’s direction and counseling as you’re going through all of this. You just don’t wake up one morning and say “Well, I’m out of here this afternoon.” That doesn’t, it doesn’t happen that way. [Clears throat] So …

DEUTSCH: Was there any particular thing that—I mean, I’m sure you didn’t abandon the ideals that had led you there.

PHILLIPS: No, no. No. And it’s very important because it’s—in the whole concept of my novitiate year, as I said, you’re being formed in a very … Some parts of the year are more intense than others obviously, but you have this formation that’s going on. And the Brothers have a rule that, you know, all the Brothers have to follow. And they’re all very good sense kinds of things, you know. There’s nothing that is, you know, out of the—truly wacky or anything. And what happens is, you go along and, you know, to this day I still try to live the rule that I learnt.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.
PHILLIPS: And it’s, you know, in many ways it’s the—you can say it’s do good, avoid evil. It’s, you know, be a good neighbor, be … And it’s all of those things that one wants to bring to the relationships that one has. And, so, you do this and you just continue to do that. You just continue to live the life you lead. You lead a little different life than you might otherwise have had. But you don’t forget, you don’t reject. At least, in my case I didn’t. And, you know, it forms the basis really of what I’ve done ever since. So, in my case, for the last 50 years now, I mean, I’ve been able to pretty much live that life and continue to do a lot of the things—I’m still, for example, I’m still very involved with the Brothers, which we’ll get to a little bit later. But, I mean, I still do a whole bunch of things for them, with them.

DEUTSCH: I was going to ask, when you had your 50th reunion, how many were still …

PHILLIPS: We had …

DEUTSCH: It was a class of how many?

PHILLIPS: We had 33 in our class and there were five left. Still Brothers. We’ve had, unfortunately, we’ve had two members who were Brothers die last summer. So, they didn’t really make the, you know, the real anniversary of it. But, in any event, you know, you—that class, that period of time back in the late 50s, early 60s, the religious orders in the Catholic Church were, they had a lot. I mean, we had 30. The class before us had 60-some odd.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: The novitiate class before us. So, I mean, they … And there was a whole commitment on the part of the Brothers to bring more brothers in. But, in any event, it’s a life that you just don’t walk out on.

DEUTSCH: No.

PHILLIPS: So, anyhow, I said I was in two years in college at La Salle. And then my junior year, since I was no longer a Brother, I couldn’t go back to La Salle. So, I went to Fordham in New York for a year and went to the Jesuits and …

DEUTSCH: [Laughs] Went over to the other side.

PHILLIPS: Well, sort of. You know, all the main rivalries between the Jesuits and the Brothers are still in their high schools. Yes. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Well, I know my son went to Gonzaga, so …

PHILLIPS: Yes, well.
DEUTSCH: I’m aware of that.

PHILLIPS: [Laughs] But it’s true. So, in any event, I went to Fordham. Fordham was a very interesting year. Now, you’ve got to understand that I came out of a supportive community environment and I found myself in a rooming house in the Bronx, 2472 Elm Place. And I had the living room of this house. And it had folding, sliding doors between the living room and the dining room. Another couple had what was the dining room. This is the first floor. There was a kitchen on the first floor. You go upstairs and there’s a bathroom in the back. And Mr. Harrington had the back bedroom and he was a distinguished Irish drunk.

DEUTSCH: [Laughs]

PHILLIPS: And then John had the middle bedroom on the second floor and Agnes Larkin had the front bedroom. And she was a widow lady and she went “round the corner”, as she used to say, to her daughter’s for all her meals and everything. And, then, there was a fishing boat captain. There was a room out over the porch and he had that room. On the third floor was Eddie Abdallah, who was from Baghdad, whose father worked at NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], actually, in Boulder. And his mother and sister were still in Baghdad. Anyhow, Eddie went to high school. He was a budding artist and all of that. And then we had Joe—I can’t remember his last name—but Joe was just a drunk. He was in the back bedroom on the third floor. So, we had all these people in this house. And there was one bathroom [Laughs] and one kitchen.

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: So, it was a very interesting environment, coming from a more structured environment to one that was more or less unstructured. But, a year in New York was very interesting, very worthwhile. I still enjoy it quite a bit when I think about it.

DEUTSCH: What were you studying?

PHILLIPS: Political science. My major in college was political science and I had some good people. At Fordham, in particular, I had Father Finley, who became president of the university later on. He was a political science professor and he was very good. And I had another old, old gentleman, a doctor. Fordham at the time had the Soviet Institute of Contemporary Affairs, which obviously they don’t have today. But, this gentleman, he was a teenager in St. Petersburg [Laughs] in 1918. And it’s one of those things, you know. I can’t really remember, but, you know, he would describe to you what was going on as, you know, and then he’s like—it was peering around the corner telling you what was going on in Russia in 1918. And it was just a fantastic experience to hear his stories and what he was able to convey. So, in any event, after my junior year, I decided I wanted to go back to La Salle because I wanted to do a
seminar with a professor there in foreign affairs. And, so, they let me back in and, so, I came back and did
the fall semester. And at the end of the fall semester I got sick. I got salmonella and mononucleosis at the
same time. [Laughs] So, anyway, I had to drop out of the spring semester. And, so, I didn’t really finish
my undergraduate stuff for a year longer than it might otherwise be. But, anyway, I did get finished. And,
at that point, I left the North and went back to Orlando.

DEUTSCH: Your family was still there?

PHILLIPS: Family was still there, oh, yeah, yeah. And this is now 1968 and 1968 was the height of the
Vietnam war.

DEUTSCH: I remember 1968.

PHILLIPS: I was no longer a student and, so, I was waiting to be drafted and decided that, well, maybe I
should just go enlist and be done with it. And get more of what I want. So, I thought I’d go enlist. And,
so, they signed me up and off I went. And when …

DEUTSCH: Army?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, this was the Army and I was … In theory, although we’re a Navy family, in theory I
had gone to the recruiter and I had taken the NSA [National Security Agency] test back when I was in
college and NSA wanted to talk to me. So, I told them all that so they thought maybe I could go over to,
you know, the intelligence end of the Army. So, anyway, but, I went up and believe it or not I flunked the
physical, because of flat feet. Believe it or not.

DEUTSCH: [Laughs] That’s the butt of so many jokes.

PHILLIPS: It is.

DEUTSCH: You know, the flat feet. But …

PHILLIPS: It is.

DEUTSCH: … it’s actually true.

PHILLIPS: It’s actually true. So, in any event, I got back on the bus from Jacksonville and went back to
Orlando. And was able to then …

DEUTSCH: Even in the NSA you need to have arched feet?
PHILLIPS: Well, I didn’t apply to the NSA at that point, see. It was just to the Army. So, the Army had their standards and it didn’t work. So, obviously, finding a job was very interesting at this particular point in time because I wound up not … You know, I wasn’t unemployable, but, you know, I picked up—while I was waiting, I worked as a carpenter. They were building, you know, tract houses down in Orlando. So, I worked as a carpenter. And, then, I worked—I was a—I worked at the health department for a year as a sanitarian. And, you know, this kid who had a political science degree was examining restaurants. [Both laugh]

DEUTSCH: Well.

PHILLIPS: School lunchrooms and things like that. So. And Head Start centers. It was very interesting because it made me—I’m somewhat of an introvert. But it made me have to go do things. You know, I had to go talk to somebody I hadn’t met before, for example.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: You know, you have to do all these things. And, so, we went and did that and had a—it was, you know, an interesting time. I was there for a year.

DEUTSCH: Were you living at home? Or were your parents still there?

