EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH PHILIPPS

July 7, 2009
Boston, Massachusetts

Interviewer
Janet Heininger

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TRANSCRIPT

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Heininger: This is an interview with Elizabeth Philipps on July 7, 2009 in Boston. Why don't you start at the very beginning and tell me about your daughter.

Philipps: There's an awful lot to tell. You've already seen that she was a beautiful creature. I don't know that it's a good thing to start with Sarah [Philipps], because I'll start to cry.

Heininger: OK, we won't start with Sarah. What we're going to do is start with, when did you first meet Senator Kennedy?

Philipps: That's a better idea. After the plane was destroyed, of course, [Ronald] Reagan was still in office for another month.

Heininger: I probably shouldn't have these facing you, should I?

Philipps: No, that's all right. There was not a peep from the President's office. Some time in the spring…

Heininger: For a month?

Philipps: Yes. After the inauguration of George H.W. Bush.

Heininger: No calls to any of the families?

Philipps: I don't know about no calls to any of the families, but there was a very loud silence.

Heininger: But your family did not get called?

Philipps: No. After the inauguration, some people got together and decided they would try to make a meeting in Washington, a demonstration in Washington. Before that, Senator Kennedy called, or his office called, all of us from Massachusetts to a meeting in the JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] Building here in Boston. I have a memory of being there but I don't remember what it was about. One of the things that happens when a child is killed is you are numb for about a year and a half. So I have vivid memories of some events of that period but not vivid memories of other events.

Heininger: You did not go to Lockerbie?

Philipps: Not immediately, no. We went in May. She's buried in Lockerbie. We went in May, 1989. We deliberately waited until they'd had a chance to clean up some. But Eleanor Bright went immediately, so she might have something more to say. She was a more—I was going to say, more aggressive, but I guess the word is more *determined* person for seeking help from the government, and she might have actually gotten in touch with Kennedy's office much earlier.

Then I was aware—I was working and didn't have very much interaction with the group, the Victims of Pan Am Flight 103. That's a name that you should recognize as different from the other—There was a rival group, if you will.

Heininger: Oh, there was?

Philipps: There always is of course. When I started working with the Victims of Pan Am Flight 103, which would have been in probably '92 or '93, then I started to hear about the things that Kennedy was doing. For instance, this is not very orderly, but to backtrack a bit: In April of '89, there was a demonstration outside the White House and somehow, [George H.W.] Bush was persuaded to have an investigatory commission. The only person I remember on that commission was Ann McLaughlin, but there were three people on the commission and a lot of people working hard to do research for them and that sort of thing. I'm pretty certain that Kennedy had a hand in getting that commission put together.

All right, so we jump from '89 to '92 or '93 when I started out with Victims of Pan Am Flight 103, and for whatever reason, I was nominated onto the board.

Heininger: Now what made you, after those years had gone by, decide to get involved with the group?

Philipps: Well, I had stopped working when we moved to Albany. My husband went first and I finished up a job I was doing here, which I will tell you about because it was a lovely job. I was project manager for an order of Episcopalian nuns, to help them sell their property on Beacon Hill here in town, on Louisburg Square, and move to a property they were upgrading and building in Roxbury. That job I was doing sort of three-quarter time and I was driving back and forth to Albany when he was there. But when that job finished, then I was sort of at loose ends in Albany, wondering what to do with myself, and quite often these victim meetings were in Albany or somewhere in the Albany–New Jersey area, so it was easy to get to them.

Heininger: There were a lot of people from New Jersey.

Philipps: Oh yes, and a lot from New York. So it was easy to get to them and I just sort of started going to those meetings and eventually was invited to be on the board. Then, perhaps for something special, and I can't remember now what it was, I started working with Trina [Vargo]. There were things going on, I mean there was legislation that we were lobbying for once the commission was over. We were trying to get their recommendations put into law. There was the cairn that had been given to us by the Scottish people. It was sitting in a warehouse somewhere and we had to find a place to put it. Senator Kennedy and his staff were very active in helping us find the location in Arlington.

Trina and I would talk once or twice a week and became pals, we would talk about other things than the issues we were working on. I'd ask, "Well, how's the Senator today?" and "What's going on?" and all that sort of thing. And whenever something good was happening to our family, I would let him know because, you know, when you've been in the pits and you're slowly climbing out, it's good to share these things. One of the funniest things that happened was in '93, our first grandchild was born and I must have told Trina. I might even have written a note to the Senator to say something about it. Back in the mail came a pair of little boy underpants, something about "Up the Irish," or "Erin Go Bragh," printed in green on them, shamrocks and things like that, which I thought was sweet. He didn't need to do that. He didn't even need to say to an aide, "Do that," but it was nice. Of course as a parent, when a grandchild is born, you're able to turn your vision from gazing into the past to looking into the future. So that was a big moment for me and I suppose he was sort of encouraging me about that time, but it was sweet of him to do it.

We were working for a couple of things. We wanted to get the cairn built. We wanted, as a group, to get an Oval Office meeting with President [William] Clinton. By this time of course, so much time had passed and Bush had left office. Trina was very useful in helping with getting this meeting with President Clinton. What else? Getting the cairn legislation passed. Clinton had said he would sign it if we could get it passed, so we lobbied a lot on that and got it passed, and always with a lot of support from Kennedy's office. Other Senators were helping too. I think of [Charles E.] Schumer, [Alfonse] D'Amato, [Frank R.] Lautenberg, even—What's her name? Mikulski?

