

Peter Phillips

Tape 1 Side A

June 16, 1997

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Abstract

Peter Phillips was born Ernest Peter Phillips in Essen, Germany on December 5, 1931. He had twin brothers who are four years younger than him and he always had to care for them. By 1936, his parents realized that even the intellectuals accepted Hitler so they must leave. They took a train to Prague. When the Nazis occupied Prague in '39 they got documents to leave and took a train to Italy and resided near Genoa. While his parents searched all day for work, Peter minded the twins in the nearby park where children molested them. After three months they succeeded in getting documents for Quito, Ecuador and went there by ship. His father did freelance work and bought hides which he arranged for export. With a partner his father organized a group to make margarine and made thermos boxes to store food. From '39 to '41 Peter was able to attend an elite school but living was very primitive so the family decided to go to the US. They succeeded in obtaining an affidavits and a visa.

Peter Phillips discusses his immigration from Quito, Ecuador to the US in May 1941 where it was difficult to learn the language and for the parents to earn sufficiently to support the family. Peter felt the War followed him when there were air raids. He suffered the taunts of toughs in Ecuador and New York because he was an immigrant, Jewish and from Germany. In NY his mother did piece work and his father worked for the Kaufman Company, the same company he worked for since age 13. Upon arrival in the US, he had a low level position as a bookkeeper and after the war was frequently sent on overseas trips so finally his father accepted a position in Rotterdam. The parents moved there with Peter's twin brothers who went to boarding school. Meanwhile Peter lived with a cousin to complete high school and lived alone in the family house in Queens for five years to complete college. Then he volunteered for the Army and was stationed in Mainz, Germany. Upon his return he had a career as a journalist for many newspapers and magazines. When he retired 10 years ago, he became a freelance writer and volunteer for the Holocaust Museum. He is married with two daughters.

Peter Phillips discusses his experience as a volunteer at the Holocaust Museum. The volunteers at his Thursday afternoon shift are friendly but sometimes he has bad experiences with the visitors who are either emotional survivors or hostile toward the Museum. He cries when the survivors get emotional and feels he is obsessive about the Holocaust as often reads about it. He has shown the museum to his wife and two daughters and is happy they are interested and one daughter is engaged to a Jew. He feels he has returned to Judaism by joining Jewish groups. He is glad that he received reparations as he lost some of his childhood and his schooling was disrupted. He does not care for rough behavior so quit ushering when children showed

disrespect and gets nervous on the beltway. Peter is in contact with Essen, Germany, his birthplace where he hopes to go some day to speak to the children of his experiences.

Summary

00:00 Peter Phillips was born Ernest Peter Phillips but uses "Peter" or "Pete" as his first name. He was born in Essen, Germany on December 5, 1931 to Bruno Phillips, born in Oberhausen and Lily Phillips born in Bochum (?). There were twin brothers, Irvin and George who were four years younger than Peter and were born in Mulheim on the Rhine, Germany. Peter's mother worked in a fancy dress shop that catered to the elite wives of the steel magnates and was apprentice to her aunt. His father was apprentice to an international hide and skin company. They met at an opera performance. His mother hated school and only completed six grades. Peter's father had about the same formal education but was self-taught as he read a lot and loved art and music. He taught himself to play the violin and the piano so that enabled him to play chamber music with his friends; almost like a genius. His mother was a genius with her fingers as she designed clothes and was able to duplicate those shown on a manikin. She made men's ties, made one dress out of another, crocheted and knitted. Peter's mother was anti-religious as she could not reconcile the hypocrisy in the world with religion. She only attended synagogue for Bar Mitzvahs, never on holidays and did not make Seder as was intolerant of religion.

05:00 Peter's father grew up devout and taught Peter to lay tefillin which he refused to comply. There was constant friction between Peter's parents on religion and he felt that he suffered from it though he went through religious phases of his own. His father is not Zionist. Peter is interested in politics and reads the New York Times and the Business Week magazine. His mother is also interested in politics. Peter spoke German when he lived in Germany and when we first came to the US. His parents wanted the family to speak English when they came here. Peter's parents behaved in the European manner with no hugging. His father never expressed love verbally as it was not the custom. Peter's earliest memories are of a strict and controlling father. Even when Peter had his own money from his allowance, he could not spend it as he desired. Peter recalls the Germans marching into Prague and bivouacking at the playground near his home. They lived in the city and he did not attend school. Peter's family left Essen when he was five or six. He sensed tension in the house in the 30s as the family kept vigil at the radio.

There were air raid drills in Prague and they kept gas masks in the wardrobe.

