

Maureen and Mike

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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

**Oral History Number: 113-003, 004**  
**Interviewee: Francis Bardanouve**  
**Interviewer: Steve Waldron**  
**Date of Interview: April 30, 1983**  
**Project: Francis Bardanouve Oral History Project**

*Note: First part of tape is rather confusing.*

Francis Bardanouve: I was saying that my grandmother was English, so I knew what Zed was. And that night we were registering in a fishing camp up there in British Columbia. They took our name and [said] their friend was named Zander. She said, "How do you spell that?"

He said, "Z-A-N-D-E-R."

She wrote down, "Z-A-N-D-E-R," and he said "No, Z-A-N-D-E-R!"

She said, "Z-A-N-D-E-R" and then we all went around, back and forth, Zed and Z.

I said, "Zumbo." His real name was Clayton really but we all called him Zumbo. He lives in Missoula. I said that in English, Z is Zed. Your name is "Za-A-N-D-E-R." That is all.

Venus Bardanouve: You know, I have lived in different parts of the county, and—

FB: You're wasting your batteries.

Steve Waldron: Okay, I have plenty of batteries.

FB: You're not getting anything on.

[Break in conversation, resumes in mid-sentence]

FB: She said, "You got a telephone call from Hays. They found a cow of yours with a sick calf. They left the calf out in the corral out there. Will you get him in the morning?"

I said, "Sick calf?" She was talking kind of funny, but I thought well, there must be a sick calf. So I went out there in the morning with my horse trailer and got my cow and sick calf. They had gotten away in another area of the [Fort Belknap] reservation, and when I got out there, he was the healthiest, toughest sick calf I have seen. He was really a lively calf. And I looked it over and I thought, oh no, that calf was not a sick calf, he was a slick calf—s-l-i-c-k. You know what a slick calf is?

Well, you'd better know. A slick calf is a calf that has not been branded. It was slick and evidently a cow that spring had gotten away before we had branding and had been running on the reservation. That's a miracle in itself—all summer without a brand on it, and that fall they found it. It was running around without a brand yet. But I got it back.

VB: Can you understand why I said it was a miracle?

SW: Oh, yeah. [laughter]

VB: That somebody didn't take it because it didn't have a brand?

FB: So a sick calf was very well.

SW: So Venus thought a slick calf was a sick calf.

VB: Yeah, I didn't understand.

[Tape turned off, then resumed]

SW: Turn it on here and away we go. I enjoyed the ranch today. I enjoyed touring it, thank you. I appreciate it a lot. I had no idea how big it was. Oh, it was huge!

FB: It isn't that big.

SW: It took us all day. You didn't tarry too long any place.

FB: I wasn't meaning to show off.

SW: No, I didn't [mean that].

FB: Lots of ranches are bigger. I'm relatively a small operator.

SW: What was it like growing up on a ranch? Your father was an immigrant from France.

FB: My memories of my early days are of ranch work. Absolute poverty. The Depression came along in [the] 1930s. Agriculture prices were almost zero. You couldn't raise anything. You couldn't get anything for what you raised. To compound it, the dry years were the same time as the Depression. Not only what you raised wasn't worth anything, you couldn't raise anything. It was absolute [misery]. Most of the ranchers, farmers in this area were broke—went broke, left their homes. It probably was a higher proportion of people [who] left here than there were in Oklahoma because there was just no hope, no rain for about three, four years and no prices. Wheat sold for 18 or 19 cents a bushel and you couldn't raise it with no rain. So we were in the midst of absolute Depression and the dry years at the same time. My family lived on a—very

low. We always ate well. My mother was a wonderful cook, and my folks worked [hard and] gave their health and their lives for hard work. He mined coal in the winter time, and hauled coal in blizzards with four horses, and get home way late at night. My mother would do the work of a man. She fed cows, cleaned barns, milked cows, cooked for the coal miners and tried to raise a garden without any rain. No modern conveniences at all. We had to pump water by hand, and carry the water to do the washing. We had no power, no electrical power. No modern conveniences or anything, so it was very difficult. We were probably about as poor as you could get.

So, those years we had no spending money. I don't think I spent two dollars a year, school years, my high school years. You just never spent money, you never had money. But somehow we survived and it was tough after we got out of high school. The worst seemed to come afterwards; we lost all the land. The bank took the land. The Federal Land Bank foreclosed and took the last land we had about 1938, and we just gradually rebuilt. The war years came along, and prices improved a little. We just slowly built back. All the young years were very, very difficult, very difficult. But I never knew anything else I guess. I never felt bad. Anybody who had a job in town was looked upon as being very rich. Oh, we were considered very, very poor.

SW: How much of your place did you lose then? And that was with the Land Bank?

FB: We lost it all. There wasn't anything left.

SW: Including the home?

FB: Yes.

SW: So did you keep living there?

FB: Yes. Nobody else wanted it. Everybody else was in the same way. Land had no value. YOU could buy land for 50 cents, a dollar an acre. Nobody had a dollar to buy it.

SW: When did you finally start coming out of the Depression?

FB: Like I say, it wasn't until World War II really. Our rain years began in late 1930s. It rained more, got more bushels, got a little more for the bushels.

SW: What was your mother like?

FB: She was a wonderful woman. Very little education. Eighth grade education. But she was highly intelligent and she was a worker, she worked all her life. When she was 79 years old, she did more work than many young people. She was a wonderful person. Bore hardships all her life and always tried to do the best with what little she had. Wonderful cook.

SW: Was she surprised when you decided to marry Venus? Your mother, was she surprised?

FB: It probably was hard on her. Yes, I suppose somewhat. She had probably built her life around me in later years. It was somewhat hard on her I think. She never said much, never said anything really. I can't really answer.

SW: How about your dad? What was he like?

