

# Candid con artist reveals crimes

## Posed as a lawyer, pilot, pediatrician

By IRIS NAAR  
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At age 16 he posed as an airline pilot, at age 18 he became a pediatrician, at age 19 he worked as a lawyer, and at 20 he taught as a college professor.

Renowned con artist Frank W. Abagnale Jr., colloquy's first speaker of the year, brought the crowd of 850 last night at Eisenhower Auditorium to their feet after he told his amazing life story.

Abagnale, whom The Wall Street Journal once called "the world's greatest con artist," said in his talk and in an interview that he began his life in crime at age 16 after his parents' divorce shattered him.

"I was one of four children and my parents divorced when I was 16. The divorce struck me very hard," he said.

He ran away from his home in upstate New York to New York City, and after working in several menial jobs began to cash bad checks from his own checking account.

"The checks started bouncing, so at age 16 I was walking down 42nd Street and I stopped at the front door of the Commodore Hotel," he said. "I saw an Eastern Airlines flight crew, and thought, what a perfect front. I could pose as a pilot and travel everywhere for free."

Abagnale convinced a purchasing agent from Pan American World Airways that he was a Los Angeles-based pilot who had lost his uniform and needed one within a few hours to make his next flight. He received the uniform free and also conned a professional airline identification card from a dealer.

Abagnale said he never had to do any actual flying while posing as a pilot because he never flew with Pan

American. As part of an airline reciprocal agreement, he was allowed to occupy a seat in the cockpit and become what he called a "deadhead" on any flight.

As a bogus pilot, Abagnale was able to cash checks at any airline desk at any airport. At one airport he spent eight hours cashing checks at every airline desk. "What happened then? Shift change! And I went all the way around again," he said.

The FBI was on Abagnale's trail by the time he was 18. So, he said, he decided to make a new life in Atlanta, Ga., this time posing as a pediatrician. After a hospital staff member left, Abagnale was asked to work five nights a week as a resident.

One of Abagnale's duties as a resident was to fill in nurses' charts, though he knew nothing of the medical profession. He said he noticed that other doctors seemed to write unintelligibly, so he just scribbled on the charts. The New York Times publication of the charts show "they say absolutely nothing," he said.

Abagnale's next stop was Baton Rouge, La., where he posed as a lawyer. "What the hell, I was a doctor. I could be a lawyer," he said.

Abagnale, who said he has a photographic memory and an IQ of 136 to 140, passed the bar exam after his third attempt. He worked on the attorney general's staff and even tried some cases in court.

He stayed in Louisiana for about a year, then moved to Brigham Young University to pose as a college professor. "I read one chapter ahead of the students and I had no problem at all," he said.

After spending some time at the university, Abagnale began to research

the entire banking system. He became so skilled at forging checks that the FBI named him one of 121 known master forgers.

Abagnale told about his most successful con, which netted \$42,000 in two days.

At 18, he said, he opened a checking account in a Chicago bank. With magnetic ink he printed his account number on blank deposit slips available at the bank. After that, everyone who made a deposit that day put the money into Abagnale's account.

The law caught up with him, though, as he eventually was arrested by Interpol in France. "Twenty-six countries immediately filed extradition requests," he said.

He was sent to a French prison. "It makes the Mexican prison look like a Holiday Inn. It was built in the 17th century. There was no plumbing and no electricity," he said.

Abagnale was placed in a 5-foot by 5-foot cell with a 5-foot ceiling. "I'm 6 feet tall. I could neither sit down nor stand up. The only thing in the room was a bucket," he said.

He said he was served meals of bread and water, bread and soup and bread and coffee. He was not allowed to make any noises and was kept in the room for six months. "Keeping one's sanity was an absolute feat," he said.

He went from 198 pounds to 109, he said, had double pneumonia and almost had a vitamin deficiency. "I would have lost my life if I was there much longer, he said."

The next country to extradite him was Sweden. He was sentenced to six months in a Swedish prison, which is "very much like a Holiday Inn. There is

nothing to dehumanize you at all," he said.

He was then sent back to the United States. FBI agents were anxiously awaiting his arrival at New York's Kennedy Airport. However, Abagnale managed to escape through a hatch under the toilet as the plane was taxiing down the runway. The headline in The New York Times read, "Skyway Man Disappears 30,000 Feet in the Air."

In an incident at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, police surrounded the airport looking for the criminal. Abagnale persuaded a bystander to answer the phone if a page came for Frank Abagnale. Abagnale had himself paged, and as the bystander went to answer the phone, policemen caught him immediately.

