



American School headmaster dies

By [Steve Myers](#) on June 11, 2007 at 7:22 PM, updated June 11, 2007 at 7:52 PM

Joseph A. McPhillips III, the longtime headmaster of the internationally known American School in Morocco, died Sunday in Tangier from a fall down a stairway. The accident occurred just five days before the school commencement, at which singer Jimmy Buffett was scheduled to give the keynote address. McPhillips, 71, was born in Mobile and raised in Point Clear. He attended UMS when it was a boys' military school, living with his aunt, Mae Leatherbury, during the school year. He finished at Andover Academy in Connecticut, and graduated from Princeton University in 1958. After service in the U.S. Army, he began several years of worldwide travel, which landed him in Tangier as an English teacher at the American School, founded in 1950 as a classic liberal arts institution for the children of diplomats and other Americans living in the country, and later expanded to include native Moroccans. McPhillips was instrumental in securing admissions and scholarships for many of his students at Ivy League schools. During his 37-year tenure as headmaster he was revered, much as the character of "Mr. Chips" in the famous movie of that name, as a father figure among the many generations of students he helped educate. He was especially disappointed that after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, some of his Arab students were no longer welcomed in the United States. Besides Jimmy Buffett, he counted as his friend the playwright Tennessee Williams, as well as movie director Oliver Stone, fashion designer Diana Vreeland and the writer Paul Bowles, each of whom in years past gave graduation speeches at the school. McPhillips was also in charge of a branch of the school recently established in Marrakesh that was largely financed by the clothing designer Yves St. Laurent. Clifton Inge, a Mobile insurance executive who attended UMS with McPhillips, remembered that he had a penchant for the arts, and especially for literature. "He sent me a copy of [J.D. Salinger's] "Catcher in the Rye," Inge remembered. "When he went off to Andover, we all knew it was because he wanted more intellectual challenges. When we were all playing sports, Joe was reading books." At Princeton, a close friend of McPhillips, the writer John Hopkins, remembered him in an article in the Paris Review, and later published as a book: "An honors student in the English department, he was nicknamed 'Rebel,' not just because he came from Alabama, but because he kept a Triumph motorcycle hidden in a garage off campus, which he used to ride into New York to see Tennessee Williams' plays. His dynamic personality and intellectual reputation had made him a big man on campus, which was practically unheard of for someone who was not a top athlete." McPhillips' sister, Lynn Meador, and his sister-in-law, Stella McPhillips, had just arrived in Tangier for the graduation festivities when the accident occurred. After leaving the rehearsal of a school play scheduled for the night before commencement, McPhillips visited with them before going to his home. It was there that the gardener discovered his body a few hours later. Burial will be Wednesday on the school grounds, and the commencement will be celebrated as planned on Friday, with Buffett making the keynote address. McPhillips is survived by his brother, Frank McPhillips, a Mobile vascular surgeon, sister Lynn Meador, of Point Clear, and numerous nieces and nephews. The family requests that donations be made to the American School, P.O. Box 2, Point Clear, Alabama, 36564. The donations will be forwarded to Morocco.

