BR family says renowned imposter took its money

By FAYETTE TOMPKINS

A man who pictures himself as a suave impostor/con man who stole millions and eluded international authorities for years was jailed here in 1969 for taking money from a local family which took him into its home.

"He was buying my wife flowers and taking us out to eat and all the time it was my money," said John M. Parks of 1565 Woodhaven.

Frank W. Abagnale, then 20, forged a $150 check to himself on the account of Parks and his wife Charlotte on Jan. 21, 1969, and stole $312 from Dooley & Son, 11488 S. Choctaw on Feb. 1, 1969, police and court records show. He was charged March 13, 1969, turned 21 on April 27, 1969, and pleaded guilty June 2, 1969.

Judge Donovan Parker meted concurrent suspended terms of seven and five years and put Abagnale on supervised probation for five years with the conditions that he get psychiatric treatment and make restitution, records show.

On Sept. 15, 1969, Parker issued a warrant ordering Abagnale's arrest for absconding from probation supervision. The warrant was withdrawn March 9, 1973 on the recommendation of a Louisiana probation officer who said Abagnale had satisfactorily participated in a treatment program while being held in a federal reformatory at Petersburg, Va.

When taken into custody here, Abagnale had an airline uniform and co-pilot's ID at the time, 1969 State-Times accounts say.

On national TV, the college lecture circuit and in a best-selling book, Abagnale has claimed he successfully passed himself off as an airline flight engineer and pilot, doctor, college professor and Louisiana assistant attorney general before he was caught in France and imprisoned there, in Sweden and in the United States.

Abagnale claims his exploits as an impostor occurred when he was between the ages of 16 and 21, but was pretending to be 10 years older. Some of his claims, including the Louisiana assistant attorney general story, are disputed in various quarters.

Baton Rouge newspaper reports of his apprehension here in 1969 list him as 30, but police records show his date of birth as April 27, 1948, indicating he was 20 when jailed here and is 33 years old today.

Abagnale was picked up by Baton Rouge police on a minister's tip before Parks learned Abagnale had forged a check on Parks account, Parks said, adding that the bank made the loss good.

Abagnale initially was booked here with vagrancy in February, 1969. He was later booked with forgery and theft.

"He made his claim on TV that he'd never done anything to hurt any families. I wanted his address real bad," Parks said.

"He called me (after being jailed) and wanted me to get him a lawyer," Mrs. Parks said. "After he'd stolen money from my husband!"

"He had a key to our front door," she said. It was never recovered. "We changed the lock," she said.

"I fed him. I cooked," Mrs. Parks said. "I think the thing that hurt me most was that someone would come into our home . . ."

"I don't trust people as much anymore," she said.

The Parks said their daughter Paula, a Delta Airlines stewardess, met Abagnale on a Delta flight to Florida when he was posing as a Trans World Airlines flight engineer or pilot.

Later, Abagnale unexpectedly went to visit the daughter in New Orleans.

"She didn't like him, didn't know what to do with him," Parks said.

The daughter brought him to Baton Rouge for a visit, the Parks said. Later, Abagnale showed up at the parents' Baton Rouge home again and stayed for several weeks, leaving intermittently for several days at a time, the couple said.

The Parks said their young son John, probably a college freshman then, liked Abagnale and they initially regarded him favorably. However, there were some things that began to bother them, they said.

"He would pace the floor here at night," Parks said. His wife concurred.

There was something else.

"He had the smell of fear about him," Parks said.

Parks said they took Abagnale to their

Frank Abagnale
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