

PRO-GERMAN OR PRO-NAZI?

Peter Joseph Greis – Milwaukee, Wisconsin

This case study is based on my interview with Guenther and Walter Greis of Mequon and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April 18, 1993, and their father's government files. Peter Greis's story is a classic example of how the government changed its standards of dangerousness in the absence of incriminating evidence:

***Walter:** My father, Peter Joseph Greis, was born in Cologne, Germany, April 9, 1891. He served as an infantryman in WW I. He was wounded twice, on the Russian front, once in the arm and on another occasion in the leg. He recovered in a Catholic hospital in Luxembourg in the interim. He was made a writer for a German officer after being wounded and was discharged in 1918. Then he worked as a chemist. He must have had some apprenticeship training there, and he had a good reputation as a chemist. He married Francesca Schykowsky in 1920. Mrs. Greis became pregnant and gave birth to a son, Siegfried Gustav Greis, in 1921.*

A very close friend of my father said, "Things are wonderful in the United States, so why don't you come over and take a crack at this. There are jobs galore, and you can always return to the old country." So he left his chemical plant, Harbig Hahauss, and sailed by himself on a vessel in 1923. Three months later Mrs. Greis sold their house, packed up their goods, and went across.

Peter Greis filed his Declaration of Intention (first papers) in 1929, but he never completed naturalization. He stated on his Alien Enemy Questionnaire, filed while in detention in December 1941, that his wife was always so homesick that she wanted to go back to Germany. However, Greis liked the United States, he said, and would prefer

to stay. "I would be willing to go into the ... army and fight for this country," he added.

***Guenther:** Originally the plan was that my dad would start a branch painting industry here in Milwaukee, specializing in the paints for leather. Obviously it didn't work out, and there was a rough period until he got a job at Kopec Chemical Corporation. He developed many of the formulas for the lacquer finishes on leather and the leather used primarily for shoes. At that time, Milwaukee had a big leather industry, and he did quite well. He also got involved quite heavily with German theatrical activity going on at the time. Milwaukee was very heavily German at one time, I think around 65 percent.*

***Walter:** We had one hundred German societies here before WW II.*

He imported chemicals from his home plant that were not produced here. That was going well for a while until they put a heavy tax on the barrels of material—lacquers or paints or something of that nature. So that fell through.

He was in a theatrical group and a male chorus. He never lost his job in the Depression because of his technical knowledge. He survived, even working Saturday mornings at the plant, developing new processes for various specialized accounts.

Q: Was there anything in any way that was political about what he did?

***Walter:** A big influence was the fact that my mother's parents came over in 1936 or 1937. It was supposed to have been a three-month*

tour, but it lasted six months. In that period the Rhineland was reoccupied by Germany. My grandfather was known to make pro-German speeches about things going on over there at the time. So that was a big influence. [This never bothered authorities.] Although my father was not a big political orator, he was a listener, and later on, when he was interned, the FBI asked him, "Who do you want to win the war?" Being a German, he said he hoped there would be some form of peace, and that he would not like to see Germany lose. He really couldn't express what he meant in clear English, which he didn't know very well. At the chemical plant where he worked, his boss was German and the vice president was a German, so he didn't need a good background in English.

Guenther: *His entire social life was in the German element.*

Peter Greis had joined the *Reichsdeutsche Vereinigung* in 1939. He was a charter member and served as its secretary. Greis later told the FBI that he joined, believing membership would gain him the protection of the German Consulate and impress German authorities with his loyalty should he ever return to the Fatherland. The Milwaukee leader of the *RV* stated in his opening address that German nationals were expected to immediately join, and that "whoever was German should proudly disclose himself as such, for the Germany of today stands behind every single one." (Authorities stated that Greis's association with the *RV* was the most damaging evidence against him.) Allegedly, when the group heard of an FBI investigation in December 1940, they disbanded.