Heininger: Barbara Mikulski from Maryland?

Philipps: Maryland yes, maybe even Arlen Specter from—

Heininger: Pennsylvania.

Philipps: Yes. And so we lobbied around and everybody signed the bill and we were thrilled because that meant that we could build the cairn and we could place it at Arlington Cemetery, even though the administrator of Arlington Cemetery was dead set against it.

Heininger: Why?

Philipps: He said it wasn't appropriate. He said it was a civilian monument. There were 18 or 20 military people on the plane, five CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], and a couple of other political and diplomatic people, like Jay Kingham. So I didn't think that was entirely right. He was also very defensive of grave space, which I think is correct for him, but we found a little space. Have you seen the cairn, by any chance? We found a little space that was unsuitable for graves. It was sort of a traffic island not far from the Lee Mansion, not far from the Kennedy gravesites, and so they let us put the cairn there.

The sweet thing again, and very thoughtful thing that Kennedy did, was he sent me—I don't know if it's original—a copy of the signed legislation, on whatever paper they put these documents on. I don't know if he sent them to other people or not. Anyway, that's something that I have t in North Carolina. It's hard to find a place to put a thing like that, even beautifully framed, in a house that's basically four rooms. We didn't even find a place to hang it up in North

Carolina, though I did have it hanging in Albany when I first got it. Very thoughtful. Maybe he's done that for other people and other bits of legislation but again, it was not necessary; it didn't need to be done. It just was a beautiful thing he did.

Then, Trina was very useful in getting the groundbreaking ceremony organized, and that was the day that several of us, two or three from the Victims of Pan Am Flight 103 and a couple from the other group, went to meet with President Clinton in the Oval Office. We first had breakfast downstairs. We'd talked to—Oh, what's his name, who was NSA, National Security Advisor, at the time?

Heininger: Lake.

Philipps: Tony Lake. We went into the Oval Office, and I don't know if you've done that sort of thing and I'd never done it before either, but what happened was we all went through a narrow door, one at a time, into the Oval Office. Clinton was standing at the door shaking hands and the photographer was there taking a picture. I looked at President Clinton and I had a flash that he was much sadder and much more troubled than he should have been on our behalf. By 1995, six years later, we'd all sort of calmed down and were getting used to our circumstances. I looked away. He looked so sad, I looked away, right away, and that's the picture the photographer got, was me looking away from Clinton and shaking his hand.

All right, we go into the Oval Office, we sit down on those two sofas that they had in front of the fireplace. I'm sitting here and Anthony Lake is here and somebody from the other group is there and the other people are arranged over on that side. The President made some kind of statement and then they all started in on him: "We hate Syria, we hate Iran, we hate these, we hate this, we're all after so-and-so and so-and-so." He was just getting ready to make a trip to Syria, which would have been the first time that an American President had met in Syria for a long time. The big woman next to me, sort of blocking my view, was nattering on, and I got an elbow in the ribs from Lake, who said, "Jump in anywhere here." So I did, and my statement was to thank him for all the work he'd done, the things that he'd done on our behalf. "Thank you for the cairn," and *blah blah blah*. And I said, "And if you have to go to Syria and meet with [Hafez al] Assad, get something out of him. Bad men have their uses."

The meeting finished and I had some material from Syracuse. Syracuse University has a very wonderful remembrance scholarship program, and I brought him that year's material, which was a book of pictures of the 35 students who were on the plane and they gave scholarships to 35 seniors who had written essays and done special things and got, if not full scholarships, at least substantial sums of money to finish out their senior year. I walked with him to his desk and put it on his desk and I said, "Thank you again for making this groundbreaking day possible."

It had been a day like today, and suddenly a beam of light came through the window onto his desk, to us, and I said, "And look, you've made the sun shine for us today, too." He said to me, "The sun never shines for politicians." Then we went out to the Presidential motorcade and drove to Arlington for the groundbreaking. I was again struck by that, from this ultimate hope merchant, optimist, to say something like that. I thought about it through the day and we had a reception. I finally got back into the hotel room and switched on the TV, and that was the day the he had started having his Paula Jones troubles, and he'd been up since 5:30 dealing with that. I

thought, *No wonder he looked to bleak when we walked in, the poor soul*. It's funny how those personal things and those political things just jog along together. You're always in the midst of one while you're in the midst of the other.

Anyway, Trina and Senator Kennedy were very good at getting us into the Oval Office for this meeting, which is something that nobody else had been able to do in all the years since the plane had been destroyed. We hadn't been able to meet with the President at all, although Bush did come to the meeting where the commission handed out flags to us all. Not a pleasant thing, to get on a plane in Washington with a folded flag in your lap and go back to Boston.

Heininger: Wow.

Philipps: You don't put it in the overhead, you know? It is something sacred. All the time that we were building the cairn and getting ready to actually dedicate it, Kennedy's office was helping us gather together the people who would be significant people there, including getting the President back to speak and things of that sort.

Also, while I was on the board, we were having meetings about four times a year and Senator Kennedy came to one of the meetings that was held in Newton, at the Newton Marriott out there by Route 128, and spoke and talked with the families. He and I and some other people were on the television news that night. It was pretty spectacular. I thought, *Sarah, you would love this if you knew about it.* I'm convincing myself that she does know about it. What else?

Heininger: Why were there rival organizations?