FB: Well again, he worked all his life. He was probably a workaholic—both [my] parents were. He was quite an intelligent man with almost no formal education. He was honest, very honest man. Very sober—

SW: How did you get along with your father?

FB: Pretty well. He had a pretty violent temper but most of the time we got along pretty well. He worked all his life and expected everyone around him to work with very little reward I guess. Those tough years they weren't necessarily unhappy years, but there wasn't much enjoyment and there wasn't any recreation or anything like that. I would say fairly well. He'd get awful mad at me at times. I think [we got along] reasonably well.

SW: Did he ever beat you when he got mad?

FB: No, no. I think he whipped me once when I was a kid, and it wasn't anything severe. No, I never was beaten in my life. No, he'd yell at you and cuss you out but that's about all. No, he never laid a hand [on me] I was a very small kid, I guess he gave me a whipping once. That was—I can't remember it very well. But that's about the only one, so I guess most kids get one whipping once in their life. You can really say that I felt at times he was unreasonable, but I guess we all are ornery at times.

SW: Ah, Francis, just so I don't surprise you, I've done quite a bit of research on you already, and so I probably know a little bit more about you than you might think I do. Were your parents separated the last few years of your dad's life?

FB: They never lived—they lived as man and wife but they were basically probably be called separated, yes. But they never divorced or anything. They didn't live really as man and wife the last few years.

SW: How did you feel about that?

FB: Oh, I guess like most kids. Probably made me feel bad, but it was something that you accepted. He would come back. He'd come home and we all lived on the same ranch. He lived

over on the west place. I guess there wasn't a complete alienation. There wasn't really any more love between my parents, I think. It kind of died.

SW: What happened? Do you have any idea?

FB: I think the years of poverty, hard work just wore them down probably more than anything. Those years of desperately trying to survive I think kind of destroyed any—I don't know. Why do parents break up? I don't know.

SW: You said you told me that your father was really a good rancher, not such a good farmer.

FB: True.

SW: He liked raising cows, horses?

FB: He raised horses in France. Horses, cattle. He could recognize any cow in the bunch. Give you the history of three generations back. He could see a horse once and know the horse 10 years later. Probably the best eye for cattle and horses I ever saw. But farming—he didn't understand the farming. In order to be successful in this dry area, you have to summer fallow. He never ever adapted to leaving half the farm in idleness. I guess in France, you don't leave anything idle. You raise every acre and you have only a few acres. I don't think he could ever accept the principle of summer fallow, which is where you leave half your land idle.

That will probably [be] where I said he was a poor farmer. He never adapted to a summer fallow type of farming. Of course, that probably made him a failure, especially in those dry years without modern chemicals and control weeds without fertilizers. You're almost losers every year you put in a crop without summer fallow. They are double-cropping now and getting away with what we called double-cropping. They raise crops year after year. But with chemicals, control weeds, and with better seeds and fertilizer you can in a year raise a pretty good crop, every year. Of course you pay a price for it with fertilizer and chemicals. If you control the weeds, you can save on moisture and put [out] a good crop. Then there were no chemicals to control herbicides. No herbicides, the crops would burn up before they ever produced. They would yield very little.

SW: You told me once that you went to the Giant Springs as a child in Great Falls.

FB: No, I never went there as a child, no.

SW: I thought you did.

FB: My mother and her parents would go there as a child. My grandparents would take my mother and her sister and brother out to Giant Springs when she was a child, and have summer picnics out there. They rented a horse and buggy and take a picnic, have a picnic on Sundays at

Giant Springs. But I never was there. I never saw Giant Springs until a few years back. I mean quite a few years now, but I was probably 45 or so before I actually saw it. I introduced a bill back in about 1961 to make Giant Springs a state park. It was killed by the Republican legislature. But I always retained interest in Giant Springs. Eventually it became a state park.

SW: So that's kind of a monument to your mother—

FB: I wouldn't say it was a monument or—it might have become a state park anyway, but at least it created interest in my mind. I remember her telling about Giant Springs all the time. It created an early interest in my mind, you know how children are and my parents would tell something about something and you remember it well.

SW: Did your father ever talk about France?

FB: Once in a while, but not much. No, he left France behind and that was it. Once in a while he would say something, but very little. He hardly ever mentioned it.

SW: Could he speak English very well?

FB: Yes. I imagine—to me he spoke well, but I imagine anybody that never knew him would, outsiders would recognize probably said certain words a little different sometimes, but he spoke fairly well.

SW: Your father taught you how to break horses, didn't he?

FB: Oh, yeah. Horses, he loved horses. We had about 400 head of horses. That was probably one of the errors he made in management of the ranch. He got in the horse business early on [because] of what he knew in France, and probably always believed horses would come back in value, and they never came back. Not in his time. Not the kind of horses we raised. We hung on to horses. I think if he had went in the cow business earlier and more—he always had a few cows, but he spent a lot of time working the horses. He probably would have made much more if he had put more effort into raising cattle than trying to raise horses and sell them for seven dollars and five dollars a head in the end. That's what they brought.

SW: What kind of horses? Draft horses?

FB: They were a medium-type of horse. Some of the earlier [ones] had Morgan in them. They were crossed. There were some of them [that] were not heavy the Belgian-type horse or Percheron horse. More of a buggy, a buggy-type horse or a light work horse, wagon horse, not a heavy, heavy draft horse as you think of now days. Or a saddle horse type. There were good saddle horses. Lighter type ones. Some were heavier ones you break for wagon, driving, haying, you know like mower farm work. Yes, hauling hay and things. They weighed about 1,200, 1,300 in there. A heavy work horse, draft horse probably weighs 1,800, 2,000 pounds. We never had

that kind. They were wild, real wild but not mean horses. They were [a] bunch you could tame them, they were good horses. Once they lost the fear of man, they recognized that you were the boss.