PHILLIPS: I was living at home at that point. And, then, I went and in a succession of about six months I was the health department and, then, I think I was the insurance adjuster. No, I was the life insurance salesman. And, then, I was the insurance adjuster. And, then, I was something else. I can’t remember. And, then, in the process of doing this, after I flunked out of the life insurance salesman thing, I was reflecting at that, well, what did I … I liked it because it was financial stuff. And, so, I said, well, who does the kind of stuff that that does but doesn’t get paid by commission. Being somewhat astute I figured not being on commission is a good thing. And, so, I said, well, trust departments do this kind of thing. So, I said, well, how do I find out about that? Said, well, call up heads of trust departments and see if you can come talk to them. Which I did. I managed to wrangle four heads of trust departments in Orlando to talk to me. And, as they—you know, I’d go to them and say well, tell me about the trust business. I’m thinking about a career in it. How do you get involved? How do you get started? What do you do? Du-duh-duh-duh-duh. And, so, I did wind up … Out of the four that I talked with I said, well, you know, there’s two of them that impressed me more than the others. So. And, every … After that, you know, of course, they said, well, we don’t have any jobs. Duh-duh-duh-duh-duh. So, I said okay. So, about every three months I’d call up and say “Hi, I’m still here. Remember me?” And, then, after about nine months the one that I really liked the best called me and said he’s got a job for me. So, that’s how I started my
banking career, just in that way. And got to be a trust officer, a trust administrator first, with the grand total of $7,200 a year. At the time it was a great goal of mine to make $20,000, because if you could make $20,000 you were really rich. [Both laugh] So, this was 1970 at this point. So, we did all that and, you know, I worked at that bank, which was then the Commercial Bank at Winter Park, which was kind of an interesting—the bank was founded by A. G. Bush, who was also the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing. So, he was the chair of 3M and they had a lot of things, obviously, up in Minnesota. But, he used to come to Winter Park in the winter and, so, he needed a bank. So, he started his own bank. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: So, that’s where you started.

PHILLIPS: That’s where I started, yeah. You have just all kinds of interesting things that—when I was at the bank he had died but then his wife was still living and so she ultimately died and the bank trust department had her estate. And, so, I was one of two—we had to go inventory the house. So, we went out and inventoried their house on a lake. And it was in Winter Park. And, you know, the thing that was very interesting, they had a bar—it was a two bedroom house, but it was the biggest two bedroom house you’ve ever seen—and they had a bar. And it was a nice bar and up behind on the glass was a little sign that said “God bless our mortgaged house”. [Laughs] A chuckle or two. So, and then the rug in the sitting area of the bar was the Scotch Tartan. [Interviewer laughs] So, it was all very well done. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Yeah. So, at any rate, so I was at … While I was at the bank, that bank, I got involved in political work. Because, again, this was 1970, and at the time I wound up getting involved with the Orlando Jaycees and a number of people there. And, you know, one thing led to another and I got involved in the campaign of Lawton Chiles in 1970. And Lawton won that—it was his first race for the Senate. He was kind of proverbial for walking across Florida. He didn’t have any money so his gambit was …

DEUTSCH: Did he literally walk across Florida?

PHILLIPS: He walked from Two Egg, Florida, up in the far northwest corner, down to Key West.

DEUTSCH: Two Egg?

PHILLIPS: Two Egg. So …

DEUTSCH: To where?
PHILLIPS: To Key West.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

PHILLIPS: And this is 19—and he started I don’t know when in 1970. But, you know, by summer and by election time he was getting press and all that.

DEUTSCH: So, he didn’t just walk across Florida, he walked the length of Florida.

PHILLIPS: Yeah. He went the length of Florida. And, in due course, I got the ability—I was on the, you know, volunteer staff and I would drive him around, pick him up, do this, do that, because he would walk for a while and then stop and do some other things and go back to where he left and pick up and walk some more. But he did, he walked every step of the distance.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

PHILLIPS: But it was very interesting because, you know, you get to know somebody like that because, you know, it’s just two people in the car driving along and you’re talking about campaign stuff. And, you know, it’s very enlightening. And he was a state senator at the time. But, then, he came up and he had, what, three terms, maybe four terms in the Senate. So, he was a senator for 20-some years and, so, and a good friend. So, at any event, so, we did Lawton’s campaign in 1970. In 1972 another friend I had met in the Jaycees, Bill Gunter …

DEUTSCH: What is the Jaycees?

PHILLIPS: It’s the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

DEUTSCH: Junior Chamber of Commerce, yeah.

PHILLIPS: Where all the young wannabes go. [Laughs] And you learn a lot of stuff. Through just Jaycee activity you learn a lot of stuff because you learn how to organize, you learn what works, what doesn’t work, and you’ve got people who’ve done it before, you know, taking the very new people and giving them guidance and mentoring and that kind of thing. So, it’s a very good program and ultimately I was the treasurer of the Jaycees for a year. But, at any event, so I wound up getting to know Bill Gunter and Bill Gunter ran for the U. S. House in 1972. And, again, it was just after a redistricting of the 1970 census. And, so, we had a new district. Orlando used to be one district and now Orlando got split. So, we had a district that went from West Orlando all the way over to Clearwater and up to Crystal River. It was a huge chunk of west central Florida. And we covered that district forever in that particular campaign and won that one. And, again, I was driving Bill around and we were doing this, doing that, doing the other.
So, you know, pretty involved in getting stuff done. So, in any event, that was, you know, ’72. In ’74 he ran for the Senate and we lost that one in a runoff election. We lost it to Dick Stone. Had won the first primary by 90,000 votes, came back, and three weeks later in the runoff primary, because Florida had a runoff system, and we wound up losing by, like, 9,000 votes …

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: … in a three percent turnout. And, you know, it’s one of those things. I had 9,000 people come up to me afterward saying I wish I knew you needed my vote, I’d have gone to vote. And, proof in the pudding, six years later, Bill runs again against Dick Stone, who is then the incumbent senator, and beats him without a runoff. [Laughs] So, you know.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: But, he doesn’t win the Senate either. That’s another story. At any rate, so, we did that Senate campaign. In ’76 Gunter runs for Insurance Commissioner-Treasurer, which is a statewide cabinet office. I’m still at the bank.

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 1

TAPE 1/SIDE 2

DEUTSCH: Okay, continuing with Bill Phillips.

[Microphone adjustments]

PHILLIPS: Okay. So, anyway, we need to move ahead a little bit. But, so, anyhow, we’d been doing these campaigns and I was going to do the State Treasurer and Insurance Commissioner, which Bill won, and then I worked for another bank after that. And, then, in the meantime, in 1972, through the Jaycees, I got appointed to the Board of Zoning Adjustment for the city of Orlando. And this is 1972. Disney opened in ’71.

DEUTSCH: So, there must have been huge issues.

PHILLIPS: There was huge issues. There was a huge amount of growth.

DEUTSCH: It was the Board of Zoning Adjusters?

PHILLIPS: Adjustment. And this particular board is not … Orlando had the Board of Zoning Adjustment and they had a Zone Commission, which most … Washington has the exact same configuration. The Zoning Board, the Zoning Commission are the ones that decide, you know, what
zoned what. And the Board of Zoning Adjustment adjusts those zones for proper reasons. And, so, we were the variance people. So, we went and gave variances for one thing or another, one reason or another. And there are legal kinds of things that you really need to do as you’re thinking about a variance. But, in any event, the Board elected me the chair of the Adjustment Board in ’74. So, I was chair of the Board from ’74 to ’77. And we had just this humongous growth in Orlando at the time. It was just amazing. Orlando was fortunate because they had Franklin Albert who was the planning director. Franklin was old then and he was able to … It was one of those things where you have a 15-year zoning plan, 15-year land use plan. And it was good for, like, three years. So, you know, you wound up being able to participate in this absorption of growth. So, anyhow, so, all of this stuff is going on at the same time as the other. And, so, it was kind of fun. And, then, in ’76 I worked for another bank, the Flagship Bank, again in the trust department. At the time I left the first bank, I was the vice president and trust officer, so, I progressed up the line, as it were. And, then, in ’77 I got a call out of the blue from a headhunter wanting to know would I consider moving to Birmingham. Well, Birmingham—this was ’77 now. You know, we were really not far from “the unpleasantness”. So, well …

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: Well, sure, I’ll go talk to anybody. So, went up and … They flew me up to Birmingham and I got off the plane in Birmingham on an April or May day and it was just this, you know—there wasn’t smog, there wasn’t smoke, it was just this gorgeous spring day. Oh, well, okay, this is pretty good.

