

NOVEMBER 2022

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# Nature Coast

NEIGHBORS

MEET

Fran Capo

A World Record  
Holder with an  
Intrepid Soul

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MEET

Fran Capo

**A World Record  
Holder with an  
Intrepid Soul**

PHOTOS AND ARTICLE BY MICHELE EISCH PHOTOGRAPHY &amp; DESIGN

I had the amazing opportunity to interview Fran Capo for this month's feature article. So many things come to mind when I think back on our time together that it's hard to quantify. It would be really easy to write a "bio style" piece, but it's been done – over and over. You see, she's a 10-time Guinness World Record holder, motivational speaker, comedienne, 22-time author, and adventure blogger – among other things. She's walked the red carpet and been on thousands of radio and television shows – and not those obscure ones. She's been featured on Larry King, Grand Ole Opry, Regis & Kathy Lee, CBS News, Time, USA Today Network, The Wall Street Journal, ABC News, The Huffington Post, Dr. Oz, Good Morning America, Nickelodeon, Entertainment Tonight, Access Daily with Mario Lopez ... wait! I'm going to resist the urge to keep name-bombing you! Suffice to say,

she's got some real fame attached to her. So, with great people having already interviewed her about extraordinary accomplishments, I went into my meeting with Fran hoping I could get to know *her*. The *person*, not the celebrity.

I do want to mention a couple of those world records, though, because they are sooo cool! The first one, and probably what she's best known for, is that she is the world's fastest talker. She can speak 603.32 words in 54.2 seconds, which equates to 11 words per second. Breaking this record is a very formal affair, which I didn't know – but it involves a Lexicon compressor that plays back the speech, slowing it down but not distorting it. There's an official Olympic timer, timing to within 1/100th of a second, and there's a speech analyst there to ensure every syllable is pronounced. If even *one* syllable is missed, it's over.

Fran is also the first and only author to visit the wreckage of the Titanic in the Mir

1 (yes, she went down to the wreckage), and hold a book signing there. She's also the first person to deliver an official prayer at the site of the wreckage (truly, a memorial) as an ordained minister. Incidentally, she also broke the record in the other direction – she climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro with her son, Spencer, and became the first and only person ever to hold a book signing there.

Here's one: In 2019, the Nicaraguan Government granted her permission to zip-line into Masaya Volcano – also known as the Mouth of Hell. It's the same volcano that Nik Wallenda of The Flying Wallendas walked across on a tightrope the year after.

In a less physical but more complicated feat, she delivered an 18-minute TedX Talk that ended with her reciting back the whole speech in a record-breaking world time of under 1 minute. Pretty cool, right? You get the idea. Fran spends time in the stratosphere



of adventure and accomplishment, but her feet are planted firmly on the ground – even if metaphorically.

Fran has performed in various capacities as a motivational speaker and comedienne for every branch of the military and all around the world. She gives back as well, donating time and participating in physical challenges that benefit animals, the military, and other causes. She's more true to herself and her soul than just about anybody I've ever met. Her home, words, outlook, morals, and entire persona are as authentic as you'll find. Truthfully, she's had more than one opportunity throughout her career to make wrong moral decisions based on income and has never once sold herself out. Fran says, "There are two things I could never live with. One is that I never wanted to have to lie to my child about anything I did. And the other is that I never wanted to do anything that would land me as a negative headline in the newspaper." She continued, "I have to be able to look myself in the mirror and know that every decision I've made was okay."

So now that you know a little about the cool stuff the world sees, you might be

curious to peek into her roots.

She's a native New Yorker (with an accent equally as awesome as it is conducive to comedy) who spent the first five years of her life in Greenwich Village before moving to an English Tudor in Queens. Mom was a homemaker, and Dad was a truck driver who later went into construction. She had a typical high school experience and was always joking around despite her shy nature at the time. Having a soft spot and being friends with all the bullied kids put her in a position to be picked on herself, but she would never relent or back down from standing up for her friends. Fran went on to complete her B.A. from Queens College on the Dean's List. She majored in philosophy and accounting, with her senior year focused on media. Fran was truly funny, and inspired by the likes of Joan Rivers and George Carlin. She didn't hold comedy as an aspiration originally; truthfully, she hoped to be an attorney. The universe clearly had other plans. Once she tapped into her love and talent for comedy, she needed answers. So, she prayed on it, asking God for a sign. Looking back, she can see that she missed them all. She



