

Chapter 2: My Family

In our family, as far as we are concerned, we were born and what happened before that is myth.

V. S. Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door* (1968)

Family lore can be a bore, but only when you are hearing it, never when you are relating it ...

Frank Pittman¹

I really know shockingly little about the family I was born into. As a child and even as a young man, I was much too involved with my own concerns to ask very many questions about the lives of the members of my family. I wish I had, but I didn't, and now it is too late. I left the house at 19 and didn't go back much; my interests lay elsewhere. Here's what I remember having been told, or having observed myself – a lot of both may be completely wrong. More information is contained in the Phillips Family Papers.

I was born into a New York Jewish bourgeois family. My father's family had done well in *shmattas* (a Yiddish word meaning *clothing*, used by Jews in the garment trade to describe the industry they worked in.) The Phillips family had lived in New York for about 60 years when I was born – the Orchard Street clothing business of my great-grandfather Rabbi Moses (*Moshe Zvi*) Phillips (right) was listed in the New York City Directory as long ago as the 1880s. They were part of the first big wave of Jewish immigrants from the Russian Empire after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881.



We were *Litvaks*, as Jews from Lithuania and parts of Poland called themselves. I did some inquiring of the old people years ago and found that of the eight great-grandparents, all Jews of course, six came from Lithuania or the Baltic littoral (including one from Koenigsberg in East Prussia), one from Suwalki further inland in Poland, and one whose origins were even then forgotten. Moses Phillips had been the sexton (*shammes*) of a synagogue in Suwalki – perhaps his title of *rabbi* did not imply ordination, but was merely the honorific *rov* given to learned and respected Jews.

There is a curious and now unanswerable question about the name *Phillips*, which is of course an English name of Greek origin.² There is a book called *The Phillips Story: A*

¹ From "How to Manage Mom and Dad," *Psychology Today*, November-December 1994.

² Meaning *fond of horses*, from φίλιππος [*philippos*], combining φίλια [*philia*], meaning *love* or *liking*, and ἵππος [*hippos*], meaning *horse*.

Chronicle and Documentary Record, by Lucjan Dobroszycki (1980), commissioned (I think) by my cousin Seymour Phillips from YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Jewish genealogical organization. It has a lot of information about the family's roots in Europe and progress in America – how accurate it is I cannot judge.³ There is a copy in the Phillips Family Papers. This book states unreservedly that the name derives from the city of Filipow (pronounced *Filipov*) in the district (governate) of Suwalki, from which the Phillips family is known to have come. I assume without actually knowing that the root of *Filipow* lies in the name of St. Philip the Apostle. The surname might have been adopted from the place name when the Russian government (which ruled this part of Poland from 1815) forced Jews to adopt surnames instead of the patronymics they had been using. The YIVO book says that on his arrival in the United States in 1881 Moses Phillips changed his name from *Filipower*.

But there is another story, traditional among earlier generations, that this story was a cover, and that our real surname was never to be spoken, because of some horrible circumstance. Because it was never to be spoken, no one alive now knows what the circumstance was, or what the “real” name was (if any) which *Phillips* was supposedly adopted to conceal. This legend is a little bit credible because if it were not at least partly true, it is unlikely that members of the family back far enough to know the real circumstances would invent a story that had something scandalous or discreditable at its core. But we'll never know.

To return to the Phillips family in America, the YIVO book states that Henry Phillips, (probably born *Filipower*) arrived in the United States before his brother Moses. He is recorded as having married in New York City in 1877, placing him in America before the mass emigration of the 80s. YIVO says Moses arrived in New York in 1881 and removed to Pottsville, Pennsylvania, during the years 1884-1888, where he at first sold shirts (which he and his wife Endel made by hand) to miners from a pushcart, and later opened a factory. He returned to New York City in 1888, the year he was naturalized an American citizen.

Moses Phillips was first listed in the New York City Directory as a manufacturer of underwear, at 1 Orchard Street on the Lower East Side. His business was next listed as shirts, and shirts it remained. His company was known from 1890 as M. Phillips and Son (later *Sons*). In 1907 it merged with the long-established firm of D. Jones to become Phillips-Jones, the name it kept for many years and under which it was first listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1919. Moses' son Isaac made a deal with John M. Van Heusen to exploit Van Heusen's soft “self-folding” collar, the innovation for which the company became best known, and eventually the company itself was renamed Phillips-

³ Many of the documents it reproduces are printed in a form too small and degraded to read.

Van Heusen (sometimes called PVH after its current stock market listing). The firm expanded to England in 1922 and later to many other parts of the world.

Moses Phillips was the father of my grandfather and namesake David Frank Phillips I (1881-1925) (below left). The story I heard was that the company's big break came in World War I, when the soft attached collar was used for uniforms. After the war the



soldiers, who had grown used to the convenience of these collars, demanded them on civilian shirts too, and our fortune was made. But I am not sure how this squares with the dates 1919 for the patent and 1921 for the rollout of the product, reported on the PVH website.⁴ One of my grandfather's brothers, my great-uncle Morris, took his share and retired to New Jersey to devote his life to playing polo. He has been my idol ever since I heard about this.

