

Square Peg podcast

Part 2: Sunny Scunny

<https://www.squarepegpodcast.com/part2>

Transcript

*NOTE: Square Peg is intended to be heard, not read. If possible, please listen to the audio, which relays feeling and tone not captured by the transcripts.*

ROB: OK, so I'm looking at being there the third and fourth weeks of October.

FRANK: Yeah, we'll be here. Definitely. No problem at all.

ROB COLLINS (narration): September, 2017. I'm planning a trip to England to meet Frank Carver for the first time and investigate his claims. I'm not a journalist, but I am a media professional, I guess you could say. I know how to tell stories. It's just that the stories I usually tell are things like, how great this high-end commercial blender is.

So why am I now thinking about getting on a plane to investigate Frank Carver's story? I don't even know for sure that any of it is true.

MARY KAY: I think that it's a pretty bizarre thing to do.

That's my wife, Mary Kay.

MARY KAY: We are very busy with kids' activities and school, and I work full time.

ROB: Yeah so it's not a typical thing for me to leave the country for work for a couple of weeks. This is a little out of the routine.

MARY KAY: Yes. This is very much out of the routine.

I do travel some for work, but I get paid for that. Which is not the case here. I'm spending our money, and we're not wealthy. This is probably not a rational thing to do. It really would be wiser to save for the kids' college, or retirement, or...

FLIGHT ATTENDANT (over PA): Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Manchester, United Kingdom where the local time is 7:02 am. We'll be taxiing the next few minutes... [fades down]

This is Square Peg. I'm Rob Collins. Part 2: Sunny Scunny.

[music]

ROB [driving]: All right, I am driving into Scunthorpe. The rental car guy asked where I was going and I said Scunthorpe, and he sort of winced, like “uhhh, sorry.” So I don’t know what to expect. Coming up on the M181...

I give up on the audio diary as I struggle with the roundabouts, but it’s a nice drive, lots of sheep and wind turbines on green rolling hills. My plan is to meet Frank first, do some research, then track down other people involved in the story—especially Frank’s brother, John, who allegedly stabbed out Frank’s eye with a drinking glass over 50 years ago and has gotten away with it, so far.

I pull into Scunthorpe, a working-class town of about 80,000, and onto the street where Frank lives. I’m not quite sure which house it is, so I call Frank and he says he’ll go stand outside. It’s a busy street, mostly residential, but there’s a nice pub restaurant on the next block and a computer repair shop across the street. I then see Frank, looking for me.

ROB: Hello Frank.

FRANK: Bloody hell! You busy bugger!

ROB (laughing): I drove right by you...

Frank looks to me a bit younger than his 70 years. He’s a good looking man, trim, his white hair nicely styled. His clothes look appropriately older-mannish, but pressed and neat, and almost a little bit slick in a 1980s wiseguy kind of way. He wears gold-rimmed glasses, and you can’t really tell that he’s missing an eye. He has an ocular prosthesis, otherwise known as a glass eye, and it’s pretty convincing. You have to really look to tell.

We go inside.

FRANK: So this is the office. This is where we do all the--

ROB: Is this Kiki?

KIKI: Hello.

ROB: It’s so nice to meet you.

KIKI: Nice to meet you.

FRANK: He shocked me...

Kiki is Frank's companion. She's originally from Belgium but has lived in Scunthorpe for many years. She's about Frank's age, and lovely. Frank had told me previously that she's the most important person in his life. Kiki's husband died years ago, but she has a son and grandkids who live in Manchester. And I can imagine her being a wonderful grandmother, that's the sense I get.

Their home feels cozy and full. The decor looks dated as you might expect with an older person's home, but it's clean and comfortable. I didn't know how this would feel, being here with Frank. But I'm getting a good vibe so far.

We go into their home office. Frank had stacked 8 or 9 thick folders full of documents that he wanted me to see.

FRANK: MoD, all of it. MoD, all of it.

[papers being stacked]

The MoD is the British Ministry of Defence, similar to the Department of Defense in the US. These documents relate to Frank's lawsuit against the MoD.

FRANK: The lawsuit is, this--

Frank points to his missing eye.

FRANK: --this was done to me by a soldier. Then, they are trying to say, "Well, it was your brother." But it was a soldier who did this to me. And he should have been punished for it but he wasn't because I think... It wasn't reported.

ROB: It wasn't reported, you're saying, to the local police.

FRANK: No, because the civil police would have not a lot to do with it because it's a military police thing. Military law and civilian law, they're different.