Informants told the FBI that Greis frequented "Nazi hangouts," and he did admit to agents that he attended functions at Camp Hindenburg, the German-American

Bund camp at Grafton, Wisconsin, in 1939 and 1940. Greis was also a member of the *Rheinländer Verein* and Barden Male Chorus, neither of which apparently had any overt political or propaganda agenda of concern to the government. Still, the FBI had no proof that any of the organizations to which Greis belonged was subversive, merely pro-German: "Like the Bund, you know they are [subversive] but can't prove it."

In December 1940, Greis rented a hall in Milwaukee for the German Culture Club, at which he showed Nazi films. A Milwaukee patrolman by the name of Henry Kresnicka was there and reported that those in attendance cheered wildly at everything in the films exalting the Nazis.

Walter: *Sunday morning, December 7, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and the morning of the 9th, at 1 A.M., two FBI men came to the door of our home and said they wanted to talk to him. He put on his coat and that's the last that Milwaukee saw of Peter Greis until close to six years later.*

Guenther and I were asleep. My oldest brother, Siegfried, was reading. He was a student at the time. He was still awake, and he answered the door, woke up my folks, and said, "There is somebody here who wants to talk to papa." So that was it. They said they wanted to question him downtown. All the people in Milwaukee who were picked up had been pinpointed; it was all preset.

Q: Had he taken out any papers?

Walter: *No—with that language barrier, working for a concern here that was all German background. When they did hire, they hired somebody for plant production who could at least talk some German. That was a whole situation there. So he was sent to a detention barracks here and that's where he met all the rest of his friends.*

Guenther: *We had no inkling from that day on for about six weeks of where he was. The authorities did not tell us that we could communicate with him. For weeks on end my brother Siegfried wrote to different camps where he thought he might be, but we had no inkling at all where the heck he was.*

I might say another thing that didn't help at all was that Mr. Pohl, who owned Kopeck Chemical, was worried that they were going to lock him up. When dad tried to get support from his boss, it backfired. He was sitting on hot coals himself; he didn't want to jeopardize his own position.

Walter: *Mother went to Mr. Pohl as soon as dad was interned. Dad always got a five hundred dollar bonus every year as manager and chemist, and naturally she needed that money, this being December 7, and she got it. In no way did Pohl want anything to do with her, but he did ask for any recipe that she could find at home from my dad. That's what he wanted, because he was in a dire situation with the war starting and no chemist.*

The other serious situation was my mother's condition. We were in a rental dwelling, all living together, four sons, and we had to make do. There was no welfare here, food stamps—there was nothing. You just had to provide for yourself. They told my mother to go to work.

Guenther: *They told us we were four healthy boys: "You're not getting anything. You go out and see that you can get work." For a while, people helped us out, brought food or whatever. We were all in school at the time. Some of us did have jobs on weekends. It was a serious thing. We just had to go out and work after school and see that we kept the family going.*

Q: Was your mother worried?

Walter: *Oh, yes. There were many "water works" in that period. Not only about our predicament here, but also the situation in Cologne. She had a close relationship with her parents, their having visited here for that six-month period. The war came along and that really upset things rather drastically for her wellbeing. She went through a trying period. We helped as best we could. Guenther worked at a butcher shop; I think it was fifty cents an hour. And Paul, the number three brother, first enlisted around 1943 in the merchant marine, which was a private concern that was paid by the shipping companies. However, when you got into war zone, then you got double pay. That was a method of getting volunteers, and it was so bad in the merchant marine that they took young kids at sixteen and a half. From sixteen and a half on you could enlist and go to specialized maritime schooling. I joined that later on myself. You did not carry any weapons; you didn't have a uniform as such. All you were assigned to do was to run the vessel as you were trained, deliver the goods, and return with the vessel.*

Walter: *Dad had several hearings in Milwaukee.*

Greis, who had been taken to Milwaukee's House of Correction after his arrest, learned that his hearing board had recommended internment, and the attorney general agreed on February 6. Three acquaintances provided affidavits that Greis was not connected to anything subversive, but the government did not accept character references in lieu of evidence that Greis was not so connected (proving the negative).

