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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: 113-005

Interviewee: Libby Kuntz

Interviewer: Steve Waldron

Date of Interview: April 30, 1983

Project: Francis Bardanouve Oral History Project

Note: This is a series of short interviews with Libby Kuntz, Francis Bardanouve's stepdaughter. Steve Waldron's final thoughts about the interviews and his opinion of Bardanouve are also part of the audio.

SW: I'll make it real easy for you. What's your name?

LK: My name is Libby Kuntz.

SW: How do you spell that?

LK: Last name is K-u-n-t-z.

SW: That's an easy name.

LK: And Libby, L-i-b-b-y.

SW: And you are the daughter of Venus, right?

LK: Right.

SW: Francis's wife?

LK: Yes.

SW: What did you think of Francis when Venus first introduced you?

LK: (laughs) Oh dear. (laughs)

SW: Give me a true answer.

LK: It was so long ago. Well—

SW: Here's this strange guy, and he's got a physical, an obvious handicap and your mother says "I like this person." What was your reaction?

LK: I know that certainly it didn't bother me. I don't think I was all that thrilled to be moving at the age of 16 from Helena to Harlem, but I thought Francis was very nice and he was very nice. I don't remember that we had much contact really. You know I can't remember a lot of specific times that I was with him you know really.

SW: You knew Francis from when you were 16?

LK: Right.

SW: Oh, that's a long time.

LK: It is. I'm 32. (laughs)

SW: (laughs) Right. How would you describe Francis? What are your feelings about him?

LK: How would I describe him? Oh, he's a very complex person. Sometimes he's moody and quiet and sometimes he's expansive and outgoing and friendly and he's been very good to me and to my family. My family has a lot of affection for him. But he, as a person, is very complex and maybe he ends to be a little moody I would say.

SW: A lot of people find that Francis has a unique sense of humor. Tell me about his sense of humor. Did you have anything you can recall that kind of struck you about his humor?

LK: About his humor? Well, he's very clever in things that he says and his responses to things. I know some really funny things about Francis that come from being a bachelor, I would say more than anything... (laughs) Is this what you want, you want funny stories?

SW: Yes.

LK: Okay. We have a very funny story in our family about him when he was taking care of my son Brett. Has anyone told you these type of things? We have a very funny story about him. He, of course, wasn't married until he was almost 50 years old and had never been around children or babies or things like this. I have this son Brett, who is 14 years old and he lived with mother and Francis for a year while I went to school when he was a baby. And so one time he was babysitting for Brett and within the morning he got a call that he was having company come. So he rushed around, and they were in town, and so he rushed around and he made some coffee—he's not terribly handy in the kitchen—but he made coffee and he was ready to receive his guest and the baby had messy pants. What was he going to do? He had never in his life changed a diaper. So he somehow did get the diaper off and got the baby cleaned up and didn't know how to put a new diaper on so he pulled down the plastic pants that you could see through and ran out with the diaper and he didn't know what to do with it, so he was going to throw it away. But he got outside and the company was coming up the road so he took the diaper and threw it up on the roof. And it stayed there for many years. (laughs) I know lots of

funny things about him that he has done that, you know, show his being a bachelor and unused to children and people.

SW: What else?

LK: What else? Oh dear, let me think. That's the most outstanding thing that stands out in my mind. I'm a blank right now.

SW: A lot of people told me that he's also a very kind, gentle person.

LK: I would say he's a very kind and sensitive and has a lot of sympathy for people, various things you know whether it be their financial difficulties or their various problems.

SW: Did you at first resent—being 16 that's kind of a tough time, being an adolescent—did you resent having a new man come into your mother's life?

LK: No, I don't think I really resented that so much. I think I resented a lot moving from Helena, which was at that time a large high school, and I had lived there for many years and had lots of friends you know, and not a time that you want to leave your friends. And then moving to Harlem, which was a very small school and a small town and seemed really different. I think that was hard. That was a hard year. Kids aren't always the most kind you know, you move from a large school to a small school and everybody is looking at you and you know maybe your clothes aren't right and that that was a hard year in that way.

SW: What was it like growing up from 16 years old, growing up being around Francis?

