



**Fran Brida**  
**ROBS History Project**  
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Francis Rose Brida was born Francis Brida. She did not have a middle name at birth so she gave herself her middle name Rose. Technically she was named after her mother whom they referred to as Francis, although her European name was Laura. Fran said that she doesn't know who in the family is Francis but hopes to someday find out. Fran was given the nickname Butch by her father who always wanted a son. Fran said, *"Since I was the last child, and since I was a bit of a tomboy, he called me Butch growing up, and that was always the laughing point. When people would come to the house, particularly when I was a teenager, and didn't look like a butch, they would go 'Who are you calling?' My father would address me as Butch and they would smile."*

Fran said that currently she is not married and has two "wonderful" children and had just become a grandmother. She was so delighted that her daughter gave her a wonderful gift of a little grandson. His name is Jonathan Luke, and Fran's son who lives in Pennsylvania is single and happy to be an uncle as well.

**Tell me about your son and your daughter. Do they have qualities that you have or known to have existed in the family before they came into the picture? Are there talents or abilities or qualities that you see in them?**

Fran said people say her daughter is a clone of her, and they look like sisters. She is identical to her. Her daughter is very talented. She's a three star athlete. When in high school she participated in basketball, tennis, and softball.

She was also an academic scholar. She went to State University at Geneseo. She went on from there to get her Master's at Stroudsburg State and recently finished up with a Health Administration Degree in Stony Brook University. She works as an exercise physiologist at Brookhaven Hospital, and married her boss who was the director of cardiac rehab at Brookhaven Hospital. Fran's son pursued non-sciences, basically social sciences and graduated from Bucknell University in Pennsylvania. There he got State Certification in history. Presently he's a substitute teacher of high school history until he finds a more permanent job. He got into Penn State Law School but didn't like it and dropped out after one semester. He lives in Lewisburg where he works three jobs. One is a tour guide to various historical places for a tour guide company, another as an assistant curator at one of the local museums and lastly he's a substitute teacher. Fran said that her son is very laid back. He's a regular "country bumpkin." She said that her daughter, whom she refers to as "The Mad Hatter," because she's always hurrying up and punctual, is the direct opposite. She sees both her children often.

**Where were you born, and what are some of the most poignant memories or outstanding memories you had growing up?**

Fran was born in the Bushwick-Ridgewood area of Brooklyn on December 4, 1945. She grew up on the "sidewalks of New York," the very urban type of childhood, playing those urban games of hot hopscotch and skellies. She said that it's all these things that kids today in suburbia here have no idea what she's talking about. But they were very, very basic games they created. "Scooters that we made out of box carts and everything, competed with the boys and closing off of the street when they would paint the street, and we'd all go out with our roller skates with the skate keys and skate. Those were the fun times and didn't cost much. It was a very simple life, where none of us were concerned about material things. And it was a nice, close neighborhood kind of thing."

**What's the first memory you have that you might say was associated with the world situation in the mid 40's?**

Fran attended Catholic school for 10 years of her life in a neighborhood parish school, and it was in the early 50's during the Korean conflict. They had to wear military dog tags in school, and they had air raid drills very often, because

they were afraid of invasion bombings. They had to duck under their desks or go out in the hall and cover their heads. She remembered duck and cover as being a routine thing.

**What are some of your early memories of your mother? What was she like?**

Fran said, *“My mother was a wonderful mother. I couldn't have gotten a more dedicated mother. I just lucked out.”* She wasn't well educated, but she was dedicated to her family. She would walk Fran and her sisters in the neighborhood to their school, because back then her father would say that girls wouldn't be allowed to walk to school alone. So, every day her mother walked them to school from first grade to eighth grade, because the school was from grades 1 to 8. Her mother would meet them for lunch with their sandwiches, stayed with them for the lunch hour and then walk back and pick them up at three o'clock. She just did this routinely and was a very dedicated mother who made a lot of sacrifices for them. She was a stay-at-home mom. When Fran was about 10 years old her mother was getting itchy to work, so she eventually found a factory job, although she lacked skills. She didn't know anything, but her sisters knew how to sew. She said that if they could do it she could do it. So, she learned how to do piecework where she got to work on sections of the garment like on women's coats. It was like heavy, heavy type of work in sweatshops. And then when Fran was 16 years old, and her parents moved out to Lake Ronkonkoma, she went to work in a dress factory where by that point she would make the whole dress.

