

Mill Valley Oral History Program

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GARY FISHER

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2015**

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In this oral history, mountain bike pioneer Gary Fisher recounts his participation in the development of the sport and the industry for which Marin County has become world famous. Gary describes how he got into racing bicycles at the age of 12 while living in Burlingame. His passion for bicycles initially set him apart from his peers, he recalls, making him something of an “outcast.” After two years at Burlingame High School, his family moved to Belvedere and Gary started attending Redwood High School. Gary recalls moving to Fairfax where he met and became friends with Charlie Kelly and other legends from the history of mountain biking. Gary characterizes Marin as a place of creative synergy, and shares his views on the role of bicycles, among other things, in the future of urban living.

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Oral History of Gary Fisher
September 21st, 2015

Editor's note: This transcript is based on a recorded interview and has been edited for clarity and accuracy. It has not been reviewed by the interviewee, Gary Fisher.

0:00:01 Debra Schwartz: My name is Debra Schwartz. Today is Monday, September 21st and I am sitting here with Gary Fisher. Gary, thank you so much for sitting and talking with me today. I represent the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library, and you are participating in our oral history program here. And we are turning off phones, and I just want to say, welcome and thank you for sitting down to talk with me and sharing with me your story.

0:00:35 Gary Fisher: Thank you, it feels very comfortable to be here.

0:00:40 Debra Schwartz: So, let's just start with a little bit of background information about you. I mean, people know your name, so I won't go there first, but you are —

0:00:50 Gary Fisher: Well, I was born in 1950 at the Oak Knoll Naval Hospital over in Oakland. When I was six-months-old my father was in the Navy, and we took a boat to Guam. My mother said I got tremendously seasick. We spent two-and-a-half years there, almost three years there. And then my mom decided she wanted to go home. We went back to Beverly Hills and we lived with my grandfather and grandmother there in Beverly Hills. My grandfather worked for Warner Brothers for 40 years. He worked for Hal B. Wallis before that for 10 years. He actually created what's called today American Broadcast English. He'd bring people like Joan Crawford, Errol Flynn, Ronald Reagan to the house.

I would go on set with him sometimes and he taught me how to stand, how to look, how to speak, all these things. It was astounding. I used to spend summers down there and I used to spend summers with my two sets of grandparents on my father's side up in Sacramento. My father — well, his father was an architect, and my father was an architect. In fact, my father owned Fisher Friedman and that was for maybe about 30 years, one of the larger architectural firms in San Francisco. They had an office right above Tadich's restaurant there and they had a backdoor pass, let me tell you. My parents lived in the house that they live in still today in Belvedere, and they are long time members of the San Francisco Yacht Club. And my other ancestors —

0:02:39 Debra Schwartz: Will you tell me your parents' names please?

0:02:41 Gary Fisher: Bob and Saloma Fisher.

0:02:43 Debra Schwartz: And your grandparents, the grandfather who was —

0:02:46 Gary Fisher: He's Fred Applegate.

0:02:48 Debra Schwartz: Fred Applegate he was in L.A.?

0:02:49 Gary Fisher: You go look in the Smithsonian, and his desk and his script for Mickey Rooney's *Midsummer's Night Dream* in 1936 is there, and colored pencils that he used to annotate the script. He developed the job script director. And he did a lot of big movies.

0:03:12 Debra Schwartz: So you grew up here in Belvedere?

0:03:14 Gary Fisher: Well —

0:03:14 Debra Schwartz: I mean later.

0:03:16 Gary Fisher: We lived in Burlingame. I went to Burlingame High in freshman, sophomore. When I ended my sophomore year, we moved to Belvedere. I went to Redwood High, class of '68. I started racing a bike, riding a bike, racing a bike down in Burlingame. I was a member of a club called the Belmont Bicycle Club, BBC. We had an Englishman as a — the guy who my father would take photos. And his stuff is incredible of bike racing in the '60s. '64 was the first year they had a national road championship and that was actually down in Los Angeles. Before that, it was all since 1932, it had been just racing on the track, they didn't have any road racing.

And Northern California in the '60s, mid-'60s was really — Northern and Southern California — the renaissance of bicycle road racing. So, I started in '62, I was 12, and I was a road racer. I rode the road, I rode the track. Velodrome, there's a Velodrome down in San Jose called Hellyer Velodrome. I was there on opening day for this whole thing. I was a total die-hard, I am not going to do anything else but race a bike when I was like 12 years old. And I'll tell you, in school they thought I was weird. It's not like today, where the kids think bikes are cool. Oh no, I mean you either were a greaser and you wore peggers, or you were a surfer and a bike guy. Holy mackerel, little girl socks and black shorts and everything. You're weird.

And I got seen on the road a few times. They all talked about it in school and I was an outcast. Oh my God. And my mother — it's really funny. I saw Dennis Christopher a couple of days ago. I have seen him a few times. And the guy was a star of *Breaking Away*. And it's funny, I am telling him, "You know my mother, my mother told me, that's a story about you, and that was a story about me." I was into this stuff and I didn't care what anybody else thought. That was it. And then I was in a race in Fairfax and it was in '66, and they told me I couldn't race anymore because my hair was down just below my ears like The Beatles, and all that. They told me I couldn't race, and well, the week before I'd been to a race down in Pescadero, California and there were two bands playing, The Grateful Dead and the Quicksilver Messenger Service. And get this, man, they played two nights and maybe a 100 people showed up, period. Period. And it was at a point like if you wanted to get on stage and play with the band, you could. It was like

that. And it was free love and craziness. I was like 15. Jerry Garcia taught me how to roll a J on that thing.

And a girl, Quicksilver girl, right? David Freiberg's wife. She grabs hold of me, we're making out in the straw field out behind, and I'm like going, "Whoa! I'm intoxicated." And I say, "Okay, do you wanna throw me out of bike racing? Fine." And I sort of became a runaway, and I was always over in the Haight and they had, you know, 710 Ashbury and 715 with a band lift, and I'd be living in one of those, working at the Carousel Ballroom. And I did some stuff like I decorated the Jefferson Airplane mansion, that was fun. I worked for those guys and I worked for the Dead sometimes, and I took care of the Bear, goodness gracious.

0:07:25 Debra Schwartz: What's the Bear?

0:07:26 Gary Fisher: He was Augustus Stanley Owsley, and he made a lot of LSD. And he actually passed away two years ago in Australia by cause of an auto accident. The guy was healthy as could be, and he had quite the — oranges, spaghetti, ketchup, steak, and milk. I always have to keep these in the refrigerator. [laughs]

0:07:49 Gary Fisher: That was his diet at that time. He was a pretty pale —

0:07:51 Debra Schwartz: Wait, say it again.

0:07:52 Gary Fisher: It was oranges, spaghetti, ketchup, steak, and milk.

0:08:00 Debra Schwartz: At least there's the fruit there.

0:08:02 Gary Fisher: Yeah, but that was what made them — that was survival food in the house. Of course, we ate out all the time and stuff on the road and all that.

0:08:12 Debra Schwartz: So, were there other people your age there living — was this sort of a communal life?

0:08:17 Gary Fisher: Yeah. It was Jack Leary, Timothy's son, same age. We used to hang out at that time. And I survived in that scene until Altamont, and Altamont was the end.¹ Yeah, 'cause you had —

0:08:31 Debra Schwartz: Got greedy then, huh?

0:08:33 Gary Fisher: Well, no. Here's what happened. It was like an insanity in a way. It was a funny thing. The Hell's Angels we were using all the time.

0:08:41 Debra Schwartz: Some of these people listening won't know what you're talking about. Maybe you can give a little preface about it.