LK: Well let's see I only had one year of school there. And so I was really only around him the one year that I really lived at home. And after that I was gone and grown up and we do live in the same town and things. What was it like? There were a lot of adjustments you know for everybody. It had been a long time since my mother had been married, and Francis had never been married and his mother was certainly not used to him being married (laughs). It was a blow to her. From the time your child is 50 and you don't expect they are going to run off and get married. That was hard for her. It was a lot of time with a lot of adjustments.

SW: So his mother was alive when you came.

LK: His mother was alive. She was, I believe, 76 when they were married and she was very strong and vigorous and lived down on the old ranch place, and she had running water but she didn't have any inside plumbing and she was just a, you know, a real vigorous woman and very strong. She lived out there all by herself through winters and times when he [Francis] was gone she lived out there all by herself and took care of herself. Hardy pioneer stock. (laughs)

SW: Do you think Francis has a lot of that that he got from his mother?

LK: I'm sure. Yes, I think a lot of Francis's life has been—oh, I don't know—I've always heard him say that they were really poor and, like I say, they didn't ever have the inside plumbing, even when they got to the fact that they could afford it. I'm sure (they could) afford inside plumbing, or afford a larger home or something. They just had a very small home. Two rooms basically and he lived in the bunkhouse. I think there was a lot, with these pioneer people in this area—you know it's only a generation back that these people were pioneers—a lot of saving and being frugal and things like this. The things like when they used to heat their homes with wood and now when my mother is gone, if she's gone for several weeks, and it's in the wintertime, Francis likes to heat the whole home with that little free-standing fireplace that they have. He enjoys going back to this. He likes to chop the wood and make these big roaring fires and turns off the heat. You know, getting back to the pioneer stuff. (laughs) A lot of the work ethic, you know, work from sunup until sundown even when it's not necessary financially anymore, he does. And I'm sure that this comes from the way his parents were as pioneers when you had to work like that to make it.

SW: How would you say the community, the people in Harlem, how do they generally feel about Francis? How do they look upon him?

LK: Oh, I think they really trust him. I think a lot of them think he's kind of a character. He is known as being a character. He will drive his old pickups into town and people laugh about how long he drives his cars and his trucks until they die. He's not one to trade in his vehicle just because it's giving a few knocks and he sometimes goes around town dressed really crummy, and might not shave, and is the farthest thing from a legislator that you could ever think of, you know. You would look at the man and say, "Is this our legislator?" and would you say "What?" But the people around town have a lot of respect for him and they call on him with their problems and he doesn't ignore them. He tries to do something, and I think they really trust him, and feel that he would try to do the best as he would see it.

SW: If you were looking over someone's shoulder and they were writing a biography, which is what I hope to be doing someday on Francis, what would you want them to include in there? If you could say now this is what you have to put down for sure.

LK: Well...probably coming from the hardness of what his situation was, growing up with his family, quite a few family problems, I think, and his own handicap that he had and how hard that must have been for him because he's had a lot of work done as an adult and as a child, and as a young adult even. I know [as] a teenager and young adult not being able to have people understand him and things like this. Never having dates. As far as I know, my mother, in his late 40s was the first woman that he ever was socially involved with. And just all the various things that—you know it's a wonder that he had the—well, for one thing that he has the intellect to go as far as he did and to use it. He didn't become a hermit and stay up on the ranch and never go anyplace. He's become a well-known person in Montana, and a respected person. You have to give him a lot of credit for becoming what he has become when you consider what he had to

overcome. I guess. You know that when I look at him and think about it, that's probably what I would say the most about.

SW: Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to add?

LK: No.

SW: This is the end of the interview with Libby Kuntz.

[End of first session]

[Second session with Libby Kuntz]

LK: I don't know if this is the kind of thing that I should say on tape.

SW: I think you'll find that I'm very protective of Francis. Share it that's the kind of stuff that you'd want to preserve. Just saying that Francis introduced some major environmental legislation and leaving it at that isn't good enough. People should know what he's like.

LK: Right. Well, this was just a little family insight as to how they didn't talk about things. How his mother didn't—I don't think, talk much about his handicap or things like that.

SW: So what sort of stuff have you picked up about his parents? His mother and father?

