



## TITLE INFORMATION

### **NEAR THE DANUBE BRIDGE**

*A Story of Faith, Courage, and Endurance*

Catherine Allen-Walters

Archway Publishing (332 pp.)

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## BOOK REVIEW

A family experiences persecution for their Seventh-day Adventism in communist Yugoslavia in Allen-Walters' biography.

Religious oppression in 20th-century communist regimes is well documented; however, the story of the treatment of members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—whose observance of Saturday as the Sabbath, vegetarianism, and abstinence from alcohol make them stand out among their fellow Christians—has been understudied. Following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Elisabeth Hartig Lentulo was compelled to share her own family's history with violent autocracies. She possessed recordings made by her deceased father, Kalman Hartig, who talked to church audiences about his upbringing in an affluent Yugoslavian family, his conversion to the Seventh-day Adventist movement, and his later hardship under the nation's nascent communist government; she solicited the help of writer Allen-Walters to write a book detailing this history. Together, the duo gathered and translated primary source documents and letters, interviewed family members, and researched the historical record. Imprisoned as a conscientious objector in post-World War II Yugoslavia, Hartig described himself as a "shrink-wrapped skeleton." Prison leaders targeted him for his distinctive religious beliefs, and specifically beat him for refusing to work on the Sabbath. Allen-Walters, a professional violinist, also highlights how music powerfully lifted Hartig's spirits, as his own background with the violin and church music sustained his faith. The stories of Hartig and his wife, Hermina, whose winding path of migration across Europe eventually took them to the United States, give the book its driving force. The author also effectively places the narratives within a larger genealogical history of their extended families, as well as the historical context of Eastern Europe. Scholars may lament the book's lack of formal citations, as it's based primarily on family documents and oral histories; however, these provide a firsthand look at communist Yugoslavia from the perspective of a religious minority, and many documents are helpfully reprinted throughout. The harrowing, engaging narrative is also complemented by a wealth of other visual aids, including maps, family trees, and a plethora of black-and-white photographs.

A poignant story of survival, faith, and family.