¹ Gary refers to the notorious 1969 Altamont Speedway rock concert that ended in violence.—Editor.

0:08:47 Gary Fisher: Oh, goodness gracious. Anyway, the Altamont was something where the Rolling Stones were gonna come to town and were gonna have a big concert in Golden Gate Park, with all the bands and everything. It was like East meets West in a lot of ways and it was really gonna be a momentous thing, just in all that good energy and everything. So, the City of San Francisco really didn't want us have that thing, and I was there at the very first meeting. It was Bill Thompson from the Jefferson Airplane, Ron Rakow from The Grateful Dead, Sam Cutler from The Rolling Stones, and Sonny Barger from the Hells Angels. And we always used the Hells Angels because we couldn't trust anybody else. Backstage there were drugs. Come on. And the Angels were great, they were perfect.

Anyway, this whole concert, we wanted to do it in San Francisco, the city wouldn't let us do it in Golden Gate Park or anywhere. And so, we're going to Sears Point Raceway and that fell through, and then Altamont came about, and it was awful. And what happened that made things go out of control with the Hells Angels was that they didn't have a very strict backstage list. There wasn't a whole procedure for that thing, and about 500 beautiful women got backstage and the band managers are going to Sonny Barger, "Man, you're out of control."

0:10:09 Debra Schwartz: You mean the Hells Angels let the girls in?

0:10:11 Gary Fisher: Yeah, they let all these pretty girls in.

0:10:12 Debra Schwartz: They just kept letting the girls in?

0:10:14 Gary Fisher: Yeah, the pretty girls. There were tons of them. They all show up for The Rolling Stones. Oh my God, it was completely at another level than anybody was used to. What's an Angel do when they go out of control? They get violent, and that's what happened and the whole vibe changed. Four people died and it was an end of the '60s movement in San Francisco. Almost all the bands left town. Some went to Oakland and most of them went to Marin, and then there were tribes of people that went to Kentucky and things. It was like the city cleared out and I left. I started living with a band called New Riders of the Purple Sage over in Kentfield. And I started riding bikes again. And they say, "Hey, you gotta meet this guy, Charlie Kelly. He's just like you. He's just like you." "Okay, cool." I meet Charlie. Shit, he's got the same colored bike I do, it's crazy. And we're friends, and like —

0:11:12 Debra Schwartz: Didn't you have another name? Didn't you go by another name?

0:11:14 Gary Fisher: Oh, with them, Spidey.

0:11:16 Debra Schwartz: Spidey?

0:11:16 Gary Fisher: Back with the band, but then that went away. Absolutely. 'Cause the other thing that came in was, there's a lot of bad drugs, and it was cocaine. Man, I

never forget, this guy comes from New York and he lays out this huge tin of coke at one of The Grateful Dead houses and he's saying, "It's not addictive and it's organic," and people believed him.

0:11:41 Debra Schwartz: What year would this be?

0:11:42 Gary Fisher: Oh, it was like '67.

0:11:45 Debra Schwartz: Really? That early?

0:11:46 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah. And things spiraled out of control really fast because you could buy an eighth of an ounce bottle of Merck brand cocaine sealed in a bottle for \$50. And what came about was this thing you call the "coke whore," and this woman wasn't there at all. She was just for a service unit item, but was unconscious for all — and this is like, "Man, this isn't what I signed up for." You know? And I got out of it. I was doing light shows, and I did all the different venues. And my partner, Alan Cooper, Redwood High guy. He's the father of Visual Basic and he's doing a thing called Cooper.com and he deals with IBM and Sony. It's just like me. We wound up dealing with the big guns.

0:12:40 Debra Schwartz: And when you're talking about this, you say this kind of incredulously because you're just an outcast bike guy who's suddenly in the midst of all this?

0:12:49 Gary Fisher: Outcast bike guy, and then you go to be a stupid hippie. And it's like, "Oh man, nobody trusts you." Back in the day they all thought we were crazy, absolutely. It's sort of the funny story of my life. My brother, he did it the other way: pocket protector, tape around the glasses at Redwood High; Stanford, mathematics, electronics; goes to Tandem Computer, works as a hardware designer for eight years; then he goes and says, "I want to get into business," goes to Harvard, gets an MBA; then he comes and works with me. It's like we take completely different paths and this is the way things work.

0:13:34 Debra Schwartz: So, let's get some context as far as time goes. So, you're biking, and I want to go back just a little bit about the bike. The moment where you said there was nothing else for you by age 12.

0:13:47 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah.

0:13:48 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember the bike, the moment? Was there a time when suddenly you just clicked?

0:13:53 Gary Fisher: Yeah, it was like, I would go on these rides with the other boys. They would be a little older than me and be into this. And it was like magic. All of a sudden my neighborhood went from 10 square blocks to 20 miles all around me and it was just a blast, really fun. A lot of things went on, I spent a lot of time doing it. And

man, I caught the bug something fierce. In the first year, I was doing these 60 and 80 mile rides. This old Englishman, Larry Wopple, and he was an East-Side London guy who had been a POW for a while, and he worked for Pan-American as a mechanic. That guy was hilarious. There was more than one time he took a piece of finch wire, wired it on to my handlebars on the back of his bike and towed my ass home. God bless him.

0:14:54 Debra Schwartz: So, you had, whatever reason, it was some kind of synergy between you and that bike?

0:15:00 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah. And it's not unusual. Now there's a lot of people that do.

0:15:06 Debra Schwartz: Let me ask, has it always been there?

0:15:10 Gary Fisher: Oh yeah.

0:15:11 Debra Schwartz: Has it ever receded?

0:15:15 Gary Fisher: It recedes when like — and it's this thing, you get too buried in your work. I'm really mission-driven and whatever it takes to get this one done. I grew up in this neighborhood. I'm realizing it now. When I was a teenager, I sort of resented growing up here, but I go into the yacht club there, and it's full of all these people. Nobody works a 9:00 to 5:00 job, they create them. You know what I'm saying? They do stuff and get stuff done. I've made my mistakes and all that, fine. But let me tell you, the one thing that got ingrained into me and drilled into me at an early thing is think big.

0:16:00 Debra Schwartz: So you're here, you're in Fairfax. You're working with New Riders of the Purple Sage?

0:16:05 Gary Fisher: Well, that was just for a short period. I was taking care of their house, the New Riders, and that was in oh, '72 or so.

0:16:14 Debra Schwartz: What was their song? There was a song.

0:16:15 Gary Fisher: Oh, "Panama Red" was one. There was a number of them. They did a bunch of stuff. They did pretty well on their album sales.

0:16:23 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, I remember the era. And so, you meet Charlie. The people say you should meet Charlie 'cause Charlie is on his bike all the time.

0:16:30 Gary Fisher: All the time. He's a bike freak and he's a roadie and it's sorta perfect. That house was tenuous. Free rent, free rent's always tenuous. So, I moved in with Charlie and that was great. It was wonderful. I started racing full-time, as much as I could, working in a bike shop, and then I started working for *Bicycling Magazine* as a road tester and that was fantastic because I got free equipment all the time. But even better than that, I went to all the bike trade shows and I met everybody in the industry.

There were very few at the time, but I met everybody and made connections. I was road racing a lot. I'd moved out of Charlie's house — first I moved to a place in the center of Fairfax. It was right behind 19 Broadway. It was \$120 a month. Five rooms from Jerome Cheloni, at Cheloni's, which later became 21 Broadway. And Jerome told me that W.C. Fields used to rent that place back in the day. He showed me where the trap doors are where the hooch was kept.

0:17:47 Debra Schwartz: Where exactly is this?

