

# Skywayman:

## The Story of Frank W. Abagnale, Jr.

By Rachael Bell

### Outrunning the Law

Frank was luckier than his fellow inmates that he left behind within the walls of the infamous French prison Perpignan. He had just finished a six-month stint in the jail, where he almost died from malnutrition and pneumonia. It was no wonder, living and sleeping in his own fecal matter and urine on a stone floor for the duration of his sentence. Those who remained in the prison continued to live a subhuman existence.

Frank was transferred from Perpignan to a low security prison in Sweden. Within the Swedish prison, the treatment of inmates and the conditions were considerably better -- far cry from the filth hole he left behind. Frank had been sentenced to six months, which sped by quickly in the near luxurious conditions.

However, near the end of his sentence his passport was revoked and he awaited deportation from Sweden back to the United States.

Although he feared a harsher sentence in America than that which he had in Sweden, it would be nothing compared to the prisons of the twelve other countries that wanted to extradite him for passing bad checks. Many of the foreign prisons were similar to the nightmarish penitentiary in France. But regardless of where he served his time, just the mere thought of being incarcerated for a large portion of his young adulthood spooked Frank. He decided to make a daring escape.

During his deportation from Sweden, Frank was escorted onto a plane bound for New York where officers awaited to take him into custody. Enroute to the United States, Frank plotted a way to escape from the plane. During the last ten minutes before the plane landed in America, Frank made his way to the plane's toilet. He had a working knowledge of the structural components of the aircraft and knew that beneath the

toilet was a hatch leading to the underbelly of the plane.

## Catch Me if You Can

According to Frank W. Abagnales autobiography, *Catch Me if You Can*, he locked himself in the planes bathroom and immediately began to unscrew the compartment surrounding the toilet. Once it was loose, Frank lifted the apparatus, revealing an open compartment. He then climbed in and crawled beneath the plane, waiting for it to touch the ground during its descent towards the landing strip. In the darkness of the night, he jumped from the plane as it approached the ground and ran from the landing strip. He was free but only temporarily.

Once in New York, Frank made his way to an old acquaintances house where he kept a stash of clothes and money. He stayed there only briefly before he left for Montreal, where a safe deposit box with thousands of dollars awaited him. Frank intended to use the

money to buy a non-stop ticket to Brazil, a place where the extradition of criminals was not practiced.

While awaiting his flight to South America, Frank was recognized and arrested by Canadian police. Shortly thereafter, he was released into the custody of the FBI who made sure Frank was safely delivered to a federal detention center. Several months later, he was transferred to a prison in Georgia to await trial. Once again, Frank decided to attempt another bold escape. This time he enlisted the help of an outsider, an ex-girlfriend.

Abagnale stated that during the time of his incarceration, federal penal institutions were under intense scrutiny by public and government officials. Many of the institutions were investigated following an outcry for prisoners civil rights. At the time, it was not unusual for undercover agents to pose as inmates in an effort to get information during their investigations into the prisons. Many of the guards working in the prisons made sport of who actually was or was not an inmate or an agent.

From the moment Frank was committed to the institution, guards speculated that he was an undercover federal agent there to report on the conditions of the prison. He simply looked and acted the part. Frank went out of his way to confirm their suspicions.

Department of Justice Federal Bureau of Prisons  
patchFrank's ex-girlfriend posed as a journalist and went to the U.S. Bureau of Prisons in Washington, D.C. to hold a mock interview with an inspector. Before her departure she obtained a business card with the mans name inscribed on it. She later gave the card to Frank to be used in his plot to free himself.

Once in possession of the card, he persuaded the guards that he really was an undercover agent. He showed them the card and told them that he was a prison inspector. The guards laughed stating that they knew who he was all along. Much to his surprise, the men fell for his con and they eventually released him

from the prison. Frank promptly fled back to New York and then to Washington, D.C.

While in the capital city, Frank stayed in a hotel where he planned his movement to another location. One day during his stay, he realized that FBI men surrounded his room. Taken off guard, he had moments to plan an escape from his current predicament.

Frank audaciously walked past the armed officers that waited for him, despite their orders for him to freeze. He coolly stated that he too was an FBI agent waiting for the arrival of another inspector. He then ordered the officers to continue their pursuit of the criminal. Surprisingly, the men dropped their weapons that were pointing at him and walked away towards the room where they believed the perpetrator to be. They hadn't realized that they had just let the offender go. Frank walked briskly from the scene and escaped into the sunset.

