

The Phillips Scholar

The Stephen Phillips Memorial Scholarship Fund

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Museum guide and author of the Trust House article, **Merrill Kohlhofer** speaks as Stephen W. Phillips.

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Overcoming Adversity: Arthur Emery

It is often easy for us to assume that some people are immune to any form of adversity, especially those whom we may view as coming from privilege. While being blessed with financial means, both Mr. and Mrs. Phillips shared difficulties that were common for all of us. Oddly enough it was their respective physical problems that provided the backdrop for their meeting at Saranac Lake, New York, during the early 1940's. During that period, Saranac Lake was a haven for the chronically ill. In his mid-30's, Stephen Phillips was there attempting to recover from a second serious bout with tuberculosis, while Betty Phillips, also in her mid-30's, was suffering from undulant fever, a disease contracted from drinking milk that had not been pasteurized. Brought together by common interests, they met there and were married shortly thereafter.



Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Phillips in the mid-1940's.

Betty Phillips had not had an easy childhood. She had lost her mother to tuberculosis by the time she was twelve. With a keen intellect and a desire to make a difference, she knew that she wanted to go on to college, despite the fact that family financial support was limited. In addition to her economic limitations were difficult physical constraints from the loss of one of her kidneys while in school. She ended up attending four different undergraduate institutions in order to receive her bachelor's degree. Not satisfied with just an undergraduate degree, however, Betty applied to Mount Holyoke College's Masters program in mathematics. Told that she did not qualify because her undergraduate degree was not in mathematics, she overcame that obstacle and convinced the College that she could meet the course requirements. Those of us who knew her are not surprised by the fact that she received her Master's degree with distinction.

It is certain that Betty and Stephen Phillips did not know the impact that both of their lives would have on thousands of people. Through the example of their philanthropy in support of education, museum and school libraries, and open-land preservation, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips challenge each of us to give from our resources, whether large or small, making a difference in others' lives as they have in ours.

Phillips Facts

- * More than \$3.3 million was awarded in new and renewed scholarships for the 2001-2002 academic year.
- * Of the 794 recipients this year of awards, 227 were new students and 567 were renewing previous awards.
- * The Internet has discovered us! As of mid-November, we have answered 1600 queries about the scholarship, more than the total of all queries received last year- and these are typically the "slow months."

The Trust House Comes Alive

Hello everyone. My name is Merrill Kohlhofer. I am a storyteller and writer with a passion for all things historical—and also a new tour guide at the Stephen Phillips House. I've been lucky enough to start here at a time when much is changing. The house itself remains gorgeous, in fine repair and filled with a wonderful collection of furniture, porcelain, paintings, sculptures and other artifacts. But now we are putting together new ways of displaying and interpreting the collection, which will make the house, its inhabitants and Chestnut Street society come alive as they were in 1919. We have expanded our cast of characters to include Bridget Durgin (the cook), Delia Cowley (waitress), Caddie Shaughnessy (maid), Connie Flynn (gardener) and Patrick O'Hara (chauffeur). You can see the places where they (and one Mrs. O'Keefe, who apparently came in to do the laundry) worked, and some of the

tools they used. We are working to make use of the literally thousands of household bills and daily calendars, letters, photographs and lecture notes discovered in last year's inventory. These are giving us new insight into the life and character of the family, Stephen Willard Phillips, his wife Anna, and their son Stevie. Our goal is always to preserve and display the house and its furnishings, but also to put them into the context of an early twentieth century American family.

