

John Fisher: How's this going to work?

Tywanna Whorley: It's going to work fine.

John Fisher: You think so?

Tywanna Whorley: Yes. Okay. First question, what's your name?

John Fisher: My name? John Fisher.

Tywanna Whorley: When were you born?

John Fisher: I was born September 19th, 1924.

Tywanna Whorley: Here in Birmingham?

John Fisher: Here in Birmingham, Alabama.

Tywanna Whorley: You remember where you were born? If it was a hospital?

John Fisher: I was born in old, so-called Hillman Hospital.

Tywanna Whorley: Hillman?

John Fisher: Hillman, yes. It was the Hillman Hospital then, here in Birmingham. I imagine it was a public hospital. I don't know.

Tywanna Whorley: Oh. Predominantly Black or—

John Fisher: No, no, no, no. It wasn't predominantly Black. It was the only—it was the only—Charity—what you call it, a charity hospital then?

Tywanna Whorley: A state hospital? You meant university?

John Fisher: Yeah, it's university now. Yeah.

Tywanna Whorley: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?

John Fisher: My parents? Well my father, Sam Fisher, and my mother, Pearl G. Fisher. Now, I had

grandparents on my father's side. I had my grandfather. I can remember distinctly, they called him Jim, so Jim Fisher, I'll say that, and my grandmother, her name was Clara. Now, on my mother's side, I don't think I had living grandparents. I didn't have—later on, I found out from her that I didn't have living grandparents at the time.

Tywanna Whorley: Can you talk about growing up here in Birmingham?

John Fisher: Now, to what extent? I really don't know what you mean when you say "Talk about growing up." I grew up, I imagine, just like any other kid would grow up. Is that right?

Tywanna Whorley: Yeah, that's right.

John Fisher: Yeah.

Tywanna Whorley: With your parents. Where did you live there then?

John Fisher: Well, now, we are actually in—right now, sitting in this office here, I'm two blocks away from where I was living when I was born. Right across the street here. This is twentieth Street and Avenue S.

Tywanna Whorley: Okay.

John Fisher: Yeah.

Tywanna Whorley: It was a predominantly Black area?

John Fisher: Predominantly Black area. The only Whites that we had in this particular area were the Italian store owners. They owned these stores and things in here, but so far as Blacks and Whites, there was no—we were surrounded by White people right here on the foot of Bush Hill and Pike Road was White, and back here close to Ensley High School, that was all White, see, because we wasn't allowed to go to that school in a way. See, that was the Ensley High School. We had a school in the area here, Councill School back here. This was a Black school.

Tywanna Whorley: What you say, cancel?

John Fisher: Council, C-O-U-N-C-I-L-L. Councill School. That's where I started school back in back 1930.

Tywanna Whorley: Was it elementary school?

John Fisher: Elementary school, yeah. That was an elementary school. Yeah. Now, when we finished that elementary school, we had to go—there was only one high school in this town then, and that was—it's called Parker now. At the particular time when I started over there, it was Industrial High School. I started high school over there in 1938.

Tywanna Whorley: How did your parents move around, in terms of transportation?

John Fisher: Well, during those years, we was using public transportation, these so-called trolley cars, street cars and whatnot. That's the way we got around here. Back during those years, no cars or nothing. There was a car every now and then, but no one in my family had a car or automobile. Be fair about it, right here in this area, we didn't have too much in there in the line of street lights. Be fair about it.

John Fisher: You see, the street lights at that particular time, when night come, it would be completely dark here. You would find a light hanging in a block every now and then, hanging off a so-called utility pole. That was the only light that you actually had at that particular time, I mean street lights, until you went up into the town part here. When you went up there, then it was lit up because we had stores, regular dry goods stores and whatnot, as you might call it.

Tywanna Whorley: What'd your father do for a living?

John Fisher: Well, my mother was a homemaker. My father, he was a—now, how would you—he was a railroad man.

Tywanna Whorley: What'd he do in terms of a railroad man?