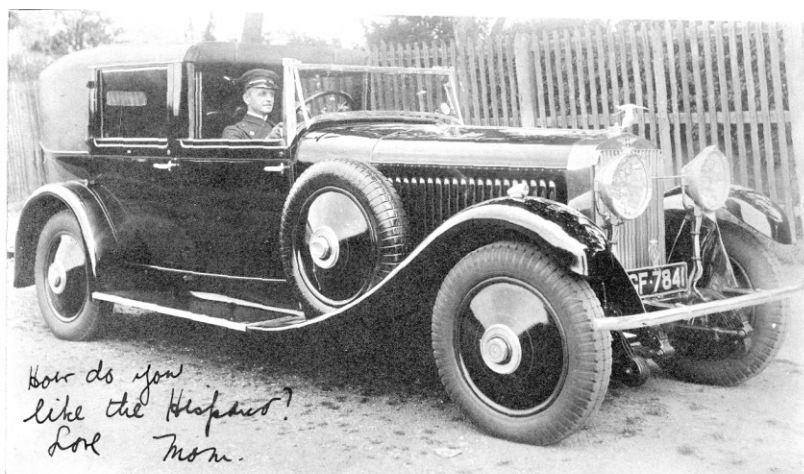
In 2008 PVH was number 832 on the Fortune 1000 list, with a net value of a billion and a half dollars. We didn't get much of that, though – my father left the company soon after World War II, and it is no longer owned by the Phillips family.

Even though Phillips-Jones was not then the huge company it later became, my family did well. Moses made the psychologically important move from the Lower East Side to the Upper East Side in 1900. When my father was born in 1916 his family was living high, on Riverside Drive and later on Park Avenue. They had a Pierce-Arrow automobile and a chauffeur named Ryan. My grandfather David Phillips married Beatrice Silberman (right), called Birdie, also of a prosperous New York Jewish family, and had two children: Louise, born I think in New York on September 8, 1912, and Samuel, my father, born in New York on April 4, 1916.



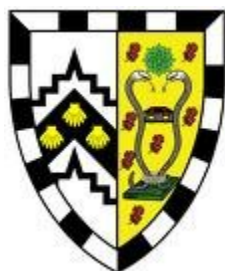
Shown below, because it is too good a picture to leave out, is the Hispano-Suiza touring car Birdie used in Europe. I'm not sure whether that is Ryan at the wheel or not.

⁴ At <http://www.pvh.com/history.html>. This page says that Moses Phillips and his wife Endel begin selling shirts in Pottsville in 1881. This conflicts with the account in the YIVO book, probably more accurate, which has them in New York until 1884.



Samuel Joshua Richard Phillips

My grandfather David died young, and Birdie married Joe Wiener (pronounced *Wyner*), a rich Jewish advertising man who lived in England. Birdie and Sam moved to England, and in 1931 Sam entered Mill Hill, a public school (in England this means a private school) in north London. Christopher later attended this school himself – see his Papers. The Phillips Family Papers have a lot of letters Birdie sent Sam as she traveled from one fashionable European spa to another. Then in July 1932 she was killed in a taxicab accident in front of the Hotel George V in Paris, and Sam, 16, was left living alone in



England. When not at school he lived in a flat at 11a Portland Place, in the West End of London; he attended Caius College, Cambridge (arms at left), beginning in 1934. I still have his pewter mug from the Caius College rowing crew.⁵

But he was lonesome there, and eventually his Uncle Alfred came over to England and said Sam, what are you doing over here, come home. So he did, a year (as I heard it) short of his degree, and went into the family business. His time in England, in the 1930s, left a lasting mark – he subscribed to *Punch* for many years afterward, and I (and maybe Adam too) developed lifelong Anglophilia at least in part as a result of this connection. Christopher says he got over his.

My father met my mother Nina David Rubinstein when he was in his mid-20s, sometime around 1940 – accurate dates may appear in the Phillips Family Papers. The story was that they met at a country club dinner, and he moved the place cards so he could sit next to her. Another story was that at an early point in the relationship he took an

⁵ The college name was actually *Gonville and Caius*. *Caius* is pronounced *keys*. There'll always be an England.

inopportunistically timed trip to California with his friend Morty HersHKovits, and Ida Rubinstein (Nina's mother), sensing that Nina was beginning to look elsewhere and not wishing to lose a potential son-in-law both rich and Jewish, told him to pay attention if he knew what was good for him. He did, proposed and was accepted, and they were married on May 14, 1942, at the Plaza Hotel on Fifth Avenue at 59th Street.⁶ By this time he was 26 and already in the army. Whether this was his first important romantic relationship I don't know – his shyness and stammer might have got in his way of earlier relationships, or maybe earlier relationships were just never spoken of. I certainly never heard of any, but that doesn't mean there weren't a lot of them.

Sam hated the army. He was just married and regarded his service as years stolen from him, which of course they were. Nevertheless there was nothing to be done about it.



Knowing he would be drafted, he tried for a commission in Naval Intelligence, but was rejected, he said, for having an overbite – he thought this was a pretext, and that he was really rejected for being a Jew. So the army got him in the draft, and he went to Officer Candidate School and became an officer anyway. He was stationed first in Rhode Island, for signals training I think, and then at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and then Fort Dupont, Delaware, and then Camp Butner, North Carolina, and finally in Germany. My mother followed him as far as North Carolina. As recounted in Chapter 1, after being born in Delaware I followed too until he went overseas, and my mother and I went to New York.

Sam was a lieutenant (second, then first) in the Army Signal Corps, and worked as noted as a cryptographic officer. As actual coding and decoding were done by enlisted men, I'm not sure just what he did in the army, but he told me it had to do with codes. I didn't inquire very deeply when I had the chance, and now of course it is too late. Why codes, when he had no mathematical background, I don't know – probably he did well on that part of the aptitude test. Some of his military records are preserved in the Phillips Family Papers, and I still have his medal ribbons (below), which show two campaign stars on the

⁶ His parents were married there too, and years later his son Adam would be also.

