

More than everything you wanted to know about Michael Barton

by Doug Gibboney

Once every thirty weeks, Doctor Michael Barton, smooth-talking smart-dressing college professor, travels the diameter of the earth. The only hitch is all that mileage isn't racked up tunneling from here to China but by riding the rails between Philadelphia and Middletown.

For like fellow Capitol professor Lemuel Molovinsky, Michael Barton commutes daily from Philadelphia. Each morning he leaves his "modest but elegantly furnished" Germantown apartment, gets into his tan 1971 Pontiac and drives down to the station in time to catch the Harrisburg Express.

By 11:35 - if all goes well with Penn-Central - Michael Barton is in Middletown. Briefcase in hand, he hikes to Route 230 and sticks out his thumb.

Like Sisyphus, who was continually rolling rocks up hills, Michael Barton is continually trying to get from the Middletown train station to Capitol Campus.

"I usually watch a dozen students pass me by until I throw myself in front of a car - then they stop. Students must realize when they see old people walking with briefcases on main highways that they are professors who need rides. Students should not pass us up. We are not dangerous."

For that matter, Michael Barton does not even appear dangerous. His manners are polite - though perhaps a bit threatening at test time. He dresses well - like a funeral director at a Playboy Club and his voice... well, his voice is so sincere that you want to buy a used car from him.

In short, he bears a strange psychic resemblance to Dick Cavett and, like Cavett, Michael Barton is a product of Nebraska. He was born in Omaha but after six months moved to Lincoln - "like most people in Omaha would like to do".

For 24 years, he roamed those plains, playing cowboys and Indians and dreaming about becoming a history professor. When it came time to select a college, Michael Barton had "visions of going to Yale but Yale didn't have those same visions although their admissions director flew into town to stare at me for my courage". He attended the University of Nebraska on a handful of scholarships.

As an undergraduate, he was a campus politician and as much of a jock as a 5'7" sociology major could be (intramural paddleball champion). He was also an evangelist.

"I used to be quite religious and, in college, got involved in several fundamentalist youth organizations. There was this sense that I and perhaps a few million other people really knew what was going on in the world. Most of the other people lived in darkness and it was our function to bring the gospel to them.

"Later, after I'd taken several courses on religion,

ethical theory, sociology and so on, I said to myself, 'Fundamentalism is wanting in many respects - at least intellectually'. I had a professor who told me that 'a good religion is one that gives meaning to life's experiences without contradicting the known facts of science'. My childhood faith didn't do that. In retrospect, I'm grateful for having had access to another world view".

Today Michael Barton considers himself an agnostic "so far as orthodox beliefs are concerned". He does, however, remain a reasonably "firm believer in the utility of moral values".

When not campaigning or converting, undergraduate Barton could be heard on a Wednesday night jazz program over the university radio station.

"It was a very informal program. I used to give my friends' names as members of the bands. People who didn't know my friends thought I was being very straight, when I'd say John Unthank was on drums, but back in my fraternity John Unthank was laughing his ass off".

After graduation, Michael Barton continued his study of history and anthropology at the University of Nebraska graduate school. He also married Jane Warnsholz, a girl he met in Spanish class. "We had both been class presidents in high school".

He received his first master's degree and, after receiving the promise of a draft deferment, he joined the Peace Corp. Jane and Michael Barton were sent to the island of Udot in the South Pacific. They were there long enough to take a memorable series of slides (shown upon request - Ed.) before Lyndon Johnson decided they needed Michael Barton in Viet Nam.

"Jane and I considered several options, before returning to the States. I enlisted in the Air Force Pilot Training Program... thought maybe I'd learn how to fly, get some stateside runs, maybe become a steward on Air Force One".

And there was one more reason; recruits who opted out of the training program would only have to serve two years, when every other enlistment option required four.

"I decided very quickly I was not born to fight and fly. I wound up as a clerk at Lackland Air Force Base, which was much like working for the post office except you wore funny clothes".

Life at the Texas air base treated the Bartons well, since Jane was a medical technologist. They visited Mexico twice and generally managed to lead a normal existence. For a time, Michael Barton worked as a disc jockey on a 100,000 watt San Antonio muzak station and later he became a booth announcer for a television station. And then Michael Barton's enlistment was up...

"All in all, we landed on our feet. We managed to use the system even though one has misgivings about doing that at times. I was with people in training who were attorneys and weren't able to use the system as well as I did. Other people I trained with are no doubt dead now because they weren't able to avoid going overseas. They didn't ship me over there because I only had a two year contract."

"It was one of the more embittering experiences of my life. I didn't become totally embittered. It's not really too productive to become too bitter or too cynical. Still, it makes you wary of a lot of things - your government, soldiers of foreign policy..."

