

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Niles Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1582

NANCY PHILLIPS

Interviewed

by

Marcelle Wilson

on

December 8, 1994

NANCY PHILLIPS

Nancy Lee (Johnson) Phillips was born on January 9, 1953 in Martinsferry, Ohio. She was the first of four children born to George and Virginia Johnson. Mrs. Phillips attended Niles McKinley High School and graduated in 1971.

She worked at the Fairhaven Sheltered Workshop for twenty years. Mrs. Phillips married her husband, Charles, on August 31, 1974. Currently, she and her husband own and run the Youngstown Burial and Vault Company. They have two children.

Mrs. Phillips attends the First United Methodist Church in Niles and is active in the Girard Band Boosters and the Girl Scouts. She enjoys shopping and baking.

- W: This is an interview with Nancy Phillips for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Niles Project, by Marcelle Wilson, on December 8, 1994, at 316 Forsythe, at 11:30.
Where did you grow up in Niles?
- P: 1413 Frederick Street, up close to Village Center.
- W: What was your neighborhood like as you were growing up?
- P: There were a lot of kids. It was a new development with a lot of younger families. I can remember watching my house get built. I was there when it was all mud and, of course, how it developed.
- W: Was your neighborhood ethnically mixed? Were there a lot of Italians or Hungarians?
- P: No, it was mixed.
- W: How many people were in your family?
- P: There were two girls and two boys.
- W: And your parents?
- P: And my parents. I was the oldest of four kids.
- W: Did you ever have any family members live with you?
- P: I cannot say live with us. My father's parents stayed with us off and on. It was never more than a couple months at a time because there were ten kids and my grandmother mostly moved around. I had another uncle that lived in Niles and she mostly lived with them. His wife died and my grandmother mostly stayed with them.
- W: What did the house you grew up in look like?
- P: It was a three-bedroom ranch. The living room was quite large and the bedrooms were a little small. It was homey. It was not an old house, like I said, it was just built. We did not build it.
- W: You had it built. You had a basement.
- P: Yes, a big basement.
- W: Did you share a room with your sister?

P: Yes I did.

W: Your brothers shared a room?

P: Yes they did. They had bunk beds and we had twin beds. That was the extent of that. We did not spend very much time in our bedrooms. My children spend a lot of time in their bedrooms. I do not remember. We did a lot of stuff outside with a lot of kids. In the summertime we played kick the can and hide-and-go-seek. Even some neighborhood girls and I used to camp out a lot. My kids just do not do a whole lot with neighborhood kids. Well, really there are not a lot of neighborhood kids on our block that are the same age.

W: What other kind of games did you play? Did you play marbles or wasn't that popular?

P: Not so much marbles, but I can remember playing jacks and a lot and card games. We played a lot of cards. There were woods besides my parents home which is now the Royal Moral Apartment Complex. We used to play in there a lot. The woods are not there anymore. It is all developed.

W: Where did you go to school?

P: In kindergarten I went to Lincoln School, first grade I went up to Washington. For the rest of my elementary school years I went back down to Lincoln. Then I went to Edison for seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. Then I went to the high school for the remainder of my years.

W: How come you went to Lincoln?

P: I do not remember. We lived on Bond Street in Niles before we moved into our home that I stated there. I cannot remember. Thinking about this interview, I was trying to remember why. I know I went to Washington for one year.

W: Did you like your elementary years?

P: Yes, it was okay. I cannot remember that much about Lincoln School. I remember that I was in fifth or sixth grade when Kennedy died. I can remember being in choir class. Other than that I do not remember much about my elementary years. When I went down to Edison, I was so sholtered. There were a lot of different kids and I was really never around black people either. I went to Edison and it was a real adjustment for me, not that black people are bad. It was just never around them.

