

INTERVIEW WITH AL DARREN JULY 19, 1980:30 p.m.

Q. Tell me what you remember about the 1939-40 World's Fair.

A. Well at that time there was a Depression, we were all young. there wasn't much you could do, there was no work, so the fair was a fantasy world to us, and we were brought up in a fantasy world to hope for better things. I was about 18 or 19, but it was something to look forward to and at least you got here and everyday there were different events, and people to see. We came over when the King and Queen of England were here and I could almost touch them and I'll never forget she was so beautiful. And then I think the other things that left an impression with me was the Russian Pavillion the first year, how gigantic it was. Of course all this talk of Communism was going on in the world and socialism. And then the Italian Pavillion, and I remember the Japanese Pavillion, the first time I had exposure to Oriental women and they were so beautiful, I could still remember.

But as I said in starting it was a fantasy world. Here we had all the international, and we went over and my friend and I were on television for the first time. I don't know how it happened, but he was picked out to go on tv and it was all over the neighborhood the next night that we were on television. We saw ourselves and we didn't realize that at that time that we would have color television and cable television at home, that the movies would be almost something that you rarely go to see today.

And then I remember the first time that the fair had a dress rehearsal. So we came in here at night and we heard music and we walked over and there was Billy Rose's aquacade having a dress rehearsal and we saw it. Eleanor Holme, Johnny Weismuller and Billy Rose was there and as hard as it was to get a pack of cigarettes he was asking us for cigarettes all night and we were saying Billy Rose is asking us for cigarettes?

We just walked into the rehearsal and, as a matter of fact, to be truthful, we never paid to get in the World's Fair. There was an area up in the northeast corner where we could get through the gates and I can remember the time when it was tragic when the bomb went off and in one of the pavillions and two detectives were killed. I don't know if a lot of people recalled that, but that happened at the World's Fair. Nobody knows to this day how it went off. They don't know who put the bomb there, but of course that time there was attention throughout the world because World War II was coming. You couldn't sense the tension at the fair. We didn't. You just forgot about Europe. Europe was 3000 miles away; we couldn't care less about what was going on over there in Japan. We were an isolated country. We didn't have the background that we have today, the communications, let me put it that way and all we looked forward to was the General Motors building and we'd wait in line and say that's what it's going to be like. Now the thing that was very ironic was the General Electric building. I used to go in there and see man-made lighting--that's what they described.

And I never realized then that I would work for General Electric and coming January 1981 I would be with them for 40 years. So here it was and the World's Fair did have a tremendous impact on me, on my life and it still does as I walk through the fairgrounds, and I walk through today.

In retrospect it was a fantasy world, but it wasn't a practical world.