John Fisher: Well, he was a brakeman, switchman, as you might call it, during those—well, we have those type of occupations today, fellas out there on the engine, on these trains throwing switches and cutting cars and whatnot, putting them in their different yards and things.

Tywanna Whorley: Do you remember when you were born, was he doing that or was that after you were born?

John Fisher: No, my father migrated here from down Montgomery area, he tell me, but he brought my mother here. They married, they came here, they tell me, back in '23. I was born the next year. Well, he was doing this type of work then. He said he was determined not to do any farming. You know what I'm saying? He left the farm, come to the city. Birmingham was the city as you called it then. He left. He coming north. You had to go north. All right, and so he did that type of work all of my life. All of his life rather, until he passed.

Tywanna Whorley: You said that she was a homemaker?

John Fisher: Well, what I mean, took care of the house, that's all. She didn't do any work.

Tywanna Whorley: Were you the only child?

John Fisher: Oh, no, no, no. I had six brothers. There was seven of us in all.

Tywanna Whorley: You were the baby?

John Fisher: I was the oldest.

Tywanna Whorley: Oldest?

John Fisher: Yeah. I was number one. Yeah. My mother had—she had seven boys, no girls.

Tywanna Whorley: What were the names of the boys?

John Fisher: The names of the boys—well, my name—at that particular time I started school, I started school as James. That's the way I was, when I first started out, I started out as James, but now it got messed up. When I came out of school and went to get a birth certificate for myself, I found out that the doctor who attended my mother when I was born, he messed up the name some type of way at the health department. When I found what I was looking for, he didn't have it in James. He had recorded it in as J-N-O, the same mother and father, you understand?

John Fisher: Then he had put my name in as J-N-O period, and I didn't know what it was. I asked in the Department of Health over there. They said, "Well, no, John or Jonathan or somebody," and so, "What you want?" "Well, I'll tell you"—only thing I could think of then was John. I said, "Well, we'll just make John." You understand? They changed it right there, see? It's been changed ever since. Well then—now what was the question you asked me? Let's go back to it again.

Tywanna Whorley: About names of your brothers.

John Fisher: Oh, my brothers. Okay. That was John, Samuel, LC, Lucius, Arthur Lee, Robert Lee, TL, Theodus, and Alfred Charles. Those are my brothers.

Tywanna Whorley: Well, can you go—I guess, as much as you can remember about growing up with seven brothers?

John Fisher: Well, being the oldest, I had to act as—I tell you what. Let me say, coming up when I was coming up—I don't know what about that. What about that living condition? That living condition was kind of rough, compared to what it's supposed to be, what it should have been, you understand? Well, now we didn't know. We thought we was doing all right. Had enough. My father was working every day, bringing in, and we was eating two and three—well, mama was cooking, see? She make sure that we—she cooked that food. She was a country girl that came in here from Montgomery, and she believed in preparing that food for us, see? Well, we lived in a little house there not too far from here. That house is still there, because it belonged to my father and my mother.

Tywanna Whorley: Were you born in that house?

John Fisher: No, they didn't buy it that particular year, but they did buy the house, see? Later year, they bought that house. We weren't living at this particular area, in this particular house at the time when we were youngsters. From '24 when I was born, it took us about five years to get to that house.

Tywanna Whorley: Where were you before that?

John Fisher: Well, we were here, and then we were about four blocks away at another place. Then I remember one time we spent about three months on—I was a little youngster. I can very remember this, because we were out in—we lived in Fairfield and I could come out where we were living out there around fiftieth. I believe I think they told me that was fifty-fifth or fifty-fourth or something, and I could come out in the yard and could look over and see that old—used to be a TCNI hospital over—it's Lloyd Nolan now, see? We could see that hospital from where we were living. Now, we didn't live out that there long. We came back here to Ensley, and by the time I started school, we were in the home house. That's what they called it now, see.

John Fisher: My father went right on and he attempted to get that house after this so-called Depression. You remember that? They were talking about the Depression? But I can remember the Depression time when people would have to go—we would have to go up to this—what do you call it? The Red Cross or the—used to haul groceries. We used to go up there with a little wagon. They would be giving away—well, nobody was working then.