DEUTSCH: And Birmingham is a very attractive city.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, it is.

DEUTSCH: It’s really quite—I was so surprised when I went there. It’s quite lovely.

PHILLIPS: Oh, it is, it is. And so I was surprised. And my sister at the time was a student at Auburn University], so she’d come up to meet me at the plane and take me to the bank and for the interview and all that kind of stuff. And then, after the interview, we went down and toured a little bit. Went to Mountain Brook, which is where all the rich folks live. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: So, it was very interesting. So, we came back and then, you know, a little bit later they offered me a job to go to Birmingham. And I said no, no, I don’t think so. I don’t really think I want to do that. So, anyhow, they came back a couple of weeks later and had a little better offer and, well, okay, well, I’ll go to Birmingham. [Laughs] So, anyhow, I went to Birmingham and went to work for the bank
and got involved in more stuff in Birmingham and enjoyed that. And the head of that particular trust department, which was the First Alabama Bank of Birmingham, which became Regions Bank, he moved to another bank in town. And then he was there a couple of months and I had … He asked me to come to his bank again because he had a mess that he wanted me to help him clean up. So, I’ve learned—and they had a mess at the beginning when I came to Birmingham. So, I’ve learned that when people want you to come do something, you know, they ask you, it’s always worse than they say it is. So, [Interviewer laughs] that’s one of life’s lessons here. [Laughs]

**DEUTSCH:** Mm-hmm.

**PHILLIPS:** So—but, in any event, so, I went to the second bank and then, in the meantime, I’m still doing political work, still doing all of this, all this kind of stuff. And got involved with the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and the Alabama Bankers Association. And I was on the Industrial Development Board for the city of Birmingham and did all that kind of stuff, too. So, it was, like, you know, very interesting in terms of participating in the life of the city. And, just as kind of a caveat, Birmingham is a really good city. For ten years I was in the business life of the community and for another eight years after that kind of worked with Ben in his congressional office and, you know, we worked with those same people in trying to do things. And the city has moved quite a bit. When I first got to Birmingham in ’77, 20,000 guys made steel at Fairfield, which is U.S. Steelworks. Over 5,000 people building freight cars down at Pullman Standard when they had their place in Bessemer. But, in the 20 years since, they have 5,000 people making the same amount of steel at Fairfield. Pullman Standard closed their plant. But, the University of Alabama at Birmingham is a world class medical center. And the city has a lot of really wonderful people in it. And I really want to emphasize that in … Whatever you think of Birmingham from 1965 and, you know, you see all the newsreels and the dogs and the fire hoses and all of that and it was a terrible situation, you realize though that—because I met them and there were a lot of good people, good white people on the other side working to get things done. And it’s a very interesting group of people to—I’m privileged to know some of them. I did have one experience with it that was, at the time—I forget what year it is, but it’s before I came up here, so it’s …

**DEUTSCH:** Mid to late 70s?

**PHILLIPS:** Yeah, well, ’77. Probably ’81, ’82. And I would say—no, it’s later than that, it’s ’84, ’85. Because I didn’t come up here until ’87. So, it was ’84, ’85. We had an unfortunate experience of a white police officer approaching a car outside a 7-Eleven or another convenience store late at night. And there was a young African American woman in the car and he told her to get out of the car. And she did something, that’s like reaching down, and, anyhow, he blew her away.
DEUTSCH: Uuuuh.

PHILLIPS: So, there was this … And, of course, it was … I don’t know, she was reaching for, you know, a piece of paper or something. So, anyhow, there was this big uproar, you know, police brutality and so forth. And, so, as it turns out, Birmingham Chamber intervened and, you know, tried to work things through. And the solution was to take three African Americans and three white guys. And, so—the African Americans were the head of the law school at Miles College; Abraham Woods, who was the chair of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; and there was another guy I can’t remember. And, then, there was John Woods, who was the chair of First National Bank of Birmingham, the biggest bank in town; Joe Farley, who was president of the power company, Alabama Power Company, the other big company in town; and me. [Interviewer laughs] And I was chosen because I happened to be the chair of the local government committee of the Chamber. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: And they were chosen for what, to kind of form a little …

PHILLIPS: Mediate and … And, as a lot of times …

DEUTSCH: You were chosen because you were the chair of what?

PHILLIPS: … of the local government committee for the Birmingham Chamber. And I’d been in town six years. So, you know, what did I know, you know.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

PHILLIPS: So, it is interesting that—yes, as many times happens with things like this you get a group of good people together who can exercise some influence. Not me, of course, because I wasn’t there long enough. But, we had … So, the six guys go in the room and we talk and essentially the African Americans tell us—look, they said, we can take care of this. But we’re telling you this is the last time we’re going to do it. Taking care of this means keeping a lid on it …

DEUTSCH: Keep the lid on.

PHILLIPS: … so you don’t have riots.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: So …

DEUTSCH: When we finish, I’ll get the names of the people on the committee.

PHILLIPS: Okay, okay.
DEUTSCH: Yeah, we can take care of this.

PHILLIPS: Yeah.

DEUTSCH: But it’s the last time.

PHILLIPS: It’s the last time. And you say okay. And, so … And, in fact, in the next mayoral election, Richard Arrington was elected. He was the first black mayor of Birmingham. So, I mean, there was …

DEUTSCH: Was he one of the committee members?

PHILLIPS: No, he was not.

DEUTSCH: Richard ?

PHILLIPS: Arrington.

DEUTSCH: Arrington. Yeah, I think I remember that name.

PHILLIPS: So, you have this participation in the life of the community and, you know, I’d seen this before. And you had the political life of the community. You know, there’s all kinds of—which life of the community are we talking about? Are we talking about the political life, social life, the …

DEUTSCH: What happened on the corner?

PHILLIPS: … the arts life, yeah. Wherever you are, whatever—whether, in my case, whether the land over Birmingham at this particular point, you participate in a slice of that life. And what I’ve also learned is it’s really interesting to—what term do I want to use? —branch out. So, that you can be in this slice of life and you’re horizontal. I mean, you know pretty well what’s going on in the business life of a community and then you’re on another level up here. You’re in the political life, you’re doing some political things. And what you want to do is don’t go horizontal, you want to go vertical.

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: Up and down the various slices of whatever community life there are. And it’s a really important part of, I think, ultimately in building community, because what happens when you do that you can put people together.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: And in my case, you know, I’ll go back to what I learned in the novitiate year with the Brothers. Well, you want to do this in a particular way, in the sense that you want it to be ethical, you
want it to be honest, you want it to be straightforward. You want it to be all these kinds of things. And, to use a term, you want to be, in my case, Christian about this. So, you know, that’s what you do. You really want to work and go among the various levels of the community. So. At any rate, so, that’s the case there in Birmingham. And then in ’87 …

**DEUTSCH:** So, just to wrap up about that committee. You met several times over a period of time?

**PHILLIPS:** Yeah. We met, I forget, two or three times. It was probably three times over a very short period of time, like maybe over three weeks, four weeks.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah.

