



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on June 22, 1998

## From Tyranny to Liberty

Barbara and Michael Geldner (shown) of Redgranite, Wisconsin, are warm and charming people who have devoted their lives to serving others. As physicians they have ministered to thousands of grateful patients. And as living witnesses to the horrors of totalitarian socialism, they provide an equally valuable service to humanity at large.



The 20th century's distinctive political invention is totalitarianism. Political scientist R.J. Rummel, the world's leading expert on the dismal science of "democide," estimates that in this century at least 170 million people have been slaughtered by government. Totalitarianism's body count has the effect of numbing human perceptions; this is why the individual testimonies of Michael and Barbara are so valuable. For them the evil of the total state is not a bloodless abstraction residing harmlessly in the pages of scholarly texts; it is an experience etched into their bodies, their memories, and their very souls.

But the Geldners have a God-given gift that they are eager to share with others: the indomitable desire for liberty which helped them surmount the horrors they have experienced. Having experienced the most refined cruelties devised by the imagination of despotism, they have a unique perspective on the fragility of human freedom, and have devoted themselves to the freedom fight with a zeal that few can match.

Ever since he was hospitalized for an appendectomy at six years old, Michael Geldner wanted to be a surgeon. "I fell in love with the hospital, the nurses, the doctors, and I knew I must be a surgeon," Michael explained to THE NEW AMERICAN. His strong interest in medicine carried through to his studies, and he entered the University of Warsaw Medical School in his native Poland in the fall of 1939. But on September 1, 1939, Nazi dictator Adolph Hitler launched an unprovoked invasion of Poland. Two weeks later, Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin launched an undeclared war against Poland from the east. Within days, all of Poland had been conquered and the land divided up between Hitler and Stalin. Warsaw fell within the Nazi zone of control, and Hitler closed all of the secondary schools and universities in Poland.

Though his hopes for a medical education had been dashed for the moment, Michael resolved to stay close to medicine and quickly found work as an orderly in the city hospital. From a patient who had family in Eastern Poland, he learned that Stalin had not closed down the universities in the Soviet zone



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of Poland.

A bold and dangerous thought soon crept into the Michael's mind, a decision borne of youthful innocence and fervent zeal for an education. The young, would-be doctor resolved to smuggle himself into Stalin's sector of Poland and get admitted to the medical school at Lvov. Against the strong urgings of his family, Michael contracted with a group of professional smugglers in November 1939. They got him across the border and provided forged identity papers and the necessary documentation for admission to the medical school in Lvov.

The first thing Michael noticed upon arrival was that the whole tone of life in eastern Poland had already shifted toward militant atheism, which did not sit well with Michael's devout Catholic faith. Though not particularly interested in politics at that time in his life, Michael found communism intensely distasteful, and, he recalls, "I probably was outspoken." It was not long before he heard the dreaded knock on his door in the middle of the night.

Michael was hauled off to the local Soviet NKVD (forerunner to the KGB) headquarters and "interrogated" for two weeks — meaning that his all-day questioning was interspersed with punches, slaps in the face, and other intimidation tactics. His ring finger was broken during one interrogation session. "A number of times, they accused me of being a spy for the Nazis," Michael recalls. The NKVD officials knew just about everything about Michael: when he was smuggled across the border from German-occupied Poland, what safehouses he stayed at along the way, the names of the smugglers, and the fact that his identity papers had been forged. "I had a feeling that, when I was arrested they knew too much about me," Michael explains, noting that he believed the smugglers were working with the Soviets, the Nazis, or possibly even both of these allied parties.

Michael was informed by the NKVD that a three-judge panel had found him guilty of violating Article 58, section 10 of the Soviet penal code. He had not been brought before a court or received a trial, but he was assured that a proceeding had taken place and that he had been duly sentenced to ten years of "corrective labor" in the Siberian gulag for engaging in "anti-Soviet activity" and "agitation against the Soviet State." "And shortly after," Michael told THE NEW AMERICAN, "I was on my way to Siberia."

"It was a starvation diet," Michael recalls, "and we were very poorly clothed for the climate; many died." During the fratricidal war between erstwhile allies Hitler and Stalin, Michael resigned himself to working 12-hour days "from six in the morning to six at night, and I had this little cabbage or this little gruel every day." Michael had been sent to Poyma, a logging camp on the West Siberian plain. The name Poyma means "wet meadow." Most of the prisoners took the name Poyma to be a cruel joke, since this "wet" meadow was frozen solid eight months of the year. Michael and his fellow prisoners did not look forward to the summer, however, "because of swamps and bugs, mainly mosquitoes and black flies, that nearly drove us insane." He recalls that he was "always very, very tired" at the end of the day, and contracted typhus from lice that was epidemic among the prisoners at the camp. Typhus was marked by an extremely high fever, delusions, and temporary hair loss, and many prisoners lost their sanity from bouts with the disease. Michael recited Latin, German, and Polish poems he had learned in grade school in order to retain his wits and his sanity during his fever.

