

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Phillips, Ragsbert, 1948-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips,
Dates:	February 24, 2008 and October 13, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006 and 2008
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:36:47).
Abstract:	Surgeon Dr. Ragsbert Phillips (1948 -) conducted her general surgery practices in Atlanta and Lithonia, Georgia. One of the top breast cancer specialists in the United States, she founded Sisters By Choice and started an annual Breast Cancer Awareness Weekend in Atlanta. Phillips was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 24, 2008 and October 13, 2006, in Lithonia, Georgia and Snellville, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_116
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Breast cancer specialist Dr. Ragsbert Frenzel Phillips was born on July 12, 1948, in Newnan, Georgia, to Olivia Louise Bohannon Mitchell and Zack Phillips. Phillips attended the University of Georgia and graduated in 1970. She also attended and graduated from Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons with her M.D. degree. In 1982, Phillips became the first African American woman to complete the general surgery program at Emory University.

Phillips started her general surgery practice in Atlanta, Georgia, and decided to specialize in the treatment and prevention of breast cancer. She is one of the top breast cancer specialists in the United States. In 1989, Phillips founded Sisters By Choice, a support group providing educational, emotional, spiritual, and physical resources to breast cancer survivors, their families, and other health care professionals. The organization strives to be a leading provider of innovative programs and efforts that increase breast cancer education and awareness. The organization provides support and counsel to individuals diagnosed with breast cancer and their families. Phillips also started an annual Breast Cancer Awareness Weekend in Atlanta.

In 2000, Phillips participated in conducting experimental surgical procedures to detect and prevent breast cancer called ductal lavage. The procedure entails inserting a small scope into the breast under a local anesthetic to remove and test cells for abnormalities that could lead to cancer. This procedure could lead to the prevention of possible future breast cancer patients and could save future lives.

Phillips continues her general surgery practices in Atlanta and Lithonia, Georgia, and has been practicing medicine for thirty years.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips was conducted by Denise Gines on February 24, 2008 and October 13, 2006, in Lithonia, Georgia and Snellville, Georgia, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Surgeon Dr. Ragsbert Phillips (1948 -) conducted her general surgery practices in Atlanta and Lithonia, Georgia. One of the top breast cancer specialists in the United States, she founded Sisters By Choice and started an annual Breast Cancer Awareness Weekend in Atlanta.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Phillips, Ragsbert, 1948-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Phillips, Ragsbert, 1948- --Interviews

African American women surgeons--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

Health services administrators--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

Women community health aides--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Surgeon

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, February 24, 2008 and October 13, 2006. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_001_001, TRT: 0:29:50 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips was born on July 12, 1948 in Newnan, Georgia to Olivia Bohannon Mitchell and Zack Phillips. Her paternal grandfather was a farmer, and her grandmother was a domestic in Atlanta, Georgia. In Newnan, her maternal grandparents owned a farm, where they raised seventeen children, including Phillip's mother. Later, Phillips' parents eloped, and kept their marriage a secret until her mother became pregnant. Phillips was named by her aunt, and had two sisters and one brother. At an early age, she moved with her family to Atlanta, where she was raised in the Southwest and Summerhill neighborhoods, and attended A.F. Herndon Elementary School and E. P. Johnson Elementary School. At home, her mother assisted with her homework, and then allowed Phillips to watch television programs like 'I Love Lucy,' 'Adventures of Superman' and 'The Red Skeleton Show' with her siblings. During the summers, she visited her paternal grandparents' farm.

African American women surgeons--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.

Health services administrators--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.

