

Jerry Fisher Transcript

Kathy Hersh: Today is March 21st, 2018. My name is Kathy Hersh. I'm interviewing Jerry Fisher, a descendent of Carl Fisher's, and we're at the Art Deco Welcome Center on Miami Beach. So, first of all I'd like to ask you about your book, and what motivated you — even though you're a relative, right?

Jerry Fisher: Right.

Interviewer: Not all relatives write books about their ancestors. What motivated you to write the book?

Fisher: Well, growing up as a child — my mother told me all about Carl Fisher. ever since I was a young boy of probably five, six, seven — so I knew about Carl Fisher at an early age, but as I grew up, and even my mother restated this, that actually people just didn't really know anything about Carl Fisher. When you'd mention that he created Miami Beach and so forth, people just didn't know, really. Even the sports center really didn't know.

I remember one time, I had a conversation with [phonetic][01:07] Shav Glick, who was the sports writer for the Los Angeles Times, and I happened to just call him out of the blue. He said, "Yeah, I heard a little bit about" — he had been covering the Indy 500 for the Los Angeles Times for over 20 years, and he still didn't know anything about Carl Fisher, which is really remarkable. You know, he's a major sports writer with the Los Angeles Times, and on our phone conversation he said, "Yes, I've heard a little bit about him, but I really don't know."

To make a long story short, he did a couple little articles on Carl Fisher and so forth, but of course, I realized that people just didn't really know. There was just no basic knowledge.

I remember my conversation with Jane Fisher, when she told me, "I think Carl is all but forgotten," and that really sunk in, because I realized that if I didn't do something, that...at that time, there was literally nothing about Carl Fisher. Obviously, we didn't have the Internet at that time. There were a few newspaper articles now and then — you know, here in Miami Beach, or in Indianapolis — but very



little. So, he was really an unknown factor.

So, I realized that if — and nobody seemed to be...there was obviously no book out. Later in my life I came to realize that if I don't do something, Jane Fisher's words are going to come back, and he is going to be forgotten.

So, to make a long story short, I had never taken any writing courses. I took one semester of journalism in college. That was my writing experience. However, I did a lot of research in college — like term papers and that — so I felt pretty competent that I could do the research, because I'd done it before, and so forth.

Anyway, it took me about 10-12 years to get all the information together for the book, because like I said before, there was no Internet. I had to go to the Indianapolis Library, the Miami Library here, and just do the old-fashioned way that people did way back in the '60's, '70's and '80's, before the Internet — just going through books and so forth.

Then, of course, I had a full-time job, so that's why it took such a long time to get the material to get the book out, but the book did come out. The first edition was "The Untold Story of Carl Fisher", and that was released in 1998.

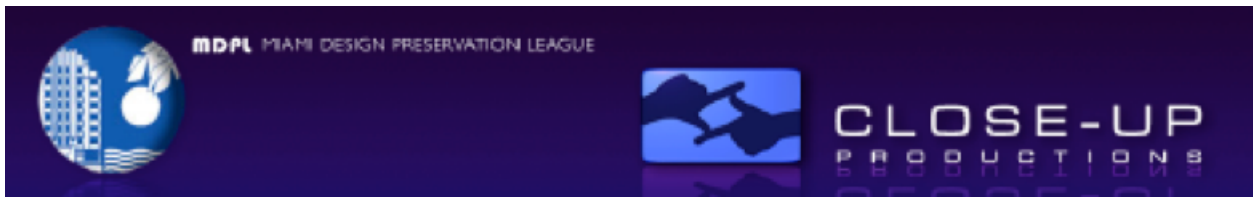
Interviewer: Let's go back to your talk with Jane Fisher, his widow. Tell us about the time that took place, and the context of what she said.

Fisher: Okay. That's a very interesting story. I was living in Nebraska, and my mother knew about Jane, although Jane didn't really know anything about us, because she was down here. My mother had followed the life of Carl Fisher, and knew about Jane Fisher, so she wrote a letter to Jane Fisher about a month before I came. I came down to Miami Beach in December, to see Nebraska play Auburn in the Rose Bowl, and my mother wrote a nice, long letter to Jane about who I was, and my relationship to the Fishers, and that I was coming down and so forth and, you know, if she had time...

Interviewer: What date was that?

Fisher: This was in December of 1963.

Interviewer: So that would have been the Orange Bowl.



Fisher: Yes. The Orange Bowl. That's when I came down. So, I met her — well, technically it was on December 30th or something like that; a couple days before January 1st. I was staying in a hotel. I came down with three other University of Nebraska classmates. We drove down.

Interviewer: So, you were in college at the time?

Fisher: I had graduated, but my other friends were still going, so we were all there together. I came down, and fortunately her number was listed in the phone book. So, I called, and she answered, and I said, "Hello, I'm Jerry Fisher," and the letter had not reached her. She knew nothing about me, and obviously there were a lot of awkward moments. You know, here I am calling Jane Fisher and she, you know...

Interviewer: How did you convince her?

Fisher: I explained, you know...I briefly got the words out, and she said, "You come right over." She lived about five minutes away, or whatever it was.

Interviewer: Was she still living in the house?

Fisher: She was in the home, yes.

Interviewer: In the house they had built?

Fisher: It was on Sheridan Avenue. It was a home. So, I went, and as soon as I came through the door, she met me, and she said, "I knew you were a Carl Fisher as soon as I saw you at the door." I thought that was a nice compliment that she gave me.

Interviewer: That you were Jerry Fisher?

Fisher: Because of the way, you know — dark eyes, broad shoulders, I guess...the way I looked. So I sat down, and we went in her living room, and she had a lot of pictures of old-time Miami Beach. A lot of famous people — they knew the state-of-the-art people at that time — and a lot of artifacts and so forth.

Then we went into her living room, and I sat down, and she sat down on the sofa, and she had this dog...I want to say it was a greyhound. I think it was a whippet. The dog just quietly laid down at her feet, and



then we started talking. We had a lot of conversations. She was really interested about me, and that I would take time to, you know...of course, I was very flattered.

We talked for roughly 45 minutes to an hour, and in the meantime I had my classmates waiting outside in the car, so it was a little...anyway, as I left she said those words, "I'm afraid Carl is all but forgotten." Of course, that message really kind of sunk in, but I was only 23, so I really didn't know how to handle that situation. It would take a near life-and-death experience when I was in my early 40's — I almost died of a hemorrhage. I was on my deathbed. It was one of those things — that I would do something, because nothing had been done.

I made a decision, at that time, to do what I could, and like I said before earlier, it took many years to do the research, and then the book finally came out. So, I was very happy that that happened.

Interviewer: Why do you think he was kind of forgotten?