10:00 Peter's mother worked in a fancy dress shop. When Hitler came to power, the customers stayed away as it was a Jewish store so the aunt could not make a living. They had some non-Jewish friends in Essen. His father carried his violin to his friend's house to play

music and saw Hitler's photo on the piano. This made him realize that Nazism was serious as his friend was intellectual so decided that the family must leave Germany. They took the train to Prague, Czechoslovakia where his father's firm had an opening in a one-man office. He replaced a man from Italy who wanted to return home. The firm's headquarters was in Argentina. They moved in 1936 to a ground floor apartment in central Prague where they remained for three years. Their apartment was across from the park which had a sandbox. They only brought the clothes on their backs and a large duffle bag that their friend, Mollie, gave them.

- 15:00 Peter liked flashlight batteries and bulbs to make theatre scenes. His parents were middle class. His mother worked hard getting proper papers to get them out. She was beautiful and his brothers were white blond and none of them looked Jewish so she acted as if she was a gentile married to a Jew. She got friendly with a Nazi and stood at the Consulate daily. Though tiny, she did not take guff from the Gestapo. The family needed to get a red "J" on their passport. The Gestapo requested 4,000 Kroner so his mother sold her jewelry but the Nazi took the money and disappeared. His mother stood vigil at their window and spotted him one day and told him she was related to a high official to threaten him and they got their passports the following day. The German government required the "J" and the names Sarah or Jacob on the passports. Peter went to school and was small so sat in the first row. He fell in love with his teacher, Fraulein Bagger (?) and kissed her. Friendship developed between the teacher and his parents and the family attended her wedding where Peter cried as realized he could never marry his teacher.
- 20:00 His parents tried to shield Peter from the current events and he does not recall when he first heard about Hitler. Peter felt there was anxiety at home because of his parents' hushed conversations with friends and they looked worried. He felt that he had a happy childhood. His parents tried to shield the children from the events. Peter had one non-Jewish friend, Herbert. Activities at that time were to go to the park on weekends, go on picnics and walks around the city and crossing the bridge over the Danube. His brothers were devils, particularly George. At six or seven they had their first brush with the police when they urinated from the bridge into the Danube. Peter did not care for sports as a child or even now. He loved music passionately as he grew up hearing his father and his friends play and listened to classical music on the radio. He knew classical works before he was Bar Mitzvah. Peter took violin and piano lessons. At age 40 Peter took private lessons with a teacher who was trained at Juilliard but he still could not learn to read music. The family celebrated the High Holidays and Passover though his mother rebelled against it.
- 25:00 She was pro-Israel but anti organized religion. Peter knew he was Jewish. He was riding a streetcar in Prague with his mother and he offered an old lady a seat. She said that he was nice and he responded that he's Jewish and has twin brothers. The air raids in Prague seemed like war to him as the noise was frightening but the gas masks remained

on top of his parent's closet. Peter heard his parents and their friends talk about getting visas so felt the danger. The air raid drills were held before the Germans came. They were realistic with sirens and simulated exploding bombs. Seeing the sky lit up with fireworks made him anxious. They stood on their terrace which overlooked the sea and saw search lights over the sky. There were only gas masks for the adults, none for the children. Peter did not recall anti-Semitism in Prague. He saw school-age children in the park. The family got their papers to leave and they departed for Italy, to Mondovi (?) near Genoa. They took a train from Prague to Genoa which stopped in the middle of nowhere and the Gestapo took their passports. By that time Peter's parents told him of the Gestapo.

30:00 The Gestapo disappeared inside a shack for a couple of hours while the family remained in their compartment. He does not recall taking any toys with him. Toys were scarce until he was nine and living in New York. He felt deprived all his life. The psychological impact was to be covetous of others' belongings instead of being happy with what you have. Peter attended synagogue with his father in Prague. One Simchat Torah they arrived at the synagogue and all the candy was already given out. They attended synagogue pretty regularly but not weekly. He only knew German, no Hebrew. It was a nice, warm climate in Italy but his parents had no work so no money. Peter does not know what they lived on. He was in charge of his brothers and took them to the park every day while his parents searched for work. The children in the park beat them with chains and sticks and taunted them as they were Jewish and did not speak Italian. There were concessions in the park but they did not have any money to spend. When they saw children finishing their ride, Peter and his brothers might try to ride a few feet for free. He was always running away from the toughs after him.

