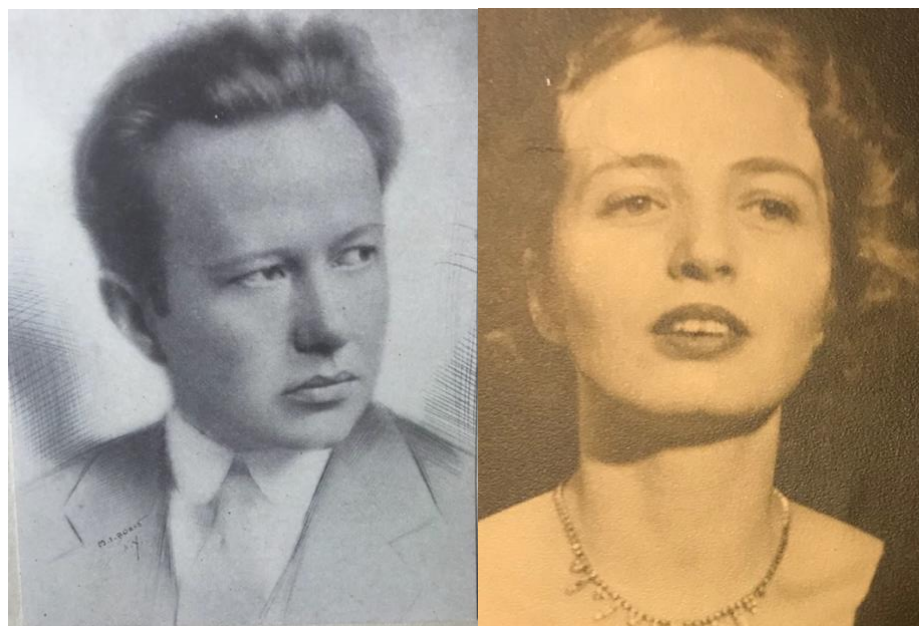


# THE LETTER / THE WARS

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PHIL JAMES



## ONE: THE LETTER

My mom, Helga, died. It's been a couple of years. My sister and I looked through the things in her room. There were all kinds of paperwork scattered here and there - she was like that. It didn't matter if it was a word scratched yesterday on a notepad, or an ancient "important" letter that somehow magically appeared. She was *full* of secrets...

One thing I was almost sure were gone: the love letters from Philip, my dad. She felt embarrassed about their existence, had burned them or thrown them away years ago. Before that I had thumbed through them secretly, and wow, they were absolutely luscious - very different from his usual business-like writing.

But she threw them away, and *her* letters too: I never even saw them.

\*\*\*\*\*

But she was eccentric - so it didn't surprise me at *all* that she had kept a single love letter from Philip, there in the room, where she died. And what a letter it is!

Philip was a pretty good writer. He didn't make mistakes, in spelling or in grammar, in the many letters he wrote each day. A letter would be typed if it smelled even slightly of business, but handwritten if it relaxed, and *smiled*. He used a pen dipped in blue-black ink, scribbling until it ran low, then re-dipping... *scritch scritch scritch*...

There is no way for you to know the subtle secrets that are hidden in a letter - especially a *love* letter! I will *try* to explain it by digging deep, revealing who Philip is, and who Helga is. But I can't begin to tell you about their intricate habits, their voices, their loud laughs; the precise *feeling* that they had for each other: the pure *JOY!*

Well I will try. I will use this letter as a walkway, incomplete, into their past... And I will explain about their plunges into the World Wars, how they affected *EVERYTHING.*



*Helga, going to school -- with her mother*

\*\*\*\*\*

The paper is yellowed and old. There's just a small address printed in blue, centered, near the top:

PHILIP JAMES  
75 CENTRAL PARK WEST  
NEW YORK 23, N.Y.

It was a Saturday, so I'm sure that he wrote the letter at home - November 24 - 1951. And the writing is full of casualness, breeziness - the "9" in 1951, for instance, says "Yes I am HERE!"

He was living alone; I wonder if he wore a tie. Probably, and it was probably stained. And how was SHE dressed, when she opened the letter? How her heart must have pounded...

**"Helgie my own ---"**

Hm, my own?

Helga, or "Helgie": one of his college students. Although only five feet tall she was stunningly beautiful - age 27, eyes glowing sharply... and HE was 61, five feet seven inches, somewhat portly, full of laughter. Well she laughed too, *occasional* laughing, almost hysterically, and nervously. And the two of them seemed to be trading salacious secret love letters.

It's all right, a professor falling in love with a beautiful young woman, a young woman falling in love with a professor...

I suppose...



The only problem is that she is already married to some other student.

Not so good.

The words “my own...”, as if Philip could OWN her, a professor... and she gets excellent grades from him... and she’s *MARRIED* to some other guy, with her thick German accent... Sounds like something you’d read about in *Enquirer*.

But that is only a part of it, a tiny part of it, and there are REASONS behind it - there always are.

There are myriad reasons she wanted a divorce, and wanted *him*; and there are myriad reasons he wanted *her*. But little did they know how difficult it would become, the extreme age differences, the wide cultural differences... and having children...

**“November 24 – 1951**

**“Helgie my own --**

**“Two letters from you this morning, dear one, and such nice ones. As I told you on the phone I had such a nice time with your parents. After dinner we had some music and then your father showed me his German movies and others of the U.S. ...”**

One can feel the CARE taken with a foreigner - the use of the “dear one”, or the two quiet “nice” phrases. It’s a bit timid, as if he’s afraid of her, as if he might have to pray that it all falls together, somehow.

Helga was born in Berlin in 1924. This is a picture of my grandfather, Hans Adolf Bujakowski (in America he became Henry A. Boyer) and mother, Helga Bujakowski (or Helga Boyer). They chose “Boyer” because of Charles Boyer, the famous film actor back then - and they chose Henry A. over Hans Adolf, because of Hitler. He is surprisingly *SMILING*, a rare occasion; yes, he was somewhat arrogant. His wife (Augusta, or “Gushi”) was trying very hard to make everything right. “Oh Hanala!” she’d scoff laughing.



