

This interview is part of the **Southern Oral History Program** collection at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**. Other interviews from this collection are available online through [www.sohp.org](http://www.sohp.org) and in the **Southern Historical Collection** at **Wilson Library**.

## **N.1: Undergraduate Internship Program: Fall 2012**

Interview N-0006

Brock Thomas Phillips

18 November 2012

Abstract – p. 2

Field Notes – p. 3

Tape Log – p. 4

## ABSTRACT – BROCK PHILLIPS

Brock Phillips is a UNC-Chapel Hill 2009 graduate where he was a Morehead-Cain scholar and majored in Environmental Science and Chemistry. Throughout college he gained experience working on farms and researching the slow foods movement. After graduation he held an internship with Coon Rock Farm in Hillsborough, North Carolina. Brock now works as the Farm Manager on Hillfield Property for Coon Rock Farm. His interview was conducted as part of a Southern Oral History Program undergraduate intern research project to document gendered challenges within the food system. In it, he discusses growing up in Wichita, Kansas and the effects that running cross country in high school and college had on his perception of healthy food. He also describes the big picture of eating well, the challenges of making food accessible, and his effort to use the land that he works to engage with the food that he eats.

## FIELD NOTES – BROCK PHILLIPS

Interviewee: BROCK PHILLIPS  
Interviewer: Meg VanDeusen  
Date: Sunday, November 18, 202  
Location: Phillips' Home, Rougemont NC 27572

THE INTERVIEWEE. Brock Phillips is a UNC-Chapel Hill 2009 graduate where he was a Morehead-Cain scholar and majored in Environmental Science and Chemistry. He grew up in Wichita, Kansas with his mother, father, and sister. The family had a backyard garden and valued having dinner together. He ran cross country through high school and college. During his college summers, Brock worked on a model farm in Tamil Nadu, India and researched the slow foods movement in Europe. After graduation he held an internship with Coon Rock Farm in Hillsborough, NC. Brock now works as the Farm Manager on Hillfield Property for Coon Rock.

THE INTERVIEWER. Meg VanDeusen is an undergraduate student in the Department of Women's Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill. Meg is an undergraduate intern for the Southern Oral History Program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. Brock Phillips spoke on his personal relation to food and farming as well as where he fits in the "bigger picture." He touched on this childhood and university experiences in reference to how he sees himself as a farmer today. Brock also talked about the way he learns to cook by what is available on the farm. Specifically, he values good simple food because of the way it makes him feel. His girlfriend Mary Beth came home and joined in some of the conversation at the end of the interview, and their dog Jackson provided for some sporadic distraction.

NOTE ON RECORDING. I used the Morehead-Cain's Zoom 4 recorder with a backup on my personal SONY recorder. The interview began outside on the farm as Brock was watering the cows, however the wind quickly became too loud for the first 3 minutes. Recording was paused until returning to the house.

## TAPE LOG – BROCK PHILLIPS

Interviewee: Brock Phillips

Interviewer: Meg VanDeusen

Interview Date: Sunday, November 18 2012

Location: Phillips' Home, Rougemont, NC 27572

Comments: Only text in quotation marks is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions.

### TAPE INDEX

#### Time

#### Topic

[Digital Recording, Starts at Beginning]

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 0:01 | Introduction of Brock from Wichita, Kansas and is now the livestock manager for property that Coon Rock Farm leases on Hillfield. Watering the cows, important to graze them intensively and quickly. Listening to gun shots.  |
| 2:20 | Childhood in Wichita, Kansas, in the city. Grew up with guns, vegetable garden, composting and joining his dad for deer season every year. Decided in high school IB program to do chemical engineering but chose UNC because of the Morehead. Tied in renewable energy to chemistry by taking Environmental Science. Summer after first year worked on a model farm in India, became disillusioned by getting to work with his hands and "teaching by doing." |
| 5:10 | Came back to UNC realized that class didn't mean that much, had always worked better with his hands. Happy with himself in high school, didn't find the desire to change in college like most university students do.  |
| 6:02 | Grew up with food and the standard that we ate as a family, typically any time between 7 and 10 at night. Mom had her sets of meals, always in the home. As a runner had the idea to eat everything specifically. In retrospect realized that USDA food decisions was misguided and now working on a farm realizes that was missing the big picture.   |
| 7:45 | Mom always bought the food growing up although he would help out. New to see what local meat looks like without knowing the contrast of factory farmed meat.   |
| 8:53 | What is the big picture? I can eat what I want as long as there's a subtraction on the other end. Less about the quantity but more about the quality, important to   |

enjoy what you eat. Learning that you can finish a meal and be happy. The question is, are you satisfied with what you're eating. Make it work for you. Food is not just fuel, but what you're happy eating.