LK: His father I don't know much about. I know he came over directly from France at age 19. I think he was a pioneer to this area. I think he was somewhat older when Alice, that's Francis's mother, when they were married. I think he was somewhat older than she, and I have always had the impression that he was maybe quite a difficult man. Maybe real quiet? Maybe he didn't talk much. Probably a really hard worker. That kind of thing.

SW: You say Francis doesn't open up some part of himself, his past life. What does he try to keep to himself?

LK: He doesn't ever talk much about his father. He doesn't say, when I was young my father and I did this or that. Or even have hardly any remembrances that he brings out about his father even though Francis lived at his home for 50 years and his father died, I think in the early 1950s. So see he [Francis] was there for a time span of 30 years which is a little bit unusual. So he doesn't really talk much about him. What kind of a man he was I really don't know. And people around town don't say much so perhaps he was a man who didn't come to town much or, or what?

SW: What about Francis's mother?

LK: She was also a pioneer in this area and I'm sure she was a very hard worker. She was a tall woman. She had a very short sister. I know she always felt she was really tall. That always really bothered her all her life. She was, I don't know, how tall.....she must have been five nine. [She was) a very hard worker. Kind of a nervous high-strung woman. Very, very protective of Francis. I think she was just probably protective of him immediately and always gave him lots of sympathy, always really mothered him all his life, even when he was probably past the age of really wanting this. He'd come in from work and she'd say, "Oh, you poor boy, you're so tired." You know, and he's 45 years old. (laughs) This type of thing. I think she really almost smothered him with her love and felt so very overprotective of him, probably due to... So she was a kind woman, too, and I'm sure she knew it was hard for him, and I think she was just overprotective. But a very, very hard worker. Even when I first knew her, when she was in her middle 70s she

was a very hard, very hard worker. Baked breads and cooked big meals and just did all those things that I guess the women in those days did.

SW: You said that she was somewhat high strung?

LK: Yes, and I think was always this way. Exactly what Francis would say about her, I don't know. I know that I don't want to give away family secrets here, Steve. (laughs)

SW: That's okay. They'll be all published when you're dead and gone.

LK: (laughs) Oh. I wouldn't want him to think that I was betraying anything that I knew or anything, but I think that she did, at least at one time during her life, have maybe a kind of nervous breakdown. I guess that's what you call it. I don't know that much about it. But I do know that at one time in her life she did. We also know that his parents were somewhat separated before his father's death. That the mother lived on the home place, and he lived—these are little things that most people would say well, my parents were separated for so many years? I have no idea how long they were separated but I know that at the time of his death the father lived in one place and the mother lived another. But I don't know for how long or for what reason or how severe it was. Maybe it was just a mutual thing. It's these kinds of things that I really don't know, and I don't know if anyone really does. (laughs)

SW: How did you happen to hear about his mother having an emotional problem?

LK: Oh, let's see, I think, well, she was more or less an open woman. She was more willing to talk about feelings and emotions and things like this, so she was more open and verbal than I've ever seen him be. I don't know if it came up in a conversation with her. She also had a sister who was alive right at the time they [Venus and Francis] were married, and it seems to me that maybe I heard her talk about her in relationship with this breakdown that she had. It seems to me as though that's the conversation that I remember.

SW: How did you feel about his mother?

LK: I liked her very much.

SW: Did you think of her as a grandmother?

LK: Yes, I think I did. I really enjoyed talking to her because she had loads and loads of stories about the pioneer days, which really even though it's not that far, or not that long ago in this area of Montana. It was settled late and so they were really the true pioneers, the settlers and the homesteaders. She had lots of interesting stories and I liked to talk with her and she was really kind. She was very, very talkative and, like I say, kind of nervous and high-strung, but I remember her with a lot of affection. I think maybe she had a reputation for being a little

sharp-tongued, but I don't remember her ever being that way with me and I always really liked her a lot.

SW: I want to tell you something. I consider you to be a very lucky person to have had that much of Francis to yourself. Thank you.

[End of second session]

[Third session with Libby Kuntz]

SW: Let's talk about the horses.

LK: I don't know that much about the horses either, see because he's not one to talk too much about it, but I do know that his father used to raise horses, probably in the days when the roads were still bad around here, and the cars were not so plentiful. Whether or not the 300 figure are correct or not I don't know. But they did racehorses and Francis had done a lot of breaking of horses. He said he thinks he has a broken shoulder that he broke breaking a horse when he was a young man and I know that was a part of what he used to do. He raised horses whereas now he owns one horse and uses it a few times a year. But that used to be part of the ranching operations was to raise horses.

