## Chapter 26

# **ANTHONE (TONI) L. PHIPPS**

#### Berkeley, California

#### July 9th, 1996

### VM = Vivian Moses; TP = Toni Phipps; SM = Sheila Moses

VM: This is talking to Toni Phipps in Berkeley on July 9th, 1996.

Toni, how did you get to Calvin's lab.?

**TP:** We had recently married and I was looking for work. So I went to the state employment (*office*) and they told me about the job (*at the Rad. Lab.*) I went up there and I was interviewed by Bert Tolbert. They accepted me; I went to work practically right away and started in with working with the glassware, not having a degree in physics or chemistry. I did this and then finally the job evolved to where I was in charge of the stock, the chemical and all the physical (*indecipherable*), ordering from The Hill — I did that and it developed into quite a big job.

VM: So let's take it stage by stage. If it was when you first got married, that would have been in '49 or '50?

TP: Yes.

**VM:** Where did you work?

**TP:** I worked in Donner.

VM: Was it in a big lab. or did you have your own room where you worked?

**TP:** No. We had one room at the back end of the long hall was our department and then to the left, about halfway down the hall, was Bert Tolbert's office and our secretaries and all were there. And then, as we got further down, there were different ones and members of the group (*indecipherable*) who had grad. students and all working with them. And then the big lab. was on the right hand side at the end of the building.

VM: When you were in Donner you took care of all the glassware did you?

**TP:** Yes, I did. There was nobody else. There was a second department, if I remember correctly, over in...

**VM:** In ORL, wasn't it?

**TP:** ...in ORL and there was little building over there, behind ORL, that they eventually...

**VM:** (No; that's fine...nothing's happened)

**TP:** ...tore down.

**VM:** But ORL was that old wooden building — you remember?

TP: Yes.

**VM:** ...and Calvin had people in there.

**TP:** Oh and...I can't think of his name now...he's now in southern California.

**VM:** Andy Benson.

**TP:** Andy Benson. Yes; Andy Benson was in charge there.

**VM:** Did you see the people over there very often?

**TP:** In ORL? Not very often. Of course, they came and went but I didn't see them very much.

**VM:** So you didn't know who they all were?

**TP:** I knew who they all were. When any thing, any group meeting (*was held*), or Dr. Calvin called a group, well we would all be there together, so this way I knew they were distinguished as being in ORL.

VM: What sort of social things did you do together, in those early days when you were still in Donner and the other people were in ORL? Did you get together out of hours, did you have parties?

**TP:** We had parties. Of course, we always had the coffee breaks — they didn't participate every Wednesday, I think was our coffee break day, "goodie day" as we called it.

**VM:** And everybody came?

**TP:** And all the building...if anybody had an occasion to be in the building, I mean those from ORL, if they had an occasion to be in the building at coffee time, why they joined in and became a part of the group just like the others.

VM: Did you celebrate things like birthdays and engagements and weddings and things like that?

TP: No.

**VM:** Christmas?

**TP:** We had a Christmas party, always had the Christmas party.

VM: That was both groups together doing that, was it?

**TP:** Yes. The whole group would be in. And, of course, we are still talking about Donner.

VM: Yes.

**TP:** Where did we meet in Donner for the Christmas party?

**VM:** I was about to ask you that?

**TP:** That was before your time.

**VM:** Well, if you went there in 1950, yes that was before my time.

**TP:** I can't recall now where we had our Christmas get-togethers. (*Editorial note: The Christmas party, starting in 1948, was held in the big lab. in ORL for the people from Donner and the people from ORL.)* 

**VM:** When we had our first Christmas in the group, which was in 1956, it was in ORL. It was, in fact, around the big white table and I think all the presents were piled up on the table where all the food was.

**TP:** Oh, yes. I guess I had forgotten that.

VM: So you would come over then, all the Donner people would come over then?

**TP:** Yes, yes. We'd all get together, wherever it was. There was a group down in LSB.

**VM:** I think that came later. When they tore ORL down, they moved them down to LSB.

**TP:** Yeah; maybe so.

**VM:** You never worked in LSB, did you?

**TP:** No. I never worked in ORL either.

**VM:** Only in Donner?

**TP:** Only in Donner and in the new building.

VM: When they moved into the new building, which I think was toward the end of '63...