There is no doubt that everyone has talents, whether hidden or exposed. Frank W. Abagnale was no exception to the rule. Not only did he have many

talents but he was a genius in the truest sense of the word, however misdirected he may have been. The truth is, among some of Franks best known and least appreciated talents was his remarkable ability to create and utilize false identities as well as bogus checks. He was a con artist extraordinaire and probably one of the century's most cunning swindlers. His talent for deceiving the authorities and cheating banks, airlines and hotels out of millions of dollars was unprecedented. Even more extraordinary was that he was between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one-years old when he committed the majority of his crimes.

### The Making of a Swindler

While stationed in Oran, Algiers during World War II, Frank W. Abganale Sr. met and fell in love with a beautiful and young French-born woman named Paulette. The two were married shortly thereafter and moved to the suburbs of New York following the war. While there, Frank Sr. established and ran what became a highly profitable stationery store on Madison Avenue. The couple had one daughter and three sons

including Frank W. Abagnale Jr. who was born on April 27, 1948.

Frank Jr. had an uncomplicated early childhood and maintained a good relationship with his parents, especially with his father with whom he was particularly close. However, in his mid teens Frank Jr.s life took an unexpected turn when his mother decided to leave his father. The separation was not only difficult for Frank Jr. and his siblings, but especially so for Frank Sr. who remained deeply in love with his wife.

### Bronxville New York map & surrounding area

Frank Jr.s life was forever changed by his parents separation and eventual divorce. Following the breakup, Frank Jr. chose to live alone with his father after moving from the family home in Bronxville, New York. The two shared a very close relationship and often spent time together. Frank Sr. would sometimes take his son with him on business outings where hed meet up with other prominent businessmen, street-wise blue collar workers and politicians. Frank Jr.



learned a great deal from his interactions with his father's associates, which greatly contributed to his already burgeoning store of knowledge. Yet, although Frank Jr. showed obvious signs of high intellect, it didn't prevent him from getting into trouble during his teenage years.

At around the time his parents divorced Frank Jr. got mixed up with a gang of juvenile delinquents, who often took part in petty crimes, including shoplifting. Eventually, Frank Jr. broke away from the gang whose practice of thievery was far too unsophisticated for him, especially after they were arrested and thrown temporarily into a juvenile detention center. The incident did not prevent him from stealing, but instead marked the beginning of an extensive criminal career. Frank Jr. was a clever teenager and began to develop more proficient and lucrative ways of obtaining money.

Despite his bad behavior, Frank's father forgave him and even entrusted him with a 1952 Ford and a gas credit card. The car and gas card were to be used to help little Frank get to his new part-time clerical job at

a nearby warehouse. However, Frank Jr. had other plans.

Like most teenage boys, girls were at the forefront of Franks thoughts. He was an attractive youth who didnt have much difficulty attracting attention from young ladies. To his delight, the car elicited even more notice from the opposite sex, which resulted in a steady flow of dates. The only problem was that he made a limited amount of money from his part-time job. He had to devise another method of being able to afford to take his girlfriends out. It wasnt long before he decided that the gas card could serve as a key to solving his problems.

Frank devised a clever, yet unethical scheme for obtaining money. Over a period of several months, Frank Jr. went about town charging items from the gas station onto his credit card. He made deals with numerous gas station attendants, in which he would charge countless numbers of tires, car batteries and other accessories onto the card and then be given in return only a fraction of the amount of the sale back in

cash. The attendants pocketed the remaining part of the money, usually around 50%. It seemed like a win, win situation. The gas attendant made a buck, Frank Jr. obtained quick cash and the gas station also profited when it came time to collect on the bill. Yet, it wasn't necessarily a winning situation for Frank's father who eventually got stuck with a gas bill of several thousand dollars.

Following his devious exploits, Frank was returned to his mother's custody and promptly placed in a private school for delinquent boys for the period of one year. Also around the time of his son's reckless caper, Frank Sr.'s stationery business was undergoing financial difficulty. It is believed that the enormous credit card bill further exacerbated his monetary problems. Eventually, Frank Sr. faced financial ruin and the closing of his stationery store.

Frank Jr. later showed regret for having duped his father whom he loved and respected greatly. He was simply a young man with growing needs and an insatiable appetite for women and adventure.

Unfortunately, money played an important role in the pursuit of his interests. None-the-less, Frank Sr. was a confident and forgiving man and showed little concern for his loss of fortune or anger at his sons misdeeds.

Due to the stress surrounding the divorce and his fathers financial misfortune, Frank left home in 1964 at the age of sixteen. He was determined to forge his own way in the world, which was exactly what he did. In fact, he would become one of the countrys most notorious forgers.