As I mentioned earlier, I am not a journalist. And of course, I am not British. In fact, this is the first time I've been to the UK. I feel like I need some help while I'm here. So I hired a couple of people. Which might seem excessive considering I don't know what kind of story I'll have in the end, if any. But I guess I'm the kind of person who jumps in with both feet.

I have some local help lined up, which I'll get to soon, but I also need someone who can do some research.

ANA: So, I'm Ana Sandra. I'm a journalist in London.

Ana's from Romania but has worked as an investigative reporter in the UK for about 10 years.

ANA: I've tried to find as many things as I could about the one-eyed man.

I hired Ana mainly to find relevant public documents. Such as Frank's Army records, so we could verify why he was discharged.

ANA: His time in the army was not recorded in a standard mode. I've been sent back and forth by the MoD press officer to another one at the National Archives. But it seems that his file was either moved, or is no longer held at the National Archives. We don't know why.

So that seems curious. But, whether or not the Army was liable for what happened to Frank, wouldn't John have at least been disciplined for this alleged crime?

FRANK: I don't know. No, I have no clue. Nobody talked to me about it. I have no idea. That wasn't in my head at the time. In my head was the fact that I've lost a blinker.

I guess when you're missing an eye you come up with nicknames.

FRANK: ...I've lost a blinker. These sort of things never crossed my mind. Dad will deal with it or the army will deal with it. It was something I didn't want to be worried about at that age.

I get that. Frank was just 17 years old, recovering from the surgical removal of what was left of his eye. He expected the Army to deal with the incident, and to take care of him.

FRANK: But they didn't. That's what the Army does.

ROB: That's what the Army does. And that's a big part of the lawsuit, yes?

FRANK: Well, not really. I'm lost at the minute. I'm in a little bit of a mix with it.

ROB: OK, want to take a break?

FRANK: I don't know where we are. I need to get these out. There is a confusion here and there's no point in talking about it until I've dug this one out. Let's just switch off for a minute and let's get this one sorted out because it is important, Rob.

ROB: Yeah.

I'm not sure what this confusion is about, but we are surrounded by hundreds if not thousands of pages of documents. I figure this is the first time Frank has had someone poking around. That must be disconcerting.

But as I continue to poke around Frank's lawsuit documents, I don't see much about his eye or being discharged from the Army. I do see a lot about bullying. When Frank joined the Army as an apprentice at the age of 15, he experienced a lot of bullying and abuse—allegedly because of his brother.

FRANK: My brother is in the Army, he was in the same camp as me. He caused a lot of trouble there, I got the backlash. I picked up the tab for his bullying to the youngsters there. When they got to the top, I came in, "Aho," so they had a go at me.

ROB: Then this abuse and bullying, it was abuse you were beaten, yes?

I was clarifying this because in Frank's book he details some pretty horrible and violent things done to him, things which to me went far beyond bullying.

FRANK: Yeah, I was kicked, I was stamped on but they did it in such a manner that there was very little showing on there.

ROB: On the face.

FRANK: Yes.

Pretty terrible. But I need some corroboration.

BILL: I met Frank at Carlisle, I was 15 year old. We joined the Army and go in- to an army apprentice school to become army technicians.

This is Bill Baynham. He enlisted along with Frank in 1962. We had connected with Bill through an alumni group of former Army apprentices, and I met him a few days later in Doncaster, a larger city about 25 miles from Scunthorpe.

Bill's now a large man with a long gray beard, wearing several military buttons on his blue blazer. We met at a restaurant he suggested that was accessible to the mobility scooter he uses. Frank and Bill used to keep up with each other, but about fifteen years ago, there apparently was some misunderstanding, and they no longer spoke. I didn't tell Frank that I was meeting Bill. But Bill was gentle and kind when talking about his former roommate, so if there was any ill will, it didn't seem to be on Bill's end.

BILL: Lou slept in the next bed to mine.

Lou, I learned, was Frank.

BILL: Basically, what happened there, his father named him Francis and he thought it was a sissy name. He didn't like it. He wanted to be called either Frank, but everybody got nicknames, and his nickname became Lou. So everybody knew him as Lou.

ROB: You were 15 or 16 years old and that's when you met and you said you were right in the same class?

BILL: We were in the same room in J-Company we were in the same room.

ROB: What was your impression of Lou when you first met him? What kind of a young man was he?

BILL: He was okay. How could we say? He seemed a bit obsessed.

ROB: With what?

BILL: With military. He was wanting, and as I found out later, he was trying to impress his father, because his father was all for John.

ROB: So otherwise besides being obsessed with succeeding in the military, he seemed a normal type person?