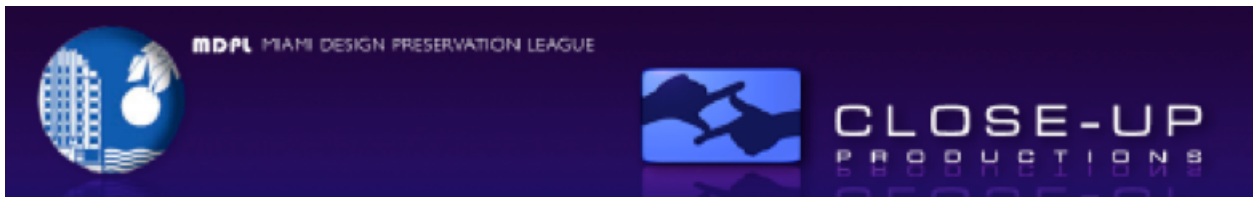
Fisher: That's a good question, because in my book I describe that Carl Fisher was a very private, humble person. As you know, he never named any of his projects after his name. It was never the Fisher Highway, or any of that type of thing, or the Fisher Speedway. In fact, people tried to interview him, and I put in actual letters from the Encyclopedia Britannica requesting a biography and so forth, and he refused.

He wrote letters back, which are in my book. He wanted nothing to do with that. In fact, when he was living, it was to the extreme. He was going to sue anybody who wrote about him. That's how privately he guarded his reputation.

Interviewer: Why do you think that privacy — for a man who was such a public promoter of Miami Beach...

Fisher: His mother, Ida, often said about Carl that he was a showman on his projects, whenever he needed to get the publicity — you know, nationwide or whatever. He could turn it on and off. He loved to be a showman, if it was about the projects, and not himself. He just didn't...I think there might have been some complexes in there and so forth.

You know, he had a very hard life growing up. He had astigmatism as a young child. He couldn't read what was on the blackboard. In those



days, we didn't have the technology that we do now with glasses, and so he didn't really know...he couldn't explain to somebody, because he couldn't see what was on the blackboard. His mother didn't know. His classmates and teacher thought he was an imbecile, dumb, because he couldn't see that well.

He had astigmatism, and so basically after all the school things that happened to him, he actually one day just took up his books, closed his books and walked out of the classroom in the sixth grade, never to come back again. The thing that really saved Carl Fisher was that he was — you know, he was gifted, obviously, but he read a lot.

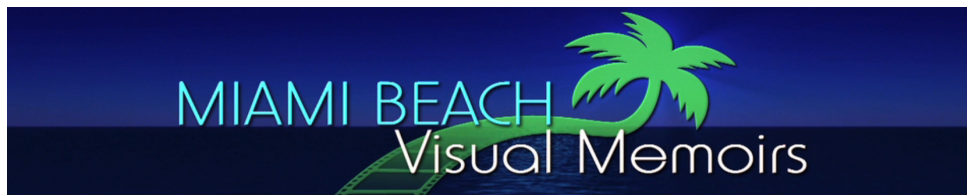
Interviewer: Once he got glasses.

Fisher: Once he got glasses and so forth. He was an avid reader throughout his life, and what is really interesting is that he read so many books and so forth — in my first book. I put three or four pages of all the books he read, because I found it fascinating. I don't care whether it was Socrates or the history of Abraham Lincoln, or all these different subjects. A wide range of subjects.

Because of his reading, he could speak on almost any given subject, and so he was highly educated, and what was really interesting was that he associated with some of the top people, as far as achievers, in the country. You're talking about Ford; you know, President Harding, of course; Harvey Firestone, Thomas Edison. All these great men. Even Henry Joy, who had a Yale degree and later on headed the Lincoln Highway. All highly educated men.

Here was Carl, with a sixth-grade education, and what I found amazing, after going through thousands and thousands of letters, was that I never found one statement ever referring to his background, which is really amazing. How did this man circulate among all these giants, with these high East Coast degrees, and then here, with a sixth grade education? I still wonder about that today. I mean, how did he do that?

And of course, all the other people — like I said, there was never one word. Nothing. "Oh, you're just a dropout." Nothing like that. They all accepted him, because they knew that when they met Carl, he was somebody to be remembered, because of his knowledge and sophistication.



Interviewer: So, he started out in Indianapolis, when he was 17, opening a bicycle shop?

Fisher: Yes. Like I said earlier, he had a rough childhood. His father was a lawyer — smart — but he became an alcoholic. He would leave the family, and then he would come back, and then leave and come back. You know, a thousand deaths. So, he wasn't really there to support Carl. He had two other, younger brothers. So, his mother Ida decided that they should move to Indianapolis, because —

Interviewer: Where had they been?

Fisher: They were in Greensberg, Indiana.

Interviewer: Greensberg?

Fisher: Which is about 67 miles from...

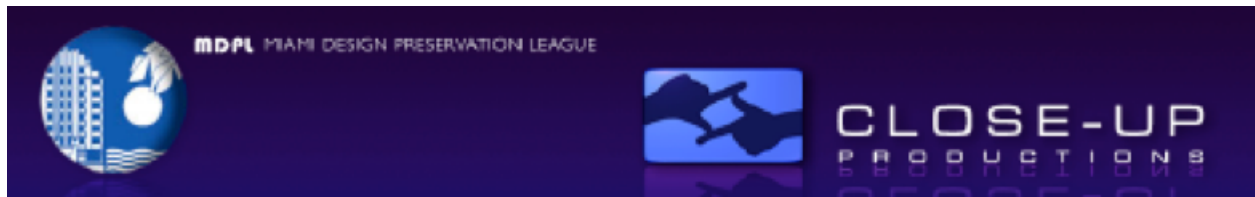
Interviewer: I know it well. I'm a Hoosier.

Fisher: Right. So, they moved there, and then Carl became what they call a butcher boy, which was on the trains — of course, everybody traveled by trains, and they had a butcher boy with this big apron, and he would have the newspaper articles, candy bars, cigars, and he would walk down the aisles. He was a hawker and did all that, and actually made a pretty good living doing that. That was a way he could introduce himself to these people, and he met some really highly famous people doing that, riding the train and everything.

So, he had the early confidence of knowing that he could sell these newspapers and this and that at all that. Later, he was a bicycle rider, and he got into bicycles. He got his big start from a large...he got 200 bicycles on consignment from one of the largest bicycle manufacturers at that time. That was amazing, that this young boy could do that.

Interviewer: He manufactured bicycles?

Fisher: No. What happened was, he got them on consignment. The largest manufacturer of bicycles at that time — I think it was somewhere back in Ohio. Carl went back and met him, and Carl was able to talk this man into giving him 200 bicycles on consignment — in other words, not paying for them — and he said, "I'll sell these," and of course Carl did.



It was gamesmanship. He would get on top of a tall building and even announce to the press that he was going to throw this bicycle off this high tower, or this eight- or nine-story building at a certain time. So, even the press knew about it. Even the police knew about it. He had been doing things like this well before, but the police chief said, “Well, we’re not going to have this anymore,” so he said, “Hey, at 12 o’clock I’m going to throw this bicycle off, and anybody who gets a piece of the bicycle can come to my bicycle shop and get a free bike.”

Well, of course, crowds gathered below, and the police chief said, “I’m not going to have any of this anymore.” So, in the morning he got his policemen to surround the building — a dozen men — thinking that he would think Carl from coming into the building, but Carl knew that, and so he went up the night before with his bicycle, and slept on the roof, and pulled that stunt off. Of course, when he did, it was amazing. I mean, he was just doing things like that.