Women community health aides--Georgia--Atlanta--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_001_002, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips grew up in the Southwest and Summerhill neighborhoods of Atlanta, Georgia. There, she was an avid reader, and often befriended her adult neighbors. She also learned to play the flute, and enjoyed singing with her sisters. Later, Phillips moved with her family to Kirkwood, a middle class, African American neighborhood in Atlanta; and enrolled at J.C. Murphy High School, a predominantly white school, where she excelled in math and science. Although unsure of her career interests, Phillips was influenced by her two older sisters to attend college. She decided to matriculate at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, where she was offered a scholarship. The university had recently been integrated by Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Hamilton Holmes, and Phillips was one of the few African American students in attendance. She experienced racial discrimination from her white peers, including her assigned roommate, who refused to live with her.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_001_003, TRT: 0:28:00 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips was one of the few African American students at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia in the 1960s. After her assigned roommate refused to live with her, Phillips moved to another dormitory to room with a black student, and later joined the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She also played in the band, and marched against the Vietnam War. Upon graduating, Phillips moved to Connecticut, and became a tutor at Bridgeport University. She went on to earn a master's degree in physical chemistry there, and was then hired as a researcher at the American Cyanamid Company. While there, Phillips decided to become a physician, and was admitted to Columbia University without having taken the Medical College Admission Test. She considering remaining at the American Cyanamid Company, but decided to enroll after visiting Columbia University's campus. Phillips reflects upon her educational experiences, and the discrimination against African Americans in schools and the work force.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_001_004, TRT:

0:28:20 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips attended medical school at Columbia University in New York City, and completed a rotating internship in surgery and general medicine at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. She decided to pursue surgery, a male dominated field; and, in 1982, was the second woman and the first African American woman to graduate from Emory University's General Surgery Residency. She opened a general surgical practice in Atlanta, where she came to specialize in breast operations. In 1989, Phillips created the Sisters By Choice organization, which helped those with breast cancer by hosting support groups, fundraising and providing healthcare to women in shelters. At a Georgia Breast Cancer Coalition Fund event, Phillips met Dr. Susan Love, and together they conducted research on ductal lavage, a technique to detect early stage breast cancer. Phillips reflects upon her decision to become a doctor, and her frustrations about the limited treatment options for cancer patients.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_002_005, TRT: 0:28:59 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips worked as a chemical researcher at the American Cyanamid Company in Stamford, Connecticut. With the encouragement of her supervisor, Phillips decided to attend medical school at Columbia University in New York City. She went on to complete a general surgical residency at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, where she focused on thoracic surgery. After finishing her residency, Phillips established a surgical practice in Atlanta, and came to specialize in breast operations after finding that such patients often preferred female doctors. She also helped conduct clinical trials for drugs such as Tamoxifen, which was intended to reduce the risk of breast cancer. Phillips recalls the support she received from the medical community while establishing her private practice, and reflects upon the ways that her gender and race influenced her practice and career.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_002_006, TRT: 0:29:56 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips specialized in breast operations at her surgical practice in Atlanta, Georgia. After treating numerous African American cancer patients, she founded Sisters By Choice, an organization where her patients could receive support from others with similar racial and economic backgrounds. She went on to establish chapters in the suburbs of Atlanta, as well as in Antigua and the Republic of Georgia. In addition to operating the Sisters By Choice organization, Phillips helped conduct clinical trials for breast cancer therapies. She describes her current trials of sentinel node biopsy and core needle biopsy techniques, and explains the importance of African American participation in medical studies. Phillips talks about the history of breast cancer treatments, and the increase in media coverage of the disease from the 1980s. She also remembers meeting Dr. Harold Freeman, a noted cancer specialist and fellow African American doctor, while a medical student at Columbia University in New York City.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_002_007, TRT: 0:29:27 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips was a surgeon specializing in breast disease in Atlanta, Georgia, where many of her patients were African American women. At her practice, Phillips disproportionately diagnosed her black patients with late stage breast cancer; and became aware of the lack of access to preventative healthcare, including mammogram screenings, in the African American community. In response, Phillips' organization, Sisters By Choice, worked to educate the

community of Atlanta, and to provide mammograms to uninsured women. Phillips describes the genetic test for breast cancer risk, and stresses the need to educate women about the importance of regular mammograms, as the chances of survival with early detection were nearly 100 percent at the time of the interview. Phillips explains the age and frequency at which women should be screened, and shares her opinion of universal healthcare policies. She also reflects upon her life and influences, including her mother, Olivia Bohannon Mitchell.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Ragsbert Phillips, Section A2006_116_002_008, TRT: 0:11:55 ?

Dr. Ragsbert Phillips remembers those who influenced her, including civil rights leaders Coretta Scott King and Andrew Young, Dr. LaSalle D. Leffall, Jr. and author Maya Angelou. Phillips reflects upon her legacy and how she would like to be remembered, and shares a message to future generations. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.