



Smithsonian

*National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center*

## Guide to the Van Phillips Video Oral History and Papers

NMAH.AC.0859

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
<b>Title:</b>	Van Phillips Oral History and Papers
<b>Date:</b>	1991-2004
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAH.AC.0859
<b>Creator:</b>	Ossur North America (Donor) Ott, Katherine (Interviewer) Phillips, Van (Interviewee) Dennis, Maggie (Interviewer) Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation. (Creator)
<b>Extent:</b>	1.35 Cubic feet (3 boxes)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	Video oral history interview of Van Phillips, inventor of the Flex-Foot and other innovative prosthetic feet, conducted by Katherine Ott and Maggie Dennis, February 27, 2004, and design drawings and printed materials regarding prosthetic feet by Van Phillips, Hilary D. Pouchak, and Slobodon Djordjevic.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The design drawings and product literature was donated by Ossur North America, on July 30, 2004. The videocassettes were donated by the Smithsonian Institution's Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation, National Museum of American History on July 30, 2004.

### Provenance

Video oral history created by the Innovative Lives Program of the Jerome and Dorothy Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation. Transferred to the Archives Center on March 9, 2004. Papers donated by Ossur North America, the company which bought Phillips' design, on November 11, 2003.

### Available Formats

Original videos digitized in 2014. See repository for details.

### Processing Information

Processed by Mitch Toda, August 2004; supervised by Alison Oswald, archivist.

### Preferred Citation

Van Phillips Oral History and Papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

## Restrictions

The collection is open for research use.

## Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning intellectual property rights. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions

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## Biographical / Historical

In 1976, after a waterskiing accident, Van Phillips had his left leg amputated just above the ankle. At the time he was twenty-one years old and a student at Arizona State University studying mass communications and advertising. The accident and his frustration with the prosthetic technology at the time motivated Phillips to switch his studies to prosthetics. He graduated in 1981. Happy to design a prosthetic foot with strength, flexibility, and light weight materials, Phillips began the process of bringing his ideas into reality. During this time his idea of a C-shaped foot was born. Carbon fiber with its excellent strength and flexible properties was cut into a C-shaped foot, with a sole on the bottom and a prosthetic socket above. With this design, weight applied by landing on the heel was converted into energy thereby simulating the spring action of the normal foot and allowing users to run and jump. After trying out his new design, Phillips immediately decided to quit his job, develop his design, and start a new company. Flex-Foot Inc. was formed in 1984 and demand for Phillips innovative prosthetic foot has increased ever since. While the firm was sold in 2000 to Ossur, a company based in Iceland, in 2000, Phillips still owns the patent rights to his invention and continues to contribute his ideas and expertise to research and development projects.

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## Scope and Contents

Approximately two hours of a video oral history interview of Van Phillips, inventor of the Flex-Foot and other innovative prosthetic feet, conducted by Katherine Ott and Maggie Dennis, February 27, 2004. In Series 2 there are design drawings and printed materials regarding prosthetic feet by Van Phillips and Hilary D. Pouchak.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged into two series.

**Series 1: Video Oral History, 2004**

**Series 2: Design Drawings and Printed Materials, 1991-2002**

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Inventions  
Inventors  
Prosthesis

Types of Materials:

Design drawings  
Interviews -- 2000-2010  
Oral history -- 2000-2010  
Videotapes -- 2000-2010

Names:

Djordjevic, Slobodon  
Flex-Foot, Inc.  
Pouchak, Hilary D.

Preferred Titles:

*Innovative Lives Program (NMAH public program series)*

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Video Oral History, 2004 February 27

Box 1, Video 859.1      Van Phillips Video History Interview, 2004 February 27  
Notes:                      Total Running Time: 32:30

Maggie Dennis and Katherine Ott interview of Van Phillips, topics discussed: his life as a father; a desire to create a Landmine Foot; his early disdain for the Flex-Foot; the brainstorming process with partners about the design of prosthetic feet; his work at Flex-Foot Inc. and the frustrations he experienced with the science advisory board; his appreciation of creativity and how ideas come to him; the founding of Flex-Foot Inc.; his partners Dale Abildskov and Bob Fosberg; the decision to sell the company to Ossur; and how he ended up at the University of Utah's Center for Biomedical Design.