### Preparing for Takeoff

Frank left home with a checkbook and \$200 in his bank account and set off to New York City. He temporarily lived with the family of a young boy whom he met during his train ride to the city. It wasnt long before Frank also found a job at a stationery firm, using his experience from working in his fathers business.

It was more difficult to earn a decent living than Frank initially thought, especially without a high school

diploma. If he were to ever live on his own one day, he would have to make more than the \$1.50 an hour he was earning. Frank had an idea that would increase his net worth in terms of his wages.

He decided to alter his birth date on his drivers license by adding another ten years to his age. His tactic was believable because he was mature for his age and six-foot tall with premature graying hair. Frank also decided to push the envelope a little further. He began to exaggerate about his education, knowing that it would likely result in a further increase in his wages. However, he quickly realized that even if he lied about his age and education, the jobs available would pay only enough to provide for the bare minimum in comfort. Frank had higher expectations.

The easiest route presented itself in the form of a checkbook. As soon as Frank arrived in New York, he opened a checking account and received blank checks. He was determined to use the checks in a less conventional manner than what they were intended for.

Instead of earning a living, Frank decided to quit his job and write bad checks in order to support himself.

Before long, he had written hundreds of bum checks and had overdrawn on his checking account by thousands of dollars. Frank knew that the police would eventually catch up with him if he stayed where he was. So, he decided it was best to move away and change his name. While he was in the midst of determining what to do and where to go, Frank had a revelation.

### The Commodore Hotel in New York City

According to an article by About.com, he was struck with an ingenious idea to alter his identity after witnessing several airline pilots and stewardess enjoying themselves outside of New Yorks Commodore Hotel. Frank thought that if he were able to get a hold of a pilots uniform he would have more success with cashing checks all about town because pilots were generally more credible and respected professionals. Thus, bank tellers would less likely be suspicious of him swindling money when he went to cash his bad checks.

From that moment on, Frank set his elaborate scheme into motion. He decided that he would find a way to get a uniform and whatever else he needed so that he could pose as a pilot in order to cash his checks. It would prove to be a more difficult con to pull off than what he initially expected.

In an interview with Norman Swan in March 2000, Frank described how he went about acquiring a Pan American (Pan Am) uniform and impersonating an airline pilot. He contacted a purchasing agent at Pan American Airlines corporate headquarters and told them he was a pilot for the company and that the hotel he was staying at in New York lost his uniform. He was instructed by the agent to visit a company specializing in Pan Am uniforms on 5th Avenue, which he promptly did. That very day, Frank was fitted with a Pan Am co-pilots uniform, which was charged to a fictionalized employee number he invented while filling out the paper work.

Pan Am uniform Frank walked out of the building with his uniform in hand, having conquered one of the first of what would be many obstacles in his scheme.

However, to make his new persona more believable, he realized he needed a Pan Am pass card. After looking in the yellow pages and making several phone calls, Frank learned that the 3M Company was responsible for making passes and IDs for several airline companies, including Pan Am.

Frank contacted the company, pretending to be a purchasing officer interested in buying new ID cards for his company. He then set up an interview. During the meeting with the sales representative, Frank was shown catalogs of the IDs they offered. He noticed in a catalog that there was a sample ID similar to that used by Pan Am. He told the salesman that he wanted to take back a completely finished copy of the pass, using as an example his picture and name so that his imaginary colleagues could see what the end result of the product would look like. The salesman complied with Frank's request and made him a sample pass with



his name and picture on it. The card was almost an exact replica of the Pan Am pass, but without the logo.

Frank solved the emblem problem by buying a model Pan Am plane, which had a copy of the logo inclusive in the model kit. He removed the famous symbol and carefully placed it on the ID pass card. The finished product looked almost flawless. Another obstacle was removed from Franks grand plan.

Frank had two more areas to cover before his new identity was complete, an FAA license that was required by every pilot and knowledge concerning the airline business. First, he decided to obtain as much information as possible about aviation, piloting and terminology used by those in the industry. Much of what he learned about the field came from library books, although they were often outdated.

In an attempt to update his budding knowledge about the aviation industry, Frank decided that it would be more lucrative to obtain information first hand. He

arranged several interviews with executives and personnel at Pan Am headquarters posing as a student doing a research project on the company and pilots. It was a brilliant idea. He gained a wealth of relevant information, including knowledge of company policies and regulations about co-pilots, the types of planes used and the international hubs where the airline flew.

