



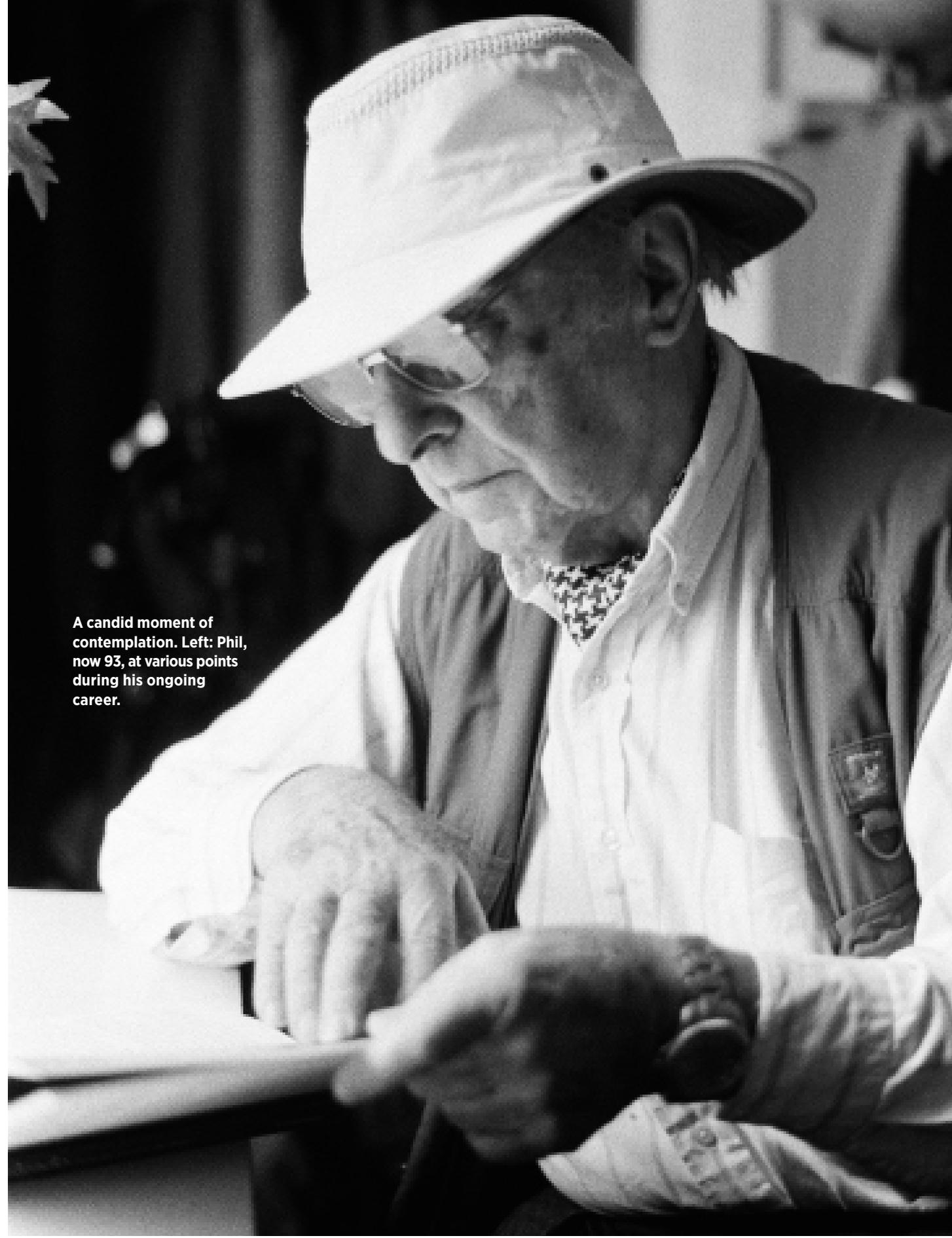
BEARING WITNESS

With The Blitz raging in war-torn London in 1941, hundreds of children were spirited to safety in rural areas. For one of these 'Pied Piper' evacuees, a lifetime behind the camera ensued **by Phil Pendry, Toronto**

I was 12 years old in 1939 when the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. I was living at my grandmother's house in London when a Luftwaffe airburst bomb blew the roofs off almost every house on the street. It also left me with a stammer that lasted until I was well into my teens.

I was one of more than 3.75 million people who were displaced by the war. In what was called Operation Pied Piper, I was one of about 500 children herded onto a train one morning, and transported north out of the city. I was able to take a gas mask in its cardboard box and a backpack with a change of underwear.

I was billeted in a very small village called Welby in Lincolnshire, about 150 miles north of London. I was struck by how far back in time I had travelled. The small labourers' cottage I was sent to was occupied by Mr. Gilbert and his daughter, Olive. It had no running water, no electricity and an outhouse for a toilet. Our only communication link to the outside world was a small tube radio powered by a wet-cell battery. The other buildings that had electricity and running water were the post office, two properties in the hands of local land owners, two pubs and two churches, one Methodist and the other Church of England.



A candid moment of contemplation. Left: Phil, now 93, at various points during his ongoing career.



CAREER TIMELINE PHIL PENDRY

1948-1951 Italy and Middle East: Assistant Camera on features *Private Angelo* and *Eagle and the Lamb*. Also cameraman on documentaries in Middle East.