They were Jewish, and so the three Bujakowskis immigrated to the US in 1938. Helga was 15 at the time, and Hans (Henry) had nobody left, no relatives left except Helga and Gushi.

He had three brothers, one of whom, Walter, was killed in World War 1.

His mother, Julie Kraemer Bujakowski, was deported from Berlin to Theresienstadt on June 17, 1942 – she was murdered by Nazis at the age of 83.



*Kurt and Dina Bujakowski (Hans' brother & sister-in-law), Helga, Julie Kaemer Bujakowski, Hans...*



Henry's brother Kurt fled to Vienna in 1936. He, his wife Dina and daughter Stephanie ("Steffi") then immigrated to France. From there they were deported to Auschwitz on September 9, 1942, and were murdered.





And Henry's brother Fritz, his wife Else and son Walter were deported from Germany to Auschwitz, where they were murdered in 1943.



*"Uncle Fritz" and Helga, 1938, still in Berlin; and when he was an aviator in WW1.*

Henry was eight years younger than Philip, and Gushi was too - odd that I would have grandparents younger than my father. And both Henry and Philip fought in WWI, but on different sides. He was an obstetrician and gynecologist, kept a home practice, and like so many in Germany he also had a hobby: violin (like Einstein). He loved photography, too, and film, and hooking rugs, and model HO railroads. But he couldn't get over the deaths. His fingers were yellow from cigarettes, and he was pretty sour most of the time. My mother wouldn't even talk to him for three or four years, after he cut my sister's hair in bangs. But Gushi kept a smile on her. She sang at the synagogue, played golf and tennis, talked on the phone with my mother for what seemed like hours, baked endless delicious almond cookies, hung out with her many friends, and said "Oh Hanala!"...



*"Oh Hanala!" That's Gushi! She smashed up various convertible cars, one I remember her crashing into our split-level burb house.*

**“...After dinner we had some music and then your father showed me his German movies and others of the U.S. In the former was Mlle. Helga. Helga in her bath, playing with the boys, chasing bees, Helga on her first ice skates and all accompanied by oohs and ahs of the audience...”**

Ah, Mlle. Helga!

Weimar culture, before Hitler - Berlin was CENTRAL to culture. Oh sure, it was poor, but it was full of parks, safe for jazz music that came from America, and accepting of gay and lesbian cabarets. German university faculties became universally open to Jewish scholars in 1918; nine German citizens were awarded Nobel Prizes during the Weimar Republic, five of whom were Jewish scientists. And creative Jewish musicians and dancers and artists were among the prominent stellar figures.

And then Hitler showed up. The brown shirts, Swastikas, “Seig Heil!”...



Hitler's face was FILLED with pain - you could absolutely feel it. He started by trying to be an artist, painting old-school pictures of villages. It didn't work - they weren't very good paintings. He joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party - the Nazis. He went to jail for a year as a member. There he *studied* intonation, how to gesture, how to modulate the words; how to grow hatred for the Jews, and others; and how to raise Wagner's Teutonic music to the HIGHEST level: the patriotic, and the shooting.

The "regular Germans" - not the Jews or Romanis or homosexuals - had it made. Now, in 1933, they could call Hitler their "leader," and they didn't really know what was coming. They were handed out radios, so everyone could listen to Hitler. That is, everyone white...

Hitler was a pawn, a puppet. He had a dog named Blondi, a German Shepherd he loved and committed suicide with, along with Eva (his girlfriend). Well the "leader" we kind of had: Trump! He doesn't have any Blondi, just the lonely, lonely *self*. They have tweets instead of radio... and they will come, the neo-Nazis. They are already here. Here is a picture of the killers, the Auschwitz Birkenau:



As a child Helga played piano, she danced ballet, and she watched lots of the latest movies from Hollywood, especially the musicals. She loved dogs - her parents always had a dachshund, and I suspect she laughed boisterously at his hijinks. Her parents were often away on vacation (they were oh-so “modern”), and she was left alone with her in-laws. She didn’t much like Julie, the grandmother who was murdered; but she LOVED her other grandmother, Celia. Celia was illiterate, but fun to be with; she later followed the holocaust immigrants to Uruguay.

On her way walking to school Helga would pass by the Romani (“gypsy”) caravans. They were generally friendly and smiling - and would no doubt be killed by the Nazis soon. Years later she would listen to the beautiful music of Django Reinhardt...

She walked to the famous Goldschmidt School; it started up for Jews once they weren’t allowed in public schools. She had some very good teachers, and a classmate named Stella Goldschlag. Stella would soon become a well-known Nazi traitor, and killed herself in 1983.

*Stella Goldschlag*



When she got off the boat in New York, Helga says she was dwarfed by the skyscrapers. And she had a problem with immigration. They asked her if she would shoot a Nazi, and she said no. There was a long delay (you had to know somebody) but she finally made it. She went to Freeport High School, then to college in Albany and then on to New York University graduate school. Her father wanted Helga to become some sort of medical personnel, but she wanted to become a musician - that's how she ended up at NYU.

She lived in tiny apartments, in the Village. She worked in cheap restaurants; she got fired for spilling a plate of spaghetti on somebody, and she worked filing music books at the NYU library.