Most importantly, Frank learned about deadheading. Deadheading was an airline employee privilege that allowed a worker to fly to far-off destinations on other airlines to fulfill specific job requirements elsewhere. The employers would almost always cover the expenses of the trip. Frank was particularly interested with this concept, because if he were able to pose as a pilot he might also be able to hitch free rides on the airplanes around the world. He kept the knowledge in the back of his head and focused on accomplishing his plan.

The next issue Frank had to resolve was the FAA license. He learned that without the license he would

not be able to impersonate a pilot, because the crew was often required to show the FAA license to airline personnel prior to outbound flights. Frank solved the problem by obtaining a plaque from a firm specializing in mounting licenses in silver. According to Abagnales book, the FAA had a mail-order branch within the company. Frank falsified his name as Frank Williams and sent away for the plaque. Upon receiving it, he took the plaque to a printer and had it downsized, mounted on special paper and laminated. Voila! Frank was ready to take off into the wild blue yonder.

## Taking Flight

Frank now had in his possession a replica FAA license, a Pan Am pass card, a working knowledge of the aviation industry, a company uniform and the audacity to pull off a remarkable con. Using the alias Frank Williams, he went around to area banks opening accounts in his pilots uniform. During his rounds of New Yorks many financial institutions, he often drew a great deal of attention and respect from the bank employees, due to his admirable status as an airline co-pilot. Little did they know that he was merely a creative and

adventurous kid making sport of pushing the envelope and testing peoples perceptions.

In the 1960s, the aviation industry and those who worked in it were highly esteemed. Being a pilot was a prestigious position, even more so than today.

According to Abagnale, it was considered even more illustrious to be a pilot for Pan Am, which was a flag carrier and called to be the Ritz Carlton of airlines.

Thus, it was not unusual for Frank to receive the attention he did when he entered banks or merely walking around in public sporting his pilot uniform.

To Franks delight much of the attention came from beautiful women, which he decided to use to his advantage. While making frequent visits to the airports to collect information, Frank met many stewardesses who expressed a keen interest in him. His charm, good looks and uniform resulted in a torrent of dates and several short-term relationships. During his many outings with the stewardesses, Frank not only learned about the mysteries of older women but also a great deal of information about the workings of the industry.

Eventually, Frank felt confident enough to attempt deadheading on a flight to Miami. He boarded an Eastern Airline 727 plane in his uniform after filling out a form stating his name, employee number and other pertinent information. When on the plane he made his way to the cockpit, eventually discovered the jump seat and prepared for any questions that might be asked by the pilots. One mistake would completely blow his cover and land him in jail.

To Franks surprise, the pilots took little interest in him and the flight was mostly uneventful. He landed a short while later in Miami, breathing a sigh of relief. From then on, deadheading would be Franks preferred method of travel for a couple years to follow. It was free and he had access anywhere in the world to cash his rubber checks. Moreover, Pan Am picked up the tab for his accommodations while abroad, which served as an additional benefit throughout his criminal career.

There was no doubt that Franks check-cashing scheme had taken on many dimensions and become more intricate than even he had initially planned. In fact, not

only had he become a successful check swindler but also an accomplished imposter. In his later autobiography, Frank stated that the key to his success rested on three critical factors: his personality, keen observation and intense research before attempting any elaborate scam.

During Devin Faracis 2002 interview with Frank, he stated that during his check swindling days, he researched check cashing in particular detail, making sure to alter the check numbers in such a way that they would be rerouted and take longer to identify as fraudulent. This research allowed him to cash several bad checks in a row at the same bank. Frank was quoted as saying I realized that the numbers (on the checks) were like zip codes, so if you altered that number the check would go somewhere else. The farther you sent it, the longer it would take to get back. Thats how I was able to go back to the same bank over and over.

Moreover, Frank was successful at cashing bum checks for a long period of time because he would open real

checking accounts under assumed names. He often used real cash deposits and provided the bank with an actual address where he was staying or a post office box where he would receive a box of personalized checks. The details made the entire transaction more credible. Frank then would overdraw significant amounts from the account by writing checks for hundreds or even thousands of dollars at a time. This he did at banks throughout the country and world, making it difficult for the authorities to catch up with him. By the time investigators realized the checks were bad, Frank was already on route to another destination opening more accounts.

