

GUITAR MAN

STORY BY PAUL HOFFMAN
PHOTOS BY DON MEYER

Frank Dean, owner of Frank's Guitars in Franklin.



Shop owner, musician loved Franklin so much, he moved there

Frank Dean's aunt likes to tell a story about when he really got the itch to play guitar.

While at one of the family's weekly Sunday dinners at his grandparents' house in the rural southwestern West Virginia area known as Gillman Bottom, Dean's cousin, Dan, at the tender age of 4 or 5, suddenly brought out a Bible and started preaching up a storm.

"He couldn't even read, but I'm sure he'd heard someone preach before," said Dean, who was about the same age as his cousin.

Dan's preaching caused quite a stir among the young girls in attendance, something Dean quickly noted. His aunt, who had recently taken her young nephew down the road to see Elvis Presley perform on TV, says that Dean immediately ran to get a toy guitar he'd received as a gift. Conjuring up his inner Elvis, Dean launched into his version of "Hound Dog" and all the girls turned their attention away from his cousin and toward him.

The owner of Frank's Guitars in downtown

Frank's Guitars

Address: 55 East Jefferson St., Franklin IN 46131

Phone: (317) 738-4497

Website: <http://franksguitarshop.com/>

Hours: Monday, noon-6; Tuesday through Thursday, noon-8; Friday, noon-6; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Owner: Frank Dean

Opened: 2005

Lessons: Guitar, mandolin, banjo, bass, violin, drums, keyboard and harmonica.

Franklin still isn't sure the story's true. But he says his aunt insists it is.

'From nothing to a star'

A fan of music ever since he was little, Dean does recall another moment when playing guitar got him a lot of positive attention. He was 6 years old when his family moved to the Ravenswood neighborhood on the north side of Indianapolis. Coming from Appalachia, and living in the only poor neighborhood that fed into North Central High School —

his house didn't have running water or an indoor toilet — Dean rarely talked at school.

"Everybody made fun of us for the way we talked," he said. "I didn't want to give them another reason to make fun of me."

But then, the Beatles hit America. And Frank Dean, who knew a few chords on his guitar, started playing Beatles songs and his popularity soared.

"All of a sudden, I went from a nothing to a star at the school," he said.

By the time he was 12, he was in his first band, which would have been called the Damn Torpedoes had the boys' parents not told them to remove the first word. From there, as Dean tells it, one thing led to another. He kept playing and meeting musicians, which led him to play all over the country, opening for just about every entertainer he ever wanted to (except for the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Van Morrison), forging close friendships with such music legends as Marty

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— Frank Dean

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Stuart and Loretta Lynn and meeting a slew of other famous musicians.

"Lou Gehrig was wrong," Dean, a big baseball and New York Yankees fan, said, referencing a famous speech by the former Yankee. "I'm the luckiest man to walk the face of the earth. Not in money, but I've met all sorts of the greatest people."

Giving back

Franklin is fortunate to have Dean, too. His store has been in town for seven years, and he moved there a year ago "because I liked everyone so much," he said. During his time in Franklin, Dean has become an advocate of the Humane Society of Johnson County, playing an annual fundraising concert for the nonprofit organization. He also was instrumental in the donation of several violins to the Franklin Boys and Girls Club so that the club could offer a string program.

Dean was able to donate all the violins because he'd been contracted by the Indiana Historical Society to obtain several violins and make them "look old" for an exhibit it wanted to present. He made a deal with the Historical Society that he would only charge them cost if they would donate the violins to the Boys and Girls Club when the exhibit ended its run. Dean hadn't realized all the violins were full size, too big for most children, and he ended up ordering smaller violins for the kids.

"I'd made the commitment, so I kept it," he said. "That program is so great."

Dean has also become a staunch supporter of the city.

"It's great to be in a small community because in a small community you can make a difference," he said. "I love Franklin. I love that there are seven or eight private restaurants where I can eat. I like that the (Historic) Artcraft (Theatre) still shows movies. It's a great community to be part of."

Dean credits much of his business acumen from working at Arthur's Music Store, located in Indianapolis' Fountain Square since 1952. Linda

Arthur Osborne, daughter of the shop's founders, hired him "probably because I was always hanging around there," he said.

