

Walking To Gibraltar, Chapter 16: In Which Frank Learns Six Lessons

by Frank Indiana

1. Frank (6) learns that good boys have hearts full of evil.

"Now you're captured!" said Frankie. "Badman Brucie McGowan. Let's just see how bad you look in handcuffs."

Frank Carey of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police climbed down from his Wonder Horse, being careful to not catch his pants in the springs. Brucie McGowan was such a little baby. Frankie had barely unholstered his six-shooter when Brucie collapsed to the floor and raised both scrawny arms in the air.

"Put 'em behind your back, Brucie," said Frankie. "I'm takin' yuh to the hoosegow." That meant jail.

Brucie complied. Frankie slapped the plastic cuffs on him and pulled him up by the shirt. "Get walkin', you varmint!"

Brucie played the weasely bad guy to perfection. He was a dumb little kid. Frankie shoved him.

And Brucie fell. And because Brucie's hands were cuffed behind his back, Brucie fell face down on the linoleum.

He gurgled when he screamed. Blood splattered over the rec room floor, all over Brucie's shirt, bubbled out of his mouth. Frankie raced to take the cuffs off him.

"I didn't mean it, Brucie!" he cried. "It was an accident!" That's what he said. But he knew it wasn't true. He pushed Brucie on purpose.

2. Frank (9) learns he doesn't know what he wants.

First day of Little League. Dad hanging out behind the chain link fence. Frankie dreaming of second base. Scooping up grounders and flipping the pill to first. Like Ron Hunt.

He was standing in the outfield with five other kids when the coach yelled out to him. "Hey, son...didn't you say you wanted to pitch?"

He did not. And said so.

Dad was not pleased.

"How do you know you don't want to pitch?" asked Dad on the way home. "You've never played baseball before. You have no idea what you want to do. The next time the coach asks if you want to do something, you say 'yes.'"

Damned if the little chubby kid who was going to catch didn't show for the first game. "Anybody want to catch?" asked Coach.

Frankie raised his hand.

Frankie strapped on the armor. Frankie pulled the cage over his face and squatted in the dirt. Every summer for the next eight years, Frankie strapped on the armor and pulled the cage over his face and squatted in the dirt.

3. Frank (13) learns he is a coward.

He can't breathe can't breathe can't breathe turns the handle can't breathe falls onto the front porch gasping in the cold night air. And Dad is lying on the smoldering carpet in the parlor. And all the kids are upstairs. And he swallows the air. And everything is dead quiet except for the sizzling sound inside the house. Quiet and cold and sizzling and he cannot go back in there.

4. Frank (18) learns his decisions don't matter.

The car smelled of golf shoes. Golf shoes and True cigarettes. Stupid plastic peace-sign filters. Not worth stealing.

"Decided on your major yet?" Dad asked.

Everyone wanted a decision out of him. He was tired of fucking around. It didn't matter, anyway.

"Journalism, I guess," he said.

Dad snorted. "Well. It doesn't matter, anyway. You know, most kids change their major at least once."

Didn't matter? Fuck his dad. He would be a journalism major, and fuck him.

5. Frank (21) learns he has the heart of a cad.

Astrid was crying. "Mom found a box of condoms."

"What?"

"Under my bed. I don't know how they got there."

"God. Well. I mean, we're not children, Astrid."

"You tell that to my mom. Tell it to Joe."

Her stepfather. "Your mom told Joe?"

"Of course, she did. You know what he said? He said, 'He's never going to marry you. He's just using you. He's going to dump you.'"

Motherfucker. "You know I wouldn't do that, Astrid." He wiped the tears from her eyes. Motherfucking Joe.

6. Frank (35) learns that class acts don't leave.

"The guy was a hero," said Butch Rodebaugh. "Class. He was class."

Bore him to the fucking moon. Chuckie Spitzer hit a shot at the buzzer in a state championship game in 1952 and lived his whole life in the shadow of that glory. And Butch Rodebaugh was a blowhard opportunist still trying to make a buck off Chuckie's long-dead high school fame. Butch was also his publisher, and Chuckie was his subject.

"You know, when Emily had breast cancer, Chuckie was with her all the way. The whole time. That kind of class."

Chuckie nodded and smiled. He liked Chuckie. But...Chuckie? A sixty-seven-year-old man still calling himself Chuckie?

"That's really something," said Frank.

"Yep. You know, most men whose wives have breast cancer end up leaving them."

"Is that right?"

Butch nodded. "Over half. Not Chuckie."

Frank smiled. He could weave this into the story.