Philipps: Well, there were an awful lot of people on the plane, and some of the parents wanted to take a certain tack in getting action about aviation safety and better State Department care for people who were part of a disaster like Flight 103, and other issues. There were just different ways of going at it and there were very strong personalities involved in these different ways of going at it. Some activists lived in each other's pockets for about four years, just organizing, and they would drop in on each other from day to day. They lived near each other and they were very strong personalities, and they had their idea of how things should go, and the rest of us were sort of, "Sure, OK," and we were following along and doing what we were told to do and every once in a while raising an idea or an objection or something like that. So it's not a surprise that there were two organizations. The surprise, I suppose, is that there weren't four.

There was our organization, which was pretty big; there was their organization, which was somewhat smaller. We managed to publish a newsletter four or five times a year to keep people informed about everything that was going on. Incidentally, copies of that ought to go into this archive, because it would be much more thorough about Senator Kennedy's actions on our behalf. It would be chronological and it would be more thorough than I can be relying on my memory.

Heininger: By the time you were on the board, if you had to characterize the differences in approach between the two, how would you? Did it have to do with who was responsible or changes you wanted from the government?

Philipps: Yes, partly the seeking out who was responsible. There was a lot of paranoia in one set of people. But I think it really was personalities. The wife of one of the organizers of the other group was hysterical and she would rise up at meetings and go on for a long time about what a terrible thing it was that her child had been killed. The rest of us all felt that and we felt that for the first two or three times we heard it, and then after a while we thought, *Well, this isn't getting the job done. It isn't getting our goals worked out*. And then of course there were a whole bunch of people who never joined either organization, and there was one set of parents that lobbied like crazy. They were very vigorous. They're New Jersey people and they were both writers and so they were very busy getting in touch with the press all the time. They wouldn't talk to either of us. It's just human nature.

Heininger: With that many people it's not possible to speak with one voice.

Philipps: No, how could you have? Exactly right. There was another thing that Senator Kennedy did for us, and that was when Madeleine Albright went to the UN [United Nations] he got us a meeting there because we were always trying to extend the sanctions against Libya. I don't know if you remember that when she became Secretary of State, his office worked very hard at preparing her, getting her up to speed on all this stuff, so they were close. We went to the UN and met her. Later we also met Bill Richardson at the UN. All of these events came about not because we as board members or members of the organization wrote to Bill Richardson and said, "We'd like to meet you at the UN." No. It happened because I would be talking with Trina or somebody else would be talking with Sharon [Waxman] and they'd say, "Well, maybe we can make something happen."

Heininger: Really?

Philipps: That something would be something that Senator Kennedy did.

Heininger: Wow.

Philipps: Or that his staff was able to work on.

Heininger: If you had to characterize, what was it that the organization, Victims of Pan Am 103, wanted?

Philipps: We wanted to improve aviation safety. We wanted to improve the response of the State Department officials in this country where disasters happened. We wanted to get the bad guys and find out why it happened, because there was so much paranoia about—well, that the CIA knew about it—there were five CIA guys on the plane—that the State Department had said on a notice, "Don't fly the last week of December because there's this threat." There was an awful lot of stuff going around, all this conspiracy stuff being talked about, and we wanted to find out what really happened and why. Of course, we never did any of that. You sort of burn out after a while.

For me, after the cairn was built—and this was another lovely Kennedy touch—He came to the dedication of the cairn after it was built and insisted on having his picture taken with me and Vicki [Victoria Reggie Kennedy], so that I would have that souvenir of the event. I left being on the board after that happened, and that would have been three or four years of intense work.

Heininger: What did you personally want out of the process?

Philipps: I wanted to find out who did it and why.

Heininger: Do you feel you have found out why?

Philipps: No. I think I know who did it. I think [Abdel Basset Ali al-] Megrahi and [Al Amin Khalifa] Fhimah did it for Libya, but I don't know why they did it for Libya. I think there might have been a connection with that plane that our Navy shot down in—was it July of '87? Going from Libya, further east? I don't remember what the name of the plane was.

Heininger: I don't know either but I bet they did shoot that plane down.

Philipps: You know the one I mean. I thought that Pan Am 103 might have been an eye-for-an-eye sort of thing, but we never did find out. I think that Megrahi and Fhimah did it, because I was at the trial in the Netherlands. That was another thing that Senator Kennedy's office and he worked at for a long time: the question of where to hold such a trial and that it be on American territory but not in America. There was talk of various nations. I would talk with Trina at that time about where it might be, endorsing various places or not endorsing various places. Finally they settled on the Netherlands and I think it was a wonderful choice, a neutral country but on a base that was ceded to America, so it would be American soil. That's when I met Sharon and spent time with her going to the trial and talking about things at the trial, and talking with the press after each day's worth of trial.

Heininger: How much of the trial did you attend?

Philipps: I was there twice: once for ten days and once for a week. I didn't go to the whole thing. It was so dreary. It went on forever, with these miniscule things happening. That was an interesting experience. They had a courtroom divided in half by bulletproof glass, and the judges and the defendants and the lawyers were all on the far side and we were all on the near side of the glass.

Heininger: They separated the victims' families?

Philipps: All of it was on closed-circuit TV, so we heard everything that was being said and we saw everything that was going on in the courtroom, but the defendants were protected from us in case we decided to do something.

Heininger: They were really worried that the victims' families would do something?