SW: Your dad was good with cattle too?

FB: Very good, very good. He took [good care], no matter how [bad the] blizzard, or how cold it was, those cows were fed. He was a good livestock man. He always took good care of them. He would ride, he would calve them out, wash them, take care of them. Baby calves, suffer with them. He was very good.

SW: Did your father show affection like hugging or anything like that?

FB: Not too much, no.

SW: Did your mother show affection by hugging you?

FB: Oh some, yes.

SW: Did your parents ever show affection to each other in front of you, just hugging and kissing?

FB: Oh, very early on, but later on not so much. All that died out.

SW: How do you break a horse?

FB: Well, first, all horses, if they're really wild, you have to rope them. First get them in the corral. You rope them. You subdue them really, and you get a halter on them. If you never worked a wild horse, it would be difficult to explain. It would be a couple-hour battle to even—the first battle would be a wild, violent [one].....they would choke themselves down, they will fight you [and] the rope. They have absolute fear. They wouldn't attack you, but they would try to get away from you and it might be a day or two before you could ever even get close to them. You have a rope on them when you have them snug to the post [snubbing post] instead of a corral. A corral is always high and round. I have seen them clear a nine-foot corral. It might sound impossible, but I have seen a horse clear a corral nine, ten-foot high. Get away when that—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]



[Tape 1, Side B]

SW: You choked them down. You choked the horses down.

FB: They will lie down. You tie them down. You rub them, you rub their face, you rub their body after they lay down—hogtied down. Rub them and pet them and never be cruel to them. I never was cruel to a horse. And then you put a halter on them and a long rope and you let them up. They will try to get away, but you snub the rope to the snubbing post and they will just lean back with all the power they have and try to break the rope, or try to get away. But finally after a long time they will quit biting, usually, and not resist you. Then you try to what you call halter break them. Break them to lead, and the horse, a wild horse will not lead. No way! You pull on them, you pull and usually you try to make them move their feet. You can never out pull a horse. If you pull right forward against him he is so much heavier and more powerful than you are. Usually you walk to the side and you pull their head way aside as far back as you could and they will get off balance and they will move their feet sideways and get back on balance. Then you go on near a side and you pull on the neck over far as you could. Eventually they will move their legs over and face you and get unbalanced again.

Then you pull forward and you hold some of the post, and he'll pull back. It was always a sign of victory when the first time they would raise—almost, every horse will do the same—they would raise their front foot and they'd put it down and then maybe you pull them along the rein here—foot down—but you might gain an inch or two. Eventually you learn that if you pull on them, they will put their foot forward, move them forward and you will quit pulling on them. Pretty soon they just follow you around the corral. That would be the big victory. A saddle horse, is entirely different than the work horse after you once [have] gotten [him] so you could pet him and you try to pet him. You reach out—always work from the side, never get right in front of a horse when he's wild or he might come down with his front feet and kill you. But work off to a side, always the front and side. [Make sure] that he's not in direct line with his feet, and try to pet him, pull his head to you and gently [pet him]. Or take a piece of board or something and make the arm longer than your arm is, rub them on the shoulders and the back and on the neck and around the ears and down around their bodies and they will lose their fear eventually.

Then if you went to a work horse, you would eventually put a harness on them and that might mean lying them down, laying them down again and then there'd be an awful row. Then you work with a gentle horse. You eventually get them out in the open where you hook them to a wagon with a gentle horse and you tie them to a post for getting them hooked up. Might take you half a day to hook one up. And then one guy, he will untie [the horse]. The other guy will untie the team from the post. And he will make a run for the wagon, jump in [and] then they realize, the wild horse knew he is free and away he went for a ride. It might be a half-hour run or more and each time, a little bit less. Eventually he [the breaker] will work them over a period of months, weeks, days, and he will become gentle. A saddle horse, on the other hand, you will—I always tried to break them until they wouldn't buck.

I never was a cowboy enough to ride a real bucking horse. I get bucked off, but I wish I was born one. Sometimes he rode them, [my dad would] take a blanket, a saddle blanket, and you approach him carefully, rub him on his back and let him [smell the trainer's hand]. A horse will always reach out with his nose, and feel something with his nose. When he fears something, he reaches out with his nose and smells it and touches it. Hold [your hand] up there and he'll reach out and touch it with his nose, rub it with his nose. You [rub your] hand on his body. Try to put [your hand] on his back. He will jump. Never let him win. [If you try something with a horse, absolutely carry [it] out to a point where you would not give up before he would. If you ever gave up before he gave up, he won the victory and never will forget. Then proceed with a saddle. Leave the blanket off, because you couldn't hold a saddle with a blanket at the same time.

You get the saddle up there and let him smell it, touch it and [then] rub [the saddle] on his shoulders and try it on his back. It will probably fly off a few times. But always come back, put it back on and eventually you'll get it on his back. Then you have a long rod or something with a hook on it. You reach underneath and get the cinch. Of course, the first time [the rod] touches his belly, he's going to throw the saddle off, and you begin all over again. And sometimes they blindfold a horse and do this, and when he's blindfolded they put a rag or a sack or something over the eyes so he can't see. He won't do much movement when he is blindfolded. Get the saddle cinched down eventually and then he'll probably buck around the corral with the saddle or try to buck it off. And you keep working with him until he accepts the saddle. Then the next big job is to accept you and the saddle and that can be a long story itself. I always try to ease myself on the saddle, put weight on the saddle without being in it. And then eventually I will be up in it and hopefully he won't buck me off. Sometimes he will. Then you ride him around in the corral, preferably with somebody else. I often worked alone because I had nobody to work with.

