

Transcript for Jack Barsky | Deep Undercover Pt. 1 (Episode 633)

Full show notes found here: <https://theartofcharm.com/633/>

JACK: You know, they could have kept me in jail for a while and then I would have been exchanged and I have no idea what the Russians would have done with me but certainly I was off the market for an undercover career.

JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm. I'm Jordan Harbinger. I'm here with Producer Jason DeFillippo. On this episode, we'll be talking with my friend Jack Barsky. Now, he's the author of [*Deep Undercover: My Secret Life and Tangled Allegiances as a KGB Spy in America*](#). But really, let's just dispense with all that. He's a freaking KGB spy who moved to America to spy on us, ended up staying here -- the story is bananas. Of course he consults for that show *The Americans*, which is one of my favorite shows on TV. This story is just absolutely insane.

He was from East Germany, trained in Moscow, stole essentially an identity of a kid to come to the United States -- this is one of my favorite interviews recently. Jack gets deep into KGB recruiting process, the espionage game from the inside out -- we'll learn how spies were recruited and trained, which skills Jack used to assimilate to the United States and pose as an American, fooling his friends, his employer, his colleagues, and even his wife. He had a freaking phase -- got a family here, they thought he was American and one day -- oh, God this is crazy. He even has a family here, I just can't believe it. There's so much more to the story. I don't want to spoil it for you. Just have a listen here to part one of the story with Jack Barsky, here on AoC. Let's do this.

JACK: I'm going to try not to be funny because I have a tendency to be quirky. But, upfront the only advice I can give young people is the following. It always takes longer and it always costs more.

JORDAN: So much for not trying to be funny. That's great though, I love that.

JACK: Apply that to whatever you do in life. It's true.

JORDAN: So far that has been -- definitely been my experience and I tell you what, as a former undercover agent for the KGB, you've got plenty of ideas on using your feelings to your advantage and also probably ignoring emotions when they are going to take you down a path that you should not go down and trying to stay calm under fire. And I know that you consult for The Americans, which is one of my favorite shows. Producer Jason just caught up as well.

JACK: Yeah, I wasn't even on that. I was an extra for episode 510, I'm standing there next to an entrance of a dry cleaners and out comes this gorgeous Russian lady and she walks down the street and, you know, I put on my best spy look and I'm looking down the road and I follow her and then she stops and talks to some lady who comes out of a car and I have to, unfortunately, walk past.

JORDAN: Oh, nice. Well, I'll keep an eye out for that. I love that show and I've always been obsessed with, you know, the Soviet Union and that started because I used to live in the former East Germany, which is where I know you're from, and I went to high school there.

JACK: Oh, wow.

JORDAN: Yeah in Halle Salle.

JACK: No way, that's about 60, 70 miles from where I studied chemistry.

JORDAN: I know so when I speak German, you and I probably have the exact same accent. Or you're from the same area where I learned German.

JACK: (GERMAN AUDIO)

JORDAN: (GERMAN AUDIO)

JACK: (GERMAN AUDIO)

JORDAN: Well look, this is super interesting. I've been waiting for this for a long time. I'm very excited about this. I know that -- just to give people a little context -- while the allies rebuilt West Germany, the Soviet Union effectively looted East Germany, setting it back about 30 years. So, when you grew up there was a struggle for survival. You know, you had to clear your plate, there was not enough food -- I guess we now know where that habit comes from for the United States, for all of our eastern European ancestry and things like that. I know that when you were young you mentioned that your mother and your parents were pretty cold. Can you tell us about your childhood? Because I think it does inform some of the things that happened later in your life.

JACK: Yeah, I've reflected a lot about it because the bottom line is when you think about people and what bothers people or what gets sort of in the way of them becoming -- fully developing, it's usually the baggage they take with them from childhood and my baggage was not necessarily all bad. It was discipline, it was sort of asceticism and that extremely long period of delayed gratification. And where the harm was a lack of emotional love. There was just none. I can't remember any. And that was somewhat typical of Germans in post-World War II, but not necessarily to the extreme that my parents took it.

My parents just like, didn't manage to even hug and kiss or say I love you. That just was completely not part of my childhood. And not having had that, you don't know. You don't know what you're missing. You don't know what you should have had and it took me a long time to get to this. And partially because of having to reflect on my past, partially when I was writing the book I was thinking about all of this and you know, the lightbulb went on. And now, I'm sort of making up for this. I have a late comer six year old child and she gets smothered with loves and kisses and I love you because I know that's very important.

