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[MAIN PAGE](#)

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[SPORTS](#)

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[SPACE](#)

[HEALTH](#)

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[BOOKS](#)

[news](#)

[interviews](#)

[first chapters](#)

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[reader's cafe](#)

[bestsellers](#)

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Eddie's tale: 'Been There, Done That'

October 4, 1999

Web posted at: 5:30 p.m. EST (2130 GMT)

By Emily Soares
for CNN Interactive

- ['I have no other talent'](#)
- [A Who's Who of the rich, famous](#)
- [Dr. Feelgood and his elixir of joy](#)
- ['The only wife I've ever had'](#)
- ['... now there's a cloud overhead'](#)



(CNN) -- He's had everything: fame, fortune, money, beautiful women, and he lost much of it through years of drug use and superstar abandon. For Eddie Fisher, the good times, the bad times and the romance of it all take voice in his expose/autobiography "Been There Done That."

This isn't the first time Fisher has put his life to paper. But he says the earlier autobiography, "My Life, My Loves," left too much untold. "I wanted to show a more overall picture and be a little more explicit than I was," he said in a recent interview with CNN Interactive.

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Such explicitness has caused some problems. Fallout from the book, which dishes dirt on Debbie Reynolds and Liz Taylor, (and Ann-Margret and Mamie Van Doren and Marlene Dietrich and Pier Angeli and Stefanie Powers ...) has already cost Fisher, if not yet in legal fees then in personal relationships. Former Mama's and the Papa's vocalist Michelle Phillips has announced she's "contacting her lawyer" over Fisher's claim that he had a sexual liaison with her. And Fisher's children -- by first wife Reynolds and third wife Connie Stevens -- are not happy either. But Fisher argues that he simply put down the events and people of his past as he remembers them.

"I told the truest story I'll ever know. It was no story; it's the exact truth," he contends. "And I have a terrific memory. No matter what I've been through in my life and for how long, I have a tremendous memory for things that have happened to me that were important."

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One of those important events was Fisher's relationship with Elizabeth Taylor, his second wife to whom a large portion of the book is devoted. Reportedly, she is not pleased with the results. The two have had virtually no contact since Taylor and Richard Burton began a tempestuous affair in 1963 that would end her marriage to Fisher. But Fisher doesn't see why she has been publicly dismissive of their relationship.

"I think there was a statement published -- something that Elizabeth said or through her lawyer: 'If you'll notice, he's the only husband I don't talk about.' Now I don't know why that is because I don't think I was the worst. I only loved her, and for her to come out and say that my book is a fantasy or that my life with her was a fantasy, it's true, it was *a fantasy*, but it was something that I'll never forget. We loved each other very much and if I tell you now that she didn't love me, it's a lie. I think she loved me more than I loved her."

Fisher and Taylor caused a worldwide scandal when he left first wife Debbie Reynolds to marry Liz, not long after Taylor's husband, Mike Todd, died in a plane crash. In the book Fisher says Liz pursued him.

"I never saw her as a beautiful, desirable woman. She was my best friend's widow, she was my friend," he wrote. Then she called, asking him to come visit her. "I assumed she wanted to talk about Mike. Which demonstrates how little I understood women."

'I have no other talent'

Though "Been There, Done That" lays out the life of a man who had a natural way with the ladies, it was his voice that opened every door. "My name is Eddie Fisher, and I'm a singer" is the book's opening line, and from the time he was a small boy there was nothing else Fisher wanted to do. "If I wasn't able to sing I would be a ... Do they still have street cleaners? I have no idea. I have no other talent."

He admits, though, that in his quest for love his career nearly got lost. And there certainly was enough to keep him distracted. "Been There, Done That" reads at times like a little black book, with the details *filled in*. For Fisher, there were beautiful women everywhere, and they all wanted a piece of him. But he says the sometimes bragging tone of the book is not him as much as the work of co-writer David Fisher (no relation). In one passage, Fisher describes his tremendous popularity and a point at which he had "eclipsed" Sinatra -- a declaration he says he would never make.

"I never surpassed Sinatra. Never. I don't care what the guy says in the book; I never approached Presley or the Beatles in any shape or form," Fisher says. "Only thing I had was 22 hits in a row, which doesn't compare to anything that they achieved. I would never compare myself to these people. I mean, these are great immortals that will live forever ..."

