

Frank & Frank

by Tim Young

Ok, so I know this guy, he's a friend of mine. A good friend, even though I think he's left too big a tip on the bar more than once. His name is Frank. It's one weird thing about Frank because even though we've known each other for many years, at least once during the course of any of our conversations, he will mention that his name is Frank. Frankly, he is obsessed with this name. The simple reason he is obsessed with his "Frank" name is because he is probably the biggest, most intense, operatic, fanatic fan of Frank Sinatra the world has ever known. If you would only spend even five minutes with my friend Frank you would know without a shadow of a doubt that what I'm telling you is nothing, so help me, but the truth.

I met Frank in a bar which is where, I learned years ago, Frank spends an incredible number of hours each week, each day when he can. It comes right down to the fact that Frank was more than inspired, more than influenced by Sinatra's recording of "One For My Baby (And One More for the Road.)" The one where Frank is singing to the bartender. "Set 'em up Joe," he says. And it's all about the wee hours. This wee hour fascination has not only cost Frank big time in the wallet, but also big time in that his wife left him because he would never return home from the bar until the very wee hours. Frank realized he would much rather converse and spend time with the bartender than his wife and that almost every other situation, other than Frank's world in the bar held no meaning to him. He could never stop playing Frank on the juke box, twirling around on his bar stool, and smoking cigarettes until the wee hours. He would enjoy watching the smoke from his cigarette leave his mouth, drift above his head, and finally disappear through his fingers as the next Sinatra tune would cue up and play on the box.

It was weird seeing Frank in the daytime but we did meet during the lighted hours for lunch at an Irish pub. Interestingly, the Irish pub Frank most enjoyed was named just that, The Irish Pub. Lunch at The Irish Pub consisted, almost always, of corned beef and

cabbage from the hot steam table. The odor of hot food crept all around the pub. Of course there were other choices but Frank usually would spring for my lunch and so I would go along and order the familiar dish. The cabbage was over cooked but the corned beef retained flavor somehow even through the long afternoon of being cooked. Something we could relate to.

It was at the Irish pub that Frank told me about his wife leaving him. It was no surprise to me. I knew his habits well and thought all along something like this might happen to him. Frank said, "She never understood me for a second. Well, maybe the first few weeks of our union when we used to speak to each other but in my heart when Sinatra would sing, I would feel a distance growing between Sheila and me. When our eyes did meet, which was never very often, I could see a gap opening in her too. She never once said to me, Frank, it's going to be all right."

I said, "So instead of Sheila singing in your heart it was always Frank?" Frank looked at me, nodded, and pushed his plate out of the way so he could reach his mug of beer. "I think it's sad," I said, "having Sinatra singing in your heart like that. Didn't you think it kind of strange?" "No," Frank replied quickly, "only if Sheila had spoken to me like Frank's music would she have been the one to sing in my heart."

After that we never spoke about Sheila again. I had met her during the course of knowing Frank and she was a pretty woman, dark eyes, angular face, just perfect for the long dangly silver earrings she liked to wear. It was only when I was with Frank that I would see her. We never had too much of a dialogue because Frank would undoubtedly commandeer the conversation with his latest insights about Sinatra or the most recent recording of his he had listened to or purchased. I don't think Sheila even liked music. But I did think Sheila was a decent sort and I was probably much more broken up about their break-up than Frank ever was. Me being not a fan of things falling apart, especially relationships.

I tried in vain, more than once, to try and get Frank to reconsider, make amends and get Sheila back but then it was clear to me that in

his mind, he had already moved on to his life as a single man. Often times I read him all wrong. For instance I thought once the divorce was final Frank would end up meeting someone at his Sinatra bar and begin an affair but I was way off base. "I have zero interest in other women," he finally told me, even though I would often see him looking around at the women in the bar but, of course, I never knew what was really going on in the mind of Frank, except Sinatra.

One bright lit afternoon at the Irish pub Frank told me he had moved. "I let Sheila keep the apartment we lived in, I even agreed to pay her rent for a time, and then I moved to an older building right across the street from the Sinatra bar. It made me feel like a kid having Christmas every day of the year. The best gift I could have ever given myself." What could I say, "Congratulations," I said, "And I bet you can see the bar across the street from your living room window." This was one time I was correct in my assumptions. Frank smiled and ordered us another round of beers.