European Theater Campaign Ribbon.⁷ Although he was not a combat soldier, he told me that one time he was in a jeep and blundered into a German position, but turned around and got away without being captured or shot. It is well possible that this could have happened. He also told me he went to Washington with a briefcase chained to his wrist – code stuff, I guess.

Anyway, after the war he came back to New York and rejoined PVH. But he was never happy there – as noted he was a shy man with a stammer, not particularly well suited to business or sales, and like me not much interested in the rewards of either. Also the early death of his father David Phillips, and the shifting of power in the company to Seymour Phillips and *his* children, put my father out of the line of succession for control. He served some time in Pottsville, learning the ropes of the shirt business, and because he had so much stock (his own and probably effective control of his sister Louise’s too) he was also a company director. But there were squabbles within the company, and then came the war and he was drafted out of the business. When he got out of the army in 1946, at the age of 30, he went back into the company at first, but finally said the hell with it. With his shares he had enough money to live comfortably, and decided to go back to school and become a doctor. Why he wanted to be a doctor I have no idea.

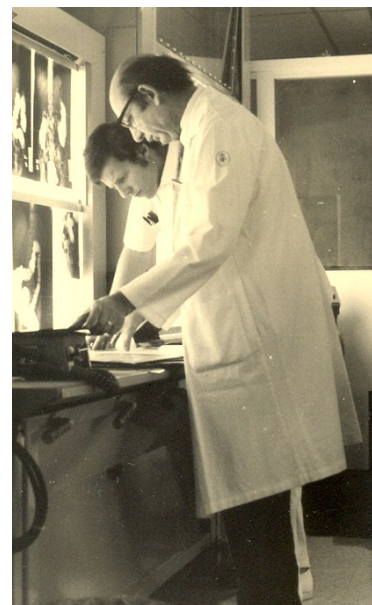


⁷ Top row: officer’s US above, Signal Corps branch of service emblem below, first lieutenant’s bar (sterling silver), dog tag. Middle row: ribbons of the American Campaign Medal, the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal, and the World War II Victory Medal. Bottom row: shoulder patch of the 89th Division (“Rolling W”), officer’s cap badge. The dog tag gives a home address of 1225 Broadway, which was actually the Van Heusen office. *H* on the dog tag meant *Hebrew*. The notch was for placement between the teeth after death, for ease of identification.

As he had not finished Cambridge and had no degree, he had to start college again as a freshman. New York University gave him no credit for his time at Cambridge. He majored in English, a surprising choice for a pre-medical student. He finished NYU in 2½ years instead of four, which was remarkably fast, but he was working toward a goal. As he recounted the story, the dean of admissions at the medical school told him that under no circumstances would he be admitted there, as he would be too old. Sam paid no attention, finished college, and by the time he applied to the medical school the dean was dead and he was admitted after all, after scoring very high on a statewide test. Medical school was a four-year course (1952-1956), plus internship and residency and national board examinations. I remember his studying behind the soundproof double doors which were built for this purpose at 1136 Fifth Avenue, and attended his graduation. He was 40 when school was over – it was a long haul. He got through the intermediate stages (I remember he spent long hours as an intern) and finally became a full-fledged physician. His diplomas and medical licenses are in the Phillips Family Papers. He practiced medicine for the rest of his life.



He specialized in radiology, which in those days meant mainly X-rays, with nuclear medicine just on the horizon. He said one reason he did this was that he didn't have to see patients, which was an odd thing for a newly minted doctor to want. But I understand it now, after a career as a lawyer who preferred not to represent clients. Also his shyness and stammer may have inhibited him. He practiced in a hospital – Presbyterian first, I think, and then Memorial Hospital, affiliated with Cornell University. He is in the foreground in the picture at right. The hospital was down by the East River, just a few blocks east of our house on 70th Street near Park Avenue, and he came home nearly every day for lunch, which our housekeeper Mary Fletcher (later Lindsay) served to him in the dining room. For more on this house, see Chapter 3B.6.



When we bought the house, we fixed up the bottom floor as a medical suite with power for X-ray machines, in case he decided to have a private practice there, but he never did. He liked working at the hospital, and I guess he didn't need the extra money private practice would have earned for him. He had enough money anyway, and when my Aunt Louise died in 1955 he inherited a lot more. So he didn't need to have a consulting

practice or a clinic of his own. He did teach as an adjunct professor of radiology at Cornell's medical school (affiliated then with New York Hospital). As far as I know he was happy in his work – I visited him at his hospital once but didn't learn a lot about it.

Sam influenced his sons a lot. He had a gentle manner and a dry sense of humor which all his sons learned from. He thought of himself as a gentleman and his regard for the values of a gentleman, whatever that really means, he passed on to us. He could make amusing drawings in cartoon format, which I can also do. His stammer was much improved by the time I learned to speak, but I got a little of it and Christopher got a lot of it. I have a blue birthmark on my forehead just where he had one just like it. Adam and I both have the same pattern baldness Sam and his father had. I learned a huge amount from reading his books (see Chapter 4), and as noted developed a lifelong fondness for England from his early exposure there. He had played the piano a bit in his youth, although he couldn't really do it later in life, and he had a lot of old sheet music which fascinated me. A lot of my lifelong nostalgia for the 20s, 30s and 40s probably stems from his taste. How much of this I would have felt anyway is unknowable.