Frank was constantly on the run in order to evade capture. The thousands of dollars he conned out of banks were kept in safe deposit boxes throughout the country to be used at whim. One would think that a young man with all that money, female companionship and traveling around the world must surely have been enjoying himself. However, the fact was that Frank was not happy. He was tired of trying to outrun the police and he was very lonely. In his interview with Swan, Frank stated that everyone he met thought him to be

somebody who he was not and that he couldn't have any serious relationships because he always had to give a fake name. He also knew that his lifestyle would not last forever and that it was only a matter of time before the authorities caught up with him.

Eventually, Frank did experience his first brush with the law on a deadhead flight to Miami. When his flight landed in Dade County, three officers intercepted him while he was still on the plane. Although Frank vigorously maintained that he was Frank Williams and an actual pilot, the officers still took him to the police station for questioning.

During the interview by investigators, Frank produced his false identification and gave the men several names of people to call to confirm his status. Fortunately for Frank he had made acquaintances with some of the airline personnel during his many deadheading flights that believed him to be an actual co-pilot. When the police made contact with his acquaintances, they confirmed Frank's position with Pan Am, not knowing



he wasn't a real co-pilot. Once Franks status was confirmed, the police apologized and let him go.

It was a close call for Frank which threatened his security. Shortly after his run in with the police, he decided to lay low for a while. He took refuge in Atlanta, Georgia where his life would take another unexpected turn.

### Calling Dr. Williams, Calling Dr. Williams

While in Atlanta, Frank found an elegant and youthful residential community where he decided to lease an apartment for the duration of one year. According to Abagnales book, Frank listed his occupation as an out-of-town doctor while filling out his leasing application, hoping it would deter any background check on his identity. When questioned about his profession, he informed the leasing manager that he was a pediatrician taking a break from his duties to catch up on much deserved rest and relaxation.

One day, a doctor who recently moved into the community paid an unexpected visit to Frank at his new home. Frank was nervous at first, fearing that the doctor would realize he was a fake. However, he learned that the doctor was not as interested in talking shop as he was about women. After meeting on several occasions and getting to know each other, the two learned that they had a great deal in common and, before long, they became friends.

The doctor asked Frank if he would like one day to pay a visit to the hospital where he worked and Frank readily agreed. Frank's one visit to the hospital turned into numerous visits and he gradually became acquainted and friendly with other hospital staff. Eventually, he was granted access to the medical library, which delighted him because he was eager to learn as much as he could about his new role as a pediatrician.

Frank's obvious eagerness and pleasant disposition caught the attention of the hospital's administrator who asked him one day to a meeting. Frank accepted

but he couldn't ignore his nagging fear that maybe the man had caught onto the fact that he was an imposter. To his surprise, the administrator made the most unusual proposition. He asked Frank to take a temporary position at the hospital supervising medical interns during the night shift to replace a doctor who had to leave unexpectedly. Although Frank initially refused, the administrator was able to persuade him to take up the position. Before long, Frank was appointed to the hospital as a resident supervisor and given authorization to temporarily practice in the state of Georgia.

Frank used humor to cover the fact that he lacked the basic knowledge of a pediatrician. If he didn't know something or was asked an uncomfortable question, he would joke about it and skirt around the issue, often leaving the actual details of the work to other resident doctors. His wit and humor worked well for him. It successfully covered his ignorance, but at the same time also earned him a reputation as a jovial, if eccentric, doctor who was much liked by the hospital staff.

Frank was able to maintain his position as a supervising doctor because he was not expected to actually perform any medical procedures on patients. He knew that the moment he was asked to tend to a patient and make clinical decisions, his cover would be blown due to his lack of medical knowledge. It was only a matter of time before Frank's charade would be tested, prompting him to rethink his potentially dangerous game.

One day, a child was brought into the hospital's emergency room with a leg injury. Frank was called into action to assist. Instead of treating the patient himself, he left the work to his interns who were eager to impress their supervisor. Frank managed the situation, yet it concerned him greatly that he was actually responsible for the lives of people. It was no longer a game to him.

According to an article in About.com, Frank made the decision to leave the hospital at that moment, realizing that he could have endangered the child's life. He

resigned shortly thereafter, having worked at the hospital for a little less than a year. He also made plans to leave the state. Franks next destination was Louisiana, where once again his life took another unexpected turn.

### Practicing and Evading the Law

While in Louisiana, Frank met up with a stewardess who he met during his deadheading adventures several years prior. The two dated for a while, but the woman never knew Franks real identity for fear that she might expose his illegal escapades. Instead, Frank led her to believe that he was not only an airline co-pilot but that he also had a degree in law, although he never practiced.