Her mother's maiden name was Paronello. She actually came here from Sicily when she was seven and often would tell Fran the story of how Fran's grandfather had come ahead of time and then sent for her mother and grandmother. Fran's mother met her father for the first time when she was seven years old, because she was born on the other side. She only knew him for seven years, because he took ill and died when she was fourteen. She had very faint memories of him. She would often describe the boat they came over on and talk about steerage and how the boat was scrapped afterwards. They were sixteen days at sea. Fran said it was quite interesting. Fran ultimately got to go to Sicily three or four years ago. She said she went by way of a tour so was unfortunately unable to get to the side of Sicily from which her ancestors came. She was on the side of Siracusa and Taormina. She fell in love with it and intends to go back and spend a month there if she can. Fran said that she knows she has first cousins

there somewhere. Her father had left one brother behind when he came to America and he had a very large family. They're scattered throughout, and the one uncle who kept in touch with them, has passed on. Fran had an old address and keeps trying to reconnect but thinks that when she gets back she can go to the local town for information. Fran's parents came from the same part of Sicily.

**What about your dad's background and your memories of him while you were growing up?**

Fran's father was a very bright man. He was self-taught. He would read medical books, because it's something that interested him. He was a great reader and had maybe an eighth or ninth grade education. He had a hard life growing up, where he had to be the provider for his family, because his father certainly wasn't there for them in the way that he should have been in those early years. Fran's father was a wonderful doting dad. He said he never regretted having two daughters, even though he wanted a son and said nothing would replace his daughters. He loved them very much.

His father, Fran's grandfather, was a stonemason. Most of her grandfathers and great grandfather's were stonemasons. Her father wasn't one to be working physically, although his brothers did and they pursued bricklaying. Fran's father was more of an intellectual. He just didn't want to do that kind of labor. He competed in his later years on Civil Service Tests and was successful. This he was very proud of. He was around 48 when he joined the City of New York, working as the Housing Authority Guard. From there he competed again with Civil Service Tests and got to work for the Parks Department in New York City and loved it, because he loved to be outdoors and with the children. That's where he retired from before he passed on in 1974 at age 66.

**Would you consider your family as being a big one?**

Fran said that her extended family was big, because she has a lot of first cousins that are local and some Upstate and down in South Carolina being able to see them. Her immediate family is smaller, because she just has one older sister, Ann who is married to Al, with one son. They live in Middle Village, Queens. Fran's sister is twenty two months older than her.

### **What have you learned from your sister?**

According to Fran, she and her sister are very different even though the same parents raised them both. In high school, when they had traditional commercial high schools and academic high schools, her sister pursued the commercial education, and Fran pursued the college bound academic education. So, her sister's philosophies and her organization skills are superb. She's always on top of everything, and she became computer savvy as soon as it came out, because this was part and parcel of what she had to do to keep abreast of it. Fran on the other hand, tends to be more of a reader, more of a complacent person and likes to travel.

### **Outside of mom and dad, were there other adult influences in your formative years, other adults that had an impact on who you are today and who you became?**

Fran mentioned two adults who influenced her, her grandfather on her father's side and her grandmother on her mother's side. Fran's mother was very close with her mother, so she had the love of a grandmother. She never knew her grandfather, because he died when her mother was young, and likewise on her father's side, she got to know his father. She never knew his mother because before her parents were married, his mother had died. So, Fran had one grandfather and one grandmother from opposite sides of the family. She had exposure to them growing up, and they were a big influence on her.