Pictures of my father during the war show that he was very thin indeed. After the war my mother and probably her mother too decided to fatten him up some. This went too far and he put on a little more weight than he should have – not a lot more, but some. He was six feet tall and weighed about 185 pounds, he said, although perhaps he gained more later. He had the ability to nap at will – he could say he was going to sleep for 15 minutes, lie down on the couch, check out almost at once, and awaken refreshed. I can usually do that too – more often now the problem is staying awake.



The picture at left is dated 1948, when my father was 32 and I was four. The later picture at right is undated – I'd guess he was in his early 50s then. I'm not sure what my father's interests were apart from his work – sadly, I was more interested in myself than in him during the years I could have learned more. He had enthusiasms but I can't remember what they were – I remember he learned to bind books,



bound one, and never returned to it. There were lots of books around, but I didn't see him read a lot. He had no interest in sports or outdoor pursuits except for walking on the beach at Cape Cod. He liked cameras too, and bought a new car every two years. He was sociable with his friends, some of whom I mention in Chapter 3A.3, but not *social* in any public sense of moving in society, nor much of a party animal.

In their early life together my parents were both interested in antiques – see the discussion in Chapter 3A.1 – but that seemed to have more or less finished when the house was fully furnished. He was a Democrat, and had no religion he ever mentioned to me, until much later he got involved with the Unitarians through his friend T. Margaret Jamer. He was supposedly influenced by a book called *To a Dancing God: Notes of a Spiritual Traveler*, by Sam Keen, but never discussed it with me – not that I ever asked him about it.⁸

He and Nina went to the theatre every so often and were fond of musicals like *South Pacific*, *Guys and Dolls* and *My Fair Lady*, all of which I saw with them – they were terrific shows. In his later years they traveled quite a bit, to Europe and elsewhere, including an adventurous trip to the Seychelles.

He provided handsomely for my grandmother Ida Rubinstein, Nina's mother, subsidizing her lifestyle and eventually moving her from her cramped apartment on West 57th Street to a modern apartment at Two Fifth Avenue, near Washington Square. He was trustee (Substituted Trustee, as the official envelopes said) under a spendthrift trust for his sister, my Aunt Louise.

My father's health started to fail in 1967, when he was 51. He had his first heart attack that year, and three or four more in the next few years. This was before angioplasty and modern heart drugs, and there seemed to be no alternative to his just getting sicker and sicker until he died. One thing he *could* do was quit smoking, which he did, although my mother never did. But it was too late and didn't help much, and it must have been very frightening for him, because as a doctor he surely knew what was happening. The house had steep staircases, and that probably didn't help either, or maybe it did by giving him a cardiovascular workout. I remember seeing him being brought down the stairs on a chair after one of these heart attacks. We looked into an elevator or an Inclinator, but nothing ever came of it.⁹ He died after his fifth heart attack, in March 1973, just short of his 57th birthday. I spoke at his funeral, at a Unitarian Church in Manhattan.

His estate went entirely to his wife, which was not good estate planning as it ended up being taxed twice. But what can you do? He was cremated and his ashes put into the family mausoleum, with a window by Louis Comfort Tiffany, in a cemetery (Beth Olam Fields) on the Brooklyn-Queens boundary.

⁸ For quotes from this book see www.fmcdenver.org/focus/698/dancing.html.)

⁹ *Inclinator* was the trade name for a seat which attached to a rail on the wall, so an invalid could ride up or down stairs while sitting down. They are still made.

Nina David Phillips



My mother was born in Brooklyn on August 5, 1917. In our family *Rubinstein* rhymed with *fine* rather than *keen*. Her parents were David Lazarus Rubinstein (1888-1929) and Ida Jean Rubinstein, *née* Sussman (1890-1962). Her birth name was Norma Shirley Rubinstein. Norma became Nina

early on, and she soon dropped the Shirley too. In her youthful try for a stage career she used the name *Nina David* after her father's given name. When she married she became Nina David Phillips – she never used Rubinstein as part of her name after she married. Above is a picture of the family she was born into – Jews every one of them.¹⁰

She grew up in Brooklyn – for a while anyway on Crown Street – and attended a private school called the Berkeley Institute (now the Berkeley Carroll School) in Park Slope, a Brooklyn neighborhood. Later she went to the Dalton School in Manhattan. Her family was prosperous, although not on the scale of the Phillipses. David's family had been in sweaters (*shmattas* again) and Ida's family in yarn, doing well until the 1929 stock market crash. David (right) had a law degree from St. John's College, Brooklyn, although he never practiced.¹¹ He followed Ethical Culture (see Chapter 3C.9) as a substitute for the Jewish religion. In 1929, but before the October crash, he committed suicide, an event the effects of which are still being felt today in our family more than 80 years later (see Chapter 7).



¹⁰ Her grandparents Jacob and Nettie Rubinstein are in the front row; her father David is third from the left in the back row. More pictures and identifications relating to this picture can be found in Christopher's book *The Rubinstein Family Photo Archive and Catalogue* (New York, 1998) in the Phillips Family Papers.

¹¹ A separate undergraduate degree was not required for law study in those days.

After David's suicide and the economic crash, money became tight. Although Nina began college (studying speech and drama at Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, now Carnegie Mellon University), the money was not there for her to continue. The story we always heard was that what money there was had to go to help her brother Roy (born 1912), because men had to become earners and women would marry. Whether this is the true story of why she dropped out of college we will never know.