During a party one night that the two attended, Franks girlfriend introduced him to a lawyer who worked in the offices of the states district attorney. The lawyer took an interest in him, especially because Frank claimed that he received his law degree from Harvard. The lawyer told Frank that there was a position open at the attorney generals offices that he should pursue. He

said to Frank that all he had to do was take his university transcripts to the examiners office and apply for the Louisiana bar examination. Once he passed the bar, Frank would be able to fill the position.

It was a challenge that intrigued Frank and he believed that he might actually be able to pull it off. Not long after his conversation with the lawyer, Frank made counterfeit transcripts, allegedly from Harvard Law School. After conducting research on the classes offered at Harvard, he gathered the necessary materials to construct the mock transcripts. The end result was impressive. Although he had never seen an actual transcript from the law school, it looked as if it might be able to pass as real. He decided to give it a try and put it to the test.

The next step was to attempt the bar exam. Frank studied law books for weeks before he felt confident enough to take the test. Once he felt he knew a sufficient amount to pass, he registered with the examiners office, supplying them with his fake transcripts. Eventually he was summoned to the office

to take the exam. It was no surprise that he flunked, since he had never attended law school in his life.

Frank later stated in an interview with Faraci that Louisiana at the time allowed you to (take) the Bar over and over as many times as you needed. It was really a matter of eliminating what you got wrong, which was exactly what he did. Surprisingly, after his third try Frank passed and received a license to practice law.

Shortly thereafter, Frank applied for the job at the offices of the attorney general. Following an interview, he was hired as a legal assistant working in the corporate law division of the attorney general. He was also given an annual salary of approximately \$13,000. Frank had risen to the challenge and succeeded in his quest. There was no doubt that his art of deception had rivaled some of the most talented con artists in history.

According to his autobiography, Frank enjoyed his new position, regardless of the fact that he was more or less a glamorized errand boy, fetching documents and even coffee for his superiors. Even though he acquired the job under false pretenses, Frank was earning a somewhat legitimate living, which paid well. It seemed as if he had found his niche, yet Frank's false sense of security didn't last long.

The attorney general had on his staff another lawyer who happened to be a real Harvard graduate. Frank began to feel the pressure, especially when the new lawyer made repeated attempts to befriend his alleged fellow alumni. When the lawyer began to ask too many questions about his background, Frank became particularly uncomfortable. He knew that if he were to stay there for a prolonged period of time, his scheme would be uncovered or the authorities would eventually catch up with him. Frank decided to leave his job as a lawyer and pursue another career.



Frank fell back temporarily into his old persona as an airline co-pilot. This time, he acquired a second uniform from Trans World Airways (TWA) and created a new FAA license and ID pass card. Thus, he had a complete set of credentials for both Pan Am and TWA. Once again, he was free to travel around the world, cashing bad checks with unsuspecting banks.

## Making the Grade

During his travels, Frank visited the state of Utah, which impressed him with its natural beauty and lovely women. He was especially drawn to the university campuses in the area, where the ladies were particularly youthful and stunning. It was a place Frank was not eager to leave, so he decided to stick around and teach a few classes, despite the fact that he had no previous teaching experience or credentials. However, he refused to allow such minor details deter him.

Frank contacted the dean of Brigham Young University and set up an appointment, posing as a professor of

sociology. He informed the dean that he worked as a university instructor for a couple of years before he left the field and became an airline pilot. He suggested that he was interested in returning to his roots as a teacher and would be like to work at the university. The dean was highly impressed with Franks background and charm and he looked forward to their meeting.

With falsified credentials in hand, Frank went to the scheduled interview. After a brief discussion with Frank, the dean made his decision. According to his autobiography, Frank was hired within the hour to teach two six-week courses during the summer at a salary of \$1,600 per semester. Once again, Frank had accomplished the unthinkable. He immediately began to research the position and study the books he would use so that he would be prepared for his new job.

His masquerade as a professor was a success. Franks classes were not only interesting and the talk of the campus but he was also highly revered by his students. Moreover, Frank thoroughly enjoyed his newfound, although temporary position. Unfortunately for Frank

his stint as a professor was short-lived and at the end of the summer he was let go with an invitation from the dean to return when a permanent position became available.

Frank left Utah and made his way to California where he returned to what he knew best, paperhanging or writing bad checks. He became even more sophisticated in his role as a con artist and forger, making tens of thousands of dollars more than he had previously. Most of the money he made was from cashing counterfeit expense checks that he manufactured himself. In fact, Frank was so proficient at his criminal trade that he managed to accumulate almost \$100,000.