Her grandfather taught her how to cook. That's why Fran said that she is an excellent cook. Her mother was not a great cook, even though she's an Italian woman, but because she was the baby of the family never learned. Her sisters always cooked, so she really never put too much attention. Her grandfather was an excellent cook. Her grandmother spoiled them. Fran has fond memories of all the time she got to spend with her too.

### **When did you first become aware of wanting to go into education, and who most influenced you in that direction?**

Fran said that it was when she was in 5th grade. It was her fifth grade teacher who influenced her. Fran had basically all Dominican nuns as her teachers

in the parish school, St. Joseph Patron, which she attended in Brooklyn. Fran was very fond of this particular nun, because she wasn't so prim and proper and seemed very real to her. She brought in a TV to class to watch the World Series. That was a big thing. During recess when they would play outside on the playground, Fran would get to spend a lot of time talking to the teacher and got to know her well. Fran admired her skill and her rapport with the kids, and the fact that she got them to do very well academically. Fran decided that some day she would like to be a teacher like her. So, that's where her love of teaching started. Fran did say though that she always had a backup plan, because she used to say, *"If it's not meant for me to be a teacher, because I really like working with kids, then I want to be an attorney. So I got my wish. There was never a need for me to pursue law."*

### **When did you get your first paying job?**

Fran was 16 when she got her first paying job at National Shoes in Ronkonkoma when they had moved out to Long Island from Brooklyn. She worked there for four years on weekends throughout her college days, because she commuted to college and loved every minute of her job. She said it was the most fun job she ever had her entire life.

Fran was then asked a few questions about things she liked and remembered as a child. Her favorite family holiday was Christmas. She liked to shop and said that she had a pretty sheltered life growing up. She said she wasn't able to do much until she got married. Fran said that she was basically a night person, not a morning person at all. Her favorite toy was a wind up doll that she had that walked like a robot. Her favorite season was the fall. Fran said that the aroma of roasting chestnuts in the City of New York brought her back to the times when her father would take them to Rockefeller Center to see the tree there every Christmas.

### **What were the schools that you attended?**

Fran first attended Kindergarten at All Saints Pre-school then in grades 1 – 8, she attended St. Joseph Patron. From there she attended St. Barbers, an Annex at Bishop McDonald's High School for 9th and 10th grades. She attended 11th and 12th grades at Sachem High School. Her first four years of college were at

Adelphi Suffolk, which today is Dowling, but her degree reads Adelphi Suffolk. She then went on for her Masters at Adelphi University. She did her postmasters work at Hofstra University for her certification requirements for Special Education and then she went on to NYU to take her administrative courses.

**Where there any teachers that you remember who made a difference?**

There was an English teacher at Sachem High School, Mr. Briston who went on to become Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent of Schools there. Fran said, "By far, he was the most dedicated dynamic English teacher I've ever seen. He would animate everything." He taught an English A-Track class when Fran was in either 11th or 12th grade. She remembered that on the first day of class he said that he would get everyone to pass the Regents exam, which he did. He just was a very positive influence. All of his students enjoyed going to his class.

**When did you first come to Brentwood? What year was it and why?**

Initially Fran wanted to be a foreign language teacher, but since she had received a scholarship for Adelphi, and they didn't offer foreign language certification, she changed to elementary education. She was then part of an internship program and was placed at the Sycamore Avenue School in Connetquot where she taught before going out on maternity leave. She was ready to return from her leave, but the school district was on strike. She was up for tenure that year, but was let go for walking the picket line. She immediately *"started cranking out interviews"*. She got an interview with the Middle Country School District and was offered the position to teach 6th grade. In the meantime, Howard Brodsky's wife, whom Fran had met while teaching in Connetquot, had spoken to Howard about her, and he was interested in meeting her. He then asked Fran to come in for an interview. Fran said, *"I went to Mr. Bradley's interview, and he said, 'When can you start?', and I was torn between making these two decisions. Should I take the easy way, go to my area of expertise and take the sixth grade assignment in Middle Country five minutes from my house, because I was living in Ronkonkoma...or should I start this whole new career with this whole new ballgame of something I know nothing about just because that lady (Mrs. Brodsky) was nice enough to speak to her husband? Because I had accepted Mr. Brodsky's assignment, basically, I kind of gave my word that I would start that September, I declined the other assignment and went with traveling*

