



Defying the Nazis: The Sharps' War

Artemis Joukowski

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Official companion to the Ken Burns film premiering September 20, 2016, on PBS tells the little-known story of the Sharps, an otherwise ordinary couple whose faith and commitment to social justice inspired them to undertake dangerous rescue and relief missions across war-torn Europe, saving the lives of countless refugees, political dissidents, and Jews on the eve of World War II.

In 1939, the Reverend Waitstill Sharp, a young Unitarian minister, and his wife, Martha, a social worker, accepted a mission from the American Unitarian Association: they were to leave their home and young children in Wellesley, Massachusetts, and travel to Prague, Czechoslovakia, to help address the mounting refugee crisis. Seventeen ministers had been asked to undertake this mission and had declined; Rev. Sharp was the first to accept the call for volunteers in Europe.

Armed with only \$40,000, Waitstill and Martha quickly learned the art of spy craft and undertook dangerous rescue and relief missions across war-torn Europe, saving refugees, political dissidents, and Jews on the eve of World War II. After narrowly avoiding the Gestapo themselves, the Sharps returned to Europe in 1940 as representatives of the newly formed Unitarian Service Committee and continued their relief efforts in Vichy France.

A fascinating portrait of resistance as told through the story of one courageous couple, *Defying the Nazis* offers a rare glimpse at high-stakes international relief efforts during WWII and tells the remarkable true story of a couple whose faith and commitment to social justice inspired them to risk their lives to save countless others.

A companion documentary film was directed by Ken Burns and Artemis Joukowski.

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