But she did drop out, and returned to New York City. She tried for work as an actress but got nowhere. She worked as a tour guide on the Sylph Line, which operated excursion boats around Manhattan Island. Pictures of her on the Sylph Line are in the Phillips Family Papers. She was a good-looking woman in her youth, slender and with long dark hair, although only one previous boyfriend (a Catholic) was ever heard of after her marriage. During the New York World's Fair of 1939-40, she worked briefly as a make-up model for the cosmetics empress Helena Rubinstein (unfortunately no relation).

And she did marry, during the war, in May 1942. Afterward, when she was not traveling from one army post to another, she worked as a volunteer at the Aircraft Warning Service, a civilian agency linked to the Army Air Force's Interceptor Command, watching the skies over New York for enemy planes and supervising other observers. It was the first of many positions as a volunteer supervisor of volunteers.



During the war, after moving with my father (and later with me too) to a series of army posts, she returned to New York when he was shipped overseas. After that she raised children for a while – me (born 1944), my brother Christopher (born 1950) and the twins Adam and Victoria (born 1955). She was not a success as a mother – more on this appears in Chapter 7.



Sometime in the 1960s she began volunteer work with an organization called School Volunteers, which organized women of means to serve in various roles in the New York City public schools. She developed a program for teaching English as a second language – now an accepted part of school and adult education curricula, but then a relatively new concept. I remember her making teaching materials out of illustrated posters of the vocabulary-building kind – a scene with lots of different kinds of transport, for example, or different kinds of food – and creating a method. Eventually her method was adopted as a standard, and she oversaw its use

(in the School Volunteer Conversational English Program) in public schools. She turned her method into a book called *Conversational English for the Non-English-Speaking Child*, published in 1967 by Teachers College Press.¹² It was reprinted for the third time in 1977. The subtitle was “An audio-visual-lingual approach to English as a second language, which special emphasis on the needs of the disadvantaged child.” A copy of this book, with more about her School Volunteer work, is in the Phillips Family Papers. She also taught an orientation on the “Culture of Poverty” for new school volunteers.

My relationship with my mother was never good – our personalities clashed from the start. Maybe not *quite* from the start – there are pictures of her bathing me as a baby and my looking like I was enjoying it. But I cannot remember a time when our relations were not marked by conflict and struggle. There is more about this in Chapter 7; Chapter 8 reveals just how far she was prepared to go to win. In the one serious “adult” talk with my father about this subject – when as a college student in the mid-1960s I took him to lunch – he told me of his regret that I couldn’t see in her the virtues he appreciated. But that was just the thing – her dominating and controlling nature, which suited him so well, was poison for me.

My mother was small (5’2”) and thin, but she had a lot of energy. In addition to the School Volunteers she had other projects – one was building a model ship, which Adam still has, and she devoted some attention to the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship in Huntington, Long Island. She was a fan of the famously neurotic singer Judy Garland (1922-1969) (right) – that has to tell you something, but I’m not sure just what. I didn’t spend much time with her, although I did come back to 112 East 70th Street for occasional dinners when in college and later in library school. About her inner life, except as it affected me directly, I know very little.



She was devastated by my father’s early death in 1973, and for a while did nothing much. She eased herself back into the world by working in a photocopy shop on Lexington Avenue, near the house – I don’t think she needed the money, which couldn’t have been much, but it was something to do. Later she went to work for Channel 13, the main New York public television channel, as a supervisor of volunteers, and stayed with that until her last illness. She developed pancreatic cancer, and also emphysema from a lifetime of heavy smoking. She is said to have smoked even in her hospital room. It was a race to see which of these diseases would kill her, but I think it was cancer. Anyway she died in 1980, at the age of 62, leaving a gross estate valued at more than \$2 million, which her children divided after paying avoidable taxes and heavy attorney and executor fees. She was cremated and her ashes put in the Phillips family mausoleum.

¹² Teachers College is the graduate education school of Columbia University.

Ida Jean Rubinstein

Both my father's parents, and my mother's father, died before I was born. The only grandparent I ever knew was my mother's mother Ida J. Rubinstein (1890-1962). When I was born in 1944 she had been a widow for 15 years; I never heard of any suitors before or after her marriage.



She lived in a very small apartment at 140 West 57th Street, described in Chapter 3A.3. It was on the same block as Carnegie Hall.¹³ She spent a lot of time with me, a relief to my mother no doubt – filling in for parents is one of the traditional roles of grandmothers. I spent considerable time at her apartment; riding the subway with her was one of my favorite activities (as it was in London and Paris also on my trip there in 1952 – the tunnels with their mysterious signs and dark passages fascinated me). She took me to children's concerts at Carnegie Hall. I remember going on board the *S.S. United States* to see her off on a trip she took to Europe in 1955 (or maybe 1960).

I occasionally went with her to the exceedingly reform Temple Emanuel (at 65th Street and Fifth Avenue) on the High Holidays. She also held seder sometimes. But she was not religious and did not keep kosher, and although she knew some Jewish recipes like *taglach* (a kind of fried dough confection in heavy syrup) she wasn't much involved in Jewish religion or culture as far as I knew. I assume she shared some of her husband's dismissive attitude toward the Jewish religion, although she wasn't overt about it – anyway it didn't seem like it meant very much to her. She had been born in Kovno, on the other side, and had, if not memories, at least childhood stories of *pogroms* which she related to me. Here she is as a young girl with her parents., around 1900.