JORDAN: I think it's extremely important. I think a lot of people would agree that as well and there's this story in the book where your stomach hurt and your mom take the bus to the hospital which turned out to be an emergency appendectomy. So it seems like early on you learned to ignore your emotions, you learned to ignore pain --

JACK: Yeah this is just like totally bizarre when you think about. What normal parent in this day and age would make their 15 year old teenager walk to the bus -- I couldn't walk straight anymore, the pain was that bad -- and says, "Well you go to the hospital?" And again, that wasn't anything that I thought was the wrong thing to do. This was just the way things were. And it was in fact an emergency appendectomy that had to be performed.

JORDAN: In the book -- by the way, [Deep Undercover](#) is the title -- My Secret Life and Tangled Allegiances as a KGB spy in America. For those of you who are looking for that, we'll link to that in the show notes. It looks like your dad -- he bought a Wartburg. And I've driven one of those cars. Did you ever get to drive it?

JACK: When I actually worked for the KGB, my German wife got a cart with the help, that was more of an upscale -- It was a Russian made copy of an Italian car, it's called a Lada. But a Wartburg I have never driven. You know, this was the best thing you could buy in those days and it was a piece of junk.

JORDAN: Yeah, yeah. Two stroke engine, there's a choke inside the car, and it fills up with gas fumes when you start it, so you've got to roll the windows down.

JACK: Yeah but, you know, listen the one vehicle that was most in use was the phenomenal Trabant. There's a GER museum in Berlin these days and one of the exhibits is one of those Trabant things that barely fits like, people my size -- I don't know how four people fit in. I burst out laughing. People didn't understand. I looked at the label and said, "It has 24 horses. Well my lawnmower has 26."

JORDAN: Ha, that's amazing.

JACK: Amazing, isn't it?

JORDAN: I know what you're talking about. You're talking about the Checkpoint Charlie Museum and the Trabbi -- Trabant -- that you're talking about, they sewed a person into the seat and then the driver sat on that person and they drove out of East Berlin to smuggle that person out. Do you remember that?

JACK: Yes, you and I need to get together in person one day and just like, exchange stories.

JORDAN: I would love that. I am totally up for that. Sign me up. So let's go back to it before I get too excited and geeking out on East Germany stuff here. So, they erected the Berlin wall, you know, to protect you over there from the West German fascists, etcetera. And at that point in your childhood, you saw a bright future ahead compared to capitalism right? You're thinking, "Wow, we have this socialist paradise going on." What's the dialogue in your head as a young man?

JACK: Oh, there was no dialogue. There was a monologue. All we ever got was a heavy dose of communist ideology which, as you know, is very appealing to young people. You know, the whole idea that we all can live together and be nice with each other and make sure that the rich don't get too rich and everything is jointly owned and it's all wonderful. It is incredibly appealing to young minds and since we didn't get any counter argument, that stuck. And I was informally chatting with you about the stickiness of ideology and boy, oh, boy, this stuck with the folks for a long time. And there's contemporaries of mine -- even though they got royally screwed by the communist state -- are still deep down inside -- they're communists.

JORDAN: Yeah, it seems like in your book -- again, titled [*Deep Undercover*](#) -- the school doesn't have any discussion. The truth comes down from the top and that played a part in -- once you became

a spy, once you became an operative, you have this near delusional confidence and very little emotional attachment -- which probably comes in part from your childhood as well as learning and propaganda and things like that -- and you talk about how this affected some of your early relationships. And obviously you brought some of those patterns with you, which no matter what anyone might look back, 20/20 hindsight sort of shows okay, once you join the communist party as a brilliant chemist, you got the knock on your door from the mystery guy -- who we still don't know who the heck that is -- of course they're looking for people like you, right?

JACK: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I was a most inviting target. I was a standout, I got a national scholarship, I was active in the Communist Youth Movement, I was a member of the party -- at the time they recruited me I had a spotless record. And then, I fathered a child out of wedlock, which by the way in those days the party didn't like a lot and normally they would have called me in and read me the riot act -- Nothing happened. So, I was already now removed from the masses, quote unquote, and I was judged by -- we're using a different yardstick. I had joined the elite, not necessarily knowing it but I know it in hindsight.

JORDAN: That's interesting so by the time you're in the KGB, you are already untouchable to some extent, inside the government. And we see that, in shows like *The Americans* where they're busting people who are doing a bit of a racket at the supermarket in Soviet Russia. The woman goes off and goes, "You don't understand. This is how the whole country works. The reason you don't see it is because you're in the KGB," and the two guys are kind of sitting there and they -- that gives them a little bit of pause because they realize, "Oh, yeah, we kind of do get special treatment. Maybe this is how people survive."