While at the House of Correction, Greis joined twenty-six other German detainees in protesting conditions. Japanese Americans at Manzanar, the group fantasized, had a "village of their own ... with all the benefits

of family life in their own cottages.” They, on the other hand, were treated like “convicted criminals” while their families were “left to their own devices.”

The Justice Department turned Greis over to the army, which sent him to Ft. Oglethorpe, Georgia, in April, then on to Camp Forrest, Tennessee, in June. The family asked the government for financial assistance, and Edward Ennis, head of the Alien Enemy Control Unit in the Justice Department, told them to look to local welfare agencies.

Guenther: *We tried to get people of some influence to intercede, get involved, and they did.*

Walter: *My mother did a lot of shopping before the war with some people by the name of Stock, who had a clothing store. My father was always well dressed; he always had good suits, and, being a dressmaker, my mother knew design, she knew clothing. So they got to know the Stock brothers personally, and when the war started she went to these people and told them how bitter she was, and what a hardship the situation was, and they said, “Listen, let’s see if we can’t do something,” and they knew judges also. One time they said, “Your husband will be home by Christmas,” so she did a lot of canning, perked up the house, and I think she bought a carpet. She was all set. Then the bottom fell out. Somehow, their connections with the State Department, where they had to go through, all fell through. There was another guy in New York by the name of Dix. I went to visit him when I was in uniform. For fifty dollars he would try and get as many clientele as he could.*

Q: From Milwaukee, was your father taken directly to Fort Lincoln?

Guenther: *No, he was in several camps before that. The only ones that come to my mind now are Fort Oglethorpe and Camp Forrest. While he was still in Milwaukee my mother and I went regularly to see him. They had a bus loaded with all the women that went out to that place. It was quite a bit north of Milwaukee, a barracks for military prisoners [This was likely the House of Correction.].*

Walter: *It was like a reserve barracks that they took over, a detention barracks of some kind. The worst part during the time he was in Ft. Oglethorpe, and later on in Bismarck, was the threatening tone of messages sent to my mother by the State Department that he would be deported [repatriated]. This frequently happened during the Easter period or just before Christmas, and then nothing more was heard, just that he was going to be deported, or that he was on the list to be deported. Finally, in 1944, they threatened to deport him again.*

Guenther had received his draft notice in December 1942. In response, he wrote his board that his father was being treated as a prisoner of war. Therefore, the family wanted to be reunited at a family camp, and had notified the Swiss Consulate of their desire to be repatriated. There wasn’t enough money to feed the family. The Department of Public Assistance in Milwaukee urged that the family be reunited at a family camp:

The family has made a very poor adjustment since Mr. Greis’s internment. Mrs. Greis appears to be quite nervous. She stated that recently the neighborhood children have been giving the “Heil, Hitler” salute whenever a member of the family appears at the window or in the doorway.

Guenther appealed his subsequent 1-A classification in February 1943. By this time

his father was at Ft. Lincoln:

My greatest reason for appealing 1-A classification is that I could never become the service man you gentlemen would want me to become—at least not so long as my father is a prisoner of the same government which asks me to carry arms for it. I have every respect for our government...but if you gentlemen were in my position I'm sure your thoughts would be the same.

The family grew more desperate. In August 1943 Siegfried wrote to Director Ennis that his brothers were “making physical wrecks out of themselves and my mother is heading for a nervous collapse.... This will be only further proof of who is really paying the penalty, my interned father or the family at home,” he warned.

A rehearing board met in May 1944, heard witnesses, and accepted more affidavits favorable to the prisoner. The board was aware that the family was suffering financially, but their request for repatriation proved to be the obstacle; it had been rejected in October 1943. Indeed, the Justice Department objected to Peter Greis's repatriation as early as July 1942 because of his special skill as a manufacturing chemist.

The board reconvened in August 1944 and recommended Greis's conditional release on probation, but no action had been taken by November. The U.S. attorney in Milwaukee believed that Greis's petition for repatriation “does not evidence any dangerous attitude,” and was probably a desperate act on the part of a man who genuinely believed repatriation was the only way to reunite his family and escape the country he felt had abandoned him.

