

IMPACT

November 2022

Dear Friend,

Chances are you are familiar with what we do, where we do it and how we work. But, you don't often read about why we do what we do.

In this issue, we talk a little about NG's values. What get us up in the morning and provides us with a sense of fulfillment after a day's work, uniting our programs, staff and donors. We were happy to have an interview with Arnold Geiger, the founder of NG and managing director of NG Services.

You'll also hear from a young US intern who spent a semester working with Amaro Tan and our social medical program in Pogradec and Doug and Michelle Mann explain the background and history of NG USA.

We hope you enjoy reading!
Grateful to partner with you,

Your
Nehemiah Gateway Team



Colleagues from different lines of work meet at Café L'Aurore on the NG Campus in Buçimas

The Choice of Trust And Respect

Arnold Geiger shares his thoughts about the relationship between work and life, and the life-changing potential of Nehemiah Gateway's approach.

The Geiger family have built their own model of work and life coexisting. It differs from most people's idea of "work-life balance" as three generations of the family live day in and day out in and around the workings of Nehemiah Gateway in Albania. The place is warm and inviting. It is also the exact opposite of not letting work take over your life. And yet this model is in many ways the point of what the Geigers set out to do in Albania over the last 30 years.



Cafe L'Aurore, a popular meeting place also for students and pupils.

"Work and life don't have to be in competition. After all, to live, we must work, and to work, we must live. That's the human condition," explains Arnold Geiger. "Work is best when we integrate it into our life. Communication is much easier once your relation of respect and trust is established." On the NG campus in Buçimas, much of this basis of respect and trust is built over coffee at the NG cafe, a few steps away from the Mission House where the Geigers live ...

Think about this for a moment. Would you choose to let all your coworkers see where you and your family live, from the very first day at work? This proximity to home is intentional and reflects Mr. Geiger's practice of starting any new relationship by implicitly offering "trust credit." "It's up to them to choose what to do with it," Mr. Geiger says. "Whether to value it or destroy it." He pauses, thinking. "Some do choose to destroy it, but that motivates me to keep trying. If I had been born in their circumstances, perhaps I wouldn't be trustworthy either. We need to always try to understand where people are coming from."

The choice to trust first is a bold reaction to erosion of trust in the world. People who grow up in societies where truth is devalued, like Albania under communism, learn to approach new relationships skeptically. Today, even in prosperous democracies, social media is cynically used by politicians, businesses, and other influencers to corrode trust between people. For young people who are still learning who they are in this world, it can be hard to know whom or what to believe in. Rather than criticizing young people for their ways ("Older people have always criticized the new generation, for hundreds of years," Mr. Geiger observes), why not start by offering them trust and respect?



Barbecue on Campus

Education is a major emphasis at NG because it provides young people with the tools they need to think for themselves, and make their own decisions based on solid foundations. "I used to say," Geiger says, "that you can build a skyscraper in the middle of Lake Ohrid. But what would the foundations sit on?" The NG approach to education is to teach people how to think, not what to think, so that each young person has the tools to build their lives on solid foundations.

For Arnold Geiger, those solid foundations lie in faith, and the biblical values that brought him to Albania in the 90s. In a country that had had the possibility of trust between people destroyed, faith offered a framework for rebuilding relationships and reweaving the fabric of society. There is no religion requirement to attend NG's schools or participate in programs. Just a requirement to treat one another as we would like to be treated ourselves, and work hard as a team to build a better world. Building a better world is work that starts with people, and at NG, it is a work in constant progress.



Five Reasons

NG's On-Site Coffee Shop is Essential

Drinking coffee is a time-honored Albanian tradition. Some might see it as a lack of activity, and possibly a bit of a problem. On the Nehemiah Gateway campus at Bucimas, Pogradec, Albania, there is much more than meets the eye....

1. Builds a positive, trusting work environment. At its best, the practice of sitting down to coffee with coworkers builds connections between people, reinforcing trust and fueling collaboration. Misunderstandings that might come up over email can't withstand the power of espresso.