JACK: Yes, I was untouchable, I was above the law -- because I broke laws internally as well as in other countries -- I was encouraged to do things that you weren't supposed to do, like watch Western television. You know, I was going to the West, right?

But when I crossed the border between East Germany and the Soviet Union, I was always bypassing customs and passport controls, so I was, you know, a young person that really feels good because I never liked rules. I really, you know, had a problem as a child and I almost got kicked out of school because I was rebellious until I learned to fit in otherwise, you know, life wouldn't be so good. But when I got the official imprimatur to break rules in support of a good cause, you know, it's having your cake and eating it too, which in real life doesn't happen but for a while I had it.

JORDAN: Yeah, I can see the lure for a young person doing that. And when the KGB was recruiting you, they had you doing profiles on other students and on people -- what were those profiles? What are they having you profile?

JACK: Well the profile typically, you know -- what are they like? Just a very general profile. I strongly believe that these were sort of exercises for them to determine how well I can judge others. The KGB didn't do internal spying on East Germans, that was the Stasi. And it wasn't really very well targeted. Now, when I profiled people while in the United States, I also had an angle to, you know -- could they be useful to us? Us being the Soviet Union. And if so, how could they be recruited? Such as, you know, they have weaknesses, they have ideological preferences, they need money, they have a drug habit, and all of that stuff. When I profiled my fellow students in those days -- that was the early beginnings and it was just like, undercover work 101 -- very, very elementary.

JORDAN: So they were just trying to see how can you read people, is there some sort of light reconnaissance but that it's basically a dry run to see what you can do. They sent you to West Berlin. When you're -- you grew up in East Germany, you're kind of in this era, especially post war. Not a lot of things are being rebuilt, there's a lot of propaganda coming down from the top -- what was your first impression of West Berlin when you finally were able to go and see it first hand?

JACK: I don't know if I wrote that in the book. If I didn't, I should have because I told people a long time ago that my first impression was, "Oh, wow, they've got color." And so I would tell people, you know, "The West was a movie shot in color and in the East they only had black and white." Because what immediately hits you was that contrast between the brown and the gray and all kinds of colors that were visible once you stepped out of the subway and appeared on western territory.

JORDAN: So it's kind of like going out of a black and white movie and into technicolor?

JACK: Yeah. Indeed. And that was enemy territory. Now, the unasked question now would be, "Well didn't you figure out that it might be better on the other side?"

JORDAN: Yeah.

JACK: Of course I did. Of course I did. There was a reason because they took all the wealth away from third world countries and so that's why you had poverty in Africa and South America because the evil capitalists, such as in England and in the United States, France, and West Germany. They became rich because they exploited the rest of the world.

JORDAN: Right, that's the line of propaganda back then as well. All right, so they ship you off to Moscow and they tell you, "All right you've got to adopt an American mindset." How did they instruct you how to do this? I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been to be like, "Hey, you need to learn as much as you can about becoming American but you can't go to America yet. You've got to do it in Soviet Russia."

JACK: Yeah, well Soviet Russia was because in East Germany they did not have a trusted individual who could teach me the American brand of English. So that was the primary driver. For two years I studied my ass off. I never studied as hard -- and when I said in the interview on 60 Minutes, I learned 100 new words every day. I can state that with confidence because I always counted in my

entire life and I had a system by which I knew exactly how many words came in and how many words came out. It was really 100 words a day.

So I became quite fluent in American English but my preparation with regard to American culture was almost non-existent and there's a good reason for that. The folks that I worked with that were original Americans and had come to live in Moscow remembered only things that were like 20, 30 years old and the folks that thought they knew about America -- spies. They're resident agents who worked for the United Nation or the Soviet embassy. They thought they knew American society but they looked at it like you look at fish from the outside. You look at the fish as an outsider and they try to teach me how to be a fish and they didn't have a clue.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: Was that effective? It seems like it would be so hard. Sure you could learn English but how are you going to learn mannerisms? It reminds me of the movie Die Hard. I don't know if you'll remember this but those German terrorists have taken over the building and the way that Bruce Willis knows they're the bad guys is he says, "Yeah it's raining like dogs and cats," instead of cats and dogs and that that's how he knows they're the foreign guys because he gets that idiom wrong.

JACK: Yeah.

JORDAN: How would you get these nuances correct enough to fool people?

JACK: I -- very carefully and very slowly. I didn't know what I didn't know with regard to how to be an American. So I was lucky enough that my first two years in this country, I had no exposure to bright, inquisitive individuals, you know? I worked as a bike messenger and I was able to observe from a distance without being caught. I'll give you a funny episode that occurred to me just the other day and this is how you so easily

can betray that you're not what you claim to be in terms of nationality. Sometime later in life I joined a bunch of young kids playing soccer. And I was already -- I think -- in my late forties, possibly even fifty and I killed them.

