

## Transcript for Jack Barsky | Deep Undercover Pt. 2 (Episode 635)

Full show notes found here: <https://theartofcharm.com/635/>

JORDAN: Welcome to The Art of Charm. I'm Jordan Harbinger. I'm here with Producer Jason DeFillippo. On this episode, we're back with Jack Barsky. Jack Barsky, author of [\*Deep Undercover: My Secret Life and Tangled Allegiances as a KGB Spy in America\*](#). All right, before we go any further, if you have not heard part one of this story from Jack Barsky, look in the episode feed last week -- Jack Barsky part one. You need to listen to that first or this is just not going to make any sense and you're depriving yourself of the beginning of an amazing story. And if you want to go there directly on the website, it's at [theartofcharm.com/633](https://theartofcharm.com/633).

Last time we were here and we left off last week, KGB Spy Jack Barsky had been trained in Moscow, gotten schooled on how to pretend to be an American, left his family in East Germany, and just landed in Chicago, finally stealing an identity of an American. And on this episode we're going to hear how he assimilated to American culture, how he managed to fool his family, his friends, his colleagues into believing his false identity as well as how Jack's double life and identity started to wear away at him, how the allure of communism began to wain, how his brainwashing started to wash away if you will -- or just be brainwashed in a different way. I guess you could put it that way, it just depends on how you look at things -- and why Jack decided to stay and become a real American and how he shook his KGB handlers and the Soviet Union off of his back. But of course, one's past always come back to haunt us and we'll hear about that as well. Without further ado, the rest of Jack Barsky, here on AoC.

Tell us about your arrival in the United States. Now you're finally ready for Prime Time.

JACK: Well I wasn't really but you can't make that up, can you? And that's indicative how poorly prepared I was. The russians didn't have anybody in Chicago so they couldn't prepare me for what

to look out for in Chicago and what areas to avoid. So when I arrived late in the evening and when I deplaned, I got through customs -- the first thing is I need a place to sleep. So, I looked up -- in the yellow pages I looked up a hotel and I called them up. I made a reservation, I got in a cab, and I said, "Well this is the address," and the cab driver looked at me funny and I had no idea, "Why is he looking at me funny? Does he know that I'm not who I pretend to be?"

Anyway, so but when we get there I had an inkling because it was a rundown place and the people in the street were not of the same color as I was. So when I walked boldly into the hotel and then I got an idea that this may not be the place where I want to be because the receptionist was protected by a wall of plexiglass but I have this funny way -- and this is probably a guy thing. We don't like to turn around and we don't like to make u-turns. But in my situation I felt funny, if I walk out of there after I make a reservation, I don't know, maybe I tip my hands, maybe something figures out something is wrong with this guy, so I went through with this. I stayed at that hotel. I had actually reserved it for two nights but I ran out of there the next morning.

After I managed to destroy the passport I travelled under and pulled out the American birth certificate from a secret compartment -- at that point I was Jack Barsky and then checked into a hotel further up town that was a lot more amenable and a lot safer under the name of Jack Barsky. And that's how my life in the United States as Jack Barsky began. That was early October of 1978.

JORDAN: Yeah that is incredible. And so, of course, you're looking for an apartment at this point and I know that you got scammed looking for that apartment. You said you learned a valuable lesson about capitalism -- if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. I want to know is it not also applicable to communism? In fact, to me this sounds like the motto for communism. It's too good to be true so it's not true.

JACK: Yeah except under communism there weren't so many opportunities to be taken for a fool. You were taken for a fool as far as your entire way of life was concerned but there weren't any shady operators that could come up to you and sell you something that was so special. Not as many. There were some. And oh, by the way, even in capitalism, you know, I know people with who I can do business on a handshake -- you know, for instance my publisher -- if this weren't such a litigious society, I would do another book just based on a handshake. But in New York City it's not very likely that you find people like that out in public who promise you a great deal.

JORDAN: Definitely not. What were some of the initial differences you saw between living in capitalism in New York -- capitalism HQ -- versus under communism? There must have been some things where you said, "Holy Cow, I really miss this about communist society," or, "This is so different that it sticks out right away."

JACK: Well Jordan, I tell you what, to be honest I didn't miss anything. I really didn't miss anything, you know? And that would be more of a who. Who I missed was friends. Not so much family -- I had friends and my German wife. But as far as way of life, there was nothing to miss. I didn't even miss being a chemistry professor. There's one word: supermarket. The variety of food that you could get there was astounding. The other thing I missed was some German food and it was quite indicative when I had my first real apartment with a little kitchen, the first meal that I ate was boiled potatoes.