Interviewer: What are some of the stories that your mother told you?

Fisher: Like I said, my mother, going back earlier, told me about Carl. I would tell some of my classmates and everything. I knew that Carl was very famous, but out of frustration...you know, the main thing is, Jane Fisher wrote a book called “The Fabulous Hoosier”, and my mother had a copy of that, so that was — I used that as part of my research.

Other than that book — I think it came out in '47 or something like that; I’m not sure of the date — other than that book, there was really nothing. So, we had that book, so that was a good foundation, and of course, when I was in college and so forth I read the book, and I was fascinated, but again, nobody knew anything. I just couldn’t believe that a man who did so much...you know, nobody knew anything.

Interviewer: Could it be, possibly, that at the time of his death, he was poor, and he had developed alcoholism?

Fisher: Cirrhosis of the liver.

Interviewer: So, he wasn’t the...his story didn’t have a happy ending. Maybe that was...

Fisher: This is the thing. I’d always heard, in many articles, before my book



was written, that he died a pauper, that he was penniless and so forth. Basically, that was really not true. Carl Fisher, from my research — because I really didn't know at that time, and when you're doing research, you're like a detective. You're going around. You know, you don't know what's happening.

I did research, and I found out that Carl had a pension from the Bay Shore Company of \$10,000 a year. You have to remember one word: inflation. What the dollar meant back then, and what it means now. Of course, people realize that now. \$10,000 a year was worth over \$175,000 a year, which was a pretty nice retirement for most people.

Carl Fisher's estate was over \$54,000. Today, that would be over \$1 million. So basically, he was not a pauper. He was broke, financially, and broken spiritually. That was the difference. He was not broke financially, but broken spiritually. So, he really didn't die — I mean, he was living a pretty good life. You know, \$175,000, you can...

Interviewer: It was the [phonetic][19:19] PanCoast family that were partners with him?

Fisher: Yes. Yeah.

Interviewer: Hired him. That I read on your website.

Fisher: Yes. So, he did have that pension. Even though at one time he was worth over \$100 million, that was on paper, so that was quite a big change.

Interviewer: So, he took high risks. He was a high risk-taker.

Fisher: Definitely, yeah. He gambled. A good point of that is the first Indy 500 was in 1909; they had their race, and at that time, they built the track with crushed rock and tar. Of course, what happened was, as the speedsters went around, the track got looser and looser. That's what happens with gravel — crushed rock — and tar.

So, what happened was it got looser and really bad, and there were five deaths in that first race. Actually, they had to call it off, and some of the cars hit the bystanders. You know, there was no protection. Over 12 people got hauled away in ambulances. It was a disaster, and of course, in the Indy Star, it was just drastic. The headlines were terrible. This was across the country.



So, Carl realized they had to do something, and so Carl actually got his engineers, and they came and decided that 10-pound bricks were the answer, and of course Carl and some of his partners thought, “Oh, we can’t do that. It’s too expensive,” because they had to be — 10 pounds is pretty heavy, and they had to be individually placed by hand. Can you imagine that, around that track?

Anyway, they built the track with brick, and they had the race on May 28th of 1911, and it went off absolutely flawlessly. So, Carl spent a lot of money — again, he took risks. A lot of people would have backed away, particularly after getting crucified by the press for all these deaths. It takes a big man to go ahead, but he was very successful.

The reason he was so successful was because Carl made two decisions. He had the largest purse — in other words, the winner got \$25,000, which is an incredible amount of money. Most races were \$2,000-\$3,000 at the most. That was back in 1911. A tremendous amount of money. The second wise decision was, he made it one race, one day, on Memorial Weekend — 500 miles around. Those two decisions set the Indy 500 above everything else.

What happened was that because of the large purse, racers would say, “Screw these other little races around the country. We’re going to come to Indianapolis, and we’re going to be here year-round, testing our car and so forth, because with that amount of money, it pays us to be here full-time, not chasing these others.” That’s exactly what happened.

So, he found all the best racers and the best car designers, located in Indianapolis. That’s how it happened, because of Carl’s basic decisions.

Interviewer: What made him move from there to Miami Beach?

Fisher: That’s an interesting story. Carl came out with [phonetic][22:52] PrestoLite, which is an [phonetic][22:54] acetylene gas. The early cars had just lanterns, and Carl knew — again, Carl had a lot of common sense. Carl knew that people had cars, automobiles, but they would never travel at night because obviously, they got lost. There were no signs around, and you can’t drive a car without lights. Let’s face it. Carl knew that.



Anyway, Carl came across a patent — actually, it was from France — of this acelyne gas, and Carl got the patent. To make a long story short, he sold that patent to Union Carbide in 1911 for \$6 million dollars. It was a staggering amount of money. It was, again, the right decision, because the very next year, in 1912, Cadillac introduced the electric battery, which would kind of have eliminated, you know, that. So, his timing was perfect. \$6 million dollars is a lot of money.

So, he had a friend that built him a boat, and the boat was ready for him to pick up in Miami. So, Carl went down to Miami to pick up his boat, and he saw — Carl was an avid fisherman, and he would go out and, you know, leave Miami in his boat. He saw this wooden bridge being built — the [phonetic][24:24] Collins — and the bridge was only halfway done. That was actually about two and-a-half miles, I believe, to Miami Beach.

Collins was 74 years old, and he ran out of money, and Carl's lawyer, Frank [phonetic][24:42] Schutz, new all about this, and suggested to Carl, "Carl, you've got a lot of money, and you have nothing to do. Why don't you loan this man some money, so he can finish his bridge?" When Carl learned that Collins was 74 years old, he had immediate respect for the man, because he thought a man at that age, doing what he did, must be worth knowing.

To make a long story short, Carl loaned him \$50,000, got hundreds of acres of prime ocean/beach property, besides charging him interest, and that's how Carl got started. It was of Collins and so forth. To make a long story short, of course, Miami Beach was nothing like it is today. You know, swamplands and so forth. What Carl thought would take about six months to do took over 10 years to develop — Miami Beach.

Interviewer: And he wanted his cronies to come down?

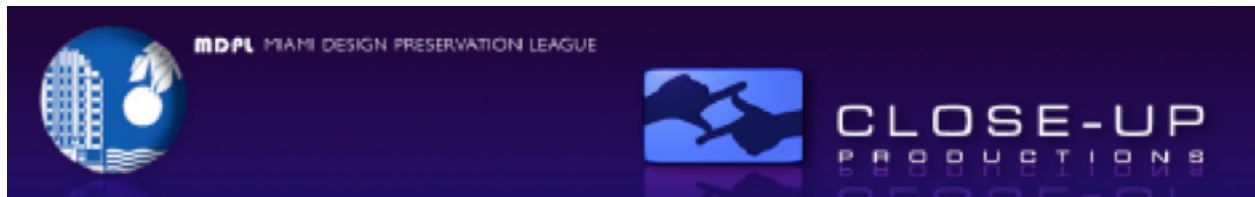
Fisher: Sorry?