JORDAN: Ha!

JACK: Now how the heck -- somebody who was born in 1940s in the United States wouldn't know what to do with a soccer ball, right?

JORDAN: And you're just doing circles around these young guys because you grew up playing soccer in Europe.

JACK: Well, you bet. So, there's a lot of things that can trip you up that you're not aware of. You know what they told me back in Russia, "Make sure that you never eat with your knife and fork. The knife in the right hand and the fork in the left. Cut your meat and take the fork and then, you know, just eat with a fork." That sort of is out the window nowadays. But that was the extent to which I learned American culture -- not.

JORDAN: That's really funny. I used to get in trouble in East Germany for the way that I ate as well. Even though I did -- I'm left handed so I use the fork in the left hand. The fact that I use the knife and put it down and everything. My family was like, "Did you grow up on a farm?" and I said, "No, why?" and they were like, "Uh, no reason. Just curious." Because they just thought, "This guy, he doesn't even know how to use silverware. What a weirdo." But of course very American of me. That was always a dead giveaway, of course, along with my strong American accent when I'm speaking German.

There's a great story in the book as well about your mother coming to visit. Because of course she thinks you're working for the space program in the Soviet Union and you've got to put on this facade. Would you mind telling us that story?

JACK: Okay, though the space program came later. So when she come to visit, I was a low level employee of the East German embassy.

JORDAN: As far as she knew.

JACK: That was the cover, right?

JORDAN: Right.

JACK: And, you know, we panicked because she wasn't supposed to meet me anywhere. So, she went as part of a tourist group and she had two days in Moscow. So, we came up with this great idea. I was living at the time in a conspiratorial apartment that she was not supposed to know about.

So they put me up in a hotel under the cover that my apartment was being renovated and then we decided that one of my handlers would come as a friend and we would just like -- my mother had her then husband with her -- we would just like inundate them with sites and things to see and, you know, make sure that they -- you know, they couldn't even get their head up and ask any kind of questions. Before you know it they were gone. So that went really well. The only thing that really became a problem was when mom said, "Why don't we take a picture with you and Serge?," who was my friend, right? But he was the handler and my God, you know, I looked out of the corner of my eyes -- I saw Serge wince because KGB employees weren't supposed to have their picture taken but he couldn't say no. So this is the only picture that I have and I think it wound up in the book where it's me, her, and Serge -- where the picture was taken by her husband.

JORDAN: So somewhere in Soviet Russia, someone's going, "Holy crap, there's a picture of my dad with this guy who says he's a KGB spy. My dad worked at a shoe factory, what's this doing in there?"

JACK: That's a possibility. Love the guy, I wish I could meet him again. I wonder what happened to him. He was a genuinely nice

person and just like me, you know, he had bought into the ideology hook, line, and sinker. I wonder what happened to him because it is so much easier -- it was so much easier -- for me to shed my baggage because I lived here and I was able to, you know, just gradually move away from that nonsense that I was taught in my youth. But to people like him it was like, Boom! Soviet Union no more. Communist party, yeah. Fringe party -- and what we've got now is an oligarchy which is not any better than what they had before but the whole ideology is gone. The fellow should still be alive and I'm wondering what happened to him.

JORDAN: I wonder if any of the sort of, fellow spy espionage geeks listening to this have any idea how to get ahold of people who used to be in those niches. Because there's -- who knows, there's probably some clubs in the former Soviet Union, especially Russia, where old KGB guys hang out and drink beer and tell war stories. And who knows, I mean if they know that that is in the book, they might be able to say, "Hey, isn't this you?" You know it's very, very possible the guy's still around. I mean he's probably just your age.

JACK: He should be -- he's my age. Secret agent anonymous, maybe they exist.

JORDAN: Who knows.

JACK: I have not been contacted. The thing is that we knew one another only by first name and I would like to add there was very strong likelihood that the first name was phoney. Now he knew my first name but I don't know if I knew his first wasn't a cover name. You know, I was introduced to many, many other folks who worked in the KGB under my -- one of my cover names which was Bruno. And my official cover name, by which the records were kept, was Dieter -- D-I-E-T-E-R.

JORDAN: Oh, yeah.

JACK: So figure this one out. When somebody says, "My name is so and so," he says, "Okay sure, my name is that," and then you just go on because it doesn't matter.

JORDAN: Right. So of course Serge just basically the name John in Russian essentially. It's so common --

JACK: Yes.