Saddle horses. To get the horse used to a saddle, you try to get on the horse in the corral, and ride him in the corral. Then you usually should have somebody ride with you outside the corral. They really blow up sometimes when they get out of the corral the first time, because they think they're free and they're going back to the range. But eventually you have to move very carefully, never move a hand, never make a quick move or anything because they might blow up at any moment. Eventually they will tame down and become very fine horses. You never want to be cruel to a horse or mean to a horse because they will fear you. They will eventually trust you and become a friend of yours, I guess.

SW: Did [a horse ever] break any of your bones?

FB: Once I probably cracked my shoulder blade, but I never did anything about it.

SW: Wow! If nothing else, at least we'll know how to break horses.

FB: It's always best not to have anybody around when you break a horse. Anything that attracts a horse's attention from you makes him more difficult. If there's somebody out at the edge of the corral or something, he watches—he's got his eye out there and not watching you. You want to have him solely concentrating on you. Never let a horse become adjusted to a certain spot in the corral. He will always figure that's his territory, and you can't move him off, or he'll always run back to it. Make him at all times obey you, not let him have his way. If a horse finds that one corner of the corral, he'll get to his corner, he'll always try to assert his rights in that particular spot. You never want to let the horse. Whatever you do you must not ever let him be the master because he'll soon find out what he can get away with.

SW: When I hear you talking, I almost hear your dad talking. Is that what your dad used to tell you?

FB: No, he never said much, it was just acquired by working with them, seeing it. You learnt some of it yourself. The right side and the left side of a horse's brain is not connected in a sense that you work always on the left side of a horse. But [when] you go on the right side, you have to begin all over again. What he learned on the left side he has not learned on the right side. If you mount a horse on the left side all the time and you never try mounting on the right side, he'll probably try to kill you or resist like a wild horse. Or try to get off on the right side when you always get off on the left side. You'll have some real troubles. If you do anything on his right side he's not used to you have to teach him that the same applies to both sides.

SW: You were born with a handicap. It's called a cleft palate, isn't it? How did that affect you as a child?

FB: Oh, I don't know.

SW: I think you told me that you were awfully shy?

FB: Yes, that's right.

SW: How did you do in high school?

FB: Oh, okay.

SW: Were you quiet and shy in high school too?

FB: Oh, I guess in certain ways. I had my friends.

SW: You didn't come to town too often, except to go to school, did you?

FB: That's right. I lived in town during the school year.

SW: Is that right?

FB: Oh yes. No way were we coming up from the ranch in those days.

SW: And then when you went to the ranch, you just stayed there?

FB: Yes.

SW: How did you finally get over your shyness?

FB: Oh, I'm not sure.

SW: Did Zander help you out?

FB: Pardon?

SW: Did Clayton Zander help you out?

FB: The older boys helped me more early on. I suppose they all helped me some.

SW: When you got older, did going to the legislature help you get over your shyness, or had you gotten over it by then? I took karate to get over mine. (Laughs.) I took a lot of speech.

FB: I suppose evolution. I'm not sure I'm entirely over it yet.

SW: I don't think I'm entirely over mine, either. I get in a crowd of people that I don't know, and boy, I just freeze up. I am just so quiet. Go stand or sit in a corner. You had some reconstructive surgery done, didn't you? When you were older?

FB: Yes.

SW: What caused you to do that? How old were you?

FB: Oh, I don't know. About 30. Something like that, 35.

SW: I'm asking you some tough questions, aren't I? I'll change the subject then. Your grandparents. Did you know either of your grandparents well?

FB: Oh yes. I stayed with my grandmother during the school years. She took care of us.

SW: She lived in Harlem then?

FB: She'd come in the wintertime and stay with us, my sister and I, and she kept house for us through the years of school.

SW: That was your mother's mother?

FB: Yes.

SW: What was your grandmother like?

FB: A very good woman. She lost an arm when she was a small child. She had one arm. Worked hard all her life. Raised her family, raised three children. Worked on the farm, ranched all her life. Kept house and she was a very good woman. Canadian born and raised. Born on the frontier of Canada, and came to Great Falls when it was a village, about 1888 or so. And was married there, and eventually moved to Havre with her husband, then her husband got this farm where we were today. Part of it is over at Snake Creek. [She] moved in and spent the rest of her life there.

SW: Sounds like a neat person. How did she lose her arm?

FB: She was playing as a kid. I don't know how old she was, 7 or 8 years old. They were jumping off a little hay barn, a little barn they had there, and there was a sickle in the hay pile, they used to cut hay. It was in the hay and she never realized it, and she was jumping on the hay and she never realized it. She fell on this sickle. [It was] very, very sharp, of course. And now a days [it would be] a relatively minor operation, but it cut her arm to the bone, and they took her to town. They put flour in it, she said, to keep the arm from bleeding so bad. And they just sawed her arm off. Nowadays, it would be a very minor operation, I suppose. In a couple of weeks, I suppose she would have been all right, but they just sawed her arm off. It looked like it was cut so bad.

SW: When did your grandmother die?

FB: 1940. 1944, I think. Yes, because she was born in 1860, and she was 84 years old. So it was 1944.

SW: Your sister Virginia, did she have any children?

FB: No, no she never had any children.

SW: How did you get along with your sister?

FB: Oh, very well, very well.

SW: What kind of things would you do together when you were growing up?

FB: Just whatever [there] was to do on the farm. Whatever one would do, the other would do.

SW: Did she break horses too?

FB: No, not really. She loved horses, of course. She left when she got married shortly out of high school, so she wasn't around that much. I mean she married young, within a year after she graduated from high school. No, she liked horses. She rode horses. She had her own horse. But she never actually broke a horse.

SW: Who did she marry?

FB: She married a neighbor's boy. A neighbor's son.

SW: Her name was Virginia?

FB: Yes.

SW: How did she finally die?

FB: She had a car wreck on the ranch out towards the Missouri River breaks, out there south of Landusky. She was working on the ranch, and went out to the field there. I don't know what happened really. The car tipped as she went down through a coulee there or something. Rolled on its side and the door came open. She was crushed on the side of the car as it tipped over. I wasn't quite sure why it happened or how it happened.