**PHILLIPS:** Because, you know, keeping a lid on it you had to …

**DEUTSCH:** But it was effective. It did.

**PHILLIPS:** Yeah, it did that, it did that. And, of course, you know, I was the sixth guy in the room and I decided to myself, well, I’m going to sit here and sit back and listen. And, you know, as it turns out, you know, as in a lot of these things, by the time I got working for Ben Erdreich, you know, I already knew Joe Woods, John Woods. I already knew Joe Farley. So, you know, you know, it’s great because I could …

**DEUTSCH:** It did you a lot …

**PHILLIPS:** … just walk in their office and we had this shared experience …

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah.

**PHILLIPS:** … that you wouldn’t have had otherwise.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah. Cool.

**PHILLIPS:** So, you have all of that and it is cool. And it is an opportunity is really what it is and, you know, every time you try to do something you hopefully can create another opportunity. So, that’s what you try and do. So, anyhow, I’m doing these campaigns and in 1986 the head of the trust department leaves. The guy who hired me twice. He leaves and, so, they want to replace the head. So, I throw my hat into the ring and say why not? You know, it’s career advancement. And, so, anyhow, I didn’t get chosen. And, so, the guy who did get chosen didn’t want me around. So, I got terminated. [Laughs] And, as has happened, I spent 16 years in trust banking and in addition to all the stuff I was doing, I was teaching in
the trust school. I was the director of the trust school in ’81. And, so, and anyhow I was doing all that. And I decided, well, what I’m going to do, I’m going to change fields.

So, I’m going to go do politics. It was ’86. It was an election year. So, why not? And, so, I wound up through a number of ways doing a campaign in Tennessee, in the 3rd District of Tennessee with Marilyn Lloyd. Now Marilyn is a Democrat. She had six terms already. But, this particular election in ’86 was going to be a major targeted campaign because the Republicans thought they could take the seat. And that district became—really it’s more conservative as has happened all over the south since. But, I mean, it became more conservative and the Republicans put up Jim Golden who was a really conservative guy and religious. He’s from the religious right. And, so—anyhow, it was a major targeted campaign. I wound up moving to Chattanooga for a year and doing the campaign. You know, by this time it’s stuff that I’ve done all this time, so it’s—you get to know the people and you get to do this and do that. And it was much easier because she’d had six terms already. So, there was a lot of rapport with The Chattanooga Times, which, you know, is part of The New York Times. And The Chattanooga Free Press was another paper that was on the far right. But, at any event, it was just kind of fun, just one of those things that you just chuckle about. We were getting hit, at one point, with being, from the Golden campaign, of soliciting money from the nuclear industry. Now, Marilyn was the chair of a science and tech subcommittee that dealt with nuclear issues and she was on Armed Services, which did nuclear issues. Anyhow, she was on two subcommittees that controlled 93% of all the nuclear activity in the United States. So, at any rate, so, we got bashed about that and Golden was saying we don’t do things like that. Well, lo and behold, somebody, one of my nuclear friends, sends me this letter asking for money from Jim Golden. [Laughs] So, it’s just one of those funny things. The Chattanooga Times cartoonist, anytime he drew Jim Golden, he’d draw a little halo over his head. And, so, we did all this and then I said “Well, you know, I got this thing.” And, “Oh, can you send it to me?” “Sure, I can send it to you.” [Laughs] I sent it to him, to the editor of The Times. And, so, it comes out and bup, bup, bup. And, so, the next cartoon we had is the halo in one panel and then something about soliciting money and then the halo’s around [unintelligible] [Laughs]


PHILLIPS: So, it’s just little things—I say little things like that. But, it’s just kind of things that you remember, doing all this stuff. And, so, anyhow, to make a long story short, Marilyn wins. Now, I’m looking for a job again because, you know. But, then, Ben needed a legislative director, so, I came up here in 1987. And worked …

DEUTSCH: Okay. We finally got you to Washington.
PHILLIPS: I went to Washington after whatever.

DEUTSCH: Yeah, yeah, and, so, did you move to the Hill?

PHILLIPS: Moved to the Hill right away, right away. Marilyn’s administrative assistant Sue Carlton—who lives over on Duddington [Place], still lives over on Duddington, still a great friend of mine, we’ve known each other since 1986—said well, you’ve got to live here.

DEUTSCH: Obviously.

PHILLIPS: So, I said sure, okay. So, I went into a—rented an efficiency apartment at Sixth and G. And, so, was there for a little bit. But, a couple of years and then I bought a house on 13th Street [SE], right across from Potomac Gardens, was there for two and a half years. This was ’89 to ’92 I was on 13th Street. And it was the height—it was before the fence around Potomac Gardens. So, it was an active drug market. There was all kinds of things going on in Potomac Gardens at the time. But, in any event, I met Monica here and we got together and we wound up buying the house now on F Street [SE] in ’92. So, I’ve been in this house now since 1992, for 21 years.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: So, and here we are.

DEUTSCH: And here we are. And, so, how did your involvement with the community start? I mean, obviously, you had an intense job going on.

PHILLIPS: Yeah. I wound up for the first little bit not doing a whole lot in the community. You know, working at the House, you said, is pretty intense and you’re doing all kinds of things all the time. And, so, you don’t really do much in the community. I did, however, join St. Peter’s and Father O’Sullivan was pastor then as he was for a long, long time. And, ultimately, he wanted to start an endowment fund for St. Peter’s. And, he realized that, gee, I’d worked for trust departments all this time, maybe I knew something about an endowment. So, I said, well, yeah, it’s pretty easy and this is kind of what you need to do. And, over time … So he started one. We started this in 1991, we started the St. Peter’s endowment. And that brings you into contact, obviously, with people at St. Peter’s. Well, there’s a lot of people at St. Peter’s who are involved in the community and all of that. And, so, we, you know, we did that. And to Father O’Sullivan’s lasting credit, that endowment is now two and a half million and it’s done really, really well.

DEUTSCH: And I assume you can take some credit for that.

PHILLIPS: Well, yeah. Well, I’ve managed the money all along, yeah. [Laughs] But …
DEUTSCH: Did you get married at St. Peter’s?

PHILLIPS: We did. We got married at St. Peter’s. And, so, in any event, once … Then in 1992, the first election after the 1990 census, [Both laugh] we had a …

DEUTSCH: Seems to be a recurring story for you.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, it is. We had a targeted campaign in Birmingham and lost the election by 8,000 votes, something like that. So, we needed, in the redistricting, we needed a ten percent minority population in the new district to win and we didn’t get it. We got eight percent. So, we knew pretty well going into it it was going to be really difficult. And it was, because the Reagan administration wanted to create another minority district in Alabama. And the Justice Department, the Reagan Justice Department, kind of decimated our district. Our district was very compact, very homogeneous. Basically it was Jefferson County, which is where Birmingham is. And they ran a finger up and gutted the interior of Birmingham with it and, I mean, it was just awful. But, in any event, neither here nor there. So, this being the House, I’m out of a job. So, where do I go from here? Well, losing an election in 1992 wasn’t all that bad for people who lost because guess who won the presidential election in 1992. [laughs]

DEUTSCH: Right.

PHILLIPS: So, the folks down on K Street were looking for Democrats. So, anyhow, I got to work for the American Bankers Association and picked up in banking where I had left off 16 years before. But, of course, I was …

DEUTSCH: Would you say you were a lobbyist then?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, I was a lobbyist.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: I was the director of policy development and senior legislative representative. So, I was a lobbyist. I was a registered lobbyist, but I didn’t have any offices to lobby. What I did was I went around the country with the elected bankers of the A.B.A., not the staff but the bankers themselves. And we …

DEUTSCH: With the elected bankers?