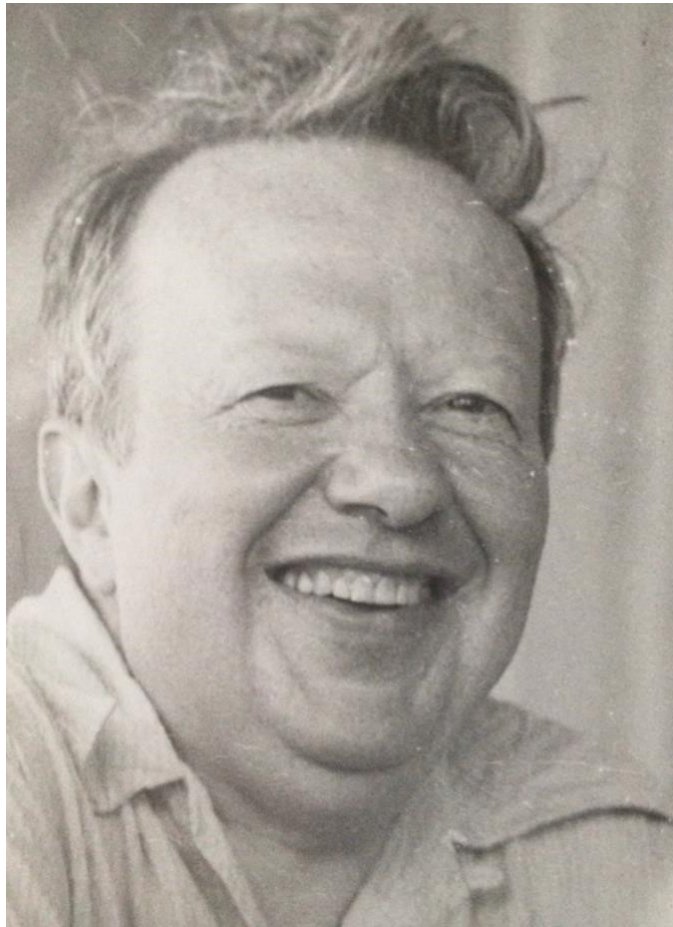


It is hard to know whether Helga was already nervous, or jumpy, from way back in Germany; I suspect she was. Her father became, as I mentioned before, *DIFFICULT*, and she couldn't say anything good about him. She was in an automobile accident with Henry, somewhere near Berlin; their Opel slid off a bridge. Ah, her fear of tunnels and heights, and all her other fears, of Nazis... She usually stayed sweet, and I mean VERY sweet, but she would fall into that hole where she could disappear and cry. People would have called her *extremely sensitive*.

Once Helga started going to NYU, she caught sight of Philip. He had recently lost his wife, and he was in a not-so-great mood, in spite of him being about as extroverted as you could get.



The next time she saw him there must have been some sort of connection. He was no doubt smiling, the somewhat innocent way he would smile, and they would grow to like each other.



Philip was the “Head of Music” - with a real sense of humor. Sometimes he’d get the students to compose something. Helga wrote a piece with no title, a Russian sounding piece - “An Afternoon in Minsk” he called it, laughing. She went on to get excellent grades - she was *exceedingly* smart!

And she met Bill Shank, the young man who came to NYU to learn music too, and librarianship. It must have been there, in the library, that they were working together.

Helga never said much about Bill - we were probably about 10 years old when she told us almost nothing. If I remember right, she *whispered* "divorce," and she sounded embarrassed. And Philip sounded embarrassed too. He said something like "All very well and good" and walked away.

Philip died, and she let little pieces of the story be revealed, but slowly: there was poetry, war... and she was married to Bill for three and a half years... but I still didn't know much of *anything* about it.

Then Helga died. I was *determined* to know about Bill.

It turns out that Bill got remarried in 1962. He had two children, his wife died a few years ago, and he died in 2020. He didn't talk about Helga to anyone: his wife didn't know about her, and his kids found out about her five years ago, when he was all ready to talk - well, a *little!*



*Bill and Helga, with a painting of Henry lurking over them*

Bill participated in an interview, in 2003. The interviewer called it “William Shank, a philosophic objector from New Jersey”:

*My father was a pharmacist. My mother was a teacher... The Depression hadn't yet started, but it came a few years later. My father began to lose all his money, the bank went bust, and it was a very hard time for the family. We moved from one place to another.*

*I was expecting my draft notice and I was prepared for it. I knew that I didn't want to go. I felt that war was something that I didn't want to participate in and I was prepared that if I didn't get CO [conscientious objector] that I would refuse to go, and go to prison, if that's what the consequence was. I mean, I really had prepared for this probably from the time I was maybe 16 or 17 or so. I really had made up my mind that I was not going to go into the Army, that I had a philosophical objection to war, that I felt that war was immoral, that I thought it was futile, that I thought it was evil, and that I just didn't want to have anything to do with it.*

It goes on like that. He met divinity students who refused to register for draft and went to prison. Finally he had a “prominent Quaker that sent a letter testifying to my sincerity and there were other people who sent letters to the draft board.” He would go away to a camp for CO's in Waldport, Oregon: the Fine Arts Group.

Steve McQuiddy wrote a book called *Here on the Edge*, the story of Waldport. The cover reads:

*There, pacifists and political objectors to World War II spent their daylight hours planting trees, crushing rock, building roads, and fighting forest fires—fifty hours a week, for no pay. At night, they published books, produced plays, and made art and music—all during their limited non-work hours, with little money and resources. They called themselves the Fine Arts Group at Waldport, and their focus was not so much on the current war, but on what kind of society might be possible when the shooting finally stopped.*



**Bill:**

*I didn't know in which direction I was going. I was very naive about probably lots of things. I was perhaps mature about political things because I had to get involved in order to develop my CO status, but aside from that I was rather unlearned, and so Waldport was to me a very, very good place to be assigned to.*

*I had a letter of introduction from Kenneth Patchen, who was a well-known avant-garde poet. I showed it to people like William Everson and some of the other people there. I think they were glad to have me there, although they probably were a little disappointed that I wasn't a poet myself, that I was more interested in reading the poetry or learning about music. I was definitely on the learning side rather than the teaching side or the performance side.*



*William Everson, 1990's*

Besides Everson, there was the fine arts printer Adrian Wilson (MacArthur Genius Grant); Kermit Sheets, co-founder of San Francisco's *Interplayers* theater group; architect Kemper Nomland; and violinist Broadus Erle, a founder of the New Music Quartet.