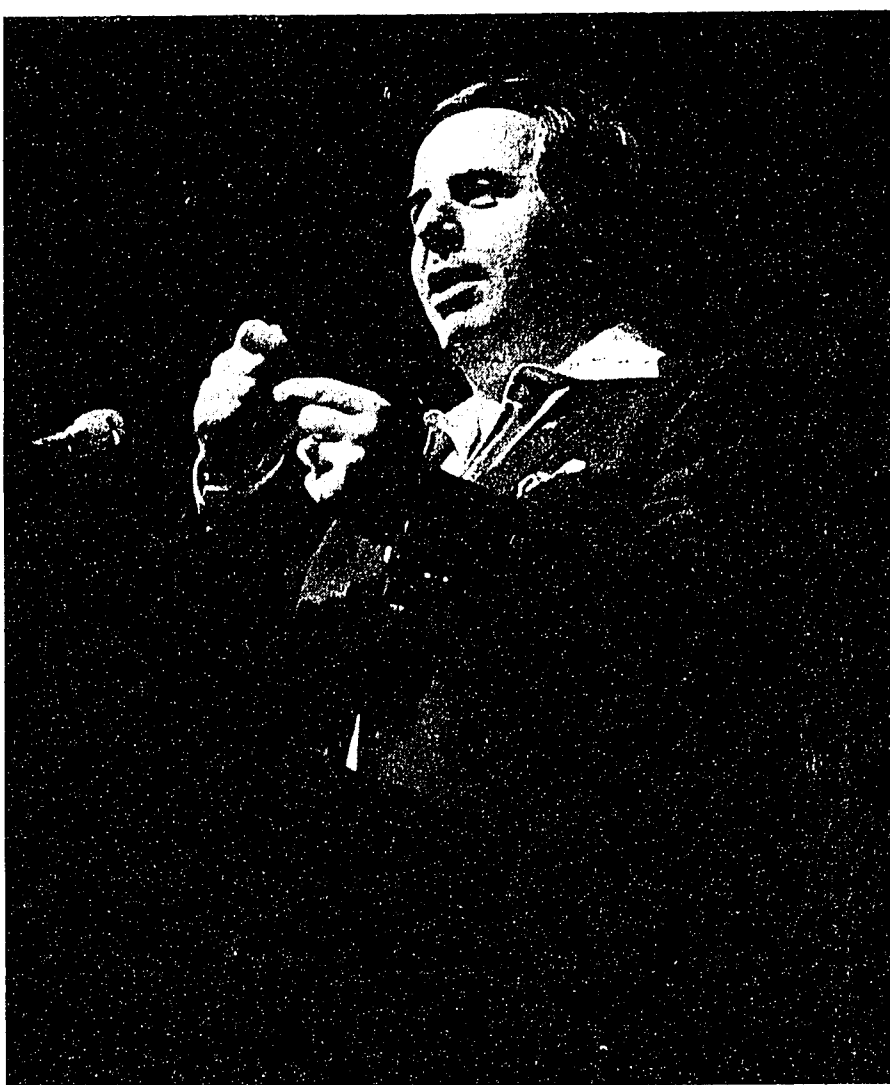
Abagnale was finally apprehended in Canada where officials turned him over to United States authorities. "I was wanted in all 50 states, counties and municipalities everywhere," he said.

While waiting for his trial to begin, Abagnale was placed in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, renowned for the maximum security of any prison in the country. Abagnale said there are now two plaques on the wall of the prison commemorating Frank Abagnale as the youngest prisoner ever to serve time there, and the first prisoner to escape from the institution.

"I impersonated a federal prison inspector and walked right out the front door," he said.

But Abagnale said he regrets his past. "I think I gave up a great deal for what little I gained. I'm 32 years old and when I look back, that's ten years of my life that I wasted. To me it was a total waste," he said.

"And I think about little things, like I



Con artist Frank Abagnale Jr. revealed his life of crime to a crowd of 850 last night in Eisenhower Auditorium. His criminal record includes impersonations, forgeries and elaborate escapes from the law.

don't know what it's like to have gone to a senior prom, to a high school football game, to have had a girlfriend in high school, to remember friends," he said.

His story is told in a recently released book called "Catch Me If You Can."

A movie about his life will be released next summer. It stars Dustin Hoffman, Katharine Ross, Cybil Shepherd and Genevieve Bujold, among other stars. Abagnale will play an FBI agent in the film.