35:00 He was eight and in charge of the twins who were four-years-old. Peter had a sense of responsibility so grew up fast but his brothers never forgave him. It was summer '39 when they went to Italy after the Germans had marched into Prague. The Germans were in uniform and looked big but not menacing. They patted the children on the cheek and observed them play. They bivouacked in the park and the children were a distraction. They were friendly as they did not know the children were Jewish. **Tape 1, Side B.** Peter spent Sundays with his parents and their refugee friends. It was just the family who went from Essen to Prague. His father's mother lived with an uncle in Amsterdam and perished in Auschwitz. They had no friends from Essen in Prague and went to Italy alone. His parents got moral support from the other refugees in Italy. In Prague, they only knew two bachelor refugees.

40:00 Peter looked forward to being with his parents on the weekends when they would walk along the strand along the beach with friends. Food was scarce. When his mother bought cherries or grapes they would count them and divide them up between themselves. They had few clothes which became a problem later. Peter felt that his father's company might

have given them some help. His mother could not work as she did not know the language. Peter did not learn much Italian. During their six months residence, Peter was sent to the park every morning and he was fearful of going. He did not tell his mother of his fear as felt responsible. His mother had one amusing friend, a fashion designer who wore a monocle and a moustache. He was engaging and highly educated and told stories which his parents enjoyed as it was entertaining and distracting. Peter was not aware of the discriminatory laws of the time. He did not go swimming although they were near the beach.

45:00 He does not recall discussing Hitler at that time. He first heard of him later at their next way station. Peter does not recall of the start of the war in September '39 or of Kristallnacht. His parents were willing to go anywhere. They were choosing between Ecuador and Australia and chose Ecuador as it let Jews in. They stood in line at the Consulate to get exit visas, passports and affidavits. He does not know who provided the affidavits but supposes it was his father's company. There was no time for horseplay or lightheartedness, just tension. There was no money for entertainment. It was not a carefree time. He felt older than his years then and still does. Someone said that he never had a childhood so feels older. Peter tried to encourage the twins to behave and not be so rambunctious but they always gave him a hard time and still do. They got papers to go to Quito, Ecuador which they never heard of. His father was approaching 40 and his mother was a year older and they were going to a country where they did not know the language. Peter is grateful they had the foresight to leave Europe.

50:00 They only had the duffle bag so did not bring toys or books. Because of the many languages that Peter had to learn, he vocalizes but is a slow reader to this day though tried attending reading school. His father was musical but his mother never sang. At that time children were to be seen but not heard. There were different standards then. He would receive severe punishment if he got out of line such as going to bed without dinner which would be considered child abuse now. His father tried to teach him the multiplication table. He was very strict about it. Peter learned by memorization. That was the only schooling he got. They packed Mollie's bag and took the Italian steamer, Kontakt Vonday (?), where he became very seasick and threw up from the oil in the kitchen. They were in a cabin to themselves. Peter would walk around in the fresh air and watch the ocean. He had an aversion to the smell of the sea from then on. There were no stops. They went through the Panama Canal towed by mules. It was the first of two trips as later they returned in the reverse direction. They might have stopped in the Canary Islands for a few hours. The Canal locks were a spectacle though he did not understand its workings. He saw the locks closing and filling up with water and the ship rising.

55:00 The ocean voyage seemed to calm his parents. His mother had manic-depressive tendencies. She was mostly depressed but sometimes she laughed hysterically and told the same stories repeatedly and attracted attention. Peter thinks his parents indicated that

the Nazis were bad and did bad things but does not recall the exact words. They sat with others at mealtimes though he does not recall talking to them. There must have been other children on the ship. It was a two-stacker ship. The five of them shared one cabin so it was crowded. They stopped at Wyaquito (?) and the pilot came and they went through customs. His uniform created some anxiety. They were on their way to Quito in the mountains. They showed their immigration papers and had a health exam. They stood in long lines until it was time to disembark. They left on a tender which was scary for Peter as he is prone to seasickness.

60:00 Peter reported that he probably did not tell his parents that he was frightened of the men in uniform as his parents were also frightened. They took a long train ride to Quito. The train kept going back and forth and Peter got sick. It felt confusing to land in a country where you do not know the language. It must have been difficult for his parents to live there, buy food and make money. German refugees who preceded them were helpful. Then the new arrivals helped those who came later. The German/Jewish community was too small to have a synagogue. They practiced religious observances at home. They stood out as Jews as Ecuador is a Catholic country and also stood out as Germans. Peter attended a private school as that was the only decent school where diplomats and the wealthy sent their children. It was strict and demanding with higher standards than those in the US as when he attended school later in the US, the material had already been taught to him in an earlier grade in Ecuador. Peter was called Ernesto in Spanish. His teacher would pick him up by his sideburns to discipline him. Peter picked up Spanish easily and was a good student. His clothes were different from the other students as he wore hand-me-downs.