-Staff Report



Joe McPhillips III - March 27, 1936 - June 10, 2007



By Kathy Kriger, Date : 7/2/2007 11:01:00 PM

You meet some people in life and they become instant friends. Such was my feeling for Joe McPhillips who died tragically, days before graduation exercises at his beloved American School in Tangier. Joe became a staple of Tangier life upon his arrival in July, 1962 after adventurous travels in South America, Europe, North and East Africa. He found a job teaching at the American School in Tangier and after 8 years became the Headmaster, a position he held, and reveled in, until his untimely death. He mixed with all facets of international and Moroccan society and became a fixture in the literary and bohemian Tangier of the 60's and early 70's. He indulged his love of the theatre through the School whose theatre benefitted from original dramatic and musical works by Paul Bowles. Throughout the years Joe called on his eclectic array of friends to deliver the annual commencement address: Tennessee Williams, Diana Vreeland, Paul Bowles, Oliver Stone. This year Jimmy Buffett delivered the keynote at commencement – five days after Joe's death. To say that there is a void in the lives of his many friends in Morocco and around the world is an understatement, but nowhere is that emptiness greater or will it be more enduring than at the American School of Tangier and the alumni the world over whose lives have been influenced and inspired by his leadership, creativity, intellect and forceful personality. I didn't meet Joe McPhillips until I had left government work and opened Rick's Cafe. Although one of Bill Willis' closest friends, a stop at Rick's just didn't work out until we scheduled an event for Diana Kerry during the 2004 presidential election campaign. It turned out that Diana had taught in International Schools and she and Joe had a dear mutual friend, so he happily agreed to fly to Casablanca for dinner the night before the event. At dinner Diana and Joe reminisced about mutual friends, teaching abroad, an expatriate's unique perspective and invariably conversation turned to the political situation in the US and the campaign at hand. Joe had a long history in supporting graduates of his school for admission to US universities and over the years not only American, but Moroccan students had been admitted to prestigious schools through their hard work and Joe's recommendations. He was distressed to see the levels of acceptance of Moroccan and other Arab candidates diminish in the post-9/11 xenophobia, and was very outspoken in his views leading up to the election – so much so that we helped him obtain his absentee ballot. After the election, whenever Joe and I would talk on the phone, the first 5-10 minutes would be spent lamenting the latest scandal out of Washington, D.C. and worrying about the long term effects this period in our history would have. Every time he'd come back from a trip to the U.S. he'd be steaming. I think Joe felt it harder having lived in Morocco for 45 years – a country accepting, tolerant, hospitable but allowing for individual privacy. I join the many thousands whose lives are better for having known him. Be at peace, Joe, we'll continue the fight.

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The New York Times

Paid Notice: Deaths

MCPHILLIPS, JOSEPH A

July 15, 2007

McPHILLIPS--Joseph A. III, The revered headmaster of the American School of Tangier, Morocco, died June 10th after a fall in his home in Tangier. The accident occurred five days before the school's 57th commencement, at which the singer Jimmy Buffett gave the commencement address. A graduate of Andover and Princeton, Mr. McPhillips, 71, became headmaster of the school in 1972 and presided over its transformation to a largely Moroccan student body as well as the establishment of a sister school in Marrakech. Under his energetic and flamboyant leadership, the school developed an exceptional academic reputation and served in these troubled times as a bridge between the Islamic and Western Worlds. Many of its graduates attended American universities. Among his many friends were Oliver Stone, Tennessee Williams, Bernard Henri-Lévy, Diana Vreeland, Pierre Berge, Frank Wisner and Joseph Verner Reed. Paul Bowles composed music for his annual graduation plays, and Yves Saint Laurent designed the costumes. He is survived by a brother, Dr. Frank McPhillips of Mobile, AL, and a sister, Lynn Meador of Point Clear, AL. Memorial contributions may be sent to American School of Tangier c/o Sumner Rulon-Miller, Chairman, 531 E. 72nd St, NYC, NY.

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*Joe McPhillips, during a recent rehearsal of *The Zoo Story*, at the American School of Tangier /Photo courtesy Karim Benzakour*

A Tribute to Joe McPhillips

Posted by SCOTT MACLEOD Sunday, July 22, 2007 at 8:18 am

During his 35 years as headmaster of the American School of Tangier, Joe McPhillips had a passion for directing the annual school play, traditionally performed just before graduation. His friend and fellow Tangier expat Paul Bowles, the American novelist and composer, often helped out by composing original scores. One year, another friend, Yves St. Laurent, flew in from Paris to design costumes for a production of *Hippolytus*. Joe bugged me for years to come over for a performance, but, alas, the closest I ever got was seeing a rehearsal for *A Streetcar Named Desire*. I thought that was pretty racy for an Arab country, even for a city as "international" as Tangier, but