SW: One of the neatest things about you is Venus, marrying Venus. She was the first woman you ever dated, wasn't she?

FB: I guess she was.

SW: Tell me how you met her.

FB: She was doing research—I never met her in Helena—on the Indian people and somehow she went around the reservations of Montana with a man here from Public Health, without really having any information. I never really had any information for her, but they said I knew a lot of Indian people. Maybe she [should] make an appointment with me. I might be able to help her on research. Really, I never helped her. She asked for an appointment. I met with her in town, and that's how we first met. She was employed with the Board of Health then.

SW: How did you go about asking her out for a date?

FB: That came quite a few, a couple of years later. I seen her in Helena at the Capitol later. She was testing hearing. She was giving hearing tests to legislators. I met her again, but then I met her a couple of years later. She was always friendly, I don't know why, somehow or other that's how it all—

SW: She was the first woman you ever dated, wasn't she?

FB: Yes, I guess so.

SW: Now Francis, I remember the first woman I ever asked out for a date, and I was just nervous as hell, and it took me a long time to build up courage to ask her.

FB: I never went out with her. I think the first time I ever really asked her if I could come visit her at her home. I visited her at her home, I think. That was probably the first time—

SW: What happened? You just fell in love with her and asked her to marry you?

FB: I guess, eventually after two or three years.

SW: Well neat. She's such a neat person. How old were you then?

FB: I'd be 47, I guess. Yes, 47 when I got married.

SW: You waited 47 years for such a neat person.

FB: Yes. I suppose she was lonely. She had a hard life raising her family by herself.

SW: I think she married a pretty neat guy.

FB: That's a matter of opinion, I guess.

SW: Where did you take her on your honeymoon?

FB: We went up to Canada. We married here. The high school here. We went up to Canada, up to Lake Louise, Jasper, the parks up there, and then we went over to British Columbia, Vancouver, and then over to Victoria and spent some time on Victoria Island. That's a big island. A long island. Went up the north most tip of Victoria and then back down by ferry to Washington. From there, we came back across Washington, Idaho, and back to Helena, where her home was.

SW: Why Venus? Why not someone else?

FB: Probably the only woman that would have me. [Laughter] And she was friendly, which made it easier. I say, had to be a friendly woman or I would never approach them.

SW: But she is a neat lady. You know you spent 47 years without being married. What made you all of a sudden change? Was it just her, or—

FB: Oh, I don't know. It's hard to say. Probably I suppose—I probably would have married many years before if I had met a woman that was approachable or friendly. I'm not sure.

SW: She's a dear, sweet woman. I really, I really like her. You know one thing I've noticed, Francis, is that you have a real love of the arts, the performing arts and music. I don't imagine you had much of that on the ranch there.

FB: I'm a moron. I'm an absolute moron in music. I can't recognize one note. I can't hardly recognize "America" when I hear it. I know what I like in art. I have nothing, no training, nothing. I like art. I'm not sure what I like about music, or what I like. A lot of this so-called cowboy music just turns me off, but I like good music. I don't know why. I know what I'm hearing. Semi-classical or pop or musicals like "Oklahoma," "My Fair Lady" and those kinds of plays, musicals and things. "South Pacific" and things like those. Those things, that kind of music I really like, I enjoy that kind of music. That may not be high music, but it is music that is fairly popular, fairly credible as music goes, I suppose. I was in New York once, and I went to some plays and things that I enjoyed it very much. I like art, I like artwork. I suppose if I had any education or something I might—

[End of Tape 1, Side B]



[Tape 2, Side A]

SW: I would go, when I went to the National Gallery of Art I would wander around in there. I spent two days there. Here was all this stuff to see in Washington, D.C., and I don't know anything about art, and I spend two days there in the National Gallery of Art. But you, in your legislative career, you've spent quite a bit of time protecting the arts and culture, museums—insuring that they had funding. Why did you do that? Why should some farmer who lives out in the middle of nowhere—Harlem is as close to nowhere as you can get—why should some rancher want to do that?

FB: Well, it's part of our culture, part of our heritage. They say man cannot live by bread alone. He must have other things. He must have beauty, he must have art. That's why I suppose I like to protect the environment too. The beauties, the wilderness, waterfalls, the music, art. This all makes a richer life, makes life worthwhile. I remember Nutter when he—I talked about Nutter the other day. He said one of the areas that was not essential for government, that we did not need, it was not necessary to appropriate any money for was the museum. The Historical Society and the museum over there. I made sure that they had their appropriation that session. He really felt that it wasn't necessary to have a museum. I was on the subcommittee that handled that. [The funds] were not cut. They never got any rich budget, but they were not cut.

SW: Which subcommittees did you serve on?

FB: The subcommittees have changed over the years. The subject matter handled by them [has changed]. Mostly executive agencies like the Department of Health, the National Guard. It was the Board of Health in those days. Many agencies have been consolidated, and so you can't really [compare]. There were general government agencies—I would say most of them were. You would call them agencies, boards, bureaus, commissions. Natural Resources—now the old Water Board, we used to call it the Water Board, I served on that—has been consolidated into the Department of Natural Resources. We'll fund the Fish and Game. Many of the agencies of general government I served [on the subcommittees that oversaw their budgets]. I never served on Institutions or the Education subcommittee because I always was involved with the... Of course, I had a very high interest in institutions, but I did a lot of work on institutions. More probably more than any other area, really.

SW: And yet you never did get to serve on the Institution subcommittee?

