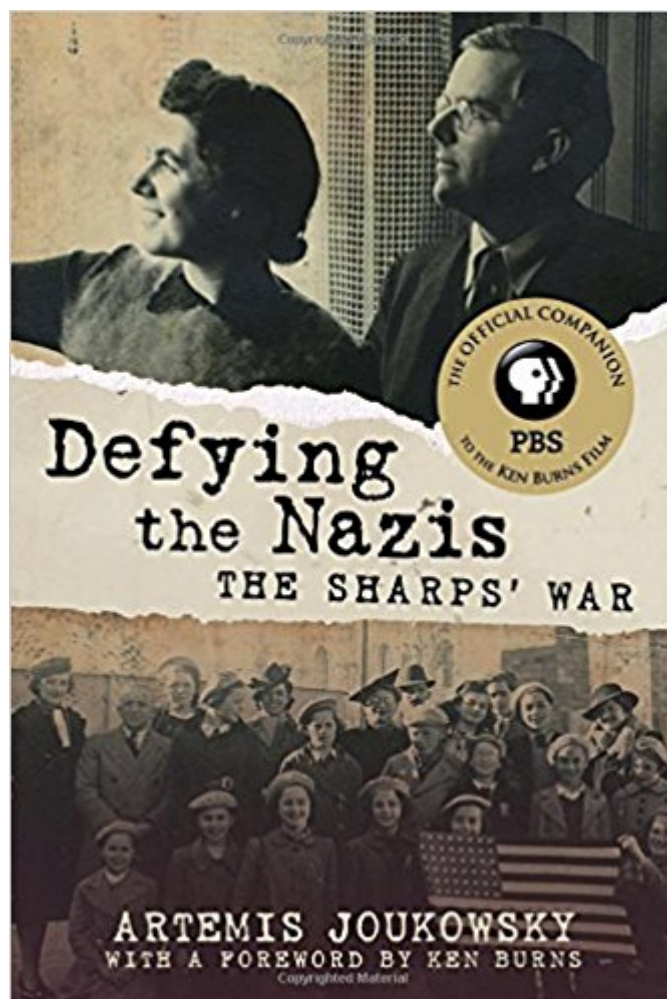


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# Defying The Nazis: The Sharps' War



## Synopsis

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 Joukowsky.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book began as a ninth grade social studies project for the author. It was the only A he got in high school, and it triggered a life-long passion as family historian. The effort to research his ancestral past is quite commendable. This is the story of Artemis Joukowsky's grandparents and the sacrifices they made as Unitarian missionaries in World War II Prague in 1939. They were selected to help a refugee organization run by the American Unitarian Association, and they accepted the challenge, leaving their two young children behind. They didn't realize the danger the endeavor would entail until shortly after they got there, but both were determined to help for as long as possible. They helped many escape, but there are also some who, sadly, didn't make it. The success and failures are both touching. Failures didn't stop these two, however. Once they were in Europe to help those to get out of the Nazi hold, they found themselves devoted to the cause for the rest of the war. The story at times reads scholarly, but this is due to the extensive research the author and his crew of hired help conducted to dig into the past. His grandmother had left all the documents behind, and survivors and witnesses were interviewed to get quotes and other details. Dates, times, locations and names are fastidiously documented here. At other times the narrative reads like a spy thriller. Both grandparents, Waitstill and Martha Sharp, had kept their activities silent from their grandchildren. Why? The author's mother was aware of what they had done, but the story was never passed down to the grandchildren. The Sharps' actions early in the war continued in other areas of humanitarian relief, something that impacted their lives after the war.

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