John Fisher: I remember my dad, he—his job was down, and the railroad was still working. He was offered a job to go to Louisville, but he didn't want to take his family and take a chance on going to Louisville. Attempt to regroup. You understand? He said that wouldn't work for him, see? So he toughed it out here, and he didn't go. They tried to get him to go to that L&N thing now. L&N, what was that, Louisville and Nashville Railroad? They wanted him in there, but we stayed here in Birmingham.

John Fisher: I can remember some hard times there when you couldn't keep heating these buildings, and we didn't have this so-called central heat and whatnot that we have now. We didn't have it. Now, it was probably out there somewhere for another group of people, but for us, understand, we didn't have it. We had to go out on the railroads and places like that not too far from here and pick up coke and stuff like that to come back home maybe.

John Fisher: Now, that was during that Depression time. I was a little boy, eight or nine years old. I can remember that real well because we would go to Sunday school on a Sunday morning. Well, we would go to Sunday school and when we'd come from church, we'd have to pull off that pair—we had had a little pair of Sunday shoes, as they called it. You understand? We had to pull that off, see, and put on your overalls and things like that and play, because we weren't going to do anything but play anyway, see? We had what you call Sunday clothes. Yeah? You've heard those terms? Yeah, that's what we had. I remember that.

John Fisher: Well, you have to get in behind me now because I think I've about run down on this thing, up

until I went to—when I was a youngster, I can remember we all played in the backyard. We used to get up in the morning, we'd have to sweep that yard, clean it, and we'd play in that yard all day long, shooting marbles and doing everything. See? Me and all my friends, my neighborhood friends. I need my buddy, he old Clyde, old Clyde would do some talking. I wish I had thought of that, I'd have brought him in here this morning with me, and he could tell you a few things, because see, these fellas sit down and they can remember that stuff. When they bring it up I go, "Oh yeah, I do remember that. Yeah."

Tywanna Whorley: How were you parents able to keep—you were saying there were some hard times in the thirties. Do you remember any others? In terms of how your parents had to keep the family together as compared to some of the neighbors, what they were going through.

John Fisher: Everybody was going through the same thing. Everybody was going through the same thing. If we had a piece of bread here, well, this fella next door didn't have it, we'd give him a piece of our bread. You understand? That's the way that thing worked. See? Children and things, I can remember children coming to play with us, being in the backyard there playing, and when my mother cooked, she'd feed all those children. See? Everybody gets fed there. I can remember young men around here, some of those fellas are dead now. They would just stay around my house because by being seven—well, at that particular time it was five of us.

John Fisher: Five of us, and all the youngsters would just crowded around us, and those dudes, man, they'd stay there day and when night come, they'd sit around. You didn't have to worry about locking no doors or nobody taking anything from you, you understand? We'd lay around and sleep and laying on the floor, it didn't mean nothing. We made it just like that, see? We got about it, and sometimes we'd wake up the next morning, find some of those dudes still sitting there. Some of them still there. "You didn't go home?" "My mama didn't call me," you understand? He stayed there. We didn't care.

John Fisher: See, now, back during those times, it was kind of rough. The sanitary condition wasn't good, see? I can also remember that these fellas—at that particular time, we didn't even have water toilets, as you might call them. In some areas right here in this section of town, we had that so-called dry toilet thing, see? Well, a dry toilet was a type of toilet where you just had a little so-called outhouse sitting there. You understand? You would go in there and use that thing, and some time during the week, a man would come down through the alleys, because the thing was sitting out on the alleys, see? A man would come down through the alley and he'd have a horse or something pulling that big little tank he had, and then have it sent home behind you. Make you sick.

John Fisher: Now, you know what I believe? That was one of the reasons why the life expectancy for us Black dudes wasn't too good, see? Because if you get to be thirty-five, forty years old, you's old (Laughs). Yeah, so we had those conditions. When they put city sewers and whatnot in, I remember when they put those in. They put those in in our area, that was in 19—I tell you what year it was, 1939. See? Because I had gone to high school, and they started putting that sewer line in back there so that we could get away from that condition.