Interviewer: He wanted his cronies to come down and build on it?

Fisher: Yeah.

Interviewer: Who were some of the people that he knew, that...

Fisher: Well, because it was such beautiful weather...you have to remember



that a lot of people were from Michigan, of course, and New York, but Carl knew the giants. You know, Firestone and all the big-name people. The spark plug people and all that. So, he enjoyed it, and these people had a lot of money, and so he thought, you know, “Come down here in the winter. It’s absolutely beautiful — the weather and so forth.” So, he talked his friends into coming down and so forth, and they all followed.

Interviewer: At what point did he build the Dixie Highway, to give them a road to get down there?

Fisher: That’s another smart thing. Of course, he started the Lincoln Highway, and we can go on about that, but the Dixie Highway — he knew that people had to come down, and so he designed the highway, actually, from Chicago — the main highway down — so people could drive down and see Miami Beach as it was being developed, because what use is it to have this beautiful place if nobody knows about it, or they can’t get down? So, that was one of the main reasons for the Dixie Highway.

Interviewer: That must have been quite an engineering feat.

Fisher: Yes. It was. The Dixie Highway was also — and then again, I’m going to go back to his common sense, that in those days, in the cities, there were all paved roads within the city limits, but once you got out of the city limits, it was all gravel and dirt, and particularly after the heavy rains — this is throughout the country — those roads were impassable. You can see a lot of pictures — in fact, I have pictures in my book of Model T Fords and the dirt is up there, that high, and they’re stuck. People just were not going to drive.

Again, common sense clicks in. Carl knew that they had to have roads, paved roads that people would have confidence on, so they could drive, as well as signs. He thought the first thing they should do is build a highway from New York City to San Francisco, which is about 3,500 miles, approximately. So, Carl got all of the people he knew and said, “We need to build this highway,” and that’s exactly what happened.

Interviewer: He got investors?

Fisher: Yeah. He got all the investors, and he knew that they had to do it because the government would not do it. It would take their time, and so much politics that the government — and that’s exactly what



happened. The state governors would say, “No, you’ve got to have this highway go through this part of my state,” or, “Why won’t you do this?” I mean, the bickering would have been unbelievable.

So, Carl knew that they had to make the decision themselves, and they did — what they call the Trailblazers. They made the first trip without about a dozen cars, with Carl leading it. He did a convoy across the country. He wanted to find the best route, and they did that, no problem. Then he knew how to get the highway where it should be built.

Interviewer: So, did he do connecting...?

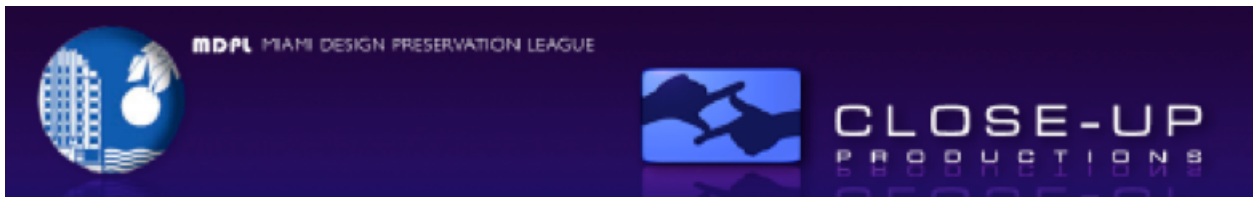
Fisher: Yeah. He started in Indianapolis with his first convoy, and went all the way to San Francisco, but in the meantime he had found out the best route from New York City — actually, which is today Highway 40 and so forth, and today Highway 80 parallels the old Lincoln Highway, so you can see the freeway that we have today parallels the old Lincoln Highway. That was due to Dwight Eisenhower.

Dwight Eisenhower, as a young Army officer, led a convoy on the Lincoln Highway, and when he signed the Interstate Freeway Act in 1954, he credited his experiences on the Lincoln Highway, because it had such an impression on him that he knew, because of the Lincoln Highway, that the states needed a freeway, and that’s exactly what happened. So in essence, you could say that Carl was the father of our freeway system that we know today.

Interviewer: I want to get clear on what was actually built, or what was already built.

Fisher: Okay. What happened was, Carl got donations from some of the largest cement companies in the country. General Motors, [phonetic][30:46] William Durant — some of the big heavies — they donated their money, and Carl did, too. So, they had enough funds.

Then, of course, they went state by state, with this big cement company providing the cement, because this was good publicity for them. Then they got all the right equipment and donations, so they built, actually, the freeway with their own capital and so forth, but they knew that they did not — afterwards, they knew that the government, the white knight, would have to take over, because it would be impossible for them to with their funds. They would run out of funds, and the government would eventually have to take over the



maintenance of the roads, and that's what happened.

Interviewer: Were there any tolls charged?

Fisher: Tolls charged? No, not in the beginning.

Interviewer: It was free?

Fisher: All free. See, Carl knew how to promote the Lincoln Highway. He would go to each state and have newspaper articles and so forth. The press was really behind this whole thing. Getting the press was extremely important, because that made the public aware of how important this was. What they also did was, in a lot of the cities, they took — the Lincoln Highway would pave one or two miles, so the people could actually see what it was like, riding a paved road.

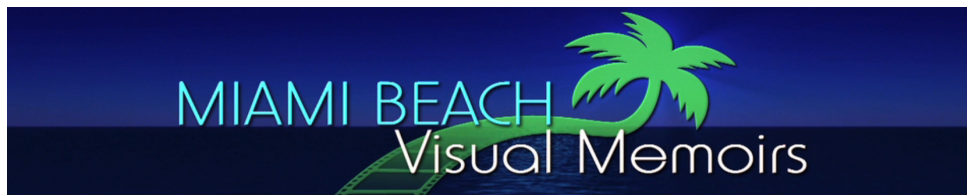
Once the people realized what was happening, there was just no stopping it, and of course it made sense, because the Lincoln Highway was the first highway, and then after that, these other highways became connected to the Lincoln Highway, and the cities, of course. Then you had Route 66, which was very famous, and was a branch of the Lincoln Highway.

Interviewer: So, in a way, he had the prototype of the national highway.

Fisher: Definitely. Absolutely. What was interesting was, Henry Ford — in my book, I have several letters corresponding between them. Carl desperately wanted to get Henry Ford involved. Carl went to...you know, Henry Ford grew up on a farm. Loved animals. He was at a state fair in Michigan, and Carl found out where he was. He was actually at a pig corral at the state fair. Carl went up to him. Of course, Henry knew Carl, because Henry was a racing fan. He even raced cars, and all that. So, they had a good relationship before.

At that time, 70 or 80 percent of the cars were Fords. So, Carl went and saw Henry Ford leaning across the fence, looking at these pigs. So, Carl went up to him and explained. They had, of course, corresponded in letters, and so Henry said yes. He shook his hand. "I'll support the Lincoln Highway."

Then, the next day, Carl went to Henry's office, and was met by a secretary, and the secretary said that Henry had changed his mind.