0:17:48 Gary Fisher: Right behind 19 Broadway. Same music place. I used to work there in the liquor store two nights a week. And it was great, 4:00 to midnight. The place didn't have any air conditioning, but you'd go in the back and sit in the cooler, literally sit in a cooler and watch for somebody to come in through the window. It was so much fun. So, I was doing that and then I was working for Fred Wolfe, which is one of Charlie's old friends in the moving business. And so, I do that one day a week, and I could make my rent in one day. It was great.

0:18:28 Debra Schwartz: So how old are you here at this time?

0:18:30 Gary Fisher: I'm 65.

0:18:31 Debra Schwartz: No, I mean, when you're telling me the story.

0:18:33 Gary Fisher: Back then, I was in my 20s. I was a really good road racer and I was back at the Olympic Training Center in 1979. I was on the Olympic long team. I was third in the West Coast in Olympic development points. It was West, Central, and East. Then our President, Jimmy Carter, says, "Guess what? We're boycotting these ones. We're not going to Moscow." And at that moment I said, "Well, it's time to start the mountain bike company." Because I've been doing this and I've done the thing with the multiple, I put the multiple gears on a bike, which was — some people make that some sort of science. Not at all. I don't agree. It's really simple, and where did that come from? I used to cycle across starting in 1964, was the first one.

It's a European version where you got little cantilever brakes, you got gears and everything. And those used tires that are 33 millimeters wide with knobs on 'em and everything. And what we were using, 52 millimeters wide. So that's the adjustment, you just make the frame a little bit bigger. It's not rocket science at all, making the bikes. And the bikes that I'm most proud of is when we went into business. God, I mean, you could buy a Joe Breeze bike for \$750 bucks and we used to snicker and say, "Well, the guy is working for 50 cents an hour." He only makes 10 bikes a year. Or you could buy a Colnago, 450 bucks, full camp and yellow. Really nice bike. You could buy a full custom Ben Serotta, \$995. Incredible, beautiful bike, incredible.

And then our bike, my bike, I sold 160 of my bikes in the first year. \$1320. We used to tell people, "You don't want a cheap parachute." And our bikes were exquisite. I had the best frame builder and I had — Joe says he designed my frame. Are you out of your

mind? He didn't design my frame. I don't know where he got that from. What? And it's not rocket science. All these frames, all of Joe's frames, all of my frames, all these guys' frames in the first three years were based, except for Mert Lawwill. Mert Lawwill was his own animal and I love Mert, and I really regret not doing something with Mert, if I ever had a regret.

Anyway, almost everybody's frames including Joe's and mine were based on the 1930 Schwinn Excelsior X. Exactly that geometry but larger diameter tubing, that's all. And thin wall chromoly tubing. In fact, Joe started to use mid-sized stuff in his very first frame and put all these twin laterals on it, and then the problem with that is it's really hard to make a straight frame when you do that 'cause you get all these little tiny tubes pulling and everything you need you gotta do all the sequential welding and all this crazy stuff. I went off and I did my own thing. I didn't wait for anybody else, so to speak. I had my partner, Charlie, and Charlie was really good at getting stuff done. The guy could drive a truck. He was a roadie.

So we'd go to trade shows and stuff, and man, we could pack up everything and leave at midnight and do a drive all night long, and I could totally trust him, completely, in a place, he'd always get there, everything always be set up. Charlie was the very best at building wheels and Charlie had the greatest sense of humor, and Charlie could write really well. I mean, really well. And that was a big part of the whole thing. To me, we made it a business and that's like — there's a university that specializes in bicycles, everything bicycle in Trieste, Italy. They did a book about me, and it's all about I created a business. I created a business, not just a bike, a business. I created a name, mountain bike. I worked with the Japanese and got parts. I'm in Shimano's history book. I made a lot of money for those guys. But I worked in all those, all the makers. We had competition and everything, so the price was good.

My first big loan, you know where that came from? The Japanese government. Oh my goodness, 'cause they recognized what I was doing. The first big show that we did to explain to the industry what was going on, it was in 1981 at the New York Bike Show. So at the bequest of *Bicycling Magazine*, Charlie and I did a big showing about mountain bikes. We were so lucky. We were so blessed. We had all these photographs from Larry and Wende Cragg that are still around today, they're fantastic, incredible. The Sierra Nevadas, of the Rocky Mountains, of all this crazy stuff in Marin including the Repack race and everything. Howie Hammerman was one of the first mountain bikers. He worked with Charlie as a roadie for the Sons of Champlin, and Howie was George Lucas' third employee.

So we used to hang around at George's screening room at his house, it was crazy. Once a month we'd do a slideshow there. We got good at it. So Charlie and I gave this presentation and we killed 'em in New York. It was all the industry there. And they're going like, "Yeah, we know what mountain bike is, and we know you're the guy that knows all about it." So I show up in Japan, they're like, "Hell yeah, we want to listen to this guy," and "Damn straight we want to make some of this equipment," and I got everybody to make stuff over there. It was just incredible. I'd be going to Japan like

seven, eight times a year and sometimes I'd spend like three weeks straight there and everything, and just working with those guys and getting the equipment going.

So the first year we made 160 bikes, the second year we made a thousand. In that thousand, that was all Tom Ritchey is making frames. So Tom would — I'd go down there with tubing and I'd deliver the tubing, and Dave and Devon worked for Tom for five bucks an hour under the table. They'd cut the tubing and tack up the frames, do the prep work so to speak, and Tom would do nothing but fillet braze, just using bronze. And Tom got so good, oh my God. He could put down this brazing and there was so little clean up, it was insane. So we made this B-frame as well as a A-frame and that allowed us to get a bike in the \$995 price point, and we went to a thousand the next year. I mean, we had a line out the door and we were delivering a lot of bikes.

So I'd pick up the frame, just the frames not the forks, just the frames, the bare frames, at Tom's place and I'd take it to — I had three painters, I had seven people making wheels, and we had this little place at 1501 San Anselmo Avenue where we used to ask people, "I hope you've had experience working in a submarine" — that is, people that wanted to work for us — "because it's really cramped in here." And we're bringing in all this stuff and then we had Joe Barry, holy mackerel, this kid. He put together 14 bikes in one day, broke the record. Then he became a racer, and man, in the meantime, we got in every magazine, all these different news articles and TV stuff because we're working the PR really well, 'cause my mom taught me.

0:26:18 Debra Schwartz: This will be in my next question.

0:26:20 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

0:26:21 Debra Schwartz: Your business is really, in essence, your first pancake. I mean, this is the evolving, it seems to be just —

0:26:29 Gary Fisher: Well, I failed a couple times before. I did a Christmas tree lot, and I allowed a couple of employees to rip me off, and that was when I was 16 when I did the light show. The light show sort of lost its whole — they were paying 100 bucks an hour. That was stupid. We were burning \$100 worth of bulbs a night, and that was a mess. I've failed before.

0:26:53 Debra Schwartz: So you, I mean, but you've jumped into a business. You're a hippie guy, you live in the hippie world, but it seems as if you have some sort of —

0:27:03 Gary Fisher: Yeah, but you've got to realize — I mean, okay, let's go back to the hippie world. This was the notion. The Haight-Ashbury was a cool place for about six months and then it went south. Then it was this whole thing of like sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll, and we'd tell you it's all for free. That was really, it was supposed to be a whole conscious-raising thing, come on! It went south completely. And all these stupid kids still come out to the Haight to this day thinking it's just sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll and all this. It was a better way of living and that's the way I want to be. That's what I want to

do, and that's why I got back into bikes. I got sorta out of that scene in a way. There's certain aspects of it I totally appreciate to this day and everything, but no, I'm not a stupid hippie, thank you very much, and I never was a stupid hippie.