This new approach will include new types of programs as well. In November we premiered a special program: "The Art of Collecting: Mr. Phillips Opines." Mr. Phillips was an ardent collector of porcelain, books, maps, autographs, prints, South Pacific artifacts, and—well, you get the point. He also left us a



Stephen Willard Phillips

treasure trove of letters, lecture notes, articles and other documents. He certainly never seems to have run short of or been shy about stating his knowledge or opinion on any subject. I have been busy reading his papers, collecting his opinions and learning to hear Mr. Phillips' voice. On November 10, to celebrate Arts and Antiques Month, Stephen

Willard Phillips returned (with my help) to deliver his opinions on the art of collecting and on choice items from his collection. We hope that this will be the first of such programs at the Phillips House. When you visit next year, you may be able to meet Mr. Phillips again, or perhaps Patrick O'Hara or Bridget Durgin will give you a taste of life behind the scenes at 34 Chestnut St. These programs should complement our regular tours, and help us continue to bring this beautiful old house to life.

Facing Challenges

Courage is the power of a person taking a risk. If you do not have courage to challenge yourself, you cannot make your life better. I know that I can make tomorrow better if I have the courage to challenge it." Phillips Scholar Shuo Zhang's thoughts on courage stem from his own personal risk taking. A resident of Beijing, Shuo left all things and people familiar behind, and moved to Massachusetts in October of his junior year. Struggling with English his first year, he then rose to the challenge of studying Advanced Placement math, chemistry and physics in a language he barely understood. With his eye on the future, Shuo more than met that challenge.

Phillips Scholarship application essays often contain inspirational accounts of extraordinary events and people in the students' lives. A number of students write about people they have met whose courage has inspired them. Many students write about the difficulties they have faced during high school. Some have found the courage to overcome

health problems; loss; prejudice; emigration, with its attendant cultural and language difficulties; and various academic, physical, or social challenges.

"Through my years as a teenager, I used my misfortune as inspiration and strength to be a drug-free, dedicated and respectable person," writes Phillips Scholar Kaine Nicholas, who lost both parents tragically at the age of seven. "This was challenging because I live in the inner city of Boston, where marijuana, cocaine, and guns run people's lives. I have had no choice but to persevere. From this experience, my personal values have been strengthened and I've been determined not to be a statistic in a city where my friends became inmates."

Musician and Scholar Patrick Brusil writes positively about his brother's challenges. "Dealing with the realities that come with a brother who is mentally challenged can be tough, but understanding and dealing with these issues have made me the person I am today. I have learned to look past the physical or mental limitations of others and to get to

know them as human beings—to look beyond that first glance. All people have value and something to offer to those who take the time to get to know them."

Booker T. Washington wrote that "Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which one has overcome while trying to succeed." Many Phillips Scholars exhibit the courage Shuo Zhang identifies, the courage to take a risk, to struggle against obstacles, rather than falling victim to them. With its emphasis on strength of character as well as academic achievement, the Stephen Phillips Memorial Scholarship seeks to recognize students who display this courage, who persevere and become stronger, who find in adversity the roots for success.



Shuo Zhang is currently a sophomore at Worcester Polytechnic Institute; **Kaine Nicholas** is a junior at Bentley College, and **Patrick Brusil** is a freshman at the Boston Conservatory.

A Scholar's Story: Semantic Wars

There were plastic tubes in my chest, up my nose and down my throat.

W.H. Auden sat on the end of my bed, posthumously, and talked about the war. *There is no such thing as the State and no one exists alone; Hunger allows no choice to the citizen or the police; We must love another or die...*

Yeats and Eliot watched from their respective perches on blue vinyl chairs with all the condescending fatherly love they had to offer.

"Perhaps you meant we must love one another or kill," mused Joseph Brodsky, who only came to check up on Auden, and, even at that, very seldom. By the way, I am not delusional. I once spent two months in the hospital in the company of dead, lonely old men poets. Let me explain (*And how should I then presume, and how should I begin*):

When I was sixteen I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, my body's attempt to eat itself from the inside out. There is no 'why' in such cases; it's simply something you live with, putting your best foot forward each and every day. Eventually that pace landed me in the pediatric unit of a local hospital, and, when all medicinal paraphernalia failed me, on the 10th floor of Children's Hospital in Boston.