*now 25 miles a day. But, I had to go to school. The state paid for a lot of my courses, because those days they needed Special Education teachers, because it became mandatory in the school. So I went on grants and had to go back to school. I mean, I complicated my life, but it was a Godsend that I did that, because it was much more challenging, and I enjoyed it. I really have to say, even my last years working with the kids have always been an enjoyment.”*

### **What were your impressions of Brentwood in your first years?**

Fran said that she bounced around a lot getting experience in different areas of Special Education including the Educable Retarded, Learning Disabilities and the Physically Handicapped. With each new assignment she had to be trained and was transferred to a new building. She said, therefore, that she saw a lot of differences from when she started. Fran remembers working with Sandy Chase and Bob and Salinas Weiner. Fran said that she worked in many of the schools in Brentwood and was fortunate enough to do the Early Intervention Program all the way up to the high school. So her experiences were with pre K through 12. She said that she worked in many different programs. The last six years were at the high school and prior to that the Freshmen Center taking 12 years of just doing Global History, which she had to teach herself, because she was not a history major. Yet, she was asked to teach that discipline when they became departmentalized.

### **Did the training you received adequately prepare you for your job?**

Fran said that it was a lot of on-the-job learning, and it had to do a lot with her personality. According to Fran, her personality played a big role in her job. If you don't have the right personality you won't be able to survive. She has seen people come and go where it just was not for them. It's not for everybody.

### **Beyond your job description, what was your purpose for coming to work every day?**

*Fran's response was, "I thought I was put there for a reason. I don't know maybe a spiritual sense that I belonged there. I thought that these kids were very needy, and sometimes I was the only act in town for them, and I think that was the incentive to go there, because I felt every day was a different day. So it wasn't boring, to say the least, and that it was very creative years ago when you could*



*mold the curriculum to interest the kids and also to make it more exciting and motivational and everything. The last few years though were teaching for the Regents and were very disenchanting to me, and I felt like I was torturing the kids. So, that was not so enjoyable, because it's just the wrong idea of what education is all about as far as I'm concerned."*

**Were you an active member of BTA from your earliest participation in the district?**

When Fran was at North Middle School, she was asked to be a Union Rep, and she did that for a year. She went on to go to one of the NYSUT Conventions out at Gurneys Inn in Montauk. She said it was very interesting.

**Can you point to certain lovable characters, or unique individuals that you met along the way?**

Fran replied, *"Well, yes, some of my colleagues were very creative. Special Education is a funny kind of a field, because if you don't make light of it sometimes and have the camaraderie among you, your peers, you could just want to kill yourself. So we would often joke a lot and, when I got to the high school I met Bruce Stuhldreher many years ago, and we became good friends. Then we reunited when we both got sent to the high school together. Very often he would joke with me, but he was creative with the computer." "There was some kind of Newsday program or something that he would monkey around with, and he would superimpose my pictures on a lot of things and put it in the front page of Newsday and put it by the front sign in sheets. It was primarily around the time of Bill Clinton's little endeavor with Monica Lewinsky, so, you know, at times I was Bill Clinton's latest squeeze. " "I was often one of the headlines." "So it was a lot of fun".*

**When did you know that it was time to retire?**

Fran said that it had mostly to do with the paperwork. It also had to do with all the turmoil within the department. There was a lot of pressure being put upon the Special Education teachers. Fran retired in June 2003 after thirty five years in education.