PHILLIPS: Mm-hmm. The A.B.A. each year they elect their officers.

DEUTSCH: I see.
PHILLIPS: They’re all practicing bankers. They’re all CEOs and they come—there’s a whole class situation where you have your Class A, Class B, Class C bank and you’re in each class by the size of your assets. And, so, the presidency rotates every year. So, every three years you got a big banker and every three years you got a small banker.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: So, anyhow, you get to meet all these guys. And, of course, I was a banker. So, we had—in the past I was a banker for a long time. So, we had this great rapport. And we went out on the road and had these town meetings and essentially you got people together, whether it was five bankers or 200 bankers. You closed the door and talked about whatever you wanted to talk about. And, so, you had a wide range of all kinds of things. You talked about politics, you talked about legislation, you talked about regulatory problems, you talked about this, you talked about that. Anyhow, it was very wide ranging. So, and I got to see a whole part of—I’ve been all over the country.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: The only state I haven’t been in is Alaska. And it’s just a gorgeous, beautiful country that we have. It’s just amazing when you see it. I just can’t tell you how beautiful, you know … And, of course, having been there in the time I was at the A.B.A., you know, you’ve got all kind of things, road stories and all that.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And we used to have—I used to take the bankers and their wives … There were four officers and their wives. And I’d invite them here to the house every September and I’d do Alabama barbecue and we’d …

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: I’d expand the table and we’d all sit around the table and we’d do this, that, and the other thing. And it was very interesting because many of them said it was the only time that they ever got to come inside a house in Washington …

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: … was when they came to my house and we had this barbecue. So. But, it was fun. It was just one of those really fun things to do. So, I did that. And while I was at the A.B.A., you know, you wind up doing, I mean, I started to do some other things within the community. And, then, when I left the
A.B.A. and started what I do now, then I really got more involved in the life of Capitol Hill. And, so, here we are. I started this investment management business in 2002 and grew from nothing to a point where I want to quit right now. [Laughs] I don’t want to do it anymore. [Laughs] But, don’t tell my clients that. But, anyway.

DEUTSCH: Right.

PHILLIPS: You wind up getting really more involved in the life of the community. So, I got involved with CHAMPS [Capitol Hill Association of Merchants and Professionals] and got involved with the economic development committee of CHAMPS. And, you know, one thing led to another and, in due course, our good friend Martha Huizenga, who was going to be the president of CHAMPS, asked me to be her vice president. I said, oh, well, well, okay [Laughs], if you want. So, we wound up … That’s how I happened to be president of CHAMPS, because Martha asked me.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm. So, you succeeded Martha?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah. And, as you know, we have two year terms. So, it’s a pretty good chunk of commitment time. So.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: So, I got involved in CHAMPS and …

DEUTSCH: What were the big issues at … What was the …

PHILLIPS: Mainly survival. I mean, CHAMPS really is in survival mode.

DEUTSCH: Is now in survival mode?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah. It’s just kind of strange because we—Martha and I, we changed it from CHAMPS to CHAMPS, Capitol Hill’s Chamber of Commerce, and you know we did the things that we thought would really get things involved. And the development of the Hill, the demographic, the whole changes on the Hill in the last 25 years have really helped businesses on the Hill. And, so, you can take a look at that and feel good about it. We do now have an active government relations committee with CHAMPS and we try to do what we can with the District Council. And Tommy’s [Tommy Wells, Ward 6 Council member] been a very good help to us in all that, very cooperative. So, you know you have that kind of thing. CHAMPS involvement is pretty broad. I mean, there’s just a whole lot of people who have been, are, and all of that. It’s a good group of people to get to know.
And, then, in the meantime, you know, we did the park. I live across the street from the park [Garfield Park]. So, it’s my front yard and, so, you know, you don’t want trash in your front yard. So, you go out and pick up trash. When we moved here in ’92, we had a neighbor way down the street, General Ort and his wife, had organized monthly cleanups and things like that and then the good general retired and they moved to Oregon, I think it was. So, I decided, well, you know, we obviously ought to continue the cleanups. So, we did a monthly cleanup. And then, after a year or so, I decided, well, you know, if we’re going to put money into it, we might as well make it to a point where it’s deductible and all of that. And, so, we formed a 501(c)3. It was very interesting because John Richardson over at Georgetown, who had done Volta Park …

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: I called him and he gave me everything. He gave me their articles of incorporation, he gave me this, he gave me that. And, so, it was, you know, kind of a cookie cutter to be honest with you. So, we did all the documents and filed everything and, in due course, got our tax qualification back. So, then we, you know, just put nickels and dimes together. And the park has come along, I think, a pretty good degree since.

DEUTSCH: Now, you must partner with Capitol Hill Day School a lot.

PHILLIPS: We do, we do.

DEUTSCH: Or how does that work?

PHILLIPS: We have a partnership with the Day School. The Day School puts $5,000—they don’t give it to the Friends of Garfield Park …

END OF TAPE 1/SIDE 2

TAPE 2/ SIDE 1

DEUTSCH: Okay. Here we go. Continuing with Bill Phillips. We’re talking about the Friends of Garfield Park.

PHILLIPS: So, yeah. The Day School does partnership. We have—they have Jim Woolwine, who’s the treasurer of the school, is on our board as an ex officio board member. So, we do have a partnership with them. We were very lucky 12 years ago now, or 13 years ago now, when the freeway [Southeast/Southwest Freeway] was rebuilt, we got some mitigation money. And, again, working on the Hill is very interesting because, having come from Congress, it’s my view that no matter what goes on
within almost immediately you can either talk to the person who either wrote the legislation or wrote the regulation under the legislation. [Laughs] So, we had very good advice on how to get mitigation money and, lo and behold, we wound up and were able to get significant money to redo a number of things in the park, which made it much, much better than it was. In the early 90s, ’90, ’91, ’92, we found a lot of needles, we found a lot, you know, of other things that you don’t want to find and so forth. And, so, it was able to do all of that. So.

DEUTSCH: And now that is better?

PHILLIPS: Better. Oh, yeah. We don’t, we haven’t found a needle in a long time. And, so, we find a lot of trash but we don’t find needles.

DEUTSCH: Well, that’s good.

PHILLIPS: But, we still do, you know, we still do monthly cleanups. We still do a whole bunch of things. The support of the community for the park, including the Foundation’s [Capitol Hill Community Foundation] support of the park, is really phenomenal and is very humbling, really, to see, you know, what happens, what has happened over 20 years, 21 years. But, the support of the community is there. It’s just totally amazing to me how people respond. And you do all kinds of different things, you know. We put out what are actually produce bags. You go in the grocery store and you get a produce bag. Well, we get—we found somebody in California, believe it or not, who makes them and they send them to us. I tell them I need some and they send them to us and we put them out for animal waste.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: All of that. And, we used to buy them but now they’re free. But, we still have envelopes on the side of the pole saying please give us money. So, we get donations large and small. So, the Foundation has been just a wonderful partner and supporter of the park. National Capital Bank has been phenomenal as well, as they are with a whole lot of organizations on the Hill. It’s just very kind of humbling to see all that support come through. So. But, the park is a park and, you know, we plant trees and pick up trash and people come. We can have 3,000 people in the park on a good summer weekend.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

PHILLIPS: So, we get a lot of folks over there. So. And it’s involved, you know, a lot of work with the Parks Department and Tommy Wells, who’s been very good in giving us assistance as he can. We’re now working with the [CSX] railroad about the tunnel, so, we’ll see.