She dressed in the style of a widowed matron – black suits and hats with hatpins and veils (her veils were of a wide mesh, which didn't obscure the face like a mourning veil). I was very fond of her, and was sad when she died of a heart condition in 1962, at the age of 72.

¹³ The genius cartoonist Rube Goldberg (1883-1970) also lived in this building.

Roy M. Rubinstein



He was my mother's brother, born 1912. He is shown here with her in an undated picture, perhaps from the 1950s. His birth name was Monas, a name he disliked, and he renamed himself Roy after the title character in *Rob Roy*, a novel by Sir Walter Scott (1818). After that he was always known as Roy

M. Rubinstein. He attended private schools (including the Franklin School) and then got an undergraduate degree from the Wharton School of Finance, the

business school of the University of Pennsylvania. As he was only 17 in 1929, the year of his father's suicide (he is said to have discovered the body) and the stock market crash, Wharton must have come after that. A lot of the family's remaining wealth went to buy him a seat on the Chicago Board of Trade, an important commodity exchange. This may explain the shortness of cash which halted my mother's college education.



But Roy's career as a commodity broker was not a success, and the money was lost. Thereafter he had a succession of minor jobs at the edges of the financial markets – with brokerage houses, and for a while in Washington with the Office of Price Stabilization. In World War II he was a sergeant in the Army, and participated in the North Africa campaign (he is shown above in Africa in 1942). Roy had a good sense of humor and was fond of jokes and of the comic writer S. J. Perelman (1904-1979). He lived in Manhattan and for a while in Forest Hills (in Queens). He was a very handsome man, successful with women, and had a very long-term liaison with the pianist Constance Keene (1921-2005). I knew her well and Christopher and Victoria knew her much better. Her papers are now at the University of Maryland.

Roy retired to a dark and gloomy apartment on 84th Street and Third Avenue, where he had some objects from his mother's apartment and not much else besides a couch and a large television set, on which he watched the financial markets all day long. The cable station he watched had three tickers going at once under the main picture. He was a follower of charts as a way to handicap the market, and subscribed to a chart-heavy financial journal, but he told me he didn't actually bet himself. He didn't have much money after a life in finance, and Constance subsidized him in his old age.

Roy was a smart man – why he kept his life within such a narrow compass I do not know, but he was subject to depression. I knew him very well and spoke with him by phone every day for many years until he died in 1993, aged 81. He died of lung cancer brought on by years of heavy smoking; although he quit smoking some years before he died it was too late. He left his small estate to Constance. He asked me if he could have my space in the family mausoleum, which I gladly gave him, and he was buried (not cremated) in a marble vault there.

“Ridiculous!”, with emphasis on the second syllable, was a catch phrase of his. He said it whenever he thought something was ridiculous, which was often. After he died I suggested carving that word on the door of the vault as his epitaph, in quotation marks of course so it wouldn’t look like a description of him. The inscription on the marble tomb would have read:

ROY M. RUBINSTEIN 1912-1993 “RIDICULOUS!”

I think he would have liked that, but wiser or at least more cautious heads prevailed.

Louise Phillips

Louise was my father’s older sister. She was married briefly, after an elopement in her youth, to a man named Kahn, but there was a Mexican divorce, and she never married again. She was an artist and an illustrator and lived a rather Bohemian life in Greenwich Village. She had the same money my father had, which was quite a bit by the standards of the day. I assume, working backward from known facts, that she was irresponsible with money, because a trust was established for her. I don’t know who the original trustee was, but my father became Substituted Trustee, and he controlled her money so she got income but no independent access to principal. A trust like that is sometimes called a “spendthrift trust.”

Even with just the income she lived quite well. She supplemented her income with design and illustration projects. The jacket copy for *The Sound of Sleigh*



Bells, by Russell McCracken (New York, 1951), which she illustrated, says “Louise Phillips, the illustrator, well known in England and France, makes this her first book published in her native United States.” One of her books, *Hoofprints on the Roof* (New York, 1952) was dedicated to me. She appears almost completely forgotten today – Google shows almost nothing. Bookfinder at the moment I’m writing this offers *The Sound of Sleigh Bells*, *French for Peter* (London 1946) and *Sarah and Sue* (London and Glasgow, 1948).¹⁴

As mentioned, Sam came back to the United States after his adolescent translation to England in the 1930s, but Louise stayed on. She lived and worked there, living in Godfrey Street, Chelsea, into the war years. I found this on a website for a gallery offering one of her 1952 fabric designs.¹⁵

Louise Phillips has a truly cosmopolitan art background. She left New York’s School of Applied Design at the age of eighteen to study in Paris and London. She worked abroad until the war interrupted her painting for a short time. During the war she helped Englishmen evacuated by bombing find homes for their families and then went to the American Embassy with the Military Intelligence Corps.

She told me that during the London Blitz part of a Messerschmitt fighter fell into her back garden. The picture on the previous page was probably taken in London. While in England she engaged a Scotswoman named Gladys Martha Watt, known as Watts, to be what was called a “lady’s maid,” which sort of corresponded to a valet for a man. Here they are (Watts to the right). Watts stayed with her for the rest of her life and was pensioned by her estate.