"The most important thing she taught me was to say 'no' to big companies," Dean said. "If you



Clockwise from lower left: A big fan of many types of music, Dean's shop features this concert poster promoting two of America's most famous bluesmen, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. The shop offers all the accessories. Dean poses with country legend Johnny Cash. Dean and country star Marty Stuart have become friends.

don't, they'll bury you. That (advice) has saved us a few times."

For example, Osborne cut Fender guitars, one of the world's most popular lines, from her lineup when Fender made some demands to which she refused to acquiesce. But a few years later, Fender dropped its demands and came back to Arthur's.

"She knew how to sell guitars and to sell quality stuff that was reasonable," Dean said.

What makes him most proud of his shop, though, is the teaching staff he has and how those teachers go out of their way for the students.

He was faced with losing several students in 2008 as Franklin dealt with a major flood, the closing of Arvin Industries and the economic downturn that affected the whole nation.

"It wasn't their fault," he said of the students. "I told my teachers that if any kid can't afford to pay, I'll forgo your studio fee for that lesson ... and they said 'we will, too.'"

The proudest I am of this store is that we have never turned anyone away because they couldn't pay," he added.

Under such circumstances, Dean allows the student to pay when they can pay or works out some

other arrangement.

"That's a good feeling," he said.

Dean makes sure the kids who take lessons at his store know and obey the rules. He also said younger kids are not allowed to wait outside on Jefferson Street for their parents to pick them up; they stay inside. And if a parent is late, he makes sure the store stays open until the child is picked up.

"We do what I'd want someone to do for my kids," he said.

Small-town business

Dean said that treating people fairly is the way he goes about life anyway, but in the case of a small-town businessman, it's imperative.


"In a small town, if you're a jerk, you won't be in business long," he said.

Dean opened his first guitar store in the 1980s at 10th and Rural in Indianapolis, surrounded by a body shop, a bar and a to-go pizza place. The fumes coming from the body shop presented a unique challenge for the businessman, and he eventually moved to East Washington Street in the the Irvington neighborhood. Guitar Town still stands there today.

He and Darryl Traylor opened Dean Traylor Guitar Company in Franklin in 2005, and Dean bought out his partner about 18 months later, changing the name to Frank's Guitars. While he can't say he's made a load of money with the store, he can say that he had a hand in sending five people from his bands "to the show," including students Jason Roller and Jason Schermerhorn. Roller plays with country star Wynonna Judd and Schermerhorn plays with Michelle Wright, one of Canada's top country music artists.

As for having a successful business, Dean said he can't equate that to money.

"I had someone ask me once 'What's the No. 1 thing to having a successful business?' I told them I didn't have any idea," he said. "If you're looking at money, I don't think anyone would call my business a success. But I make my house payment and I have my motorcycle. 'But I've worked two jobs since I was 17 years old in order to be able to do that.'"

"I have the honor to be part of this community that I live in," he added, "and the experience to help keep these kids from making some of the same mistakes I've made." 


Frank Dean's music highlights

Besides his solo efforts, Frank Dean has performed with regional favorites Blue DeVille, and Hillbilly Central. He also founded and fronted Sindacato, one of Indiana's most popular and critically acclaimed groups. Their albums "Logan County" and "Sindacato" each won Album of the Year awards from The Indianapolis Star and NUVO magazine while chalking up three Band of the Year awards from both critics and

readers polls.

His songs have been performed by more than 100 acts, including the recording of his tribute to Johnny Cash, "You Walked Tall," by Cash's band of 30 years, The Tennessee Three. Dean also performs with The Snakehandlers, a '50s and '60s style Chicago Blues

group, and with duo partner Scott Parkhurst.

Some of the musicians Dean has performed with or opened for: Dickey Betts, George Jones, Wynonna, LeAnn Rimes, Reba McEntire, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Hank Williams Jr., Merle Haggard, Marty Stuart, Dwight Yoakam, Emmylou Harris, Ralph Stanley, Junior Brown, Doc Watson, Alison Krauss, Blind Boys of Alabama, Rodney Crowell, Rosanne Cash, Patty Loveless, Beach Boys, Travis Tritt, Kitty Wells, Ricky Skaggs, Robert Earl Keen, Todd Rundgren, Steve Earle, Albert Lee. 

SOURCE: FrankDean.com

