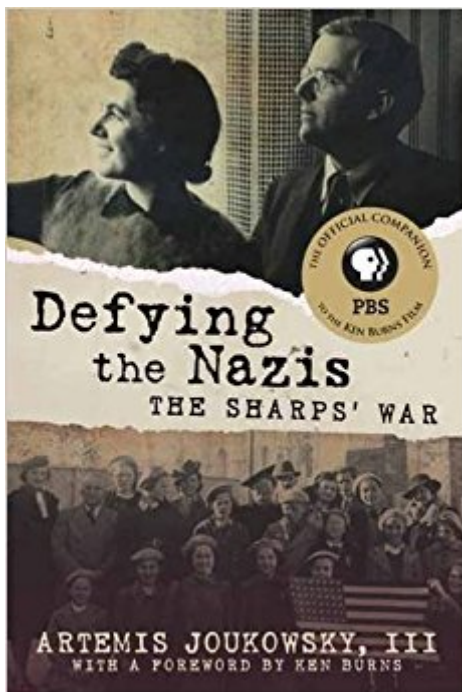


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# Defying The Nazis: The Sharps' War



## Synopsis

The little-known story of the Sharps whose rescue and relief missions across Europe during World War II saved the lives of countless Jews, refugees, and political dissidents. Official companion to the Ken Burns PBS film. For readers captivated by the story of Antonina Zabinski as told in *The Zookeeper's Wife* and other stories of rescue missions during WWII, *Defying the Nazis* is an essential read. 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A clear, unpretentious volume that justly celebrates a couple who risked all for others.” —Kirkus Reviews “Defying the Nazis hooks you, catches you up in the narrative, and pulls you along by all the elements of great storytelling...It reads like a spy novel, but it’s all true.” —Ken Burns “This gripping tale of intrigue and courage, of love’s power and its loss, is both entertaining and inspiring. Heroes are often thought to be super-human. But Defying the Nazis proves that true heroes emerge not from the pages of comic books but the halls of everyday life. The common denominator is a stubborn faith in humanity and a conviction that the shape of history is ultimately in each of our hands.” —William F. Schulz, president of the UUA, 1985–1993; executive director of Amnesty International USA, 1994–2006; and president of the UUSC, 2010–2016

Artemis Joukowsky is an author, filmmaker, and socially conscious venture capitalist. He is the grandson of Waitstill and Martha Sharp and has spent decades researching his grandparents’ heroic rescue missions in Europe. He is also codirector, with Ken Burns, of the companion PBS documentary film *Defying the Nazis: The Sharps’ War*.

Thank you, Artemis Joukowsky, for a story that has brought tears to my eyes. When I read your excerpts from both Martha and Waitstill’s comments, it is clear that both are not just brave, but highly intelligent and perceptive. Like many, I am sad about their parting and less than totally amicable divorce. The book actually has a less complete quote than the film, about Martha’s reference to “Lady Chatterley’s Lover” and I am wondering if this might clue us about inherent marital anxieties in the couple. There is a letter from Martha Sharp to her husband dated 07/23/1939 which is narrated at 39 minutes into the PBS broadcast: “I’ve been reading ‘Lady Chatterley’s Lover’ which I should like to discuss with you when I get back. The parish would disown me if they knew that book. I’ve been thinking about the things that we ought to do that we don’t. Somehow we’ve got to begin to tell the world where it gets off. So, in the midst of their covert deeds and dangers, hours of strenuous work and urgency to save lives, here we have what is the very epitome of a saint . . . the evocation of service Jesus refers to in his Olivet discourse . . . who makes the time to read ‘Lady Chatterley’s Lover’ (knowing the parish would disown her) and who tells her apparently ‘difficult’ (prim) husband she ‘wants to discuss it with him’ and heroically advocates ‘somehow we’ve got to begin to tell the world where it gets

off. That is remarkable, and means more to me personally and emotionally, than all of the progressive (and excellent) UUA OWL (Our Whole Lives) sexuality education program. But I am so very curious: was Martha's brave advocacy for human health and fulfillment mismatched in Waitstill, who appeared to be more relatively traditional and prim. Not much is explained about the separation, given this enormous and compelling story of what they shared, but did sexuality differences ultimately drive them apart? Again, thank you for a wonderful story! Craig

I believe it is the perfect book for the perfect time....It should be a heads up for our nation as we face an uncertain future, if we forget the lessons of the past. Incredible people during a horrific time. Everyone should read this book. I look forward to the documentary. Thank you for the reminder to always be vigilant that we are never bull dozed again by someone like Hitler.

Everyone, every human, should read this story. It is of two brave & incredible people who saved the reason to be alive...To help fellow man. God bless them & we will never forget.

I was glad I got to read this before it came on the local PBS channel. It is one of those books that has more background than the movie/special.

This important history read like a novel, and so I was spell-bound throughout, I appreciated that the difficulties were neither whitewashed nor spectacularized. Well researched and I recommend it!

This is such an interesting and sad story that looks at sacrifices that one family made during World War II.

A true story where the heroes didn't get much credit at the time for their efforts. Disappointed in the leaders the country and church had at the time. Rev. Sharpe & wife showed more courage than most at that time. Thank you for telling us the story.

A fascinating page-turner! I feel privileged to have become acquainted with the Sharps.

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