John Fisher: Our house caught afire one night. Never will forget that either. Our house caught afire, and the fire department couldn't get down to the house to put it out because the roads was all opened up. They were putting sewer line there. See? When they did get to that house, that house about—the same house about burnt down, see?

Tywanna Whorley: You know how it got started?

John Fisher: Never knew, never knew. My father worked night all the time, and he would go to work at eleven o'clock at night, around ten o'clock at night, and he didn't come back to the next morning at six, seven o'clock. We were there in the bed asleep that night, and about—oh, I guess about one thirty, two o'clock, my little baby brothers—I had a baby brother, one who died, Theodus. He woke my mother up because he was crying and hollering on.

John Fisher: She was thought maybe that he was having problems, and when that boy started crying, that whole house was full of smoke. See? We were laying there asleep, everybody been there asleep. That boy cried and my mother woke up. When she woke up, she could smell that smoke and she said she could almost see it. See? She started hollering, but when she started hollering, I immediately heard that. I jumped up. See, I was in bed myself. I jumped up and that whole fire was up here and smoke, and we were in the bed down here. I had to break a window out to get out of that house. See?

John Fisher: We had been locked up. We was locked up in there, and when we did get out, I remember some old fella was standing up out there, just standing there looking at it. He wasn't trying to look like he was trying to wake nobody up either. I found— we had to come out of a window. We couldn't open the door to come out. I knocked the window out and I—during that year, I was wearing—I was the only one in high school. We were wearing uniforms to school. We wore uniforms to—

Tywanna Whorley: Parker?

John Fisher: Parker and Industrial, yeah. After we got outside, I didn't have one pair of pants, that was just the damn uniform (laughs) and one pair of shoes. I looked at that, I thought, "My shoes are still in there, man." I broke back in that house, get my shoes, and I had to crawl out and I come out on my stomach. I got my shoes though, but that's all I had.

Tywanna Whorley: Where did your family stay?

John Fisher: Where did we live?

Tywanna Whorley: Where did your family live after the fire?

John Fisher: I tell you what, it was a room left there that didn't burn up. (laughs) We didn't lived there while they built it, you understand, while they fixed it back. They didn't do no big thing. They just do a lot of patching until they got it fixed up, and we never left there. See? Yeah.

Tywanna Whorley: Who was doing the building?

John Fisher: Well, just a handyman. I reckon you didn't have no—ain't get ahold of no contractor, we didn't—dude come along, said he could build it, let him go to work. See? Trying to get it back up. Trying to get it back up, that's the way it was. Now, that was my life up until '42.

Tywanna Whorley: You said that you wore uniforms for Parker?

John Fisher: Yeah.

Tywanna Whorley: Parker, was it a Catholic school?

John Fisher: No, no, it wasn't a Catholic school. That was the attire then back in—up until—they really just changed that dress code. I imagine that changed after World War II, but now before then, prior to then, everybody wore uniforms. See?

Tywanna Whorley: Male and female?

John Fisher: Male and female. Yeah.

Tywanna Whorley: How would you describe the uniforms?

John Fisher: Well, the boys would wear olive drab, as you might call it. Olive drab trousers, kind of brownish-looking trousers, and the girls would wear blue—I believe it was blue skirt or white dress or something like that. That's what people were wearing then. That's been so long, actually, them colors and things kind of get me messed up, but I do know we were wearing uniform. See?

John Fisher: We wore uniforms because that being—at that particular time, these high schools like—Irma. I believe that was another school, but I don't know what year, it was in—now, the only other high school that we had was in the county. This was a city school that I'm talking about now, Parker was. Now, you had your county schools. I think Fairfield was considered as a county school. See? They had a high school out there.

John Fisher: But here in the city, every child from all over this city, Black, had to come to one location to high school. See? The method, the transportation then was by trolley cars. Those trolley cars, they ran all over this city, everywhere. All from Homewood to Bessamer to out here in this section, east, west, north and south. Understand the trolley cars, everybody would come right there to Eighth Avenue, Third, Fourth Street. Third and Seventh, Fourth Street, and you would have, I imagine—what, about five, six thousand children, see? That school was over there. The graduating class being about five hundred. Wasn't nothing but five hundred students. Yeah.