DEUTSCH: What’s the issue with the tunnel?
PHILLIPS: The tunnel—they want to widen and deepen the tunnel, starting sometime this year. We’re waiting on the final environmental impact statement. They’re waiting on the final EIS and, so, we’ll see how that goes. The trivia question is, well, why do they need to widen the tunnel? And what they want to do is, they want to run double stacked flat cars through the tunnel. A double stack are two truck trailers stacked one on top of the other on a flat car. And the tunnel now is—and they want to do it on two tracks, not one. The tunnel now isn’t tall enough for double stacks and it’s not wide enough for two tracks. So. It was built in 1886, ’88. So, they have all of, you know, all of those issues. It’s a huge project. And the reason they need to do all of this is because of the Panama Canal.

DEUTSCH: What?

PHILLIPS: The Panama Canal. The Panama Canal is being widened and deepened itself. It will be finished …

DEUTSCH: Is it?

PHILLIPS: … in 2015. And they’re going to hold—be able to run container ships through the Canal which now don’t fit in the locks. They’re building a whole new set of locks.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: On either side. On the Atlantic and the Pacific side. So, these large, now container ships, instead of going to west coast ports and the containers coming across the country, will come through the Canal and will come up to east coast ports. So, it’s much cheaper to send a ship through the Canal and up this way, rather than put it on a train and come across. And, so, the railroad needs to … This is the weakest link they have in their north-south route. One mile long that they can’t do...] It’s just a total weak link. So.

DEUTSCH: Can’t have that.

PHILLIPS: And there’s a lot of controversy in the neighborhood, obviously, as to how they’re going to do it.

DEUTSCH: Well, will it take part of the park?

PHILLIPS: It won’t take any of the park. But, we already gave. We gave a lot in times past. So. In any event, they will, I’m pretty sure, wind up doing it. They have the ability to do it. I don’t think there’s going to be any process. They own the land. A lot of people, a lot of neighbors don’t understand. They own the land.
DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: They don’t have to get any approval about use of the land. There’s no zoning question that needs to be done. And, oh, by the way, they have eminent domain. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Mmm, yeah. So, maybe it’s a good idea not to make too much of a fuss.

PHILLIPS: Well, you know, you—but there is going to be some degree of difficulty and there’s going to be a lot of dislocation in the two years or so it’s going to take to do this tunnel. But …

DEUTSCH: When is that going to start?

PHILLIPS: Probably later this year, because it needs to be finished by 2015. It’s going to take them probably about two years. So, anyhow, so, the railroad is—we’re working with the railroad. We want to do some more things under the freeway. We actually have a whole plan of what we want to do that was all vetted by the community about three years ago. So, we have a whole … And we want to connect Garfield Park with Canal Park, which is a new park south of the freeway. So, we have those connections.

DEUTSCH: How will you do that?

PHILLIPS: Well, what we want to do under the freeway … Under the freeway is kind of a forbidding place.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And we had a basketball court under there which was fine for a while and now it’s just all been taken over by skateboarders. Which again is fine. We have a good example of urban art on the freeway wall.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: So. But, we want to do some more things with it. We want to … The skateboard park has kind of grown ad hoc and we want to build a regular, you know, skateboard park and kind of reclaim the basketball court because that’s where the skateboarders set up their stuff. We have a whole area to the west of that that we want to be able to use. And we want to put an ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] ramp in and, you know, a whole bunch of stuff. So. And we’re hopeful that the railroad will help in funding that. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: So.
DEUTSCH: So, what do you—what are the lessons you’ve learned about community building through all this?

PHILLIPS: One of the things that … You know, I watched Father O’Sullivan build the community at St. Peter’s for about 25 of his 35 years there. And he asked me to participate in a lot of it. And a lot of community building in my view is very simple stuff. You ask people to be involved, you treat people nicely, you thank people. It’s all the things you learned as a four and five year old.

DEUTSCH: Or you might have learned as a four and five year old.

PHILLIPS: Yeah. Might have learned. Hopefully learned. And it all fits, in my perspective, and it all fits in a lot of the stuff that I’ve done because you take that and you put it in with … You know, go way back to my novitiate year. I mean, it dovetails very nicely with that. It dovetails very nicely with all the things you try to do in politics. In politics, you know, when you work in the House, presumably the Senate, 95%, at a minimum, of what you do is garbage. [Interviewer laughs] It is. It’s just total garbage. And you wind up, though, with …

DEUTSCH: Did you say in Congress? When you worked in Congress?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah, you know. Well, somebody wants national, you know, Raise your Hand Day.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Well…

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: We’ve got more serious things we really need to deal with. [Interviewer laughs] And, you know, you do a lot of—which I didn’t do and didn’t have to supervise, but, I mean, it certainly is very important. Some of the most—I say that 75% of what a member of Congress does or a Senator does, if they’re successful at their casework, is helping their constituents deal with agencies, deal with the federal government. Whether it’s Social Security disability, in our case we had a lot of black lung cases, and it’s just critical that that occur. And, so, that is not garbage by any stretch. But, I mean, you’re talking about legislative work. Ehn, you know. Really there’s not much that an individual member of Congress does legislatively. It doesn’t work that way. So, you—having said that, you look for what actually works. What can you do? And you ask yourself that question whether you’re congressional staff or whether you’re president of CHAMPS, in my case, or whatever function that you do. And it’s cut across all those other things that I’ve talked about over the last 40 years of my life, where you look for what you can do. I
mean, none of us wants to beat our head against the wall. You have a whole range of things where you grow up …

**DEUTSCH:** Mm-hmm.

**PHILLIPS:** … as you mature. There were a lot of times we learned the same lesson 20 times before we actually say okay …

**DEUTSCH:** Right.

**PHILLIPS:** … I understand this now. [Laughs] And, then, hopefully you understand it. And, you know, it’s really kind of interesting because as you go … You know life is a journey. And in your journey you go down a lot of false roads. You have a lot of good, happy times. You have, you know, your family times are good. And you just—you wind up learning and learning and learning. And it’s a … You can feel—I don’t know about you, but sometimes, you know, you can feel yourself, well, no wait a minute. My instinct is to do this. And no, no, you’ve got to pull back a little bit and see where this goes. I’ve been down this road before, you know. It feels like I’ve been down this road before and we don’t need to go down it again. We need to do something else. And we all come from backgrounds. You know, in my case, my mother was an alcoholic, not, I mean, she wasn’t—but she was overly dependent on alcohol. And we had to intervene. And to her great credit, when we intervened, the thing that she said was “I didn’t know you loved me that much.”

**DEUTSCH:** Ummm.

**PHILLIPS:** And …

**DEUTSCH:** [Sigh] There’s a lesson there.

**PHILLIPS:** There’s a lesson there. And, you know, in her case, her mother died when she was three.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah.

**PHILLIPS:** And her dad was—came from Dublin. And in 1920, a single father didn’t raise a little girl.

**DEUTSCH:** Yeah,

**PHILLIPS:** So, she went to live with her aunt. Which was fine, you know, and all of that. But, then, you know, you don’t have family…..

**DEUTSCH:** Life was hard.
PHILLIPS: Families are just strange groups.

DEUTSCH: [Laughs] You’ve noticed that.

PHILLIPS: So, sometimes—yeah. So, hopefully, you learn from that. And, you know, once we dealt with my mother’s situation and she, you know, she was fine. She never took another drink during all the rest of her life.

DEUTSCH: How old … Were you a child when that happened?

PHILLIPS: No. I was at the bank. I was in Birmingham.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: My parents came from Orlando. They came to Birmingham to live with us. And, you know, it’s said that you can’t go home again. Well, I can also tell you, you can’t bring home to you.

DEUTSCH: Mmm. Yeah.

PHILLIPS: That’s really tough.

DEUTSCH: So, your parents came to live with you?

