

# What Freedom and Solidarity Means to Me

by  
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On February 3, 1983, I was expelled from Poland on a boat to Helsinki, Finland with nothing but the shirt on my back and a briefcase full of papers. What choices had I made in life to lead to such a disastrous outcome? I had been caught up in the Freedom and Solidarity Movement in Poland. I had helped carry the banner “Wiara Niepodleglosc” (Faith Independence) of Kornel Morawiecki’s group “Fighting Solidarity” with friends through the streets in Warsaw to Victory Square in 1979, where the Polish Pope, John Paul II gave his homily to the waiting crowds. Later, the historian John Lewis Gaddis, described the moment when Pope John Paul II began his pilgrimage, “When he kissed the ground at the Warsaw airport, he began the process by which Communism in Poland, and ultimately elsewhere in Europe, would come to an end” [1].

After the Pope’s visit, it was hard not to get involved in the strong winds of change that were shaking Polish society to its core all around me. I took part in street demonstrations, and sought refuge in Polish Churches with tens of thousands of street demonstrators. *Jeszcze Polska nie zginela, poki my zyjemy.* (Poland has not yet perished as long as we are living). Martial Law was declared in Poland on December 13, 1981. Russian troops were said to be on the alert on the outskirts of Wroclaw, where I had been living in South Western Poland. Many of my friends had been jailed, among the thousands of Polish workers, university students, professors, and journalists, and were being held without charges. In August 1982, with Professor Zbigniew Oziewicz, I was caught red handed in the Wroclaw train station with Fighting Solidarity pamphlets. This was the beginning of the end of my more than 5 years of living and working in Poland.

I first traveled behind the Iron Curtain to Poland in the Winter of 1973, after visiting European Universities during the Fall. I was an unemployed mathematician that had been unsuccessful in obtaining an academic position after getting my Ph.D in Mathematics from Arizona State University in 1971. My dream had been to continue my mathematical research in an area of mathematics that was largely unknown. It was during the time of First Secretary Edward Gierek, economically not the best of times in Poland, but things would get a lot worse in just a few years. Professor Roman Duda of the Polish Academy of Science, offered me a Post Doctoral Research Fellowship, which allowed me to follow my dreams at any University in Poland for one year. I chose the Mathematics Institute in Wroclaw, because I had already made many new friends and acquaintances. I was given an apartment and a monthly stipend of 2300 zlotych per month.

I returned to the United State in 1974. Unable to obtain an academic position, I took a year’s consulting job at the Medical University in Charleston, SC. I suppose I could have abandoned my dreams for a new profession in computerized medicine, which was just getting started, but the memories of the intellectual freedom that I had enjoyed in Poland, and the new friends that I had made, beckoned me to return to Europe and Poland in 1977– 1982. Freedom and Solidarity was a powerful message that brought people together across Poland in all walks of life, reaching the boiling point soon after the Polish Popes’ 1979 triumphant return to Poland. Poland was not 35 years old as tooted by the communist regime, but had a 1000 year history to be proud of.

Exactly what is this “Polish Cross of Freedom and Solidarity” that I am going to receive today here at the Polish Embassy in Mexico? Am I worthy of this great honor? After I was caught red handed with the Solidarity Pamphlets, I was called into weekly sessions with the Polish Secret Police (Ubeks). Who

were my friends? Who gave me the pamphlets? Who was I working for? Why had I chosen friends that were enemies of PRL? Endless questions. My house was raided and my writings about what I had witnessed during street demonstration were confiscated – I still do not know what happened to this material? The November 1982 day came when I was called in by the Secret Police and informed that I was being expelled from the country. I was told to wait in the waiting room while they prepared documents that I would need, including my American Passport. A million thoughts ran through my head...sitting alone in that somber room where the oppressive walls seemed to be closing in on me like a coffin. I got up and walked out and spent the next six weeks in hiding with my Fighting Solidarity Friends.

On Christmas Eve, the Secret Police raided my Solidarity friends' homes, looking for me in their children's beds. By January 1983, it was becoming too dangerous. My Fighting Solidarity friends smuggled me by train on a cold snowy evening from Wroclaw to Warsaw and deposited me at the steps of the American Embassy. I was reassured by the Embassy Consul, that I would be allowed to return to Wroclaw to collect my belongings. I was frightened and didn't want to leave the Embassy. They took me to the Hotel at Victory Square, where the Pope had given his famous homily three and a half years before. The next morning an Embassy Consul took me to see a doctor at the British Embassy, and later dropped me off at the Warsaw Train Station. While waiting in line to buy a ticket the Secret Police arrested me. Later that snowy night they took me by Police car to Wroclaw, where I spent a week in jail with common criminals, and made an appearance on Polish Television. In the wee hours of the morning I was driven to Gdansk, Lech Walesa's home and the birthplace of the [Solidarity trade union](#) movement in 1980, for my boat trip to Helsinki.

There is a great lack of Freedom and Solidarity in the World Today. Great wealth inequality has led to social instability, wars and terrorism. The first concerns of good government should be the Education and Health and Welfare of its People, especially its young people who are its future. Why are great countries spending billions on endless wars and weapons of mass destruction, instead of guaranteeing free education and health care for all its citizens? How can a country be truly great and democratic if its young people, its only hope for the future, are unhealthy and uneducated?

Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook in his 2017 Commencement Speech to the Harvard graduating class expressed the dilemma of our time perfectly. "Let's face it: There is something wrong with our system when I can leave here and make billions of dollars in 10 years, while millions of students can't afford to pay off their (student) loans, let alone start a business.... The greatest successes come from having the freedom to fail... We should have a society that measures progress not just by economic metrics like GDP, but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful. ... And yes, giving everyone the freedom to pursue purpose isn't free. People like me should pay for it. Many of you will do well and you should too" [2].

Only with the Freedom and Solidarity that I found in three countries, the United States, Poland and Mexico, at different times in my life, have I been able to pursue my mathematical dreams that I believe to be important. Long live Freedom and Solidarity in the World! I am truly honored to accept the Polish Cross of Freedom and Solidarity.

**References:** [1] John Lewis Gaddis, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Lewis\\_Gaddis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Lewis_Gaddis). [2] Mark Zuckerberg, <http://www.cnbc.com/2017/05/26/full-text-of-mark-zuckerbergs-2017-harvard-commencement-speech.html>