JORDAN: Man, we have those here too, you know?

JACK: Yes. Boiled potatoes and butter.

JORDAN: Now you got a job as a bike messenger and you're making deliveries all over the city. You once made a delivery from Russian Tea Room to Dustin Hoffman. Does Dustin Hoffman know that he came face to face with a KGB spy?

JACK: Of course not. And by the way he was not highly regarded by us. He didn't tip. He was very cheap. The Russian Tea Room was his favorite restaurant and he was in the hospital. I don't know what the reason was.

JORDAN: That's incredible. That's so funny. Dustin Hoffman, multi-millionaire, doesn't tip, got his food delivered by the KGB.

JACK: So did Jacqueline Onassis. I never got to see her but I had a carpet sample delivery for her. So there were some tenuous touch points between the KGB and some rather famous people but they didn't amount to anything.

JORDAN: And you get married in 1980 actually, and you have a kid with Gerlinda. How do you compartmentalize your two identities at this point, right? You've got spy mode and then you've got Jack Barsky, American guy with a wife and a kid mode. Does that not cause you just ridiculous amounts of stress?

JACK: No and so when you asked the question, "How," I can't answer it. But I did and it's really odd. And this is one of the things that I had to really analyze whether that was true -- which nowadays I can say with some confidence that I had manufactured a dual personality to some degree -- not fully -- and that was really clear about six years into my career here as an agent.

So every two years I would go back and spend time with Gerlinda and at that point, my son. It was great to be home, it was great to meet my wife who I still loved very much, meet my son, have German food, drink a lot of good beer, and it felt like home -- and speak German again. And so this is what happened when I went back to the United States. And I usually would not arrive in New York City. It usually was a different airport so as to not run into people that knew me and so, "Wait a minute, you come from Europe?" because I was travelling on a different name and false passport.

So, let's say I would touch down in Washington D.C. or in Boston and I'd get off the plane, I hear American English and I'd say,

"Whoops, it's good to be home," because I already had the start of a good life. I started a career as a programmer and I worked for MetLife. I loved my team. I loved what I was doing. You know, I had become so accustomed to the American way of life. Clearly not enough to ultimately stay here. There's some people who misunderstood that because I loved the American way of life. The reason I stayed was Chelsea, my daughter. But this certainly helped to a degree because I had Americanized to a large extent already, after six years.

JORDAN: Tell us about the process of Americanization. You started working at MetLife, you make friends with this guy Patrick -- your insurance job essentially starts to change your ideology. Can you walk us through that -- how that happened?

JACK: Well, as I say in the book, one of the most evil entities of capitalism to us as we were told in East Germany in those days, were the insurance companies. I had no idea why they would zero in on insurance companies. It was banks, insurance companies, Wall Street -- these were the epitome of capitalist evil, greedy money hoarders and the people who played others. So I get my first job -- first of all I spent three years in college in the United States. That was interesting but at that point I still didn't know what it was like to be and work as an American. I got my first job at an insurance company.

First of all, I liked the work. I mean, programming. For the first time in many years, my brain got engaged again. I was allowed to do logic, I was allowed to create, and then I met so many smart people and they were all really good people. They became friends. The other thing is, you know, MetLife in those days was a mutual company and I don't know if your generation knows that but in those days, mutual companies were extremely paternalistic. They didn't pay you that well but they treated you really well. The untold compact was when you find employment there, you have a job for life and you will return with a golden watch, you know, and a great pension, and in between you have job security and MetLife even gave us free

breakfast, lunch, and dinner, if you cared to eat three times out of their kitchen.

So that was completely contrary to what we were told back then about the evil about the insurance companies. On top of it, even though, you know, my bosses were all nice and you know, I couldn't find anybody evil. I knew, sort of, that there were some and they were probably in government, in the highest level of American industry, but at least down at the level of the worker bee, I didn't feel exploited. That was a big change in my fundamental ideology and at that point, I had shifted from being an ardent communist to sort of, becoming a socialist -- not too far away from where Bernie Sanders is nowadays.

JORDAN: That's interesting. So you sort of shift from this hardcore communism to, "All right, let's just make things more fair for everyone," like you mentioned Bernie Sanders.