65:00 Peter did not know where his father got money to live on. Perhaps his former employer, the Kaufman Company, helped him as he was employed by them since age 15. The company is still operating. His father did freelance work and bought hides which he arranged for export. He also teamed up with a Czech, Mr. Robachek (?) to make margarine out of vegetable oil in a garage. They employed the natives who squeezed water out of the margarine by hand. They also made thermos boxes out of two layers of wood with excelsior as the insulation for food storage containers which they sold. Peter's father met Mr. Robachek, a fellow refugee, in Quito. Since the Jewish community was small everyone knew one another. Peter knew that Hitler and Stalin had signed an agreement but did not recall the invasion of Poland. They only learned by word of mouth as there was no radio and no newspaper. The living conditions were primitive with the buildings made of clay. The tropical rains would cause their roof to cave in and they would have to go to another house. Their next door neighbor, Mr. Tinsmith (?), lived in a cave. They lived in the outskirts of Quito where the streets were not paved and were muddy. They shopped when the natives would come to their house with goods such as vegetables which had to be disinfected. Peter never felt secure.

- 70:00 He had one friend, Klaus, who was also a refugee. Peter had no spending money and no toys. They played with metal and made soldier uniforms out of scrap metal such as swords and hats. Peter did not consider himself German. He wanted to assimilate and be left alone. His parents learned Spanish. Their second house was the guest house of a rich family's compound. He was invited to see a movie, the story of Jesus. He did not understand the movie and asked the daughter for an explanation. She said that the Jews killed Jesus and they should know about it. It was his first episode of anti-Semitism and upset him and he asked his parents about it. Peter always felt frightened and uneasy. His clothes and food were different from his classmates and he spoke Spanish with an accent so felt different from his classmates and felt that he stood out. He did not feel at home, like one of the boys. Peter attended an all-boys school where he was the only refugee and the only Jew. There were about 15 or 20 children in his class. He felt lucky to attend the elite school. A shortwave radio gave them some information about Europe. Peter attended two grades of school from '39 to '41. It was helpful that the US had separate quotas for Ecuador. The family got affidavits and a visa to go to the US.
- 75:00 They had no fear of being placed in a concentration camp but Ecuador was primitive and they felt they could do better economically in the US. Many refugees aspired to go to the US. Peter was always chased and punished; it was never-ending.

Peter Phillips

Tape 2 Side A

June 16, 1997

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Summary

- 00:00 Peter Phillips starts his interview by telling how a refrigerator serviceman who came to his house six years ago indicated that he was from Quito, Ecuador and attended his school there. He was two years younger than Peter and had the same teacher and principal. They discussed the higher standards in their school than in the US schools. Peter reports that he dealt with anti-Semitic experiences by running away. When there was a confrontation or potential fist fight, he would run fast. The children would taunt him by saying, "Jew", "Gringo" or "German" as there were three strikes against him—immigrant, Jewish, German. His brothers were tough and had better coping skills than him and would protect him. The twins were two together against the children and would not run away. Peter's parents told him to avoid the situation and stay out of trouble. They thought it was okay to run away. Peter felt sorry for his parents so he shielded them from unpleasantness as they had much to endure.

- 05:00 Peter reported that he is a worrier and always overreacts which his brother do not. His parents did not discuss the relatives that they left behind. When they arrived in New York, Peter's father found out that his mother had been killed. His father wrote to his brother, Hugo in Amsterdam and sent him money for food. Peter's mother did not like Hugo. Hugo had married a non-Jew who had a son, Herbert. Peter met him 60 years ago and there has been no contact since then. If he is living, he is one of the few Jews who spell his name, "Philipps" with one L and two Ps. Peter felt they had a meager existence in Ecuador. They had enough to eat but no indulgences as there was no dessert, movies or entertainment. They made do with what they had. They played "cowboys and Indians." He did not make any close non-Jewish friends. The Jewish community stuck close together for moral support. There was the language barrier with the Ecuadoreans. There was no synagogue in Ecuador. He does not recall having a Seder; his mother did not care for it. He did not receive any Jewish education but his father tried to instill a Jewish sense of belonging. Perhaps his father prayed privately. Peter's parents dreamt of going to the US. He completed a second year of schooling before they left in May 1941, six months before Pearl Harbor. They went on a Chilean steamer through the Panama Canal. He recalls being seasick on the trip including when they arrived in New York Harbor. His parents went on deck to see the sight while he was in the bathroom.
- 10:00 They were met by Paul Jonas (?), a bookkeeper in his father's company who he knew in Germany. He helped get them through customs. They took a taxi through Manhattan where Peter noticed fire escapes on the outside of buildings. He was concerned that they were the stairs up to the building but Mr. Jonas explained. First they stayed with HIAS on the lower east side. They were given black bread and herring and saw two movies; one was sponsored by Phillip Morris cigarettes. Though his parents were less anxious in New York about being persecuted, they were anxious about finding a place to live and work to make a living. They were permitted to stay longer than the usual week in HIAS to find a place to live. Peter tried to teach himself English by reading signs on stores and the subway. While his parents looked for work during the day, Peter took care of his brothers. They rented a one-room apartment in a Brownstone in the West 70s near the railroad tracks. His father got a job as a bookkeeper at the Kaufman Company who he formerly worked for but now only earned \$10 a week.
- 15:00 A detective in the building showed he was friendly by showing his gun to Peter but Peter did not know English and could not speak to him. They moved to the 2nd floor of a 3-story Brownstone on 188th Street. A Brownstone was called a railroad flat at that time. Peter attended third grade in P.S. 189 which was nearby. When he was at HIAS, he was in day care so at 9 and ½; Peter was older than the other children. Therefore, he was permitted to read while the others napped. Although children pick up language quickly, Peter did not feel comfortable as he did not understand what was going on. Even years later, he still put the accent on the wrong syllable. Learning to play stickball, marbles

