

## REMEMBERING FRED MORRISON—by Phil Kennedy

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Walter Fredrick (Fred) Morrison, best known as the inventor of THE Frisbee, passed away February 9, 2010 at the age of 90 at his home in Monroe, UT after a long period of declining health.

### ***Fred Morrison had just “the right stuff” to invent the Frisbee!***

Tall, with a wiry athletic build; inquisitive, with a razor-sharp mind honed by western wit; generous to a fault with the biggest, kindest, warmest, people-loving heart around. Not known for being humble, Fred was nevertheless self-effacing: he readily admitted to not being overly handsome. (He was also a distant cousin of Marion Morrison...better known as John Wayne.)

The idea for flying discs didn't start out as the Frisbee. Like most boys and girls since the dawn of time, Fred experimented with flat, round objects he found laying about his small town neighborhood in Richfield, Utah. Flipping them to see how well they would fly, Fred developed a lifelong fascination with flight.

His father, an optometrist, moved the family to Los Angeles in time for Fred to attend John Marshall High School, where he fell head over heels in love with Lucile Nay. Lu invited Fred to her family's Thanksgiving gathering in 1937. After dinner, Lu's uncle produced a popcorn can lid to toss about for fun in the back yard. Fred and Lu continued to enjoy sailing the metal top for days, until it became banged up beyond repair.

They found that a cake pan “borrowed” from Fred's mother's kitchen flew even better. They practiced at the beach until they became so skilled that one day an admirer offered to buy the cake pan for twenty-five cents. A lightbulb went off in Fred's mind. Cake pans then sold for five cents. Trading nickels for quarters had definite possibilities! A new business was born: “Flyin' Cake Pans” were soon available whenever the two showed up at beaches and parks throughout the L.A. area. Sufficient profits ensued to fund dates, and finally, a wedding ring.

Fred began collaborating with his father on developing a better-flying cake pan to sell, but Pearl Harbor interrupted their plans. Because of his love of flight, Fred enlisted in the Army Air Corp, becoming a WWII P-47 fighter-bomber pilot. On a mission over Italy, he was shot down, and held as a P.O.W. in a German stalag for 48 days.

After the War, Fred became a carpenter to support his growing family. But, in his spare time, his thoughts oft returned to developing that better-flying cake pan. In 1946 he drew up plans for an aerodynamic flying disc and dubbed it the Whirlo-Way (after the legendary racehorse).

A year later, he and his boss, Warren Franscioni, decided that producing the Whirlo-Way in plastic might have commercial success. In 1948 their little business, called PIPCO, launched the world's first plastic flying disc, renamed the Flyin-Saucer to take advantage of the new U.F.O. craze. However, despite intense efforts, Flyin-Saucer sales were tepid...attracting no major toy distributors. In early 1950 Fred and Warren parted company.

In 1954 Fred bought more Flyin-Saucers (by then made of the new, flexible polyethylene plastic) from the original molding company to hawk himself at local fairs. As a long-time wheeler-dealer entrepreneur everything was BIG-TIME with Fred: big ideas and big gambles...always with the hope of a big payoff. Thus, when he soon discovered that his margin of profit would be greatly increased by developing a mold of his own, he immediately sat down at the kitchen table and designed the legendary Pluto Platter—now regarded as far superior to the original Flyin-Saucer—and the archetype for all modern flying discs.

Fred was a born goofy show-off...which greatly helped attract large crowds at all of the major fairs he attended in 1955 and 1956. Sales of Pluto Platters were so brisk they attracted the attention of Wham-O Mfg., a young Southern California company that had been aggressively seeking unconventional ideas to develop new lines of interesting products...like the Hula Hoop. On January 23, 1957, his thirty-seventh birthday, Fred and Lu signed over production and marketing rights to their Pluto Platter in exchange for royalties on future sales.

By late spring, Rich Knerr, president of Wham-O, had heard that some college students in New England were referring to the Pluto Platters by another name...a name they had co-opted from the Frisbie Pie Co., a local bakery whose empty tins were tossed after classes. "What the heck, if that'll boost Pluto Platter sales back East, we'll call 'em that, too." Not knowing how to spell the odd name, he settled on "Frisbee" to trademark. The marriage of Fred's plastic flying disc and the catchy name was complete: the Frisbee was born.

Inspired by the increasing royalties pouring in, Fred exercised his inventive spirit: he thunk up Crazy Eight Bowling Balls and The Popsicle Machine, inventions which Wham-O bought into, and an early design for in-line skates, which Wham-O did not(!) In 1961 he gave up the carpentry trade to take a position as a Los Angeles building inspector. Retiring in 1967, he owned and operated a hardware store, and indulged himself racing airplanes.

In 1983 Fred returned to Richfield, Utah and ran a variety of business ventures ranging from operating the local airport, owning a deluxe motel, and establishing a successful racehorse breeding stable on his eighty-acre ranch.

In late 2001 Fred discovered the Internet...and how much grossly false information was being spread about the origins of the Frisbee...*and him!* He became motivated to correct the record! In 2002 Fred connected with Phil Kennedy, an original Pluto Platter player, disc collector and Frisbee historian, and began a four-year joint project culminating in their definitive 436-page book ***Flat Flip Flies Straight, True Origins of the Frisbee.*** ([www.FlatFlip.com](http://www.FlatFlip.com))

Fred often spoke of his total astonishment over how his simple idea for a better-flying cake pan took off. Today, there's virtually no one on the planet who doesn't know what to do with a Frisbee!

"It's amaaaaazing...I've been the luckiest guy in the world!"

Smoooooth flights, Fred!