BILL: Yeah. As normal as you can be. We were all slightly, how could we say? You have to have a certain mindset to go into the military. Because when you sign on, you're signing a blank check.

I ask Bill about Frank being abused and bullied.

BILL: Lou slept in the next bed to mine. It had to be, I don't know, 11-12 o'clock on a night. Suddenly you could hear people talking, the doors opened and someone said, "It's there." The next thing Lou's bed goes up in the air and they're starting lash into him.

Bill remembered that older apprentices stormed into their room late at night, found Frank's bed, and threw it up in the air. He said it was like when your bed was being inspected in the morning by the corporal. If your bed wasn't made properly...

BILL: They'd up your bed end.

ROB: But they did it with—

BILL: They did it with him in it.

ROB: That surprised you when that happened?

BILL: Yeah, it was a bit frightening. So Lou was taken down to the guardroom, spent the night in protective custody.

I ask Bill if he knew why this happened.

BILL: They said, "This is Carver's brother here."

ROB: So these people, who were these men, boys, what would you call them? Young men?

BILL: Yes.

ROB: Were?

BILL: Victims of Johnny Carver.

Bill acknowledged that bullying was common, but said this seemed different. Worse.

BILL: It seems that Johnny Carver took it to an extreme.

ROB: He took it to an extreme against his subordinates?

BILL: Yeeah.

ROB: Then those subordinates when you and Frank got to the camp, Johnny's subordinates became your superiors?

BILL: Yes.

ROB: And so they gave Frank, or Lou, additional, how would you describe? Abuse? What words would you use to say?

BILL: What they wanted to do was really hurt him. They wanted to give him a good beating.

So to be clear, Bill did not witness John behaving badly—Bill had never met John. But he did see older apprentices abusing Frank because Frank was John's brother, as retribution.

I'm relieved that Bill is corroborating part of Frank's story, because the thought had definitely crossed my mind that I should have done some more fact checking before I headed off on this self-funded investigative extravaganza of old British men and military lawsuits. And remember, Bill and Frank are no longer friends, and Frank doesn't even know I'm here, so Bill has no reason I can think of not to tell the truth.

So now, after speaking with Bill Baynham and hearing about this vicious brother of Frank's, I'm relieved that at least some of it is true. And then as soon as I let that sink in, I remember that I'm going to have to try to confront this violent bully. Sure, he's now 74 years old, but still, it makes me feel a little uneasy.

Anyway, I'm not quite finished talking to Bill Baynham. I ask him if he knew anything about what happened with Frank's eye. And his answer surprises me. That's after the break.

[break]

I'm interviewing Bill Baynham, who served in the Army with Frank when they were teenagers in the early 1960s. Bill confirmed Frank's account of being abused as retribution for John's extreme bullying. That happened before the incident that left Frank missing an eye. So I ask Bill what he knew about that.

He didn't know firsthand of course, and qualified that this was hearsay, but:

BILL: I was told that he was acting up and Johnny got a Drambuie glass, he went to throw it but went too far and the Drambuie glass breaks very easily.

ROB: It does, it's a light glass?

BILL: Yes, very light.

ROB: OK.

This is the first time I've heard anyone besides Frank talk about what happened on that fateful night of New Year's Eve 1964. And it's very different from the story Frank had told me.

So let's go back and hear the full story of the most important night of Frank Carver's life. Here's Frank's version, as he told me initially over Skype:



FRANK: John had been away, he was down south of the country. And he got leave for that Christmas. And we were in the pub, having a drink around lunch time. And he came with his wife. And it was the days in between Christmas and New Year. New Year's Eve. And I'd had a couple of drinks over the limit. And this big six foot guy walks in. And as he pushed his tray on the bar, he didn't say "excuse me," he knocked my drink over. I thought, "Well, you're gonna say something, I'm sure." He never apologized, and I just watched the gin and tonic roll off the edge of the bar onto my shoes, and I thought, "You son of a bitch." So I just looked up at him, and said "Aren't you gonna apologize?" He never answered me. So anyway, to cut a long story short, I took a swing at him, to wake him up. And I missed, I missed me target. I spun around like a spinning top. I fell onto the floor. They just laughed their heads off—it was a joke.

Frank remembered that people in the club were laughing at him as he was sprawled on the floor after whiffing on a wild right hook. But one person wasn't laughing.

