

Branching Out (*Excerpt*)

A Profile on Steve Frampton



Figure 1: Steve Frampton (personal collection).

If you have ever lost your keys to Dorchester House on a bitterly cold Bournemouth night or partied to the point that you cannot remember which flat is yours, you might very well have sought out Steve Frampton.

Often described by Bournemouth University (BU) student residents as the ‘dad of Dorchester House’, Steve smiles as he recounts trading more than four decades as a master carpenter for the boisterous environment of university accommodation. At 68, he wanted more than just retirement.

“I couldn’t imagine not doing *something*. The opportunity came along, and I just did it.”

Nearing the end of his overnight shift, it is unusually quiet at Dorchester House. Steve keeps a watchful eye over a group of inebriated students staggering toward their flats. Balancing on the balls of his feet, he is alert and ready to immediately break from our conversation if they need assistance. After they pass safely through the gates, he relaxes and expresses sentiments on his family roots.

Steve is the youngest of seven children, five of which are half-siblings from his father’s first marriage.

Although Steve grew up with his brother Tony and sister Christine, it was only three years ago, that he met his other five siblings (Lyall, Monica, Evyon, Joan, and Valerie).

“I loved them straight away. It was as if I had always known them.”

After two marriages, Steve now enjoys life in Bournemouth with Sally, his third wife of 33 years, his daughters Sheena, Tracy, Kimberly, and Stephanie, his sons Carl, Tony, and Garreth, as well as ten grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

Steve branched an extensive family tree and cheerily admits that he worries about the students just as if they were his own family.

“These kids want to feel grown up, but without their parents around, there’s no one looking out for them really. It’s a different England than the one I grew up in.”

Born in April of 1949 to parents Millie and Bertram, Steve experienced a complex childhood with an abusive alcoholic father and a loving mother. Twenty years Millie’s senior, Bert was 62 when Steve was born and did not develop a relationship with any of his children. Steve delicately curves around memories of his father and instead focuses on the forces that provided him the most stability growing up.

Despite a slight aversion to showing his teeth, Steve is a habitual smiler. He cannot stop grinning as he talks about Gwen and Betty – neighbours on the left and right sides (respectively) of his childhood home. There is a soft tenderness in his voice when he calls them his ‘aunties’ which serve as a symbol of sentiment rather than a familial bloodline. Steve has maintained a lifelong friendship with both families, most especially with Gwen’s children Dave and Valerie (not the aforementioned sister, Valerie)

In fact, his first memory in life is of Valerie. Steve recalls being in his white pushchair, not even a year old, while his mother and Auntie Gwen chatted in the street. Behind him, facing the opposite direction and obstructed from view, Valerie sat in her own pushchair. Stretching his head backward around the stroller, Steve strained to catch glimpses of her. His small body half flopped over the side as he reached toward the back of the chair, only centimetres away from falling out.

“I was *determined* to see her. I couldn’t, but I sure tried.”

Steve chuckles to himself after reliving the memory and adds, “You know, most of my favourite memories are all before I could talk. I wonder what that means?”