Philipps: The interesting thing was I would look around the courtroom from time to time, and we had TV screens in our section, and people would be, instead of watching what was going on in front of them, they'd be gazing at the screen. I thought, *We've gotten too close to television.* The closed-circuit TV was in order for people to watch in Lockerbie, people to watch in New York, people in Washington. At certain places around the country, this closed-circuit television was received. That was a wonderful thing to do. I don't know if it was something that Senator Kennedy worked out or that his staff worked out—maybe the State Department put it together, I don't know.

Heininger: How much of the time did Sharon attend? Was she there the whole time you were there?

Philipps: No. She was there for, I don't remember, four or five days of the first week that I was there. One of the problems the first time that I was there was they continued the case for two or three days and over a weekend because something was going on, some sort of legal step was being taken and they couldn't hear the case at that time. So we were there for a week and I went off to London and somebody else went off to Paris and other people went various other places, and then came back for more of the trial. We'd told our families we'd be gone for ten days. It wasn't sensible to come back to the States and then come back to Holland. So that's the sort of thing that we did.

Heininger: Why did Sharon go? Why did Kennedy have Sharon go?

Philipps: I don't know. I really don't know. Probably because she'd worked so closely with so many people in the organization. I really don't have a sense of that. You'd have to ask her.

Heininger: How did you feel about the sanctions and lifting them?

Philipps: I thought the sanctions were useful when they were first applied, but I have long thought that the sensible way to deal with these rogue states is to lure them in and get their economy heavily engaged with ours, not to exile them and keep them away, because that just makes them madder. I mean, look at North Korea. They get madder and madder and more and more demonstrative because they want people to pay attention to them. If we were trading billions of dollars of goods with North Korea, they wouldn't dare be so aggressive and arrogant.

Heininger: Did you feel that at the time?

Philipps: No, not at the time. Whatever people felt diplomatically had to be done to Libya, I felt was reasonable to do. The feelings of the group that I was with, the Victims [VPAF 103], was to keep on sanctioning Libya until we got something out of them, and what we got out of them was to get these two people, Megrahi and Fhimah, to come to trial. Then other people raised the issue of monetary settlements, which I thought was totally unreasonable. Not unreasonable but unlikely, so I didn't pay very much attention to that and we just watched it sort of filter its way through the process and come out the other end, positively for us, which was very nice.

Heininger: That was actually a very important step in being able to lift the sanctions.

Philipps: Exactly right, that's exactly right. One of the issues was how our culture felt about dealing with a crime of this sort and how their culture felt about it, and of course their culture says an eye-for-an-eye and money-for-money, and that's how you get out from under evil deeds. So it was reasonable, it seemed to me, to ask them for money. The problem is, I never knew where the money came from. I can't believe it came out of [Muammar] Gaddafi's pocket or the government's pocket. I think it probably was somewhere secreted from their oil business in whatever country they were dealing with. I mean, I know that our Treasury sequestered a lot of Libyan funds, but that would not have been enough to pay off this huge settlement.

Heininger: It was huge.

Philipps: Yes, it was huge. So I'm sort of curious. I'm not curious enough to research it or to ask people about it but I've sort of wondered.

Heininger: It was more than the 9/11 families got.

Philipps: Really?

Heininger: Substantially more, yes. I think the maximum award there was somewhere between one and two million.

Philipps: Really? Even with the people who were high-powered executives?

Heininger: Think of how many people were involved, three thousand. And we paid the money.

Philipps: We got a small settlement from an insurance company that had insured all the students: $25,000, I think it was. We got an insurance payment from a Visa card because Sarah had charged her trip from New York–Kennedy, to Boston–Logan, and Visa did a door-to-door travelers' insurance. And there was a small settlement, it was $575,000 or something, from Pan Am, where Pan Am's lawyers, or actually the lawyers of the insurance company of Pan Am, said to us, "Well, college students aren't worth very much, you know."

Heininger: Are you serious?

Philipps: That was one of the "nice" comments that was made. The lawyer for Pan Am said, "Unless you have it in writing that your child swore to you that he would give you dinner once a week and mow the lawn, you can't count on them for any kind of income or support." His own child was in the courtroom when he said that. Sweet.

There were some interesting things that were said to us. Somebody very early on said, "You people sure are lobbying a lot. I don't think you people would have been so active if we didn't have so many college students on the plane." There were 58 college students on the plane and there were 58 very angry sets of parents, so he's right probably.

Heininger: Do you think that's the case, that the parents are more active than those who had had spouses?

Philipps: One of the things that we did at these four-times-a-year meetings that we had in our organization—There was always a time where whoever wanted to could go into a room and meet a grief counselor and we would talk about things. It pretty quickly became apparent that while all of us were terribly wounded and sad, that it was a different kind of loss to lose a spouse than to lose a child, especially a child who was just coming into his own or her own, who was just finding out that their brains actually worked and they were putting them to work, who was eager to enjoy life and who loved their parents and their families and their friends and they were engaged with life. And then when that's over… I'm sure one of the reasons I went to work for the organization was that, because I had so much emotion left over that I couldn't bestow on Sarah, I paid it out in other ways.

Heininger: I don't think children are ever—I don't think anybody ever recovers from the loss of a child.

Philipps: I think that's absolutely right, as a matter of fact. I don't know if you have personal experience. I hope you don't.

Heininger: It's not crass, but the death of a spouse—It is possible to fall in love again. You're not replacing the spouse, but to have another life with another mate. But children are not replaceable.