“He’s not going to support it,” and of course, Carl was devastated.

Interviewer: Why had he changed his mind?

Fisher: Even up until today, people are still speculating about that. Some people say it was because it was not Henry’s original idea. Henry had an ego, like everybody else, and because it was not his original idea, he didn’t want to necessarily jump on the bandwagon and so forth. Henry was very gifted.

It was kind of interesting, doing the history of Henry...actually, it was not Henry’s idea, but it was a foreman who worked for Henry, who came from a meatpacking place in either Chicago or Omaha — where they slaughter cattle, and they put them upside down, take their hooves, put them on this conveyor belt, and put them down the line.

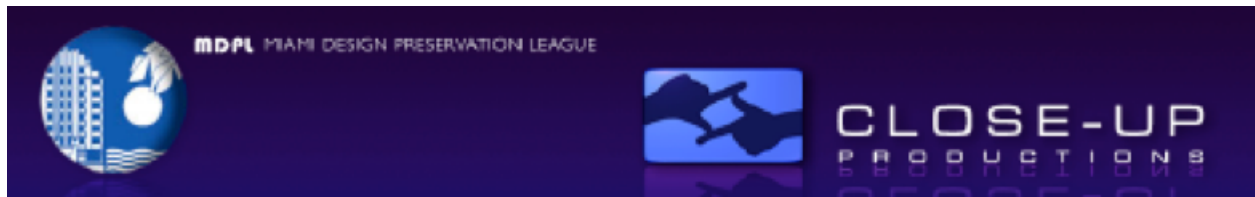
So, this foreman suggested to Henry, “You should do this in the manufacturing of your automobile,” and bingo, the light came on. So actually, it was not his idea, but Henry was smart enough to capitalize on that idea, and obviously we know what happened then. That was kind of interesting. The speculation goes on today. I don’t know why Henry never jumped in, but it is what it is.

Interviewer: The Dixie Highway — are there remnants of it still?

Fisher: There are a few signs that you can see — I believe they’re still up — that say “Dixie”. I think there’s been some changes, and some people people have either taken down — which would be a shame, really — because maybe it has a southern thing...I don’t know. The history is what it is, but I would hope that they would keep them up, because the “Dixie” sign is really — it’s history. It’s what it was, so I would hope they’d still keep up the signs.

Interviewer: One of the things that, I guess, historians have pointed out that was a negative in his background was anti-semitism. In your research, in your exhaustive research reading letters, did you see indications of a streak of anti-semitism?

Fisher: That’s a good point. We have to remember, and it’s very difficult for us today to look back on those times. When I was reading my research for the book, prejudice was all around. In fact, in the early days of Miami Beach, when people were selling, leasing and so forth, they would go to a stationary store — what we would call a stationary store — and



the documents were already printed out. The documents said, “We will not lease, we will not sell, to an Indian, a black, an Irishman, a Jew,”...they were all printed in the states. It’s unbelievable, but that was the acceptance at the time.

We have to remember that as far as the Jews were concerned, even back in New York, if you trace — and I did — the early days of the banking industry, the banks themselves would not allow any board of directors, or any major manager, to be Jewish. It was forbidden. That was Wall Street at the time, and so you can see how that — obviously, the reverse is true today.

Carl had...no. I found very little. There were some things Carl mentioned in there about the Jewish people and so forth, but you have to remember that at that time, it was accepted. You have to remember that Carl’s closest friends were Jewish. I remember one of his closest friends was Fleischman — you know, the big food person — and Carl and Fleischman were very close. In fact, Carl was a pall bearer at Flieschman’s funeral.

In fact, I have a letter in there from Mrs. Fleischman — and I put the whole letter in there. She was so thankful for their relationship, and Julius Fleischman was very close to Carl, and Mrs. Fleischman wrote in the letter how much her husband appreciated the relationship with Carl. So, Carl’s closest friends were Jewish.

Interviewer: Fleischman’s first name was Julius?

Fisher: Yes.

Interviewer: So, about the relationship with Jane...did she talk about him at all, when you met her for the first time?

Fisher: Oh yes, she constantly went on. Yeah. Everything was about really not herself so much, as just...yeah, I could see that in there, but she loved Carl, and it was really remarkable that you could see that.

Of course, with Jane, when you say “talk about”, it’s interesting. She had a newspaper article that would come out every Sunday in the Miami Herald; it was “I Remember When”. So, every week, every Sunday, people would read it. That went on for years and years and years, until Jane passed away in 1967.



So, she wrote that article a good 10 years or more. “I Remember When”. So, a lot of the people...of course, now it’s probably a handful of people. I don’t know if there’s hardly anybody alive now that would know about Carl Fisher, but the people the knew, and that was a way to keep it going, with this article in the Miami Herald.

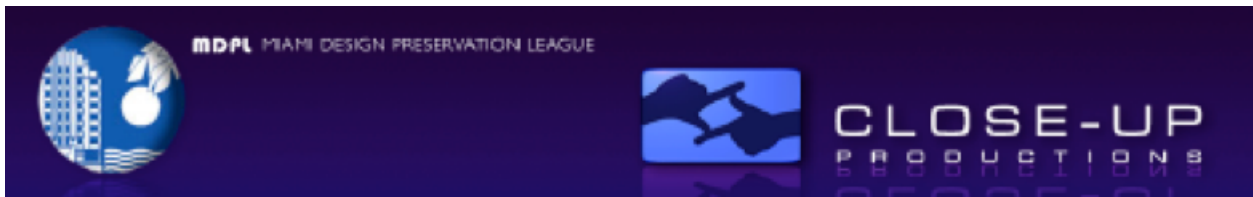
Interviewer: Did you come across any relationships with organized crime? The Mafia?

Fisher: That’s interesting. In my book, I detail quite a bit about Al Capone. It was actually a [phonetic][40:39] court seed, but Carl made a big deal, even in the papers and so forth — Al Capone would come down to Miami Beach in the winters, strolling around the beach with his cigars and all that, and Carl really detested Al Capone for a lot of reasons. Also, the editor of the Miami Herald felt the same way, so between the editor of the Miami Herald and Carl, they had a good combination of putting articles in the paper.

Anyway, to make a long story short, Carl finally asked if there could be a hearing in front of a judge, because of Al bringing down the values of real estate. Carl thought that because of Al Capone coming in here, this would bring the values down. So, he wanted to have, you know, a trial, and get got — which is interesting — 50 witnesses. Even Harvey Firestone. When it came to the day, none of the witnesses showed up except Carl and a Jewish lady. I can’t remember her name. She was the first Mayor of Miami Beach. This little Jewish lady.

She and Carl were the only two that testified in public. In the courthouse was Al Capone, you know, staring at Carl, and of course Carl stared back at him. So, it was a dramatic scene, and I go into detail about that. It was kind of rumored that if Al Capone lost this court case, that he would put a contract out on Carl, and I have co-written a screenplay, and I have in this screenplay a scene of Al Capone telling one of his henchmen, Vinnie, before he goes into the courthouse, “If I lose, gun him down as he comes out.”

