

III. Racing Years

No one guessed that the bright-eyed, energetic little Carl Fisher was half blind. Even as a child he was considered as a show-off. He couldn't pass a barrel or a fence or gate without stopping to stand on his head or to "skin the cat." He practiced running backward instead of forward, and tightrope walking on his mother's clothesline. He was the best ice skater in Indianapolis. He built a pair of stilts so tall they had to be mounted from an upstairs window. Once he staged a sensational sled flight down a snowy hill, carrying banners advertising the grocery store where he worked to support his mother and two brothers.

All the time he was deadly serious about everything he did, in a way that made him seem different from the usual "show-off."

Little was known of child care or child psychology when Carl was a small boy. His mother and teachers in Greensburg, Indiana, where Carl was born on January 12, 1874, and in Indianapolis, where Mother Fisher moved with her three sons, Carl, Kolly and Earle, when they were of grammar-school age, would have been surprised to learn that the child Carl had only fifty per cent vision. His "show-off" efforts were compensation for his nickname "Crip," short for cripple, and for being considered the stupidest boy in school. They called him Cripple because he stumbled so much, not knowing how little he could see.

Nothing in Carl's ancestry accounted for his sensational streak. Ida Graham Fisher, his mother, was a firm-minded, steady-eyed woman who had separated from the boy's father, and first supported her three sons by taking in boarders. Only his grandfather had foreshadowed the sort of man Carl would be. Grandpa Fisher laid out the first real-estate development in Indiana, and he was the first man in the state to have his tintype