Prisoners at the camp were dehumanized. Religious services and Bibles were forbidden in the prison system of the atheistic Motherland. "You see, we didn't have names. We had numbers," Michael explains. "I was number 1519ZK. And I had this on my head [cap] and on my chest and on my back." Prisoners were called by their number, and they were never directly spoken to by the commandant. "This commandant of the camp never talked to prisoners unless one was sentenced to die or was



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supposed to be punished in some very, very unpleasant way,” Michael emphasizes.

Then one day, five years into his sentence, Michael’s number was called and he was ordered to the *commandantura’s* office. He had just returned from a long, hard day of logging in the woods, and “when I heard this, I remember that my legs gave out because I felt that it was the end of the road for me.”

Escorted by the political officer, Michael entered the commandant’s office. The commandant did not look up, but took a file folder from the political officer. “He just looked at the file and said to me, ‘Go, you are free.’” Michael did not know what to say, but he did know enough not to ask the commandant what he meant. “When after five years you hear, ‘Go, you are free,’ first you ask yourself, ‘What do you mean?’ You don’t ask the commandant questions. You don’t have the right to ask questions. You don’t know what to do. What was meant by saying ‘go’? Go where? Second, ‘You are free.’ What do you mean by ‘free’?” Michael didn’t know what to do, “so I went back to the barracks and explained to my friends who were working there at the camp.”

The next day Michael was called to the *commandantura* and given a slip so that he could leave the camp. He had been released in a general amnesty of Polish prisoners for Soviet propaganda purposes. Stalin had carried his war against Hitler to Polish soil by that time, and was looking to gain a propaganda initiative over the Germans among the native population. More importantly, the Soviet dictator had agreed to demands by his new British and American allies that Poland should be freed after the war and allowed to hold free elections. The amnesty served to give a false impression that Stalin would allow Poland to be returned to its pre-war independence.

Leaving the gulag was more difficult than most people would think. Even people with a strong religious faith and a fervent desire for productive work are impacted by years of dehumanizing propaganda and cruel imprisonment. Leaving the security of a meager ration of gruel and a daily work regimen — where at least one knows what each day will bring — for an unknown was more than a little frightening for Michael. As he walked out of the camp gate, he was still more than 2,000 miles inside the Soviet Union. No transportation had been provided for him to get back to Poland and he didn’t have a clue as to how he would get there. And in any event, he knew Poland was a blood-drenched war zone contested by two of history’s worst tyrants. What did it really matter that he was free? Perhaps, he thought for a moment, it would be better to stay in the security of the camp. “I did not know what to do with myself. I would rather stay in the camp,” he recalled.

Michael quickly realized that it was pointless for him to stay in Siberia. The thought of home and family soon drummed out the feeling of hopelessness and he was on his way across the Russian countryside. It took three months to make his way back home. Intermittently, he had to stop to earn food money by doing odd jobs for Russian war widows or by begging a job at a Kolkhoz or Sovhoz (Soviet agricultural collectives). Along the way, he learned that the war had ended and he soon resolved to pursue his dream of becoming a surgeon.

In the office of the dean of admissions of the University of Warsaw medical school in the fall of 1946, Michael met Barbara Janiszewska. Michael told her about his gulag experiences, and he listened to Barbara’s own difficult ordeal.

Barbara was born into the Catholic gentry of Poland. Her father was a chief cartographer in the Polish Department of Defense, and held the rank of brigadier general. He fought the Bolsheviks when they attacked Poland in 1920, but died of natural causes shortly before the Nazi/Communist invasions of 1939.



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Barbara's brother had been a pilot and officer in the Polish Air Force. He joined the British Royal Air Force after the defeat of Poland and was killed during the Battle of Britain. Barbara's mother was a supervisory nurse at the University Hospital in Warsaw, from whom Barbara acquired a strong fascination with medicine.