After being discharged, Michael Barton continued to pursue the old dream of attending an ivy league school and becoming a professor. The University of Pennsylvania had an excellent program that combined history with anthropology and sociology, so the Bartons headed east.

It was through the University of Pennsylvania that Michael Barton reached Capitol Campus. He was hired in part because of his affiliation with a particular university.

"This is a system that is unfair to those people who come from lesser universities but one can argue those people should have known that. This is the obvious reason everyone wants to go to Harvard.

"If one goes to Kent State and earns a Ph D, those of us who went to Penn can say he should suffer for that choice. The market is rather blood-thirsty in that respect".

Michael Barton likes Capitol Campus and enjoys teaching his classes in American Character, Cultural Anthropology and kindred subjects. One of his more famous quotes is that "after a while, all those courses turn out the same".

The students at Capitol, he believes, are as good and as bad as students everywhere. Michael Barton says he has "a good deal of respect for the faculty" and he considers them as good as the faculties you'll find at major universities.

"Like all professors, though, they make an impact in only one way and that's with their intelligence. Nowadays that is a fragile commodity because it is so easily attacked". He feels many profs invest their egos in their work to a point where they can't afford to be wrong. He recalls a quote from an old Alec Guinness movie: "The more store a man puts in his wits, the quicker he loses them".

Michael Barton feels this brings about a certain amount of catiness among faculty members everywhere in a system that is easy to go along with but tough to break.

The "Publish or Perish" syndrome is also evident at Capitol but Michael Barton thinks "it is not as severe here as at other institutions". Still, Michael Barton is preparing

two books.

Scheduled to be finished next year, one book deals with the history of American psychiatry and is designed to be a response to recent criticisms of the field. Michael Barton is co-author.

"I hope the book is received well. It's intended to be a corrective to a number of overly critical histories that are selling well these days. We continue to complain about the short-comings that exist in the care of the mentally disturbed but we tend to forget just how far we have come in the last thirty to fifty years".

Michael Barton admits to being somewhat of a cocktail party liberal and says the Che Guevara poster on the wall of his office is "only there because he has a nice face".

"The cost of trying to be an authentic liberal is profound and all encompassing. So you make gestures - give a few bucks here and there, vote for McGovern, speak to a few people who agree with you, like students, but rarely with those who don't".

He does feel strongly about feminism. "I'm convinced women are discriminated against in ways a man can't appreciate. I'm also beginning to believe that the way for me to evaluate a man is in terms of what he thinks of women". Michael Barton attributes his feelings about the women's movement to incidents his wife, Jane, has encountered as a medical student in Philadelphia.

"She copes very well, and she's one of the better students nationally. But all the subtle and blatant discrimination amazes me. Few people achieve perfection, but some are perfect fools. You're doubly impressed because they don't realize the measure of their disrespect for women. For that reason, women know their progress is in their own hands, and, moreover, that progress is attainable. I'd rather be a woman in America than anywhere else."

(Editor's note: The final few graphs of this article were inadvertently destroyed while Doctor Barton was proofing the copy. The doctor suddenly began mumbling something about being thrown to the wolves for the amusement of an elite few, and started gnawing on the manuscript. What could be salvaged was returned to the newspaper office where it remained under lock until being sent to the printer. The Reader staff had reservations about having the thing published and it would not have seen the light of day except for a long distance call from Philadelphia which was received shortly after the Army-Navy game last Saturday. A spokesperson for Doctor Barton was on the line, claiming the good doctor didn't care what we published and if we wanted to we could have a good



Dr. Michael Barton

time "picking the carcass because we wouldn't have Mike Barton to kick around anymore." The Reader staff believes this means Doctor Barton may refuse any future interviews.)

Meade Black-Out

End of the term - paranoia time - finals and projects piling up - Sunday night, December 1st, was no time for the lights to go out on campus. You might have been anywhere, living room, kitchen, bedroom - but the bathroom is the worse place to get caught in when the lights go out.

Safely navigating out of the afore mentioned predicament, I met the other roommates in my house in the living room. We debated the question of the black out during the initial first few minutes. A quick check found our household without candles, not even a transistor radio to compete with the sound of the wind whipping outside the house.

The lights had gone out in the Heights last spring for about 5 hours, but this was winter time, with a possible 4 to 8 inches of snow on the way - so the gas burners on top of the stove went on right away. We congregated in the kitchen for awhile, watching the house across the street. Matches would flicker on and off as candles were lit, while we cursed the darkness.

Thoughts now ran to hoping that the food in the freezer would stay frozen and not thaw out. Money and food stamps are hard to come by these days.

At this present writing, sleep has overtaken my two roommates. It's funny how we depend on electricity so much. The power was off for only one hour and forty-five minutes, yet it seemed like an eternity. signed, Ready Kilowatt