FRANK: My brother John was in there, and they saw what was going on, and he come and he got me suit jacket, ripped it up over my head, pinned me to the ground, and gave me a good beating. And then he dragged me outside through the club, and just left me there. And he said, "Don't you dare come back in here boy, because you won't be standing up again." And that was it. Then when I went home, I staggered home—not staggered home, I wasn't that drunk, I got home. That was it. I had a lot of milk, I remember that. I had sobered up reasonably well. I was OK.

Frank remembered that he sobered up and phoned Derek, the bartender and owner of the club, to apologize for the scene. Derek said, "No harm done, come in tomorrow for a drink." Frank thought all was well.

FRANK: And then I'm in the back room. John walked in, stood in front of the fire with his hands warming himself because it was cold outside. And his wife had sat down in the chair at the side of the fire. And then he started on me. Disgracing my uniform. I said, "I didn't have a uniform on." You know, he started picking on me, and he just wouldn't lay off. And I ended up saying to him, I said, "If it hadn't been for that cow," as a polite remark, referring to her.

The "her" in question was John's wife. Frank had just "politely" called his sister-in-law a cow.

FRANK: He was holding a glass of Drambuie. It's a liqueur. And the glass—straight into the face. And he actually used it like a dagger, and he lunged it at me. And it's a very robust glass, these Drambuie glasses, very very robust. They weren't thin, they were quite thick, and when that was shoved at me, the glass broke on the cheekbone and then because it broke, it sliced me eye in two.

So that's Frank's story. Yet Bill heard at the time:

BILL: I was told that he was acting up and Johnny got a Drambuie glass, he went to throw it but went too far and the Drambuie glass breaks very easily.

So Bill basically heard that it was an accident. Frank was "acting up," which seemed about right between his antics at the club and then the argument with his brother. So John goes to toss his drink in Frank's face, but it goes too far, and the glass somehow breaks inadvertently.

How did that version of the story get back to Bill? I'd have to wait a bit for the answer to that question. First, I had to pick up someone from the train station.

[car sounds]

ROB: Right side.

BETH: It's weird that we drive on the left because most European cities drive on the right. It's just England that decided to be different.

ROB: We're gonna turn-- [thump] That was the curb. Sorry about that.

BETH: It's all right.

ROB: I'm gonna stop talking.

BETH: Okay, you just focus on the roundabout. [laughs]

As I mentioned earlier, I wanted to hire someone to help me here in Scunthorpe. So a month or so ago, I posted on the job board of the University of York, which is about an hour north of Scunthorpe. I called the position "associate producer" and ended up hiring two people. One is Marie, and I'm scheduled to meet with her in a couple of days, but I'm connecting now with Beth Fereday, a recent philosophy graduate who had worked at the university's newspaper and radio.

BETH: Yeah that's correct, I guess I'm your England counterpart to help explain to you all of those English colloquialisms that might escape you. And to help as well with this unfolding story, as it happens.

[car sounds]

So I'm driving Beth around Scunthorpe, or Sunny Scunny, as the locals call it. This is Beth's first visit.

BETH: It's very different to York but it's not dissimilar to most of the towns in this area. You have the long rows of red brick terraced houses.

This part of town is called Ashby. It's where Frank lives too, sort of a small town within a small city. And I'm really enjoying it so far. I don't know what was up with that rental car guy in Manchester, but I like Scunthorpe. It's a working class town, industrial, but friendly and almost quaint.

We drive by Carver's Fish and Chips.

BETH: This is the fish and chip shop that his parents, the Carvers, used to own.

ROB: Yes, Frank was born upstairs.

BETH: Wow. Yeah, there it is, Carver's Fish Restaurant.

ROB: You can go to the back and see where he would have jumped off the roof when he was...

BETH: Oh yeah!

It's funny, but Frank's already turned into a minor celebrity, or thereabouts, in my eyes and seemingly in Beth's as well, and Beth hasn't even met him yet. I mean, I don't think anyone would get that excited about going by my childhood home and yet there we were, oohing and ahing on the Frank Carver celebrity house tour.

We're actually on the way to see Frank. Beth has heard some of my Skype calls, and when we stop for coffee I ask her if she believes Frank's story.

BETH: You never want to say you don't believe someone, you think someone's lying because that seems like a harsh thing to say of someone. Perhaps, when he retells the story you think maybe elements can be exaggerated just because his story seems-- If it is true, it's really awful. If he's experienced this systematic bullying, almost hazing, in fact, whilst in the Army, and then he gets injured by, yes, his brother, but another soldier in the Army wants to tell him that he's not covered under military law. As you said, sling him out in the rain on his own. If that all is true, it seems like a pretty awful thing to happen to someone.