W: It is a really different experience, especially at the time. Were there a lot of blacks in

- your neighborhood or not?
- P: No, not at all.
- W: That is interesting. Did you walk to school?
- P: No, I always rode a bus.
- W: Well, I wanted to ask you if you walked home for lunch. (laughter)
- P: Edison had open lunch periods. My mother gave me 35 cents for lunch-not 50, not a dime more. We used to go to Rudy's Restaurant. It used to be in downtown Niles across from the library. We went in there and I think I got a piece of pie for lunch.
- W: A piece of pie for 35 cents?
- P: A piece of pie and probably something to drink, or an order of french fries. I remember going out for lunches at Edison.
- W: You just walked over there without any problem? You never thought a thing about it?
- P: No, not a thing.
- W: A lot different from today?
- P: Oh yes. I would not want my kids to go out for lunch. My son complains about it and we are only two or three blocks from the high school. He could come home without the blink of an eye for lunch. Stay there.
- W: What did you do for fun when you were in grade school and as you were getting older? Did you go to the movies, dances, roller skating?
- P: I do not remember going roller skating so much. I went to all the school dances when I was in more like ninth grade. I do not remember having dances in seventh and eighth grade. Here in Girard they had a second and third grade dance. Second grade has a dance in the spring and third grade just had it before Thanksgiving. Girard has elementary dances, but I could never remember. I would really ride my bike all the time. We would be gone for hours.
- W: Did you ride to the corner store to get ice cream or anything? We used to go up to the village center and Carlisle's had a little restaurant area. My girlfriend and I would go in there and get hot fudge sundaes'. That was always fun. I think there was probably a Woolworth's or a Five and Dime, some kind of store in there too. I can remember going

in that store. It was so different. I cannot even imagine letting my kids doing something like that.

W: You never went to the movies?

P: Not very often.

W: They were too expensive or they just did not appeal to you?

P: They just did not appeal to me.

W: It was not the thing to do?

P: Yes.

W: Some of the other people I interviewed said that was a big thing for them.

P: I cannot remember going to very many movies.

W: How many family members completed high school?

P: All of us.

W: Did any of you go to college?

P: My brother John went and my brother George went, but never completed it. John completed three years at Athens University. He took a year or two years off, and now he is going to Y.S.U. I think he is studying to be a teacher.

W: Great. Where did your family go to church, or did your family go to church?

P: We went to the First United Methodist next to Washington Elementary.

W: Did you always go there?

P: Yes, and even now living in Girard I still go to Niles. I often thought I should change and go to one in my city here, but my roots are there. Now my children are in the programs there and they still attend, I guess for the duration.

W: Who were some of the ministers there you can remember as you were growing up?

P: John Burnes was there for many years. He married my husband and me. I can remember still being in school when he was there. Reverend Butler was a minister there. Reverend

Butler was there right after Burns had left. I want to say almost ten years. They get them in and they keep them.

W: Well, that is good. Stability is good. What did your father do for a living?

P: My father worked at American Welding in Niles. It is behind Jackson Elementary School. He was a welder. He also drove a tow truck.

W: That is the only job you remember him having?

P: Yes.

W: Did he walk to work or did he drive?

P: He drove and he always left five minutes before he was supposed to be there. He was never late. How he ever did that is beyond me. My parents never planned ahead. He always made it, though.

W: Did your mom ever work?

P: Nothing steady. She worked for Archie McCully. I was catering when I was in high school. She also worked at the G.M. plant where they served food, but not long. I always think that she had the luxury of staying at home. She did not have to work. When I was a kid, I always thought that was terrible. Now that I am a mother myself I think, "What a luxury she had." Even when my children were babies, before she got sick she watched them. I thought, "How lucky she is?" Now I get to be like that, but only I am still working.

W: At least you get to work at home.

P: Yes.

W: What did you like least when you were growing up, certain chores, certain family functions? Does anything come to mind?

P: Yes, my father was a very controlling person. I try so hard not to be like that. He used to watch me wash dishes. If I did not do it his way there was always a fight or argument. I love my father very much. He was a very controlling person. You did things his way or you did not do them. I have this little person that sits on my shoulder all the time and have their arms crossed and legs crossed. When I have differences with my son that person goes, "You did that wrong." I always think back on how my dad used to treat us. He was a good provider. We always had everything we needed. We always went somewhere in the summer as a summer vacation. He was just a very controlling person

and I try so hard not to be that way. I am guilty because I am that way.

W: Nobody is perfect. That would be no fun. Where did you go for family vacations? What were they like?