I learned from someone in Truro who knew her that Louise had a reputation for enthusiastic sexuality and had many wild affairs, including one with the clarinetist and bandleader Artie Shaw and another with the actor Canada Lee, who was (gasp!) a black man, at a time when interracial canoodling was an incredibly scandalous thing to do. When I knew her she and Watts lived in an elegant private house at 17 Commerce Street in Greenwich Village. The house, of brick, had two or three stories and a back yard and had belonged to Aaron Burr – there was a plaque on the front of the house, missing now.

¹⁴ Bookfinder, www.bookfinder.com, is the premier site on the Internet for used and antiquarian books. The selection of course changes constantly. There are other writers and illustrators with the same name, so not all entries refer to my Aunt Louise.

¹⁵ <http://gypsywearvintage.com/artfabrics.htm>.

She had cats too – I remember with pleasure visiting her and her cats and her wonderful unabridged dictionary with whole pages of special symbols (see Chapter 6.A).

She was a great favorite of our family and used to visit us regularly at 1136 Fifth Avenue. I remember she always had a scotch and soda when she visited us. She introduced me to double-crostics.¹⁶ She even took me once to see a live production of *The Jackie Gleason Show*, one of my favorite entertainments.

Aunt Louise died of stomach cancer in on August 8, 1955, at Doctors' Hospital in New York, at the age of 42. I wish I had known her better – I was not quite 11 when she died. Victoria, born the next month, was given the middle name Louise in her memory.

Other relatives

Of my other family members I know even less. The relatives I knew included, on the Rubinstein/Sussman side:

- My grandfather's brother Abe Rubinstein (1879-1974) and his wife Esther (*née* Rashkin (1890-1981). They lived in Brooklyn. Uncle Abe was a wealthy man, with a Cadillac and I think a chauffeur too. He shocked me by supporting Goldwater for President in 1964. Uncle Abe and Aunt Esther used to visit us in Manhattan and sometimes we visited them in Brooklyn.
- Abe's daughter Judy [Rubinstein] Rosenberg and her husband Al lived on Pierpont Street in Brooklyn Heights. We visited them too. Judy had a large collection of dolls which she kept in glass cases. Al was a lawyer. Judy later moved to the Ritz Tower, at 57th Street and Park Avenue, where she lived in great style until she died in 2008.
- My grandfather's sister Sarah [Rubinstein] Levine was a small but jolly lady and a terrific cook. She was married to Dr. Sol Levine, who was far gone with Alzheimer's when I knew him. Their son Nate Levine was the head of the high school at Walden when I went there – see Chapter 9.
- My grandmother's brother Sol Sussman, and his wife Sarah, known as Aunt Sass. They too lived in Brooklyn. Sol was a cheerful gent who smoked cigars – he had been a trick bicycle rider in vaudeville in his youth. They too visited us in

¹⁶ Double-crostics were word puzzles sort of like a crosswords. You fill in definitions and then transfer them letter by letter to specified boxes on a matrix, and when you are done it spells out a quotation. The *Saturday Review* published one every week.

Manhattan. His son Richard Sussman lives in Palm Beach now (2010), a hale and vigorous 85.

- I remember another Sussman cousin, who was a comedian and used the name Herb Sheldon. He appeared on New York local television. I didn't know him very well, but he has a page in Wikipedia, which no one else in the family has.
- As noted, for more on the Rubinstein relatives, with pictures, see *The Rubinstein Family Photo Archive and Catalogue* (1998), published privately by Christopher. There is a copy in the Phillips Family papers.

On the Phillips/Silberman side:

- Our cousins Richard and Evelyn Phillips, who lived in Portchester (in suburban Westchester County, NY). Dick was a regular at the Yale Club, and Evelyn had a business called Young Rembrandts, which transferred images from children's drawings onto ceramic objects like tiles and ashtrays. They visited occasionally, and we saw them sometimes when we summered in Westchester before we bought the house in Cape Cod in the mid-1950s. I knew their children slightly – they were Billy, Jordan and Priscilla. Jordan died young and Billy is now (2010) a lawyer in Paris.
- I remember Uncle Harry Marks, a distinguished lawyer who looked like Toscanini. I knew his son David slightly – he was also a lawyer. Another Marks cousin, whom I hardly met in my youth, was Jack Marks. I got to know Jack very well in the 1970s and 80s. He had been a captain in the Coast Guard during World War II; he served in Australia and met his first wife there. Later his wife, whom I never met, fell ill and they moved to Tucson, Arizona, for her health. He prospered there and became a judge. I visited him every so often in Tucson, where he lived with his second wife Selma Paul Marks, and we became good friends. He died some years ago.
- My cousin Stefan Blaut and his wife Cornelia were German Jews who had been chased out of Germany by Hitler. Stefan's family were in the leather business in Frankfurt, Germany, and did very well; after the war their properties, fortunately in Western Germany, were restored to them. In the meantime they re-established their leather business in Luray, Virginia. Stefan and Cornelia spoke superb English but with a delightful German-English accent and aristocratic cadence I loved to listen to and remember now with great pleasure. They were favorites of our family and we visited each other – they lived in an apartment house on East 62nd Street. Stefan had gone to Harvard and one memorable day invited me to lunch at the Harvard Club. He became an Episcopalian in his later years and died unexpectedly young.