JORDAN: -- that it would be impossible to pull it out so of course, I'm sure you're right. That probably was a fake name in some way. Now, when you're learning to be a spy, when you're learning to be an espionage undercover agent here, you've had a lot of counter-surveillance training and drills. Tell us about how you were trained. It seems like they were chasing you through town and things like that. Super interesting.

JACK: Yeah. I mean this is -- when people think about espionage and what it's like to work undercover, this is as close to how it's portrayed in the media as possible even though what you see in the media is just like, false in its execution. And I guarantee you, even nowadays, if somebody wants to know whether they're being observed or being followed, they need to do what I did. Because there are not enough cameras in the world yet that can be martialled to follow somebody to know what they're doing. It took a phenomenal amount of time for me just to find the right places to visit, the right route to Moscow to determine whether I was being followed. And every month I had one exercise where like on a -- say on an evening before Serge would call me and says, "Hey tomorrow 9 o'clock. It's a go."

So then I leave my apartment and I go on a three hour trip across town. You know, visit all kinds of public places, shops, possibly a museum, buy a ticket at a theater and do all kinds of things that one could do. Even though nobody in their right mind would do all this but at least there's no proof. It maybe odd but if somebody follows you, there's no proof that you're doing something that intelligence officers would be doing. So, and the whole idea was to then get to spots where somebody

has to get close enough so you can see them. So my ability to recognize faces was very important because if they don't get close enough then they'll lose you. And even though -- and I typically had it between 8 and 10 people on my tail -- even though they would switch places all the time, they ran out of switches, so to speak. And when I got to a point where I saw the same face again, I know that I was being followed so that's how I wrote my report, they wrote theirs -- and it was -- sometimes it was interesting to get the report that they wrote because, you know, I realized, "Oh, I missed that one, I missed that one," but ultimately I was never wrong. The ultimate score -- and these were like highly trained professionals -- but the ultimate score was me like 10 and they're nothing.

But one thing I just would like to share with you and your audience which was really interesting -- one guy got sort of caught. He knew that he was too close. I saw him and he did something that is the ultimate diversionary tactic. He came up to me and asked me for a light. I never thought that he was one of the surveillance group so, well done. I paid him a compliment.

JORDAN: Right because he did the opposite of what you would think, which is he was supposed to, "Oh, no, he saw me. I'm supposed to duck out of sight or pretend the jig is up," and instead he walked up and said, "Hey, you have a lighter?" and you thought, "Oh, well this can't be him because he's right in my face."

JACK: Absolutely. And yeah, as I said, these were professionals. I know that because they were the teams that would be deployed to follow American diplomats or high level visitors from the west. There were armies of them but the guy who was in charge of these groups -- I worked with him individually -- he was a master of disguise. And I discussed that in the book and the disguise is not what people think.

JORDAN: What is the disguise typically then if it's not a wig and a fake moustache?

JACK: He was a master of misdirection, the master of like, you know, "You look over here and I do something over there." For me to put on a wig was an absolute no-no. That's nonsense. The surveillance team sometimes used at least accessories. They might change even jackets or put on a scarf or, you know, put on a different hat. But generally, this is one of the running feuds I have with the producers of *The Americans* because every time I see one of the agents with a wig on I just shiver and I said, "No!" I scream at the TV.

JORDAN: Yeah, they do look ridiculous wearing the wigs and you're thinking, "Of course you look like the same person. You just have another bad '80s hairdo. What are you doing?"

JACK: Did you ever visit the Stasi museum? There's a picture of Stasi agents with wigs and funny hats on it and it's so ridiculous. I couldn't stop laughing when I saw that.

JORDAN: I must have but it's been so long. I went in the '90s. It was in 1997 so it's hard to remember everything that I did but when I go back I would definitely love to see that as well. And I know that it's in the old Stasi headquarters as well.

JACK: That I don't remember. It's somewhere near -- in the center of town but it doesn't matter. As I said, wigs are a no-no and so the anti counter-espionage measures took a lot of time as far as my training is concerned and I think that was the most thorough part of my training, other than language.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: Do you have any tips for learning faces? You mentioned your facial recognition skills had to be on point.

JACK: You know I think it's a bit of a talent. I've been told even early on when I was a teenager, when we would be with a friend or with my family in a restaurant and people would tell me, "Stop staring." I was always staring at people. I was always observing. There was no -- nothing I'd practiced. There were no tools that

allow me to get better with that. I think it's partially a talent and partially it's just focus.

JORDAN: Yeah. Maybe you're just looking at people's faces instead of being self-absorbed or looking at their faces instead of looking at their clothing, things like that.