and baseball all took time to learn the rules and how to play the games. There were constant conversations about the War. They owned a small Emerson radio which announced an air raid. Their windows were taped up with masking tape to prevent shattering. A radio announcement interrupted his favorite program with instructions to lie down on the floor until "all clear" sounded. When his parents' refugee friends came over, they would talk of the War.

20:00 One of them is 92 years old and they recently visited her in Santa Barbara. Peter does not recall much of December 7, 1941 but he knows it was a Sunday and they had the radio on. He does not remember what people said. It seemed like the War followed him wherever he went. Peter did not think the US would escape the War. Children would be scared of invasion and bombing. He had a friend, Peter Adler, who was 11 months older. They met in Hebrew School and are still inseparable. They talked of the War. They would save aluminum foil and newspapers. They briefly went to the same school and then the friend attended the High School of Music and Art. His friend was in a higher grade but they met at lunch and would have a wide choice of penny candy at a pushcart. His friend was also a refugee. He came to the US via London with his mother and older brother and his father had died of a heart attack. Peter tells of his experiences of children throwing ice and rocks at him or starting a fist fight because they thought he was German or because he was Jewish. Peter tells how he saved money to buy a pair of roller skates and two toughs stole his skate key so he could not use the skates.

25:00 He would receive toys from Jewish agencies or charity and they would be stolen if he played with them on the street. His friend lived three blocks away and would have to walk through a small forest where tough kids were awaiting to cause them trouble. Religious training was given in Rabbi Birbaum's (?) apartment where the two Peters met. Rabbi Birbaum had been the Rabbi of the Munich congregation which was the first synagogue the Nazis destroyed. Peter's parents joined the Beth Hillel congregation which met in the 183rd Street dance hall. For Holy days, they rented out more dance halls. It was a congregation composed of refugees and the sermons were given in German and they prayed in Hebrew. Peter's family spoke German at home and his parents attended night school to learn English. They never lost their accents. Peter was Bar Mitzvah in a basement room and had a party in their Hillside Avenue one-room apartment where they served punch and canapés made by his mother to adult friends. He does not recall receiving any presents. Europe became a blurred memory. Peter desired penny loafers and to speak good English. He was dismayed when his father's company got a shipment of girl's shoes and he was given a pair to wear which embarrassed him.

30:00 Peter was happy later when he got a pair of penny loafers. There was rationing of food and gas but the latter was not their concern as they did not have a car. Peter hated to go shopping as men did not like to be seen pushing a cart at that era. There were food shortages so he would have to go from store to store to find the necessities. Peter was in

Junior High in 1945 at the end of the War. His English was good but he still had an accent. He was able to keep up with his classroom work. His father's company started sending him abroad. His father had started working at age 13 and by age 18 was traveling for the company so it was a downgrade to be a bookkeeper. First he traveled to Mexico and Cuba and in 1949 to Europe. There was jubilation on VJ Day with the children on the street throwing stones at the street lights and breaking the bulbs. When his mother tried to pick up the bulbs, the children told her to go back to where she came from, threw tomatoes on her and called her, "dirty Ref" and "dirty Jew." When Peter was in Junior High, his father's frequent trips made him anxious. Airplane travel was a big deal then. Peter would cry a lot. He was closer to his father than to his mother who was incapable of showing love. He graduated high school in 1950 when his parents had returned to Europe. His father became director of his firm in Rotterdam and his brothers moved there and attended boarding school.