So, I have a scene with this man in this big, black Cadillac sitting across the street from the courthouse with his Tommy gun. It’s a laugh. It’s quite a thing. Actually, I don’t know whether that happened, but there were rumors around, and I’m sure Al Capone — because you have to remember that the St. Valentine’s Massacre; where was Al Capone? In Miami Beach. He put the contract out that killed all those people, see? So, he could have put a contract out on Carl.



I think he really would have, so it was good that Carl lost the case, because otherwise I think Al Capone would have taken care of him. Isn't that something? It's scary. All those witnesses that said they were going to come never showed up, and I can see, even nowadays, you know, you get intimidated by, you know, the Mafia and so on.

Interviewer: Yes. As a matter of fact, we've found it difficult to get anyone, really, to talk straight about those connections to this day.

Fisher: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. So, that's kind of interesting. It was remarkable — before I forget — that Al Capone had, maybe, a high school education, and of course Carl had 6th grade. What was interesting was in those days, Carl had a speedboat. I have a picture of the speedboat. Carl would take runs over to Cuba. He knew all the presidentials, and all the top people.

Interviewer: During Prohibition?

Fisher: Yeah. Prohibition was from 1920 to 1933. Carl would take trips over in his speedboat, and he had, in the floorboards, secret compartments, and he'd bring back this rum. Now, Carl was not really a rum drinker, but he had a lot of friends that were. So, Carl would bring this rum back, and he would send it to his friends back in Michigan, and all over the country, really, who were rum drinkers.

Interviewer: So, he was a bootlegger.

Fisher: He was a bootlegger — again, like Al Capone. Al Capone had a limited education; Carl had a limited education. They were both bootleggers in their own way. Of course, Carl brought it back but he didn't sell it at a profit. He just distributed it to his friends. So, I found that pretty remarkable.

Interviewer: Maybe that was part of the enmity between Carl and Al Capone — that they were rivals, to some extent.

Fisher: Yeah. I'm sure Al Capone even knew that, you know. There were rumors that the Coast Guard were chasing Carl in his speedboat, and again, these are rumors, but I don't know whether the Coast Guard really wanted to capture and arrest Carl that much or not, because I think they were friends of Carl's, anyways, and Carl never got picked



up, which was kind of interesting, for bringing over all this illegal...

Also, when President Harding came down to visit Miami Beach, Carl was able to — President Harding had a lot of other plans for the day, but Carl met President Harding, got him to come on his boat, took him way out — several miles offshore. Who knows what happened, as far as drinking out there, but he also did that. So, it's kind of interesting.

Of course, the next day the newspapers all across the country picked up this idea that President Harding had gone with Carl Fisher, which was not expected, and had been out on Carl Fisher's boat celebrating and so forth. After that, President Harding said, "This is a beautiful place," and when he said that it hit, again, the major newspapers across the country, and that just sold Miami Beach to the rest of the country.

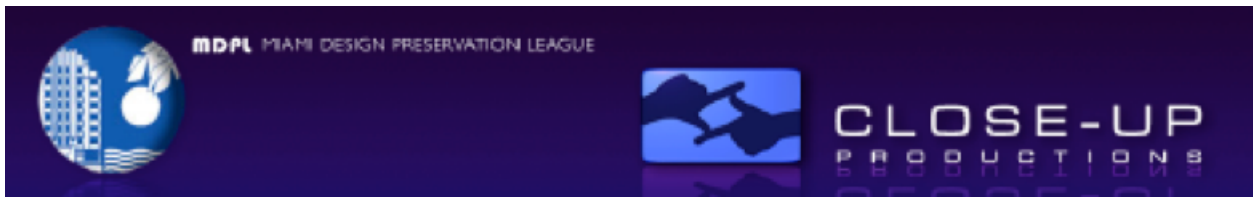
Interviewer: So, Carl Fisher had a knack for publicity.

Fisher: Yes. Yes. Ever since the earlier days — like I said about the bicycles — Carl was a showman, and so forth. He even had three elephants, and he would use one of the elephants to give children rides, you know, and of course that was big.

Another interesting story was that when Miami Beach opened its first bank, somebody had the bright idea to bring in Carl's elephant. Carl had a professional trainer, an Indian, that had a good relationship with the Elephants, particularly Rosie. So, they had the idea of bringing Rosie into this beautiful new bank in Miami Beach for the day opening.

So, they brought Rosie in on this marble floor, and Rosie was very gentle, but you could imagine, back in those days, all the cameras had these bright flash lights going off. All at once, you could see 20 or 30 photographers going boom, boom, boom, and they hit Rosie's eyes, and Rosie became so excited that she made a deposit on the floor, and you could imagine the people inside — not only with the odor, but the sound and everything, just helter-skelter ran out of the bank. The next day, "Miami Beach gets the biggest deposit on record" or something like that. It was hilarious. Of course, that went all across the country.

Interviewer: Who was with him when he died?



Fisher: His doctor, a Jewish man by the name of [phonetic][48:44] Koltenstein, and a couple other gentlemen. There were actually four people when he died. He was 69 years old. I go into it into the book about how [phonetic][48:54] Pinchas had written him a letter, asking Carl to come and join them for a 15th anniversary luncheon of Miami Beach, and Carl normally would turn these things down, but he did accept. Then they played a joke on him, and then Pinchas writes him a letter on July 14th, and then Carl never got that letter because Carl died at 4 o'clock in the afternoon on July 15th. That's what happened.

Then, of course, Jane was in the Catskills, and Margaret, who was his second wife, was there, and then there was a long debate — again, I go into it in the book — about where he should be buried, and that went on for a couple of years. Carl was cremated, and because Margaret and Miami Beach could not agree on where he should be buried, and also who would take care of the burial grounds and so forth, his urn was later moved to his mausoleum in Indianapolis, where he's still buried today, along with his mother and brothers and so forth, and his son Carl Jr., too.

Interviewer: So, he had the son with his second wife?

Fisher: No. That was with Jane.

Interviewer: With Jane? Oh, I thought they lost their son.

Fisher: Well, that was it. They had Carl Jr., which was devastating, because he lived only 26 days. He died of a digestive disorder. Actually, his intestines. This little baby could not get food because of his intestines. He actually died of starvation, which is kind of remarkable. Carl, with millions of dollars, and his son dies of starvation. He only lived 26 days.

That was devastating, and Carl never recovered from that, which is interesting. The early hotels were built without bars. They served coffee and tea and things like that. Lemonade, this and that. Jane did not believe in drinking. Their parties just had, like I said, coffee, tea and lemonade.

The early hotels had no bars. After that...Carl was a social drinker before, but after that, Carl started kind of hitting the bottle, because he wanted to be a father more than anything in the world, only because of his background. I think he wanted to prove to himself that he could be



a good father, and so when Carl Jr. was announced, he sent letters to Fleischman, and all these famous people in the country. You know, Will Rogers — all of them — about it.

