

AFTERWORD

BY SPECIAL AGENT JOE REILLY, FBI (RETIRED)

I FIRST “MET” JACK BARSKY IN THE SUMMER OF 1993. We were about five hundred yards apart across a verdant meadow of wildflowers, weeds, and grasses in a little valley awash with hawks, doves, jays, woodpeckers, and other winged creatures. He was on the other end of my field glasses, working in his backyard.

I was pretending to be a bird-watcher, but I was actually a special agent with the FBI, and Jack Barsky was a deep-cover secret agent sent to the US by the Soviet Union. By then, he had been operating on American soil for more than ten years, and we were anxious to find out what he was up to. Was he running a spy ring, stealing secrets of scientific, political, or military value? We had to find out.

I positioned myself alongside a little-used dirt road on a hill overlooking Jack’s home. From this vantage point, I had a good view of his modest two-story country house, which sat on two acres of green lawn. After setting up a cheap folding table and covering it with books on ornithology, I set my chair in just the right spot, took out my field glasses from their case, and watched “the birds.” Few cars ever passed, and no one ever inquired about what I was doing.

I followed this routine, intermittently, on weekends and holidays during the warm months of summer and fall. Though I saw an abundance of birds much more often than I saw Jack and his family, I learned a great deal about the Barskys. I knew when Jack would be home, and I wanted to get a better read on this mysterious and sinister person.

Our surveillance team had followed him to and from work and to other places, but I wanted to know more about the man himself. What kind of person was he? I knew that someday we were going to arrest him and try to recruit him to work for us. I wanted to be in the best position to overcome any resistance on his part.

I was surprised by what I learned from just watching him. He worked hard in his yard, planting trees and shrubs. He did most of his own landscaping with some help from his wife and his young daughter. On hot days, they swam in their aboveground pool. He also had a two- or three-year-old boy, who also played in the grass and splashed in the pool.

Barsky seemed quite attached to his children. He often stopped working to play with them. In the evening, he taught his daughter how to play basketball in their driveway. He seemed to be patient and understanding. Often, after a long day of activity, he would emerge from his house wearing jogging clothes and run five miles through the countryside. At first, we followed him, very discreetly, to be sure he wasn't meeting anyone or engaging in nefarious activities. He wasn't. In those early months of our investigation, I came to believe that Barsky loved his children, but his relationship with his wife was perfunctory, if not downright cold. In time, these observations proved to be true.

Our investigation during the many months that followed revealed that Barsky was an energetic, focused, and intelligent man who would do well in almost any undertaking, except perhaps diplomacy. He was advancing quickly at his job and was well liked and respected. An ideal spy! But what was he actually doing for the Russians, or what had he been doing for them? We were well aware that the KGB's internal operations were in disarray after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but how did this affect Barsky? Was he still receiving instructions, or had he been put in sleeper mode?

Months turned into years of investigation and surveillance. At one point, we even purchased the house next door to the Barsky's to better observe him. We saw nothing to indicate that he was still active. I became convinced that if we arrested him he would cooperate. He seemed to be thoroughly Americanized. He continued to make progress at his job, and he had close friends. He seemed comfortable in his home

and loved his children. I did not believe he would give up all of this and go to prison out of devotion to a bankrupt ideology and a failed state. But FBI headquarters did not agree, and the investigation dragged on.

The Justice Department (DOJ) became another source of delay. Their lawyers refused to support our efforts to place listening devices in Barsky's home. We wanted to know for sure whether his wife was involved with his spying operations. She had entered the US from South America, and her past life was clouded. The DOJ refused to support us because we could not show that our spy was actually spying. They readily accepted that he was a Soviet agent who was in the US illegally, and that he was using the identity of a deceased American child to further his mission. But because we couldn't provide evidence that he was currently spying, they wanted to protect his "constitutional rights."

If this sounds bizarre to you, I'm glad. It certainly did to me and my team. In fact, I got the distinct impression during a contentious meeting one time in Washington, DC, that some of the lawyers at the DOJ considered the FBI to be a greater threat to the US than Jack Barsky or the KGB. Finally, after the FBI director intervened on our behalf, common sense prevailed. The Justice Department supported our petition to the court based on FISA—the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. We were immediately authorized to conduct electronic surveillance.

On a weekend when we knew that Jack and his family were away, we entered the house and placed microphones in the kitchen and family room. This was expertly done and the bugs were never found. Within weeks, a conversation in the kitchen between Barsky and his wife, Penelope, broke the case open. She was not happy to be married to a man who was not what he pretended to be. He was asking her to understand his position. At first, he couldn't tell her who he really was or where he was from. He was in constant danger of being arrested as a spy or "silenced" by the KGB for deserting them. This told us a great deal, and we finally received authorization to pick him up.

My personal relationship with Jack Barsky began with his arrest. Well, technically we didn't arrest him. We simply detained him until we were certain that he would cooperate with us—which he did, completely. During the weeks and months of his debriefing by a team of intelligence experts, Barsky and I became friends. He is, indeed, a fascinating

man, who as a young man embarked on what he believed would be a great adventure—an adventure that rendered all other human concerns secondary. As his devotion to Marx and Lenin faded and the world of human love could no longer be suppressed, Jack Barsky the spy became Jack Barsky the human being, and his world became more complicated and painful, full of regrets, hurtful memories, and doubts about the future. A lesser person would have fallen apart under the weight of it. Failed marriages, abandoned children, lost causes, financial uncertainty—all the detritus of a spy's life—failed to crush an inner spark of optimism that continues to drive Jack toward the next new chapter in his life.

Jack Barsky's old life, growing up in postwar Germany surrounded by physical and spiritual destruction, was filled with the gospel of Marx and Lenin. According to this new religion, a brave new world would be built on the ashes of the old. The previous generation of young Germans had worshiped at the altar of National Socialism. Jack's generation prayed to the gods of international Communism. There were no other choices, and like most of his friends, Jack was no heretic. As he and I talked about many things over the years, we discovered that life, like the waves of the ocean, has a way of wearing down the sharp edges of early beliefs until only the bright coral remains—at least, for those who have eyes to see it. Jack Barsky is a man who will never stop looking.

This book takes you through many adventures and reveals much about the world of the Cold War. But the most interesting parts are about the man himself. Flawed though he is, and scarred by many of life's cuts, he soldiers on without complaint, trying to be responsible, trying to do the right thing. It is a great irony, but nonetheless true, that our country could use more people like Jack Barsky.