Philipps: I thought I might have another baby. I was 49. I said, "I'll just have another baby," forgetting that I'd had my tubes tied.

Heininger: It's not—you know, nothing takes the place.

Philipps: It wouldn't have worked. What else did you want to ask me?

Heininger: What was the sense about the lawyers who worked to get the compensation and the contingency fees?

Philipps: Somebody very active in that was Bruce Smith, whose wife was one of the stewardesses, air hostesses on the plane, and he was determined to get the bad guys and make them pay. He got involved with a couple of lawyers who were very glad to take on the case and pursue it and eventually our lawyers got into the swing of working to make the Libyans pay in some sort of way. I had met one of the very young men who, I'm not sure whether he was a Syracuse graduate or if he actually knew anybody that was on the plane, but he struck me as a sort of disaster groupie. I didn't have very much to do with him, deliberately. I really felt queasy about the idea of a money settlement, you know, if they just paid all of us enough money we'd let them off the hook in a way.

But I also was feeling—I mean, you feel ambivalent about these big things. I also was feeling, again, what I said to you earlier, that it was better to rope these people in and bring them closer to us, to keep them from supporting terrorism and doing bad things because they'd been cast out by us. I solved it by not thinking about it very much, trying not to think about it very much. It was just a thought that came to mind.

One of the things that Kennedy's office did to support us in our work was to help us follow the oil and who was buying it, and help us lobby against—I mean, everybody in the UN said, "Well, we won't have any business with Libya," because that's what the sanctions said, but of course there was always oil business going on. Italy bought a lot of oil and Spain bought a lot of oil and France bought some. So there was always something going on there—conversations going back and forth to keep us informed about that sort of thing.

Heininger: There are always those who will continue to do business.

Philipps: One of the things the group did, and I don't know how much effort the Senator or his office put into this, was to get a training film made for the State Department, so that new hires in

the State Department could be taught how to deal with enraged and grief-stricken parents and spouses and children.

Heininger: It sounds like there was a strong feeling that in the immediate aftermath the State Department representatives were not helpful.

Philipps: Oh, not at all.

Heininger: Really?

Philipps: Not at all. Now, I don't know what they were asked to do or who asked them to do anything. I do know that Pan Am said to all the bereaved people, "We will fly you to Lockerbie if you want to go there." Some people took advantage of that. Eleanor went. She wanted to get her husband and bring him home. Well, she went a day later. People were still lying out on the fields at that time. They hadn't brought everybody in, even. Sarah was 48 hours out there.

After a couple of weeks maybe, three weeks or so, we started getting—After the first of the year we started getting contacts with the State Department and they'd say, "If there's anything we can do for you, let us know." But by that time—

Heininger: But it took three weeks?

Philipps: There wasn't anything that they could do. The plane went down at 2:30 American time, and we heard finally at 11:00 at night, from Pan Am, that Sarah was on the plane. It took that long for that kind of information to get through.

Heininger: But they had the passenger manifest.

Philipps: No. This is one of the things that we worked for, that the Aviation Commission then—

Heininger: They didn't have a passenger manifest?

Philipps: You didn't have it immediately the way you do now, because it's all computerized now.

Heininger: Well, true.

Philipps: But then, it took just, it seemed like hours, to get the passenger manifest. In fact, they said to us when they called us up, "Sarah and her husband were both on the plane." Well, Sarah is Sarah Philipps.

Heininger: And you said, "I think not."

Philipps: And Sandy Phillips of Arkansas—

Heininger: Whose name is spelled differently?

Philipps: Yes. That's something that people are not able to comprehend very well. And they even got the seat numbers mixed up in this book. She was sitting at 21 with Julianne Kelly and

he was in the back of the plane, and they told us they were both there. I said, "Well, she's not married, so you can just leave that out." But that was the airline. Now they're much better about it. Of course, I think the stringent information-gathering that's required to keep terrorists out helps in that regard, because people have to use whole names. You can't be SSB Philipps; you have to be Sarah Philipps. And you can't be Sandy Phillips; you have to be Frederick.

Heininger: It now has to be your passport name on an international flight.

Philipps: Yes.

Heininger: So that the passport matches up.

Philipps: Exactly right.

Heininger: So it took you quite a long time to get—You knew she was on the flight.

Philipps: Well, we found that out that night. We'd hoped that she'd missed it but we found that out that night.

Heininger: The one time that you hope somebody misses a flight.

Philipps: I got a phone call from my sister, "Please tell me Sarah was not on the plane." I said, "I can't do that."

Heininger: But you didn't hear immediately from the State Department. That to me is mind-boggling.

Philipps: I think part of it had to do with the time of year, and I think this is what happened: I think that the Libyan plane that was shot down at Ramadan or some holiday time—in July of '87, was it?

Heininger: Yes.

Philipps: This plane was shot down or exploded in midair, just before Christmas of '88. So it sounds like that was a payback there, doesn't it? If you just put the timing together.

Heininger: There could have been, yes.

Philipps: We never found out whether there was or not.

Heininger: But there were still people in the State Department, holiday or no.

Philipps: Well yes, at half-strength and not knowing what to do and wondering whether they should shoot down somebody else or invade somewhere. It took a good while before we even found out that it was a bomb. That was two or three days. I don't remember. I didn't watch any television at that time, so I don't remember that sequence of events very clearly.