0:27:48 Debra Schwartz: I mean, in a sense, but you've gone — suddenly you've got a professional career, you are presenting yourself. The way you're describing your business and the acumen in which you seem to display your ability to represent yourself and the era of bicycling that you're bringing forward. You say you created the name "mountain bike?"

0:28:24 Gary Fisher: Yeah, we started a company called Mountain Bikes and we needed an original name. I'm not gonna name it after the pastime or something, give me a break. And there was no one, I thought of that in my head. Now, of course someone else thought of that word somewhere else, but we put it out there and for a number of years, we put it out worldwide. We ship bikes worldwide, and we had stories worldwide and nobody came after us saying, "No, that's my name and I had it first."

0:28:52 Debra Schwartz: So what is the name of your first business with Charlie?

0:28:55 Gary Fisher: Mountain Bikes.

0:28:56 Debra Schwartz: Mountain Bikes, that was it?

0:28:57 Gary Fisher: Yes, plural.

0:28:58 Debra Schwartz: But your bikes that you make now are Gary Fishers, right?

0:29:00 Gary Fisher: That's right, and that's like we failed to trademark it properly, it went generic. We let it go generic too much.

0:29:08 Debra Schwartz: So the mountain bike is a generic name?

0:29:11 Gary Fisher: It is now. It is now. But I thought of that name, I put it out there, it was my name, and I can rightfully say I made the first mountain bike. 'Cause it's like the fat tire bike, you go back — okay, one of my first people that put money into the company, John Finley Scott, he was a U.C. Davis professor. He did the Davis Double Century, and he made himself what he called a Woodsie bike in 1953. That had multiple gears, although the gears weren't so effective, and that had a single front chain ring, therefore the chain can fall off really easily. It had a three-speed rear Sturmey-Archer hub, and in our experience we could not make one of those things put up with the intense going up steep hills. It had a lousy caliper brake on the front. It was a little brake that went on a steel chrome-plated rim, which is totally worthless in the wet, completely worthless. It had a small, this Sturmey-Archer drum brake, a small diameter one. And in our experience the small diameter drum brakes would overheat and fail really quickly. So he had a bike that didn't work.

0:30:21 Debra Schwartz: He had an idea, but the bike didn't really —

0:30:24 Gary Fisher: Well, that one didn't really work. Then you go back further, there were some guys in France in the '40s. They had shocks, they had multiple gears, they had knobby tires, not quite as big as ours. They did jumps and crazy stuff like that. And we find this out 20 years after we've all been making bikes, we find out about this. They kept it to themselves, they didn't make a craze. I made a worldwide craze. I created a million jobs, and there are a lot of people doing this, and I changed the bike industry. What I was saying before, what I was most proud of, is I changed people's perception of what a bicycle should cost. And that's happened a few times, and when they did that with —

Trek did it recently with all our carbon fiber frames. For better or for worse, Lance Armstrong and everything. It's one of these things if you have a great, incredible ground-breaking design. You hype the living shit out of it, and then it's not vapor ware. People can actually buy it and use it, and it actually works. I pulled that one off already with this, and I did it again 10 years ago with this whole 29er thing, which is another thing. It's just a wheel size. And to do that too, one of the things I had to do was go to the Union Cycliste Standard Internationale, the guys in Switzerland and say, "Change your rule." And they did for me, because I'm powerful. I'm powerful as can be. You can't believe, it's crazy. It's a crazy thing, and I'm still like I really — I've learned to be not such a control freak.

0:32:10 Debra Schwartz: Are you a control freak?

0:32:11 Gary Fisher: Well, everybody that does a lot of these things to some degree is. And then you learn, it's like the Serenity Prayer, "Dear Lord, give me the wisdom to know what you can change and what you can't," because, man, there's a lot of stuff. You're just beating your head against a wall. And there are other things, man, all you gotta do is go, just a little snap, a little suggestion, a whisper in the ear, and it's amazing what can happen. I've been able to tune into more of those lately, and that's been really satisfying just to watch that happen. And what's going on lately is more urban infrastructure, and sort of future thought about what's gonna happen. It's things you realize, it's 100 years ago, any family who had means raised their kids in the city because that's where culture was. So what we got going on in the last 40 years has been anomaly, it really has been. And when you think about what happened 40, 50 years ago was President Eisenhower built the interstate freeway system and enabled developers, architects, to create the suburbs. Money rules, it makes things happen. And what's happening is people are coming back into the cities. Only 18% of Americans live outside of a city now. The city leaders worldwide are saying, "What am I gonna do to make my place a cool place?" So that's what I've been doing, I've been going around to city leaders and they've been accepting me to come in and talk and to be in front of the media.

0:34:00 Debra Schwartz: And your part in that is to bring in, I guess, the greening of the cities through bikes versus cars?

0:34:06 Gary Fisher: Well, it's a lot bigger than that. It's like I'll say "Let's take a third of these streets and tear the pavement out completely. Let's put gardens in there." Now think about it, think about it, think about the inconvenience that you'd have if you couldn't drive up to your garage. Now think about this, would you like to live on that street? Think about it, it's gonna be quiet. There's gonna be gardens all over, fruits and vegetables and things. Do you think your property values would go up? I think they will. I'd wanna take another third of the streets and it's just gonna be walking and slow biking, shopping. Last third of the streets, the new transit. The transit that's going to come isn't gonna be on rail because the public has to buy into that. And there are great forces in this country against public transit, as you know.

What's going to bring it in will be the private side, and that'll be people like Apple and Google and Tesla, Ford and Chevy, and folks like Mercedes and Audi, they're all working on this autonomous car. And this car, the autonomous car, it's not gonna be a car that you recognize today. It'll be this little tiny thing. It'll fit two people, just be as wide as a business class seat. Two of them, or a four when you face each other. And this thing, you'll order it up like an Uber car, you won't own the thing. So what happens, it'll come to you in the morning, it'll bring you your breakfast, bring you your coffee, or you can just sleep on the way to work. Think of it. On the way home you will never get a DUI again. And there'll be cities and places where this is going on already. And this will all be electric, too, because that's the other thing.

0:35:51 Debra Schwartz: I was going to ask, how is this going to get around? Is this going to be on an electric, some kind of a —

0:35:58 Gary Fisher: No, driverless. There is a technology. It's already here. It's coming so quickly, you can't believe it.

0:36:05 Debra Schwartz: And where do these little pod cars live today?

0:36:07 Gary Fisher: They live in the street. See, that's the point is right now 30% to 35% of American cities are dedicated to parking lots and parking structures. Man, that's a lot of space that we can have back 'cause we won't need that parking, 'cause we won't let the regular cars in there and do this thing. A car spends 95% of its life parked. And there's cities now, in Germany in particular, where they're going on a whole program of no combustion vehicles inside the parameter of the inner city because of the fine particulates. Fine particulates kill about 45,000 Americans a year prematurely, premature defined as 12 years or more. So, it's a bigger issue than people wanna recognize here.

0:37:02 Debra Schwartz: So what you've started with in your biking innovation, creating something that actually had been around and it was logical to have around a bike with a fatter tire and all that, but actually making it, jumping in and doing it. Did you ever hesitate? Did you ever think to yourself, as an innovator, which is what you are, did you ever think, "I'm going to innovate," or did it just come out of you? Is stuff always coming out of you?

0:37:31 Gary Fisher: Well, yeah. I've always had, I've always made weird stuff. When you see all the light show equipment I made, that was all weird optics and things and ways of doing things that nobody had ever made before. It was all homemade, all that stuff. And to the houses I had, one time, we used to take care of Slide Ranch. I forget what the name of it, it's the same people today.