JACK: Well the one thing that may help -- when I look at people I usually speculate who are they, where they come from, why they're here -- and so, now your brain operates already at a different level and I think it may make the visual stick better.

JORDAN: So what are those three factors again?

JACK: Who are they, where do they come from, and why are they here? And what are they going to do next? This is sort of like -- especially when you're stationary and there's folks next to -- table at a restaurant and I've been very, very curious all my life and, you know, that's part of what makes you good at at least that kind of activity.

JORDAN: You mention in the book [*Deep Undercover*](#) that caution is a spy's best friend and paranoia is his enemy. What does that mean?

JACK: That's well put, isn't it?

JORDAN: Yeah.

JACK: Well obviously you have to be cautionary but if you take this to an extreme, at any point in time in my career, so to speak, I could have come up with 50 to 100 reasons why I shouldn't be doing this, right?

JORDAN: Yeah.

JACK: There is danger lurking around every corner and if you can't put this out of your mind, then you will freeze because then, you

know, you will just pee in your pants out of fear. It's almost like performance anxiety. I'm sure you're familiar with that.

JORDAN: Oh, yeah.

JACK: Any good performer has a certain level of performance anxiety. If you go too far, you can't perform. But if you don't have it, your entire being will not be ready to do its very best. And I think that's what I meant by this saying. Don't be afraid to be scared but don't be scared to a point where you can't operate anymore, then you might as well just pack it in and go home.

JORDAN: How do you keep those two things straight? Because caution and paranoia are basically on the same spectrum.

JACK: Because I think you can do that only in the realm of reason. When you allow your emotions to take over, that caution will very quickly turn into a fear that cannot be managed. It's reason. You reason with yourself. You know, "This can't happen, this can't happen. It doesn't make any sense. The probabilities of something going bad here are very low, put this out of your mind."

JORDAN: That's fascinating, right. So you have to control your emotional response to things otherwise you will start to become paranoid which is the far end of the spectrum when it comes to the caution. So in other words you can become so cautious that you become ineffective.

JACK: Yeah and I think my scientific training had a lot to do with this. When I said -- I studied chemistry and there was a lot of math in there and I've always been a numbers person. So when you go into a particular situation when you go into a new endeavor and you figured that the probabilities are reasonably in your favor, then you stop thinking about it and you just do it.

JORDAN: So finally the KGB sends you to Canada, you're ready for almost Prime Time, you're watching a ton of TV -- you mentioned The Price is Right and Good Times with JJ, you know, "Dy-no-mite!"

JACK: Yes, sir.

JORDAN: And you said you had trouble understanding him. Is that because he spoke, essentially an urban dialect of English that you wouldn't have learned from your teacher?

JACK: Yeah it was jive, right? I could not understand it. I mean it was so foreign to me and, you know, nowadays, you know, I don't even know why I didn't understand it but I had learned what you call high American, so to speak. It's not -- it doesn't exist, but you know the midwestern brand of the American accent. And I could not understand JJ, no way. I barely managed to understand the Flo person out of the diner episode because she had a southern accent. But I managed to understand her, you know, and it showed me that, you know, I was far away from actually being an American. That test trip was actually a real good thing that helped me a lot to understand and to make sure that I don't go into the real game cocky. That's like when you have a good practice game and your coach will tell you all the bad things that you just did. You know, and in my case, I just noticed that all myself.

JORDAN: Right, so you had to pick up so many different things. You mentioned Flo from the diner and she's the -- "Kiss my grits," that's her, right?

JACK: That's her.

JORDAN: That type of thing. I watched a lot of TV as a kid, can you tell?

JACK: Yeah. We watched the same stuff.

JORDAN: Yeah.

JACK: But what you probably didn't watch is The Friendly Giant from Canadian broadcasting.

JORDAN: I did, and I'll tell you why. I grew up in Detroit, so I was right across from Windsor and you mentioned going to Windsor in the book and you nailed the American comment here. You say, "Well, it's always worth the trip across the river. Your beer is so much better than ours." That is something that everybody from Detroit says when they go to Windsor, which we do all the time.

JACK: Oh, wow, that was a good guess. I had no clue but I knew that the beer was better. I don't know how I knew this because I hadn't had any American beer but I knew it was -- by law it was weaker. Maybe while I was in Montreal people were bragging about, "Well, you know," and it's like, "our beer is so much better," you know because you know Canadians have a chip on their shoulder and any time they can say something or talk about something where they're better or superior to their southern neighbor, they will rub it in your face.

JORDAN: Yeah, of course. That definitely makes sense. Maybe a little bit of a complex there. Now they're just glad they don't have to deal with the same politicians as we do but back then definitely there was a little bit of a, "Hey, you know we're different in this way."