Barbara had just one year of schooling to finish before she could apply to medical school. When the Nazis invaded Warsaw, Barbara's school was closed down and she enrolled in a cooking school. According to Nazi ideology, Slavic peoples were incapable of learning the higher arts. The Nazis saw trade schools as a more appropriate mode of study for an *untermenschen*. But the schools reopened in the underground, and Barbara was able to complete her final year of secondary school. Many other Polish organizations entered the underground resistance, and so did Poland's scouting organization, in which Barbara had long been active. Scouting had been banned by the Nazi and Communist occupiers, both of whom had their own youth organizations which would have had to compete with the Catholic-dominated Polish scouts. Barbara was among the many scouts who joined the Polish Home Army, the underground resistance.

The Nazi occupation under which Barbara and her fellow countrymen suffered was marked by the absence of all leniency. While the Soviets massacred 5,000 officers of the captured Polish army in the Katyn Forest, Hitler's National Socialists also set about the task of eliminating the *intelligencia* — those persons with leadership qualities who had the potential to challenge Nazi dominance over the nation. The Nazis murdered 50 randomly selected intellectuals daily, posting their names in the public square in order to foster the appropriate level of terror and fear of their regime of pagan totalitarianism. Most Polish intellectuals — doctors, writers, poets, lawyers, and army officers — of pre-war Poland did not survive the Nazi occupation.

And it was not long before the streets of Warsaw heard whisperings about a camp called "Auschwitz" in the industrial town of Oswięcim, 35 miles west of Krakow in southern Poland. Originally a forced labor camp, in 1943 Auschwitz added gas chambers and crematoria designed for extermination. "Everyone knew about Auschwitz," Barbara Geldner recalled to THE NEW AMERICAN. "Everyone knew about the murder." Underground sympathizers scrawled, "We will avenge Auschwitz!" on the walls everywhere in Warsaw as early as 1941, although it is likely that few were aware of the scale of the murder committed there and in other extermination camps which the Nazis had installed inside Poland.

Before the Nazis were stopped, they had killed an estimated four million Poles, about three million of them Jews. An estimated 11 million civilians — about six million of them Jews by faith or ethnicity — died either in Nazi prison camps or were exterminated where they lived at the hands of the S.S. *Einsatzgruppen*.

On April 8, 1943 Barbara arrived at a clandestine meeting in the Warsaw apartment of one of her friends, and the Gestapo was there waiting for her. Only four people were told of the meeting — her three girlfriends and the mother who was hosting the meeting. The Gestapo simply waited for the four to show up at the apartment and arrested them all. Much later, the girls guessed that the Gestapo had found out about the meeting by tapping the telephone line. The three girls, the mother, and the Gestapo agents waited in that apartment in silence all day, just in case more might show up. At the end of the day, a car pulled up to the apartment and took all four away. Barbara and her friends arrived at the local Gestapo headquarters, but were immediately transferred to Pawiak, an ancient prison in the middle of what had become the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw. From her prison cell in Pawiak, Barbara could hear the commotion of the Ghetto Uprising of the Jews against the Nazis.



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Several weeks later, Barbara was summoned to Gestapo headquarters for questioning. Driving through the Warsaw Ghetto in a truck with six armed guards, Barbara got a clear view of the devastation that was being exacted upon her fellow countrymen. "The view was terrible," Barbara recalled to THE NEW AMERICAN. "The ghetto was destroyed, house after house, and it was just heartbreaking."

A single Gestapo officer with an SS military-style uniform questioned her in a room alone. He casually slapped his riding crop against his polished leather boots during questioning, making an intimidating impression upon young Barbara. "I was just looking sideways, wondering what he was planning to do." But Barbara suffered no physical harm during questioning at Gestapo headquarters, unlike the torture Michael had endured several years earlier at the hands of the NKVD. She stuck to her story, that she was simply a student at a cooking school, and was returned by the Gestapo to Paviak.

Barbara was taken from Paviak on May 13th and shipped to Auschwitz, which she called "organized hell." The new crematoria and gas chambers were just about to become active as she arrived. Barbara was selected for the women's labor camp at Auschwitz. Her head was shaved and she was issued a prisoner uniform with the letter "P" stitched inside a red triangle (the code for political prisoners). Next, her left forearm was tattooed with the number 44728. She was assigned work emptying garbage cans throughout the camp. Within a month, she contracted typhus and was sent to the camp infirmary, which was staffed by doctors who were prisoners themselves. Barbara stayed in the little camp infirmary for four months, and began getting packages of food sent from home. These helped her to regain her strength.