0:37:56 Debra Schwartz: Oh, Doug Ferguson, I interviewed him. He talked about the Grateful Dead hippies living in Slide Ranch.

0:38:01 Gary Fisher: We were there. That was us. That was us, and I built an incredible tree fort there. My friend Richard Martinez — all shingled and everything. We're in these big eucalyptus trees. We had these incredible tepees. Oh my God, we harvested all the —

0:38:17 Debra Schwartz: So you were one of the, oh but —

0:38:20 Gary Fisher: I was there.

0:38:20 Debra Schwartz: Actually, there's quite a story as Doug tells it, that you guys said that you could do something, take —

0:38:28 Gary Fisher: Eddie Washington was a guy, our guy, our connection, with The Nature Conservancy.

0:38:34 Debra Schwartz: The Nature Conservancy, right.

0:38:34 Gary Fisher: That was it. Yeah. I built one time in Mill Valley, this is my second place in Mill Valley, I built myself an apartment from a 12-foot diameter wine barrel, redwood wine barrel. You'd strike it and you could smell the red wine as it —

0:38:50 Debra Schwartz: Wait, now. Okay, so let's just stop because this is about Mill Valley. I want to hear a little more about this wine barrel house, 'cause it is good that we bring it back to that.

0:39:00 Gary Fisher: I had a view of Mount Tamalpais. It was perfect, and nothing else.

0:39:02 Debra Schwartz: I have not heard about a wine barrel house yet.

0:39:04 Gary Fisher: I made that.

0:39:05 Debra Schwartz: Where is it? Tell me.

0:39:07 Gary Fisher: It went away. It was not to code.

0:39:08 Debra Schwartz: Where was it once?

0:39:10 Gary Fisher: I could show you on the map here. I forget the name of the street. It was so long ago. But I had a place there that I built once.

0:39:19 Debra Schwartz: On someone's property?

0:39:20 Gary Fisher: Oh yeah, they were gone. We built it, and then later their neighbors busted them and they had to get rid of it.

0:39:27 Debra Schwartz: How big is it?

0:39:29 Gary Fisher: It was 12 foot in diameter and it was 14 feet high. I had a loft in it, and it was really cool. I built it all by myself. Can you imagine? All the stage and all that stuff, I did it all by myself. Built the foundation, the whole thing. I was 17. I used to like to do stuff like that a lot. My apartment here has got what people would say is sort of crazy stuff. I'm not afraid of it.

0:39:54 Debra Schwartz: Well, I did notice when I went into your apartment that the dining room wouldn't really — I wouldn't describe it — that would be the ambiance of that room, I would say more of a bike cellar.

0:40:07 Gary Fisher: No, the bikes don't always live there. It's nicer when the bikes are out of there. It's a nice world.

0:40:11 Debra Schwartz: No, it reminds me of what Charlie, when I interviewed him, Charlie Kelly, I asked what your place was like in Fairfax.

0:40:19 Gary Fisher: Oh, it was incredible.

0:40:21 Debra Schwartz: What were the rooms like, and how would you describe those rooms?

0:40:24 Gary Fisher: In the living room there was a bike stand and a work bench, really was functional. We had bike hooks on the wall so you could hang a whole bunch of bikes up and that was great, but we also had the wherewithal to go out and get a whole bunch of big, long planks, 12-bys, and make a huge banquet. One time we made a huge banquet table there for the whole club because that was where it was at. My mother taught me that, my grandmother taught me that. That's just how you have a dinner. It's like, we're Californians too. It's like *L.A. Confidential*, the movie. My great-grandfather who owned the San Diego transit system, his house is the house Kim Basinger is in in that movie.

0:41:11 Debra Schwartz: Oh, that beautiful bungalow place.

0:41:13 Gary Fisher: Oh man, my mother pulls out the original *Architectural Digest*

piece on it, the whole thing. It's like that. She knows how to make a table, place cards for everybody and a gentleman between courses trade, and it's always interesting. She sets it up that way in the social, because this is what we're talking.

0:41:35 Debra Schwartz: This is an era, this is a time.

0:41:37 Gary Fisher: It still, it runs things. I mean, my God, the story. Come on, that's what sells. And that's the thing. She taught me publicity, as did my grandfather, and it's made such an incredible difference. My great-grandfather, Guy, who ran San Diego transit, he was famous for speaking. And I got stuff, it just comes out of my mouth so easily I never — and people go, "That was incredible," all the time now. It's wild.

0:42:07 Debra Schwartz: Maybe you've just been around so long you've got an arsenal of —

0:42:10 Gary Fisher: Yeah, I definitely do. There's no doubt about that.

0:42:14 Debra Schwartz: To draw from.

0:42:15 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

0:42:16 Debra Schwartz: Tell me, with your bike business, I'm just suddenly quite distracted by your socks.

0:42:24 Gary Fisher: By my socks, yeah.

0:42:24 Debra Schwartz: Classic, very nice. Those are purple —

0:42:26 Gary Fisher: Paul Smith.

0:42:27 Debra Schwartz: Paul Smith, very nice.

0:42:28 Gary Fisher: I designed a bike for Paul Smith once, he's a friend. [laughs]

0:42:32 Debra Schwartz: So you —

0:42:33 Gary Fisher: Oh, mercy.

0:42:33 Debra Schwartz: When you are here, now you're older, you've had the bike business, you've had a few lives.

0:42:45 Gary Fisher: Yeah, definitely, yeah.

0:42:47 Debra Schwartz: If you could tell me the lives as you see them?

0:42:54 Gary Fisher: Well, I've had kids. I've had women. Holy mackerel. I mean,

it's been a long time since I haven't had a girlfriend or a wife. I'm a serial monogamist. Those two things right there, that's the majority of my time. Then I've got riding a bike, and boy, that's a lot of time, too. You spend 20, 25 hours a week riding your bike, just the riding part, not the resting part or anything else. And then the business, to be honest, with the business I've worked less hard than you could ever believe.

0:43:37 Debra Schwartz: But was your head in it all the time? Were you always thinking?

0:43:40 Gary Fisher: Oh, my head's always in it. It's one of those things where I'm always thinking about it.

0:43:44 Debra Schwartz: Because when you say you work, sometimes in interviewing these bike people it's work/life. It's not that nine-to-five kind of concept. It's a lifestyle choice, it seems.

0:43:58 Gary Fisher: Yeah, but a lot of bike guys, oh man, especially the guys working in shops, they're working for long hours. Oh man, it's hilarious. They always say, "Well, I used to ride a bike, then I bought this bike shop." And they work like dogs. That was never, that's never been something I've been super fond of. At one point I went and worked at the Trident restaurant. I started as a dishwasher and then moved up the cold side. I really got along with Pierre, the head chef. I thought about it the other day, I could've totally got into being a chef. But you know what? Man, that is a hard job, and it's hard working. And until you write some books and get into some TV and stuff — oh and TV didn't exist then. Until you do, and you're a celebrity and stuff, there's a few guys that get out, but that's a hard-working job.

0:44:53 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:44:54 Gary Fisher: And you think about what I do, I'm an entrepreneur and I'm an idea guy. I come up with the ideas and I come up with solutions. I get people to calm down, I get people to think, and I get people to solve their problems all by themselves.

0:45:11 Debra Schwartz: And how do you get these people in your court?

0:45:15 Gary Fisher: You gotta have empathy and you really gotta stand in their shoes. You gotta understand it from their side. Goodness gracious. Figure out how, what's going on here, right? If you don't, you can always figure out your side. Man, that's coming out you loud and clear and maybe way too loud. You gotta tone that down and go into the other side and then you might have half a chance of making a really good solution.