JACK: No offense, I love my Canadian brothers and a majority of really good comedians in the United States all come from Canada so, thank you very much for that export.

JORDAN: Yeah of course. Look you had to acquire your identity in Canada. Can you tell us how you tried to get the birth certificate and become, essentially American or -- at that point by what you were doing there?

JACK: Yeah. That was a failure, actually. Besides this being a practice trip, I was also instructed to get a copy of a birth certificate of a young person who had passed at an early age. I don't know how they found out, I have no idea how they actually found that information because the county where that person was born was some place in California and the only place in California where the Soviets had folks operating out of was San Francisco.

No idea. So anyway, they gave me a name and they gave me basic information and in those days, at least it was possible that you can get the copy of your birth certificate by mail.

So, I sat down, I wrote a little letter that says, "I'm Henry van Randall," which is the real name that this person had, I remember that one -- "and this is my father's name, this is my mother's name, I was born on this date in this place. I'd like to have a copy of my birth certificate. Enclosed is the amount of," you know, there was a fee attached to it. And I mailed that letter and then I waited, and I waited, and I waited -- instead of just taking a week or two weeks as we had thought -- then after like five or six weeks I decided I've got to do something about it. I actually called the registrar's office of that county and I sort of pretended to be angry. I yelled at them and says, "Hey listen, what happened to my birth certificate? You have my money so can I please have what I paid for?"

And so there was some back and forth and eventually the lady at the other end or whoever was -- it could have been a guy but I think it was a lady -- said, "Okay we'll take care of it," and within a week's time, I get a letter in the mail. It's addressed to Henry van Randall at the address where I lived -- I masked the address, it was a small hotel so it wasn't visible that it was a hotel. And it was from California -- I say, "Yoohoo!" You know I collect this downstairs, I go up to my room and in anticipation of this great success, I open the letter and I pull this thing out and it was one of the biggest disappointments in my entire life. I mean, it ranks only second to being dumped by my first girlfriend.

It was in bold red letters, stamped across from bottom left to top right, "DECEASED." So this is what I was thinking, "Oh, shit." Because, you know, immediately you understand that here is a person who says, "Send me a copy of my birth certificate," but the person died. Something is wrong. So, you know, I packed up, I left Montreal, you know, went on the rest of my trip, you know, from town to town until I wound up in Windsor. And later on I found out that actually law enforcement was on my tail but

they never really caught up with me. As a matter of fact, the FBI -- during my debriefing process, or you would call it interrogation or whatever you want to call it but -- they showed me a police sketch of me.

JORDAN: Wow.

JACK: That was taken based on the folks who were running the hotel, giving them a description of what I looked like. I mean I escaped by a hair's breadth of being caught. And at that point, no more undercover career, you know? They would have put me in jail, I would have told them, you know, that I want to talk with the East German embassy and eventually, you know, they could have kept me in jail for a while and then I would have been exchanged and I have no idea what the Russians would have done with me but certainly I was off the market for an undercover career.

JORDAN: Jeez that's insane. How then did you become Jack Barsky? And I've realized this in the book is quite the saga but how did you become Jack Barsky? Who was this person because it's easier for us to say, "Oh, it's the person you're talking to now," but that wasn't always the case.

JACK: Well, you know, after this failure to acquire the birth certificate of Mr. Van Randall, the Soviets decided that, you know, "Maybe we will do something different." They sent me back to Berlin for a while with the instructions to learn Portuguese. The whole idea that somehow Brazil was in the picture. They never disclosed whether Brazil was going to be a weigh station into the United States, which would have been quite normal. It's what they did very often -- to go to the United States via a different country -- or whether Brazil was going to be the final stop for me.

But anyway -- but after about six months, you know, I get a call from my handler and it says, "Oh, listen, pack your bags. Back to Moscow. We've got a birth certificate for you." So some diplomat in Washington D.C. was wondering around in cemeteries and he

found the gravestone that was engraved with the name of Jack Barsky born in 1944 and passed away in 1954. I know that now but I didn't know it then. But he posed as the father of the deceased, first acquired a death certificate and with that actually was able to get a copy of the original birth certificate then sent it to Moscow and it was handed to me and that's how I became Jack Barsky.

JORDAN: What do you think of that whole thing now? I mean, is there any sort of -- at any level in your head is there sort of any identity issues that, "Look you've been living under the name of a dead kid for a long time but at the same time, that's you also, now."