After being released from the infirmary, Barbara was sent to work in the fields outside of camp near the *krematoria*. Unlike the hard labor camps of Stalin, where Michael had labored all day clear-cutting the forests of the Siberian taiga for the greater glory of socialism, work in Hitler's camp was more of an activity to keep the dead and dying busy. Barbara explains, "They told us to rake the ground and get the stones and push them away. No one really paid attention to how much work we were doing. And no one really told us to hurry up, or beat us up, or anything like that." But like Stalin's atheistic socialism, the paganism of the Nazi Party was becoming more and more evident.

Bibles were prohibited in the camps, as were all books. Religious services of any kind were also forbidden in the camp. Although the Nazi Party had used long-standing friction between Christian and Jewish religious communities as a wedge to rise to power, there was little sympathy and much antipathy towards Christianity in the upper echelons of the Nazi Party hierarchy. The Christian Bible was disparaged early by the Nazis, especially the Old Testament, which was considered an inferior Jewish text.

Catholic Archbishop of Munich Michael von Faulhaber protested such Nazi attacks, writing: "When racial research ... makes war upon religion and attacks the foundations of Christianity; when antagonism to the Jews of the present day is extended to the sacred books of the Old Testament and Christianity is condemned because it has relations of origin with pre-Christian Judaism; when stones are cast at the Person of our Lord and Savior, and this in the very year which we are celebrating the centenary of His work of Redemption, then the bishop cannot remain silent." In protest of the Nazi attack on the Old Testament, Faulhaber preached on Christ in the Old Testament in his sermons throughout the Christmas season. By 1942 Reich leader Martin Bormann, who served as chief of staff of Hitler's Chancellery, circulated among National Socialist (Nazi) Party leaders a letter plainly stating that "National Socialist and Christian concepts are incompatible." Bormann stated that Nazi Party officials had come to the conclusion that "the evangelical church opposes us with the same hostility as



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the Catholic Church. Any strengthening of the evangelical church would merely work against us.” Bormann emphasized that “it must be made absolutely impossible for the Church to exercise its old influence” and suggested that Christianity would eventually find itself “suppressed by the state.”

Barbara’s personal experience was in keeping with the general tone of hostility toward God in the Nazi regime. She recalls: “There was no discussion of religion in the camp. No one discussed religion, no one talked about it.” It was not that people in the camp were not religiously minded — Barbara certainly was — but there was always fear of German reprisals against the prisoners. The code of silence in the camp was designed to protect everyone, Jew and Gentile alike.

Omnipresent at Auschwitz, Barbara recalls, was “the smell of burning bodies” from the crematoria. From the fields, sometimes at close range and other times at a distance, Barbara could see trainloads of new victims coming into Auschwitz. The routine was nearly always the same. The train would stop. The people would file out, watched by armed guards and attack dogs. And the empty trains would pull away. A few pre-selected younger and stronger people were called out and separated from those who were destined for the gas chambers. These younger and stronger ones would show up at camp a few hours later to replace workers who had died of starvation or disease, while the masses — often entire families — would be marched to the gas chamber.

Barbara recalls the innocence with which some of the victims approached their demise and the brazenness of the camp officials in parading the victims before the laborers of the camp. One day, the camp had just finished roll call and the inmates were still standing at attention near the crematoria, when a train pulled up. Barbara recalled to THE NEW AMERICAN: “They were from Romania or Hungary. Strong, big people carrying a big copper kettle. And they said, ‘We are going to work.’ And then they went straight into the crematoria. And by the door was standing this physician, and he was standing by the big door with charm inviting them in.” That physician was Dr. Joseph Mengele, the so-called “Angel of Death,” and he stood not more than 20 feet from Barbara. No one in the camp dared to say anything to warn the new arrivals of their imminent demise, since it would have meant their own immediate deaths as well.

Soon trains were arriving so frequently that even the high-capacity crematoria ovens could not burn the bodies quickly enough. The Nazis dug huge pits outside the camp grounds to burn the excess bodies. Barbara saw the pits and the fires that illuminated from them, and with the increasingly frequent arrivals of trainloads of prisoners, she did not have to guess about their purpose.

In the labor camp, food was sparse. The rations were designed to starve prisoners slowly, but Barbara and her fellow prisoners found some relief in the fact that “some were getting packages from abroad, like the packages I was getting from my mother until she stopped working. Some Jewish girls were from Czechoslovakia. They were there much longer than I was, and their numbers [on their forearms] were much smaller than mine. They were still there. They were getting packages from the Red Cross, packages with some kind of sprouts, sardines, and some biscuits. So this was an inflow of some food.” Barbara’s packages from her mother stopped coming in the early summer of 1944, and times were leaner from then on.