Frank was now in his late teens and incredibly wealthy for his age. But he was still lonely. This loneliness ended when he met and fell in love with a young stewardess. Frank and the young woman were so enthralled with one another that they began to discuss marriage. However Frank began to feel ill at ease because she had no idea who he really was. Moreover,

she was a good girl and he feared she would not accept his shady background.

One day, Frank decided to come clean. He revealed to her his true identity and his devious criminal lifestyle, hoping that she would overlook his shortcomings and unconditionally accept him. Frank was surprised when instead of forgiving him she informed the police and the FBI of his whereabouts. Frank narrowly evaded capture and was once again on his own and on the move.

Frank traveled the world over using his airline uniforms to hitch rides to far-off destinations. He also continued to paperhang as often as he could. During a trip to France, he met a stewardess with whom he began a relationship. Before long he learned that his girlfriend's father ran a family print shop. Naturally, Frank was very interested in meeting her father, eager to make a proposition to him. Eventually, he was introduced to the man and asked him if he would be interested in performing a large print job, allegedly for Pan Am.

Frank requested an order of 10,000 Pan Am payroll checks, which the girls father agreed to fill.

To Franks delight the checks were superbly made. Unbeknownst to his girlfriend or her father, Frank successfully passed them off to area banks in return for large amounts of cash. He then returned to the states, where he collected even larger sums of cash from his illegal exploits.

Not long after his return to the U.S., state troopers apprehended Frank at a Boston Airport while he was waiting for a flight to depart. They immediately took him to jail and charged him with vagrancy until they were able to gather enough information on him proving he was the infamous Frank Abagnale Jr. However, the police never had a chance to discover his true identity. Frank was released on bail just barely missing the FBI who was enroute to collect him. Once again, he escaped a close call with the authorities, yet he refused to let the incident slow him down. In fact, Frank became even bolder in his attempts to obtain money.

According to Abagnales book, soon after he was released from jail, he rented a security guard uniform and stood in front of a night-deposit box at the airport where he was captured just hours earlier. Frank held before him a large canvas bag and waited for people to drop off their nightly deposits, which they did by the dozens. They, like many others had been misguided by Franks uniform. When the bag began to fill, he decided to put the loot in the car he rented for the occasion. However, the bag was too heavy for him to carry. Surprisingly, a couple of state troopers assisted Frank with loading the bag into his car unaware that he was in the process of stealing the money. Frank drove off with more than \$60,000 in cash, outwitting the people who sought to detain him.

### Catching Up and Coming Clean

Frank seemed almost invincible. Most everything he attempted, he succeeded in, including eluding the police and FBI. With every new plan, he perfected his techniques in con artistry, forgery and impersonation.

One particular scheme he devised showed evidence of how talented he had become in his criminal trade.

Thinking of a way he could cash a multitude of checks at one time, Frank came up with an extraordinary idea. He decided that he would no longer travel alone but with an aircrew, preferably consisting of beautiful stewardesses. If he were able to find women to act as a front for him, he would be able to cash in more checks, appear more credible and avoid any suspicion.

While visiting Arizona, Frank had set up an interview with the director of student placement at the state university. During the meeting, Frank discussed the possibility of recruiting a handful of junior and senior women to act as public relations representatives purportedly for Pan Am. He further suggested that the chosen women would be given the opportunity to spend the summer traveling Europe, with all expenses allegedly paid by the company. Moreover, the girls would be supplied with stewardess uniforms and comparable salary as well as letters of employment, which would grant them opportunity to work for the

airline following graduation. It appeared to be the chance of a lifetime for anyone lucky enough to be chosen. Appearances were Franks key method of deception.

The eight young women who were eventually chosen were all thrilled to have a chance to see other countries and experience to a stewardesses lifestyle. Besides, the money was exceptional considering they were being paid to have fun. They had no idea that they were merely a part of an elaborate scam. The group of women traveled to more than a dozen European countries throughout the summer, taking part in photo shoots, supposedly to be used for advertising purposes by Pan Am. The photo sessions, scheduled by Frank with commercial photography companies, had no particular relevance except to make the scam more credible to the girls.

Franks real interest was to manufacture phony Pan Am expense checks for each girl for the primary purpose of having them endorsed over to him. The sum of each check was made out for an amount significantly larger



than their actual expenses. Frank paid the bills and pocketed the remaining money, making sure the women were constantly with him to make the transaction all the more convincing. By the time the summer was over and the girls returned home after having been paid for their services, Frank had pocketed approximately \$300,000.