JACK: Yeah, yeah. More fair, sure. Capitalism is not a bad thing because it creates wealth, we just want to make sure that, you know, it's more evenly distributed. And interestingly enough, there was a streak that became pretty strong in Eastern European communist parties. It was called a convergence theory by which capitalism and communism was on a path to converge and become some kind of a happy, socialist kind of conglomerate and this was actually, also -- that had infiltrated the KGB because one of my handlers actually volunteered that to me, without me even talking about it. He says, "Oh, by the way, convergence theory is where it's at," and that's Gorbachev.

JORDAN: Wow.

JACK: And this is ultimately how the Soviet Union ultimately disappeared. It softened -- it became very soft in its ideology and became, therefore, very vulnerable to tipping over, which it did.

JORDAN: Now you started to feel, at some point, like spying was actually getting in the way of your job, which I thought was funny.

JACK: If you have friends who work in information technology, you probably know what I'm talking about. Us worker bees who operated computers and computer systems, were often on call 24/7. My desire to do a good job, my competitive spirit was focused on doing a great job for the company that started paying me very well and that included overtime weekend work, late night work, night calls and all that. And then I had to do all this other stuff, you know? And when I talk about this other stuff, there was this tipping point. It was not at the beginning but when I started kicking in and it became a really valuable contributor and it took about two years. When I knew that I was really good and I was appreciated by my bosses, that's when my focus shifted towards doing a good job for MetLife rather than the KGB and it became a nuisance.

The communication as well as surveillance detection -- all this kind of stuff takes a lot of time. And it takes a phenomenal amount of time so what we're doing here -- talking back and forth -- the information that I just gave you, for me to actually hand that amount of information to the Russians, I would have had to write it down, take a picture, put an undeveloped film into a container, ask for a dead drop operation, make sure that I'm not being followed, drop this thing some place, and wait to see that the person actually picked it up and there's a sign some place that they picked it up. The whole operation end to end, not real time but end to end would take a week or two and with all kinds of activity in between. You know, that interfered with my normal job, so to speak.

JORDAN: It's so funny. You're just sitting there doing the insurance thing, programming something that you thought would be a side cover and now they're saying, "Hey we need a full report," and you're thinking, "These guys. What a pain." It's so funny. They're communicating with you on the short wave. By the way, they're communicating with you on the short wave radio, right? How is it done? What are they saying because they're obviously not saying, "Hey come in Jack Barsky, spy for the Soviet union." What are you listening for on this radio?

JACK: If you watch *The Americans*, I saw this one scene where they were actually listen to spoken digits -- 5, 6, 4, 8 -- interestingly enough, there seems to be an international standard when it comes to encryption. There's always a set of five digits. So, whatever is transmitted is in digital format and there's groups of five. You know, it's throughout, it's used by the CIA, was used by the KGB, it's probably used by everybody -- I don't know why but there may be a good reason to have these groups of five. So no, I would get digits transmitted, as I write in the book, that started and they never changed.

It was 9:40 on a Thursday night. Just prior to 9:40 for about three minutes, and I knew the frequency to tune into but in case -- to make sure that I truly find it, there was a call signal that had three letters and or digits that indicated that this transmission was for me. And then the whole thing started and sometimes it was pretty long and sometimes it took a good hour to actually listen to the whole thing and write it down. And then it took another three to four hours to decrypt thing. And then when I got really mad was when at the very beginning of this radiogram, I get something like, "Congratulations comma blah, blah, blah, on the International Worker's Day." I said, "I don't need this stuff!"

JORDAN: That's clearly -- that's a bureaucrat writing this in four minutes and then they don't realize it takes four hours to do.

JACK: Well it was a bureaucrat and it was an ideologue -- it was somebody who didn't think out of the box and couldn't empathise with what it was like to be me.

JORDAN: Geez. Yeah, never was in your shoes. Because I'm thinking like, look, this is on shortwave radio, obviously anyone can hear that but it's encrypted and I'm wondering if it's just random letters and numbers because when I was a kid, I would go up north and be stuck in this dumb cottage and so we had a shortwave radio. It was old. It was probably from the '60s or '70s. And so I'm a kid in the '80s and I'm listening to this and I'm hearing other



languages. I'm just wondering, is there any chance at all that I heard something that was intended for a spy? Because the 11 year old in me is extremely stoked at the idea that I might have heard something like that as a kid.

JACK: Oh, there's a very good chance that you heard something that was encrypted. There's no doubt. I mean, first of all, it isn't just undercover agents. There are other agents that need to get a quick message and that's the quickest way of transmitting something and you transmit this in code. Even as we speak, I guarantee you, if you traverse the short waves, you will hear digits being transmitted that are meant for somebody that is doing something that is not entirely legal in the place where he's doing it.