Tywanna Whorley: How much was the trolley then?

John Fisher: At that particular time to ride the trolley? Well, I can remember them at seven cent. Then it went to a dime, but when I was going to school, they would give the school children a book of—you had an authorization to get you a book of tickets from the transit company, and those tickets would give you twenty rides. Was supposed to last you a month, see? You could get that book of tickets for a dollar and a quarter. See, that run about two and a half cents or something like that for a fare.

John Fisher: That was the most—and a whole lot of time children didn't have that dollar and a quarter to buy those tickets with. Then you would see a lot of children in the streets walking to go to school, go to high school. They'd leave home in the morning, five or six o'clock. A whole lot of them from way out in the outlying areas, they're trying to get in here, see, to go to school. They'd be night getting back home in the evening because they had to walk. Nobody—

Tywanna Whorley: What about you? [indistinct 00:26:41]?

John Fisher: Well, from there, to a bicycle, I had me a bicycle. People bought me a bicycle. See? It's about two miles across here to Parker to Industrial, and I had a bicycle. See? Then a whole lot of times I wanted to walk, because everybody else walked, walked with them. We had a good time walking. Yeah. That's right.

Tywanna Whorley: When you rode the trolleys, I assume they were segregated.

John Fisher: Yes. They was. They was segregated at that particular time. You had the White would get on. The school children, they put on a special car for school children.

Tywanna Whorley: Black school children?

John Fisher: Well, Blacks, yeah. Well, I really can't speak too much for Whites because there was no Whites out here. This was all Blacks. You understand? We had what you call a special. A car would be out here every morning, two or three cars, trolley cars. They're specials. They don't ride nothing but school children, and they just filled it up with school children going to school, see? Those that had tickets, the fares, to pay for, to ride it. In the evening, those same cars would be sitting out there waiting on you to get out of school. See? When you get out of school, you load up on your car. When your car gets full, that fella would take off with that car. Then another going to come up. He load that, he take off with that car going this east, west, north and south all over the city, see?

John Fisher: That was—now, the general public, that was segregated conditions there, because they're—I've known the time you had all—there were no Black operators. You know what I'm talking about? They were all White, and I have known the time when the White people that get on that car, they would be in the front, and if you had a White motorman sitting up there driving, you was supposed to get on the front and pay him and go to the back, but he would open the door and collect your money and tell you to go back to the back there, get in the back door (laughs).

John Fisher: Am I telling the truth? Yeah, well I'm telling you, that's right. I know that to be a fact. See? Sometime he'll drive off and leave you. You'll pay him, he drive on off and leave you. He ain't going to give you time to get on. See? I've known that to happen.

Tywanna Whorley: When did you first become aware of—that there was a difference, or that there was something in terms of segregation?

John Fisher: Well, yeah, well now—I've probably been aware of it—I have been aware of it all my life, but it really didn't affect me because I didn't get out there too much dealing with it. I'd been aware that there were certain things, that we had limitations. I have probably been aware of that all my life. See?

Tywanna Whorley: Did your parents ever talk to you about it?

John Fisher: Well, yeah, in a way. I don't know. Maybe—my parents—

John Fisher: I had an incident once. I got to get this over to you, let you know, because it's really—my people, they didn't just sit down and talk to me until in later years when they found out that I didn't like a whole lot of stuff that was going on. I wasn't going to take a whole lot of it. You understand? Then they had to tell me that I had to be aware of what I do. You understand?

John Fisher: Okay? Because you see, I thought, really and truly as a youngster coming up, I didn't pay too much attention to the White boy, and the White and the Black. I just knew that I didn't play with him. See? I didn't know why, and didn't make too much difference. See?

John Fisher: Later on my, I found out that these people thought they were—well, they acted in a superior way. They thought you had to be submissive to them or something like that, see? I found out as I've gotten a little older, coming into adolescence, a youngster growing up, that when we go out, all of a sudden groups of people that you just didn't be with. You didn't be with. It wasn't advisable for you to try to associate with them because you going to get in trouble, see?