FB: No, no, I never served on it. Well, those Republican years I wasn't appointed. The first year I wasn't appointed. I was just happened to be assigned to it. Like I say, [I was assigned to] the Department of Health, Highway Patrol, things like that, and for the next few years, the Republicans controlled. They just kept me on those areas where I have served before. In 1965 I was the chairman and then I fell back into the pattern of being assigned where I had worked years before. They never assigned me but I did a lot of work then with them. Maybe I got more help not being on it necessarily, I'm not sure.

SW: You've got a lot of Indian friends. How did you get so many Indian friends?

FB: I went to school with them. Your classmates were Indians. [I had a] high number of Indians in my class. You went to school, they got to know you, you got to know them, and you got to be friends with them. And then later, my folks—Indians were always coming to our home. They were always welcome at our home. They'd wander in and out, dealing in horses or something. Riders worked there on the ranch; they were very fine riders, cowboys. There were always riders around the ranch, oftentimes Indian riders I have known. Later on, I was operating on the Fort Belknap [Reservation] by the Hays-Lodgepole area. I farmed several thousand acres out there in partnership with the Zander boys. They were my partners and we hired [the Indians], they worked with us. It's about friendships over the years. Then politically I campaigned among them, and they knew me, and I knew them. I farmed out here by Snake Butte. I think I told you last night, I had an Indian family, had lots of relations [with them]. [They] had this land, [and] dealt with me over the years. I never beat them. I guess they learned to respect me. They sometimes beat me. But mostly, I think they came to know me. Not try to beat them. Tried to be fair with them. They are just like anybody else. When you're in this community with the people around you, you form friends with them just like you do with whites. And they knew me in class, in school. There are a lot of people in Harlem that have Indian friends. That isn't unusual when you come to a community that is biracial. You become friends with the people you associate with. If there were a lot of Negroes at the sawmill where you work, you'd probably have friends among them.

SW: You've looked out for the Hutterites too in the legislature a couple of times, haven't you?

FB: Yes. Not because I particularly carry a law for Hutterites, it's just that they represent a form of religion. I feel very strongly [for] our basic rights. If you violate the religious rights of one segment of American society, you can violate them all. I think that is what we were founded on, the right to freedom of religion. That's one of our [rights] —to believe as you feel, to do as you feel and the right to have your religion is a very, very important freedom. I suppose that is why I [have helped the Hutterites]. I do like the Hutterites, they're friends of mine, but that isn't why I [help them]. When I first became involved with the Hutterites, I knew no Hutterites, so it wasn't a matter of knowing them first and then protecting them. I knew there weren't any Hutterites around here when I first got involved with the Hutterite Bill of 1961.

SW: What was that bill? What was it about? What happened?

FB: It was a bill to regulate the amount of land they shall own. Elmer Schye was one of the leaders of [the bill]. And it passed the House [with a] big majority, and it would have passed in the Senate, I'm sure. And Governor Nutter would have been happy to sign it, I'm sure. However, I became very concerned about that type of rule. I felt it clearly was unconstitutional. I was only a second-term legislator at that time. There was a lobbyist for the Montana Council of Churches working the legislature against a relatively minor gambling bill. I don't know why I wrote a press

release, one of my first press releases probably I've ever written. I attacked the Council of Churches, the lobbyist for ignoring a fundamental, a real serious bill, that would threaten the freedom of religion in Montana, and not raise a hand to oppose that bill. They were spending all their time on a little minor, relatively minor gambling bill. Something about bingo or something, I don't remember what it was. Well, they came out of the woodwork. They rushed down to Helena and asked me for a meeting, wanting to know why I felt that they weren't doing their job and I just told them. I remember [John] Melcher. They asked for a meeting. I remember Melcher was a freshman at that time. He came with me to that meeting, and they were kind of hostile. But after they sat down with me, I believe they felt that they [should go] to work on the Senate, and it was killed in the Senate. But I'm sure that the Senate would have passed it. I feel it was a violation of our constitutional rights to single out a segment of our society. A religion many not be the same as yours or mine, but I feel they have that right.

SW: You did the same thing in the 1983 Legislative Session on a study resolution, didn't you?

FB: It had the same—it was basically the same issue. It was very cleverly covered up. I found out afterwards [that] it was drawn up so that people wouldn't recognize it as a Hutterite bill. But it was clearly aimed at and for the Hutterites and it was the same issue all over again, except in a more modified form. But it was exactly the same issue.

SW: And you managed to get it killed in the House this time though?

FB: Yes. I found out that the bill drafter was instructed to cover the issue up so carefully that it wouldn't show. But the Agriculture Committee clearly talked about the Hutterite things. I found out that it was an anti-Hutterite bill and later on, one of the people who supported it came up to me and told me—I won't name the name of the legislator. He told me that it was to get the Hutterites.

SW: You don't sleep very well during the legislative session, do you?

FB: Oh, I sleep well. I sleep, but I don't sleep much.

SW: How many hours a night do you sleep?

FB: It'll vary. When it gets real tough, I suppose about three hours or so.

SW: And then what do you do? Do you get up and pace?

FB: No, I never pace the floor. I plan and figure. I get up real early and go down to the capitol. Sometimes I go down at four or five o'clock in the morning, if I'm not real tired. I usually go down between six, half past six.

SW: If you were writing an autobiography of yourself—

FB: Which I wouldn't do.

SW: That's why I'm doing a biography because you won't do the autobiography. You won't do your memoirs, so I'll have to do it for you.

FB: Oh, I think you're wasting your time.

SW: Well maybe, but let's say you were looking over my shoulder as I was doing your biography, and you could put anything in the book you wanted to about you. What would you want people to know about Francis Bardanouve?

FB: Steve, you ask tough questions.

SW: I know it.