JORDAN: Wow, yeah. Because of course, people think, "Oh, you just use the Internet for that," you could but with shortwave, it's broadcasted. You can never pinpoint the receiver, which is the point, right?

JACK: That's one thing that's correct. You don't know the general direction and I guarantee you the NSA knew there's a guy here some place, in the northeast, who's getting this every week. But that's all they knew. There's no way that they could trace that back to me. They could probably trace it back to where it originated but I don't know if that's possible with shortwaves. On the Internet, there's all kinds of things. You know, shortwaves still doesn't break down. The Internet still has problems. So, at least as a fallback, shortwave, I guarantee you, is still being used.

JORDAN: Interesting. How did you flip to eventually essentially becoming full American? I know they tried to call you home. Can you take us through that?

JACK: Yeah. There was never a written plan for how long I was going to be in the United States. It was all verbal and it was, "Okay, go back for another two years, go back for another two years." Sort of the unspoken term was, "You're going to do it for about 10

years then you come home and do something else." So I was in my 10th year. At that time I had now two families; I had my German family and I had married a young lady who was originally from South America and we had a child together. Something happened and neither the FBI nor I have a clue why the Soviets at that point thought that my cover was about to be blown and I am absolutely convinced that they were sincere in their belief.

They called me back, and they called me back as an emergency departure. That could have been a ruse, right? Because they've done this in the past, they've called back an agent and as soon as they step on Soviet soil they are jailed or even executed. Now the execution thing was in the past but Stalin did a lot of that. Even after Stalin, some of that happened when they would call back agents -- "Hey listen," and they knew that there was something wrong with that person, "Listen come back," you know, "You're in danger." They go back and Boom! That's where the danger was. I know that this was not the case with me because I was in very good standing and the fact that they followed my request -- or they honored my request to give the money that was in my account to my German wife, indicates to me that I was okay with them.

For some reason they thought somebody knew about me and my cover was about to be blown, which I didn't believe. I had no indication that somebody was focusing on me but you never know. I was now in that moral dilemma and the moral dilemma was, "Can I leave this 18 month old girl to fend for herself with a mother who didn't have much of an education?" She came from a very poor country in South America and Chelsea -- my daughter's name -- would have grown up most likely in some kind of poverty. That was the rational thinking but you know, this is also, you know, when you are there at birth and you watched them grow -- for a father it takes a while to bond with a child and I had really bonded with that child.

For the first time that I felt unconditional love. Even when I was in love with Women in Germany, there was always an

expectation of getting something back. This was unconditional love and that was ultimately too strong against all the other factors that spoke in favor of me going back and following the orders by the KGB, so I decided I would defy them and tell them that I'm not returning.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: I was going to ask how you weigh the pros and cons but it sounds like once you bond with your child the pros are stay with your child and the cons are, "Look you've got people back in Germany but you know that Chelsea needs you more than they do," from the sound of it.

JACK: Well, the pros for going back were like purely selfish. They were in favor of going back like it was not even going back, like it was not even close. You know, I had money saved on my account. It was a lot of money. You know, in those days \$60,000 on the other side of the Iron Curtain was a fortune. The Russians had promised me a house and I was going back a hero and rejoin my family. You put this on one side of the scale, on the other side you have three things: You've got the FBI possibly chasing after me, the KGB not being very happy with me not going back, and then there was Chelsea.

JORDAN: Wow.

JACK: Think about that. I have, in the recent past, occasionally questioned my honesty with regard when I tell people what I just told you. My honesty as to the motive and whether I'm covering something up, but these are the facts. These are, to a large extent, provable facts because I know that the Russians gave my German family the money as I asked them to, so I was in good standing. And there was a chance that the KGB and the FBI would come after me and that the KGB would not be very happy with me defying the orders to return and the only counter to all that reasoning was my love Chelsea. This is a line that's used very often, and very often unthinkingly but true love conquers all.

JORDAN: You just proved that I would imagine, I mean -- look, the KGB wants to kill you. The FBI, if they can find you, will put you in prison probably for the rest of your life. Maybe not for the rest of your life but they certainly would send you back to Russia, where the KGB would probably jail or kill you. How did you get away with that? I mean, you had an encounter with the KGB at one point before -- you're kind of blowing them off, right? Can you tell us about that?

JACK: Yeah. It took me a while. You know, just like when you have a really, really hard decision to make in life, you have two alternatives and neither one is really that great. So you kick the can down the road until there's a wall at the end of the road and you can't kick it anymore because if you do, it comes right back and hits you in the face. So that's what happened. I was stalling the Soviets like, pretending that I didn't get their message. And there's all kinds of reasons why you might not get their message, one of them would be the radio is broken or the shortwave reception was awful, or I was sick for a while -- it's all possible.

