

AKRF-154

ELIZABETH DELANEY PHILLIPS

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IRELAND, 1920

AGE 18

APPEL: This is Willa Appel and I'm speaking with Elizabeth Phillips on Monday, February 10th, 1986, we're beginning the interview at 10:00 AM and we're going to talk about Mrs. Phillips' experience of immigrating from Ireland in 1920. Okay, why don't we begin by you telling me a little bit about where you were born.

PHILLIPS: All right, I was born in Wexford, Ireland in 1901, November and it was very, I didn't realize it was so small, I went back in 1971 or I think it was, not '70, no, no, '50--

APPEL: You went back in 1950?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I was fifty years, over fifty years married and I never got back because my husband was an enlisted man and never had to take care of the children, thank goodness, so my daughter that you met, went back and I guess that must have been 1970, and of course things had changed very much in those years.

APPEL: Do you remember what it was like when you left as a young girl?

PHILLIPS: Yes, things was quite disturbed. On Easter Sunday they had a rebellion over there, I remember that, and then I left in 1920 I guess.

APPEL: What rebellion?

PHILLIPS: Easter Rebellion. the Irish Rebellion.

APPEL: The Irish Rebellion?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I remember that, I remember so much about the English soldiers being there, what we called the "Black and Tans", which if I want to hurt anybody's feeling, which was very cruel, because they, of

course, I don't know how true k\history is, but it said that they let them out of all the jails and the asylums to come over and we had difficult times then, walking out or something, we were afraid. And of course, I left early, I think Ireland was free then, I think in '22 or something like that and I was in Southern Ireland, that's not the Northern Ireland they of the other six counties then.

APPEL: Why did you leave Ireland?

PHILLIPS: I left because I met my husband through my brother in 1916, and I was very young, and it was the biggest airbase then in Europe, I believe, airforce of the United States. And my brother worked, works the electric, I don't know what they called them then and I met him through my brother and my parents were very strict, they were against me going out or anything like that, but in 19--, I think it must have been 1917 or 18, I'm not sure which, a lot of Americans married the Irish over there and brought over a lot of war brides but I wasn't one of them because my folks was just determined I wasn't. But I reached eighteen and then I was on my own and that is when I decided, "Well, I'll go (?) and get married," even if it was against my mother's wish because my father was dead at the time and so that's how come I was on the Baltic and my godmother's brother was purser or something on the Baltic, and he took good care of me but I was very sick.

APPEL: Just go back one minute so I understand the story better, so you had fallen in love with this american serviceman and you had decided to get married?

PHILLIPS: Yes, yes, against my people's wishes. They were farmers, I didn't get to come free as a bride, as the United States either sent their own ships what to bring them over but I didn't come as a war bride. I know there must be many around here that did.

APPEL: How did you get from your town, to the ship, what was that--

PHILLIPS: A boat, I went to, now that's something, I think that I went across the Irish Sea to Hollhead, to Liverpool I think it was, But before I forget, when I spoke to you first I called them Legal Aid, it was Ladies Aid Society in those days and they seemed to know all about it and we had a friend of the family which in those days they call a Solicitor which is nothing but a lawyer now, but the way I thought in my terms but he was a friend of the family and investigated a lot, evidently my people had investigated my husband's people. I didn't know anything about, they knew more about my family when I came here than I did myself. So, then from there we got to Liverpool, I believe it was, yes it was, we sailed from Liverpool and we stayed at, oh, different, I can't remember the place, but

there was a lot of people going, that's where I met Mrs. O'Brien and Mrs. O'Keefe and one of them would go to Clausen Avenue (?) in Brooklyn, am I right, I have their address, somewhere buried because they took over, just took me in complete care and I can't remember whether they went to Ellis Island because Mrs. O'Keefe's husband was meeting her and I think the McGuire girl had already people, now whether those kind of people went to Ellis Island or not or whether, like I was immigrating to someone else. But I remember big, I don't know what you call them, a big boat or ship and take you through the (?) and the first time I saw the Statue of Liberty it was in my head, I remember all the people rushing to the side of the boat and just screaming their head off, "There she is, there she is," and waving and cheering, I remember that. And in my mind's eye I can see it, you know, I mean I can see it and suddenly, after all this question comes up, she wasn't on Ellis Island, I think she was on another little island.