Box 1, Video 859.2      Van Phillips Video History Interview, 2004 February 27  
Notes:                      Total Running Time: 30:15

Continuing discussion of his work at the Center for Biomedical Design for Jan Secosa; working on his prosthetic foot designs on the weekend; problems with various materials and the toes of the feet always breaking; the overall development of his prosthetic foot design; setting up his apartment to fabricate prototypes; calling companies to get free samples of materials; differences between bolted and bonded feet; how his energy idea was born; his own use of prosthetic feet such as the Sach Foot and the Greisinger Foot; the Seattle Foot prosthetic foot that was similar in concept to Phillips; and the benefits of the split toe design.

Box 1, Video 859.3      Van Phillips Video History Interview, 2004 February 27  
Notes:                      Total Running Time: 28:20

In this portion of the interview, Phillips talks about his amputation surgery and a subsequent surgery (Ertl technique) 10 years later to correct the first amputation; being able to finally use his own foot designs because it no longer hurt his stump to do so; his experiences with the patent system and the toll litigation takes defending his patents; working with Aimee Mullins and Dennis Oehler; the rise of the sprint leg in popular culture; and his thoughts and opinions about people with disabilities and the culture that surrounds them.

Box 1, Video 859.4      Van Phillips Video History Interview, 2004 February 27  
Notes:                      Total Running Time: 27:30

Phillips discusses the differences between amputees and wheelchair bound individuals; his feelings about his disability; life before his waterskiing accident; the future of prosthetic

technology; powered prosthetic feet; the C-leg; osseointegration; and gives advice to new amputees.

Box 2, Video RV  
859.1-4

Reference Copy Videos of the Van Phillips Video History Interview, 2004  
February 27

Box 2, Folder 1

Transcript of Van Phillips Video History Interview includes index, 2004  
February 27

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## Series 2: Design Drawings and Printed Materials, 1991 - 2002

Box 3, Folder 1	<a href="#">Design drawings for prosthetic foot, the Vari-Flex, by Van Phillips, 1990 October</a> 4 Drawings (visual works)
Box 3, Folder 2	Design drawings for prosthetic foot, alternate style of the Sure-Flex known as the Nipple Foot, by Hilary D. Pouchak, 1994 February-June 1994 12 Drawings (visual works)
Box 3, Folder 3	Design drawings for prosthetic foot, the Phoenix Foot later known as the K2 Sensation, by Hilary D. Pouchak and Slobodon Djordjevic, 1998 April- May 1998 13 Drawings (visual works)
Box 3, Folder 4	Design drawings for horse prosthetic foot, the Barnaby, by Hilary D. Pouchak, 2002 April 4 Drawings (visual works)
Box 3, Folder 5	Design drawings for prosthetic foot, the Delta Foot (never made it to market), by Hilary D. Pouchak, 1995 July 12 Drawings (visual works)
Box 3, Folder 6	Design drawings by Slobodon Djordjevic, 1999 November-2000 July 10 Drawings (visual works)
Box 3, Folder 7	Design drawings for prosthetic foot, the first prototype of the Air Bladder Foot or Geri-Flex (never made it to market), by Hilary D. Pouchak, 1991 July-1992 December 10 Drawings (visual works) Notes: Printed documents: letter and instructions regarding the Geri-Flex to prosthetist.
Box 3, Folder 8	Design drawings for prosthetic foot, the second prototype of the Geri-Flex, by Hilary D. Pouchak, 1992 December-1993 March 27 Drawings (visual works) (Letter, instructions, and specifications regarding the Geri-Flex to prosthetist.)
Box 3, Folder 9	Design drawings for prosthetic foot, the Flex Sprint I, II, and III (Cheetah), the C-Sprint, and the Sprint Symes, by Hilary D. Pouchak, 1991 October-2002 March 24 Drawings (visual works)
Box 3, Folder 10	Design drawings for prosthetic foot, the Ski Leg I and II, by Hilary D. Pouchak, 1997 March-1998 February 9 Drawings (visual works)

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