

Elizabeth Rose
OTA 110 Human Occupation Across the Lifespan
Interview Assignment
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An Interview with *Frenchy*

The individual interviewed for this project was, Ervin "Frenchy" LeComte. Due to Covid19 issues, Frenchy, as he enjoys being called, was interviewed on the phone over two sessions.

I spoke with Frenchy prior to set up times that would work best for him, he decided on morning calls as he explained that, *"I feel clearer in the mornings, but to be honest in this lockdown, I have to freedoms, my time is no longer my own."*

Frenchy is a family friend for nearly three decades. He is 102 years old. Frenchy only recently moved into an Assisted Living facility (about 18 months ago), and regrets every moment of it. Frenchy was living on his own entirely in a small apartment and rented out his family home to supplement his income. Frenchy was driving, playing golf, going to the bank and restaurants independently, until the imposed Covid19 shutdown on March 20, 2020, at his current living facility.

Frenchy is a very lucid, independent, articulate gentleman.

- ***Where was the person born and raised? What effect did this have on the person? What are some favorite memories of childhood?***

Frenchy was born in Connecticut in 1918. His family relocated to Glendale, California, in 1923, when he was five years old. Frenchy said that the last thing he remembers about living in Connecticut was the snow. Frenchy's family was impoverished, and both parents were immigrants. His father was from France, and his mother was Switzerland.

One of the first things he remembered when they arrived in Glendale was his parents attempting to enroll him in school. The public school rejected him entirely because he could only speak French. The schools were wholly unprepared to help him. His older brother and some neighbors attempted to teach him English.

A year later, his parents returned to the school and were able to enroll their son in school as he was able to speak a little bit of broken English. The other students and teachers referred to him as "that little French kid," and that was how Frenchy got his nickname. The reality is that it is more than a nickname; he explained that if someone referred to him as Ervin, even now, that he wouldn't even look up.

- ***How many siblings does the person have? What impact did they have on the person's life?***

Frenchy had one brother and one sister. He was the middle child. He explained that the three of them were very, very close. He lost his brother 14 years ago, and his sister ten years ago. Frenchy is very emotionally moved at the mere thought of his siblings. They were raised before and amid the great depression. This period of time had a significant impact on his entire life and reflected in his values and principles.

Frenchy's brother, Bob, helped him get his first job, after school when he was 13 years old. His brother worked at a pharmacy in Glendale, as a soda jerk. Frenchy's job was to deliver prescription medication to the pharmacy customers at their homes. Frenchy delivered these packages on his bike and paid 5 cents per delivery.

Frenchy worked during the week making deliveries every day from 3 pm to 9 pm, and on the weekends, he would start at 8 am and work until 7 pm, hoping to make a dollar for the day. He said that it rarely happened. He and his brother, and everyone living in the house, would take their earnings and put it in a jar every week. Working was not an option; it was a necessity for their family's mere survival.

- ***What is the person's cultural background? For how many generations has the person's family been in this country? How has this influenced the person?***

Frenchy's father was from France, and his mother was from Switzerland. His father never spoke a word of English his entire life. Neither his mother nor his father ever drove a car. His mother spoke both French and English. Frenchy refers to his family as coming from "the old country."

When the family arrived in Glendale, Frenchy's father started a gardening service. His father built a large red wagon that he could tote his lawnmower, bucket, and other tools. He left very early every morning and walked to every single client to service their account.

Frenchy's mother taught herself how to speak English and got a job as a housekeeper for the priests at Holy Family Church in Glendale. This job allowed her to have her children receive free education at the school as part of her pay. Frenchy and his siblings all attended and graduated from Holy Family School through 8th Grade.

The house that they lived in was occupied by Frenchy's parents and two siblings, along with a maternal aunt, and her husband, and his maternal grandparents, and everyone worked to put money in "the jar."

- ***How much education does the person have?***

Frenchy completed high school in Glendale and worked every day after school and on the weekends. Frenchy never attended a single college class his entire life. He said that college was not even a remote possibility and that all of the family members had to work and put money in

the jar so they could survive. Frenchy credits his solid Catholic education for his ability to maneuver throughout his life.

- ***What was the person's career? What influenced this career choice?***

After high school, Frenchy took on an extra job early in the mornings to remove the trash from an apartment building every day.

One day, one of the tenants of that building took a "shine" to Frenchy and asked him if he would be interested in working in a new business that he was opening up down the street.

The gentleman's name was Bob. He promised Frenchy that he would teach him everything that he needed to know. Bob turned out to be very successful and started a little place called *Bob's Big Boy*.

Frenchy then got a job in Hollywood working for a carpet and furniture cleaning company. He didn't have a car but managed to hitch a ride; he referred to it as "thumbing a ride" every day to get to his job in Hollywood. He worked six days a week for \$10 a week for two years.

Then Frenchy got a job working at JC Penny company for six days a week for \$12 a week. He worked there for about two years until another position became available at a new company Western Electric Company for \$16 a week. He started working there until he was drafted into the army in 1941.

He met a "beautiful" young woman that was working at Western Electric Company. Her name was Frances.

When Frenchy returned from his time in the army in 1946, his job was waiting for him at Western Electric. He retired from Western Electric in 1977 after celebrating 38 years. But this was not the end for Frenchy, not by a long shot.

Frenchy's wife encouraged him to get into the real estate business, and he started buying and selling homes. Additionally, he began to make small loans to families that had a difficult time coming up with a down payment.