APPEL: Right.

PHILLIPS: If I remember, I remember that distinctly, and I remember they were all crowding so much and I remember one gentleman I was little and I wasn't feeling good at that time and I remember him holding me up, he says, "Look at her, look at her," and in all kind of tongues, whatever, whoever they come from, but everybody was saying, "There she is, there she is," like it was somebody who was greeting them. And I remember

the ship, the Baltic docking after that because I remember the people lining all up and as we came in, I said, "Look, over there in that direction, that's Manhattan." Now I remember that, which didn't mean anything to me then, and then I remember the people saying, pointing to me, these people who were taking care of me and telling them who I was because evidently they had been from my part of the town, little town of Wexford which is the oldest seacoast town in Ireland, where the vikings and all that went in there, we've got a lot of round towers and things like that.

APPEL: So, it is a fishing town?

PHILLIPS: No, not necessarily, did a little of everything I guess, foundries, a lot of fishing, yes and I remember, what we called a quay, that you called a waterfront here, always had foreign ships, schooners, masts from India and those places. We had a lot of foreign people come in, so I guess it was a sort--

APPEL: A port?

PHILLIPS: Yes, but when you're eighteen you don't take things seriously in your mind like that, you know, I had one thing on my mind, that was getting away from there.

APPEL: I was going to ask you, how did you feel about leaving your home, leaving your family?

PHILLIPS: At the time I felt good in mine way, one half was pulling me and yet my mother was crying the last time I seen my mother and begging me not to go, and one of my grandparents has the letter that she wrote saying that she'd never give her consent, but I know I was of the age where really I could go against her, otherwise I made it over here in '17 and wasn't but what else did you want to go, you see I drift.

APPEL: No, that's fine, I was going to ask you about what the journey on the S.S. Baltic was like?

PHILLIPS: Well, I remember one thing definitely about it, there was a Russian, a lot of Russian people and we all ate in one dining room it looked like, I can see the long tables. The Russian people I remember were always well-dressed, now what class I was, I don't know, whether there were three decks or not, but I know below us was what they call, maybe steerage, I'm not sure now.

APPEL: Well your postcard that you showed me said that it was third class, it was the third class menu written on the back of the

postcard.

PHILLIPS: Well, wherever, we picked up, I had lots of cards belonged to in every position and I remember them, they had all been able to eat and I couldn't, I was just a poor sailor, I remember that very much, but as I remember, the food was very good and I remember them bringing me broth and things to my cabin because I had this neighbor which my godmother's brother, and he was my neighbor, I think he was what they call a purser them, I don't know what exactly, maybe I'm wrong about it, his name was Murphy. That's the only thing I can remember and I guess like anywhere else, a little pull, I got broth I think on the ship, I remember it looked like bunks I believe, because I know the O'Keefe girl and two girls, maybe it was four bunks, must have been.

APPEL: In you cabin?

PHILLIPS: In the cabin and I was very ill, we had nurses which they called, I think, Sisters, whether they were Irish, most of them I think were English and some Irish, but they were very kind and when you're seasick you don't pay attention to anything in the world. I don't know whether you have ever been seasick, to give you a little idea, and the weather was stormy, in fact coming over I think this was, something went wrong with the Baltic's rudder, if there's such a thing, and we were delayed and I think we

were on the water probably from the time we left Liverpool about twenty-one days I believe it was.

APPEL: This is, you left in November?

PHILLIPS: No, it didn't land until December, no we didn't land until December, but I know that's, and I ask my children and that they claim is what I always said, so I go by that, but I remember all the people that were coming. The main thing That I remember about Ellis Island, I think the people that were married and had husbands, I don't know whether they had to go to Ellis Island or not, whether the people met them, but the people who were immigrating, which I considered that time I suppose I was, we went, this boat took us straight to Ellis Island and I remember long counters, I'm looking in my mind I can see them, I can't express, long counters and I remember we come to two people, and they looked at your passport and asked you questions and confirmed it to the other person and from there we went to the next two people and they examined, they pulled the eyes down, they looked in our ears, our mouth and I believe they listened to our chest, I'm pretty sure and I remember one of them saying, "Why are you frowning for?" I guess I must have been frowning because I hadn't noticed that these, to them, to me they were foreign people, you know, there were a lot of children and they were all dressed in heavy clothes, they didn't speak English and the women wore kind of shawls over their head and I can see the men very