Then, of course, the tragedy happened. That's really hard after you expose your joy, and then have this happen, and he just never could get over that. Never. They adopted a son, Jacky, which was a remarkable little boy, but Carl really just couldn't identify with that. It was kind of a sad story in itself, but that's the way it is.

Interviewer: Did he get involved in much of the politics? Did he get involved in much of the political structure of the day?

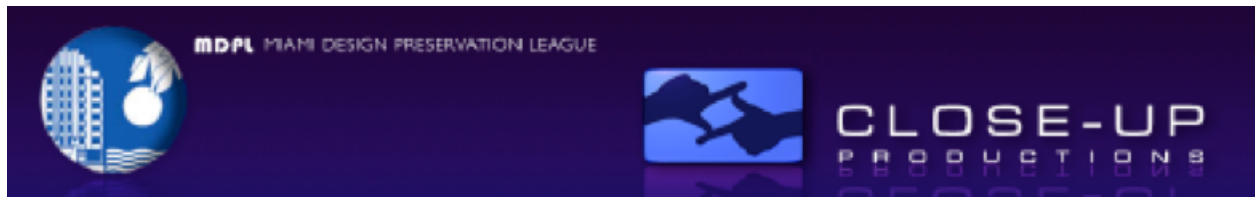
Fisher: No. Carl really was not a politician, with the exception of President Harding, and the people that he had to meet — the governors, you know, while promoting the Lincoln Highway. Again, he was a private person. What's interesting about Carl is, if he met important people, politicians and so forth, and even when Jane would throw parties, Carl was, again, private, and as soon as it became small talk — you know how it is at parties.

As soon as it became small talk and gossip, Carl would excuse himself and say, "I've got to go to another important meeting," which really wasn't true. He went to his bedroom, because he was an avid reader.

He would retreat to his bedroom, where he had a stack of books beside his bed. He would retreat, and he had several dogs throughout his life, but he would retreat with a dog laying beside him on the bed, reading books by himself. These were probably some of the happiest moments of his life, lying on the bed with a dog, reading books by himself, versus being out with small talk.

Interviewer: He didn't have to get involved with a lot of the hurly-burly of development?

Fisher: No. No. He had these hundreds of acres and so forth, and I go into details about how these big roots were there, and the workers were having a hell of a time getting these roots out. Carl picked up the phone, called the president of the International Harvester Company in Chicago, and the next week, by train, there were three big steel blades — you know, with trucks — sent out, and after that, they just took up all those roots, because it was impossible before.



Carl did a lot of dredging, and did all that and so forth, and dredged these islands that we have today. Actually, the Bay and certain parts were pretty shallow, so it was pretty easy to dredge, but even, for example, like Fisher Island...that was named after Fisher only because of the locals. You know, Fisher did this big island, and the locals would say, "Oh, there's Fisher Island." They kept repeating it over and over. That's how Fisher Island got its name, not because Fisher wanted it. It was because the locals kept calling it Fisher Island.

Interviewer: They associated it with his work.

Fisher: They associated it, and the name stuck, so that's about the only place that you'll see "Fisher" today — the name, as far as his achievements.

Interviewer: It's true.

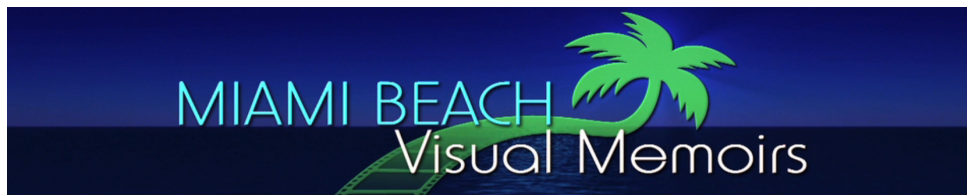
Fisher: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So, he had a really rough time after the hurricane.

Fisher: Yeah. What's really interesting is — well, first of all, going back to the building, Carl was a firm believer that somebody should get what they pay for. A lot of developers sometimes will put in certain things, but Carl always made sure the paved streets were in, the lights were in, the sewer systems for that extent were in, and that took a lot of money, so Carl never expected somebody to buy something without them seeing what they could see. So, I thought...he's been praised because that's very remarkable, and it took a lot of money.

Getting back to another thing, in July of 1926, a hurricane came. In those days, they didn't have all the technology, of course. This was one of the first major hurricanes that hit Miami Beach, and hundreds of lives were lost. Thousands injured. Homes destroyed. Yachts, boats in the harbor gone completely.

Carl was in the middle of building [phonetic][56:27] Montauk. He started Montauk in 1925. When he heard this, he stopped his project. He got a telegram, stopped the project completely in Montauk — he had bought, like, 10 thousand acres. A big development. He went back to Miami, and with his own personal money — over \$1 million dollars he spent in rebuilding Miami Beach.



That was before FEMA. There were no government programs in those days. Carl knew that he had to do it. It was his responsibility, because he knew even if the government would come in, they would make so many — as we've seen before, with criticism of the government and FEMA — they take so long to act. You know, this and that, and the politicians get involved. For Miami Beach to get built again, it would have been years and years.

Carl took \$1 million dollars, went and did it himself. Again, that was a lot of money. He didn't have to do it, but he did, and I would say spending that money — the Depression and the hurricane were things beyond Carl's control, and that's what led to his financial downfall.

Interviewer: Was he ever philosophical about that, in writing in letters in things?

Fisher: No, not really. He took responsibility. He knew he had it, and other people discouraged him saying, "Carl, you don't have to do this," but he knew, deep down, that this was his city that he loved, and he was a builder — he knew how to do it — and he just couldn't wait for the government.

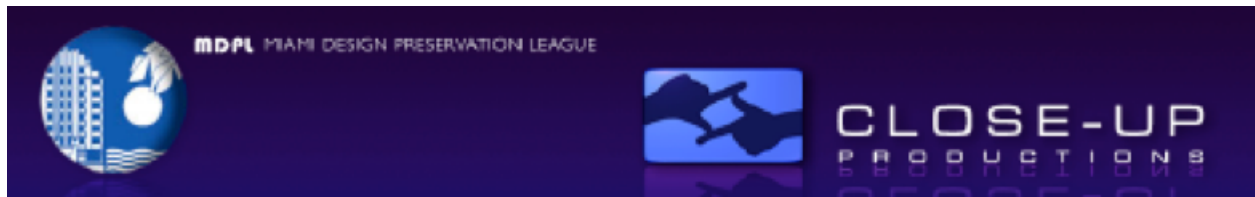
Interviewer: He was not bitter at the end of his life, then?

Fisher: No, no. Sad, but not bitter, no. He played — as Howard Kleinberg, another writer for the Miami Herald, and an author, said, it was like poker. Let the chips fall where they may. Let's go with it.

Carl liked money, as far as what it could do, but Carl was never materialistic. It was never about himself. It was never how much money he could make. I'll admit, he could have done a lot of things differently, the way he handled things, but it was never about how rich he could be. That was not important, because he was a very humble person.

It was never really about the money itself. So, the fact that...he was very adequate, like we mentioned before. He didn't die a pauper, but I don't think that bothered him much. He lead a good life, and he accomplished a lot, really, considering his background.