**TP:** Was it?

VM: Yes...you came over then and everybody joined together.

TP: Yes.

VM: And what did you do in the new building?

**TP:** In the new building, they built this as Dr. Calvin or someone told me — it was Dick Lemmon — you are going to have so many thousand (*square*) feet of storeroom. So then they built that room with the idea of it being a stockroom and they put me in charge of that.

VM: As soon as you moved into the new building, that's what you started doing.

**TP:** I moved in and I was taking charge of that.

VM: Very different for you to do that? Had you any experience of doing that sort of thing?

TP: No. I remember one Sunday, Ed Bennett was in the building working and he came down and helped me sort of sort out my stock and get things arranged. This was a Sunday afternoon; my husband was helping me too, to get this organised, because I was sort of overwhelmed with all of this stuff coming from ORL and coming from LSB and Donner. We had stuff stacked all down the hallways.

**VM:** What was the position about stockrooms before then? In Donner, was there a stockroom?

TP: Yes.

**VM:** Who ran it?

**TP:** Nobody ran it, really, as I know. It was there, of course, when I came; it was already set up, and if somebody needed something, you could call The Hill. The main stock supply was on The Hill. You'd phone up there and get whatever you wanted. If you had to order a case, well then what you used and then the rest would go in to this stockroom.

**VM:** There wasn't a stockroom keeper who kept the stock up on a daily basis?

TP: No.

VM: So When you went down and began to work in the new stockroom in the round building, did you have any catalogues of what there was, any lists or did you have to go around and sort everything out and find out what there was.

**TP:** I used my own initiative to go ahead and organise this (the stockroom) and put all this type of flasks here — this would be the flask shelves, I designated — they left that up to me, practically. I organised it as it turned out to be pretty efficient. And then I'd label; I had made...What was the guy's name who was in charge of the building?

VM: Paul Hayes?

**TP:** Paul Hayes. Paul: I would ask him for certain things and get his OK sometimes. I know about labelling on the shelves, as to what this shelf contained certain sorts of thing; you know, like. It was kind of fun because I kind of like things in their place, you know, and I like things in order. So that was fun for me to do and I enjoyed it because I got it straightened out after all those cases of stuff that were lined down the halls, to finally get (*organised*).

I know one thing which was quite funny. Dr. Calvin had a little box of vials, of very special chemicals that he had — I don't know whether he had developed this thing, but they were special, a special little box, it had about six little vials in it. It was missing. Paul said "oh dear; we got to find this. This is Calvin's and he will raise hell if we don't find it." I said that I haven't seen anything like this. Well, the whole thing...specially Paul and myself because we were directly responsible for it. Finally we found it and in the hall back over...the names have escaped me; you know, where the seminar room (was) on this hall. You could walk through the stockroom and go out a door over into the hall on that side, which was on the hill side of the building. Well, when they delivered all this stuff from LSB, as I said, it was lined all down the wall in the hall. Well, one of those big, heavy doors...this little box, which was about the size of say 8 x 10, little box was...this door had swung back against it. They had been cleaned out...everything was all straight and in order and this little box was hiding behind the door. What a relief! Paul especially; he was really relieved to find the box. He took it in and put it in a vault in his office.

**VM:** He had a vault in his office, did he?

**TP:** He had a little vault...well, you call it a...

VM: A safe?

**TP:** A safe; that's what I mean, a safe.

**VM:** The stuff wasn't broken, was it?

**TP:** No, everything was in order.

VM: So when people wanted stuff out of the stockroom, did they come and get it through you?

TP: Yes.

**VM:** They just didn't come and take it themselves?

**TP:** If they knew what they wanted. Some of the grad. students I could help in the assembly of extraction (*apparatus*): I knew some few things like this, and help them get the equipment to set up an extraction or a distillation equipment or something. That's the way it worked. And if they wanted: "I need such and such and such a thing and order it for me" and then I'd order it from The Hill and then I would notify them, phone them and tell them that it's in.

**VM:** What happened if The Hill didn't have it, if you had to go outside to order it?

**TP:** No, I didn't go beyond that. The real heavy, expensive stuff, like pieces of equipment, was done through Paul. I would tell them, direct them to Paul if they needed something special because he was authorised to do that. I wouldn't know anything about handling that. I just handled everyday organic and inorganic chemicals and glassware and everyday equipment.