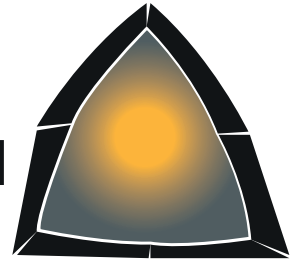
2. Work opportunities. Students at Nehemiah Gateway University work at the café, learning customer service and money handling skills in a friendly, comfortable international environment.

3. Nutrition. Snacks are tasty, nutritious, and homemade. Students at Nehemiah School can take breaks between classes and get snacks that are as healthy as they are tasty.

4. Caffeine for weary travelers. NG sees a steady stream of visitors from other parts of the world: visiting professors at NGU, coworkers from the other NG offices, and VIPs. It is a long journey. A good cup of coffee is always welcome, and a great way to meet the local team.

5. Reduces hierarchy and breaks down barriers. On campus everybody drinks coffee at Café L'Aurore, from the Managing Director on down. There is always a new opportunity for communication and collaboration.

NEHEMIAH
GATEWAY
USA



NG USA's Roots and Background in Albania

Sarah Pita talks with Executive Director Michelle Mann and her husband and co-founder Doug about the history of NG USA.

Tell me about the first time you went to Albania.

Michelle: We were living in Germany in 1991 when Albania first opened to foreigners. We wrote to the University of Tirana to request an opportunity to visit. They provided a car, a driver, a translator, and a history professor, and took us around the country for two weeks. In those days everybody was so openly curious and eager to meet us.

What was the Albanian Encouragement Project (AEP)?

Doug: The Albanian Encouragement Project was an international forum of missionaries working to be ready whenever Albania let in foreigners. When that day did come, they provided coordinating services throughout Albania. So much of life in Albania in those days was about handling the things you needed to handle to survive. AEP would help missionaries with some of those tasks and lighten the load a bit.

When did you live in Albania?

Michelle: In early 1997, there was major civil unrest in Albania. Most—not all, but most—of the foreigners left



The Mann family in Tirana, 1997



Kosovar refugees 1999

Albania. AEP was packed away in boxes and put into storage until it was safe to come back. The board of AEP invited us to reopen the project and welcome the missionaries back. We moved to Tirana with our children, then four and two years old. The office was just down the street from our home. You'd still hear gunfire on the streets at night but things were beginning to stabilize.

Doug: We focused on building robust systems for helping people—including accounting, Michelle's piece. When war broke out in Kosovo in 1998 and Albania was flooded with refugees, those systems helped in coordinating aid. AEP was an effective partner to many organizations helping refugees. We first visited Arnold Geiger and Nehemia in 1998—

Michelle: I think it was 1997. We first visited the Geigers in Pogradec then. It was winter—

Doug: It was SO COLD. They were still living in the hut then. It was like a wooden shipping container, no heat, mice. The Geigers were so hospitable, though, so warm and kind.

Michelle: And then we went back for the opening of the church in Pogradec. Nehemia had bought an old factory and built it into a nice facility. It was always exciting to visit and see Nehemia growing and helping more people.

Doug: It was around then that Michelle started helping them out with their accounting.

Michelle: Arnold invited me to Pogradec in early 1998. He knew that I was a CPA, that I was helping other NGOs under the AEP umbrella. He asked me to look at what they were doing and set up a transparent, easy to use system with good internal controls.

Doug: The accounting structures that you set up are part of the foundation of what became Nehemiah Gateway.

It is core to NG's identity to manage the finances clearly and transparently. You brought something unique as a missionary and a CPA. Those skill sets don't overlap that often.

Michelle: After we returned to the US they would fly me out every couple of years as they were growing and their needs evolved. I still participate in the annual audit for NG Albania to this day!

What did you do after you left Albania? Tell me about a couple of your projects.

Doug: We left Albania in 1999, but some of the things we had seen in Albania stayed in our minds. Helping people to create enterprises that would then support them was critical. There can be a tendency to think of religious work and business in opposition, but it's all part of a holistic life. That's why I started working with Global Business Assist (GBA).

Michelle: Our first project, in Kosovo, was probably one of the most successful. We helped Albanian missionaries we knew to go to the town of Peja and start a successful language school.