Clearly, one problem with the delay in implementing the board's recommendation for release was a behavioral report from Ft. Lincoln in August. Its thrust was negative, concluding that Greis was still pro-German, a man pleased with Axis successes and loyal

to Axis principles and nationality—although no one yet used the term “pro-Nazi”—whose closest associates were pro-German. Greis had written a poem to another German in which he indicated he would “meet these band of rascals (Americans) in Hell, where the chief of the devils would make them account for all their monstrous sins on Earth.”

In September, Will Robbins, the chief internal security officer at Ft. Lincoln, interviewed Greis about his attitude toward parole, the U.S. war effort, and the outcome of the war. Regarding the latter, Robbins informed the commandant of Ft. Lincoln that Greis stated

he wishes that Germany would not lose the war.... He had been a soldier in the last war and that after Germany's defeat there existed such a chaotic condition in Germany that he could not bear to think of the German people suffering through a repetition.... He professes no interest in the Nazi form of government, [and] he seems to be greatly perturbed over the prospective fate of the German people as a nation.

Guenther: We got a notice towards the end of 1944 [December 27]; Mother, Sig, and I had ten days in which to pack up. We were to be deported with my father.

Walter: Well, they said originally that he was going to be deported, and my mother said, “OK, if he's going to be deported, we're going to go too. Where should we go and what should we do?” They sent back a telegram, “Be at Ellis Island at that time,” and that was right over the winter period of 1944.

Francesca and Siegfried Greis were on their way to Ellis Island by early January. Guenther awaited their arrival. Authorities had decided to repatriate him as well, even though he was an American citizen. Paul

was a seaman with the merchant marine, for which the fourth son, Walter, was in training at Sheepshead Bay (Boston).

An ominous, cautionary FBI memo describes the sons as comparatively well educated:

They look like first-rate military personnel or first-rate possibilities for training in espionage work to send back to the United States.

Guenther's inclusion in plans for repatriation also raised the question of repatriating a U.S. citizen; for, if he were to be sent back to Germany, he would lose that protection.

Guenther: *We had to be in Ellis Island by January 3, 1945. At that time Wally was at an officer's training school and didn't go to the island.*

Walter: *I recall visiting you guys. I remember you wanted to get an accordion from a junk shop if possible, and I don't know if I ever obtained one, but you were locked up there with Sig and the parents. Because of the situation, I was visited by the FBI and lost my radio-school training. They bounced me out and I returned from Boston to New York where I went to an engine training school.*

Guenther: *In the meantime Paul, the fourth brother, was in the merchant marine, but he knew nothing at all of what was going on.*

Walter: *We didn't know where he was.*

Guenther: *We tried to contact him through the Red Cross, without any luck. We would have been shipped out without him even knowing what was going on.*

Q: And then what happened? You obviously didn't go on the *Gripsholm*.

Guenther: *Sig and I were interviewed by some officials a number of times. They asked our political views about this whole business, whether we were born in America and what not. I said I certainly don't know what Germany is!*

The night that they loaded the Gripsholm, they included my mother and us. The women were put inside the cabin on the coast guard cutter, but the men had to stand out on the back platform, on the steel deck, which smelled like hell. They ran us over to the tail end of the Gripsholm. And as we got there, they asked where the Greis family was, and they said, "You stay on board." And everybody else went aboard the Gripsholm but us. We went back but never heard a word of why we had to stay. To this day we don't know why.

The following morning we met my dad who had come from Bismarck. Those people from Bismarck, wherever they were detained in New York [or New Jersey], they never came to the Island. They were boarded right on the Gripsholm.

Walter: *The luggage was all put aboard. Remember the overseas trunks? They lost everything.*

Guenther: *We were able to make plywood containers; I think we had ten of them for the whole family. Those things went without us. We tried to recoup them, but they just disappeared.*

As for the canceled voyage, there is a cryptic message from the INS on January 9: "Subject's repatriation on SS "Gripsholm" was canceled, and he desires to remain at ELLIS ISLAND WITH HIS FAMILY UNTIL REPATRIATED. Additional information concerning this alien than what is indicated above was not available." Francesca, Siegfried, and Guenther now

became voluntary internees.