fran on her pool patio

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Delivering her Love, Laughter and Light show to a sold out Wetmore GM audience

motivational speakers. She was always reading books and materials about having a positive mental attitude; and always told me I could do and be anything I wanted. My Mom loved music and always had it blasting in the house. She is the person with the single most influence on my life and success." She continued, "Mom was my best friend. She was always there for me no matter what. When I was scared, she soothed me and gave me the courage to keep going. I learned never to let fear stop me. She was spiritually so far ahead of her time." Between her father's love of humor and her mother's strong influence, Fran learned early that one of the keys to success and happiness was to *just say yes and figure it out later.*

She said yes to her son Spencer's father, and their marriage didn't work out, but they keep things on good terms. Spencer is a little famous in his own right - he did his own comedic routine at the age of two during one of Fran's shows. He did imitations of Jack Nicholson and Richard Nixon, landed himself on the Geraldo Rivera show as the youngest standup comedian, and graced the covers of the New York Times and the Daily News. He went on to do comedy for a while and some acting but is happy now working with computers and developing apps.

Fran met her current husband Steve (she refers to him as the secret husband, like Dolly Parton's) back when AOL was big. Here's another short version of a great story she told me: She reached out, he didn't respond. She reached out again. He apologized for not responding. He

didn't think she was getting any signs! So, in what I now know as typical *Fran style*, she re-played, asking for a *convenient* sign. One that she wouldn't miss.

Here's the short version: she got the sign (trust me, it was really obvious), entered a standup comedy contest, won, and performed her first gig. Night one was a smashing success, and that's the one that made the headlines. Night two was a bomb - and taught her what not to do. As she perfected her craft and wrote more material, the opportunities came. Opportunities brought her further on the road, but also 'little exit ramps,' as she calls them, to more options for learning things and exploring her various talents. She had no idea at the time that she would

be the New York editor of Laugh Factory Magazine, take the stage with the likes of Ray Romano, use her talents to raise funds for Tunnels to Towers, go on tour with LL Cool J, and eventually be elected to the National Comedy Hall of Fame.

When I asked Fran to tell me more about her parents, she said, "My Dad taught me to find humor in everything. He wanted boys, but got two girls. He was tough on us, and I can remember riding on his motorcycle handlebars. If I fell off, he'd say 'don't be such a baby.' He taught us to box, and my sister and I took karate. We were the only two allowed to spar with the boys. Mom is the one that taught me nothing is impossible. She believed in the Law of Attraction and brought me to hear

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# Hopeville: The City of Light

By Fran Capo

# ALMOST A WISE GUY

World's Fastest Talking Female

The funniest  
thing I ever read  
in a book (about)  
a woman who  
talks too fast

Hopeville and Wiseguy: The books that  
Fran's working to get made into movies



Photo taken after breaking the world record for reciting back her entire  
TEDx talk in less than 1 minute

saw her on a television show, and started responding a lot more. They began dating, and the rest is history. He wants no part of the spotlight. He likes being 'the secret husband.' Steve told me, 'I've always felt bad for celebrities who can't get a moment's peace from the press. I like being in the background. I don't want my picture taken, and I'm not the celebrity - she is.' Fran says, 'I keep him out of things, but he does go to my shows, and on occasion, I will point him out; and we'll have a good laugh about it. But for the most part, I'm very protective of his privacy.'

Steve is successful in his own right - an entrepreneur who has patents

and manages a very successful company. Incidentally, he was one of the nicest people I've ever met, and the relationship's rock-solid energy was abundantly clear. One time, when she was touring with Ripley's Believe It Or Not, she called him, exclaiming, 'Steve! I'm in the car and we have the world's largest hairball and a shrunken head in the trunk!' To which Steve replied, 'Fran, just once could you call me and let me know you bought a t-shirt?' He's got a great sense of humor. No surprise, right? They've been together 22 years.