0:45:44 Debra Schwartz: Well, that's interesting what you're saying. When did that part of the equation occur to you?

0:45:49 Gary Fisher: Oh, it's been coming along the whole time. There've been times

when I hate on some guy and then I wonder why he hates me. [chuckles] There's been all kinds of crazy stuff where it's like, "I gotta stop. I got a flat spot on my head, I gotta stop pounding my head on this wall." And it's going back to that serenity prayer of what you can do and you can't. Sometimes when you take the pressure off is when things are allowed to happen.

0:46:18 Debra Schwartz: Do you have particular individuals in your life that you feel have influenced you in particular?

0:46:27 Gary Fisher: Definitely. There's quite a number. Quite a number, quite a number. And it's sort of like, I try to allow to have somebody to influence me each and every day. Then there's some that have been there the whole time, like my grandfather. I mean, he's gone 25 years and there's not a day I don't think about him, I know it.

0:46:51 Debra Schwartz: And which grandfather?

0:46:52 Gary Fisher: Oh, my grandfather, Fred Applegate. And then my father. He's here now and we talk.

0:47:00 Debra Schwartz: Really, your father's still alive?

0:47:00 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah. So that's really great. He's here. We spend more and more time with him and talking with him about important things, 'cause he's been through a lot. He's done a lot. And then there's many others that have wisdom. We got our church, we got my wife, we got all this, her family and everything. It's crazy. My brother, oh my goodness. That guy is such the great analyst of things, and such a great pragmatist. And it's just, we're blessed in that way. We're really, really lucky that we've got these experienced, just steady, rational people in my life to help me. I've really valued it.

0:47:57 Debra Schwartz: Something that I think is important in these interviews is to discuss the community and what community does. It's a very busy world and I've interviewed a lot of people and they talk about what this area was like once and what it's like now.

0:48:16 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

0:48:16 Debra Schwartz: And what community is. Maybe you would like to speak a little bit about that.

0:48:20 Gary Fisher: Well, it's changed, of course. It's like Mill Valley used to be this cool little place, and now money is there and everything. It's totally changed. It's really funny because it's the same place insofar as like it's no bigger than it used to be. There is no big huge developments that have really changed things. I think the last developments went in there in the '60s or something, but people do a lot more and they get a lot more money. That's okay. I don't mind that at all. Marin is a strange place in that it's the oldest

county in the whole Bay Area. We tend to complain a lot about one thing, traffic. We don't do anything about it. It sort of cracks me up.

0:49:07 Debra Schwartz: But there is community here.

0:49:09 Gary Fisher: Oh, there's a huge community.

0:49:10 Debra Schwartz: You're describing in your life, community.

0:49:12 Gary Fisher: Oh yeah. You go up and see the sunset, go up to Mount Tam, go to Bolinas, go to Bobo. I came back here, I didn't really expect. We came back, we were living in the city, the middle of the city. We came back to Belvedere.

0:49:34 Debra Schwartz: You and your wife now?

0:49:35 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

0:49:35 Debra Schwartz: Now, people don't know this, but you have a new baby boy.

0:49:38 Gary Fisher: I do. He's eight months old and he's incredible. It's just a miracle that he's here and everything. He's beautiful, robust, and he's changed so many things for the positive in my family with everything.

0:49:53 Debra Schwartz: So, were you living in the city with your wife? Your wife's name is?

0:49:57 Gary Fisher: Alex, and we were living in the city. We were there for about eight years and I haven't lived with my parents since I was a teenager, or even lived here.

0:50:10 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

0:50:10 Gary Fisher: We came back and it's been great.

0:50:18 Debra Schwartz: So, you've come home. You're 65 years old. You have an eight month old son and a beautiful wife who is a physician, a big family. You're back home and your folks are alive, small town boy comes home.

0:50:35 Gary Fisher: Small town boy comes home, and then just lately I've been getting all kinds of opportunities brought my way to do more of what I really want to do, which is — you know, I get lifetime achievement awards. Every year or two I get one from somebody in the mountain bike world and I want to do more.

0:51:01 Debra Schwartz: He says with a twinkle in his eye. You've got more life to go here. You wanna do more. Mountain biking more or in all new directions?

0:51:10 Gary Fisher: No, it's bringing more health and vitality to our people and

that's what the mountain bike did. It brought some health and vitality, but this time it's more back to my roots of working with infrastructure and changing things in the cities. Our cities, our suburbs, in the way we live and our lifestyles and changing that, because we've got crises right now, health crises that is. Even my Republican friends can totally relate to the fact that 17% of gross domestic product is spent in the United States on health care versus all these other first world countries that are running their health care systems from 9%-11%. You think about that spread, even the 6% spread, that spread of gross domestic product, that's actually bigger than the Chinese debt and the federal debt put together and people just act as if nothing's happening. This is crazy.

Okay, here's the other part that's crazy. For the first time in American history, your children are not gonna live as long as you do. Lifespan is going south and I want to know what kind of plan anybody has for it because I've got a plan. It's like I was describing before, we're gonna do this with the streets. We're gonna have this driverless car. We sort of got stuck on that one. It's sort of like the new railway because you don't have to buy rails, that's the whole point of it. They've already got it mapped out, they've already got it mapped out and it's amazing.

The other thing is going to be safe routes to school, but man, we're gonna do it like Ray's Indoor Mountain Bike Park. And this, I've gotta show you because you don't know what this is about. This guy's been around for the last 14 years and he builds all these trails and things out of wood, even for beginners, and this guy takes people off of the street. He herds them around, they all have a great time and nobody kills each other. It's all made out of wood and I'm talking about drilling through buildings, going straight over streets and things. This is our kids and our kids had a lot of fun coming to and from school.

0:53:28 Debra Schwartz: Where's the prototype for this?

0:53:31 Gary Fisher: Well, he's got a place in Cleveland and in Milwaukee.

0:53:34 Debra Schwartz: Do these people contact you or do you find them?

0:53:37 Gary Fisher: I know them, I go around. See, this is the point that's great about being old. You've been around and you've seen all this stuff and you hear about everything. I'm pretty obsessed with being tuned-in to what's going on in the scene, and I know Ray. I've known Ray for some time. We talk and I'm gonna use one of his artists to help me illustrate more of this stuff. I'm working with different artists right now, and I wanna be able to show people.

0:54:04 Debra Schwartz: I wish people could see your face right now, because you sort of look like, I don't know how to describe it, rather childlike, I mean you —

0:54:11 Gary Fisher: I am, but it's hilarious because all it is, is I'm gonna make paradise, and make it work. 'Cause back to what I was saying before, 100 years ago they thought of the cities as paradise, and then we sort of screwed up. Cars don't work in cities, they don't work. There are 1.3 passengers per vehicle, there's no way. It's not

gonna move enough people around, that's all there is to it in a city. You like a city to be dense enough so you can walk around and get somewhere.

0:54:42 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

0:54:42 Gary Fisher: That's the charm of a city, and people love it. They're sick and tired of watching TV. Great wasteland — oh, and develops your waist, too. It's like this vicarious lifestyle is not being sold to the millennials right now, they're not going for it. They don't wanna buy a car, they wanna take the \$7,000 that they save per year by not having a car, put it in their back pocket and pay for rent and food. C'mon! And they love the idea of going on some sort of transit where they can sit there and communicate with their friends, 'cause they think driving is boring. It is boring, it's boring and it's stressful, and we got all the stats, all the peer-reviewed medical stats now that say, "Look, you do too much of this, it's killing you."