John Fisher: We would try to go to the movie, but when we got to the movie, the White people would go downstairs, sit in there down in the audience, and we had a little space up in a little balcony up there. We had to go around the side, take steps and go up here. You understand, and look down at the movie. Well, that's the way it was. I thought maybe that's the way it's supposed to be. See? I ain't give it a thought. I didn't thought about it. I just said I won't go to the movie. That's what—forget about it. We had—then when I got bigger, we would go downtown and we had a movie down there. You can go in the bottom or top, see?

Tywanna Whorley: What was the name of the theater?

John Fisher: Famous Theater. The old, the Famous Theater, and then they had another one right across the street was called Frolic Theater. See?

Tywanna Whorley: Were they all on Fourth Avenue?

John Fisher: All on Fourth Avenue, but now they had another one right around the corner there on Third Avenue across from the Alabama was the Lyric Theatre, but you had to go upstairs in there because White people going downstairs. Then in later years, of course I had quit going to movies after I had an experience when I came out of service, and I just straight out quit going to movies. See? Because until I got to be my own man, and of course I had a family then, and I would take my children and we would go to the so-called drive-in that we had. I put them all in the car and we'd go to drive-in, see?

Tywanna Whorley: Where was the drive-in?

John Fisher: Well, we had two or three that—it wasn't the best of drive-ins, but we made do with it, you see? I can remember a couple of them we had on this section of town. We had one out here close around this Grand Terrace. It was the Grand Terrace Ballroom they had out there, and he had a drive-in theater there, and they had another one right here in Brighton or in Bessamer or someplace down there. I don't know the name of it, but those two. I had a family then, and had access to an automobile. Things had gotten a little better so far as transportation was concerned. Of course, the trolley cars were just about gone, see?

Tywanna Whorley: Can you tell me—you mentioned that you were in the service. When did you go into the service?

John Fisher: I went into service in '43.

Tywanna Whorley: Which arm?

John Fisher: The army. Went into the army, and I stayed in the army—at least I was there until '46.

Tywanna Whorley: Were you drafted or —

John Fisher: I was drafted. I was drafted back in '43, in May, I believe it was. Yeah. When they—I believe V—what you call it? Oh, what you call that day—

Tywanna Whorley: V-Day?

John Fisher: Not V-Day, but—

Tywanna Whorley: D-Day?

John Fisher: D-Day. D-Day, yeah, '44. D-Day '44. I think I was — I was speaking about that the other day to some people. I said, if I can remember correctly, I was in the Pacific Ocean on the ship on my way to the South Pacific, see? I was down there when they dropped that atomic bomb in '45. See, I was sitting in the South China Sea getting ready for the invasion of Tokyo, see? We were sitting out in there, out in the South

China Sea, and they dropped that atomic bomb, and after they dropped it, then they turned around and rerouted us so it brought us back off there out of the South China Sea and sent us back into Manila.

John Fisher: That was our base there at Clarks Air Force Base. Then I was discharged from there. I left there—I believe it was December eighth, 1945. We made stateside on the twenty-fourth of December, but they just stopped us there in San Francisco. We didn't get a chance to see our people until January, the next month, because that's when—it was so crowded there in San Francisco back in '45, because all the soldiers was coming back, coming from everywhere, and they were trying to get them home, you know? Servicemen, rather, not just soldiers.

Tywanna Whorley: When you first joined, where were you stationed?

John Fisher: I was stationed—I went in and they accept—I went down to Fort Benning, and from Fort Benning after I was checked in there, they sent me over to Camp Rucker here down around Dothan, Alabama someplace, but I left there and I went out to North Carolina. That's where I taken my basic.

Tywanna Whorley: Your training?

John Fisher: My training, yeah, there down around Monroe, North Carolina, close to Charlotte, see? Then I left there after we'd taken our training there. Then we had orders to go to Camp Shanks in New York, but they changed our orders and told us to report to Stoneman in California. They said they pulled the debarcation, as they called that. Get you out of the United States, [indistinct 00:38:22] somewhere. Wanted to fight the war, in the war, they needed us. Yeah, we had to go, so we went on to the—went to the South Pacific, and I stayed in the South Pacific until that war was over with. See?

