



John Francis/Special to the STAR AND WAVE  
Susan Spencer of CBS 'Sunday Morning' arrived at John Francis' house in West Cape May at about noon Feb. 10 for an interview about loneliness. Francis didn't speak for 17 years while hiking, camping and creating art as he walked across the country.

## Planet Walker

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publications.

The topic of the CBS story was being alone. Francis understands alone. He walked alone across America and took a vow of silence.

"I can't get my head around this. You did not say one word to another human being for 17 years?" Spencer asked Francis in her report.

She noted he stopped talking at the age of 27 and did not speak again until he was 44 years old. Francis admits there were four occasions when he accidentally spoke, such as bumping into someone in the grocery store and uttering "excuse me."

Another unplanned utterance occurred when Francis was watching the movie "The Ten Commandments," and he blurted out "Oh, my God" when Charleston Heston, portraying Moses, parted the Red Sea. The CBS story included the clip from the movie, something that amused Francis.

His silent years were

spent hiking, camping and creating art as he walked across America, something he continues to do in stages, chronicled in his book "Planet Walker." Francis told Spencer he was lonely before he took his vow of silence in the sense he did not want to be alone with himself, which is what makes one lonely.

He said his loneliness turned into solitude, something people seek. Today, Francis has a wife and two children and said he is not lonely.

Francis told the Star and Wave he received a phone call from CBS and told them he did not plan to be in New York anytime in the near future to tape the story. That was not a problem for CBS. Spencer and her crew came to Francis' home in West Cape May. On taping day, a sound and light crew arrived at 9:30 a.m. and spent three hours setting up equipment, he said.

Around noon, Spencer arrived at his home along with

a segment producer.

"We did an interview for about two and half hours," Francis said.

He said he was pleased with the interview, the editing and with the kindness of Spencer and the crew.

"They were very respectful on every level and in every moment of the process," Francis said.

For post-production, CBS asked for photographs and some of his paintings, he said.

Francis has been a United Nations Environmental Ambassador and has been involved in revising oil-transportation regulations, advocating for environmental education in schools and has written books about his experiences and about his doctoral training in land management.

He returned recently from a Buddhist teachers' training session about silence and meditation. Future travels may take him to Tanzania for planet walking and speaking.

## Lower to mark officer's death

TOWN BANK — The Lower Township Police Department will commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of Officer David C. Douglass Sr., who was killed in the line of duty Feb. 18, 1994, after exchanging gunfire with a man who had just burglarized a home and set it on fire.

Douglass was dispatched to investigate the report of a suspicious person in the area of North Cape May. As he pursued a suspect on foot, the suspect turned and shot him. Douglass was able to return fire, striking the suspect in the hand, and was able to make it back to

his patrol car to call for assistance but did not survive the attack.

Following an intensive investigation, Lower Township police, along with several other assisting agencies, arrested the shooter in April 1994 in New York City.

There will be a flag-raising ceremony in Douglass' honor at 10 a.m. Feb. 18 at the Town Bank Fire Department, 224 Town Bank Road in North Cape May, followed by light refreshments inside the firehouse.

The flags at Township Hall and the police department will also be flown at half-staff and a memorial wreath will

be placed near the flagpole at the Town Bank Firehouse in honor of Douglass.

There will also be a brief ceremony at about 7:15 p.m. at the gravesite at Cold Spring Presbyterian Church, 780 Seashore Road. The ceremony will correspond with the time Douglass responded to his last call. Dispatch will transmit Douglass' end-of-watch broadcast for Lower Township Police Department and all fire sirens in the township will be activated in memory of Douglass, who was also a Town Bank firefighter.

The public is welcome to attend these events.

## City corrects incorporation date

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — At some time in the past 160 years, the exact date of Cape May's incorporation as a city was erroneously defined as 1857 when the correct date was 1851.

City Council passed a resolution Feb. 5 to change Cape May's seal to reflect the actual date of the city's incorporation. The resolution authorized the city

clerk, the keeper of the seal, to take necessary action to modify the seal and correct letterhead and other pertinent city documents, according to city solicitor Frank Corrado. The change took effect immediately.

In 2017, resident John Bailey brought to the attention of the city a possible inaccuracy regarding Cape May's date of incorporation, which is used on the city's logo and seal, according to Deputy City Clerk Erin Burke. Both read "incorporated 1857."

Bailey contended the cor-

rect date of Cape May's incorporation should be 1875, based on a number of excerpts from history books. Burke contacted Laurie Boyd-Thomas, the county's public records and archives clerk, who researched the issue and provided excerpts of New Jersey Sessions Laws that showed an act to incorporate Cape Island into a borough March 8, 1848, Burke said.

An act to incorporate the city of Cape Island was enacted March 10, 1851. At that point, a city council was established.

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