Bill again:

*I was very enthralled with the printing press at Waldport. They printed some very beautiful books. I think that the Untide Press, the name of the press, they just did absolutely some of the finest press work. Adrian Wilson was someone who was there at the time and he helped me a lot in developing my printing skills.*

Bill Shank took a furlough in Christmas of 1944, and he brought samples of the Untide Press to show Kenneth Patchen. Patchen was so impressed that on January 1945 he wrote an introductory letter to William Everson. He had within a year published Untide Press' *An Astonished Eye Looks Out Of the Air*, and years later Patchen and Everson wrote a book together... so Bill is the start of it!



Bill:

*The time that I was exposed to chamber music was a very thrilling and inspiring time for me. I didn't know very much about music at the time. I liked certain music. I had gone to concerts and had gone to the opera, but I wasn't really moved and thrilled by it the way that I became at Waldport. To hear these works it was just such a thrilling and inspiring thing for me that I became very deeply and profoundly interested in music and some of the people there who were musicians guided me. One person gave me piano lessons and I was able to sit in on rehearsals and this became an important part in developing my career. When I started going to college and wasn't sure just what to do, I started taking music courses and eventually became a music major and eventually became a music librarian.*

Yes, he came back to New York and met Helga. It looks like they were a couple from 1945 or '46. They were married in 1948, when he was 22 and she was 24.

Philip attended their Jewish wedding. I haven't the slightest idea where Bill and Helga lived, or how they lived. I think they lived poor; I know they HAD to work. She always speaks of "cold water" apartments, almost tiny places on Bleeker St. or MacDougal St.

Kenneth Patchen lived in NYC at the time, on 12th Street with his wife Miriam. Helga and Bill would go over there on Sundays:

“Other friends from the late 1940’s at the 12th Street house were William Shank, Harold Preece, Robert Cantwell, who with others often came over on Sunday afternoons to talk of writing and the world.” (Larry Smith, *Kenneth Patchen: Rebel Poet in America*)



*Kenneth Patchen*

Helga spoke well of Patchen; he had to lay down on his permanently injured back to read or discuss things. And she *didn't* speak well of Miriam, who was always trying to “pin things” on Helga, whatever she meant by that.

Henry Miller wrote a book in 1942 called *Patchen: Man of Anger and Light*. Yes, it depicts the FIRE Patchen held inside. For instance, he wrote this one for Bill Shank:

for Bill

with the warmest good wishes of Kenneth Patchen  
October 10, 1946

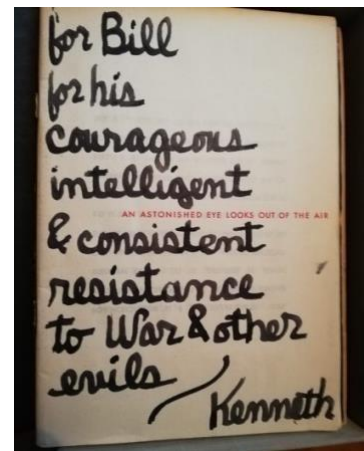
O the lions of fire  
Wait in the crawling shadows of your world  
And their terrible eyes are watching you

The lions of fires  
Shall have their hunting in this black land

Their teeth shall tear at your soft throats  
Their claws kill

O the lions of fire shall awake  
And the valleys steam with their fury

Because you are sick with the dirt of your money  
Because you are pigs rooting in the swill of your war  
Because you are mean and sly and full of the pus of your pious murder  
Because you have turned your faces from God  
Because you have spread your filth everywhere



and another...

All right, we're on to this section of the letter: **“You must get your mother to tell you of how Shirley Botwin received the news of our doings. She kept saying ‘Repeat that again - please’ again and again.**

Ha, Shirley Botwin was one of Helga's high school friends. Gone was Bill... and here comes “old man Philip.”

OK, *WHY* was she away?

Helga was staying in Daytona Beach, Florida. The rules were something like this: you had to be away from NY for two or three months to get a divorce. That was it, if you were a woman you simply had to do it, no matter how embarrassing it was.

She was living alone in a one or two room apartment, full of rodents (I know - I saw the partially chewed up letters!)

Here is a photograph from Daytona... I can't imagine the fear and excitement she felt! She had a somewhat thick accent, and a shy look that never completely went away:



Well, who knows why a divorce. I *think* she needed a lot of comforting... yes, she and Bill went to work together at the library, and probably shopping, and playing piano together, and listening to poetry. But what was lacking was real comfort. And it's what Philip needed, too. They both needed it. To SINK IN. To BE.

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**“There is a lot of important mail I shall want to have forwarded to me when I am in Florida so if the Post Office is not too far from your house will you rent a box for a month which we could both use for that matter. However if you do this will you let know the box number before I leave N.Y. so I may leave it with the manager here as well as Roslyn [his secretary]. However if you think it is OK for me to have letters forwarded care of Mrs. H.B. Shank, etc. etc. I will do it that way. Just let me know which is better for you and a way which will not be of embarrassment to you.”**

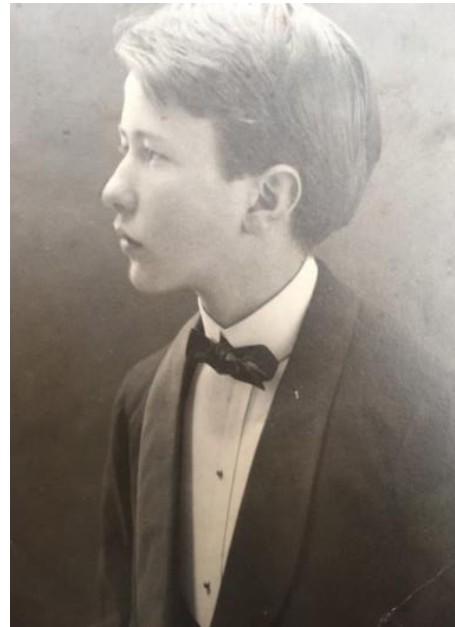
Ah, the tone is so CAREFUL! But he tells it like it is: he is coming down to Florida, staying a full month with her, and in a NICE hotel (the Tower) to boot! Kind of odd: a couple for a month, age 62 and age 27, and she is still married...