**VM:** When people took stuff out of the stockroom, did they tell you what they had taken so you knew to reorder it?

**TP:** No, not necessarily. But I kept track of my stock and if I see these beakers were getting low or something like this, I didn't have any system of, any records or anything that I could keep, only what I established myself.

**VM:** Even among the chemicals, you didn't know what was there.

**TP:** Yes. I knew about the chemicals. How did I know about the chemicals? Well, I knew what chemicals I had and if I had more than one of a certain kind, I would see that maybe someone...You see, that stockroom was open and grad. students and everybody 24 hours a day. The students coming in there working all night. One incident that happened: we found that there was a student who had a mania for stealing things and I had a big key ring with keys to the closet that had the...what were they? They were caustic chemicals and things like this.

VM: Dangerous chemicals.

**TP:** Yes, dangerous, because it was in this little fireproof room. He stole the key and came in and took things out of the lab.

**VM:** Did you know who it was?

**TP:** They finally found him with the keys. He was a student. I guess he was kind of familiar with the work we were doing. But they got him; they arrested him for this.

**VM:** Was he a student in the lab. or from outside?

**TP:** He was from outside. He didn't work there. But, you see, then they began to be careful about who could...They would come in there, those students would bring their

friends in and they'd use up all the coffee, they'd use up all the cream and sugar and things like this at night. You would get there and go to make some coffee or something and there was just a little bit of thing where they had been drinking it all. They would bring their poor, hungry student friends in there and fill them up!

VM: I remember one time, but I don't know whether you were still in the stockroom or whether your successor, who was Bill McAllister, was there. I remember at one time we tried to make a catalogue of everything in that stockroom so we could keep track. It was an enormous business and it didn't work. We made a list of all the chemicals and I think we put them on cards so that people could see...if anybody wanted a chemical you could see whether we actually had it without going through all the bottles. But within a few weeks, I think, it had all gone to pot because people took stuff and they didn't write anything on the cards. So we never knew — it just got into the same mess as it was before.

**TP:** Of course, I was there, my desk there and I'd see pretty well. One time somebody up on the third floor, I can see her now, was having a Christmas party and we had this alcohol in the big carboys with the syphon and all on it, and they were coming down there every now and then, somebody would come and go in there and draw out a beaker of alcohol. And then pretty soon, somebody else would be coming down and so they were supplying this alcohol for their Christmas party. So I told Paul about it and, of course, they put a stop to that right now.

**VM:** I think that's somewhat illegal, isn't it.. Apart from stealing, you're not supposed to drink that alcohol.

So you were there as storeroom keeper until you retired from the lab.?

TP: Yes.

**VM:** When was that?

**TP:** In '70?

VM: I don't know. It was before I went because Bill McAllister was already there for at least a year or two.

**TP:** He was the one I contacted on The Hill whenever I ordered anything. He would generally be on the phone and would send it down to me.

**VM:** So when you left, he came down from The Hill to replace you?

**TP:** I didn't know that.

**VM:** You didn't know he came down?

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**TP:** I heard afterwards that he came down because he knew, pretty much...he was in the big stockroom on The Hill and it was through him that I'd fill my orders to keep my stock up.

VM: Your desk was in that stockroom...

**TP:** Absolutely.

**VM:** ...which didn't have any windows?

**TP:** No windows.

VM: Trouble you?

TP: No.

VM: Of course, you could walk out whenever you wanted to see the sunshine, couldn't you?

**TP:** Yes. I could walk out. And, of course, the elevator was right outside my door. And I also had...like I would get a big case of beakers, for instance, Erlenmeyer or some of those ordinary flasks — big boxes of stuff I'd put it up on the roof in the room up there and I could refill my stock shelves from there until I ran out and then I could another big whole case of the stuff.

VM: There was all that storage space under the sloping tiles on the roof, wasn't there, which people used for that and for spare books. What sort of memories do you have of working among...because you must have worked there for nearly twenty years, I should think.

**TP:** I worked about fifteen, sixteen years.

VM: You must have retired in about '66, '67.

**TP:** Around '70: I sometimes think, sometimes I wonder whether this is Alzheimers!

VM: I don't think you've got Alzheimers!