## Leaders of Syria, Libya discuss merger for unity

TRIPOLI, Libya (UPI) — With a half-million Libyans chanting "one nation, one path," Syrian President Hafez Assad and Libyan strongman Col. Moammar Khadafy began talks yesterday on how to merge their countries into a united front against Israel.

Clapping, stomping and shouting their support, 500,000 Libyans gathered near Tripoli's airport to hear Khadafy and Assad sing the praises of Arab unity and lay the groundwork for the merger of Syria and Libya, the state-run Libyan news agency JANA reported.

"This unity," Khadafy said, "is to confront Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Arab reactionaries. . . . In order to establish a greater Arab unity we should start with Syria and Libya."

It was the mercurial Libyan leader who proposed the merger scheme on Sept. 1, the 11th anniversary of his rise to power. Assad, who has become seriously isolated both domestically and regionally, was quick to embrace Khadafy's proposal and called for immediate steps to effect the union.

"Unity would be a health potion for us and the death knell for our enemies," Assad told the crowd, which repeatedly interrupted his speech with chants of "one nation, not two" and "long live the merger of two nations."

"For confrontation, for Palestine, for

our dignity and for our liberation, we want unity and we shall walk together on the same path," said Assad.

He was accompanied to the Libyan capital by Prime Minister Abdel Raouf Kasm, Foreign Minister Abdel Halim Khaddam, Information Minister Ahmed Iskandar Ahmed and Deputy Premier for Economic Affairs Abdel Kader Qaddoura.

In what appeared to be an allusion to past failed attempts at Arab unity and the difficulty of merging two countries 700 miles apart with completely different histories and personalities, Khadafy said "It may be difficult to have such a merger between Libya and Syria, but this merger is going to go through no matter what."

The two leaders and their aides began discussions on various technical aspects of unifying their countries immediately after their speeches.

There was no indication how long Assad would remain in Tripoli but Arab press reports in Beirut speculated that when the talks are completed, Khadafy may fly to Damascus to formally proclaim the merger.

Arab diplomatic sources say Sept. 28, the 10th anniversary of the death of former Egyptian President Gamel Abdel Nasser, is a likely date for officially uniting the two countries,

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## Judge splits defendants from Abscam trial

PHILADELPHIA (UPI) — Two of the four Philadelphia men scheduled to go on trial in the nation's third Abscam case were severed from the trial yesterday by the presiding judge.

During a pretrial hearing shortly before jury selection got under way in the \$70,000 bribery trial, U.S. District Judge John P. Fullam Jr. separated the cases of Philadelphia Councilman Louis C. Johanson and his former law partner, Howard L. Criden, from the trial of two other city councilmen charged with conspiracy, ruling there was a "substantial legal question" over whether Criden and Johanson can be tried again.

Fullam said defense lawyers John Duffy for Johanson and Richard Benveniste for Criden "have raised substantial double jeopardy and due process points" because the charges apparently

stemmed from a single conspiracy. "There is a substantial legal question on whether they (Johanson and Criden) can be tried," Fullam said, adding he was taking the matter under consideration.

Former council President George X. Schwartz and former council Majority Leader Harry P. Jannotti, who lost their leadership roles when they were indicted, should be tried separately, Fullam said, because the Aug. 23 convictions of Johanson and Criden in a New York federal court could prejudice jurors.

"In view of the recent convictions (of Johanson and Criden) which received so much publicity here it would be unfair for the remaining defendants to have to select a jury which may or may not know that the two other defendants have

already been convicted," Fullam said. Fullam also said by severing Johanson and Criden from the other defendants, the availability of Johanson and Criden as witnesses will be greatly enhanced.

Reacting to Fullam's severance decision and comments on double jeopardy, Duffy said, "Super!"

"We have a motion pending on this double jeopardy issue," Duffy said. "We took the position from the beginning — Howard (Criden) has four indictments against him and Lou (Johanson) has three. The government indicted them multiple times in different jurisdictions simply to harass them into pleading guilty."

All four are charged with sharing the payoff money from undercover FBI agents in return for helping a bogus Arab sheik who wanted to build a hotel

complex in the city and develop Philadelphia's port.

The FBI's case is based in part on videotapes of the defendants allegedly accepting the money from undercover agents.

Johanson and Criden were convicted along with Camden, N.J., Mayor Angelo Errichetti and Rep. Michael Myers, D-Pa., on Abscam-related bribery charges.

In the Philadelphia Abscam case, Johanson, who has been granted a paid leave of absence from his legislative duties in council, allegedly took \$25,000. Schwartz allegedly took \$30,000, and Jannotti was charged with taking \$10,000.