So, I bought myself time for several weeks and then one day they put an end to that and that they send one of their resident agents to actually tell me what the orders were and he said to me, "You've got to come home or else you're dead." The reason that they knew where I was -- I had to give them the route by which I go to work. So they knew exactly how I would go to work every day. And that's where he caught me on the subway platform, one early morning around 6:30 in the morning and he said exactly those words and it was up to me to determine what that meant. You know, it could have meant, you know, You're dead. Your cover is blown and he sort of didn't use the right word, or it was a threat. Now you had to take the threat seriously because the KGB in those days did kill, and I knew that. My hand was forced. At that point I knew that they knew and they knew that I knew. There was no more kicking the can. There was the proverbial wall.

I love telling that story because I think I should be in the Guinness Book of World Records. I resigned. First of all, I don't know how many people resigned in writing, an assignment with the KGB. Secondly, I used secret writing. I wonder how many people in the history of man wrote a resignation letter in secret writing. Probably not -- so anyway, I wrote them this letter that, "I understand you want me to come back and I'm not coming because I have contracted AIDS and this is the only place in the world where I could get treatment. Sorry I will not defect. I will not betray any secrets, and please give the money on my account to my German family. End."

JORDAN: Wow, and of course you didn't have AIDS, you just thought, "I'm going to get these guys off my back by telling them I have a disease they don't want in their country."

JACK: Yeah and I made it pretty believable. I even traced the virus back to somebody I had profiled previously so they knew a name from whom I got the AIDS virus because I'd told them that she'd had a previous boyfriend who was a drug addict and that's how she caught it. Bingo. And AIDS was a really, really scary thought for all of us, but even moreso behind the Iron Curtain, because Russians and Soviets -- us communists -- knew that AIDS was indicative of the downfall of western society because of the immorality in the west. So, it worked!

JORDAN: That's incredible. And they just left you alone after that. And then, now, everyone to the outside of you -- nothing has changed -- but in your mind, you've just left behind the KGB, Soviet Union, East Germany, unfortunately your family and friends and wife and son also in Germany --

JACK: And my mother.

JORDAN: -- and your mother. You left behind your mother but you've gained your American and ostensibly you've gained your freedom, finally.

JACK: Yeah, and the freedom thing grew on me very slowly. By the time I made that decision, I sort of like, really narrowed my horizon. I was out of the spy game, I was off the stage of the international scene, and I was just going to dedicate my life to my family. And so when my American wife suggested that maybe we should look into buying a home, I got serious. By the way, I also signed up for a 401K, which I hadn't done before. Another sign that something was a little odd about this fellow, you know -- "Why doesn't he sign up for free money?" Well I know I couldn't get it with me. I signed up for that and I discussed with my wife to have another child. We moved to another suburb of New York and within about four or five months my son was born and so we had the perfect American family: husband with a good job, pretty lengthy commute, a nice house, two children, career opportunities -- career was going well and that is where I was.

For a while, I didn't want to hear anything about ideology, the world, politics, and so forth. But when the Internet allowed you to do searches, I started poking around and I started looking. Obviously the Wall had come down a year after I resigned. I started trying to figure out what was East Germany actually all about and there's enough truly authentic information to be found about East German, because of the way that it fell. I was very much disabused of any residual idea that we were actually doing the right thing, we just had the wrong leaders. And so, that's where I was at until the FBI caught up with me and then I had to face my past and really figure out, "Who am I and how do I relate to this country that I'm living in?"

JORDAN: Yeah, I wondered what did you think when the Berlin Wall fell and what was the most shocking thing you learned about your former government after reunited Germany and having access to things that actually happened in East Germany when you were growing up there?

JACK: When the Wall came down I watched it as if it didn't generate an emotional response. It had no impact on my life because I knew I would never go back to Germany. My passport

application was denied twice, or at least I thought. The second one wasn't denied but I never got the passport. I don't know what happened. It was stolen or lost in the mail. But I didn't want to go anywhere near the State Department again to, you know, not risk being detected as an illegal still. So I looked at this and I was like, "Yeah, interesting. Well, that's too bad," and that was the end of that.