SW: Well, you know a lot about Francis.

LK: I think I do, but it's just kind of comes back in bits and pieces which is mostly the way I've gotten it. You know he's not a person—it just mostly comes in bits and pieces. It might be he might see something and say, “Oh yes, we used to have a lot of horses here,” or something like that. It's not something where you sit down and he tells you a lot about the way his life was when he was young. Like my mother is very happy always to tell me about her grandparents and her parents and the way her daily life was when she was a child. Well, from Francis you just get it in little specks. Little comments that he makes. He talks quite a bit about his grandparents. I think you could ask him about his grandparents and I think he would tell you a lot about them. I can't remember completely about them but he's always—he has a grandmother I believe that had lost an arm as a child in a scythe or some kind of an old-fashioned farm equipment. He talks about her sometimes. So I'm sure he would be glad to tell you about his grandparents.

SW: I've got two hours of tapes on him and I'm not even beginning to get finished, and I guess I'm really lucky because he's given me all those bits and pieces. And so that I can drag them out of him and get him started, and once I get him started, then he'll go on.

LK: Yes, some of it you might have to. It might be a little more difficult for him to talk to because he just isn't used to talking about things like that, and there are these blank spaces in his life that I don't know if it was just kind of unremarkable maybe. I don't think anything ever happened. I'm sure you know he had a sister. You didn't know he had a sister? Okay, he had a sister. Her name was Virginia. She was a very small woman, very short, very tiny. Really a horsewoman, loved the cattle, loved the horses. Didn't have any children. The one strange thing about Francis's family is there are so little relatives. His father, of course came from France. He has some relatives in France. His mother was from a family of three. His uncle—his name was William I believe—didn't have any children I don't think. His aunt, who lived in Harlem all her life, never had any children. He had a sister, she never had any children. Then he himself didn't have any children. So it's really strange in that way that there are practically no

blood relatives. There are some in France. There are a few second, third, fourth cousins or something that live in Spokane, but not much family at all and certainly no nieces, nephews, all this kind of things that most people have. His sister died in a car accident. I'm not too sure exactly what the year, five years ago maybe.

SW: I never knew that.

LK: Yeah. Her name was Virginia.

[End of Interview]

Note: This portion of the audio contains Steve Waldron's thoughts about Francis Bardanoue.

SW: This is five, one, eighty-three [May 1, 1983]. Steve Waldron speaking. We just had lunch with Francis and Venus, and while Francis was out paying the bill and picking up the check, Venus and I had some discussions and we had some discussions earlier. I wasn't able to get her on tape, but she did give me a lot of insights into Francis. For instance, he goes to church just about every Sunday now and Venus assured me that he doesn't go to church just because of her. He goes to church because he wants to. And she assured me that he doesn't do anything unless he wants to. And I guess that pretty much typifies Francis. She pointed out that sometimes he'll pick up the newspaper and read while company is there. He's very unpretentious and her family and her children and grandchildren have learned to adjust to that.

Venus also told me that he's a very generous man. Some people see him as being very tight but in his personal life he's very generous. He's loaned people money around town, around Harlem from time to time, personal loans. The religious bookstore, the Galilean Bookstore, which Venus is involved with, Francis loaned money to start up the store out of his own pocket.

I've found Francis to be very generous myself. During the entire stay here this last weekend, Francis refused to allow me to pay for anything, lunch or anything. He said "You are my guest," and that's been my experience with Francis pretty much in my legislative career. Venus said that Francis acts differently around home than when he's in the legislature. He's more subdued, more quiet, and I found that to be true. He is rather quiet. In the legislature he's more outspoken, more demanding, very assertive. He was not assertive at all [at home]. He would ask Ray [Waldron's son] and he would ask us what we wanted to do.