FB: I have a funny philosophy. It's a very simple [one]. I have always said for many years, I don't know when I first came up with the idea, that somehow I would like to leave the world a little bit better than when I came into it, and I think that is what [is] probably behind a lot of my philosophy in the legislature, the bills that I support. If I can improve the air, the water, the land or the environment; if I can improve the lot of the people in institutions, people, consumers who are unfairly treated. Maybe I feel that I'm carrying out that philosophy of just leaving the world a little bit [better]. Maybe a very, very small part of the world. But it's a part of the world that I can have something to do with. Maybe that's what I would [include]. I'm not sure.

SW: If you could look over my shoulder when I'm writing this book, and I'm getting to the part where I'm going to describe you, how do you want me to describe Francis Bardanouve? To the people of this state?

FB: I will want you to describe me as you see me—not as I see myself.

SW: I want to know how you see yourself.

FB: I'm not sure how. It's not important how I see myself. It's how other people see me. I wouldn't know—I would hope you would say that I was honest and tried to be fair and tried to work the hardest. And tried to be fair with my fellow citizens, legislators. And tried to improve society, our Montana society, our government. If you improve your government, I think you improve the welfare of all the people. I think the welfare of people depends upon how well their government is operated, how well it does, how honest it is, how it meets the obligations in education, institutional care, general government. You want something, sir?

SW: You betcha.

FB: So I guess that's about all.

SW: What do you see in Montana's future? What's going to happen to Montana?

FB: I have no real fear. I [will] always remember my first session. We had a lawyer from Harlem, who eventually became a justice on the Supreme Court. He moved from Harlem. In fact, his family owns land out here south [of us]. He was a lawyer in Chinook for many years, and eventually was elected to the Supreme Court. He has several prominent sons in Montana yet. Bob Lee, Bob Lee's family. He knew my folks, he knew me as a kid. After my first session he wrote—I never forgot this, I'm surprised that a Supreme Court Justice would write a hillbilly legislator, but being from Harlem and from Blaine County, I guess he took time. He wrote me, and said, "Francis, you may be discouraged by the legislative process in your first session. However, over the years I have seen in government that you move ahead and then you fall back. You move ahead, you fall back at times, but over the years you always move a little further ahead than you fall back in improvement operating the government." And that's why I feel that Montana will be a better place in the years to come.

Twenty-six years from now, they'll look back and say, "Oh, my, my! Those boys were pretty backward back there in 1983. We are much better off, we are today." I think that. The quality of legislators, the education of legislators has risen tremendously. The younger type of legislator who is more apt to be inclined to improve Montana has come into office. The old, rugged frontier spirit of "I won the West by myself, by God! The government don't need to do anything for me" and "everybody else, you do the same as I have done." It may be a noble concept, but it's not a very realistic concept for a woman who has children to support, has no husband [and who] may need help. [There are] many other examples. Or a person in an institution. They can't win the West by themselves. Those days, those kind of people fell by the wayside and were wiped out. They ended up in the poor house, poor farm.

I think Montana's future is safe. We lived through one of the better periods. In my time I have lived through one of the darkest periods and one of the best periods. I think [that during the] reactionary period, we never really ever went back. It was, of course, the Democratic Senate [that] helped kill some of the bad legislation, but even they were very conservative, most of those senators. We never went back very far. In the 1970s, we moved ahead a long ways so we can even retreat some from where we are but we'll be better off than we were 10 years, 15 years ago. I think Montana has a good role to play. We have a lot of room here. We have some natural resources. We have clean air, we have water. We have good people, we have good government. Our government is at the present time better financially, in better shape than many governments. Our education system isn't bad. Our laws are pretty plain laws, pretty good laws unless we have a terrible period of something I can't realize at the present moment, unless we sell our souls to industry at all costs or something, I feel that Montana will never become a slave to industry because heavy industry that really can control an area will never come to Montana. We're too far from population, we're too far from transportation. Our climate is severe, [with] short seasons, so we'll never have a giant car factory, giant mills and things like in

the East. Of course, we're not even sure that those kinds of industries can even survive in the East anymore.

We may come to a new period in America where we won't have the heavy industry that we were famous for [for] so long. I can see coal becoming more important, maybe play a more important role, but so far we have not allowed it to dominate [Montana] like the Anaconda [Company] had a stranglehold on Montana many years ago, and kept it there for many years. If a bad thing can happen during the Anaconda years, it may be beneficial that many, many, many people today say, "We'll never let that happen to us again." We'll never let coal become the Anaconda of the year 2010 or something. Hopefully, that will happen. When Anaconda got control of Montana, most of the population was in a very small area, and now the population is dispersed over many areas, many cities. Coal will never dominate politics like it was able to do for so many, many years out of Butte-Anaconda. No, I have no fear for Montana in the years to come. There might be some bad periods, bad days, but overall I think Montana—we can be proud of Montana.

SW: If you had your life to live over again, what would you change about it? What would you do differently?

FB: Not too much. There wasn't much I could change when we were so desperately poor. There wasn't any opportunity to change it much when I was much younger. So if I had the same circumstances, it would be very difficult to change much. My life pattern was pretty well set by the economic circumstances, so I guess there wouldn't be much change. If economic circumstances were different, maybe I would have a university education or something. I can't say. There was no means to have an education, even if I had wanted one, and in the academic field, I was always fairly able to cope. I could, I feel I could have handled college pretty well. The same subject matter goes on in college. More advanced but the university education might have been something that might have occurred if there had been [the] economic opportunity to make it possible. I'm not sure, I can't tell. But if I were under the same circumstances, a university education might have been very difficult. It wouldn't have been easy even if I had the economic means of having one.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

[Tape 2, Side B]

SW: So, you kind of missed out on not having a university education. How does it feel when you have to fight those university presidents? What's it like having to deal with them? Do you feel like you're a little bit disarmed fighting such intellectual giants?