But, as I said when I started doing my research, the one thing that was just like hit me over the head, was the pervasive surveillance of East German citizens by the Stasi -- well depicted in the movie *The Lives of Others*. I had no idea. As a matter of fact, when I lived there, studied there, and briefly worked there, I was not aware of anybody who was a victim of Stasi machinations or anybody who did that kind of work to spy on their coworkers, family, and so forth. Partially because I was a member of the elite -- where that didn't happen as often -- but partially, I didn't look. Probably if you look you find. I was at the point where I really appreciate the level of freedom that you have in this country -- used to have and still for the most part have. And I realized that the entire nation was suppressed from the very top and that the whole thing was a complete lie.

JORDAN: It must have, at some point, rocked you a little bit. I mean, not necessarily the Wall but looking at this and thinking like, "Wow, I not only lived there," but you worked for one of the arms that was in part responsible for some of this stuff.

JACK: Well to be quite honest, you know, at least I was able to rationalize my way out of it, at least partially, because I never did any of that internal spying. And, you know, it's very hard to say whether I would have if I had been asked. I can't say I wouldn't have, I don't know. However, that doesn't let me off the hook because I still did work to enable that very regime that did that. Here's where it really got me, and that wasn't too long ago. I did a lot of research in preparation of writing the book as well as public appearances I've made.

There's a book that I read called [\*Stalin's Hangmen\*](#) and that describes the bloody history of the KGB. I kid you not, page after page -- every page, there's somebody who gets killed. Sometimes it's one person, sometimes it's a group, sometimes it's a mass killing -- literally at one point when I was like two thirds into the book, I broke down crying because I realized what an evil cause I had served. Even though it was modified and moderated when I joined the KGB, but it still had its root in that very evil that was perpetrated under Stalin.

And so, ultimately my journey to becoming a full-blooded American did not end when I got my citizenship, but it ended not too long ago when I realized that, in my view, this country still is today the only true hope for the world to become a better world, warts and all. I'm not saying we're a great country period but we are sitting on a foundation which is called the constitution, that has -- that gives us the best hope for everybody who wants to have a good life, to have a good life. We're not there yet but clearly there's no other country in the world, other than really small manageable countries, who might be there. But, you know, this is a complete flip-flop from where I came from and where I am today.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

JORDAN: Tell us how you got caught because the story is just not complete until you -- like you said-- had to face your past.

JACK: Yeah. You know, I thought I was, you know, in the clear. We moved from the house in the northern suburbs of New York into some place in Pennsylvania where my job worked and I had a good career. I was doing well, I made it up to director already, I made six figures, and I knew that I would live out my life as a corporate employee and you know, would go on vacation only within the United States because I wouldn't try to get a passport. And that's where my mind was at when one day, I was stopped at the other side of at tollgate crossing the Delaware river. It was initially -- it was a state trooper who said, "Routine stop. We would just like to check your license and



registration," and, "Could you step out of the car?" I step out of the car. I still am not having a clue what was going on. And then I see, out of the corner of my eye, somebody approaching me from the back. There was another vehicle parked there and before I could put two and two together, the fellow introduced himself. He says, "Joe Riley, FBI," and he showed me this badge, "We would like to talk with you."

JORDAN: What are you thinking at that point? What's going through your head right then?

JACK: I didn't use the F-word but just something like this BAM! I mean, it was like the floodgates opened and it was a rush. The entire collected past was descending on me because I knew I was in big trouble. I had no idea how big it was but was not prepared. According -- who's now my friend -- Joe Riley, I handled this pretty well. You know, I could have completely collapsed, peed in my pants, and you know, curled up in a fetal position, which didn't happen.

So once they had me in their car, we drove for about a minute. First question I asked, "Am I under arrest?" and the answer was no. Well I didn't know what that meant but you know, I was being detained, for sure. I didn't have a choice. Then, within another minute or so, I said, "So, what took you so long?" I have no idea. You know, this was my intrinsic, sort of instinct to break the ice. I always do that and sometimes it doesn't work really well. You crack a joke with somebody who is like, on the other side, and you think it could get contentious and you could have a tough relationship, you make a joke.

I think they chuckled a little bit and I think it helped break the ice. Clearly this wasn't one of these things where you like -- you know, you mastermind a situation and you're cool, calm, and collected, like in a movie and say, "Hey what took you so long," and deep down inside you're thinking, "Yeah, I'm going to play these guys." No, it was instinct. Just to get back, how they found me was, you know, another one of those one in a billion odds. There was a defector that used to work in the KGB archives who

defected to MI-5, the British version of the FBI, and brought with him a whole bunch of handwritten notes. And amongst those notes was a blurb that says, "Jack Barsky, undercover New York region."