OK, I'm going to talk a little about Philip James:

He was born in Jersey City, 1890. No cars, no airplanes; plenty of quiet. His father was Welsh and his mother was German, and they were fairly poor. His father worked for the railroad, then later in life he worked security at a large chocolate factory.

Right away Philip *knew* he would become a musician. He studied piano, violin and theory with his sister, who was ten years older: she was what he called “a real musician.” He sang in churches, as a soprano and alto soloist. And he wrote his first published hymn in 1899.





He began studying with organists, conductors, composers - he wrote very romantic pieces, for voice, for piano, and often for solo organ.

And he was becoming a teacher himself, a very GOOD one, not your scolding "NO!" whenever you made a mistake, but a generous "Let's try that again."



*Philip is wearing a top hat - a choir he directed...*

He married Millicent in 1916; she was fifteen years older than him. According to those who knew her, she was a real character, opinionated and very sure of herself.



She and my dad bought a house in Amagansett, along the deserted sea beach, and they used to spend the summers there – and he absolutely LOVED it! He ended up keeping the house until 1955, when it was in a serious hurricane, when I was just a year old.





And then it was World War 1.

Philip was drafted, served October 8, 1917 till April 19, 1919. He joined the band and learned to play tenor sax - he'd rather play an instrument than shoot a gun! He and Millicent called his instrument "Baby" because she couldn't have children, I don't know why...

But he spent the year in France, burying the dead. It's what the band did during their "time off." His diary:

**“We had been ordered here to bury the dead which are still remaining here, and there are hundreds of bodies which have been left for weeks without burial. Sanitation squads have been overworked as well as all the chaplains in this respect. About 8:00 in the morning we started in digging graves, making and marking crosses and then burying the men who were principally Germans. I hope I shall forget the horrible sights. Nearly all were in bits from machine gun fire and we had to collect them in blankets, some rotted, some almost skeletons, find their identification tagged with long nippers or pliers and finally bury them with prayers etc. The stench was horrible to say the least.”**

He played burial services: “Nearer My God to Thee.” He would count the explosions - he counted “987 shell explosions” in one night: “It was no Central Park for the young men from Manhattan” he wrote. And more and more: at one point he is “told by good authority” that “nearly 300 bandsmen were killed and wounded in this war, which makes a casualty list of 33% of men in the service as bandsmen.”

General Pershing, the “leader” of the War, was a real music fan – yes, he believed that music would give us “the *spirit*.” He loved the classics, and ragtime and jazz... and James wrote band versions of the “Star-Spangled Banner” and “Over There,” among others. And from his headquarters in Chaumont, France, Pershing helped choose (with Captain Louis Fisher) the *top* musicians in the army:

**“In April 1919 Philip James returned to the United States as conductor and commanding officer of the Allied Expeditionary Headquarters Band, now known as ‘General Pershing’s Band.’ He led the band on a nineteen-city Victory Loan tour, and, like Europe’s tour with the Hellfighters at about the same time, James’s concerts were wildly received as emblematic of America’s contribution to final victory in the Great War.”** – Glenn Watkins, *Proof through the Night: Music and the Great War*





*Lieutenant Philip James, conductor. This was New York, May 3, 1919: beginning the "Victory Tour" around the US. Besides the usual, he played his own compositions.*

*They went to war and they came back alive, with their instruments and costumes and marching. Wars wars wars – boys boys BOYS! The Purple Hearts should have gone to all their nurses.*

Victor Herbert (a famous popular composer at that time) happened to be in the audience and was so impressed with the conducting and compositions that he hired James for his Broadway musical *My Golden Girl*. James used to think back on how much he learned from Herbert. They went to a bar after the show, drinking plenty of whiskey and talking about, among other things, orchestration.



*photo of Herbert - died in 1924 of a heart attack, age 64, and according to James he was probably drunk*

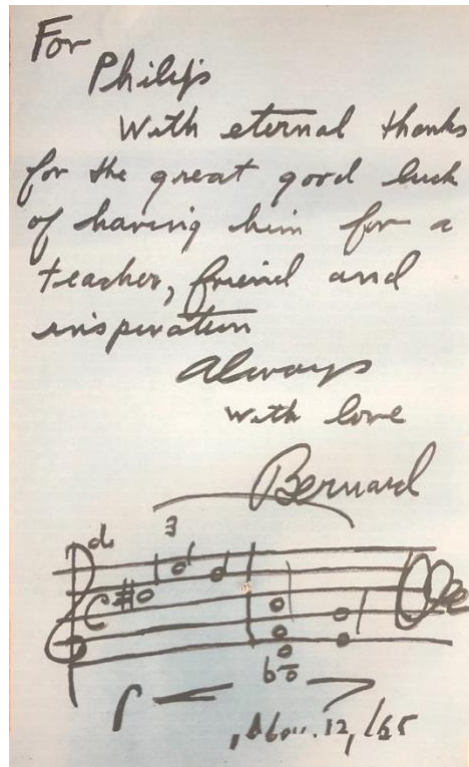
In 1922 Philip founded the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and conducted it for seven years, until 1929. He *built* it, starting from a small performance group in Montclair all the way up to a full orchestral sound. By 1926 he was including guest artists such as Pablo Casals, Harold Bauer, etc.

And then he conducted a radio orchestra on the air, WOR, from 1929 – 1936. Each week he played classical music and modern American music. He also taught a “kid’s show” on CBS in 1940: “Music for Fun,” “Animal Fantasies,” “Latin America”...





He didn't have anything beyond a high school diploma, but it didn't seem to matter: he was teaching at New York University...