Eventually a State Department memo of March 1945 revealed why the Greises had not been permitted to sail on the *Gripsholm*: the two youngest sons, Paul and Walter, were serving in the armed forces.

Peter Greis submitted to another interrogation about his attitudes on January 19 at Ellis Island. Siegfried interpreted the exchange. The overall impression he gave was that of a man torn between two countries, who despaired for the future of his family in the United States. The family wished to remain on the repatriation list and be sent to a family camp in the meantime. Regarding a possible parole and rehabilitation, Greis said,

We are down and out. We don't see how it can be possible.... We don't have a home anymore. The contract I had with my employer has expired. The two boys have given up good jobs, and finally, after taking this step a certain stigma, which we have on us, will be hard to remove.

Yet another hearing board recommended Greis's parole, but on February 21, 1945, Attorney General Biddle refused. Assistant Attorney General Herbert Wechsler asserted that Greis could not be let go because of his "present pro-German sympathies" and attitude toward repatriation. A report from the chief of the Review Section of the AECU elaborates: "The subject, because of his very pronounced pro-German inclinations, as proved again recently by his attempt to take to Germany even his American-born children, should not be given consideration for release or parole."

Peter had written the State Department on Washington's birthday to explain the family's dilemma: Francesca had liquidated their home in Milwaukee when notified of her repatriation in late 1944. Now, they had no money and nowhere to live, it having been suggested to them that Francesca and

the two oldest sons, Siegfried and Guenther, return to Milwaukee and petition for Peter's release. Peter saw "no future" and had "no courage to start all over again on vague promises of my eventual release." So, thoroughly disheartened, the family asked that all six Greises be repatriated on the next voyage of the *Gripsholm* (there would be none). They didn't want the family split up again. This decision would return to haunt Peter Greis.

Then suddenly, at the end of March, the Greises changed their minds about repatriation and requested cancellation of their petitions.

Guenther: They put us back on the Island, and we stayed there until late April. From there they shipped us down to Crystal City. In the meantime, my mother got awfully sick, probably one of the reasons we stayed on the Island so long was that my mother was very sick and they put her in the naval hospital over on Staten Island [U.S. Marine Hospital, Ellis Island].

Mrs. Greis was admitted twice, once in February and the second time for a week in March. She had been losing blood internally and was anemic. Eventually doctors certified that she could travel "without undue danger of life or health."

Guenther: They packed us on a train with guards; there were two men and a woman who escorted us on a troop train that headed south. Talk about being tight; we didn't know what the Hell was going to happen. The Border Patrol guards, or whatever they were, said, "These are very important people," something to that effect. "Special passage." Otherwise, it could have been something else on that train with all those troops, you know.

Q: How much longer were your parents kept

there?

Walter: *They got out in 1946.* [Walter is off by a year. The new attorney general (Biddle was in Nuremberg, prosecuting war criminals). Tom Clark, had ordered Peter Greis out of the country in January 1946. A Special Board of January 1945, and a Repatriation Hearing Board of October 1945, gave him 30 days to leave.]

Meanwhile, at Crystal City in June 1945, Mrs. Greis's health took a turn for the worse, and Siegfried petitioned to be let out of camp. Francesca was tentatively diagnosed with uterine cancer (subsequent tests showed it wasn't cancer) at the U.S. Marine Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, where camp officials had sent her for more complex screening.