JORDAN: Oh, man.

JACK: That's all they had. If the Russian agent had found a gravestone with the name of Joe Smith, they wouldn't have found me. But, there are not too many Jack Barskys in this country.

JORDAN: Yeah, and one of them died as an infant and the other one is you, at least in that area.

JACK: It's the same guy. It's not the same guy but it's the same name. And so, not finished because there's also another chain of improbabilities, but it finishes a lot of improbabilities in my life where you shake your head and say, "Really? That happened?" AND I can't claim credit for any of that. The fact that I became a public figure -- that had nothing to do with me. There were people who knew people who knew people who -- ultimately it started with my wife who is from Jamaica. Okay, so figure this one out. It's in the book and I don't want to go too far but there's all these weird things that happened that, you know, if you want to make them up as literature, people would say, "Well yeah, you know, that's a novel." Well, I lived that novel.

JORDAN: Why aren't you in jail right now? That's what people want to know. Okay, you get caught by the FBI, what are you doing here?

JACK: Well you need to ask the FBI. It was signed off by the FBI director. I can only quote the FBI folks -- will give in response to that question and I've done a couple public appearances with Joe Riley who was the lead agent on this case and who actually wrote the afterword for my book. And his answer was, "Mr. Barsky was a whole lot more valuable to us cooperating than in jail. He would cost us money there and we wouldn't have gotten out of him what we got and that was valuable to us," and that's

the answer. Now some people don't like that answer but I'm sorry, it is what it is and these are the facts. You know, I give an addendum to that answer. You're familiar with the Witness Protection Program --

JORDAN: Yeah.

JACK: We don't know how many killers are in the Witness Protection Program but I'm willing to bet you there are because let's say, for instance, that in a situation like the mafia, if you can turn one of the guys and you can catch 10, but in return, you put him in a Witness Protection Program and give him a new ID, as long as you know that this person can't be a danger to others. That happens. This is a tough choice that the legal system in this country makes all the time.

JORDAN: Incredible. And I mean, I have no problem with it. I assume they asked you about operational procedures, they probably looked at the crimes that you have done and thought, "Okay so he reported on how insurance companies work in the United States. I think we can get over that in exchange for looking at your crypto-technology, the frequencies where they talked to you, other people you might know who live here, what those people look like," that information seems much more valuable.

JACK: Yeah operational stuff and also just knowledge that there was no additional threat that lead back to me. Because in those days, both the FBI and the CIA were smarting because there were a couple of moles in both organizations. And when they originally heard about me -- that I was buried deep undercover, which is a rarity to begin with -- there was some thought that I still might be running an agent within the United States government. And knowing that I didn't -- that was helpful too.

JORDAN: Right sure, of course, they've got to explore all those threads. You mentioned that you've spoken in public with the FBI agent who caught you. What's that relationship like? I mean he must know a lot about you because he studied you for months, and

months, and months, and watched you for months and months ostensibly, before he caught you. What's that relationship like?

JACK: Well at one point I said to him, I said, "You know more about me than I remember," because the debriefing process was extremely meticulous. It went into everything: what I remember about childhood, personality, people that I grew up with -- I mean it was six weeks intense, if not every night but every other night. And you know, they took notes, and I don't know how thick that folder is. We got to know each other. We played a little golf together and then we played a lot of golf together. And he's now the godfather for my last child.

JORDAN: This is incredible because this is a man who, if things hadn't gone so smoothly, would gladly have put you in jail for the rest of your life or --

JACK: Absolutely.

JORDAN: -- traded you back to Moscow, which would have been a death sentence and now he's your daughter's godfather. And you play golf.

JACK: And this has proved to me that, you know, just because a person belongs to another group that may be hostile towards the group that you belong to, that doesn't mean that they're bad. There's a whole lot of good in people who you think are your enemies. Here's another example. I have a good friend who is my age. He spent some time in Vietnam -- active combat duty. At a time when we were protesting the war and we knew that the war was evil and the war was an unjust war and was proof that America was bad. Nevermind whether the war was good or bad but if they had called me into the army and possibly fight on behalf of North Vietnam, I would have exchanged bullets with this guy and he's a good friend. Think about, you know, attaching yourself to a group, particularly a group that is ideologically motivated and hostile towards other groups. Most likely, you're not going to be yourself. You're going to give up part of yourself because you're not subject to judgement of

others' groupthink. That's one of the things, you know, I'd like to tell young people. Don't lose yourself, don't lose your sense of self as part of a group. Don't ever forget who you are.