This activity turned into a private loan company that he still "tinkers" with ***today***. Frenchy explained that he has a small portfolio of clients that he still assists with short term real estate loans.

So in essence, he never really retired, he slowed down, then sped up, and then slowed down again. He attributes his longevity and health to being strong and never quitting.

- ***Is (was) the person married? If so, for how many years?***

Frenchy married his sweetheart, Francis, when he was first drafted into the army. They were married in Texas. Her parents allowed her to travel via train to Texas to meet with him before he was due to ship out. She was 19.

They married, and shortly after that, Frenchy was accidentally shot in the knee while on training maneuvers in Texas. This wound kept him stateside throughout wartime, and the army trained him on how to be an x-ray technician. He thinks getting shot in the knees may have saved his life as he lost many friends overseas.

Francis died about 15 years ago after a lengthy illness. On the day of our first interview session, he was celebrating what would have been their 77th wedding anniversary. His love and devotion to her are endless.

- ***Does the person have children? If so, how many? Do they live close to their children?***

Frenchy and Francis had two daughters. One died about ten years ago, and his remaining daughter, Shelly, lives nearby. They speak daily. Frenchy and Shelly owned a real estate business together for nearly 20 years until SHE decided to retire.

- ***What role do grandchildren play in their life?***

Frenchy has four grandchildren. He doesn't see them as often as he would like but loves them dearly. He says that they are in the building part of their lives, and he understands how busy they are with their own families.

- ***At what age did the person retire? How do they feel about retirement? Was it a difficult adjustment?***

Frenchy's first attempt at retirement came at the age of 59, and it did not stick, or at least that is how he refers to it. Frenchy has remained active and working his entire life. He said that after his first daughter passed away, and his other daughter Shelly decided to retire from their real estate business, things got a little difficult for him. He was not ready and had no desire to NOT work in some way. His loan business became a focal point of his life in about 1995 and that he still dabbles with select clients today. He enjoys helping and loves all aspects of banking.

The only thing that he feels that helped him through "slowing down" was golf. However, golf has played a focal point in his life since before WWII.

- ***What are some of the major events that occurred during the person's lifetime? What impact did these events have?***

Frenchy attributes his being wounded in WWII stateside as a significant experience in his life that changed his outlook. He thought he was going to go off to war and have experienced good and bad things all over the world. That never played out for him, and he regrets not having that opportunity.

Frenchy also was significantly impacted by the loss of his wife and daughter. He was and is a devoted family man, and the loss of his wife made him feel lonely.

Interestingly, Frenchy considers the effect of the lockdown he is experiencing due to the Covid19 global pandemic, life-altering.

He believes that this is slowly, day by day, killing him. Before March 20, 2020, Frenchy was living a very independent and self-reliant lifestyle, despite recently moving into an Assisted Living Community. Reluctantly, he agreed to move out of an apartment he had been living alone for about eight years. His remaining daughter and grandchildren insisted that he needed to be there for his own safety and their own sanity. (To be honest, I was relieved when I heard that he finally moved into an Assist Living Community). Frenchy believes that if this situation continues, the sudden deterioration he is experiencing will be irreversible.

- ***What occupational roles does the person have and what roles are most important to them?***

Currently, Frenchy can take care of nearly all of his ADLs and IADKs independently. The main reason he agreed to move to an Assisted Living Community, was to have help with laundry and meal preparation. He enjoys eating out, driving, golfing, visiting family, and banking; he loves banking. All of these are extremely meaningful to him. The occupations of taking care of oneself, including bathing, showering, personal hygiene, functional mobility, feeding, eating, etc., are all activities he is currently independent. Additionally, the loss of the freedom to participate in playing golf has started to manifest in very negative thoughts and depression.

As he has lost the freedom to drive himself to doctor's appointments, banking, and visiting family members, this has hit home for him. He explains that he feels trapped in a studio apartment 23 out of 24 hours a day like a prisoner.

Then, based on the information obtained in the interview, comment on lifestyle of the person. Would you consider it a healthy lifestyle? If you were working with this person in OT are there any recommendations that you would make?

Frenchy has led an endlessly productive and healthy lifestyle. Being active and robust are quite essential to him, and he credits this for his clarity and longevity. He has had the great advantage of working with many OTs and PTs in the past that have assisted him with accommodating specific tasks so that he can continue in the occupations that are most meaningful to him.

Due to the current Covid19 situation, I believe his family needs to intervene and push to get help during the lockdown. Presently, he has been left to his own devices, and there has been no therapeutic assistance to maintain his upper and lower extremity strength.

He needs to have daily help to maintain his dexterity in his hands so he can continue to manipulate the clubs for golfing and putting.

He feels that these skills are melting away during the lockdown. Perhaps exercises with tennis balls, and grip devices to maintain hand dexterity and strength would be beneficial.

Frenchy mentioned that he has a putter and golf balls in his room. Perhaps OT help with creating tasks that would help maintain balance without putting him at risk due to the new weakness he is experiencing would be beneficial as well. He may feel motivated to attend to golf-related tasks as it is the occupation that drives him still at 102.

Frenchy is an extremely social person that is now being left entirely alone, except for meal deliveries. He is not allowed visitors. I believe increasing phone communication and possibly bringing in a tablet or laptop that could be used for zoom video-conferences may help the isolation he is experiencing.