

Is great imposter a great imposter?

By FAYETTE TOMPKINS

NEW ORLEANS — Fast-talking con man Frank W. Abagnale Jr. glibly told a Tulane University audience Thursday he passed the Louisiana bar at 19 without a legal education and became an assistant attorney general.

Some others don't believe him, but the Tulane crowd apparently did. Abagnale got a standing ovation after regaling them for almost an hour and a half, only a few minutes of which were devoted to his Louisiana activities.

The self-professed fraud from Houston said he faked Harvard Law School credentials and "went to work under Attorney General (Jack P.F.) Gremillion where I worked in the civil division of the Attorney General's Office under the name of Bob Conrad. Now I practiced law there for almost a year without any problems at all."

Well, maybe a few problems.

For one thing, after allegedly spending nine months on the job in Baton Rouge he couldn't pronounce his ex-boss's name. He called the ex-attorney general "Grim-mill-yun," accenting the second syllable.

For another, he seems not to have made a deep impression. Gremillion and three real lawyers who were on the staff say they don't remember a Bob Conrad or recognize photos of the man who claims the AG's office later described him as "a hell of a lawyer."

Assistant Attorney General Ken DeJean and others, including state Civil Service, have said they can't find records that a Bob Conrad was ever on the state payroll.

Louisiana Bar Association Executive Counsel Tom Collins of New Orleans couldn't find a record of anyone by that name from Baton Rouge being admitted to the bar in the late 1960s.

The State-Times has tried to reach Abagnale at his Houston office for an interview several times, but was always told he was out. He left the stage Thursday night without taking questions from the audience. Backstage he answered questions from students, but told a reporter he doesn't do press interviews.

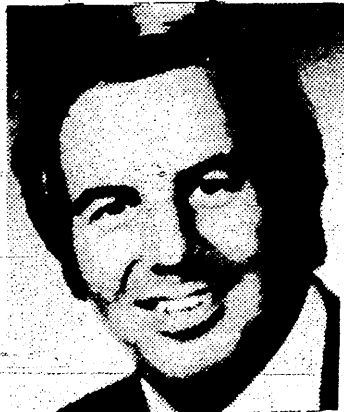
He was asked about his mispronunciation and told the AG's office and state bar doesn't seem to have records to verify his story.

He said he has check stubs and pay records proving his claims.

Abagnale says he now lectures on the college circuit and has a consulting firm which teaches businesses how to deter hot-check artists like himself and other crooks.

His brochures bill him as "possibly the world's most accomplished con artist (retired)."

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Frank W. Abagnale Jr.