JORDAN: Interesting advice from somebody who's been many people.

JACK: Well, that was probably one of the most astute comments I've heard in the many interviews I've given -- made me laugh. You're right but so what else is new? And you know, my life has been a set of contradictions. Here's another one, you caught me.

JORDAN: Now, coming from the inside, what do you think about Putin, former KGB, being the head of Russia?

JACK: This is all a series of educated guesses and then you draw your conclusion. There is no doubt that the ranks of the KGB during the times of the Soviet Union was populated by the elite of Soviet society. They recruited from the top universities and a lot of these jobs were coveted jobs, particularly the ones that allowed you to travel. So Putin was part of that elite. He actually resigned from the KGB but that was after the Soviet Union collapsed, before the KGB was officially dissolved and then he started a political career. Now, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the wealth of the country -- both material wealth as well as power -- was distributed in some way. And the ones that had a significant advantage were the elite. The elite were -- a lot of them were KGB and they wound up getting a big piece of the pie, both as, you know, became oligarchs and super rich people or became prominent politicians. And who beat all of those infighters and successful people out for the top job? Vladimir Putin. Now, that tells you one thing: Don't ever underestimate him and don't ever think he's your friend. Don't ever trust what he's saying because he's all about himself. I cannot say anything else because I don't know this guy and very few people do.

JORDAN: Yeah. Well he was KGB and he was stationed in East Germany, so maybe -- maybe you did cross paths with him, you never know.

JACK: I know in East Germany, not too far away where I grew up but that was at the same time I was here. So we didn't cross paths. Maybe a friend of mine or two met him in some way, who knows?

JORDAN: Who knows? Oh, wow, this is phenomenal. Jack, thank you so, so much  
(German audio) this was phenomenal.

All right, Jason, final verdict on Jack Barsky. What do you think?

JASON: Dude, how awesome is it that he can take the guy that busted him and turn him into the godfather of his children?

JORDAN: You know I didn't even think about that. The skill level involved -- this is a counterspy, right? It's not some shmoe FBI guy. He's counterintelligence. They both have similar skills. How did that even happen? That's a whole different show. How do you turn the guy who's chasing you down, ready to throw you in jail, turn him into your buddy who you play golf with all the time, godfather of your grandkid -- this guy has magic skills.

JASON: He is a super spy ninja.

JORDAN: No wonder they wanted him back. They knew what they had. I mean, come on, unbelievable. Great big thank you to Jack Barsky. The book title [Deep Undercover](#), of course that will be linked up in the show notes for this episode. If you enjoyed this, which I know you did, I'd love to hear your number one takeaway from Jack Barsky. I'm @theartofcharm on Twitter. As usual, we'll be replying to your questions and feedback for Jack in Fan Mail Friday. And remember, if you're looking for the show notes, you can tap your phone screen. And unless you're using Spotify, they should pop right up. I want to encourage you to join us in the AoC challenge at [theartofcharm.com/challenge](http://theartofcharm.com/challenge) or you can text 'AOC,' that's A-O-C to 38470.

The challenge -- it's about improving your networking and connection skills and inspiring those around you, such as the counterintelligence agency, who's chasing you down to put you in prison, how to develop a personal and professional relationship with you. The challenge is free, it's unisex, it's designed for all y'all and a lot of people don't know that but that's the idea. It's a fun way to get the ball rolling and get some forward momentum on these skills. I can't promise you you'll be Jack Barsky by the end of it, but you'll be damn close, hows that?

We'll also email you our fundamentals Toolbox that I mentioned earlier in the show, which includes some great practical stuff, ready to apply, right out of the box. You know we like the practicals here. We're going to teach you how to read body language, have some charismatic nonverbal communication, at least more charismatic than you've got now. We'll teach you the science of attraction, some negotiation techniques, networking and influence strategies, persuasion tactics, and everything else that 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](http://theartofcharm.com/challenge) or text AOC to 38470, that's AOC to 38470. For full show notes for this and all previous episodes, head on over to [theartofcharm.com/podcast](http://theartofcharm.com/podcast).

This episode was produced by Jason DeFillippo. Jason Sanderson is our audio engineer and editor. Show notes on the website are by Robert Fogarty, theme music by Little People, transcriptions by [TranscriptionOutsourcing.net](http://TranscriptionOutsourcing.net) -- I'm your host Jordan Harbinger, love me or hate me, don't care. 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 your friends and share the show with your enemies and share the show with counterintelligence chasing you around the country. Stay charming and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.