At the time I was actively engaged in an independent study in Irish literature. Despite my lack of Fenian blood, at times I feel I have a "touch of the poet" in me, and that led me to Yeats. There is something ethereal in Celtic mythology, where men in grief battle the waves as they roll into shore, or catch birds in mid-air, and tear them apart only to piece them back together again. Yeats saw that, and when the Demerol kicked in, so did I.

For two months I read and I wrote. Time is surprisingly contiguous when there is nothing to break it up into segments. I couldn't eat—meals came in the form of a milky white substance that was pumped directly into me through a central line under my collar-



bone. My condition worsened, the medicine was not working. One week turned into three, and my feelings of isolation increased, although I have wonderful friends who came to decorate for Halloween. My physics class chipped in and bought me a plastic

jellyfish, for which there is still no explanation. Hospitalization had turned me into a wandering Oengus, though, no matter how hard I tried to remain normal. Every morning I made my own bed, lapped the central nurses' station several times in my daily walk, and still I would find myself crying at four a.m., lit by the fluorescent bathroom light, looking for a way out.

The problem lay in my determination. My mother calls it being stubborn. After a week I had decided. They could take my colon out, as long as they let me go home.

No one else agreed with me. "That's not what you really want," they said. The doctors, the nurses, my parents. "Do you know what that means?" Of course I knew what it meant. It was simply a case of semantics. Such frustration breeds loneliness, in my experience. And being a case of semantics, I turned towards the poets—*because the mountain grass cannot help but keep the form where the mountain hare has lain*.

I have never been a great speaker. I dread answering the phone. Writing has always been my best means of communication. So in between writing down my reflections on Frank O'Connor and Frank McCourt, I began to write letters. I was going to fight the best I could to have the surgery, *ileoanal anastomosis*, and go on with life. Thus began the semantic wars.

Through the month that followed, life was rough. I was on enough steroids to make me an emotional wreck, and attached to two IV poles, in which on many occasions I entangled myself. *Your torrents, salt and sunless, remain*

enigmas: what I believe is doctor's hearsay only.

There were good moments, too. When my doctor at Children's finally realized I was serious about my decisions, she revealed to me that, in truth, I really had no other options anyway. My surgeon also proved an ally, becoming one of those people you are so much the better for having known in life. And sometimes, at night, when the 10th floor had died down to the scuffs of nurses' clogs on linoleum and a hint of yellow light underneath the door, I could almost hear the voice of Auden at the edge of my pillow. *Beauty, midnight, vision dies...*

So I went ahead with the whole shebang. Three operations later I count myself as close to normal as a person with a "neo-colon" ever gets. *Our liveliness and good humor, such as they are, are those of survivors, conscious that there are others who have not been so fortunate...*

In Semantic wars, poets are always allies.



Jessica Ingram is currently in her sophomore year at Haverford College, where she is studying biology and participates in several community outreach programs.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

During the first two weeks of May, we anticipate receiving an enormous volume of applications. These packets need to be opened, checked for completeness, logged in, and acknowledged.

Can you offer several hours of your time to help between the hours of 8:30 and 4:00, Monday through Friday, April 29 through May 10? Please call us at 978-744-2111 if you are willing and able to help out. There is train service to Salem from Boston.



To our delight, we visited with more than 60 students and their families this summer. Some of those visitors included (top to bottom, left to right): Estela Thano, Gbemisola Sorinmade, and Denis Aliu, who discussed the challenges of being foreign-born students; former scholars Maria Speridakos and Sarah Petrin; Stasha Fyfe, Kelly Allen, and Kerry Gavin; Salem residents Olga Abinader, Charles Olsher, Jurgen Lika, Julie and Christine O'Donnell, Abigail Stewart, Hugh Galligan, and Amanda Lahikainen; twins Sarah and Abigail Beckwith; Joanna Heath, Chanelle Fillion, Ashley Fowler, Emily Dolan, and Nan Swift at the Gordon College scholarship luncheon; and Therese Nurse, with her parents and siblings.