But just as you are asking me this kind of question, we had this kind of question and a million others that we wanted answered at the time, and so we were all scurrying around trying to get

answers out of anybody we could get them out of. Senator Kennedy helped every chance he got. I don't know what he said to his staff, but they just were available and helpful whenever they could.

Heininger: Did you have the sense that the Congressional representatives from other states dealt with their constituents the same way?

Philipps: Well, I've named several to you already.

Heininger: I mean there is constituent service but it strikes me that what Kennedy did in this case went above and beyond that.

Philipps: I think that's partly explained by—

Heininger: Did you have the sense that he personally cared about this?

Philipps: I did, yes, but I think that it fell into the category of constituent services because, as I said, there were 17 people from Massachusetts on the plane and five or six of them were young, beautiful college students. I think that's reason enough for him to be so vigorous. And also, he was so effective. If you're effective at one thing and you just keep inching out the envelope, keep on chasing it, you can keep on being more and more effective, and that's probably part of it too. It helped that we got rid of [Bush] 41 and got Clinton in, because there was a good, strong relationship between the Clintons and the Kennedys, so all that stuff worked on our behalf.

Heininger: And you still don't feel you have the answers that you were looking for?

Philipps: I feel that Megrahi and Fhimah put that bomb on the plane. No, they created the bomb and they put it into the aviation system. They put it on a plane in Malta, it went to Frankfurt, unaccompanied luggage, and at Frankfurt it wasn't X-rayed. It was unaccompanied luggage and it went on the plane to London and then stayed on the plane until Lockerbie. I don't know why they did it. I think Megrahi was some kind of secret service operative for Libya, and I don't know why they did it. Did Syria pay Libya to do it? Did Iran or somebody there pay Libya to do it? Did somebody get together in a consortium and decide that they'd ask Libya to do this? I don't know. You know, we're being asked now to write letters to the Scottish jail system about whether they'll let Megrahi go back to Libya because he's got cancer of the prostate. Part of me says, "Yes, let him go *but* he has to tell the truth first, tell why he did it." I mean, you don't get an idea in your head to do a thing like that without somebody saying something to you.

Heininger: If he was an agent for the government—

Philipps: I'm sure he was.

Heininger: It was a government decision.

Philipps: Yes, exactly right, but he hasn't spoken. So if he can be obdurate about not speaking then I can be obdurate about not letting him go back to Libya.

Heininger: Is it Dr. Jim Swire who is trying to get him released to go back to Libya?

Philipps: I don't know. I haven't followed it very closely at all. He's another—He had a wonderful, darling daughter and we felt he just went 'round the bend when his daughter Flora [Swire] was killed.

A friend (from VPAF 103) is the mother of another student. (The parents of this child were very active in the group.) He had a brother. He was maybe ten and the brother was seven. They moved into a new house and the seven-year-old came out of the cellar with something in his hand and said, "Mommy, what's this?" He was manipulating it and it was a phosphorous grenade and it killed him. For his brother to be killed in another explosion like that just made these parents frantic.

Heininger: What was a phosphorous grenade doing in their basement?

Philipps: That house had been owned by somebody who had come back from Vietnam. There are sad stories. We lost Sarah in December of '88, and my son's girlfriend died in July of '89, and my good friend who lives upstairs in this building has a niece who died in November of '89. I thought, *Wait a minute, this is too many young girls dying*.

Heininger: That's too many. Well, one is too many.

Philipps: I'll tell you another story: In April, they all went to Washington to demonstrate out in front of the White House and persuade Bush 41 to set up a commission of some sort, or to take some action of some sort. I didn't go because I was working at that time for a small publishing house and we had a business in California and I had gone there for that business. My husband went; it's the only time he's ever done any public demonstration of any sort. He went, and when he got there, somebody was handing out flowers. We were laying flowers in the name of each person. You know, it's a big heap when you have 270 flowers.

He went to talk to the parents of Sarah's roommate. He went to talk with Alexia Tsairis's parents because we had met them at Syracuse at the memorial service there. They were talking to somebody else and he looked at that person just as Dr. [Peter] Tsairis was introducing him to that person and he said, "Peter, what are you doing here?" It was Alex Lowenstein's father, Peter Lowenstein. [Ervin] Erv Philipps and Peter Lowenstein had lived in each other's pockets when they were in elementary and middle school. They were best friends. Then Erv and his family went to Holland where his father was doing business and where Erv was at school, and then came back and he went to a different school from where Peter was. He hadn't seen Peter since then. So in between that seventh grade or high school time and this time, they hadn't met or talked to each other.

There was Peter Lowenstein. He said, "My son was on the plane." And Erv said, "My daughter was on the plane." Then somebody else came up to talk, and Erv sort of wandered away and a reporter said, "You look like you've just been struck by a two-by-four," and he said, "I feel that way. It's just from what's happened."

So, the Lowensteins get 17 or 18 pages of Alex's journals back and in them he talks about this beautiful girl, Sarah Philipps, that he met, and he hopes that he can keep on seeing her when they come back to the States. And we get Sarah's journal back and she talks about this fabulous surfer

dude named Alex Lowenstein that she met and that she thought was really wonderful and she sure would like to get to know him better.

Heininger: That's actually lovely.

Philipps: Isn't that—But it's frightening.

Heininger: Talk about a small world though.

Philipps: It is lovely.

Heininger: It is lovely though. It's very nice that it wasn't, "Oh, he was such a jerk."