the kids were deeply into it. The acting of the girl playing Stella was electrifying, even in AST's plain rehearsal hall. A few days later, Joe telephoned me in Cairo, heartbroken, to say that his dazzling girl had been very seriously injured in a car accident. He was devastated over her misfortune and her disappointment at not being able realize her triumph on stage. This year, tragically, it was Joe who didn't make it to opening night. On June 11, he died at home in Tangier. His sister Lynn Meador says he had suffered a catastrophic aortic valve blockage and died instantly. His body was found at the bottom of a steep flight of stairs, apparently having taken a fall after a heart attack. Even though he was 71, well past the usual retirement age, he had never shown signs of slowing down. "He told me many times that he would die with his boots on, and that's what he did," Karim Benzakour, his friend and AST colleague, told me afterwards. For the 45 years in all that Joe spent in Morocco and serving AST, we owe him an immeasurable debt of gratitude. Few did more than Joe to embody and promote in this part of the world the best of what America represents for many of its citizens--ideals like excellence, creativity, tolerance, freedom, cultural pluralism, individualism and respect for the individual. Joseph A. McPhillips III was a southern boy from Mobile, Alabama who went up north to attend prep school at Andover and college at Princeton. He was a larger than life character, out of a Faulkner novel. After Princeton, he served a stint in the U.S. military. Afterwards, he traveled the world and landed in Morocco, where he got a teaching job at AST, founded only a decade earlier in 1950. Joe became friends with the bohemians who also made the trek to Morocco in those days, like William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsburg and Streetcar's author, Tennessee Williams. Joe's particular art was teaching. Besides being headmaster, he was guidance counselor and English teacher. He was an incredible inspiration to the hundreds of kids who passed through AST, many of whom ended up in some of America's finest universities. "He was the spirit of the school," Karim Benzakour recalled. "It is difficult to speak about the school without speaking about Joe. He was the pillar. He was the man. There was no place for being approximate. It had to be perfect, on time, precise and well done. He pushed people to the limit, so that sometimes you said, 'My God! You questioned yourself whether you can continue.'" AST graduating classes are tiny--there are only 300 students, K through 12--but Joe often attracted speakers worthy of university commencements, among them Pierre Berge, Bernard Henry-Levy, Oliver Stone, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Princess Lalla Hasna, daughter of the late King Hassan II and brother of Morocco's current monarch, Mohammed VI. The last time I saw Joe was in May 2004, a few weeks before graduation exercises. He proudly showed me construction work, financed by a \$500,000 gift to the school from American painter and Tangier expat Marguerite McBey, for a new gym and swimming pool. Over the years, the American community in Tangier had dwindled and the school's enrollment had become overwhelmingly Moroccan. We talked about his latest project, an American school that he established in Marrakech. Begun in a simple house with one teacher in 1995, he had just inaugurated a proper campus designed by architect Charles Boccara. That evening, after drinks at his fabulous house overlooking the Strait of Gibraltar--an earlier gift from Marguerite McBey--we had dinner at one of his favorite hangouts, a simple Italian restaurant called Casa d'Italia. He spent most of the evening speaking with great knowledge and eloquence, though it was not his field, about the calamity that the Bush administration had visited on the Middle East. He was dismayed by what he felt was the influence of right-wing Christian fundamentalists from his South on Bush's policies toward the Islamic world. He was so steamed up--this was about a year after the invasion of Iraq--that he planned to spend his annual summer holiday back home volunteering for John Kerry to get Bush out of office. Joe got Jimmy Buffett, another southern boy, to give this year's commencement address. Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, about division and alienation in America, was the pre-graduation school play, and Albee himself was due to attend but cancelled his trip. In the evening after the last rehearsal, Joe took his fatal fall. It was a theatrical parting worthy of Joe's colorful life, Benzakour remarked to me afterwards. The performances of *The Zoo Story* played to packed houses, with what seemed like half of Tangier turning up to bid farewell to Joe. That wasn't the final curtain. When Paul Bowles died in 1999 after a lifetime in Tangier, Joe personally carried his ashes back to the U.S., and had them interred in the Bowles family plot in Lakemont, N.Y. Joe, on the other hand, was determined to stay in Morocco and be buried on the grounds of his beloved school. In the end, the Moroccan authorities said no to that, arguing in effect that if they granted Joe's wish, you'd have a lot of other crazy Americans wanting to be buried all over Morocco. So Joe was laid to rest at the Anglican cemetery of Tangier, a city that will never forget him.

--By Scott MacLeod

PAUL BOWLES' FRIENDS, Part One

Joseph A. McPhillips first met Paul Bowles and his wife Jane Bowles in 1962, shortly after he moved to Tangier, Morocco, when he accepted a job as English teacher at the American School. In 1972, he was appointed the Headmaster of the school. McPhillips became the executor of the estate of Paul Bowles upon Bowles' death on November 18, 1999. He arranged for Paul Bowles' funeral in upstate New York on November 1, 2000. Read a short biography and obituary of Joseph A. McPhillips III below.