**What do you want to do next? Do you have any plans for your retirement?**

*“I didn't have any formal plan. I really didn't. Actually, I went out two years later than I was eligible, mainly because most of my friends were still working, and I thought, ‘Well, gee, I want travel companions and people to play in the sandbox with’, so I waited the two years, and a few more of my colleagues went out. Now my plan is to travel, enjoy my family and take the year off. If I get a little antsy where I want to go back to work, then I might do something a little less stressful but I don't want a big career job anymore with a lot of responsibility.”*

**Is there anything that you can look back on and say “I’m really proud of that accomplishment?”**

Fran said that she and her colleagues worked on several curriculum projects. They put together a behavioral plan that was quite impressive. She and a core of teachers were always called upon and were sent over to the high school to change hands and make changes in school.

**What was your first year’s salary teaching?**

Fran jokingly said about \$4000, and if you took the 12-credit tuition off, we were working as volunteers for that. That was what it cost the teachers for the 12 credits towards the Masters, and what they earned if you deducted it.

**What gave you the most pleasure of all the things you had to do?**

Fran replied, *“My pleasure teaching was seeing these kids come back and look me up and hearing their stories and their observations of me and why it was so important for them to find me. Particularly this one young lady who I had many, many years ago was very quiet introverted in the class, and I remember I had a brother also. Many, many years later, she had called Special Services to find out if I had retired, and they said no and that I working at such a school. So, she took the initiative to contact me. She was an adult and had a family and was working. She was one of my success stories.”* This was a student that Fran had in elementary school.

**What do you miss most about your active service, and things that you won't miss?**

Fran said that she misses her colleagues and the kids. She said she had to laugh at many of the responses that the kids would come up with, like the time she was asked to go to the prom. *"But I mean, they'd come out with the wildest things you know. At times and I'd go home scratching my head and laughing. I'd be driving home on the Expressway with a smile on my face. People must have thought I was crazy, but I would be thinking about the day and what the kids had said throughout the day. So I miss those things. They keep me young. The thing Fran won't miss is all the paperwork, like the IEP's. She said, "They should be shredded for confetti."*

**If you were able to change something that you were unable to in all the years that you were in the classroom and in public education, what would you like to have been able to see happen?**

Fran said that she would have liked to see more services for our kids. She felt like Special Education got short-changed. She said they needed much more ancillary support services for these kids than was given, like more social workers and psychologists. There should be a restructuring of the job description of what they ought to be doing too. Not just testing.

**What advise would you give to an incoming young professional person just starting out?**

Fran said it was important to keep your sense of humor. Learn to be flexible and not to think that your expertise is the only way. Be open to new ideas and learn from your colleagues? Keep your eyes open, and certainly your eyes in the back of your head. You need to be with it at all times. This is very important in Special Education to be on top of things. Be able to do a lot of things at one time. She said that you are constantly making snap decisions.

**Anything we left out? Anything you want to talk about?**

Fran wants to do a lot of traveling now that she is retired. She talked about some of her travels. One trip in particular she spoke about was a European trip

that she took for the first time. It was a tour run by an Italian teacher from Sachem whom she had met in a NYSUT seminar she attended. She was lead to believe that she would be traveling with other teachers, but as it turned out, she was the only one and would be chaperoning eight Sachem students. She was nervous about it, because she had never traveled abroad. *“So I went on this trip with a strange man and these eight kids and had the time of my life.” “You know, it was all new to me. It was exciting. It's like taking a child to Disney World, because I was just as excited as the students were.” “But that was my first indoctrination to European travel. From then I visited Italy four times total. I've gone on to England, Germany and Austria. My son studied in Oxford, England. One particular summer it was a Duke University in conjunction with Bucknell trip, and we were fortunate that he made reservations. My daughter and I went to visit him at Oxford. We stayed at Oxford for about three to four days, and then we went on to Wales and then to London, England.”*

**How do you want to be remembered by your colleagues and by the students you worked with?**

*“I hope that I would be remembered as a very caring and dedicated teacher. I hope that what I imparted to these kids beyond the academics . . .that they got other things from me you know, a value system. And my colleagues, I just hope they would enjoy my sense of humor.”*