Doug: It was during these years that the Ghana work started. I got a call one day-- I was driving to Home Depot in suburban Illinois and I got a call from Ghana. It was Doris Donkor's father. He asked me when I was going to visit them. I had never met him and had no idea who he was. His daughter, Doris, was quite young then and singularly focused on empowering young women through microfinance. We developed a good partnership. Their work grew into D1:8, Nehemiah Gateway USA's partner organization.



Global Business Assist to Ghana



Michelle (left) with University students in Buçimas/Albania

How did NG USA start?

Doug: Arnold Geiger came to the US with some of his board members and told us he wanted to open an office here. We changed the 501(c)3 registration for GBA to NG USA and opened the office in Colorado.

Doug, you left NG in 2019. What are you doing now?

Doug: I am Director of Marketplace Missions and Empowerment at Global Advance. I have always been drawn to work directly related to business, and what small enterprises can do to empower people. Global Advance gives me the opportunity to focus on that.

Michelle, what is your vision for the future for NG USA?

Michelle: I am looking forward to engaging more with our project in Ghana, D1:8. I'm hoping we can recruit students from D1:8 to attend Nehemiah Gateway University. The skills we teach at NGU are invaluable for NGOs like D1:8. Students get high-quality instruction in principles of accounting, marketing, and business. Built-in internships mean they get real-world practice before they take on those roles in their sponsoring organizations. It's a great model. The University is an increasing emphasis for NG USA—both fundraising and recruiting students.



Michelle in Ghana, visiting our partners at Project D1:8 in November.

Tell me about the experience of going back to Albania in 2021 for 30 Years of NG.

Doug: I was amazed by how utterly Western everything was. Especially in Tirana. I hardly recognized the place. It's easy, I think, for the older generation to get nostalgic for certain things—the slower pace, people going for walks hand in hand and drinking coffee, going home to nap in the middle of the day. That world is gone. It's a process reconciling those memories with the Albania of today. It was gratifying to see the growth of NG's projects. The staying power of that ministry is incredible. There is really no one who compares with Arnold Geiger and NG in Albania in terms of impact. It was a wonderful celebration because there was a lot to celebrate. And of course, it was great to be there with Michelle.

Michelle: After the 30 Years of NG celebration, we returned to Kosovo and visited our friends in Peja – the ones GBA helped launch back in 2001. Their language school has been very successful. Juli and Enka are extraordinary people. We are grateful to have been a part of their journey. It was powerful to see that, having found success, they are so focused on aiding others. It was a beautiful reconnection.



From left: Prof. Dr. Bardhyl Musai, Head of Department of NGU, Gentiana Sula, Head of the Authority for Access to Information on ex-Sigurimi Files, Anke Neuzerling, TV Journalist, and Bernd Borchardt, Former German Ambassador and Ambassador of OSCE in Albania.

RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation with our past, with our community, with our society, with ourselves? We must reconcile with so many things in life and this was also the topic of the 2-day events that NG Albania organized in Buçimas.

Speakers from many walks of life - politics, sports, business and academia - shared their knowledge and experience on the topic of reconciliation, including

Albania's conflict-ridden history from World War II to the end of the communist regime in 1991.

Historical facts, e.g. about the notorious Sigurimi secret police during communism, combined with recollections of personal experiences, shed new light on Albania's history for many in the audience.

This is especially true for the era of the Jewish Holocaust, when Albania achieved what no other European country has managed to do.

History:

Albanians Competing for The Privilege Of Saving Jews

When Hitler took power in Germany in 1933, there lived only 200 Jews in Albania, but many more who had to flee Germany in the following years found refuge in the small country of Albania.

After Germany occupied Albania in 1943, the people of Albania, in an extraordinary act, refused to obey and to hand over to the occupiers lists naming the Jews living among them. Also, various state institutions provided Jewish families with forged papers, so they could mingle with the local population. The Albanians not only protected their own Jewish citizens, but also provided refuge to those who had come to Albania while it was still under Italian rule and who now lived in constant danger of being deported to concentration camps.