FB: No. They fight fair, I think. I never feel—I'm amazed that somebody—I sometimes question the system where it puts the power of appropriating money to universities. A person that has power over some of it, at least, has no education himself. It seems ironical and maybe not fair [that] a person who has people with all the education they have will have to come to a person like me to ask for money. Maybe the system is not quite right in putting me in that position. No, they never awe me. I just give and take. Of course they have to be very careful how they treat me, which is unfair really. They don't really ever try [to be unfair]. They will swallow a lot, but just in order to get along with me, I suppose. If they really wanted to have it out with me, I'm sure that they could abolish me or demolish me very quickly, but first they have to let me take my little jabs at them and smile and smile and smile. Of course they get what they want in the end anyway.

FB: You know Francis, I was just thinking, when you married Venus, and I just think you're really lucky to find such a beautiful person. I hope I'm so lucky someday. But she had children, didn't she?

FB: Yes.

SW: How many children did she have?

FB: Three.

SW: Three. What was it like to be a bachelor 47 years, and then all of a sudden have a wife and three kids?

FB: Well, really only one because—

SW: And that was Libby?

FB: Libby, yes. Kathy had been married and had children long before we were married. Rick was pretty much on his own, but he hung over our heads pretty heavy the first year of our marriage. He created quite a few problems, but he wasn't really in the family.

FB: His inability to handle money and things was pretty tough.

SW: He experimented with drugs too, didn't he?

FB: I have no way of knowing. I guess he has experimented with alcohol, drugs, whatever. He has said that had he not changed his ways, he would have been in prison. Wild women, whatever. He kept his mother financially broke the years that she was raising him. Getting him out of jackpots, trying to keep him from getting in trouble and running away and searching for him and—

SW: Did you have to help him out of some of those jackpots?

FB: Well not real serious. He never got in enough serious [trouble], but he didn't handle his money very well. He was kind of on his own and I kind of—what am I hearing?

SW: That's the T.V.

FB: Oh. Venus just practically lived for her son. I figured he was a man and [it was] time he made his own, hoed his own row and that we weren't going to babysit him the rest of his life. I think it may have been just as well. I helped him. I tried to help him some, a few times since, but these are not jackpots lately, I just help him out. I figured that as long as he took care of his money and give himself jackpots and his momma was always here to wipe his nose for him and set him up again, that he would never change his ways. I just felt that he had to make it on his own. I didn't try to get too involved with him. I got involved somewhat, but it usually never ended too well. I tried not to disown him or anything. I tried to treat him fair. I tried to help him some, but I kind of made up my mind I wasn't going to be pouring all, everything I have into his way of life.

SW: What about Libby?

FB: Well, Libby was—

SW: She was 16 when you married Venus.

FB: She was in high school. It was difficult for Libby, very difficult to change her way of life. Libby was very independent and I think she bitterly resented me at first. I think she was heading for trouble in high school. I tried to head some of it off, but I think it caused some resentment and unhappiness with her. I guess over the years she has found that I haven't been all that bad, and I think she has seen I have tried to help her, and her family. I don't think it was very happy for her at first. In fact, probably very unhappy for her.

SW: Did that bother you?

FB: Oh yes, it worried me. Libby had her flings; she was cutting a pretty light path. And got herself in trouble, which I thought she would, but she has redeemed herself many times over. I mean, she matured very quickly, and has been a wonderful person since. But it caused some rough spots, rough days between Venus and I too.



SW: Really?

FB: When she was in high school, I really could see more clearly what was happening. Whatever Libby said, Venus would unqualifiedly accept it and I could not accept it. That, of course, caused some troubles. But being right always is not always the best things I guess, but it all came out well.

SW: Were there ever times when you wondered if maybe you hadn't made a mistake getting married and taking on a child.

FB: Oh, I'm sure. I know Venus has thought that many times, I'm sure. Being a farmer, a rancher here on the farm is not seeing me as a legislator who more or less looks like a professional person up in Helena. You come and see me on the farm, day to day as a dirty farmer. I mean a dirt farmer, or rancher, long hours and things and [that] can be a shock. She was raised in the culture of the university world, highly educated herself. It was hard for her to accept all these things—very hard. It wasn't of an end where you rode out [to] the pine trees and rode back without sweating dirt on you.

SW: Do you think Venus is happy now?

FB: Sometimes very happy. Other times not so happy. It'll vary I suppose with the conditions. I think by and large in many ways I've probably been a disappointment with her.

SW: Why is that?

FB: Things just don't always work out like you think they would.

SW: Do you think she misses the big city life?

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FB: Not so much the city life in itself. She no, not the society, the culture, [it's] the professional people that she worked with she misses I think. It's hard, the small town, cowboy-type people who didn't have an education and who are not of the academic world. She lived in the university world, at a fairly high level. Her husband was a doctor, an academic doctor, and they traveled in a different world. She was on the Board of Health in Helena. She traveled with a professional doctor, medical doctors and things all the time. Professional people. [This is] really the first time in her life she has ever been out of the professional world. It's not the same. A cultural shock, a cultural shock.

SW: That was quite a few years ago.

FB: Yes, but those things don't change quickly.

SW: I'm not supposed to do this, being a historical researcher, but I want to tell you that I think you're all wet. I think she's very happy to be with you. She has friends here in Harlem. She's got that bookstore that she helped to start, that religious bookstore. She's got the church, some dear friends. I just can't believe that you really believe that she's unhappy here.

FB: Well, not entirely, no, but I mean periods of unhappiness.

SW: Do you [have] any stories?

FB: What do you mean?

SW: Anecdotes? Fun things that happened. Things in your life that really stand out.

FB: Oh, I just can't say right now. If we were talking over a long period of time, then things would come out. When you ask outright... [Laughter]

SW: Yes. OK, well, I guess I'm done. We have about four hours almost of tapes, three-and-a-half I guess, somewhere in there. A little over three-and-a-half and just an outstanding job, so we'll call it quits then.

[End of Interview]