Philipps: Suse [Lowenstein] and I would every once in a while think about, what if our kids had had gotten together in some sort of way and we had met as parents, how it would have been for us to realize that these guys that were friends in middle school…

Heininger: Well, it is a very small world.

Philipps: I suppose you're right. This boy's mother is the one who built "Dark Elegy." Have you heard about it? She is an artist, a sculptor, and she, for a while just worked on life-size figures of herself and how she felt when she heard that Alexander had been killed. Then she invited other people, spouses or parents, men or women or whoever, to also pose as they felt when they heard this news. She made her figures, built them up on chicken wire, and then with different earth-tone plasticine and stone combinations, built up the figure. It's this very rough sculpture. It's not your beautiful, smooth marble stuff; it's rough stuff. They're slightly abstracted, they're not portraits. They're slightly abstracted figures but quite powerful when you see a hundred of them all around. She asked people to give something that would be personal to the lost one, and she put that little package inside.

Heininger: That's very nice.

Philipps: Where do we put this sculpture now? A hundred life-size figures of mourning women is not the sort of thing that attracts—People don't want to go see it all the time. Some people might want to see it but not everybody wants to see it all the time.

Heininger: Memorials are difficult things to design. Some are stunningly successful.

Philipps: Vietnam.

Heininger: Like Vietnam.

Philipps: Lincoln.

Heininger: Yes. And others just don't resonate with people.

Philipps: Yes, they don't make it, that's exactly right. I think she could probably select eight or maybe ten of them, and make an installation somewhere, and then another eight or so and put them somewhere else, but she wants to keep them all together and find a place for them. They

have been shown. I think she showed 58 of them once at a library in New Jersey, on the grounds outside. They're meant to be shown outside. "Dark Elegy," it's called. You can call it up on your computer; you could Google it.

Heininger: She's got it on the Web?

Philipps: Mm-hmm.

Heininger: I'll take a look at it.

Philipps: What else?

Heininger: Do you want to tell me a little about Sarah?

Philipps: Well, you have this piece.[1] She was the kind of kid that people coagulated around. After the disaster, after we heard that she was on the plane, friends of ours who were in the ministry persuaded us to have a memorial service, even though she had not yet been identified and found. We decided to have this memorial service and we were getting ready for it. People came from England, who had seen her just before she took off.

A boy came to the back door with a cake in his hands and he said, "Mrs. Philipps, I made this for you because of Sarah." I looked at him. He looked like a young Ratso Rizzo. I thought, *This kid is not in her circle of friends*. But this is somebody that she would say hello to at high school, you know? She didn't snub him. She didn't punish him for being—He had ridden his bicycle from that famous Marriott down on Route 128, all the way down Commonwealth Avenue, in December, with this cake in the basket or on the backseat. I don't know how he got away with making it at the Marriott Hotel but he'd made it there in the kitchen and brought it to us, so we served it after the memorial service. My son [James Philipps] Fritz knew him and said, "I see David"—whatever his name is—"here. How's he going to get back to where he's going?" I said, "He came on his bicycle," and he said, "Oh, my God," and he rushed out to go and see if he could chase him and get him to put his bike in the car and he'd drive him to wherever, but the boy had gone by that time.

Heininger: I think you never know how many people are touched.

Philipps: That's a nice point, that's a very nice point. Over that week after that day, after the 21st—By the way, December 21st is my mother's birthday—people kept coming to me and telling me things. Her classmates would come, and one of them said to me, "Mrs. Philipps, I came here to help you and support you and tell you how wonderful Sarah was and what a good friend she was to me. But you've helped me." One of the things that I was trying very hard to do was not to fall apart. After a while I realized that I was trying to show people how to absorb an event like this into your life without becoming hysterical. One of the mothers of these Massachusetts kids sat on her sofa for a year-and-a-half and did nothing, and she had young children in the house. One of the women in Albany did the same thing. When she wasn't tearing her hair and being hysterical, she was inept and incompetent and inactive and unhelpful and not

[1] "Elegy for Sarah," *Boston Globe* Magazine, August 23, 1992

helping her children get used to the death of their sister, to figure out a way to deal with the death of their sister.

Heininger: That doesn't strike me as you.

Philipps: No, so that was what I was trying to do. This same girl, two or three years later, came to dinner for whatever reason, I don't remember. She was in town and we said, "Come on over and have dinner with us." She came over and she said to us, while she was sitting there at our dining room table eating, "Mrs. Philipps, this isn't the first time I've been in your dining room." I said, "Oh, really?" She said, "Yes. But it's the first time I've been sitting at the table instead of lying under it."

Heininger: [*Laughing*] Oh, weren't you happy to get *that* information?

Philipps: Well, but we knew that.

Heininger: It was very human.

Philipps: We knew that our kids had a lot of friends, and there were a lot of people going in and out because our house was across the street from the high school.

The same with the cops who came: They were directing traffic and one of the policemen said to one of our sons, "This is the first time I've been directing traffic to let people *into* your house, not to try to get them out of it." You know, that's the kind of kids they were. They were engaged. People were very fond of them and they were always wherever the action was.

What about Sarah? Sarah went one year to Vermont, to Lake Champlain, to a YWCA camp called Camp Hochelaga. She went with another girl from Newton. They were good friends. They went up there and she had a wonderful time and she went back the next year without her. We got a letter from her, "Dear Mommy and Daddy, My new best friend in the cabin is Ann and her dad's a radiologist. Maybe Daddy knows him?" We wrote back and said, "If you tell us her last name, maybe we'll be able to know whether Erv knows this person."