Criden was charged with taking \$5,000 in return for bringing the politicians to Philadelphia's Barclay Hotel last January to meet with agents.

## Cunningham introduces legislation Anti-abortion bill goes to House

By TOM BOYER  
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

A bill prohibiting nearly all state-funded abortions has been introduced in the state House of Representatives by Rep. Gregg L. Cunningham, R-Centre Region.

"I view this bill as merely the first step in an ongoing effort to restrict abortions in every way possible by every means possible," Cunningham said Sunday in an interview with The Daily Collegian.

The bill will restrict state funding of Medicaid abortions for the poor and disabled in the same way that federal funds for Medicaid abortions are restricted.

Federal money may only be used for abortions in cases of rape and incest, or when the mother's life is in jeopardy.

However, state Welfare Department regulations permit Medicaid-funded abortions if a woman can get two doctors to certify that her physical or mental health might be injured by childbirth. Cunningham said amounts to "abortion on demand."

Cunningham said there is "virtually no question" the bill will pass in the House. A similar bill has already been passed by the state Senate.

"I would say that there's a very strong likelihood that this will be the law prior to the first of the year," he said.

Cunningham said his bill is the result of a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision "that paves the way for the states to cut off funding for abortions to the same extent that the federal government restricts funds for abortions."

The bill is written in such a way that, as more stringent federal laws are passed, the law will "automatically adjust itself" to concur with federal guidelines, he said.

He said Congress will probably eliminate federal funding for abortions even in cases of rape and incest when it acts on this year's version of the Hyde Amendment.

If this law passes, Pennsylvania also will not fund abortions for rape or incest victims, Cunningham said.

"The availability of the rape exception option has given rise to staggering fraud. The huge proportion of the women who are claiming to have been raped to procure federal funding is completely out of proportion

to all of the other statistics," he said. Cunningham said his bill is "only the beginning" of a sequence of anti-abortion legislation to be introduced in the state Legislature.

The bill is part of a series of "stop-gap" measures designed to prevent as many abortions as possible until a constitutional amendment banning abortion is passed, he said.

"We can't do anything but snipe away at this thing until we get a human life amendment, but snipe away we will," he said.

*"The availability of the rape exception option has given rise to staggering fraud. The huge proportion of the women who are claiming to have been raped to procure federal funding is completely out of proportion to all of the other statistics." — State Rep. Gregg L. Cunningham*

Cunningham said the legislation is being developed gradually because "there are pro-abortion federal court judges who would like nothing better than to get all of this pro-life legislation in the same bill so they can strike the whole thing down. We're not going to give them that opportunity."

He said the new legislation has been drafted carefully within the wordings of past court decisions so that it will withstand any court challenge.

The next step for anti-abortion legislation in Pennsylvania will be to reduce the amount of time a rape victim has to report the crime in order to receive public funding for an abortion, he said.

Current federal regulations allow a reporting period of 60 days. Cunningham said he thinks this period is too long.

"Sixty days is a very cynical and transparent effort to promote fraud because the average person who

becomes pregnant is aware of that within 60 days and is able to go back after the fact and falsely report a rape," he said.

Reducing Pennsylvania's reporting period to 10 days will largely prevent fraudulent rape claims, Cunningham said.

Cunningham said he is working on a comprehensive package of anti-abortion legislation, to be introduced in the state legislature early next year. The legislation, which Cunningham calls the "ombibus bill," would require:

- Information about abortion, including photographs of a human fetus, to be provided to the pregnant woman by the doctor.
- A 48-to-72 hour "cooling off" period between the time an abortion is approved and the time it is performed.
- Notice to the parents of a minor having an abortion.
- Notice to the father of the fetus.
- Birth and death certificates, along with funeral arrangements for the fetus.

Cunningham said the omnibus bill, if passed, would be the toughest anti-abortion law in the United States.

"Unfortunately, this is one of those issues on which there is no compromise. Either you kill the baby or you don't," he said.

Cunningham said he has received nearly twice as many letters supporting his stand on abortion as he has opposing it.

However, he said his anti-abortion stance is a matter of personal principle and does not depend upon what his constituents prefer.

"I would vote this way on this issue if I was the only person in the world who felt that this was the only appropriate course."

### Hot and humid

The sun should shine long enough today to drive the temperature up to 82, along with increased humidity. But a strong cold front will spark shower and thunderstorm activity tonight as the temperature drops to 60. Wednesday's weather will feature partly to mostly cloudy skies and windy and cooler conditions, as the mercury fights to reach 69.



Photo by Siet Varian

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— State Rep. Gregg L. Cunningham