John Fisher: I was on several islands down there. I started out in New Guinea, and we went up through—[indistinct 00:38:48] or something or other like that, I don't know, but—and then we went into the Philippine Islands. I remember going into Mindoro, Mindanao, and Luzon, see? Up there close around Bataan where they had that death march, actually. Well, I happened to witness a whole lot of that stuff.

John Fisher: I came back home. Well, my father, he had passed. He had been dead about a year when I come back home. A whole lot of it I didn't even know, because during that time they would censor your mail, see? If it was anything in there that would worry you, then they would cut it out of your mail.

Tywanna Whorley: What kinds of mail?

John Fisher: Well, they would open all mail. See, when we were in service there during those years, they would open your mail and read it and then they wouldn't let no information get to you that would disturb you. My mother told me—I never will forget it. I came home and when I walked in, I spoke to my mother. I grabbed her and hugged her. She said, "Daddy left us." Well, it kind of worried me. I said, "What you mean, he running away?" (laughs) You understand what I'm talking about? I didn't know he had passed. She said, "No," said, "He died." I go—but see, I just didn't think nothing like that would ever happen. You know what I

mean?

John Fisher: Then she told me, she said, what happened when my father passed, she said the Red Cross or something like that, the War Department, somebody come to her and told her that—well, said, "Your husband is dead." Said, "We know your son is alive now, but if we attempt to bring your son home, then we might bring your dead son." See? Now that's way it went, see? That's what she told me, see? I took it for face value. Yeah, I understood what was going on at that particular time, see? We were really into it because I was sleeping in foxholes at that particular time, right on the ground in a hole.

Tywanna Whorley: Was the army—I know it wasn't—can you tell me a little bit being in the army—

John Fisher: The army was segregated stateside. I know they were, because we were in a Black unit all the time. No Whites were there with us. Now, they attempted integration when we went overseas. They tried to mix the White—and we mixed well. I think we did well. When the war was over with, they brought us back home together. We did okay until we got back stateside. When we got back stateside, they separated us again. See?

Tywanna Whorley: What did they say?

John Fisher: No, no. It was no explanation. That's just the way it worked out. See? They worked out—they sent us—we got on a troop train. I got on a train, it was all Black. You understand? We was going two different ways now. You understand? That thing switched up just that quick.

John Fisher: Well, I imagine all the Black boys were just about it like I was. It didn't make too much difference. "Look, you don't want to be with me? I don't need to be with you either." You understand? Yeah, we can start a big fight if you want to. It'd be all right. We could do that.

John Fisher: It was a whole lot of controversy went on while we were in the service overseas. We had trouble with—Blacks and Whites had trouble. See? If you attempted to try to get together, there was going to be a big fight. I imagine the whole world was segregated. See? I don't know. We just thought we were alive. Never given a thought about, we're not supposed to be segregated, we're supposed to be together. I ain't never give it a thought. I was, well—but I do know that the Black—if you went in any of these stores, even downtown where—

John Fisher: We would go downtown and you couldn't go to the restroom. They had the big signs sitting up here, Colored and White, for water, at the water fountain, things like that. A number of times, I'd been downtown and needed to go to the restroom, and I had to—well, I had to walk fast. See? You could always go down to the train station. Right here in Birmingham, down there on Mars Avenue to the train station. You could go in there and you could use the bathroom, you could use the restroom, but you had Black and White. Black restroom, White restrooms, see?

John Fisher: If you were Black and you got caught uptown, well, you had to try to make it, if you could, back

to Fourth Avenue. See? Because some of these places down here where all the Black folk was, but the Whites, they could sit down, they could eat on the mezzanine and places like that. See? All you can do is pass by and look. Got to be eating. They playing good music for them (laughs). All that kind of stuff. Yeah. Well, that's the way we made it.

Tywanna Whorley: I'm going to stop the tape there.