It was interesting to see that change in him and he was very quiet. Normally his voice is very loud. Even when he and I would go to dinner during the legislative sessions his voice is very loud. Yet around his house he was very quiet, and I found the difference to be interesting. Venus pointed that same difference out. She's noticed it too. Venus also said that just from the hints she's received she thought his father might have been rather cruel. Not necessarily physically cruel but harsh, hard, and she also discussed his handicap, his cleft palate. She too pointed out that is something that he just does not like to talk about. I found that to be true. That's the one area he and I just cannot discuss. I suspect he doesn't discuss it with anyone. The shyness that he has had in his life, I suspect, is probably a result of that handicap and plus living out the ranch, which is rather remote.

The Zander family, specifically Clayton Zander, who now lives in Missoula, (Francis has) indicated to me that Clayton Zander is the best friend he ever had and I think it was probably Clayton Zander who helped him—and the other Zander boys helped him—overcome his shyness. He couldn't speak very well, and it wasn't until he was 30 that he did have some reconstruction surgery done on his handicap—his cleft palate. So I suspect it was probably Clayton Zander who helped him to get out. Francis has told me that when he would go to a restaurant with Clayton Zander, and indicated that it was with Zander the first time he was ever

in a restaurant, Francis indicated to me that he would point out an item on the menu, and then the Zander boys would order it for him. So, Francis has overcome a tremendous handicap, both the physical handicap and the emotional handicap, the shyness, the personality handicap, that was probably in large part due to that physical handicap.

We discussed the church a little bit after the services, or I discussed with Francis (that) the pastor gave a real hellfire and brimstone sermon. It was the first one I'd ever seen. I've heard of them, but I've never experienced it before. I mentioned that to Francis and he says, "Well, that's true, he does get carried away, but the pastor really cares about people and spends a lot of time helping people." And he said that generally about the church and the people in the church, that they spend a lot of time helping people. There were a lot of poor people who came to church, a lot of Indian people, and he said, "You know, some churches are just for rich people, and that one isn't." I would like to discuss Francis' religious beliefs sometime and I'll do that the next time we get together, but just from the little bit I've seen I think religion to him is more important in your actions than what one professes to worship. He really likes this particular church, which is the Pentecostal Assembly of God Church. He likes it because of their emphasis on helping people and their emphasis on helping Indian people. Francis has a very deep concern for groups who have been downtrodden, the underdog so to speak, especially Indians. The Hutterites, he's gone to bat for them also.

SW. I suspect that Francis' care and concern for the underdog—he's expressed to me concern about poor people, about welfare mothers and children, Indians, Hutterites, who aren't necessarily poor but are a group that has been discriminated against. I suspect that comes from his experience with his handicap and also from his experiences in the Great Depression. Venus has told me that is one thing he discusses often. How poor he was and how hard times were. And that's had a real impact on his life. So he constantly goes to bat for those people who have difficulty defending themselves. We're quite lucky to have people like Francis in the legislature who will support people who are not likely to provide too much political benefit, if any political benefit.

[Break in audio]

When we were on Snake Butte Friday, which is just on the Indian Reservation a few miles away from Francis' house, the Fort Belknap Reservation, Francis told me how, when he was a young man, he'd be out in the countryside. He pointed out where he'd be on his horse, and he would ride the horse full bore over gullies, and rocks and flats and hills all the way back to his house and just really enjoyed doing it. When he got back there the horse was white—white with perspiration. As we were travelling around on the ranch the next day, which was Saturday the 29th of April, Francis took Kyle, his grandson, Ray, my son, and myself all over the ranch and showed us something called "Indian rings," which are apparently stones that were placed in a circle probably to hold tipis, which were before the modern day Indian or, I believe it's called the Late Hunter Indian. My best speculation right now is probably the Folsom Man. He indicated that he wanted to preserve those things because they were important to be

preserved. Venus also mentioned the Indian rings and how Francis would not tear up the land that the Indian rings were on to grow crops, just so they could be preserved.

Many times Francis, in the past, has talked to me about a dog he had that just died last year. The dog's name was Pharaoh after an Egyptian pharaoh. The dog would go with him everywhere. Francis loved the dog quite a bit, from his conversations at least. When he'd see Francis getting his coat on, the dog would be all set to go and want to go hop in the truck. If Francis would say, "No, Pharaoh, you can't go," the dog would cry a little bit and Francis would take off to town but generally he would take the dog with him. And it was probably good company out on the ranch to have that dog.