Bernard "Benny" Herrmann composed MANY films, including Hitchcock: *Psycho*, *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo*... Welles: *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*... Truffaut: *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Bride Wore Black*... De Palma: *Sisters*, *Obsession*... Scorsese: *Taxi Driver*...

He taught conducting class on Saturday mornings - he would haul some section of his orchestra, for instance woodwinds, or strings, to class, and the students would conduct it. Some of the people who speak *highly* of his teaching include Milton Babbitt, and George Kleinsinger, and Louise Talma, and...

The thirties were really his time. He composed the satirical "Station WGZBX" and won a \$5000 prize from CBS; wrote a Western cowboy-style "Bret Harte" overture; a Welsh "Gwalia" set of folk tunes; a Salvation Army "General William Booth Enters Into Heaven"... These pieces were usually jazzy and memorable, a bunch lighter than the heavy European stuff. And every piece ended with a whizbang smiling major tonic: "ta-DAH!"

Leopold Stokowski (the conductor) said it all, in a letter to Philip: *“I enjoyed conducting your work and hope you will let me conduct another some day... I especially enjoyed the great beauty and depth of feeling... and the plastic quality... It is a pleasure to find an American composer who has freed himself from the academic dogmas of form and has the power to create his own forms.”*



**HOWEVER:**

Toward the end of the twenties and thirties things started to change. Yes, it was crooning singers, popular jazz, radio, “parlor” music... but then came the forties, and very serious composers were at work: Carl Ruggles, Elliott Carter, Ruth Seeger, Roger Sessions, Harry Partch, etc... And modern jazz was starting to catch up. The second World War was on, and these composers weren’t writing any “pageant or fanfare” stuff à la James - no, they were definitely “the serious” composers!

Both Philip’s parents died; and his wife, Millicent, was dying too. He put on his glasses and read to her the Victorian novels of George Meredith, and Trollope, and George Eliot.

He wrote his first symphony as she died - the third movement is a chilling, long slow march, remembering the old war and the new war. Millicent died in 1945; she was sixty-nine years old, and he was fifty-five. It was the year that Helga showed up at NYU.

Yes, the forties: he began writing much more seriously now... and getting *FEWER* concerts. He wrote "Galarnad" (lamentation) in memory of Millicent; "Chaumont" in remembrance of World War I; and "Symphony #2," in utter absolute *TERROR* of war - I remember hearing it. He composed it in 1949, when Helga was married to Bill. And none of these compositions had more than one or two concerts, if *ANY*.

His life was getting complex and busier with odd jobs, with NYU, with the boards of musical committees; at the same time it must have felt lonely and sad. He is living alone from 1945 till 1952 (seven years again - he always considers seven his lucky number). He attends the MacDowell [Colony] in the summertime... there he gets to hang out with other artists and composers, and write music, and *drink!*

He writes in the letter:

**"Today I addressed about 200 envelopes for Christmas cards as I am going to get them off as well as my presents before I leave for the South and my Queen."**

"...the South and his Queen." He has a smile on his face, no doubt, as he dips the pen, and probably smiles again. And then he adds:

**"Your parents did not know the American slang expression "Shank's mare" so perhaps you don't. It simply means one's own legs."**

A little piece of old knowledge, known in the *last* century, when people were still using horses... and "shank's mare" sounds so much like Shakespeare!

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OK, this is funny. "Springer" was a dachshund, and Philip was trying to "borrow" a diaphragm[!] from Henry's examination room. I suspect this was Helga's idea:

**"About the diaphragm. I was unable to get one from your father's treatment room. Several times I started for it saying I was looking for Springer but Springer would steal my thunder by rushing down the stairs and running after me which made my original intent and purpose of no avail. Why not let me buy a 70 if you think this one I have here is not good. The one here was never used and is about four or five years old. Do they deteriorate with age?"**

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Now here comes the heart of the letter, the juicy part, the CLIMAX:

**"I am so anxious to get down to you and am nearly crazy awaiting the day of departure. I just long to undress you and undo all those strange mysterious buttons, zippers etc. before unfolding to my ecstatic touch and gaze your most beautiful body which you have given me. Darling -- what a life is to be ours for evermore."**

Wow! **"DARLING -- WHAT A LIFE IS TO BE OURS FOR EVERMORE."**

And:

**All my love to you and more and more.  
Your adoring husband  
and lover  
Philip**

uncovering the way of  
I just long to undress you and  
~~undo~~ undo all those strange  
mysterious buttons, zippers etc.  
before unfolding to my ecstatic  
touch and gaze your most  
beautiful body which you have  
given me. Darling - what a  
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All my love to you and  
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Your adoring husband  
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Philip



## TWO: HIM/HER

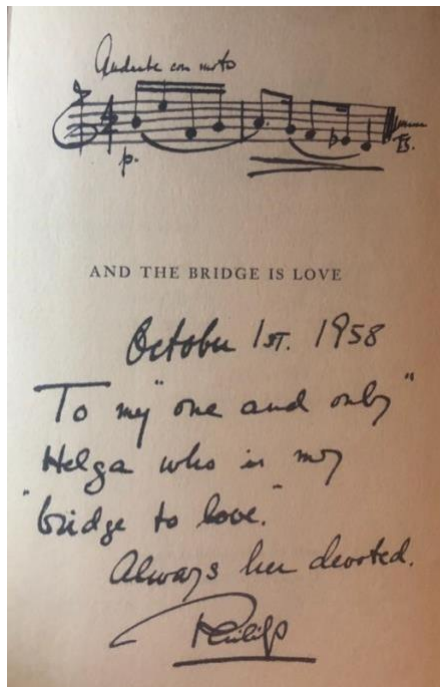
That was the juicy part, like I said: the climax. It should be the end of this story.

But it doesn't just end there, I'm going to extend it into their marriage, their health... and the devastating outcome of the Wars. War affected ALL of them... and US.