plainly, they all were dressed in a suit with a white shirt. I remember they didn't have ties and a lot of them sort of had round hats, different from the style we had and the little children, they had their dresses were long worsted kind of material, you know, sweaters, and they had little tiny shawls or babushkas or what do you call them, and I remember I don't know how or why I remember those, looked like isles or something and some of them standing there and crying and some, I heard them cry, cry, and I asked somebody why and they said, "Because they're rejected." Some of them didn't pass, something in the eyes or whatever they found, and part of the family was, and there was a lot of weeping by the one's turned back, and I guess I was frowning, I remember one of them saying, "What are you frowning, don't you like us already over here?" I remember them saying that to me. But I didn't ask questions because I didn't know what to ask, but the questions I found from them, this is why they were turning them all back and there was quite a lot of them but I don't remember seeing those people ordinarily on the boat. I admit I was in my cabin most of the time I was sick, I admit that.

APPEL: They may have been in steerage?

PHILLIPS: That must have been it, but I felt real sorry for them, they didn't, why I don't remember many of them sickly looking or anything, but they must have turned them back for that reason. Someone told me they

were looking for tuberculosis which was very, how do you say, popular, can't get the word--

APPEL: Widespread.

PHILLIPS: At that time, but I think that's all they did, I can remember on Ellis Island, going to a room which looked like a dormitory or something, but it had washbasins and the first thing I wanted to do, I felt dirty, wash myself good, and I remember still alongside of me, she was the most beautiful human being I ever seen, but she couldn't speak a word of English and she tried to talk to me and I couldn't understand her. Now what she was coming for or whether she was coming to marry somebody, I don't know because I couldn't speak to her. And then, after that, what I'm trying to remember is I don't think my husband came to Ellis Island, or to be at that time, but the ladies took me to a tall building, it has always stayed in my head, it was somewhere in Manhattan, these Ladies' Aid Society, that's what they were called and I, that's where I stayed the night. I don't believe, I don't remember staying the night in Ellis Island, and took me to this place.

APPEL: So you were on Ellis Island for part of one day?

PHILLIPS: Yes, probably, it seemed a long time so it might have been the process might have taken quite a bit.

APPEL: Do you remember how you felt about going through Ellis Island and being asked questions?

PHILLIPS: No, because I figured that that's what people did, you take it for granted, like, you know, you go to take a passenger train or (?) no, I guess when you're young you're a little dumb too, put it that way (she laughs). But it didn't bother me. But when I went to this with the lady, Ladies' Aid Society, I stayed there a night with them 'cause I remember seeing the room in my mind's eye. It had a piano and it had, I cleaned up and they treated me very well and the next morning my husband came and they came with me, I don't know whether it was a man or not, and I remember the tallest building in New York, now, I believe they called it the Woolworth Building at that time, and with them I went up and my husband came up and they married us.

APPEL: Right then and there.

PHILLIPS: I never was released. They took care of people in the position I was coming over to marry, they didn't just push you through, don't care what happened to you, they really did. I remember that much distinctly, this is how much I remember of Ellis Island, but the main thing I remember clearly is seeing the Statue of Liberty, I can actually see it

now. Just, and the people going wild, they knew, probably, more of the history, especially these people that didn't speak English. They were so glad to see that, some was just praying. I was just glad to see America and I remember some saying, "Mercy, look!" You know, and this was the land, I can visualize it, Manhattan, they said Manhattan, so the Statue of Liberty for years took it for granted was on Ellis Island, and suddenly it dawned on me, no it was not, there was a space between. Am I right?

APPEL: Right, it's on Liberty Island which is very close to Ellis Island.

PHILLIPS: Yes, it's here and Ellis Island, well you can't understand what I'm trying to say, I can see in my vision.

APPEL: No, I can.

PHILLIPS: Now, that's all I remember in that respect, is there anything else I can answer?

APPEL: I think if I can, I'm curious because you got off the boat, you went into Manhattan and you immediately got married?

PHILLIPS: Yeah, after I went through all this on Ellis Island, and

taken to this, I presume a hotel or something, then detained because my husband to be was not allowed at all, I was with them until I was safely married.