One thing that's always amazed me about Francis Bardanouve was his excellent memory. He has phenomenal recall abilities. He can remember numbers, dates, times, places, laws. He's always amazed me with that exceptional ability of recall. During the session I also found out something about him. That's the 1983 session. He doesn't carry cash with him. He rarely carries money with him. He uses his checkbook, and in Helena it's kind of tough cashing a check from Harlem, Montana. Most people in Helena don't even know where Harlem is. Many nights he and I went to dinner together and it was usually late at night after a committee meeting. I would end up buying him dinner, which didn't bother me, I was happy to do it. He'd always told me he'd pay me back he'd buy me dinner sometime, and knowing Francis and his high ethical sense that he has, I assumed that he would or I would forget about it. It was no big deal with me. On the last day of the session, Francis came up and handed me a check and that was to pay me back for the times that I bought him dinner. Now it was totally unexpected, but that's just the sort of guy he is. He keeps track of that sort of thing.

His wife Venus told me that that's the way he is at home also. He rarely carries cash with him. He does everything by check. I don't know how he makes out as far as buying gas and so on when he goes out of town if he doesn't have the cash because there's a lot of gas stations that won't accept a check from Harlem, Montana.

It's pretty obvious that Francis has some strong feelings of love for Venus. He's very concerned about her. During the '83 legislative session he received a call that she'd been injured and he disappeared. Someone had told me what had happened, and he just wasn't around. He'd gone down to the governor's office and got the governor to send him back to Harlem on the governor's plane. Francis also called Venus every single night, and there were often times when he and I would get ready to leave for dinner after a long day's session. It would be late at night, and he would have to go upstairs and call Venus. I don't think she expected it. It wasn't anything that Venus demanded, it was just something that he did and that's just the way Francis is. I'm sure that he went to the capitol on Sundays and called Venus also.

I was in Harlem, Montana, this last weekend March 20, 28—[no], April 29, 30 and then May 1, 1983. When my son and I were wandering around town with Francis, he would introduce me, he introduced me as, "My Steve Waldron, my number two man in the legislature." Or "My

right-hand man in the legislature," and he constantly introduced me as his right-hand man. Francis is a very kind person, but he doesn't give out compliments unless he really feels them. I thought that was a nice compliment that he paid me, but it also shows the way he talks to people. If someone is really important to him he lets everyone know that this person is important.

Francis sits in the legislature, in the front row on the corner in the center aisle. This is a very prominent position. Every session he has a different seatmate. He makes a request to the Speaker for a certain individual that he'll pick out—always a freshman—someone new and interesting. He likes to get to know new people that he thinks he would find very interesting. He has made some very close friendships by his choice of seatmates.

I don't know how he goes about choosing them, but they are usually very intelligent people and very interesting people. The 1979 legislature he had Jim Azzara sit by him. In the 1981 legislature he had Ted Newman, and in the 1983 legislative session he had Kelly Addy. Jim Azzara was from Missoula County, Ted Newman is from Vaughn, which is north of Great Falls, and Kelly Addy is from Billings.

I've seen Francis around children on numerous occasions. He really likes children. He enjoys being around them, he enjoys talking to them, he kids them, he jokes with them. The last day of the 1983 session, Francis and I went out to dinner. We were at Jorgenson's. Two children came up, I think they were grandchildren of Senator Dave Manning, and asked me for an autograph of the Anaconda Company Legislative Booklet, which had our legislators' pictures in it. I obliged and then I pointed out to them that Francis was also a legislator, so they asked for his signature. He said sure, but he wanted to know their names. He talked with them and he said their names were nice short names and then he said, "I want to show you my name." He wrote their names in the book, and he said, "See, there's your names, and they are both really short and here's my name." And he writes out his name, Francis Bardanouve, and he said, "See, I have a very long name." The children enjoyed him.

I've watched him with his grandson up in Harlem and he enjoyed talking and kidding with his grandson. He enjoyed my son, who is 16. He enjoyed talking with him, enjoyed joking with him, kidding with him. When we left, Francis kept saying that he was going to cry, and my son really enjoyed that sort of teasing, that sort of kidding. Francis does the same sort of kidding with pages, any young people that he encounters. He enjoys children very much. I think that's interesting, since he's never had any children of his own and certainly there's no hope of him ever having children of his own now. He shows such compassion and love for children.

[End of Interview]