Joseph A. McPhillips, III

Born in Mobile, Alabama on March 27, 1936; died in Tangier, Morocco on June 11, 2007

Joseph A. McPhillips III was a longtime Headmaster of [The American School of Tangier](#). He was born in Mobile, Alabama on March 27, 1936, and he was raised in Point Clear, Alabama. After graduation from Phillips Andover Academy in Massachusetts, he went to Princeton University in New Jersey and graduated in the class of 1958. Beginning in 1959 and into the early 1960s, McPhillips travelled throughout parts of Central and South America and several countries in North Africa and Europe, accompanied by John Hopkins, a Princeton classmate and friend.

In 1962, he accepted a job in Morocco as an English teacher at The American School in Tangier. McPhillips was appointed the Headmaster of the school in 1972, a position he held for 35 years. He was particularly proud of and devoted to his school's annual dramatic productions, which he directed and produced. Paul Bowles composed music for nine of the plays. Another friend, the couturier Yves Saint Laurent, flew to Tangier from Paris to design the actors' costumes for *Hippolytus*. The play was performed in both English and Arabic in June 1992 at le Palais du Marshan. In 1995, McPhillips established a sister school to AST [The American School of Marrakesh](#) or ASM. The school's beautiful campus was designed by the highly-acclaimed Tunisian-born architect Charles Boccara, who now lives in Marrakech. Joe McPhillips' many friends included Jane Bowles, Paul Bowles, artist Marguerite McBey, playwright Tennessee Williams, Beat writers William Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, film director and screenwriter Oliver Stone, Moroccan Princess Lalla Fatima Zohra, designer-architect [Bill Willis](#), singer and entertainer Jimmy Buffett, philosopher and journalist Bernard-Henri Lévy, fashion editor Diana Vreeland, Pierre Bergé, Frank G. Wisner, former American vice consul in Tangier and Joseph Verner Reed, former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco. McPhillips was the executor for the estate of Paul Bowles after Bowles' death in late-1999, and he arranged for Paul Bowles's funeral. McPhillips personally brought Paul Bowles' cremated remains to Lakemont, a small town in upstate New York for burial on November 1, 2000. Joseph A. McPhillips III died in Tangier, Morocco on June 11, 2007. He was 71. His unexpected death, five days before his school's 57th commencement, was the result of a heart attack and fall at *Gazebo*, his home on the Old Mountain. On June 15, 2007, a funeral service and memorial for Joseph A. McPhillips III was held at the Spanish Cathedral in Tangier, attended by several hundred friends, students, admirers and family members. Remembrances were given by Christopher Gibbs, John Hopkins and his longtime secretary Blanca Nyland Hamri, among others. After the service, he was buried at Boubana Cemetery in Tangier. He is survived by a brother, Dr. Frank L. McPhillips of Mobile, and a sister, (Carolyn) Lynn Meador, of Point Clear, Alabama. Joe, as his close friends called him, lived 45 years in Morocco

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(See other photos of Joe McPhillips in the galleries of photographs on the [Paul Bowles funeral](#), [Robert Freson](#) and [Return to New York, Part Two](#) pages. For a complete listing of the music that Paul Bowles composed for dramatic productions of The American School of Tangier, see [Catalogue of Paul Bowles' Musical Works](#).

Joe McPhillips, notorious pedophile and the longtime headmaster of the American School of Tangier.



Joseph A. McPhillips III, a longtime friend of Paul and Jane Bowles and the Headmaster of The American School of Tangier, at Gazebo, his villa on the Old Mountain, 1993.

McPhillips in New York for the September 1995 Paul Bowles Music Festival held at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and The New School for Social Research. The events were organized and sponsored by Jonathan Sheffer, founder and conductor of the EOS Orchestra.

Joseph A. McPhillips III, the executor of the Estate of Paul Bowles, places a CD recording of Paul Bowles's music into the grave, along with some soil from Morocco, flowers and Moroccan Dirhams. McPhillips had brought Paul Bowles's cremated ashes by air to upstate New York after retrieving them at the Manhattan funeral home



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At Paul Bowles' grave site: (left to right) Virginia Spencer Carr, Phillip Ramey, Joseph A. McPhillips III, Cherie Nutting, Kenneth Lisenbee, Claude Nathalie Thomas, Irene Herrmann and, at the far right, Philip Krone. Three local residents also attended the burial..