They absolutely LOVED each other, Philip and Helga, yes, love love LOVE.

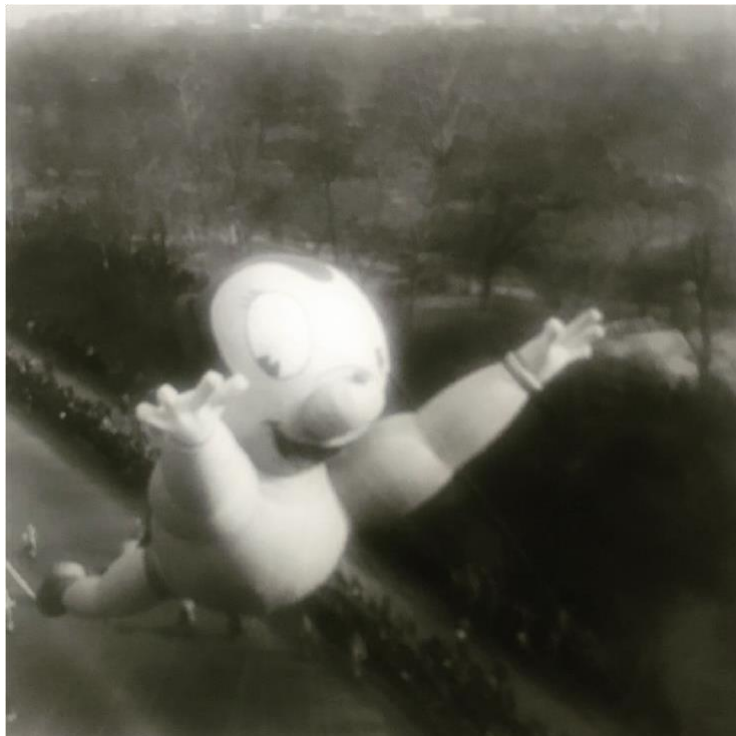
He brought her gifts: Chanel perfume; necklace with three changeable hearts in different stone colors; and MUSIC... and she brought him gifts too, books, flowers, brightly colored vests.

Oh, it wasn't perfect, there were arguments... but it was a *SHINING* relationship!



Helga was around the old people once they were married - not the high school girlfriends, but instead the somewhat alcoholic musicians of the twenties and thirties. He entertained them with his wonderful sense of humor, and his homemade cocktails... and she seemed *used* to it! She put out simple canned “hors d’oeuvres” and he handled the rest, with the apartment laughing uproariously.

My sister was Daddy’s Opus 1 (Vivien), and I was Opus 2 (Philip Dylan, named after Dylan Thomas). We looked out onto the snowy rooftop of the church next door, all white except for a flock of pigeons; Central Park across the street with its trees and parks and rounded hills; and then there was Macy’s Parade: from the eighth floor apartment you could *ALMOST* reach your hand out to touch Mickey.



*from our apartment*

Philip was a walker at first, with his old-fashioned dark beret hat and gray coat - and later, his wooden “stick”. And oh my god his love of the SEA: he’d stand in the wind and call out “Ah Napoli!” He *introduced* me to the beauty of the sea!

He was a teacher who never got angry... well, ALMOST never: I could make him angry, if I wanted to. He talked old-fashioned talk, expressions like “the velvet goods” and “harbor lights” and “I’ll sight you to it.” As I mentioned earlier, he never had a degree - he put up with college (CCNY) from age 15 to 17 and then just left it. He was given an honorary doctorate in 1946, and from then on everyone called him DR. James - it was kind of a joke, but he loved it.

We moved out to the suburbs in 1960, on Helga’s recommendation. She couldn’t stand the dirt of New York City. I remember her saying “soot” with an accent as she wiped the windows. But it never quite went away, that feeling of the city...

Philip at that time had a pretty serious heart attack. He came home from the hospital and cried. His doctor recommended that he walk slowly, limping along with his wooden “shillelagh.” And he had kidney stones... and cancer on his nose... and his TEETH made a loud noise...

*Drunk again – I know it because of how he LOOKS – and wearing a red vest on a holiday...*



He stopped writing orchestral music; you had to be “modern” to make it in that world. He *OCCASIONALLY* wrote church music, for the money. And he stopped conducting.

I used to walk with him, long *SLOW* walks, holding hands. And he’d give me some odd jobs, like filing letters. I used to be *SUPER* impressed with letters from Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson and Henry Cowell...

He played checkers, and played piano (“pop pop pop pop pop goes the corn”), and read to us from the comic section of the Times. We’d go to restaurant after restaurant - I remember him and me getting clams and oysters together, just like grownups.

He was *FUNNY*. He answered the phone: “Nierenstein und Blasen kranker - Campbell’s Funeral Home” (kidney stones and bladder troubles). Or he agreed to call a grumpy old teacher of mine, secretly, putting on a weird woman’s voice.

I grew to love/hate my father. Yes, he suddenly became an old man, a VERY old man. People seldom came and visited him. He got drunk a little too easily. He couldn't play sports, couldn't drive any more, and later in years could barely walk. And I felt downright embarrassed about him, and about his unfashionable music "from the olden days". But oh, he was a brilliant teacher! He would jot down a melody and get me to turn it into a four-part harmony; or he taught me some of how to magically conduct, or how to find the secrets of playing organ. Those days SING in me deeply, to this day. I truly loved him... but I couldn't help but feel he was broken. Yes, broken.



He died (stroke) in a house just a block from the beautiful Shinnecock Bay, snoring loudly, repeating desperately "Jack! Jack!"; I have no idea what it meant.

I think about my father a LOT. Here he is, in 1916:



Ah well! Goodbye, Daddy!