As the Russian army closed in on Poland at the end of 1944, the Nazis made the decision to phase out Auschwitz and to shift the prisoners to camps inside Germany. On January 6, 1945, Barbara boarded a train with several hundred other prisoners and was sent to the camp at Bergen-Belzen, which was located in Western Germany near Hannover. Many froze to death on the trip, which they made with no extra provision of clothing in open air cars during the dead of winter.



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Although Bergen-Belzen was not an extermination camp like Auschwitz, Barbara personally found the conditions much worse than they had been at Auschwitz. Food was rare, water supplies were cut off regularly, and the brutality of the guards was severe. “In Auschwitz, there was still a little of something,” Barbara recalls. “In Bergen-Belzen there was no food. It was half of a cup of something similar to soup with nothing in it.”

A round of typhus and dysentery spread throughout the camp. As more prisoners arrived every week from camps on the fringes of the shrinking German Reich, camp commandant Josef Kramer went through the motions of writing a request that more food rations be sent to the camp. Once his letter was rebuffed by the Nazi leadership and the military, Kramer simply threw up his hands as the prisoners under his charge died from starvation and disease. Kramer had earlier served as a supervisory officer at Auschwitz. He confessed at the Nuremberg trials that he personally turned on the gas at the first test of the chambers at Auschwitz. Eighty Jewish women were killed in that test, but Kramer claimed that he was not at fault because he was only following the orders of commandant Rudolph Hoess.

Kramer made no effort, however, to tame the brutality of his guards — a brutality that worsened with the approach of the allied forces. One day after a particularly long roll call, the prisoners were ordered to go back to the barracks quickly. Recalls Barbara, “I was already an experienced prisoner, so I got back quickly and was sitting on the top of the bed. There were three levels of beds; I always slept at the top. And I looked through the hole [in the wall] and I saw people come. And there was one who didn’t have the strength to go faster — but she was moving. So this young man, this young German soldier, shouted at her, ‘*Schnell! Schnell!*’ And maybe ten feet from the barracks, he drew his gun and he shot her in the head.... And my mouth just dropped.”

A few hours after the incident, which occurred on April 15, 1945, British soldiers entered the camp and liberated the prisoners. Barbara laments the unnecessary death because of what might have been. “If I had known that she was so sick, if I had known her, if she was closer,” Barbara thinks back. “Everyone had some friend around. You would never go by yourself. I would have grabbed her somehow, with another one, and somehow we would have helped her in.”

The British liberators found a huge pile of unburied dead and rotting corpses in the camp. The bodies, Barbara remembers, were “piled up to the sky. It was higher than the top of our barracks.” Barbara and the others were given medication for their dysentery and directed to “special quarters, which were clean with new linens, with bathrooms and showers for a little while. And after a while we contacted a [Polish] army representative in the Netherlands.”

With help from the London-based Polish army, Barbara was able to enroll in the Medical School of the Catholic University at Louvain in Belgium in the fall of 1945. There she was also able to attend mass and receive the sacraments of the Catholic Church for the first time since her arrest by the Gestapo two years earlier.

After a year, she transferred to the University of Warsaw School of Medicine and was reunited with her widowed mother. Michael was also admitted as a sophomore at the medical school of the University of Warsaw that year, and the two first met in the office of the dean of admissions in the fall of 1946. A measure of freedom was allowed in Poland after the war, but the complete takeover of Poland by Stalin’s communists in 1947 ended any freedom won by post-war promises of free elections.

After 1947, the repression began in earnest. Barbara and Michael kept their mouths closed and finished school, marrying shortly after graduating in 1950. Michael’s studies continued to neurosurgery and



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Barbara specialized in ophthalmology.

Although the Geldners were both skilled professionals, the Stalinist sychophants who ran Poland looked with disfavor on their steadfast refusal to join the Communist Party, and their failure to recite Party propaganda. Michael explains that “if you are in a labor camp and you are in the Soviet sphere of influence, they don’t like you. They don’t believe you are a person whom they could trust. They didn’t trust Barbara, and they didn’t trust me.”

The two were discriminated against in their apartment accommodations. Recalls Barbara: “All we lived in was a one bedroom apartment. We shared a kitchen with another family. It would have been easy for us to say, ‘Well, we want to be members of the Party,’ and have better accommodations, a better apartment. No.”