Just sitting in a chair being online kills people, we know this. And the car is pretty much the same, and even taking a kid in a bus everywhere. In Tiburon, we got the bus system to alleviate part of our traffic problem, but the bigger problem is like man, we gotta take care of our kids. We know that running the motor for a half-hour in the morning for a kid, that is their internal motor, makes them smarter, and it calms them down and stuff, keeps that Type 2 diabetes away from single-digit players. Our kids are getting that when they're under 10, it's crazy.

0:56:04 Debra Schwartz: So do people come to you because you're who you are with your bikes? You have this certain level of fame as The Bike Man, right?

0:56:14 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

0:56:14 Debra Schwartz: So, when you're at a show or you're speaking, or you're doing something like this, and people come up to you I imagine afterwards, yes?

0:56:24 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

0:56:24 Debra Schwartz: What do they say to you?

0:56:27 Gary Fisher: It's like I get on an airplane and people stop me, all the time.

0:56:31 Debra Schwartz: You're recognizable wherever you go?

0:56:31 Gary Fisher: When I go and do a good job, like I was in India, I'm gonna tell these guys, "If you do a good job — " The press guys, when I got interviewed by 147 different press people including the *Times of India*, the whole thing while I was there. The guy at customs will know who I am, and the guy at customs knew who I am, was there. I go to Europe, most of the guys in customs know who I am. I'm the most popular mountain biker in the world. Right now there's an organization down in Santa Monica, and they track everybody, figure out how famous you are. I'm number 15 in bike people

right now. It's all done with algorithms. They go look at how many articles you're in, how many movies, how many this, how many that.

0:57:18 Debra Schwartz: Of course they would do that.

0:57:19 Gary Fisher: Okay, it's fame. It's not popularity.

0:57:23 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, gotcha.

0:57:24 Gary Fisher: Okay, yeah. So, Lance Armstrong is the most famous cyclist, though.

0:57:28 Debra Schwartz: Did you meet Lance Armstrong?

0:57:30 Gary Fisher: I've met him a few times. I've talked to him about 40 words. I did a signing down in his bike shop in Austin, and the 30 of those words: "Lance, I've done something for you, now you're gonna sign this poster and you're gonna put my mother's name and 'Happy birthday, Saloma'". He never writes that kind of stuff. Well, he did for me because I asked him. [laughs]

0:57:52 Debra Schwartz: Your mom wants the autographed posters?

0:57:55 Gary Fisher: Yeah. This counts, and that counts.

0:57:57 Debra Schwartz: What do your parents say? Is your mom alive still?

0:58:00 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah.

0:58:00 Debra Schwartz: Both of your parents are alive?

0:58:01 Gary Fisher: Oh my mom is so happy, she holds that little boy. Oh my God! [chuckles] It's so good.

0:58:08 Debra Schwartz: What do they think about you taking on the bike business when you're —

0:58:12 Gary Fisher: Oh, they thought it was crazy at the very beginning, and then everybody — I got a number of different advisors. A couple were from the family, a couple from outside of the family, and I did everything they said.

0:58:26 Debra Schwartz: Oh really?

0:58:27 Gary Fisher: Yeah, we made a lot of money. We would make a lot of money, then we wouldn't make money, then we'd make a lot of money, then we wouldn't make money. It was up and down for a while, and we were at an uncomfortable size. We needed to either be small and boutique-y or we needed to be about \$55 million in sales

for the economy of scale, and we were at about \$10 million. And it was we were leveraged out like crazy, and the money was double-digits, or it was the interest, and the currency was all over the place. Then all of a sudden, people wanted to buy us, all over the place. So my brother and I sold the company, and the first go-around we sold it to some Taiwan guys and that was crazy, it was nuts. I pulled the whole thing off, which will be in my next book, it will blow your freakin' mind how I landed on my feet in that, because I got totally manipulated, lied to, it was incredible. [chuckles]

0:59:23 Debra Schwartz: Would you call yourself a trusting man?

0:59:26 Gary Fisher: Definitely. I'm very, very, very careful who I get into bed with, that's everything. It's good my oldest son has got that going for him, and he's got a fiancée right now, but man, he's a beautiful boy. Beautiful, 27-year-old, cool kid.

0:59:44 Debra Schwartz: Are you involved with the Marin Bicycling, with the museum, the new museum?

0:59:51 Gary Fisher: Not really, they're too busy.

0:59:53 Debra Schwartz: Have you been?

0:59:54 Gary Fisher: I haven't been. It's not my gig. I've got a museum; the museum I'm in is in Reno, Scheels. I love those guys. They're out of Fargo, North Dakota, and I worked with them for a couple of weeks. They had a beautiful museum. They store a lot of my — a ton of my stuff in there. 7,000 people a day walk past that museum. The one in Fairfax, I don't know if that's gonna be around in three years. I looked at their financials and I sort of — I gotta not talk about that.

1:00:26 Debra Schwartz: Where are your bikes? You made your first Gary Fisher bike when? What year?

1:00:34 Gary Fisher: Oh, in what? Technically that wasn't until what, '83, '84? When I split up with Charlie.

1:00:44 Debra Schwartz: As you described that, you said you divorced him.

1:00:48 Gary Fisher: Yeah, in a way. We were in debt and then I turned it around and made a whole bunch of money within about three or four months. We just weren't clicking. He said, "Nah, I don't wanna do this, I don't wanna do that. I don't wanna do this, I don't wanna do that." Pretty soon he was just building wheels.

1:01:11 Debra Schwartz: Do you still see each other?

1:01:12 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah. Charlie's a sweetheart. He's in a lot of measures, although I don't know. I don't know if I wanna say anymore.

1:01:27 Debra Schwartz: You've had a big life.

1:01:28 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's a good one. A lot of opportunity, a lot of really good friends, a lot of people in the business are friends. Amazing.

1:01:38 Debra Schwartz: Names?

1:01:40 Gary Fisher: Oh, like Antonio Colombo. I saw him down at Airbike, the owner of Cinelli, and Columbus Tubing and all that. I designed tubing for him, I designed bikes for him and he's a total art freak. Oh, he did an exhibit with Zio Ziegler out in Mill Valley and everything. In Milano. "Anytime you wanna come work for me, any day, any time. Oh, Gary!" Oh, we love each other so much. And the Shimano brothers, they're still really good friends. And the president of SRAM, Stan Day, really good friend. And Valentino Campagnolo really good friend. I've had risotto at his house. Same with the Shimano brothers, at their house. Who else? Todd Slavey from GT Bikes. He's a competitor of mine, but man, we just really get along.

Mike Sinyard from Specialized. All these other guys will bag on him 'cause he's big and powerful and mean at times. But Mike, he calls me up a few days before the Grateful Dead concert down in Santa Clara and says "Hey man. I've got extra tickets. You wanna come?" "Yeah, I'll go with you, Mike." 'Cause everybody thinks we've been competitors like this, right? And he's got a really big company. And I go down there and there's not a single Specialized employee there. It's just Mike, his wife, and a guy named C.J. And we're at the Levi's Stadium, we're in a suite, C.J.'s suite and C.J.'s the president, the brand president of Levi's. It was like, "Wow, cool." And I brought my wife, so I meet C.J. C.J.'s all stoked to see me. I'm wearing a Levi's jacket, just out of total coincidence, and I've been invited to go with Mountain Girl, but she was pretty busy taking care of ex-Grateful Dead employees, making sure they had the right place. I said, "Well heck, I'll just take these," and it was incredible.

C.J.'s got the tickets for the floor. We go down on the floor, end of the first set. And all of the sudden there's this rainbow, and I'm thinking, "C.J., you would know. This is your place. Did you do this? Did you do this? This rainbow, C.J., did you do this?" He's going, "No, man. This is the natch. This is on the natch." We call up Mountain Girl, "It's real. It's real. I got the man right here. It's real. It's real."