**TP:** I forget things that I'm not familiar...I put all that beside me years ago. It's like trying to pluck something out of the cobwebs and it's not very easy to do.

VM: I know.

**TP:** (Let me fix you a little glass of wine.)

**VM:** What sort of memories do you have of the people you worked with there?

**TP:** I had very pleasant...I had no unpleasantness, only with a gal who wasn't any good, unpleasant. But she was kind of a (*nut*?). Did you remember Altha Vann?

**VM:** No, I have heard the name but I never met her.

TP: She was a pain. She was a black girl but she would come in and she'd say to me, she was kind of eerie, "Oh, Toni, would you like to go to the (*indecipherable*); they are giving a formal dance in San Francisco, would you like an invitation?" I said "No, I wouldn't." Meantime, she is saying this at the door up there and broadcasting it all over the lab., which embarrassed me. So I' "Well, I can get you..." I said "I don't care to go. I have already declined the invitation so Bill and I..." "Well, I just thought it'd..." I would just go and ignore her but that was the only unpleasant thing. The personnel in my group, that I worked with, was very good. I had good relationships with all of them. I was invited to all the parties.

**VM:** And your husband went with you to parties?

**TP:** Yeah. They invited Bill: "Toni, you and Bill come now, be sure".

VM: The more you talk about him, the more there is some memory coming back to me of what he was like. Before I leave, I'll have to look at a picture of him and remind myself of what he looked like. Did you talk to Calvin?

**TP:** Oh, yes. Oh Dr. Calvin: he made a suit for Dr. Calvin.

VM: Bill did?

**TP:** He was a tailor for the officers on Treasure Island...and that little bear there, with the green candle in it, Dr. Calvin...he used to call her "Babe" you know; he'd say "Hey Babe, "isn't this cute?" When he'd come back (*for a fitting*) he'd catch my eye and he would look as if he would swipe it.

VM: I'd better explain for anybody listening that "Babe" was what he called his wife, wasn't it?

**TP:** He'd used to call her: "look, Babe, ....". We always thought Dr. Calvin would be so dignified, he wouldn't say...but, of course, he was just like anybody else.

**VM:** How did you get along with all the other people — Dick and Ed and Al and Andy and all those people?

**TP:** I got along all right with them, Ed and...I didn't have any unpleasant incidents to record at all because things went very well for me.

**SM:** They were a very nice group of people, weren't they?

**TP:** They were. To have a number of people of different personalities and all like this and doing some very technical work sometimes, they were all very good people as far as being congenial and all.

VM: You met lots of overseas students and postdocs.?

**TP:** Yes. That was the interesting part about it. I could interpret some of this badly broken English that some of them were speaking. I know there was an East Indian fellow and he had done thing there, you know, his studies and he wanted to go back home and he wanted to take a lot of baby food with him.

**VM:** Why did he want baby food?

**TP:** He'd gotten this little baby...

**VM:** I see; with him in...?

TP: ...and he can't get this kind of food in India that he was using over here so he wanted to take loads of this back. He wanted a wooden box. I said, "well that would be hard to be". We usually had cardboard which is just as firm and substantial as wood. He said "but I don't want this to get broken; I want wood". I said "well the only thing it would have to be built", so I directed him to The Hill and talk to stock up there and maybe they could get somebody to build a box. But he was very unhappy because I wouldn't order him a box to pack his baby food in. You know; all these kinds of things.

**VM:** But mostly they were OK and they didn't need a lot of baby food.

**TP:** No. He left, I remember that. Cyril Ponnamperuma...

**VM:** Was he the man?

**TP:** No, it wasn't he. He's down the peninsula isn't he?

VM: No, no. Well, he was. He left here and went down to Ames Lab. on the peninsula and then he moved to the University of Maryland. He died, three years ago, four years ago. I think he had a heart attack. He wasn't very old; he must have been late sixties, I would think.

**TP:** I lent him an ottoman because he was having a party and I was having a big ottoman, white plastic thing; I used to have it here. And he wanted something like...they wanted an extra chair. And so I said "well, I can give you card table chairs". And so he said "well no, he didn't want anything like that and he saw this old business and asked what (*indecipherable*). So he took it and used it for his party. There were a lot of personal things that happened, that I can't quite recall now. Some things were kind of funny.