Fran's comedy writing comes from many sources. One of them is

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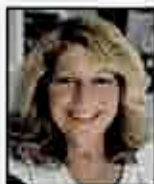
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Fran in front of her world record collection

her adventures. With every gig or tour, she makes sure to schedule an adventure experience. It could be hanging off a skyscraper or swimming with sharks, but she makes sure there's an adventure and uses some of that material in her motivational speaking and her comedy routines. Her son Spencer accompanies her on many adventures, and they remain incredibly close in their relationship.

These days, Fran's career is divided into three dominant areas. One of them is her one-woman show *Love, Laughter, and Light*, which consistently sells out. Her standup comedy and her writing are the other two, although she still does acting and voiceover work. Her latest film is coming out on December 3rd—it's called *Friend Draft*, and she plays a fast-talking lawyer. On February 11th, she's got a Valentine comedy special happening at the Wellcome OM Center in Spring Hill called *Two Chicks and a Horse Tail*.

The thing that really gave me insight into who Fran is as a person was her home. She gave me a little tour, and that's where I figured out what her substance is, and what's really important to her. One of the biggest things I noticed was that her home was filled with beautiful artwork. It was adorned with everything from fractal art to handmade treasures to statues. Every single thing that filled her walls and home had a memory attached to it. And it wasn't just a memory of a place or an adventure, it was memories of who she was with, what they said, emotions they shared, and what it meant to her. With a range of friendships spanning from the 3rd grade to the present, she told me story after story about each thing. Everything in her home was a reflection of her and Steve, because she found a way to mix her whimsical taste with his more elegant style. As we walked through and I listened to her stories, I realized just how much depth she truly has. Several rooms had themes: there was a sunset room, a cave room, and a castle room, to name a few. The castle room has a secret space just for Fran and features a beautiful drawbridge-style writing desk made from upcycled

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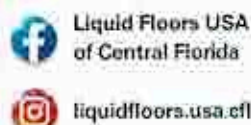
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shipping crate material. She likes to read and write content there. The main living room is elegant, yet features a full-sized bartender figurine holding a teacup with a rose inside it. Fran "thinks" his name might be Bernard, but Steve differs – he calls him Hopkins. The entire home is full of little shout-outs, third-eye paintings, fairies, and other subtle curiosities that make you laugh and ponder. All of the items share one thing in common: they all have a back story.

Listening to Fran's stories made me think about just how important the people in our lives are. Truthfully, she lives in a beautiful home and has clearly done well for herself. But none of that seems to matter most to her, honestly. When she was showing me around, the stories are what stood out to me. How she talked about the people and friends she's encountered in her life genuinely moved me. You can't deny that kind of energy. She's got big comedy, but her heart is even bigger. She's got the kind of soul-shine that you rarely find in a person, and she's actively using it for the better good of humanity. There's no façade, what you see is what you get. Fran is as real as they come, and her 'people' clearly know that. Blessed, that's what she is, and she feels it. There wasn't a moment when I felt that fame had gone to her head – she's as down-to-earth a person as you'll ever find. Oh yeah, here's a couple other fun facts: Fran hates cooking. She exclaimed, "I'm the only Italian on earth who hates garlic and onions!" She loves to bake, though, and tries to invent delicious recipes to bring gluten-free baked goods to her friends.

Fran's got three major goals left. First, she'd like to have two of her books made into movies. Previously, Lionsgate Entertainment wanted to make one of them into a movie, but it required her to change things in the book that she could not morally do, so she passed. The dream remains, however. Second? She'd love to do voiceover work for a major motion cartoon picture – she can imagine some kind of fast-talking little character. The third is to have her *Love, Laughter, and Light* show made into a Netflix or HBO special. In the meantime, she'll be headed to Vietnam to trek deep into the jungle. There, she'll find the world's largest cave and sleep in it. It's called The Son Doong Cave, and it was discovered in 2009 by Peter MacNab, a member of the British Vietnam Caving Expedition. An entire Boeing 747 can fit inside it! I can't wait to hear what comedy and motivational material she gets from that experience! Bats, much?

Fran might be trended on Twitter, but unlike Twitter, she's not fickle. And she's anything but trendy. She keeps up with the times and stays relevant, but her values are traditional, solid, true to herself, and don't change with time. To me, that's the indication of someone truly remarkable, who genuinely lives what she espouses. *Just say yes, and figure it out later.*

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