FRANK: What do you think then? [laughter] You have met me, an ogre. Grrrr.

BETH: You're not an ogre. That's unfair. [laughs]

We arrive at Frank and Kiki's house and get off to an odd start as Frank tells Beth about some medical procedures he's had before.

FRANK: There if you're look at my stomach that's where the bag was and the feed bag. They were next to each other, and they had to get down and cut--

BETH: We were talking about Frank's current struggles with his health.

This was later, when Beth and I debriefed.

BETH: He's been in and out of hospital and he's had invasive operations, and then to prove his point he lifted his shirt up, up to his collarbone in fact, and then proceeded to point out to me all the various incisions he'd had during his operations.

ROB: I think he just wanted to show off his tan. He's rather tan.

BETH: Yes. He was tan, he's slim as well for a guy of his age.

FRANK: It was such a mess, of the intestines...

BETH: I think in my head he was a larger figure, I'm not sure why, but he's a slight figure, he is very clean, he's very well kept.

ROB: He didn't smell much like garlic today. Did you notice a garlic smell?

BETH: A very faint garlic smell, but I think I only picked up on that because you told me beforehand that he does like to eat garlic.

Frank had told me before that his secret to good health was drinking Guinness and eating raw garlic.

BETH: After a while, I could tell there was an unusual smell you'd said the garlic and it kind of put the two together, and I was like "Hmm." [laughs]

A few minutes later, Kiki comes in. She'd be out for a walk.

KIKI: Hello! I'm just getting my shoes off.

FRANK: Did you enjoy your walk?

KIKI: Yes, thank you.

FRANK: All right. You can tell us about it when you come in.

ROB: Can I ask Kiki a question?

KIKI: Sorry?

ROB: Can I ask you a question on this?

KIKI: Well it depends what it is. [laughs]

I was curious what Kiki knew about all of this family drama.

ROB: When did you become aware of Frank's family story, what happened to his eye and?

KIKI: He gave me a book.

ROB: Did it strike you as an unusual story?

KIKI: Well yeah. It's a little bit awkward I think.

ROB: Yeah. I then with his family in town and John and...

KIKI: I have never ever seen them.

ROB: Just to have the family who you haven't seen live nearby, just seems very strange to me.

KIKI: I don't know them. So I couldn't see. Maybe I walk into town they were in front of me. I haven't got a clue, I don't know what they look like.

BETH: She was a very lovely lady. Very welcoming into her home. Very hospitable. When it came to Frank and his stories I think she at times indulged him.

ROB: But she seemed fond of him?

BETH: Very fond yes. They seemed like a nice pair. I did like Frank actually, I thought I was ready to kind of spend the day with a guy I wasn't going to like, but I liked Frank I thought, he was funny and he was joking with us.

Earlier in the day, Frank had performed a sort of magic trick for Beth. He showed her a Tupperware type container with a white object inside.

FRANK: What does that say?

BETH: "There is no such word as 'can't'. When there's a will, there's a way. Yes, you can fit a square peg into a round hole."

FRANK: Can you?

BETH: I don't know about that.

FRANK: Well, you've heard about it and you've heard the saying, you can't. Well that's square, that's a triangle, and that's a round hole.

Frank had taken a piece of Styrofoam and carved three holes, one square, one round, and one a triangle, and he attached a handwritten inscription that Beth just read. He had also fashioned a square peg.

FRANK: And I'm going to outfit that through there and through there, and it can touch all the surface of sides.

ROB: Do you think that's possible, Beth?

BETH: I mean... no. It seems impossible to fit a round peg in a square hole.

FRANK: You see if you take that out of there, and push it in there, like that--  
[FADES DOWN] It touches all the sides...

He fits the square peg into the square hole, but then somehow magically makes it also fit perfectly into the round hole, and the triangle.

BETH: Oh yeah? That's clever.

[laughter]

Frank's rather proud of this contraption, so I won't spoil the trick, but just remember his inscription:

BETH: "There is no such word as 'can't'. When there's a will, there's a way. Yes, you can fit a square peg into a round hole."

Frank Carver believed that anything was possible if you just kept pushing. And I was really starting to believe him. I had my doubts initially, but I'm feeling like maybe this is gonna happen. Maybe after all these years of seeking justice as the victim of an awful crime, we were finally about to get there.

Now I just need to track down Frank's favorite person—his older brother, John. Oh boy.

[music]

Square Peg is a LUSID48 production. It was written and produced by Ashley Hall and me. Visit our website, [squarepegpodcast.com](http://squarepegpodcast.com), to learn more.