PHILLIPS: Yeah. My parents came to live with me. And you just can’t do that.

DEUTSCH: That’s hard.

PHILLIPS: It’s hard. And, so …

DEUTSCH: Especially if mom’s drinking too much.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And my dad—you know my dad was an aeronautical engineer. And he worked within tolerances of 10,000ths of an inch. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: And, so, you know, he’d build really—he actually did build nuclear warheads. He designed them, an anti-missile missile thing. Anyway, to make a long story short, he goes to north Alabama, after my mother’s intervention and all that, and said we’re going to build a house. And, so, he designs the house. And there’s this … this contractor who’s working with guys. And it’s a quarter-inch off. Well, now, the good old boy says “It’s just a quarter-inch.” [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: They don’t know who they’re talking to.
PHILLIPS: No. But, anyhow, you learn things, you know. So, after my mother’s intervention and all that, and, so, I read this book. I read this book on adult children of alcoholics.

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: I’m an adult child of an alcoholic and so I read this book. And I say, oh, God, you know, it makes a lot of sense. And, so, you go down this road and you … You know I go to a lot of Al-Anon meetings on the Hill.

DEUTSCH: Do you?

PHILLIPS: Not anymore, but I did. The first ten years I was here I went to a lot of Al-Anon meetings. And, you know, you can’t talk about anything you learn there, but what you do learn is no matter how bad you are, you go to a meeting, somebody’s worse.

DEUTSCH: Um, yeah.

PHILLIPS: You know, and that ..

DEUTSCH: And no matter how wretched your situation is, somebody else is something—yeah.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, my mine was, on retrospect, mine’s a piece of cake here.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And, while that might make you feel better, what you learn is that the dysfunction that you had through all of that—you can just see things. Well, the dysfunction just doesn’t affect your personal life, it affects …

DEUTSCH: Everything.

PHILLIPS: Everything. And, so, you know, you kind of learn from that. And that’s why I say—I mean, sometimes, you know, I say, well, I actually feel this. Well, no, wait a minute here. You know, we need to look at that and see if that’s what we really, really want to do.

DEUTSCH: Do you need to answer that? (Phone rings)

PHILLIPS: No, no, I’m just trying to get it to stop beeping. [Interviewer laughs] So, you know, you have all of this. And, you know, I’m 68. Well, you know, I’m not done yet. And, so, you have to—in my view you go back and you’re a composite of all your experiences. And you bring it and hopefully at some point in time—you know, we’re never going to be perfect—but you bring it and everybody new that comes in,
they all have a story. And they all have a situation. And they’re asking you for help. You know, given my background, my first inclination is to help them. [Interviewer laughs] Well, okay. Well, what’s the best way? How do you do this? What can be done? You know, how can … And then it applies like when we do grants [at the Capitol Hill Community Foundation]. Okay, so, I go talk to the people at STRIVE. Well, they’re doing great work. I love them. And, you know, you talk about it and you say, okay, is this the best way they can do that? And, you know, they have to make those decisions, not me, obviously, or us. But, you have an impression and you want to be able to give them whatever benefit you can when you talk to them.

DEUTSCH: And I’m sure, like me, sometimes you’re sort of overwhelmed with how small an amount of money they’re actually needing to do this incredibly significant work, like STRIVE.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It’s just an amazing kind of thing. And maybe we can switch to the Foundation for a minute, because being president of CHAMPS, of course, I get to be on the Foundation board and all that. And, so, you know, it’s the very beneficial part, you know, I think. And I think being on the grants committee is just the greatest thing since sliced bread because we get to give money away.

DEUTSCH: It’s true. It’s fun, isn’t it?

PHILLIPS: Having done all this trying to raise the money, I get to give it away. I get to have a part in giving it away and it’s really fun to do. But, it really is. I mean, Stephanie, you said all this time, you know, that the greatest part about it is you get to meet all these wonderful people. And you do.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And you just meet all these wonderful people …

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: … who do all this wonderful stuff.

DEUTSCH: Yeah, it’s true.

PHILLIPS: And, you know, you might be able to give some expertise, maybe not. Most of the time you don’t. You just listen to their story and you ask more about their story and you learn more. And that’s what’s so rewarding. And, you know, you just learn from it. And you do what you can. And, it is, I mean … Whatever we might be able to give, I mean, that money goes out and it’s like, you know … I mean all of us probably have our own little personal grantees.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm. Oh, yeah.
PHILLIPS: And, so, you know, you do that and, you know, that helps as best you can. And, so, you know, you—it is a—it makes you feel better in many ways about it, you know, how you can help…

DEUTSCH: What do you like about living on Capitol Hill besides that? What are your pet things that you love?

PHILLIPS: It’s the community. I mean, it’s the community. I mean, you go out and it’s … Okay, so I’ve been here 26 years or thereabouts and, you know, I’m sure like you, you walk down the street and if you don’t see two people, three people you know, you know, you’re in the wrong place or something.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: I mean, it’s just an amazing thing. And it’s the greatest community. In our neighborhood, you know, we’ve got members—I’ve got Senators and [House] members and all neighbors and all of that, and when you go talk to them that’s fine. But, you know, the greatest part is, like Christmas, everybody goes away. Thanksgiving, everybody goes away. [Interviewer laughs] And we have this great little town. And you can walk about [both laugh] …

DEUTSCH: That’s true.

PHILLIPS: And, you know, anybody in the world can come visit me at Christmas or Thanksgiving, but I’m not going anywhere. And, you know, we just have a great, wonderful place. And, you know, the community just didn’t happen. I mean the demographics of the Hill have changed over the years. I mean it’s not the same as it was 20, 30 years ago. And that’s, on the one hand good, and on the other hand, maybe not so good, you know. What have we got? Well, we’ve got more rich people, you know. Probably fewer poor people. But, we have poor people. We have people who need help. We have people who are, really, at the crossroads of their lives, you know. And we have just this great cross section of humanity that need all kinds of—you know, I want to, I’ll say they need it, but then there are things that can be done with them. And everybody can contribute. It’s not us giving to them…

DEUTSCH: Right. Everybody can contribute.

PHILLIPS: … everybody contributes, everybody. Anyway.

DEUTSCH: I’m going to wind this up soon. But, did you grow up in a community like that in Baltimore?

PHILLIPS: No.

DEUTSCH: No.
PHILLIPS: No. We were, in our family in Baltimore, my great aunt, whom we called my grandmother, she really … Because she raised my mother, she felt that my mother owed her …

DEUTSCH: Ooo.

PHILLIPS: … to a certain extent. So, we were somewhat, I mean, I was somewhat of a latchkey kid, an early latchkey kid in the 50s, because I went to school downtown, Baltimore. And, as I say, when I came home I rode a streetcar and two buses and walked a mile and [laughs] and …

DEUTSCH: Wow.

PHILLIPS: … if there was a blizzard, I had to go through the blizzard.

DEUTSCH: What school did you go to?

PHILLIPS: I went to Cathedral School in downtown Baltimore and then I went to Calvert Hall, which was a half a block away.

DEUTSCH: Oh, right.

PHILLIPS: So, anyway. But, in any event, you—our family kind of revolved around all of that and, you know, you have all—I said, you refer back to all the dysfunction that that situation involves. You know, it’s just … I mean, it was a good, loving environment. It wasn’t that it was not a good, loving environment.

DEUTSCH: But it wasn’t this.

PHILLIPS: It wasn’t this.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: Right. This isn’t what we got. And, one of the great results of being an adult child of an alcoholic many times is that those kind of people want to fix things. [Laughs] Want to help.

DEUTSCH: Mmm.

PHILLIPS: And, so, that’s one of things you really, you know, in my case, I really have to watch out for. Because you can’t fix everything.

