



Forging Ahead: Recollections of the Life and Times of Esther Dartigue

Esther Dartigue, John Dartigue

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Esther and her family left behind a comfortable life in Hungary to escape what her father sensed was coming – World War I. But instead of rejoicing in their new U.S. home, they were plunged into poverty and deprivation. So at age 11 Esther made another escape, seeing education as her ticket out. She left home and supported herself as a domestic while she went through high school, college, and graduate school, earning her master's at Columbia University's Teachers College, where she met her future husband, Haitian-born Maurice Dartigue. After a whirlwind romance, they married and went to Haiti, which was the start of a 15-year adventure. They fled Haiti in the midst of a revolution and received political asylum in the U.S. Money was very tight until Maurice found a job at the new UN, while Esther taught at the college level and directed several nursery schools. But the specter of bigotry, because of his color and their mixed marriage, always shadowed them. When Maurice transferred to UNESCO in Paris, a brand-new adventure opened up, lasting almost 50 years. Esther became director of the UN Nursery School and a spokesperson for and specialist in bilingual education in an international nursery school setting. After Maurice's death, she researched and wrote two books about his career, one in English and one in French. Through the years, she rubbed elbows with peasants and presidents, poets and politicians; traveled extensively; and took advantage of all that she encountered. It really was an extraordinary life!

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