John McCandlish Phillips, born in Glen Cove, NY, was a born-again Christian and a star reporter for The New York Times for 21 years, from 1952 to 1973. In an era of legendary writers such as David Halberstam, Richard Reeves and J. Anthony Lukas, Phillips was said to be among the very best. Gay Talese—another of those legends—once called him “the Ted Williams of the young reporters… the only one guy I thought I was not the equal of.” His editor, Arthur Gelb, described him as the most original stylist he had ever edited.

Phillips became a Christian as a young man, in 1950, just before entering the U.S. army. Faith in God and compassion for human souls would become hallmarks of his life—and of his reporting. His stories, Talese wrote, “were invariably distinguished by their fine use of language, their slightly archaic, almost biblical precision and conciseness, often their humor, and always the author’s compassion for his subject.” Talese also wrote that Phillips “is not interested in winning a Pulitzer Prize…. He wants to redeem people.”

Phillips retired from The Times in 1973 to pursue a wider variety of endeavors. In particular, he mentored young Christians; wrote books such as The Bible, the Supernatural and the Jews, and What Every Christian Should Know about the Supernatural; and supported the work of the New Testament Missionary Fellowship, an evangelical church that he co-founded in 1962—and which continues to minister in Manhattan and the greater New York City area today. He remained a faithful and prayerful servant of God until his death, at 85, in 2013.

“Always remember that, in public accusation, the irreducible, elementary, primary, essential requirement is that it be factually accurate.