

Martinez Oral History Project

Interviewee: Frances (Frank) William Bozdeck, Jr.
Interview Date: February 21, 2021
Interview Location: Homeless Encampment at Amphitheater, Martinez, CA.
Interviewer: Deborah Zamaria

Frank has a slight recollection of his grandparents. His grandfather on his father's side was William Edwards Bozdeck and although he never met him, he was told that he lived on an island off the coast of New Zealand named Bozdeck Island. There are 600 small islands off the coast of the north and south islands of New Zealand, and apparently Bozdeck Island is one of them.

His grandmother on his mother's side was Frank's favorite grandparent. Her name was Ruth Hanratty. She lived in Napa and Frank has many fond memories of going to his grandma's home for holidays and every summer.

Frank was born on February 6, 1968 at a Catholic hospital in Oakland to Frank William Bozdeck and Barbara Claire Hanratty Bozdeck. His parents met on land, under the Golden Gate Bridge in California. Frank senior spotted Barbara and complimented her. They dated for a bit and then got married at a Catholic church in Oakland in 1966.

His mom, Barbara had been previously married to a Commander in the Navy. They had a daughter and when they divorced, the daughter lived with her mother and became Frank's step-sister.

During the time of Frank's parents meeting, his mother was in the Army and was also working part time at a small bar on 31st Street in Oakland. After Frank was born the small family moved to an apartment on 31st Street. However, when Frank was two years old, his parents divorced. There was a custody fight over the step-daughter and she went to live with her father, the Naval Commander.

At this point, Frank and his mom moved to Vacaville to a little apartment on Peabody Street. Next they moved to Alamo Street and finally they moved to the Callan Street Apartments in Vacaville. His mom didn't work at this time but received help from the government in the form of food stamps and General Assistance.

Frank attended school in Vacaville from Kindergarten through high school. He first attended Payton Elementary from K through 6th. Then he went to Jepson Junior High and finally he attended Vaca High. He was one class short of graduating but left school. There was a creek near his house called Alamo Creek where Frank and his friends often gathered. His mother joked with him that he was attending Alamo Creek School, because he spent more time there than in his classes.

Frank had been very athletic in high school, playing baseball and football and was scouted by the LA Dodgers in his senior year. He decided not to go with them however, because he wanted to be with the Oakland As. Looking back on that decision, he realized the mistake he had made because he could have played professional baseball and ultimately gotten traded to the As. His cousin, Terry Hanratty, was a former American football quarterback who played in college at Notre Dame and in the National Football League during the 1960s and 1970s, so that athleticism ran in the family. However, Frank took a different path.

When he was 18 years old, Frank moved from Vacaville to Benicia. At this time he had a pretty serious drug problem and realized he needed help, so he entered a residential drug treatment program in Benicia called Alamo, on First Street. He stayed there for two years and was clean and sober for three years after that.

After leaving the program, he moved in to a two-bedroom apartment with another graduate of the program. Frank was working in the Mare Island Commissary at the time, stocking on the night shift.

Around 1990, he moved to Vallejo. He was closer to his work at Mare Island and he has some good memories of this time in the little blue apartments, until he started using again.

2002 was a difficult year for Frank because his mom passed away. His mom had remarried later in life to a man named Billy and Frank, who had only known his mother for most of his life, felt a competition and resentment towards Billy.

His mom and Billy were married for 13 years and Billy passed away in November of 2001, but before he died, he reached out to Frank to make amends and Frank realized that Billy was a really good guy.

Frank's mom died shortly after Billy passed, in early 2002 and her death sent Frank into a tailspin of destructive behavior. He felt completely alone, losing his job and his apartment and giving up on everything. Frank and his aunt and uncle made the arrangements for the funeral and then, desperate, Frank moved to Reno. His drug and alcohol use became dangerous and he lived in a "hole in the wall" motel. This was a dark time for Frank, but his best friend, Sean Ramirez, who Frank had known since he was nine years old, rescued him.

Sean brought Frank to Altus, Oklahoma in 2003 where he lived with his wife and children. It was here in a guest house in Sean's backyard that Frank went through withdrawal and was watched over by Sean. Sean, who had a job as an ambulance driver, listened to Frank as he vented and faced the difficult emotions that he had to face as he became sober

Frank stayed with Sean and his family for two years while he healed and got back on his feet. Sean's father owned a hay business and when Frank felt better, he worked in that business for a number of months.

Finally, with Sean's help and Frank's hard work, he felt well enough to move back to the Bay Area, to Vacaville and then to Martinez.

In Vacaville, he met Mica Ramirez, who was to be his girlfriend for 17 years. They met in a bar in Vacaville, and although they never married, they remained friends to this day. She lived on Ferry Street in Martinez and Frank stayed with her for a while until his demons returned and he started using again and cheating on Mica. His name had been on her lease, but she kicked him out and removed his name from the lease.

It was at this point that Frank became homeless. He stayed at different locations outside around Martinez and met Judy Vanier through a work program in Concord around 2015.

Throughout his stay in Vacaville and Benicia, Frank became involved with three different women and fathered three different children. His girlfriend Chris gave birth to Jessica. With Robin, he fathered Blue Merrill and with Cindy, he became a parent to Amber Louise Kay Bozdeck. All three daughters are now grown. Amber is with her mom in Iowa, Blue is in Benicia and Jessica lives in Vacaville.

Frank, Shon Mercurio, Mike Nadeau and a few others discovered the Amphitheater and thought it would be a good place to camp. It was around this time that Noralea Gipner and Rodney Brinsner, a Martinez police officer, started an encampment at the Amphitheater that Frank calls "Noralea's Little Town". It quickly became a safe place for many homeless folks to stay during the pandemic. With the help of Frank and other campers, and of course, Noralea, the encampment has become a safe place for about 30 homeless people to stay and try to get their lives back on track during this pandemic.

Frank would like his legacy to be that he helps people. A mentor by the name of Frank Costanza, who worked in a drug rehabilitation program called Personal Support Group (PSG) in Lake Port when Frank was a resident there, taught him to be patient and to not blame others.

With past guidance from Mr. Costanza and Frank's grandmother who insisted that Frank attend church when he stayed with her, he's learned to forgive himself for the pain he's caused to his loved ones. He indicated that he would like to go back into an inpatient program so that he might start over, have success in life and be a positive influence on those around him.

Frank is already a positive influence in the camp at the Amphitheater. He takes the initiative to help others and he's a valuable member of the camp.