1:04:26 Debra Schwartz: The interesting story I think about the era that you've been involved in the mountain biking is it's so much more than just biking.

1:04:35 Gary Fisher: Oh, yeah.

1:04:35 Debra Schwartz: It's a time and place. The Grateful Dead, the music.

1:04:40 Gary Fisher: Mount Tam.

1:04:41 Debra Schwartz: Mount Tam. Let's talk about Mount Tam.

1:04:43 Gary Fisher: Mount Tam, oh my God. This is a very special place. This is the birth place of low growth. So in the '60s, the developers wanted to come to Marin and take it from 220,000 to 1.4 million. It was the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club that fought tooth and nail and beat them, basically. We were going to have a freeway that went along Highway 1 out to Olema, and another freeway out Sir Francis Drake and we were gonna have Marincello this huge subdivision out in the headlands and Bolinas Lagoon was gonna be a marina and dredged out and everything. And well, quite arguably after that occurrence, the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, they owned the mountain. And then we came along, and it was first by hippies. You could take your Volkswagen bus or whatever you wanted and take it out into the woods. I would take my mother's Chevy Impala, just drive it out there. You could drive on the firewood, so there was nothing out there. No chains, no nothing.

Then the water district put up chains. That was easy for them to do. Then the bike became the golden key out there and my high school buddies at Redwood High were the Larkspur Canyon Gang, and that was because of drum circles. Casey Sonnabend and the drum circles and Todd Beeson and all these guys, the drum circles. We'd go out in the woods, and people would drag conga drums out there. Dickens Bascom, holy mackerel, do you remember him?

1:06:19 Debra Schwartz: No.

1:06:19 Gary Fisher: Oh, he did the first decorated car. It's still sitting over there in Sausalito.

1:06:23 Debra Schwartz: Oh yes!

1:06:25 Gary Fisher: He had the Unknown Museum.

1:06:25 Debra Schwartz: Yes, the Unknown Museum in Mill Valley.

1:06:28 Gary Fisher: I was one time —

1:06:29 Debra Schwartz: With the 50 TV sets with doll heads in them on the —

1:06:32 Gary Fisher: Yeah! Right. Well, we did. I've got one of his posters in my house, an old one from the Haight. He lived in Larkspur Canyon, and he corrupted all those young boys at Redwood High, oh my God. And those guys, they were like "Hey, we know you're into bikes, so you gotta come out with us and check this out." It was like that. I'd ride my bike to school sometime. One time, I rode my track bike to Redwood High, and I was a senior, and this junior, Robin Williams, wanted to ride my track bike. Well, I let him ride my track bike around the parking lot. And on that bike you can't coast, it's a fixed gear. So Robin forgets, he goes over the handle bars and he had to have his spleen removed.

1:07:25 Debra Schwartz: Get out!

1:07:27 Gary Fisher: My bike.

1:07:28 Debra Schwartz: But he became quite a bicyclist.

1:07:30 Gary Fisher: Well, he did, but I rode with him about three times. That's it. I didn't hang out with him so much. I won a photo of him and underneath it says "Scholar." You think about it. That guy was one of the hardest working people you'll ever meet.

1:07:48 Debra Schwartz: He worked at The Trident as a busboy, too.

1:07:51 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

1:07:52 Debra Schwartz: Were you working there?

1:07:53 Gary Fisher: 'Cause all the pretty girls were there. That's why we worked there, c'mon. It was the place. It was something. Frank Werber.

1:08:00 Debra Schwartz: Yes, I knew Frank Werber.

1:08:01 Gary Fisher: Oh, man.

1:08:01 Debra Schwartz: Yeah.

1:08:02 Gary Fisher: It was something. It was beautiful. All that painted ceilings and all that woodwork and everything. It was incredible.

1:08:09 Debra Schwartz: So, I know that your son's gonna be coming here soon, but before we close I wanna ask a couple things.

1:08:16 Gary Fisher: Sure.

1:08:20 Debra Schwartz: When you're thinking about this area and how it's influenced you, if you would consolidate in some way to say how being here at your time and place, and how we are here today and being raised here, how would you describe your relationship to this area? How it's formed you and how you've formed this area in your own way as well?

1:08:47 Gary Fisher: Well, it's extremely stimulating. It hasn't been something that I've been totally in love with. But, I think now I like it even better because it gives you a lot. There's all this pressure and stuff. Absolutely, you know it. There's plenty of pressure in this county, but then you've got this place that's absolute serenity. It's totally beautiful. It's a brilliant combination. There's some places in the world that have it, but not that many. I've always appreciated it that the air's coming in through the Pacific, and

everything's so clean and nice. And, on the other hand, man, we can make it hard on ourselves in this county for no good reason. And you know what I'm talking about. It's people. People being people. We are so hard on ourselves as people.

1:09:55 Debra Schwartz: What would you do different? How would you wish it to be different?

1:09:58 Gary Fisher: Well, this is a grand challenge for me, 'cause the hardest thing to change is the grey matter between the ears. It's like they used to say, "Go to New York City. If you can master this, you can do it anywhere." If I can master Marin County, I can master anywhere.

1:10:16 Debra Schwartz: And your greatest challenge here in your desire to master?

1:10:21 Gary Fisher: Is to bring a lot more happiness, 'cause there's a lot of angst in this beautiful little county of ours, an undue amount. There really is.

1:10:30 Debra Schwartz: Why do you think?

1:10:31 Gary Fisher: Well, because it's very competitive. It's competitive just by price and prestige. We got a completely nonexistent transit system. Our transportation system, the car system is a mess here, as it is in most places. And people, they're just frustrated with that. It's like this, everybody that comes to Marin is very special. Wherever they came from, they were extremely special people. And then they come to Marin and they gotta line up with all the other special people. And then some people get really hyphy about it, 'cause they're no longer special. [laughs] That's what you got going on here. That's the hard part about here.

1:11:19 Debra Schwartz: So —

1:11:20 Gary Fisher: It's not like going to the Midwest where everybody is all super-happy to be in line with each other. It's not like that. I don't mind that at all. I like the East Coast, West Coast pressure. It's a competitive place. LA is a competitive place. New York is a competitive place. And, San Francisco, well, guess what? It's become a super competitive place. There's a lot of money there, a lot of good jobs, and a lot of people live here. And well, they're Type A. So am I.

1:11:50 Debra Schwartz: So, I guess what you're saying then is your idea of a better Marin County is for you to have this competitiveness, this stress?

1:12:00 Gary Fisher: Yeah.

1:12:00 Debra Schwartz: Or the pressure of whatever it is that invokes whatever creativity comes from having all these good minds together, but with paradise and calm there as well?

1:12:10 Gary Fisher: It's more like this, it's more a periodization thing. There's nothing wrong with pressure as long as you got time to recover, that's the point. People that are under pressure, it could be mild pressure as long as it's constant and it never lets up, they're the ones that die. That kills you. Whereas pressure and then no pressure, that's good.

[background conversation]

1:12:44 Debra Schwartz: So Gary, your eight-month-old son has just arrived and as a mother, I know that our time is now closed because you've got your boy here. I just want to say thank you for your insights. Thank you for contributing to our oral history program. Thank you for bringing to the library and to all the listeners a time and place and a personal experience that is so unique just to you. To just be able to hear the story offers us a broader perspective for what it is to grow up here and the kind of life you've had and the influence that you've had on the county. So, thank you so much for that.

1:13:23 Gary Fisher: It's been my pleasure to share this when I feel like I've been really lucky.