Literary Tangier, 1963



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Literary Tangier, 1963, sitting on the terrace of a café located in the upper medina having mint teas: (left to right) unidentified standing, Paul Bowles, William S. Burroughs, Christopher Wanklyn, Jane Bowles, Emilio Sanz de Soto, Omar Pound (standing), Joseph A. McPhillips III, and John Hopkins.

The New York Times

High Marks for A Headmaster

By JAMES M. MARKHAM | JULY 12, 1978 | TANGIER, MOROCCO | ARCHIVES | 1978

ELECTRA is from Turkey, **Orestes is the 16-year-old son of the American Consul General**, Tindarius is Palestinian descent and the Greek chorus is from Haiti, Morocco and the United States. The rehearsal for "Orestes," one of the strangest and most difficult tragedies by Euripides, unfolds in the vaulted Palais Marchand under a large photograph of King Hassan II. The actors are teen-agers from the American School Tangier. The eerie electronic music for the play was composed and recorded by Paul Bowles, the author and composer. Joe McPhillips, headmaster of the school, has been wrestling with the happy, anticlimactic ending of the play for weeks, unsatisfied. Now he has fashioned an unhappy ending. "Blackout!" he shouts as the tragedy comes to its new finale, and he smiles triumphantly. The youngsters, gathered around their perspiring director-headmaster, agree that he, and they, have improved upon Euripides. **"It's much better," says Steve Eastman, the tall American who plays Orestes.** Like professionals, they exchange opinions on their performances; then they clamber back onto the bus and return to school — and homework. Five years ago, Joseph A. McPhillips III, who came this Mediterranean port in 1962, became headmaster of school that seemed to have lost its place and role in the world. Established in 1950 as an elementary school to serve the bustling English-speaking community of what was then an international city, the school watched its resident clientele dwindle as Tangier came under Moroccan sovereignty in 1956. "When I became headmaster, we had five boarding students," recalled Mr. McPhillips, who is 42 years old. "kicked out two of them." Paul Luebke, an official of the State Department's Office of Overseas Schools, remembers "strongly recommending that they close shop and use the place for ski instructors or something like that." But Mr. McPhillips, a graduate of Phillips Academy and Princeton, had an emotional investment in and a private vision for his small school, which he had decided to convert into "the Andover of the Mediterranean"— a rigorous, disciplined place of academic excellence. He has begun. The total of boarders, drawn from a number of countries and 21 nationalities, has jumped to 52 in a school population of 200; a dormitory that should be completed this summer will add 28 boarding slots. With the decline of Beirut as an expatriate academic center, the headmaster plans another of his ambitious recruiting trips, to the Middle East, to attract Americans, Arabs and other foreigners. Mr. Luebke, whose office provides support funds to the Tangier school as well as to 150 other American community schools around the world, is impressed. "The kinds of scholarships they get for the kids and the sort of acceptances is sort of phenomenal for school of that size," he said. "For parents who want to get their kids into good colleges it's great." The headmaster's academic formula is simple: concentration on basic reading, mathematics and language skills, with a highly sophisticated near college curriculum in the upper grades, combined with firm rules about deportment. "We don't allow gum-chewing it's not that kind of operation," Mr. McPhillips explained. "We are very tough on narcotics it's immediate expulsion." "I think the kids are no longer naive when they are 14," he went on, discussing the high-powered curriculum. Recalling a student, the daughter of an American oil-rig worker in Algeria, who graduated and went on to become the first member of her family to go to college, at Rice University, he said: "I'd much rather have a kid like that and turn him on to what quality education really is. The boarding students from Rabat — they feel very superior to what's going on down there." "It's rougher than public schools in the states," said Charles O'Rourke, junior, trying on his costume for his role as a slave in the play, "but in the end I'm sure it will pay off." A version of this archives appears in print on July 12, 1978, on Page C1 of the New York edition with the headline: High Marks for A Headmaster.

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The New York Times / James M. Markham

Joseph A. McPhillips heads the American School of Tangier, which he seeks to make "the Andover of the Mediterranean"