Guenther: *When I got to Crystal City there were still about eight hundred Germans there. Sig, my oldest brother, who was still a German citizen, was worried like crazy. He wanted out, and before long they released him. I stayed with my folks through the following summer or fall, I would say over a year. Of course I said I wanted to get back to college. They said, "That's no problem." So I went back that following fall. They asked me if I would do them a favor, bring two young Japanese kids and drop them off in Chicago, which I did. Crystal City was divided in half. There was a contingent of Japanese down there; the Germans were on one side and the Japanese on the other.*

Siegfried's request was accepted by Milwaukee's Department of Public Assistance, and he was advised to report to his draft board on arrival. He got back his old job at the Schlitz Brewing Company ("It seems as if I had never been away.") and applied for his first papers. Never far from his concern was his father's continued

plight, to which he now turned with newfound energy, and none too soon. On July 14 President Truman had ordered that all remaining internees be deported. Peter requested a hearing. Shortly thereafter, Francesca, much improved returned to Crystal City.

Siegfried, having been told before he left Crystal City that the government placed considerable importance on whether an internee would have a home to return to, wrote to the internal relations officer at camp, "Mac" Alexander (E. D. McAlexander), that he had found a furnished apartment for his parents. Moreover, he had asked whether his father's former employer would take Peter back. However, it came as a shock to Siegfried to learn that his father was to be deported since he was expecting Peter's imminent release.

In an exchange of letters with Edward Ennis, Siegfried now learned that his father's formerly pro-German attitude and behavior had been transformed into "substantial evidence that he adhered to the Nazi government and its principles." This change, designed I believe to satisfy the language of Truman's blanket deportation order, happened to many other Germans in Greis's predicament. Ennis added that if Peter were to be repatriated, "it is probable that he will not be permitted to return to the United States."

In the midst of this ominous news, Guenther also wanted to return to Milwaukee to enter the University of Wisconsin. He, too, of course, had to report to his draft board and promise not to carry messages to unauthorized persons or discuss the camp or any of its inmates.

Guenther: *I went back to school and Sig got a job Schlitz brewery; he was at Schlitz before we left, and he went back there.*

All this was awfully hard on mother. While she was on Ellis Island she was very

sick, and part of it probably was due to psychological effects. It was a heck of a strain, everything being torn apart, especially not knowing where Paul was. Of course, everything in Europe was all blown to bits already; it would have been a heck of a thing, being shipped over there.

I was surprised years later to find that once we were at Crystal City, they were going to start proceedings again to ship us back to Germany.

Walter: *After Siegfried and Guenther left Crystal City for Milwaukee, they were going to deport my mother and dad, around 1946. The war was over and they're going to deport them. The war was over!*

A repatriation hearing board met on October 2 to make a recommendation on Peter's fate. The board made a direct connection between Peter's membership in German organizations in Milwaukee and the German-American Bund. It noted, too, his attendance at Camp Hindenburg. While in internment, Peter showed himself to be at least strongly pro-German "*if not pro-Nazi*" (italics added). Peter told the board that his sons, including the two in the merchant marine, whom he tried to have released, did not want to go to Germany but were willing to do so for the family's sake. The board decided on repatriation due to Peter's attempt to have Walter and Paul released from the merchant marine and because of his "influence upon his four sons ... in favor of Germany."

In mid-December Francesca began a thirty-day visit to her Milwaukee sons, which, with repeated requests for extensions, lasted for three months.

Peter was told of his imminent removal on January 16. There ensued a renewed effort to get Edward Ennis and Attorney General Clark to reconsider, including letters from Siegfried, Edward Stock, a

Milwaukee businessman and old friend of the family, and Wisconsin's two senators, Alexander Wiley and Robert M. LaFollette. All were politely rebuffed, the attorney general citing Peter's "adherence to Nazism." (Remember, when Peter was interned he was thought to be merely pro-German.)

By May, overcrowding at Ellis Island postponed Peter's removal indefinitely, and he now had a lawyer: George C. Dix of Wall Street in New York City. Dix, who was handling many other German deportation/repatriation cases, promised to take the necessary legal steps on Greis's behalf as soon as Peter received his final notification to depart. The lawyer intended to file a writ of habeas corpus with the Texas attorney general.