APPEL: And did you have a special dress to get married in?

PHILLIPS: No, I remember I had, we called them costumes then. I can remember what I had, I had to say that at that time I was ahead of my time because these clothes we had, came from England, from Paris, across, it was a blue coatsuit and I think I have, I have a passport here, that's what I wanted to show you, now this was the, to show you what I'm telling you the truth when I came. Now my children have a lot of this now, that's only (?) over there.

APPEL: Now, how did you feel about getting married, were you--

PHILLIPS: Beg your pardon?

APPEL: How did you feel about getting married?

PHILLIPS: Oh, I was alright, I trusted my husband, I corresponded with him for two full years and then his people that I felt, when you correspond that long with anybody, now there is my, I think, I don't think,

I have one but I was married in the Catholic Church in Ireland, ah in Pensacola, Florida when I came because my people then, they were old fashioned and strict, 'cause I married outside of the church, whether it was Catholic priest or whatever, I wasn't married until I was married by, so I was married in Pensacola, Florida which some of them have the certificate, but this I kept because the children was, they kept, I hadn't seen this in a long time. My husband-to-be sent this in the middle of the ocean and it wasn't a telegram, it was called a Marconi in those days and he wanted to to make sure I was on the vessel, I guess maybe they heard there had been a disturbance on the vessel or something, so he wrote that, into the ship, and we were in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean when they came down and they were quite excited about getting one of those in the middle of the ocean. But he was, they didn't call them radio, electronic in that business and I think that maybe he was able to do this, I don't know. Isn't that terrible of me (she laughs).

APPEL: It doesn't look terrible. You were a very pretty girl.

PHILLIPS: Oh goodness gracious.

APPEL: And after you got married, where did you go?

PHILLIPS: Right away to the train for Pensacola, Florida Air

Station and went to live with some wonderful people called Pritchards and that was, it gives you the dates, I had a lot more stuff like I tell you, but like I say, I have somewhere the addresses of those people and I bet they could tell you a lot, right in your hometown, McGuires and O'Keefe, the O'Keefe had two girls. Well, I think that English speaking people, maybe Irish, I don't know, they stuck together a lot, because we understand each other and I think the foreign people more or less, which we had a lot of on the, whatever position I was on, I mean in passage, on the ship, but they had husbands there I know, O know the O'Keefe's because here husband was meeting her and I was, I have their address, it could be looked up but I wonder are any of those people, they were older than I, actually they were married, I figure the girls were about eight and twelve. Say, I was eighty-four next birthday, (?) the first next November, '85.

APPEL: You were eighteen when you came over?

PHILLIPS: Yes. eighteen in November and I guess then this was all in December.

APPEL: I have, I wonder whether you have had expectations of what America was going to be like, before you came over?

PHILLIPS: You know, my husband tried to show me, the first show we

went to see was the Ziegfeld Follies and I remember Marilyn Miller played in it, and Jack Pickford, "Silver Lining" and he always used to call, "That was our song." Look for the silver lining in all things and I remember the thing that intrigued me, I don't think they had them in London (?), was the overhead trains, they had them, but I had been to London and when I was young, very young, my father, it was something to do with horses, bought them or something and I remember being into the big city, he said, "They didn't quite impress me as much as I thought it would be." But I remember what really impressed me was the huge electric signs. "Wrigley's Gum", for some reason, I always remember, isn't that strange? And I think the restaurant we went to, I think it was called Child's, was there such a thing?

APPEL: Yes, Child's restaurant.

PHILLIPS: Okay, I ate in Child's restaurant and I remember some of the things I fell in love with, there was pastry with apples in between them, I don't know, just remember just exactly, but everything was novel to me,

but the signs, the thing that struck me, I had never seen so many electric and I must have been, I suppose, he wanted to impress me so he took, I imagine Fifth Avenue, I don't know--

APPEL: Possibly.

PHILLIPS: Possibly, it must be, but I remember that, and he took me to another show--

APPEL: He might have taken you to Broadway, that's where there were lots of overhead signs.