- 12:48 Still surprised how I feed myself. Kale and fried eggs over rice not as good as I thought it would be. Important not to get bogged down in numbers
- 13:42 How do you use the land that you're on to enact with the food that you eat? You have to eat seasonally based on what's on the farm. Grocery list based more on the necessities and not the flavor. Planted on a marketing basis. Most of our diet based around meat. Taking a toll on Mary Beth who might be allergic to mammalian meat.
- 16:35 Base what cooking around what kind of meat to eat, which is contradictory to what telling people at market. Marketing perspective to make meat the accent and not a highlight
- 17:38 How do you negotiate the cooking. I do most of the cooking. Mary Beth feels bad about that sometimes because of the way her parents interacted. It's a symbiotic relationship. Women just aren't as comfortable cooking with meat as men, very gendered and not sure why. When people come to market wife asks the husband what he wants to cook on the grill. Beauty of cooking is even if you mess up you still enjoy it. If you have a nice kitchen everything works out from there. Try to be creative
- 21:33 First learned to cook from his mom. Food network became mainstream while he was in high school. Go for a long run on Sunday mornings and then watch Sandra Lee and Rachel Ray. Remember a polish sausage stir fry. Watched a chef on the farm. Everything should start off with butter and garlic. Chef taught how to sell it and took it back to how to cook it. Sautéed greens is a go-to dish. Cook books are like maps, could stare at them all day. Become more confident with messing up. Crock pots are good for the forgotten meats.
- 26:00 Came to the farm with no experience, so sells his meat and how to cook it as if he was learning for the first time. When in college terrified of coming to farmer's market. Sell with how to use as few ingredients as possible. If you have good ingredients you don't need much more than salt and pepper.
- 28:14 Farm does 3 separate farmers market, Mary Beth and I go to a shopping mall in Raleigh: North Hills. Contradictory being next to Chick-Fil-A and selling local produce. Providing samples is what sells, especially with a convincing dog.
- 29:50 Farming started when younger with mom's yard garden. Had a lawn business in high school. Getting hands dirty in India at the model farm. Volunteered at dancing pines during the Piedmont Farm Tour. Still keep in touch, receive encouragement

- 32:16 Travel Study summer in England, Spain, Italy, France and researching slow food and local agriculture. Each meal was research. (Mary Beth comes home.) Carlo Patrini started up in Bra Italy, now has three pillar system of good, clean, and fair. Good food didn't have to be complex food, as seen by the three ingredient pizza. I don't like traveling that much.
- 36:38 When returned to UNC realized he really didn't want to be in school. Decided to go to the Institute for the Environment in Thailand. Some of it was frustrating for not knowing the culture. Final project tied in to agriculture through rice straw. Took an extra semester when returned to finish Chemistry major.
- 38:38 Applied to Peace Corps and decided to return to Chapel Hill while waiting to leave ended up working on Coon Rock Farm. Loved working with Richard Holcomb. Went to Peru as environmental volunteer, but didn't enjoy it. Realized wanted to work with agriculture, learned that quicker than others. Farming isn't something that you "hop back in to" because it takes time, money, and knowledge.
- 42:09 Mary Beth and him moved back to the Farm in April 2011. Always loved working with animals. What's the most challenging part? Mary Beth has taught me a lot because she understands them more. Design things so animals are less stressed. Create an environment they want to move to.
- 44:38 Animals being animals. Early two pigs got in to the raised beds. Conversation with Mary Beth about what consequence that would cause. Must be patient with animals.
- 45:43 Favorite story. New interns see him appear out of nowhere to catch the pigs. Chicken getter doesn't work as well for the Turkeys: crapped in my eye.
- 47:25 Where do you fall on the idea of helping make food accessible? Farmers should not go in to debt to sustain themselves and create what others want. Lots of ways you can provide for families. Characterized by an upper middle class group. All about choices. Donate some food to St. Joseph's in Chapel Hill. Provide cuts of meat that were historically expected for African Americans to cook. Accessible in their mind as opposed to in practice.
- 53:35 What people prioritize. Use those who will pay more to subsidized what's less desired. Choices. Farmers need to take a stand and go, only provide for people who are giving back
- 55:38 Last semester at UNC started to hear about 2008. It's going to take a serious look. Hard to get middle class families to rent a lot, why would low SES be any different.

- 57:30 Chick Fil A right behind their booth at the farmer's market. Become unapologetic about prices at market. Doesn't cost less to produce food. The farming market is not like the rest of the economy. Farmers getting billified. Charge what the market will take, not greedy.
- 1:01:28 How can we make a living off of working on a farm for ourselves and then children. Land is so expensive, meant to buy houses not property. Agricultural business man: socially sustainable. People will pay the higher value. When farmers charge less than other farms it's not malicious but it's also not fair. Movement to get farmers to see this as a life style.
- 1:05:42 Thank you, any other stories? Pig gave birth a week late, calf didn't move with the rest, lots of random things. Truly enjoy what I do and feel very fortunate. People just have to be happy with what they do.