35:00 Peter lived on Hillside Avenue during high school and college. A cousin, Mr. Hirsch, who survived Auschwitz had married a German woman and they shared the apartment and cooked for him. They did not speak English and were scarred from the War. Peter's parents did not attend his graduation from Brooklyn Tech High School. They bought a house in Rego Park just before they moved to Rotterdam and Peter lived there during college so was lonely. For five years he took care of the house himself and attended college. His friend, Peter, moved to Queens with his mother. The two friends spent time together at dances and on blind dates. **Tape 2, Side 2.** From 1941 when the family came to the US to the middle of 1950 when his parents left for Rotterdam, Peter's mother worked as the father's income was insufficient. She did alterations, knitted neck ties, assembled cigarette lighters, covered cloth buttons, made powder puffs and shower mittens. She opened a factory on 162nd Street, bought sewing machines and employed several women to sew. His father gave up his job briefly to help his mother.

40:00 A silent partner cheated them of the proceeds and his mother tried to interest a popular chain of stores in her shower mittens. They turned her down but copied her idea. She worked at home and hid her work in the stove when inspectors checked her for the use of child labor. Sometimes she worked at night in the bathtub. To make the cigarette lighter, the entire family assisted in assembled a foot long wick, a wheel and a flint. They cut round pieces of cloth for the buttons. Sometimes Peter delivered items via the subway. They had a drying rack on the ceiling and pinned ribbons with clothes pins for the powder puffs. Peter has no recollection of anyone talking about the concentration camps after the War. His high school graduation present in June 1950 was a flight to Rotterdam on a KLM Lockheed Constellation with gourmet meals and handouts of names and seating arrangements and menu. He had taken along a pipe but was told that he could not use it on the plane. The Korean War had broken out. Peter stayed all summer.

- 45:00 His parents had a nice apartment near the zoo overlooking a picturesque canal. They got the international Herald Tribune and worried about his being drafted into the Korean War. He was deferred from the draft as he was attending college. Peter had no desire to return to Essen or Genoa. His father had a company Mercedes car with a chauffeur that drove them to Belgium, Holland and Germany but not to Essen. It was wonderful to be an American in Europe. The dollar was all mighty. You could tell an American from his clothes. His parents did not speak German in Europe and were happy to be American. His brothers had placed five or six American flags on their bikes which made the front page of the newspaper. Peter was never comfortable with the Germans, even today. If he meets someone his age, he wonders what they did during the War. He has been a member of the Cardarock Swim Club for 35 years which has many German members but he and his wife, Evelyn, have never spoken German there. It took him five years to get his B.A. at the City College of New York. He worked summers for his father's company, the Kaufman Company, as a hide inspector and office worker and went to the slaughter house on 10th Avenue and to kosher stores in Brooklyn. His father felt that it was a dying business but we now use leather seats in our cars. Peter had no idea what to do upon graduating from college so in March 1955 he volunteered for the Army and was sent to Mainz, Germany.
- 50:00 When he got a weekend pass, he would take the train home to Rotterdam for home-cooked meals. He hoped to become an interpreter but there was a surplus of German-speaking GIs. He had completed advanced Infantry Training which was unusual for a college graduate. Peter felt lucky that he was sent to Germany. His Army records incorrectly noted that he was a teacher. The Army was looking for former teachers to set up a recreation program for children of the families stationed in Mainz. He organized a girl's softball team and trips and became a Boy Scout leader. Later he went to the German Consulate in Mainz and got permission to organize a program which included square dancing for the German children. He met a German girl and they became engaged but his parents were devastated as she was not Jewish. The girl's mother forbade her to date a Jewish guy so they broke up. In 1957 the German Army started an officer's corps and they needed GIs who spoke German. Peter was chosen to indoctrinate the new German officers and train them in American equipment. One duty was to show the officers an American Army field kitchen. There was a tent in which they ate but Peter did not know where he should eat. He was happy when a German officer clicked his heels and told him that a Colonel invited him to lunch. The Colonel asked him how he learned German. He said that he learned it from his father who had worked in Germany but did not admit to being born there.
- 55:00 Only recently has he admitted to it. He would say that he was born in New Zealand. Since he has been volunteering at the Holocaust Museum, he has felt proud to admit that he was born in Germany. When he would orient the children, he would ask them if he

speaks funny as he felt he still had an accent. His parents were still in Europe when he was discharged and returned home to the US. He still did not know what to do. The wife of a Kaufman Company executive asked him what he would like to do and he responded that he would like to write short stories. She got him an interview at the Esquire Magazine through an acquaintance. At the interview, Peter admitted to having no training or experience as a journalist. It was suggested that he try to get into the Herald Tribune as a Copy Editor. He became a glorified errand boy and distributed newspapers, mail, galley prints and lunches using a shopping cart.