JACK: Two answers or possibly even three but two primary answers to that question. A, that was standard operating procedure by Soviet intelligence, to steal people's identities, particular individuals who had passed away at younger ages. They did this throughout, you know, the thirties and forties and into the fifties. Number two, I don't feel good about it and I had plans to change the name back to my -- you know, at least the last name, back to my German name, which would do well in American English as it could be pronounced as Dietrich. But I couldn't at the time because I was involved in some civil proceedings in court and you're not allowed to change your name.

JORDAN: Ah.

JACK: Then I was caught by 60 Minutes and before you knew it, you know, I now have a brand name that says Jack Barsky. I can't get out of it and continue to function in the way I'm functioning now as an author and as a public speaker and all that. You know, I just can't. You know, eventually I have to find -- my daughter, by the way, Chelsea -- the one who plays a big role in my life -- she changed her last name back to the German last name. One of those days I'll find a way to at least shed part of that name because I -- this is one of the things that I don't feel good about. There is not too many things where I said I was absolutely, fundamentally, morally wrong, but this is one of them. And every time somebody asks me that question or I

think about it, you know, I just want this to go away but it's hard.

JORDAN: Yeah, I can imagine and I understand the tough spot that you're in. I don't know if I would have done anything differently. It seems very tough to be able to change something like that after so many years. And to a certain extent, you've had the name Jack Barsky longer than the person who originally had it and so -- I don't know, it's tricky, right?

JACK: Yeah, yeah. I had it longer than the German name and think about this one -- I got a six year old. You ask her, "What's your name?" -- "Trinity Barsky."

JORDAN: Oh, yeah.

JACK: Okay, so -- it's a good Jewish Polish name. A lot of people attach emotions to names. I don't because I carried a lot of them, particularly when I traveled illegally. But, you know, you have to respect how other people look at names and very often people attach their own self to a particular name that they carry.

JORDAN: Yeah, well again, you didn't. And I think it's more your choice now. The original Jack Barsky has nothing to say about it. In fact you've -- in many ways -- lived a fuller life than he ever had, of course. So, I don't know. I definitely understand both sides of the equation. So now they send you to Belgrade, Serbia, then through Rome, then finally to the United States and you walk through customs with a shortwave radio and seven grand in cash -- which seems like painfully small --

Great big thank you to Jack Barsky. The book title [Deep Undercover](#). We're not done yet. There is part two. I know you're thinking like, "What? He lands in Chicago and now we're," -- Yes. That's right. We're making you wait. Jason, what do you think so far?

JASON: So far -- I mean, I loved when we did this interview because I think I could just see you smiling through the text window the

whole time because you were just like a kid in a candy store with this one.

JORDAN: Yeah, this is -- this story is crazy and I feel like I clicked with Jack quite well. He actually emailed me yesterday. The guy is a gem. I'm glad that he's American now. That's -- I guess, that's a good place to leave it. Although, is that a spoiler? I don't know, I think it's pretty obvious by the fact that we have him on the show. How the story sort of ends --

JASON: Sort of.

JORDAN: Yeah sort of. If you enjoyed this one, I would love it if you'd tweet at me your number one takeaway from Jack. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter. Like I said, part two coming very, very soon. As usual, we'll be replying to your questions and feedback for Jack on Fan Mail Friday. And remember, if you're looking for the show notes, you can tap our album art in most mobile podcast players. You can see the show notes on your phone screen. We'll link to those right on your phone.

I also want to encourage you to join us in the AoC challenge at theartofcharm.com/challenge or you can text AOC to 38470 -- AOC to 38470. The challenge is about improving your networking and connection skills and inspiring those around you to develop a personal and professional relationship with you. It's free, it's unisex -- that's the whole point. It's a fun way to get the ball rolling, get some of that forward momentum, shake off a little rust.

We'll also email you our fundamentals Toolbox. That's what I mentioned earlier on the show. That includes some great practical stuff, ready to apply, right out of the box -- reading body language, having charismatic nonverbal communication, the science of attraction, negotiation techniques, networking and influence strategies, persuasion tactics, and everything else we teach here at The Art of Charm. It'll make you a better networker, a better connector, and a better thinker. That's theartofcharm.com/challenge or text AOC to 38470. For full

show notes for this and all previous episodes, head on over to theartofcharm.com/podcast.

This episode of AoC was produced by Jason DeFillippo. Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer and editor. Show notes on the website are by Robert Fogarty, music by Little People, transcriptions by TranscriptionOutsourcing.net -- I am Jordan Harbinger. Go ahead, tell your friends because the greatest compliment you can give us is a referral to someone else, either in person or shared on the Web. Word of mouth is everything. So, share the show with friends and enemies and maybe just those you think are your friends but are secretly your enemies. Stay charming and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.