1951-1955 Montreal and Toronto: National Film Board; Korea and Hungary - Pathe News Reels. All filming 35mm.

1955-1970 Stationed for CBC in London for seven years, then Tokyo for two, Paris for one and London again for five more—covering conflicts in Europe, Middle East, Algiers, Cyprus, The Congo and Vietnam; camera work on Yoko Ono's *Film No. 4*. during this time period as well.

1970-2020 Toronto News World International, CTV, BBC, Wandering Canada Screen Arts, General Motors, Secretary of State, and Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs - freelance.

COVID TIMEOUT For the past two years, Phil has volunteered as director and cameraman on a documentary in support of doctors, dentists and aid workers in Kenya and Uganda, being produced via the Toronto-based nonprofit Bridge to Health (bridgetohealth.ca). Work was halted due to COVID. Another documentary in Lunenburg, N.S., with a month of shooting scheduled for last October, was also shelved. At 93, Phil hopes to resume both projects as soon as permitted.

Mr. Gilbert was “C of E,” while his daughter was Methodist. More often than not I was compelled to attend a service with each of them.

The schoolhouse held about 20 children between the ages of 5 and 14. Two stern, rather strict matronly teachers provided some basic classes. I, like many other children, played hooky. Some fun could always be found leading farm horses across the fields or along the dirt roads. My favourite escape though was to the local blacksmith shop, where I was allowed to pump the bellows to boost the temperature in the furnace. Oddly enough, this led to me being recruited to do the same thing at the Church of England—to pump air for the organ!

Instead of going to school, I would often watch a movie crew working on a film near the village. Because young men 18 years of age or older had been conscripted into the armed services, there was a shortage of adults to work on many jobs, including the making of movies.

It was a summer day when one of the film's assistants spotted me and walked over to ask if I might be interested in a job. I said that I wanted to operate the motion picture camera and, much to my surprise, I was hired as a second assistant cameraman. I was 14 and officially in the film business when they handed me a union card. I started my career as a clapper boy with my very own clapper board.

A year later, my film career led me to run away from the cottage and the village that had become my home away from home. Without parental consent, I rented a small room above a pub so that I could work at Denham and Pinewood Film Studios. I was just 16. By the time I turned 17, I had been promoted to focus puller and worked on such films as *The Way Ahead*, *Tawny Pipit*, *In Which We Serve* and *The Way To The Stars*.

I turned 18 and was conscripted into the army. When they learned I had been a camera operator, I was promoted to sergeant and swapped my rifle for a camera. Posted to the Allied War Crimes Commission in German, I served as a photographer to a pathologist looking for the remains of Allied



prisoners of war who had escaped, but may have been later returned illegally to Nazi concentration camps. I experienced absolute and complete embarrassment at the condition of the inmates as compared to my own state of well-being. My only reaction was to hide behind my camera, and use it as a shield against the reality of the situation, which was fear-inducing. Having covered more than 30 conflicts since, I've reviewed them all as the theatre of the absurd, always using my camera as a protection against the horrors of war. Most conflicts in my view were driven by religious differences: Northern Ireland—Catholics and Protestants; Cyprus—Muslims and Christians; Nigeria, Biafra—Muslims and Christians; Israel—Muslims and Jews. India and Pakistan—Muslims and Hindus. Cambodia—Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Sadly, the list goes on.

THE FEAR FACTOR

The first of the two other times I was truly scared was in 1961 during the Algerian War, between Muslims and the European Algerians known as the Pieds-Noirs. The Pieds-Noirs' attitude towards the Western press had been hostile and dangerous. To avoid conflicts, we used to go to the Arab quarters in the casba for meals, as it offered some protection. French President de Gaulle had granted the Pieds-Noirs independence and issued orders for them to evacuate to France immediately, which raised tensions. When the barracks of the French Foreign Legion, who were supporting the Pieds-Noirs, were ordered evacuated as well, hos-

tilities escalated. Adding insult to injury, de Gaulle's edict was delivered by a lowly lieutenant from the army pay corps. With the Foreign Legion trending towards insurrection against de Gaulle lest he disband them, and the Pieds Noirs in a state of full agitation, we were forced to abandon our coverage and retire to relative safety elsewhere.

The second real scare was in Biafra. Suffice to say it was an extremely dangerous place, as the Biafrans employed South African mercenaries—mostly ex- or still-practicing criminals. We were warned against going out on patrol with them, as they were prone to eliminate camera crews and divide the spoils. This became known during the Vietnam War as “fragging,” a similar method used to get rid of over-zealous superiors and other undesirables.

My relations with news correspondents were many and varied. Overall, I preferred working with female colleagues as their approach was usually more informed and direct. Recording behind the camera during interviews with world leaders was simply mind-blowing. Documenting the Dalai Lama, Nikita Khrushchev, Pandit Nehru, Nelson Mandela, Patrice Lumumba, Willy Brandt, Jomo Kenyatta, John Major, Hugo Chevez, Evo Morales, Richard Nixon, Marshal Chen Yi, Fidel Castro and so many others was akin to viewing history in the making. That such a privilege was bestowed on me largely because of my childhood penchant for playing hooky to watch film crews at work never ceases to amaze me. ■

For more about Phil, visit philpendry.com

Above, from left: Phil (sporting the local headwear) in Vietnam during the 1970s, and much more recently in Africa, shown here with school children and a cheetah.