The indefatigable Siegfried had decided on some investigating of his own. He got hold of the minutes of the *Rheinländer Verein* back to 1930. Nowhere, he wrote Thomas M. Cooley, II, the new head of the AECU, could he find any evidence of its being pro-Nazi. When it had been suggested that the group boycott stores as being anti-German, the resolution was thrown out because "the membership felt that the organization should not be used as a political tool by anyone." Siegfried emphatically denied that his father had anything to do with the showing of "Blitzkrieg in Poland," as had been reported. His father had encouraged his sons to join the merchant marine, and it was more his mother's prodding, her physical condition, and growing bitterness that prompted the family to apply for repatriation.

In a separate letter on July 20, Walter Greis backed all of his brother's assertions about Francesca's role in requesting repatriation, the political neutrality of the *Rheinländer Verein*, and the showing of pro-Nazi films. Moreover, Peter had never contacted Walter to persuade him to leave

the merchant marine in order to return to Germany. This and a follow-up letter in late October did nothing to dissuade the attorney general, however, even though Cooley and the solicitor general now recommended Peter's release. Walter made an appointment to see Cooley on December 2.

On March 12, 1947, Peter was given a thirty-day parole to arrange his affairs, pending repatriation. Then, without explanation or fanfare, as often happened in such cases, the attorney general released Peter on March 21.

Why hold him for nearly two years after the war and threaten deportation? Wasn't internment and his family's impoverishment punishment enough? Hitler and his gang were either dead or imprisoned and Germany occupied. Was Greis somehow less dangerous on March 22 than the day before? Perhaps his supporters had finally convinced the attorney general that Peter wasn't a danger and hadn't been a Nazi. Perhaps the timing of his release had to do with the imminent closure of Crystal City. Perhaps it was because Greis had not retained a lawyer after all. Others who were parties to class-action suits were sent to Ellis Island to await pending court decisions regarding their status, and were not released until 1948 or 1949. Perhaps the Nazis were passé now that the country was embracing a new manifestation of fear: the Soviet Union and a domestic Red Scare.

Two weeks after hearing the good news Peter and Francesca left Crystal City, not for Ellis Island and a one-way ticket to Germany, but to their anxious sons in Milwaukee. Peter returned an unused portion of their rail fare to the internal relations officer at Crystal City, and both made application for citizenship, although, as a German citizen, Peter expected to receive a pension from the West German government.

Q: Did anybody ever tell you what the reason for all this was?

Guenther: *The only thing that kind of sticks in my mind from the FBI was, "Well, your dad was an awfully popular guy," and that was not good news. When they put on those musicals, they had a full house. In fact, the police would monitor how many people could go into that hall. Let's say they had a limit of eight hundred people, but they'd try to jam a thousand in.*

Walter: *They played in other cities, too. They'd pack up the stage crew and everything, and they'd play in neighboring cities—Sheboygan. I think they played in Manitowoc, too. In Milwaukee, they would give the same performance two or three weekends because there was such a good turnout. It was all amateur, but they had their own costume designers who were professional people belonging to the club. They had that carnival background from Germany.*

Q: They told you that because your father was so well known he was more vulnerable?

Guenther: *Yes. He could persuade other people. Apparently that's what they figured. My dad certainly wasn't a political-minded guy who would get up and make political speeches or anything like that. Hell, there was none of that. There were many other people in Milwaukee that did that. Other than him being friendly to Germany, politically there was nothing of any essence. The other thing that proved it too, was, they used to have Steuben Day parades here.*

Q: Did your father ever become an American citizen?

Guenther: *No, but my brother Sig did as soon as he got out. I guess it was one of the*

first things he did. Politically, it wasn't an issue for my father. He had a good job, the people that he was involved with at work, like Wally said, were German. It wasn't an issue.

Walter: *After the war he was pretty worn out. When he came back to Milwaukee, his whole life style and philosophy had changed from sitting all those years and being non-*

productive. He tried to get employment in the chemical field, but he was six years behind. Everything had changed.

Guenther: *Plus, there was a black mark on his record. People wanted to know where he had been for six years.*

Peter Joseph Greis passed away in January 1979 in Milwaukee.