PHILLIPS: And I remember seeing Billy Burke and the first thing what made an impression on me, she was red-haired, I was red-haired and my mother would let me wear anything red or pink and this woman had a velvet cape on her and she had a boat shaped hat, I don't know what they call it, with a feather. I was really up close to her and I don't know where I was when I met her, but then she was a wife I think of Ziegfield or something, I don't remember exactly but I remember another show I went to see, that actually had live elephants on stage,

and I remember one thing they had a stage and suddenly it disappeared and they dived into the water, it was to me, then, beautiful and enormous thing, and this girl was swinging in a swing over it, I can't remember the name of that, but the little things impress me, the details. And I remember I was at this side I guess it looked like a balcony but over there we were all sitting next to where all the rich people went, they were all dressed beautiful and all this thing impressed me. So at that age you're not much more than, I realized now more of those things that glitter helped you, not the serious things.

APPEL: Did you go to these shows before you got on the train to Pensacola?

PHILLIPS: Yes.

APPEL: So your husband took you around New York, to show you the sights?

PHILLIPS: That's right, yes, as much as I can remember is this, I remember that.

APPEL: And you stayed in a hotel?

PHILLIPS: Yes, but what the name of that hotel was I just don't know. But one main thing I want to impress I think the people that took care, like I'm sure I'm saying it right now, the Ladies' Aid was so marvelous. They guarded what was a trust you know, I mean, I look back as I grow older and realize how much care they took of me, they didn't just, I go in, anybody come and get you or anything. There was no danger. I'd hate to be coming in today like that.

APPEL: We're just going to break for one minute because this side is over.

PHILLIPS: Oh, I forgot.

APPEL: No, that's okay. This is the end of side one of the interview with Elizabeth Phillips.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPEL: This is the beginning of side two of the interview with Elizabeth Phillips. You were saying Mrs. Phillips, you were saying how good the Ladies' Aid Society--

PHILLIPS: Yes, I'm sure that's what they were called.

APPEL: Did you contact them before, in Ireland?

PHILLIPS: No, they evidently knew what was going on, why or what, I don't know how that happened. There's something that's vague to me.

APPEL: So they contacted you when you were on board ship?

PHILLIPS: That's right, and when I was at Ellis Island, that's where they took me, to Ellis Island. And at the time I thought maybe everybody went to Ellis Island, but I don't think so, for the simple reason that I know of two families that came over with us, one of the McGuire girls and Mrs. O'Keefe with the two girls, they would have, I know been around me or somewhere because they took that much care of me like I was one of their own children, I guess.

APPEL: Were they from your hometown?

PHILLIPS: Yes, they must have been, yes, but I didn't know of them because the reason I say yes, distinctly, because when we land, the boat landed at the wharf, I suppose you call it, a lot of people along there and they say, "Francis Street," where I was, where I lived and Jones Street was at the bottom of it and they'd point out my name, and so they point to me and then evidently, it's a very small town so they knew, but I don't remember knowing them. But I think that actually the O'Keefe family had been working in England when he got a job or something because they were coming, I know she was coming for her husband, to her husband, I know that.

I wish I had kept those and I probably could, but it would probably take hours to find them. but I know one of the McGuire girls were on Clausen Avenue because I had their address and I was going to call them and go, you know how that is? And instead of that we were shipped from Pensacola to Virginia, Panama Canal, you know, the Navy Posted all around, you lose family, you lose touch, like the saying, "Ships that pass in the night," I guess. But they were so good to me and that's why I know so little about the foreigners because I was sick so much and kept to the cabin so much. But I

remember I was alright when I reached Ellis Island, how long we stayed--seems to me like we got there in the morning and I don't remember, no way did I stay there all night, I'm sure I didn't. I think these people took me back to Manhattan. I say Manhattan and I'm not even sure myself, to this tall hotel. It was very tall as, you know, the buildings are.

APPEL: Had you been in a hotel before, in your life?

PHILLIPS: Oh, at home yes, but there weren't many hotels. White, I think the biggest hotel was the White's Hotel, and father, in fact my father worked there. He trained and that's something with horses. In fact that's how he met his death. He was schooling a horse, you understand?

APPEL: Training a horse?

PHILLIPS: Ah, yes, because I'm speaking, he got entangled in the rein and they pulled, the ditches in Ireland, green ditches, over them. I remember well they brought him home, I must have been around eleven, I guess. They had a door, they brought him back on a door or something. Of course, now a days, he'd have been alive

because he broke his ribs and it went in, I guess he caught pneumonia. Today, the people living today, they just, because of this century, if they were born, things like that would be simple but if they, I remember that.