Interviewer: I read a quote — I think it was on your website — where someone referred to him as having lived the American dream, and he contradicted him and said that it wasn't a dream, and he wasn't a visionary, and he could have gone and had a cattle ranch.



Fisher: Yes.

Interviewer: Could you give us that exact quote? Do you...?

Fisher: No, I don't remember that exactly. I've heard that, but I don't remember the exact quote. Again, he didn't want to be classified as a big visionary, and you know, Encyclopedia Britannica wanted to do this and that, but getting back to my thing before I forget, when I was researching, I came across an article in the Saturday Evening Post. Now, for those who don't remember, that was the...that was like God, that Saturday Evening Post. It came out on a weekly basis.

I read an article that the editor of the Saturday Evening Post wrote, that it was a travesty that Carl was not remembered. When I read that article — because I still didn't have that much confidence in myself about doing this whole thing. When I read that article while doing my research, that the editor of the Saturday Evening Post said it was a travesty that Carl was not remembered, it was a Eureka moment for me, because then I knew I was on the right track, and this had to get out.

Interviewer: Did your mother live to see the book published?

Fisher: No. She passed away in the '80's. I think in the beginning she knew I was working on a book, but no. My mother died in the late '80's, and unfortunately she never saw that happen, but I think, looking above, she'd be proud.

Interviewer: Have you encountered any other relatives of his in the course of doing this work?

Fisher: You know, you put your book out and you hope that things will happen. My book has been out quite a few years. I was always hoping I'd hear from William Galloway, who was Carl Fisher's black confidant. Black servant. It's a remarkable story of what happened there. I go into detail about that, because that's also when racial issues were really at the peak.

Interviewer: Well, tell us about that.



Fisher: Carl had this black waiter. Actually, he met him — William Galloway — at a restaurant where Carl would go every day, and order the same thing: steak and potatoes, every day. To make a long story short, Carl became friends with the waiter. Carl hired him, and Galloway was with Carl throughout the entire rest of his life, which is really interesting because Galloway took over completely. Carl had, maybe at that time, 14 employees — black servants and so forth — and Galloway was the head of the whole thing.

Galloway took over, completely, the household money and everything. Galloway was his chauffeur. He'd drive the car. Galloway was everywhere. Galloway met President Harding, and all these famous people, and I often look back — still do — on what went through his mind. I don't know what his education was, but he had beautiful penmanship. He wrote Carl a couple letters, and I put the letters that he actually wrote in my book, so people could see the penmanship this black person had. It was beautiful.

Interviewer: What's his first name again?

Fisher: William Galloway. They became friends and so forth. It's kind of a remarkable story about — like I said, Galloway was with Carl all over, and in those days they didn't necessarily like...we talk about prejudice, but you didn't see that many white people and black people with their photographs taken together. Didn't matter to Carl. I have a picture in the book of that.

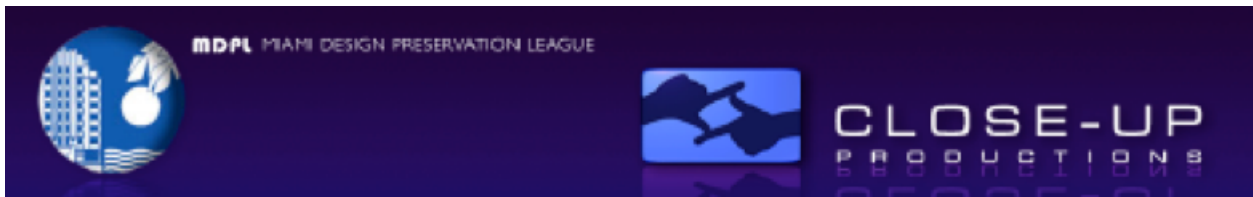
So, Carl was really a social maverick in many ways. He didn't believe in...at that time, of course, the beaches were segregated. Carl actually — there was part of a beach that Carl devoted to the black people who could come to the beach.

Interviewer: Where was that?

Fisher: I don't remember. It's a certain part of the beach that was kind of known, in those early years, that they went to.

Interviewer: That's interesting, because that's unknown. I had not heard that before.

Fisher: Yeah. There was a part that they frequented. The same thing had happened in Indianapolis. Carl would hold certain days where only black drivers and their families could come to race, and that was a



special time, and Carl held that, and not too many people know about it. In a book called, I think, “The Black Flag,” — I was reminded by another author when I was writing my book. He said, “Jerry, that was really unusual that Carl would have...” — it was more like a picnic. Let me put it that way. Black people could come. They had some racing, and it was only for them. So, Carl was very conscious of what was happening, you know, along these lines.

Interviewer: In your research, did you come across anything that surprised you?

Fisher: You mean overall?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Fisher: Well, yeah. I go back to the education. It surprised me that all these famous people with high educations would associate with Carl. I mean, that really surprised me. The other big surprise I had was Jane Fisher writing about when the Indianapolis 500 was being built. There were 200-300 black laborers doing — this was in the beginning, when they had to put the tar on, remember. Actually, the black workers appreciated the work at that time.

During the construction, they had these big, gigantic containers, and this black tar would come pour down into buckets. One of the black workers got too close; this tar came down and went on him, and the majority of his body became burned. Bright red flesh was exposed.

William Galloway was there. He rushed to Carl, told Carl about it. They go and...[crying] I'm emotional about it. They pick up this black worker, put him in Carl's limousine, and they go to the closest hospital. He's not treated because he's black. Carl becomes just unbelievably...he knew he couldn't make an argument. They take the black worker, about 20 minutes later, and of course, he dies.

In Jane Fisher's book, Carl was so distraught about that that in those days, hospitals were built with private money. So, Carl stopped his money. He stopped donating to this hospital, and got all of his friends to stop, and the hospital closed.

Interviewer: The one that refused him?

Fisher: I found that remarkable, because I just didn't know about that. One of



the first days, when I went to the library, I had a researcher help me, and we looked it up. The dates correspond. This hospital — it said “closed”. It didn’t say why it was closed, but it closed on that date, and I knew exactly what had happened. So, with the librarian and I getting that exact date — because a hospital really wouldn’t close unless, financially, there was no money involved.

Interviewer: Do you remember the name of the hospital?

Fisher: No. I can’t remember, but it was closed. Once I got those dates, then I knew exactly what was happening. So, Carl was...that was probably one of the biggest...I knew about the story, but the fact that I could check it out, and it was true, really had a big impression on me — that this all happened.

Interviewer: Did he fund the building of another hospital, you said?

Fisher: Yes. Yes. The hospital that treated the black worker, he donated a lot of money, and they put on big new wings. An expansion.

Interviewer: What hospital was that?

Fisher: I don’t recall.

Interviewer: This was in Indianapolis?

Fisher: In Indianapolis. Yeah. It was well-documented. That was kind of an interesting thing that that really happened. Those are true stories. I think that had the biggest effect on me, as far as from a research standpoint, that I came across, that I could — again, it was in Jane Fisher’s book, but it just made me feel good that I could substantiate that.

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