Fisher says the title wasn't his idea, either, but that of the publisher. "My title was 'Prisoner of Love.' I can't fight them now. It's too late."

A Who's Who of the rich, famous

While Fisher spends a lot of time describing, in somewhat lurid detail, his liaisons with a Who's Who of gorgeous women, his male contemporaries are as colorful -- the royalty of 1960s celebrityism, from Camelot to the Rat Pack. Underworld boss Sam Giancana, linked to both Sinatra and John Kennedy, is described as a close friend. "He treated me like the Jewish son he never had," Fisher writes.

"I hate to say he loved me, because there I go again, but I was talking about the people that I knew and I was close to him -- not in the Sinatra way -- but I didn't get into his life and the things that he did, but I liked him. I was very, very fond of him and I know how notorious he was, but I had some wonderful stories being with him. But some of these, if I told you, you could never print it."

Fisher was also very fond of President Kennedy, with whom he shared similar tastes in women and friends. "I loved him. I think he had the charisma, more than any motion picture star or anybody that I ever met in my whole life. I mean, I've met almost everybody, and no one possessed his magic."

Dr. Feelgood and his elixir of joy

Fisher says he and the president shared a more sinister bond: they were both patients of Dr. Max Jacobson, a physician known to the high and mighty as "Dr. Feelgood." Fisher says Jacobson figured prominently in his own life, starting at age 25 with a shot of "serum" from Jacobson when Fisher was having trouble with his voice prior to a performance. The shot was methamphetamine, and Fisher says he was hooked for 37 years. Fisher says many others, including Kennedy, enjoyed a boost from Jacobson's elixir.

"He was a very big figure in my life. ... I think he thought he was helping people, but I think he got terribly, terribly lost in the middle of it all.

I think the medication went to his brain because he used 100 times more than he used on us guinea pigs. He would give himself these injections and he would fall asleep in the middle of injecting us. But I didn't know it at the time.

"I figured he was a doctor and he was so famous and what he did for me -- in my mind, I thought I was more brilliant than I was. I didn't know that I was an idiot. And he made me sing better, I thought. But I discovered years later when I was no longer on the methamphetamine, that I sang much better without it. I thought that I couldn't live without it, just like I couldn't live without Elizabeth."

'The only wife I've ever had'

After kicking the drugs and his habit for actresses, Fisher, 71, says he found true happiness with his fourth wife, Betty. In the dedication of the book he describes her as "The only wife I've ever had."

What? He's quick to explain.

"When you marry an actress, you're marrying someone who is in an all-encompassing business -- it's a business no matter how we look at it -- and they

can't be a wife like the wife I have now. We've been together 11 years and she knows what it's all about to live with a man. ... she takes care of me; I take care of her. But she's a very strong lady and very difficult to take care of; I cannot keep up with her."

'... now there's a cloud overhead'

But with residue of the past unearthed in the new book, Fisher's already strained relationship with his children -- Carrie and Todd from his marriage to Debbie Reynolds, and Joely and Tricia from his marriage to Connie Stevens -- has been further damaged. "(Todd) is not even talking to me anymore," Fisher says, "but I hope that's temporary, because I love them all so very much. Even though I was not there for them. I was not a -- I was going to say I was not a great father. I wasn't a father at all. But we became, we understood each other, all of us, I thought. And now there's a cloud overhead."

Though it has opened old wounds, "Been There, Done That" also documents the music and culture of an era that is increasingly a fascination for younger generations. "It was wonderful stuff," Fisher says. "There's some good music today, but most of it is too loud and I can't hear the words."

For Eddie Fisher, the music of his time brings to mind bittersweet years: glorious concerts, Max's "vitamin cocktails," broken marriages, and whirlwind sexual liaisons. But when all is said and done, he says it's the women he remembers most fondly.

"I think the songs in my era; they had wonderful lyrics. (They were) so full of love and so full of charm and, I guess, sentimentality. I love sentiment. I love romance. That's what I love about women -- it's romance."

Perhaps the book should've been titled Prisoner of Love, after all.

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