**VM:** I think you have told us a lot of interesting memories.

TP: We used to go to parties all over the place. Everybody was giving parties. There would always be...and the rest of the gals...there were two other gals, black gals, in the building in Donner and they were jealous of me because I didn't have any reason to associate with them because my group was doing altogether different work and so we had nothing much in common. I didn't know them socially outside of the lab. and didn't care to, necessarily.

VM: One of them was Altha Vann, was it?

**TP:** Altha Vann worked in ORL.

VM: Who was the other one? You said there were two girls.

**TP:** There was one girl that worked...what was her name? Do you remember when she got stuck on the elevator?

**VM:** No. I can't remember that. Was it Alice Smith?

TP: Alice, that's who it was. Alice got stuck on the elevator. She was one of these kind of gals that has all these Sunday school Bible cards and when she wasn't busy she was sitting up there reading the Bible. I think it was so ridiculous. People that do this make me sick because they are generally the worst hypocrites in the world, you know, and they are always talking about this business. Anyway, she got stuck in the elevator and she alarmed the whole building. Because, you know, when you bang on the (*elevator doors*) (*indecipherable*), everybody was coming "hey, what's wrong?" She was in there saying "Oh Lord have mercy; Lord have mercy; Oh Jesus, oh."

**SM:** And did He?

**TP:** He did.

**SM:** She might have had it right!

**TP:** Paul came around and said "Alice, just stay calm, there's nothing that can happen to you. We've called the elevator service emergency..." (*Rendering of Alice Smith yelling and moaning*.) This was right outside my office door, see, and I came up there and (*told*) Alice "why don't you stop all this? Nothing can happen to you." (*Further rendering of yelling and moaning*.) Finally they came and released her.

**VM:** It took her a long time to recover, did it?

**TP:** Yes. She was fit to go so they let her go home after that. That was funny.

**VM:** There were lots of fun times there, weren't there?

**TP:** I know you remember...lived in Walnut Creek, lived in Pleasant Valley.

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**VM:** Martha Kirk.

**TP:** Martha Kirk.

**SM:** She was a lovely lady.

**TP:** Martha. Martha; she would come down there sometimes and eat her lunch with me. Somebody would come in there with the broken English and (*she*) said "what did they say?" I don't know how I was able to decipher whatever they were saying. Martha would say "how did you know?" I would just get a gleam of what they were talking about.

(What follows is no more than marginally relevant to this history.)

And Bill Hart (a laboratory glassblower) made this for me (referring to an ornament). He had this large tubing and then he made the smaller diameter inside and then he told me to go to the hobby store and get some marbles, whatever colour combination that I wanted, so I got the brown and the blue, the amber and green and blue. He made this and, of course, I said "how does it go in diagonal lines like this?" He said, "course, if they were square, they would stack and would be straight stacks. By being round, and rolling and falling in place like that." Somebody said they saw something like this in some store somewhere and it was around about \$69.50 or somewhere.

VM: Since people who listen to this tape can't see it, I should say that it's a cylinder about 10 or 12 inches high and 4 or 5 inches across and it has an annulus down the middle and between the two cylinders are packed coloured marbles, packed in such a way that there are lines of colours rising diagonally through the cylinder.

TP: It didn't originally have this core. Bill and I camped and fished a lot and I would pick up grasses and different things, and I saw this beautiful white, snowy-looking weed, it was nothing but a weed but it was really pretty, on the banks of some river up north and so I picked some of it and came back and put it down in between here. It was brittle and dried, and as it dried it fell off it just messed up all of the marbles. So I took it back to the lab. and I said "Bill, what am I going to do with this?" He emptied it out in one of those big developing pans and washed it all and put it back and made this lid...

**VM:** That's also glass, is it?

**TP:** Yes. This goes down in there, so I can still set it and I can set in in water if I want to make a centrepiece for my table or something. I can set it in water and put flowers in there and it still wouldn't get into the marbles.

**VM:** He was a very good glassblower.

**TP:** He was really an artist. He invited Jo Onffroy (*one of the group secretaries*) and I down to spend the weekend with him...

VM: ...in his...

**TP:** ...cabin down in the foothills near Yosemite. We went down there. He's a vegetarian so we brought one of those little bitty tins of ham, you know: Jo said "I like to have some kind of meat". So we bought this can of ham and all.