P: My parents grew up in Ohio, but right near Wheeling, West Virginia. They both came from families of ten children. A lot of our vacations were in Bridgeport, Ohio, but we called it "Down the river." We spent a lot of time there. I had an aunt that had a cottage on Lake Erie. We would go up and spend time there. I can remember going to Idora Park, Cedar Point, and Conneaut Lake Park in the summer when they were opened. I always remembered going to the amusement parks. We had a lot of picnics. I can remember going to parks with my parents and having a lot of picnics. The year I graduated, we went out west. We were gone for a month. My dad had thirteen weeks vacation.

W: Wow!

P: Yes, we went out in 1971. We went out west and took our time. I have an uncle in Arizona and an aunt in California. We spent a lot of time at both of their homes. I can remember going to Kentucky.

W: Going to see family members?

P: Yes, that was what it existed of.

W: All of your family members went?

P: Yes, always.

W: What kind of jobs did you and your brothers and sisters have as you were growing up? Did you deliver the paper, baby-sit?

P: I did a lot of baby-sitting. I can remember watching a family that had six kids and I was a kid myself. I could not have been much more than twelve or thirteen years old. I can remember the family lived on Gypsy Lane in Niles. That was near my home. I was doomed to work there. Also, there is a park real close to the Fairhaven school. There was two or three baseball diamonds there. My father was sports minded. He ate, slept, survived on baseball and football. Today I do not like sports because of that. He did a lot of coaching. There was a little concession stand there. I ran it for a couple of summers. There were a couple little jobs there, but when I was sixteen I was allowed to get a real job. I worked at Kinney Shoes in the mall. I think I worked there until I graduated. Then I worked at Strauss in the plaza.

- W: What kind of money were you making back then?
- P: Minimum wage, but what was minimum wage, \$2.50 an hour? Baby-sitting was like \$1.00 an hour, I can tell you that. I could not tell you what minimum wage was then.
- W: I can hardly remember what minimum wage was when I started working because it has changed so much.
- P: Yes it has. \$2.50 an hour, can you imagine. I worked at Kinney Shoes on the weekends from 10:00 in the morning to 9:30 at night. I missed a lot of my high school functions because I worked. When I was in eleventh grade, from then on I bought all my school clothes, my school year book, and gowns for big dances. I bought my school ring. My parents just did not have it. I worked and I guess that is what I had to do. I cannot remember my mother insisting that I bought those things. I do not remember her saying, "Come on, we will have to buy you a prom gown."
- W: How many hours a week were you working?
- P: I am sure I worked two or three evenings during the week and on the weekends it was all day. They were not open on Sunday's then.
- W: The laws were still in effect?
- P: I cannot remember when that started.
- W: I think it was in 1978 when they slowly cut down. Grocery stores were not open on Sunday's?
- P: I cannot remember them being open on Sunday's. Boy, we are going back a few years here. I did not do much around the house when I was a kid. My kids have a chore list and they have a consequence if they do not choose to do their chores. I never was interested in anything my mother cooked. My dad and brother were diabetics so my mother never baked Christmas cookies. Boy, I had an eye opening when I got older and was working with different people. I just do not ever remember my mother baking a whole lot at Christmas. So I was never really interested in housework from cooking to anything. I love to bake now. I really do love to bake.
- W: We enjoyed the cookies. (laughter) We really did. Did anyone in your family belong to any local social club, Elks, Eagles or church groups?
- P: I was going to say, my mother always belonged to what she called circle groups. It was the United Methodist Woman's Association, and they had circle groups. She was very active in our church. She played a dice game like a card club group. I can remember her

having maybe two or three parties. When you belong to a club like that you have one party a year.

W: Your father did not belong to anything?

P: My father always bowled and played softball.

W: With a work group or with the church?

P: Not with the church. I am sure that bowling was with work. Softball, I do not know. Once my two brothers were old enough to play, he stopped playing himself. Then he coached. I hate baseball. Someone told me once, "You are not American if you do not like baseball." Why, yes I am American, I do I like apple pie and hot dogs. (laughter)

W: What was a typical family meal like, especially since your brother and your father had diabetes?

P: My mother was never fancy.