Heininger: Is anyone Ann's dad?

Philipps: So the last name came through and in fact it was the man that Erv had been in radiology residency with at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. He'd been through one marriage and into another, and we'd kept touch with him and then we'd lost touch with him. She reunited us with him, just like reuniting Erv with Peter Lowenstein.

All right, time passes. Three or four years ago I got a phone call: "Mrs. Philipps?" "Yes?" "This is Melissa Stone. Do you remember me?" I said no. She said, "Sarah was my best friend in all the world when we were in third grade." Or fourth grade. She said, "Sarah was so nice to me. The other girls weren't nice to me because I lived on such-and-such a street and my mother wasn't married, and we didn't have a very nice house, but Sarah was always very nice to me." She said, "I have four boys from two marriages and I'm going to have another baby and it's a girl, and I want to name her Sarah, and I want you to tell me Sarah's middle name."

Heininger: Well, that will do you in, won't it?

Philipps: Eighteen years later, yes. But that was the effect that Sarah had on people. They just loved her. There's another girl that's named her baby Sarah: a University of Colorado roommate has had a child and named her Sarah. That's the best thing, when people remember your child like that and want to call their children—They're not saying it's bad luck to name a child after Sarah Philipps. They're just saying, "She was a wonderful person and I want my child to be a wonderful person and so I'm going to call her Sarah."

Heininger: One doesn't look for silver linings in something like this, but it's very nice when things like that happen.

Philipps: It's very nice.

Heininger: Because it means she's not forgotten.

Philipps: Oh, that's the point. But of course I think my daughter was unforgettable. *Of course everybody remembers her.* And people do. They email me from time to time. "Oh, we were talking at the high school reunion and we dedicated this to Sarah." Was it '89 or '90? Her high school classmates decided they wanted to put up a little memorial to her in the park, in Newton Center Park. I said, "Why did you choose Newton Center?" And one of the girls said, "Oh, Mrs. Philipps, that's where we used to go to meet the boys."

Heininger: Oh.

Philipps: "OK, fine. Then why a bench?" They said, "Well, we were thinking first of a bar stool." Of course, she never had a legal drink in her life. They said, "But that wouldn't have been like Sarah. We wanted a place where more than one person could sit together." So they got some money together and put a bench down there.

I wanted to put some notice on a rock near the bench so that people would know what the bench is about. I've seen benches dedicated where they're actually incised into the bench, or there's a plaque on them, but I wanted a little bit of a story. So the mother of Sarah's senior prom date and I—He was very active in this, he got the bench put in—went around looking for a rock. We went to mortuary places and nobody had a nice enough rock. I was driving down Commonwealth Avenue one day and saw, in the very back end of the Newton Cemetery, a pile of rocks. I called her up and I said, "Let's go look at these rocks. They're in the cemetery. They must be dragged out—Whenever somebody can't get enough space for a grave, they have to pull this rock out. I'm sure we can find something there."

So we went together there and we're climbing all over this pile of rocks and a man drives up very fast in a truck and he comes out of the truck and he says, "I don't know what you women think you're doing there but you must get off that rock pile immediately." We did of course but in the end, when we got down off the rock pile, we had chosen a rock. And that cemetery took charge of moving it to the park.

Heininger: Really?

Philipps: And helped the kids get the plaque made and adhered to the rock. So people in Newton were very sweet about it. They wanted to do things for Sarah. I thought that was nice. But I loved that: "I don't know what you women think you're doing.…"

Heininger: Looking at the view. Well, any last words about Senator Kennedy?

Philipps: He's been a presence to me, even though he's never been in this house or any of my other houses. He's been a presence and he was a fabulous supporter at a time when we needed support and encouragement, and he chose the right people on his staff to help us. I think he's been an amazing Senator, and I'm glad he didn't get elected President because he'd be out now, he'd be finished. I'm sorry for the sad things in his life. It's always been painful to listen to people denigrate him for various youthful events that were not so nice, but I think he's risen above that magnificently and he deserves to be honored the way he's being honored now and the way people talk about him. He is a very effective Senator and he cares about his constituents and I think he went beyond what other Senators, certainly beyond what [John] Kerry has ever done for us as a family. So I'm sad that he's sick.

Heininger: Well, thank you very much.

[BREAK]

Heininger: This is a resumption of the interview with Elizabeth Philipps.

Philipps: A couple of years after the Kennedy Library was built, Sarah and I went there. She might have been seven or eight, and at that time they put you into a theater and they showed a film that began with JFK's [John F. Kennedy] funeral. The minute I saw that, I had the same reaction that I had in '63, when it was going on. I started crying, and she looked at me and she said, "Mummy, why are you crying so hard?" I said, "I'm sorry, I've seen this before but it just makes me sad every time." She was very taken with that. I think she liked the Kennedy Library. I remember what I was doing when JFK was assassinated.

Heininger: I think we all do.

Philipps: I think we all do, yes. So the Kennedys—I was just down on Garden Court Street here in the North End, showing a friend where Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy lived before she was a Kennedy. They're just part of Massachusetts and part of Boston and part of our lives.

Heininger: Little did you ever think that you would have to have that part of your life though.

Philipps: No, but that's all right. He's had his own tragedies. If someone with a tragedy helps you with a tragedy, you know you're in good hands with experienced people.

Heininger: Well, thank you very much.

Philipps: You're welcome.