- Stefan's mother was the formidable Aunt Florrie Blaut, *née* Florence Silberman. I knew her slightly; she died in 1968. When in New York she lived in great luxury in an apartment at the Sherry-Netherland Hotel on Fifth Avenue and 59th Street. I remember her monocle and enormous diamond ring. She had had a daring youth and driven race cars in England. The family legend was that she interfered with Stefan's love affairs.
- I should mention my Silberman cousin Margot Hoare, *née* Blaut. She was Florrie's daughter and Stefan's sister. She was a tax lawyer (a barrister) in England., I visited her and her husband Malcolm Hoare, of the banking family, in London and at their home in Barnes (formerly Surrey, later part of greater London) a few times when I was over there. I also knew her daughter Katherine Hoare-Temple-Lau slightly. Christopher knew Margot and Malcolm extremely well when he lived in England, and afterward. He has collected letters to and from them to be a separate collection within the Phillips Family Papers. I have some letters to and from Malcolm which will go up there also.
- Seymour Phillips (called Sy), who became head of PVH, I knew only slightly and don't have a clear recollection of him.
- I must say the same of Samuel J. Silberman, known as Buddy, who married Lois Hershkovits, widow of Morty Hershkovits, one of the friends of my father's youth. Buddy was a philanthropist and gave the Silberman family house (and its neighboring house), at 79th Street and Lexington Avenue, to Hunter College as the site for their School of Social Work.
 - His grandfather (I think) and namesake, the earlier Samuel J. Silberman, left an estate which became a limited partnership, and which owns an office building on Canal Street from which my siblings and I are still annually benefiting. The income which comes from being a descendant of Samuel J. Silberman has been a vital cushion for us, and is today (2010) supplementing my Social Security and other income to allow me a modestly dignified retirement.
- Libby Marcus, *née* Phillips (1898-1992), was another relative I didn't know well. Her girlhood diary was privately reprinted and there should be a copy in the Phillips Family Papers. I know her son James S. Marcus quite well, though, and see him whenever I am in New York. I once visited his vast house in East Hampton, Long Island. Jim, who also went to Harvard, was a partner at the investment banking house of Goldman Sachs and did well there; he is active in philanthropies like the Metropolitan Opera (past chairman) and Lenox Hill Hospital (ditto). I hope he will lodge his papers in the Phillips Family Papers at Yale.

- Libby's 1914 diary was transcribed and privately published, with commentary, in 1993 by her grandson Gary Phillips Marcus. A copy should be in the Phillips Family papers.
- The famous fixer and villain Roy Marcus Cohn (1927-1986) (right), known for his association with Joseph McCarthy and later depicted as an important character in Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America*, was a cousin through the Marcus family. I never met him but wish I had.¹⁷



- As long as I'm mentioning Roy Cohn, I should also mention Haym Salomon (1740-1785) (left), the financier of the Revolution, who was responsible for raising the money to fight the war. Despite his Sephardic-sounding name he was from Poland, and my father's uncle (by marriage). For more on Haym Salomon, by far the most distinguished member of our family, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haym_Salomon.

For more on the Phillips family history see Dobroszycki's book *The Phillips Story*, already mentioned. There is a photocopy in the Phillips Family papers. YIVO specializes in Jewish genealogy. I saw a family tree derived from YIVO research hanging on the wall at the PVH office one day, and was appalled to see it got the dates and even the names of the relatives of my generation wrong. If it got us wrong, who were available to call on the phone to confirm our dates, how reliable was it for people now long dead? I don't know the answer to this, but I have my suspicions. Maybe they were more interested in other people than in us, but still.

My siblings

I omit here discussion of my siblings Christopher Mark (born December 19, 1950, now an editor at the *New York Times*), Adam Robert (born September 24, 1955, now a radio producer at the Voice of America),



¹⁷ He was brilliantly portrayed by Al Pacino in the HBO version of *Angels in America* (2003) and by James Woods in another HBO film about him called *Citizen Cohn* (1992). There are many other portrayals of him in films and novels. He was the only member of my family ever to have been played by Al Pacino. Future researchers: HBO (Home Box Office) was a premium cable television channel which developed very superior movies and television shows for its subscribers which were sometimes later released on disks.

and Victoria Louise (also born September 24, 1955, now an executive at Macy's department store). Christopher's papers are of course in his own archive at Yale, and I hope the others will lodge something about themselves in the Phillips Family Papers. My relationships with both my brothers continue to be exceptionally close, and letters and e-mails in this archive (including the Supplement) will reveal something of that. Above is a picture of the three of us together in my home library, Christopher at left, Adam at right, on the occasion of my 60th birthday party in September 2004.

The only one of us to have married is Adam, whose brief disastrous marriage to Nadine Epstein begun on the unlucky day of February 29, 1992 produced one child, Samuel Noah Epstein Phillips (born July 2, 1992). I hope Noah too will deposit material about himself in the Phillips Family Papers.

A curious thing

It was always understood when I was growing up that we had a very small family. The family consisted of my parents and their four children, my Uncle Roy, my Aunt Louise until she died in 1955, my grandmother until she died in 1962, and that was it. The other people I just listed, and many more besides, were *relatives* rather than *family*. And even with them, our contact was cordial but limited to occasional visits. There was no contact to speak of with the next layer out, or the next layer down (meaning the children of the "relatives"). Their names were unfamiliar to us, and I accepted without examination the idea that I did not really have any relatives younger than my parents.

When Christopher moved back to New York from England in 1991, he began making contact with the members of our family, not only the older ones but those in our generation and even younger (because even our generation are now old enough to be grandparents). He found that there were quite a lot of us. He has come to know many of them, although living in California I have not been able to do so myself. It turns out our family was not all that small after all. I wonder why we were raised with that perception.