And anyway, he took us all around and he had this huge swing with these...what do you call ropes that are all stretchy?

**VM:** Elastic type ropes?

TP: No. These were yellow; anyway, they have elasticity like this and this was what this swing was made of. He had a tall, a big high limb where he had this thing. He said "Get in, Toni, and I'll push you". It swung out over a kind of a little stream he had there and so you swung out and oh, you got a long swing; it was really firm. Jo said "I'm waiting because I haven't done this since I was a kid." She got in there and she said "you know, when I was a kid, I used to go way up there, I used to jump out off of the swing". I had no idea that she was going to do this, at her age. After she swung a few times, when she got way out over there, she jumped out. She wasn't any good for the next two days.

VM: I cam imagine.

**TP:** It was funny. I didn't want to laugh, because she could really have been seriously hurt, but I had to laugh anyway because it was so funny. I had no idea she would do that.

**SM:** What was the name of the glassblower?

**VM:** Bill Hart. They were fun days, weren't they?.

TP: I enjoyed it. I missed you guys when I got home. I thought "gee whiz". You know when you work with...I spent the better of my waking hours with this group. I'd get up in the morning, throw down some cereal, go on to work and come home in the evening and take off my hat and coat, grab a skillet and cook dinner, and pretty soon — you read or something and the television or what have you — then you go to bed and get up and do that five days a week for years.

VM: That was the case for all of us. Many of us used to work at nights and the weekends as well, especially, I think, when we were younger. When we got older and had families, we didn't do it so much.

**TP:** Where are you living now?

**VM:** We are living in London.

**TP:** Oh, you're living in London.

VM: Yes.

**TP:** Oh, I wondered. Since you called me and all, I wondered where you set up if you're practising or if you're working or what.

VM I'm retired.

**TP:** You've retired from the lab.?

VM: I'm retired altogether.

**TP:** I imagine you wouldn't be coming over here with a mission like this unless you were retired.

VM: I retired about three years ago. I'd better stop this...

**SM:** Can I ask Toni something. What have you done since you retired, Toni?

**TP:** I haven't really done anything that I can say I'm ashamed to say that. But I haven't done anything that's really constructive necessarily. I belong to a sorority and we did some little charitable things and little things like that. I haven't really done anything. I'm ashamed to say it but I haven't done anything really.

VM: I don't think you need be ashamed to say it.

**TP:** I am, because it is just wasted time. You don't pass this way but once.

**SM:** Did you enjoy it?

TP: I enjoyed it. Bill and I had...I had a very beautiful relationship with my husband if I must say it. We were compatible, very compatible. We liked the same things. I'm from the Middle West (Iowa and Nebraska) and what I knew about mountains and fishing, and like that., my father was a physician/surgeon and there was not outdoor life like that in our family. I thought the height of boredom would be to sit on a stream someplace and watch for a cork to bobble with a fish on the end of the line. He bought me some fresh water tackle and took me up behind the Claremont Hotel (*in Berkeley*) on Old Tunnel Road up there and taught me how to cast.

Then I got interested in it and he got me freshwater and saltwater equipment and I had my waders, and all like this, and we used to go all up in Northern California, camping — we had everything to camp with — and we had a ball. I liked it; he like to do the same pursuits. Few men like to shop; he liked to shop.

**VM:** Shop for groceries?

**TP:** Groceries. I was telling a friend: we were buying melons the other day and I said whenever I buy honeydew melons I always think about Bill. I'd be standing there; he

and were shopping and I'd go over to the melon counter and I'd be looking at melons and he would say "stand back, stand back there, let an expert get up here". He would pick out this melon and when we get it home it would taste like a pumpkin. And he laughed about that; we would have a little laugh. We had lots of fun together. He liked to work in the house. He remodelled it: see, he knocked all this out here.

- VM: I think we are going to have to draw this to a close because the tape is about to run out. No, no, don't move.
- **TP:** I must fix some wine.
- VM: Before you do, I just wanted to thank you very much for all that you have told us. It's nice seeing you again after so many years and nice to hear from you. Your record will go down to posterity on this tape.
- **TP:** I'm flattered, really I'm really flattered to think that you put me in for posterity.
- **SM:** I'm glad we were able to get to you because we had some difficulty between us in fixing a date.