Oh, if my father had been alive, I doubt if I'd ever been over here (she laughs) he was a very strict man. He didn't even believe in movies. So, anything else I can--

APPEL: Just one final question and that is, when you think about the fact that you left Ireland and you came to America and you made your life here, what difference do you think that made to you?

PHILLIPS: Well, it made every difference. Sometimes I got homesick and my husband would be away and I'd have the children alone, and if there'd have been a bridge, sometimes I would have started out, to be perfectly honest with you. But I really, the first thing that struck me very much was education. In the 1920's, education was the first and last word in their lives. Everybody wanted to, now they take it for granted, all this education, but not in the early 1920's. That was the first thing and I wanted that for my children very much, and believe it or not, I succeeded. That daughter that you met, she worked twenty-five years in the Bank of America, my oldest son is, had been in partnership with another man. for a

civil engineer in their own business, and my youngest was a civil engineer with the city. He's retired now for the past two years, so that left this mark on me. Now in Ireland when, is this interesting to you?

APPEL: Very interesting.

PHILLIPS: In Ireland, when you were a girl, school didn't mean a thing. You were brought up, you were a woman, you either went, you were there for service, a lot of them went out to service to England as domestics, as they call them nowadays, but as far as the younger people of my age, I remember you went to school, you went to school early, you went to school about four years old and you stayed there all, 'til three o'clock in the afternoon. And, of course, it was always parochial schools and I was Catholic, and I remember that quite distinctly, hating every minute of it and I'm, religion was the first thing, it was actually, it was judge and jury, I put it now. Then, of course, I wouldn't think of it in such terms but I lived a lot of those things. It's not that inspired, I've lived long enough to learn a little bit on the way, let's put it that way. And I don't know, women didn't have the, a woman going out to work or anything like to do in education-wise, no, no way. And there was strictly religion. When you walked up the street, you met a priest, you genuflected and strict. I remember one time there was a couple with their arms around each other, and I know the girl well, and the priest came along and he had his stick and he

beat them, hit them, I remember that. So, look at the comparisons. They mad a different human being entirely out of me. I expect America, in the 192's, to me was a most wonderful and still is, in spite of all the crimes, and we have them in San Diego, believe me. Still, the best country on earth. Though everything is changed in Europe, too, but whether it's for the best or not I don't know as much as I do about my own country. And I'm very sad sometimes to see, my most complaint now is with justice. Especially, I don't know about back East, but speaking of San Diego now, I don't think it was right because they'll get these murderers and after a year or two they let them out in the street and then sometimes they're guilty of some lesser crime to me and they keep you in. So I think we need an adjustment like that. But with all its faults, there's no place on earth you can go out and criticize your government, say what you want about being scared to death. Its still to me the best country on earth. In fact, I never tell anybody, I never, I forget about Ireland unless something comes along like this (she laughs).

APPEL: Well, thank you very much, its been very, very interesting.

PHILLIPS: Well, I wish I could help you, I think I have just been babbling along.

APPEL: Not at all, it was very interesting.

PHILLIPS: But like I wish I could tell you more about Ellis Island. I can see but can't--I guess you're too young to understand that, its sometimes when you get old like this you see the pictures of things very clearly. I remember going through what looked like turnstiles, you know, on Ellis Island. I remember the counters, I remember the men who spoke and I turn around and heard that weeping and that;s one moment I felt pretty much alone, pretty, I think that was the only time I was really scared, begin to know, well, is it going to be like this or not? But then life was to be nothing, it has its ups and downs with a lot of happiness. My husband will be twelve years dead on the 28th of this month so we stayed married many a year. Gosh my daughter is sixty-two and I've got a lot of grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

APPEL: So, it's been a full life?

PHILLIPS: Full life, I had it sometimes easy, sometimes bad. My daughter was widowed, helped raise her three children all through the years, two and three and four. I've raised all of mine and they turned out good, one was a school teacher, one is married, my little granddaughter there. I don't want to hold you up, when you're through you just let me know.

APPEL: Okay, thank you. This is Willa Appel, this is the end
 of the interview with Elizabeth Delaney Phillips.