Following his audacious scam, Frank decided to slow down with the check fraud game for fear that the authorities would catch up with him. He moved to Montpellier, France, at the age of twenty, not far from where his mother was born. Frank quickly settled into his cozy new cottage, after having changed his name to Robert Monjo. To further protect his identity, he posed as a successful Hollywood screenwriter and author.

Finally, for the first time in years Frank made an attempt to live a normal life. However, he knew that the risk of being caught significantly increased if he continued to stay in one place for a prolonged period of time, but it was a chance he was willing to take. He had simply spent too long on the run and he was tired.

It was only a matter of time before the authorities caught up with Frank. In fact, they were not too far behind. Heading the FBI investigative team was Joseph Shea who spent years looking for Frank. In fact, it had taken years just to figure out that Frank was not an adult but actually a kid. Only four months after Frank moved to France, Shea learned of Frank's location. Apparently, an ex-girlfriend who was a stewardess recognized him on a wanted poster and immediately notified the French police, who in turn contacted the FBI.

The authorities went to the small city to collect the young man who had generated so much financial havoc around the world, having passed a total of \$2.5 million dollars worth of bad checks. They eventually found Frank shopping in a grocery store nearby his home. They immediately apprehended him, taking him to the Montpellier police station to be booked for his crimes committed in France. After a brief interrogation, Frank admitted to being Frank Abagnale Jr. but refused

to reveal any specific information concerning his crimes.

In less than a weeks time, Frank was tried in a French court and a couple days later found guilty on several charges, including fraud. He was sentenced to one year in the notorious prison Perpignan, but ended up serving only six months of the prison term. It was more than enough time, considering the horrific conditions of the institution.

## The Art of the Steal

Following his extradition to Sweden and eventually to the United States, Frank once again found himself on the run after having escaped the police and FBI on several occasions. There werent many places left for him to hide. According to Abagnales book, The Art of the Steal, he was apprehended a final time while hiding out in New York. He was eventually released into the custody of the FBI and tried for his crimes.

Frank was found guilty and received a sentence of twelve years. Following his sentencing, he was remanded to the Federal Correction Institution in Petersburg, Virginia. However, he was granted early parole at the age of twenty-six years, having spent a total of five years behind bars. Finally, Frank was free and had the chance to make a new beginning, although it would prove to be difficult.

Following his release, Frank worked at a series of low paying jobs, although they were mostly short-lived. Frank tried to conceal from his employers that he was an ex-con, knowing it was likely they would not hire him if they knew the truth. However his employers would eventually learn the truth and immediately fire him.

After a while, Frank began to get frustrated because he knew he had talents that could be of use to somebody somewhere. He just had to find a client that would be interested in his skills and maybe in some way profit from them. He also knew he had to find a way to market himself.

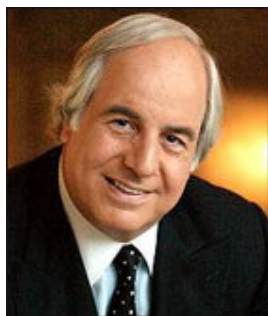
Surprisingly, it was the very people that captured Frank that would offer him a second chance. The FBI and other law enforcement agencies were just the people who could gain from what he knew. They needed to know the workings of a criminal mind from first hand experience so that they could use the knowledge to better apprehend offenders. Frank began to lecture to them for free, realizing that he had to in some way repay his debt to society.

Before long, more jobs came Franks way but ones which paid. In fact, as the years went by, Franks knowledge was in great demand by major companies around the world. Companies realized that they could save millions if not billions of dollars protecting themselves from con artists and counterfeiters and Frank was just the man that could provide them with the valuable information they needed.

To date, Frank is one of the worlds foremost authorities on document fraud, including check swindling, forgery and embezzlement. According to his

company website Abagnale.com. Frank has been a consultant, lectured and instructed hundreds of seminars worldwide and continues to offer his services for free to the FBI. Moreover, he has published several books, manuals and articles and has designed secure checks that are utilized by businesses worldwide.

There is no doubt that Frank has made great efforts to make amends for his past wrongs. He successfully rehabilitated himself and has channeled his talents in a more positive direction. According to an interview with Frank by Laura Pulfer, Frank stated that his relationship with his wife of more than a quarter of a century and his belief in God has led to his about face. He currently lives in the Midwest with his wife and three sons.



Frank Abagnale, Jr. (as he looks now)

[http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/criminal\\_mind/scams/frank\\_abagnale/index.html](http://www.trutv.com/library/crime/criminal_mind/scams/frank_abagnale/index.html)