W: Meat and potatoes?

P: Yes.

W: Desert?

P: No, no deserts. If she made a vegetable soup, we ate it for two or three nights in a row. That and bread and butter, that was it. If you missed dinner, too bad. You better find yourself a sandwich or something. I can remember eating a lot of sandwiches. My kids eat a lot in between meals, I am not going to say they do not. For them to go the refrigerator and get lunch meat out to make a sandwich, no. I ate a lot of bologna sandwiches. Just the thought of that now.

W: Did your family have a garden?

P: Yes, but not faithfully.

W: Did you eat a lot of your vegetables out of your garden?

P: Yes.

W: Did your mom can them?

P: No, you know what, I take that back. I have an uncle that had a large garden in

Lordstown. They would go out and help him. I can remember them doing some canning. I cannot remember my mother doing much canning.

W: On her own?

P: Yes.

W: Did you eat at a certain time every day like as soon as your father came home?

P: No.

W: Usually everybody was present?

P: Yes.

W: If they were not, they fended for themselves. What did your family do to celebrate a birthday?

P: We had birthday cake. I cannot remember that a lot of other family members outside our house would come and celebrate it with us. My mother always made sure we had a birthday cake and candles to blow out.

W: Ice cream?

P: Yes, we had ice cream. We did not have a lot of pop to drink then. I think that was an extra little treat too. We had pop to drink.

W: What kind of gifts did you get on your birthday? Was it a big deal or was it one item?

P: It depends on what we needed. Mostly it was probably clothing items that we needed. I cannot remember very many birthdays. My birthday is January 9th.

W: Do you get short changed sometimes because it is right after Christmas?

P: I can remember hating my birthday. I always in the beginning of December, decide what I am going to get my son because his is the seventh of January. I usually buy that before I even buy any Christmas presents. I can remember my birthday being right after Christmas. It was never really a big deal. I am sure it was when I was younger, but I do not remember getting anything spectacular. We got a lot of things for Christmas. I never was without. I always had a bike or a doll.

W: What did you do to celebrate Christmas, Easter, that kind of thing? Any kind of special foods?

P: No, we never celebrated on Christmas Eve. That was always my parent's anniversary. We had a little exchanging of cards and stuff. As a small child growing up, Santa Claus decorated our tree. We did not even have any decorations out. My father always had a training board that was fairly large that he would set up a couple days before Christmas. He sometimes put the track together. We did not see anything until Christmas morning. Then we would have breakfast. Of course like I said, most of our families lived 100 miles away. We were like, "Here's your Christmas," open our gifts and we were out the door and we would go to my grandparents.

W: Bridgeport?

P: Yes, my parents. Today, I will not go anywhere on Christmas Day. That is my children's day and I do not leave the house. If you want to come see me, you are welcome. I think because of that I will not take my children out. I do not remember really ever having a fancy holiday dinner. When I was much older, I can remember having special breakfasts on Christmas morning, but nothing out of the ordinary. Mostly because we wanted to see my grandparents. That was always fun. Easter, we always had a ham. We always had a ham, I can remember that.

W: No chocolate eggs?

P: Oh yes. The Easter bunny always hid our baskets. We had to find them. We always had an Easter basket with the candy and stuff in it. We always had what we were supposed to have. You have birthday cake for your birthday and you have Easter eggs for Easter. I do not know, it is kind of sad. I look back and I think, "It was not real special."

W: The reason I asked this is because I have been interviewing Hungarians and Italians, people who came from Italy and Hungary. Their traditions, you would think they are all the same, but they are not. That is why I go into all the questions: What did you have? What did you do? What kind of gifts did you get? You would think everybody is the same and they are not. It is really interesting. What kind of gifts did you get for Christmas, toys, clothes?

P: Mostly toys and a couple outfits. My mother was real secretive, even when we were older. I can remember being a teenager and taking her to a store and saying, "I want this, I want this," and I had no idea what I was getting. We always had nice gifts.

W: Were your gifts wrapped?

P: Yes, everything.

W: My grandparents never wrapped Christmas gifts.