- 60:00 Peter even had to transport an editor's blood on the subway for testing. Then he heard of an opening in the Sunday department and took it. The work was similar but more interesting. Peter taught himself to be a journalist by observing the editors. He saw the connection of getting clips from the morgue to the finished paper. After three years he became the picture editor. Then he worked in Connecticut as an editor for two years when the New York Times called him and asked him to return. For four years he was a staff writer for the "News of the Week in Review." It became boring and he left and became Copy Editor for Business Week for five years. Then he was offered to be Assistant News Editor for the Washington, DC Bureau so he came here. By then, he and his wife had two daughters. They were happy that the company paid for their move to Bethesda. He worked a total of 21 years for the McGraw-Hill Company and retired at age 55 about ten years ago. At that time, he heard of plans for the Holocaust Museum. He thought it would be a small place. They met on L Street and Peter said that he would be willing to do anything for them. .
- 65:00 He was in the first training group. He felt that he had to get involved as immigration was the seminal event of his life. He was grateful to be at the Museum to talk about his life as he has few scars as compared to others. He reads a lot of books on the Holocaust. He has missed very few of his Thursday afternoon shifts. He immediately expressed interest in working the floors and being with the visitors, not behind the walls. Since he still works full-time, he makes up his shift by working nights and weekends. He feels that working behind the scenes is like a job doing research and paper work. He enjoys being in the exhibits with the people. It was difficult at first but now he does not mind being in the permanent exhibit. It helps him recall where the portions of the exhibit are located and is thankful (cries). Peter reports that he does not feel the museum is now making good use of him as the orientation changed so he no longer speaks to the children about his experiences. He feels it would add another dimension to the visitors. Other volunteers have more to tell and should be utilized.
- 70:00 Only those in the Fanny May (FNMA) program get orientation so get more information. Peter still works full-time so he does not have time for the Fanny May program. He mans the ticket desk and responds to questions. He feels at home at the Holocaust Museum. He belongs here (cries). Peter indicates that he cries easily. When the Museum first

opened there were lots of survivor visitors (cries). Most of them came on pilgrimages but now most visitors are ignorant of the Holocaust. He hopes they learn something. Working at the Holocaust Museum has connected him to his Jewishness. He is not religious, not observant, but connected to his German/Jewish past. He is proud to be a German Jew but is still grappling with questions so needs to read more. Peter is grateful that his entire family escaped and that the Museum exists. His source of unhappiness is his hostility to those with no interest in the Museum such as his brothers. His brother, George, converted. His strange relationships with his brothers stem from this. He realizes that it might be too emotional an experience for some to visit but feels that every Jew should make the pilgrimage.

75:00 .

Peter Phillips

Tape 3 Side A

June 16, 1997

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Summary

00:00 This tape begins with Peter discussing his volunteer experiences at the Holocaust Museum. Once when he was on the 3rd floor of the Permanent Collection, standing near the Auschwitz barracks, a short older man told him that he slept in one of those barracks. This was emotional for Peter. The man grabbed Peter's arm and pushed him away to take a picture. Peter walked away and the man took a flash photo which was not permitted. About two hours later, Peter saw the man leave the exhibit and he gave Peter such a push that he thought he cracked a rib. Another time when Peter was at the Information Desk, a hostile man in his 40s asked several questions. One was why was the museum built and why placed here and Peter replied it was to tell the story of the Holocaust and is here in the US as we had a major role at the end of the War. When the man inquired whether visitors are expected to feel sorry for the victims, Peter felt like hitting him and could not respond. He reported that most of the visitors make positive comments as they are survivors and want others to know what they lived through. Some American-born visitors shake his hand and say it is incredible. This is heartwarming to Peter and makes him feel it is worthwhile to volunteer. He does not admit to visitors that he is German which might limit the moment of glory for the survivor as it might detract or diminish his feelings.