Frank never talked about his financial situation but it was obvious the man had some money or a line of credit that reached to the moon. He was always treating me and now I knew he was paying rent on two places. And since we often had lunch he apparently did not work a day job. I worked nights, maybe he did too but that was something I was never sure about. I worked nights as the manager of the Art House. A movie theatre that played classic American and foreign films. Our last screening of the day ended around midnight and so it was after that I would meet up with Frank at the Sinatra bar.

Ok, so it's Friday night and the screening of Ben-Hur with the indomitable Charlton Heston is finally over. As I watched the famous chariot racing scene with the wheels madly spinning, all I could see was Frank spinning on his bar stool. I'm looking forward to unwinding at the Sinatra bar and of hearing the latest news from my bar fly friend Frank. Once I enter the bar my eyes search for Frank but he is not in his customary spot. I find him sitting alone at a table for two in the very rear of the place. His table is populated with empty beer bottles and I see his ashtray is overflowing, of course his

table is swimming right next to the juke box. I'm hearing Frank as he sings "The Summer Wind." I find this somewhat ironic as there is definitely a wind outside but it's a damn cold winter wind. Then again Frank was never one to pay the weather any mind. "Frank," he says, a little too loud, "Frank, come sit with me. I've been waiting for you. Frank has been waiting for you. I've been saving all my empty beer bottles for you. Maybe you want to begin a collection? This is the third time I've played the Summer Wind, I'm hoping it might help to warm it up outside somewhat. I decided I'm going to learn to sing like Frank and get my career going in show business. I'm gonna take lessons, I'm gonna buy a piano and learn all my most favorite Sinatra tunes. I've decided I'm going to be big, Frank, very big!"

Instead of immediately reacting to Frank's "big" speech, I grab two handfuls of beer bottles and return them to the bar, and while over there I pick up two fresh ones for Frank and me. Back at the table, Frank is lighting another cigarette. He catches my eyes. "You know," I said, "Big singers shouldn't smoke so much." He laughed at me. "Frank was a big smoker and look how far along he got. I've got all the essential ingredients right here to ensure that I make it big like Frank. My name is Frank. I've got booze, butts, and the wee hours all in my corner just waiting for the precise moment to break me out of this rut and into the big time. I can feel it, Frank, can't you feel it?" He took a big slug off the new beer I had brought. "Hell, I don't care if you can feel it. All that matters is that I do. I feel it Frank!"

I said, "I think what you're really feeling is the rush of alcohol in your bloodstream and it's singing to you like Frank. Frank thought for a moment, stubbed out the latest cigarette, took another huge swig from the bottle and stared at me with a surprising concentration I thought for someone who had consumed more than many beers. He kept staring at me in what seemed more than an eternity before he said something. "I'm a phony, Frank. Even with all my money I can't buy a voice like Sinatra. Sitting here tonight I believe I finally realized that my most valued expertise is sitting here

drinking in the wee hours wishing I was Sinatra, wishing I was anyone or anything other than the fucking Frank I am, excuse my French. I hate when I start to curse, it's not like me Frank but now for whatever reason there is under the shitty sun I don't care anymore. Do you care anymore, Frank?"

I said, "I think I should take you home." Frank gave me that long concentrated stare again, then told me, "Leave me alone, Frank. Get the fuck out of my life. Now I see that you don't understand me any more than Sheila did, maybe even less. I know what to do. I know where to go and I know when I've had enough which is never." With that he took what looked to me like the last cigarette out of the package, struck a match, inhaled, exhaled and raised his hand to wave through the smoke. The smoke wrapped around his fingers. The bartender came over with a tab and said they would be closing soon. Frank looked at him like he was out of his mind. I didn't know if any of us were in our right minds. The clock above the bar said a quarter to three. Even I knew the next line. But the "you and me" turned out to be not Frank and me but the bartender and me. While I was staring at the clock or Frank's empty cigarette package, Frank had placed a hundred dollar bill on the table, under his empty beer bottle and now I was sitting alone. I don't know how I could have missed him getting up and walking out the door. Maybe I had been listening to Sinatra. The bartender said, "Last call." I went over to the juke box and played "That's Life."