- P: You come out from my parents bedroom part of their house, kind of like your parent's house is set up. You cannot really see the stove and the sink area sitting in the living room. I can remember this one year they had their little piles. Looking around, "Oh, this is nice," and opening all our presents. My brothers got an Indian fort set. It was a big box. My dad sent my sister out to get a knife to open up this box. She comes back in from the kitchen and, "Oh, I know what that is, a bike." Well, I was like beating myself down to get in that kitchen to see how many bikes were out there. There in the "L" shape of the kitchen were two bikes. I remember that. It was like the best thing I could ever get, "I got a bike for Christmas!" My husband and I bought our daughter a bike for Christmas. I was just talking to him about that, Tuesday night. "Where are we going to put this bike? We cannot really have it out in the open."
- W: You said you took the bike a lot and the car. Did you ever use a bus as you were growing up to get place to place?
- P: No.
- W: What happened when a family member died maybe down in Bridgeport? Was it anything unusual compared to today?
- P: No.
- W: They went to a funeral home? They were not buried in the home?
- P: No. I think the first person really close to me was my grandfather. I was probably in the ninth grade. It was real sad, but there were so many people there because of the large family. We were all together. They had to rent a hall for us to have our little dinner afterwards. A funeral home and a funeral, they did have calling hours two or three nights. They do not do that anymore.
- W: What did things cost as you were growing up, coffee, pop, hot fudge sundaes'?
- P: Hot fudge sundaes' were like 50 cents. I never had to worry about that.
- W: You never went to the grocery store?
- P: No. They had a McAllister's, probably more like our convenient stores now. They had milk jugs made of glass that they would take back for money, and pop bottles. My grandparents went to Arizona and California with money that everybody saved from pop bottle money. I can remember all the time being in the car. If we saw a pop bottle on the side of the road we would stop and pick it up, Grandma Johnson's California fund.

W: What about clothes when you were buying them for yourself in high school?

P: They were a lot less than they are now, of course. I never had anything fancy. My daughter says, "I would never buy anything like that for me, never." I had nice things, I cannot take that away from my parents. As far as spending a lot of money on stuff, we just did not do that.

W: They were practical?

P: Yes, very practical.

W: Do you think maybe that is from them going through the Depression?

P: Yes, and I think because my mom did not work and there was not a lot of money. They were not fancy at all. We had what we needed, but nothing extra.

W: Did your mom drive?

P: Yes she did.

W: Did she have her own car?

P: There was one car in our family. She did not drive until-my brother George is 35 and she was pregnant with him when she went and got her license. She did not have her license all the years I was growing up.

W: Are you the oldest?

P: Yes.

W: John is the youngest?

P: Yes.

W: It is you, George, Linda, and John?

P: No, Linda is before George.

W: What kind of music did you like as you were growing up? Did you listen to the radio?

P: Just what was on WHOT. I can remember listening to that.

W: Rock and roll?

P: Yes.

W: Were you a big Beatles fan?

P: I liked whatever was popular at the time. I love music, do not get me wrong. I really like it, and of course I know who the Beatles are. Now I know who Billy Ray Cyrus is. To put a name and a song together, I was bad at that. I can never remember, unless I like something a lot like and I make an effort. I never was real good at who was playing what. My girlfriend and I liked a lot of Tommy Jones. We liked to sing into a tape recorder. We just thought we were cool because we sang into a tape recorder and listened to it back. We did a lot of that.

W: What kind of music did your parents listen to, or didn't they?

P: They did not.

W: Was T.V. very popular at your house?

P: Yes. We had it, but if there was sports on, that is what we watched. There was always one T.V. and you watched what they wanted to watch. I know certain days in the house there were certain programs that were certain family members favorites. We (today) have three T.V.'s so I could send my daughter upstairs. I do not think she is old enough yet to have her own. She would love to have her own T.V. I sometimes send her to my room and watch T.V. if there is something my husband and I want to watch together, but myself, I do not really watch a lot of T.V. Only at night before I go to sleep to relax. Now our son, that is another story. That T.V. would be on all the time if it were up to him.

W: It was not a big thing?

P: No.

W: Did your family participate in any politics?

P: No.

W: Just voted?

P: My parents always voted.

End of Interview