05:00 It is hard for Peter not to cry in such instances but the exhibits are dim and hopes the visitors do not see him cry. He likes the others who serve on the Thursday afternoon

shift. They are friendly and once got together at someone's home. He feels that he should have them over his house. The group is very caring. If someone is absent, they are called. They keep up their families' stories. A group member will switch off an assigned post if someone does not wish to stand. The group is a mixture of survivors and non-survivors. They get together on Volunteer Appreciation Day. They do not talk about their Holocaust experiences. Peter feels he is obsessed with the Holocaust as he cannot read enough about it. He viewed "Schindler's List" twice as he was so upset the first time that he had to see it again. Both he and his wife, Evelyn, cannot understand why he reads so much about it. He has gotten used to the Holocaust exhibits but when others get emotional, he gets emotional. He has been with the Museum for four years and it no longer upsets him. The first time he took his wife to the Museum, she got so upset that she had to leave. She was born in NY and had no Holocaust experience. Her mother was from Berlin and her father from Zittan in the western part of Germany. He was a physician in Berlin where they met and fell in love.

10:00 Her mother was already married and had two sons. In 1934 Evelyn's father could no longer practice medicine in Germany so came to NY and her mother followed him. Her father thought the situation would blow over and sent her home. Then her husband divorced her and left for Brazil with their two sons. Evelyn's relationship with her stepbrothers is not very good. Evelyn's mother only spoke German to her as she wanted her to be able to speak to the grandparents should they come. The grandfather came with his second wife and lived in the Kahn's apartment. The grandparents hid separately during the War and met by chance in NY. Peter feels he lost part of his childhood as he still would like an electric train and lacks interest in sports. He enjoyed softball in camp as a child. Peter feels lucky to have two children who are the first family members born in the US. They are aware of his family history and are Jewish so he is pleased. One is engaged to a Jewish boy. He feels he has a wonderful family and happy that they indulge his interest in the Holocaust.

15:00 His daughters viewed the survivor tape twice. When they became teenagers, Peter wanted them to know about the Holocaust, wanted them to be Jewish and wanted them to marry Jews so that Hitler does not win posthumously. He talks to his daughters repeatedly with the same message and they did not rebel. They were better children than he was to his parents. He left the Jewish religion for a long time as did not attend synagogue and worked on the High Holidays. His mother retreated so it was easier but it made his father unhappy. Now, he is back in the field and wishes he knew more and could read Hebrew better. He belongs to a Jewish-Catholic dialogue group and to a Chavurah (Jewish social group) which is new so he is trying to be a better Jew and make up for the years of neglect. He thinks of all the moving the family did during his childhood but now the memories recede. He has reactions in everyday life which are unrelated to the Holocaust which are upsetting. Coarseness, meanness, unkindness and

bad behavior upset him more than normal. He has phobia on the beltway; not that he is afraid of something happening to him but is afraid of seeing violence or aggressiveness. He only goes to the movies on Halloween as he cannot stand violence. His being a vegetarian for 20 years is related to this as he is irrational to anything that involves killing. He realizes he is contrary as he wears leather shoes and has a leather chair.

20:00 In his early years, he and his family earned their income from the leather business. He cannot stand the music of Wagner as it sounds like the background of a Pogrom to him. His father took him to hear the Meistersinger but he did not care for it. People in uniform do not bother him. He was proud to be a soldier in Germany but he gets a little nervous when he sees a policeman. He realizes they are not the enemy and feels safer. When he saw the police in his rear window he got worried but they did not stop him. Peter feels that if he did not have these experiences, he would be more self-confident, assertive and more successful. He has given up the idea that if he did his job well, he would move up. It does not work that way as you must do something to stand out but he was not brought up that way. He was always deferential, afraid of his teachers and bosses due to his upbringing. Peter feels that since the 60s authority is not respected. He ushered at the Washington Hebrew Congregation for 15 or 16 years but quit because of the children's behavior. They did not respect the Rabbi so when he arrived home after ushering, he had to take two stiff drinks. Peter admitted that he gets upset at things that do not upset others. He gets upset when he sees litter at the side of the road. Peter received 5,000 marks in reparations for having his schooling disrupted.

25:00 His mother received nothing as she had no records of working but his father received a small amount of reparations and had to sign a release that he would not make future claims. Five thousand marks was the equivalent of \$1,000. He does not recall what he did with the sum; perhaps he bought stock. His father applied for it on his behalf. Peter does not mind taking the money as his schooling was interrupted and it took him a long time to learn English. He has not been back to Germany since he was stationed in Mainz for two years. He stayed in contact with people in Essen but he writes in English as he cannot write in German and they respond in German. They sent him two books. He viewed a photo of the synagogue that the family had attended in Essen. In '56 it was a burned out hulk. He would like to return and tell the German children his experiences but is considered too young. There are 200 survivors and they are inviting the oldest ones first. His daughters know about his experiences and are interested. His younger daughter went to the Holocaust Museum twice and the elder daughter visited it once. He hopes they will remember him as a survivor and tell their children as his story is worth telling.

30:00