Helga was completely different. She was complicated, so SO complicated. It has to do with Nazis, and authoritarians, and parents, and... I remember a couple of stories:

Like Gushi (her mother), she really couldn't drive very well. It took her *HOURS* of driving lessons - she learned when I was six or seven. Yep, Helga took the wheel, and her body was tensed like all get out. I remember when we were driving the Long Island Expressway at 35 mph, and then 50, and then 40, and she got stopped by a cop with a ticket. My mother said in her German accent "But I don't want a ticket, why should I get a ticket? I don't want a ticket!" And Philip said very nervously and softly "Take the ticket!"

She **DROVE** us to school every day, very badly. I only rode the school bus one time, or maybe twice.

And she didn't like cops at all, or any uniform. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts: I guess it reminded her of Hitler Youth.

*Helga and "Bubi" Tobek, who later became a Hitler Youth*



One day my father decided we'd eat at Luchow's, a German-style tourist restaurant. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but we'd only been there a few minutes before my mother started arguing with the waiter. He was a tall old German man, and he yelled at her "I am not a Nazi."

"Yes you are!" she shouted back.

My father wasn't going to get involved, and I know *I* was embarrassed. They gave us a new waiter.

The sauerbraten was pretty good, said my father meekly.



We were very “tuned in” to the constant diseases, mumps, measles, you name it. And we weren’t allowed to eat peanut butter, or tuna, or...

We’d get up in the morning and Mommy would make *SURE* of our health, our coughs, our sneezes before going to school. And she often had what she called “palpitations.”



Once, when I was a failing part-time college student, the NYU newspaper came out with a story about their bookstore: they were having a contest and giving away a case of sangria. My mother read it wrong and called me with her nervous heated German voice: “Oh dear, there’s been a case of sangria right inside the bookstore! I guess he or she was hospitalized!”

She either frowned nervously, or she laughed and laughed - and I mean *hysterically*. She loved dogs, and she would laugh at what they did. She would *hang out* with them, laugh loudly at their wonderfully excited running around. When a dog would come visit her, she would *BE* a few moments in heaven. Humans could act like Nazis; dogs could not.

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“*Vash hands und zit down*” or “*Wash hands and sit down*”: my mother is about halfway in-between the two, singing three notes, loudly.

Pause. She sings the three notes again: *Vash hands und zit down!* Slowly my Dad waddles to the table. My sister and I show up just a little late. The food is generally overcooked.

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And she didn't think much of sports, in spite of Gushi. She grew up in the old-fashioned European model, going on hikes, practicing dancing, swimming - nope, it wasn't her bag. But she liked books, books books BOOKS, and musicals from Hollywood.

Ha, I remember her trying to use my sister's bicycle one time: she sat on it and rolled down a REALLY LITTLE hill and jumped off laughing.

And she swam with her head up, frowning, slowly...



Oh yes, Helga **ADORED** my father. About five years after he died she started working on “*A Catalog of the Musical Works of Philip James (1890 - 1975).*” For every piece he wrote she researched and looked through yellowed paperwork and figured out the dates of first performances, and soloists, and a **MYRIAD** of countless other things. It was her **WORK**, way back in the library, with Bill Shank - that brought her a sort of happiness.

Six years later, 1986, there was a “Philip James Festival” in Huntsville, Alabama. And indeed the Festival was remarkable, five days of performing Philip’s music, orchestras, bands, soloists, chorus...

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Then one day there was Albert, a peculiar but kind old guy whom she found online, or at a “sweethearts agency” back then. Albert Schoenberg, an odd man indeed, and Helga seemed to fit right in. She was traveling around the United States and Canada, by train because he’d never been in an airplane. They never

argued about ANYTHING, at least when I was around. They seemed to love each other, though he had nothing in common with her.

Alas, Albert died after seven years, in Helga's apartment, having come from the hospital where they'd just amputated one of his legs. She called me on the phone and cried and cried, a sort of DEEP crying.

She wasn't going to take yet ANOTHER old guy. She'd rather be alone. Alone alone alone.

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Toward the end she couldn't walk any more, and we had to put her in an old age home. She hated it: the management was very sterile and somewhat demeaning - they had to make money. She read and read, Thomas Mann, Andre Gide, and her favorite, Oscar Wilde. She listened to recordings of Ravel and Delius until she lost her hearing. She complained and complained about the nurses, and about the "crazy old people," but she could laugh at times.

And that was it. Goodbye, Helga: you are adorable, and now I love you more than ANYONE! I don't know why, with all the nervousness and arguments and bickering... but it's time to LET GO...

And yes, she loved us back, the family, *wholeheartedly*.



World War 1 and World War 2 - Philip and Helga were profoundly affected by the wars - and I mean *PROFOUNDLY*. And Bill Shank, too.

Now we are faced with sad, sad “leaders” like Putin, like Trump, like Hitler, the white boys, their playtime guns.

What my father held in his heart was musical beauty. He carried it *INSIDE*. He knew what it was all about - finding yourself, who you *ARE!* He knew it... and passed it on.

And of course, the letter, the very letter:

**“...before unfolding to my ecstatic touch and gaze your most beautiful body which you have given me. Darling -- what a life is to be ours for evermore. All my love to you and more and more.”**



That's what it's all about.

## **APPENDIX:**

You can see Helga's photos and other exhibits at the [Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) (25 or so photos of their life in Berlin).

To get information about "Philip's War":

[The World War I Army Bandsman: a Diary Account by Philip James](#) ...

or you can read James' [own article about it](#) – from 1919.

James' music is VERY hard to come by – I will try to release some of it. The colorful romantic 1916's *Meditation à Sainte Clotilde* is still played, and the 1920 *By the Waters of Babylon...* and [one of his symphonies on YouTube](#)... and you can read about [Station WGZBX at New Music](#)...

To listen to a very beautiful rendition of Philip James' organ music, played by David E. Lamb:

[Novellette](#)

[Pastorale](#)

[Pantomime](#)

[Solemn Prelude](#)

[Passacaglia on a Cambrian Bass](#)

[Galarnad](#)

[Meditation à Ste. Clotilde](#)