Stars of David decorate a front door in Korça in the 80's

The help given to Jews can be understood as a matter of national honor. Albanians spared no effort to help, even competing among themselves for the privilege of saving Jews. They acted out of compassion, human kindness, and the need to help people in distress, even those who had a different faith or background than they did.

Albania accomplished what other European countries failed to do. All Jews living within the borders of Albania during the German occupation, Albanian citizens as well as refugees, were saved, except for a few members of a single family. There were more Jews living in Albania at the end of the war than before.



Michael Loewer (left) at the Summer Camp for persons with special needs in 2021

A Better Kind of Respect

Michael Loewer on the implementation of NG values

I had been in Pogradec for less than a week and was still absorbing the sights and sounds of a new city when Herolinda Shkullaku invited me to accompany her to the festival officially opening the tourist season. As we found seats in the open-air stadium, Herolinda was invited to come sit in the front. Herolinda's husband Ardi explained that because she was the executive director of NG Albania it was important for her to be seen at official events. Meanwhile, we could escape the ceremony and go enjoy some coffee by the lake. I had never been a part of an organization that commanded such respect in its community. The rest of the day passed in a blur, but the event left me wondering: how had Nehemiah Gateway garnered such a reputation?

This question could be answered in numerous ways. During my time in Pogradec I focused my efforts on understanding the values of Nehemiah Gateway. My internship coincided with NG's thirty-year anniversary, a natural time to reflect on significant moments and values that made up NG's identity. Taking advantage of this mood, I interviewed employees about the values of NG.

Over the course of my research I came to realize that the high regard the city has for NG is largely shared by employees. I consistently heard from employees that the working environment at NG was unlike any they had experienced before. Some likened it to being in a family, while others made a more explicit connection to one of NG's core values: respect. My host mom for the

latter portion of my internship works at Amaro Tan as a sanitation worker. She described her experience thus: "I'm very grateful for the staff. They respect me and my work the same as the work of others. They don't respect me as a sanitation worker, but they respect me equally as all my colleagues. This is a value that you can't find everywhere."

A conversation with Herolinda shed further light on why my host mom's statement was so remarkable. Albanian culture places a high emphasis on respect, but it is generally shown to those above you in social status. That is what makes NG's definition of respect countercultural. NG seeks to flatten or even reverse the hierarchical nature of respect in their community. Here, at least for my host mom, NG has succeeded in its vision of creating a workspace where people feel respected no matter their position.

What happens when an organization is committed to treating everyone with such respect? You have more stories like my host mom's, a staff team who feel valued whether they have been at NG for 30 years or interned for six months. Clients are treated with the same respect as staff. This sort of change does not happen overnight. Nehemiah Gateway's commitment to its values is a significant part of why employees see it as extraordinary. I believe that part of the reason Herolinda was asked to sit in a position of respect is because of the respect that she and NG have so consistently offered to others in Pogradec.

About the author: Michael Loewer interned at Nehemiah Gateway in 2021 as part of his undergraduate studies at Wheaton College. He spent most of his time at Amaro Tan, and also spent time at NGU and in NG's human resources department.

AT A GLANCE



FAREWELL

Her professional articles made their mark on NG's publications: Sarah Pita, until October 2022 Development Director at NG USA, is now moving on in her career and we had to say goodbye. We will miss her joyful personality and her great expertise - whether in grant applications, fundraising, social media or right here with the Impact newsletter. We wish her all the best and God's blessing for all her new endeavors!



VACATIONS 2023 - WHY NOT IN ALBANIA?

Are you already thinking about your next summer vacation? What about a trip to Albania? We would like to give our friends, supporters and all interested people the opportunity to see the work of NG Albania with their own eyes, to get to know new people and a new culture, and to explore the beautiful country in the south-east of Europe in small groups. Further details and information will be available beginning of 2023.



TO ALBANIA BY MOTORCYCLE

EC-Mot, a group of Christian motorcyclists from Germany, visited NG in Albania. Especially the boys at Amaro Tan were fascinated by the heavy bikes and all the kids were excited about new shoes and lots of gifts brought along in the escort vehicle.

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