

Russ Winson and Frankie Rosera

When Jayne Sorrels, Executive Director of Interfaith Sanctuary, asked for Volunteer Spotlight suggestions from the staff, Operations Director, Dan Ault thought of Russ and Frankie. I spoke to him over the phone and asked him why.

“What I like most about the two of them is that they’re always in a good mood. They’re always happy,” Dan said. On a nightly basis, when Sanctuary opens, guests must check in. They line up and say their name to a volunteer who checks them off of a list compiled of people who have spent the night in the past. Frankie is often that volunteer. “Frankie knows most of the residents by first name and that’s key.”

“Everything they do is totally selfless,” said Dan. “When we come in, they automatically set the place up.” The dining area in Sanctuary consists of folding picnic style tables and folding chairs that need to be put into place each night. “Frankie cleans out and sanitizes the [front] desk. She makes herself right at home,” Dan said.

Throughout the evening, guests at Sanctuary can move from inside to outside. There is an area in the parking lot where guests can visit with one another. A volunteer is assigned to watch over this area and helps where needed. Russ is usually that volunteer. “Whenever something is going on outside, Russ is always there. If I need a trash bag, I swear he is right there standing behind me. He reminds me of that guy on a construction site who is always ten steps ahead,” Dan told me. He then went on to say, “Russ and Frankie are so subtle about being the most wonderful people in the world. They provide so much more than what’s expected.”

Introducing Russ and Frankie

Russ Winson and Frankie Rosera are soft spoken. They say only what they need to. It is refreshing to talk with them. As we sit in Frankie’s family home in South Boise, I feel as though I am with friends. It did not take long for me to know I can trust the two folks across the circular table from me.

“My father built this house,” Frankie says. The ranch style home, built in the 1950s, is in stark contrast with the rest of the neighborhood. It is reminiscent of what seems like a more genuine time. There are large trees surrounding the Rosera’s modest piece of land bordered by a well-kept brown wooden fence. The house is partially brick, strong and sturdy. “We used to own more land. When dad sold most of it, they said there would be no multi-family homes,” Frankie says. She then points out the window toward a group of apartment buildings across the street. “They just went ahead and rezoned it, then built those,” she says.

Russ drives an old Ford pickup. I can tell this vehicle was well used over the years. The exterior has a few scratches and there may be a dent here and there. However, it is immediately apparent that like the man, this pickup has more to it than the eye can see.

The engine purrs as he glides up to the front of the house without a squeak from the brakes. On entering the home, he says a quiet hello with a firm handshake.

The Interview

1. Why do you volunteer at the shelter?

Russ: “I volunteer because I like to meet people. I don’t care if they’re homeless, if they’re wealthy or rich. I just want to meet them and see how they’re doing. People are people. It doesn’t matter if they’re red, black, green or yellow. Everyone should try it once, just to see what it is like, what [guests] are going through. For the experience.”

Frankie: “We ended up starting to volunteer on a trial basis. Now it’s five years later and here we are. I felt a little bit of trepidation at first. But I really believe that everyone is just not that far away from being homeless and you never know what your fortune is going to be. We want to change someone else’s world for the better. I like understanding [the guests] and finding out about their hopes and dreams for the future.”

Russ: “You’re just one paycheck away from being there. It’s the way the economy is going right now. You see a lot of people on the corner. A lot of buildings that are empty where jobs used to be.”

Frankie: “I’ve wanted to see a need and fill it. It makes you feel good you know, after leaving there after you’ve helped.”

Russ: “If you listen to their stories, where they’ve been and what they have to deal with. It can be pretty sad at times. It feels good to help. We just listen and understand and try to take it one step at a time.”

Frankie: “We started when it was in the old library. It’s interesting to talk to the people. I feel really sad for the kids who are in this situation. From the first time I started doing it, I said this is something I could do to help. It’s not a religious thing. For me, it’s part of being human. At a particular time it means being there to give someone moral support.”

2. What are your impressions of Interfaith Sanctuary?

Frankie: “It’s wonderful to think that the community has gotten together to house people that have nowhere else to go. We donate money and other items that we think they can use. It’s really well run. [The staff] are artists at doing what needs to be done.

Russ: “They have a [canopy] in the back that acts as a kind of smoking area. They can get under there and get out of the cold or the sun.”

Frankie: “The beds that they have are great. It’s wonderful families can spend time in a safe comfortable place. If someone is hungry there’s something for them to eat. I think

that's nice. Some people think they are going to be at some risk going down to Sanctuary. I think the people are appreciative you care. I've never had a problem."

3. What are your impressions of homelessness in general?

Russ: "Scary, you can be just a paycheck away from being homeless. When you get out on the street, what do you do? Where do you go? You can go to a place like Interfaith Sanctuary and they will set you up for a night but what beyond that? It could be anybody. You can be flat broke in a minute."

Frankie: "It's kind of hard to imagine being in a situation where you don't have family to look out for you, to be totally without resources. [Depending on who is elected in the upcoming presidential election] I think resources will be hard to come by. And they are already hard to come by. There won't be the social programs to help them out. Churches can only do so much. The deadlock in Washington now is so frustrating. The chances we are losing make me sad. I think we should get somebody in there who cares about others."

- Barry Franklin, Sanctuary PR Team Writer