DEUTSCH: No. [Laughs]
PHILLIPS: Can’t do it. Can’t do it. And you’ve got to be realistic about what you can do and there’s no sense, you know, going down a road you know you’re not going to get through. So, you know, you have all of that and it’s a—you know, that’s that. But, again, in whatever I can bring, it’s hopefully being able to add to what any individual can add to me. And it’s a—I don’t know how to describe it.

DEUTSCH: Reciprocal.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, it’s reciprocal. And it’s to the good of the whole community. And, if we can take as broad a look at the community as we can, you know, I think that’s a good thing. But, we’re the sum of all the experiences that we’ve had, you know. None of us are cookie cutters, thank God. And, you know, we all hopefully can take each other with a grain of salt and …

DEUTSCH: What would you like to see—what are your main hopes for the Hill? What would you like to see moving forward?

PHILLIPS: Well, obviously, to build on what’s already here and let the spirit of the community, the cooperation of the community, the care of the community, the love of the community come out. I mean, we’ve done that but one spinoff of CHAMPS is Celebrate Capitol Hill, which is a 501(c)3 corporation.

DEUTSCH: I guess I don’t know that, Celebrate Capitol Hill.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, we formed it to get grants because the city, the District won’t give money to CHAMPS anymore. You have to—they’re only going to give it to a 501(c)3. So, we formed this 501(c)3 to get grants from the city essentially. And what we’ve done so far is we’ve done—right now we’re doing the T. C. Maslin thing. And it’s just amazing …

DEUTSCH: The T. C. Maslin? [Note: T.C. Maslin was beaten and robbed and seriously injured while walking home from a bar on Capitol Hill in the summer of 2012. Partly because his wife was well known as a teacher at Brent Elementary School, the community rallied round and donated money to help the family.]

PHILLIPS: Maslin. The guy …

DEUTSCH: Oh, oh, the—yeah.

PHILLIPS: And we have—we’ve raised, like, $72,000, I think.

DEUTSCH: That is remarkable.
PHILLIPS: It is remarkable. And it’s somewhat the power of the internet because … Somehow it must have gotten on the internet because, I mean, all the contributions come here because I do all the book work and all of that. And, you know, we’re getting contributions on Pay Pal from California, New York.

DEUTSCH: Wow.

PHILLIPS: I mean, it’s just—it’s people who wouldn’t ever have any reason to give here …

DEUTSCH: Yeah. The internet is a powerful tool for all this.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah. It really is. And, you know, to be honest with you sometimes there’s a part of me that’s, like, okay, okay, we need to stop this … Hopefully it doesn’t stop. But, you know, there is a part of me that says okay, I need to wrap this up and put it away and go on to the next thing.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: But you can’t.

DEUTSCH: Although I suppose the needs will be ongoing there.

PHILLIPS: That’s the point. In terms of what can we do, it’s all the … You know, okay, so, you know, we’re going to die off in 20 years. So, what’s the next generation going to do? You know, how are they going to participate in the life of their community? And, it’s things like—I sit here all the time and I look out the window and across the park and the freeway and it dawns on me every once in a while there’s 6,000 people on the other side of the freeway that weren’t there.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: What are we going to do with them? Or how are we going to get them involved in our community, because the freeway, I mean, it’s a huge, huge line …

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: … of steel.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: But, I don’t know how we—we’ve got to wrestle with that, but—six, seven years. You know, we’ve managed to do … Again it’s an example of how you can do things on a very small way at the start. There’s a lot of people who come to the park with their dog. From the other side of the freeway.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.
PHILLIPS: So, we can’t go door to door and give out newsletters over there. But, we do have a listserv and we do have email addresses. We do have communication with everybody over there. And, so, you know, you start out small and you try and …

DEUTSCH: Build on shared interests.

PHILLIPS: … build on just—yeah, shared interests. And you go from there. You never know where one path is going to go.

DEUTSCH: No. That’s very true.

PHILLIPS: Your wife—Monica Phillips?

PHILLIPS: No. Monica Sullivan.

DEUTSCH: Monica Sullivan. Okay, I’m glad I asked.

PHILLIPS: Okay. And Monica and I have been married since October of 1993.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: And married at St. Peter’s.

DEUTSCH: And what does she do?

PHILLIPS: Monica is the Deputy Copy Chief of National Journal.

DEUTSCH: Oh.

PHILLIPS: Before that, she was the publications director for the League of Woman Voters for 26 years. She’s one of eight, came from Columbus, Ohio. And this is part of my checkered past. We didn’t talk about my checkered past. [Interviewer laughs] I’ve been, you know, all of those… but I’ve been married twice before.

DEUTSCH: Really?

PHILLIPS: Really. And it basically is kind of the result of all of the family stuff.

DEUTSCH: Mm-hmm.

PHILLIPS: You know, having been through all of that kind of stuff. And then I’ve gotten two annulments from the Church, which, you know, people … But, in any event …
DEUTSCH: No kids?

PHILLIPS: I’ve got two kids from Trudie, who’s my second wife. Kate and H. Kate is 34, and will be 35 this year. She is a neonatal nurse at Children’s Hospital in Birmingham. She will graduate with her master’s in nursing and be a nurse practitioner in May, thank God.

DEUTSCH: Oh, great.

PHILLIPS: [Laughs] In doing all this, she’s the mother of four boys.

DEUTSCH: Oh, my God.

PHILLIPS: So.

DEUTSCH: That’s something.

PHILLIPS: Yeah. And she’s married, obviously, and all that.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: And, John, her husband’s a photographer.

END OF TAPE 2/SIDE 1

TAPE 2/SIDE 2

PHILLIPS: [Recording begins in the middle of a sentence] … for this year. And he—Sarah. He and Sarah aren’t married but he and Sarah have been together for, like, seven years. And they moved to Orlando and back, and they’ve done this and they’ve done that. They don’t have any children, but, hopefully, soon, maybe. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Do you think either of them will be at the dinner?

PHILLIPS: I don’t know. I mean, I need to talk to them about that and see, see what we can do.

DEUTSCH: You should get them to come.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah.

DEUTSCH: Especially, this may be our only moment. You know we’re never going to win Academy Awards.

PHILLIPS: No, we’re not.
DEUTSCH: We’re not going to be on TV, so … [Both laugh] You’ve got to get your kids there.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah. So, and H, he’s a district manager for—and I kind of cringe at this—but he’s district manager for a check cashing firm.

DEUTSCH: Oh.

PHILLIPS: And he and I talked about it for a long time, obviously. I mean, I’m kind of a banker, right? [Laughs] So.

DEUTSCH: Right.

PHILLIPS: He’s almost the enemy in …

DEUTSCH: We think of these things as a bit predatory.

PHILLIPS: Yeah, yeah. And in some cases they are. And he says, well, he says, first off, the people who come won’t go anywhere else. And in the main part he’s right. There’s a subpart. When I was at the A.B.A. I worked with Treasury. Again, I went around the country with Treasury on electronic benefit transfers, which is food stamps on a card, a debit card and all of that. We went through …

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: … all this stuff. And he’s right. I mean, there are folks who will not give up cash. There are folks who just won’t, they just won’t.

DEUTSCH: Yeah.

PHILLIPS: I mean, I know that from having tried. So, anyhow, he does all that. And he says he’ll go tell people, he’ll say, you don’t want to do this. This is what you want to do. So …

DEUTSCH: And is he is Birmingham, too?

PHILLIPS: He’s in Birmingham. So, they’re all in Birmingham. So. And my first wife is in Orlando. [Laughs]

DEUTSCH: Okay. I don’t think we need to include her.

PHILLIPS: We won’t. We won’t do it. [Interviewer laughs]

END OF INTERVIEW