The Geldners were held up to constant communist scrutiny in their personal affairs and treated to an increasing barrage of petty harassment. Michael notes that the fear of openly expressing their opinions “was really terrible. I could talk to you but I was really apprehensive, because I didn’t know if you were carrying a microphone or whatever. When we had three people in the room, even friends, forget about it.” It was not long before the Geldners decided to flee Poland when they had the chance.

The chance came in 1956, when Michael’s old university professor recommended Michael for a two-year stint in Israel, which was in need of neurosurgeons. But the Communist Party told Michael that he would have to go to Israel alone and leave his wife and baby daughter behind. The Geldners had indeed, as the communists suspected, already planned to flee Poland and emigrate to the United States as soon as possible. Michael made it clear that he would not go to Israel without his family and — after more than a year of back-and-forth on the issue — the Polish government finally allowed Michael to go to Israel with his family in October 1957.

Their first stop out of the airport in Tel Aviv was the U.S. embassy, where they applied for asylum as political prisoners who had escaped communist tyranny in Poland. The U.S. government refused their application for asylum because they were already in a free country, Israel, and no longer in Poland. But the Israeli government was kind enough to extend their Israeli visas while the Geldners waited five years to get permission to emigrate to the United States.

Barbara and Michael Geldner were drawn to the United States for two reasons. One was the opportunities it offered them to make the most of their skill and hard work. But there was another more important reason. “It was the freedom,” explains Michael. “It’s strange what I will say to you. But when I heard that people in America can carry guns, I said, ‘Lord, here are people who can carry guns, who are so free that they are not afraid of government.’ In Poland, if you had a gun, it was ten years in prison without being in a court a day. Do you understand me? After 1947, when somebody found a gun in your possession or in your home, you got ten years without being in a court. It was automatic.”

Life in the U.S. was not easy at first for the new immigrants. They could not practice medicine until they passed special certification exams for foreign physicians, exams they would need to take in English — a new language for them. Michael recalls, “It was very, very difficult. You see, some people feel that when you come to America, there is gold on the streets. It is not true. You need to work very, very hard. We were studying every night until 2:00 in the morning. And then early in the morning at 6:00 I was already on the train from our residence in Edison, New Jersey to the New York University Medical Center in New York.”

Observes Michael, “This is one thing about this country that people do not understand — if you want to





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do something, you can do it, and you can prosper. It is not easy, but it is the only country in the world where you can do that. It is something very special.” Michael is disturbed that among the native-born of his adopted country, “there are people who are taking this for granted.” Michael and Barbara certainly do not. When the Geldners explained the threat of totalitarian socialism to their new American friends in New York, they were met with a most depressing reaction. “With whomever I was talking, they were always saying ‘you are paranoid,’” Michael explains. The Geldners were labeled “McCarthyites” and “Red baiters” by many native-born Americans. “Having spent 16 years under communist rule, five of those in Stalin’s forced labor camp in Siberia,” notes Michael, “I see communism not as an abstraction, but as a personal enemy.”

Michael has long been an active letter writer to local newspapers, and both Geldners are avid readers of THE NEW AMERICAN. But before the Geldners found THE NEW AMERICAN, Michael explains, “I was looking for an outlet. I was without air. I wanted to fight communism, but I didn’t know how I could do this.”

In the mid-1980s a local member of the John Birch Society noticed Michael’s frequent letters in the local newspaper, called Michael, and asked to meet with him about joining the John Birch Society. He met with Michael at his clinic in Neenah, Wisconsin (where the family had settled) and within an hour Michael had decided to join. Michael recalls that “the next day I was a member, and Barbara, too. And we enjoy every moment of it.” Barbara was drawn toward the beliefs of the Society, because “it is against socialism, against communism.... It stands for individuality and religion.” After trying for several decades to fight communism and socialism in an effort that at times seemed alone, Barbara also appreciates how the John Birch Society “gets people together.” Michael emphasizes that “we need to have an outlet. The Republican Party doesn’t give you this. We are members of the Republican Party, but that is not enough. It is not ... productive in changing a mind. It is not enough to write a letter to a newspaper.”

Both of the Geldners have now retired from their medical practices, replaced by their two children who followed them in the medical profession. As often as they are able, they continue to do what they can for their country as members of the John Birch Society. “I am so worried about this country,” Michael emphasizes. “I am so worried that people do not understand what they have, and they do not understand what they will lose. And it frightens me, because of our experiences.... It bothers me very much. I have grandchildren. I don’t know the future, but history tends to repeat itself.” And history will repeat itself, unless enough Americans become — as Michael terms it — “productive” in the freedom fight.

*Photo: Drs. Barbara and Michael Geldner*



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