

Praise for *The Medic's Wife*

The Medic's Wife is a story of altruism, bravery, and leadership in the face of unimaginable adversity. Set against the backdrop of WWII, this gripping story follows the lives of Mary and her husband Edmund, a combat medic in the U.S. army, before, during and after the war.

The writing is raw and honest, capturing the complexities of military life and the toll that war takes on the brave soldiers who have “borne the battle” and the families who have sacrificed along with them. But at its core, *The Medic's Wife* is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of love to heal even the deepest of wounds.

This book is a must read for anyone who wants to draw inspiration from a generation of Americans who put the country's needs ahead of their own. With its compelling characters, evocative settings, and powerful message, *The Medic's Wife* is a story that will stay with you long after you turn the last page.

Robert A McDonald, West Point Distinguished Graduate and Chairman of the Board of the Association of Distinguished Graduates. Retired Chairman, President & CEO of the Procter & Gamble Company. Eighth Secretary of the Department of Veteran Affairs.

We, a group of armed forces veterans, have come together to write about a man who lived in our hometown and was a silent war hero many years ago. As young kids growing up alongside him, we simply knew him as “Mr. K” a quiet dad and kind neighbor who never spoke of his military service. It wasn't until a decade after his passing that we began to learn the true extent of his service to our country.

During WWII S/Sgt Kruszynski led a platoon of army medics and took part in some of the most dangerous missions of the war. Despite the danger and hardship he faced, this silent war hero remained committed to his fellow soldiers and the missions he was given.

Through our own service to our country, we have come to understand the immeasurable debt of gratitude we owe to those who have served

before us. We are privileged to share the story of our neighbor “Mr. K” and his wife Mary, for whom this book is named.

In an age where heroism is often celebrated with fanfare and publicity, *The Medic’s Wife* is a must-read and a powerful reminder that true heroism often goes unnoticed.

Michael Good	Kirk Shawhan	Ralph W. Lunt	Mark Louis
Col (ret) USAF	LtCol (ret) USMC	Col (ret) USAF	Cpt USAF
Astronaut	Marine Pilot	Senior Navigator	Instructor Pilot
All United States Armed Forces (ret)			

The Medic’s Wife is a powerful and deeply moving account of an American medic’s experience as he bore witness to the horrors of the Holocaust. The story is retold through Mary, the medic’s wife, and we are given a stark and unflinching view of the atrocities committed by the Nazis, and the unimaginable suffering endured by those who were imprisoned in the concentration camps.

The story’s vivid and haunting descriptions of what was seen and heard within the camp walls are a testament to the strength and resilience of the human spirit in the face of the unimaginable. The author’s commitment to retelling the truth about what happened in these camps is a powerful reminder of the importance of bearing witness to history.

This book is a must read for anyone interested in the history of the Holocaust, and for those who seek to understand the depths of human depravity and the power of human compassion. It is a powerful reminder that we must never forget the atrocities committed during the darkest chapter of our history, and that we must always strive to ensure that such horrors never happen again.

The Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust and Humanity Center,
Cincinnati, Ohio

As a Maj. General in the U.S. Army, I have encountered numerous stories of bravery, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment. *The Medic’s Wife* delves deep into the heart and soul of an army combat medic, shedding light on the trials and tribulations they face while tending to wounded soldiers on the front lines. The author’s meticulous research and attention to detail transport readers to the battlefields, allowing

us to witness the horror and courage that permeated every moment of those trying times.

I have seen firsthand the toll that war takes on the families of our servicemen and women. The author expertly captures the emotional rollercoaster experienced by those left at home, portraying the fortitude required to carry on in the face of unimaginable adversity. It is a beautifully written story that will transport readers to a pivotal era in our nation's history, and showcases how unbreakable bonds are forged during times of trial.

Maj. General John A. Yingling, United States Army (ret)

Being a military wife and mother, I found *The Medic's Wife* to be a powerful and deeply moving memoir of love, sacrifice, and resilience in the face of the unimaginable horrors of war. The story brought to memory my time with the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program whose mission was to advocate for the most seriously injured soldiers returning from the Gulf Wars and beyond. Unlike the WWII times, I am relieved to report that there are now many programs in place to help with all types of service-related disabilities.

Like Staff Sergeant Kruszynski and his friends, there continues to be dedicated and courageous men and women serving our country today. And like Mary, the military spouse continues to be a hero, keeping the "home fires burning" while supporting loved ones who serve our country all around the world.

The Medic's Wife is a must-read for anyone who has ever loved someone in uniform and for those who want to be inspired by the indomitable spirit of military spouses, and their families.

Mrs. Ann Yingling, former U.S. Army Wounded Warriors Advocate. Wife of Maj. General John A. Yingling U.S. Army (Ret). Mother of Maj. Scott Yingling, currently serving on active duty in the U.S. Army.

THE MEDIC'S WIFE

Edmund A. Kruszynski

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THE
MEDIC'S
WIFE



EDMUND A. KRUSZYNSKI

*The Medic's Wife is dedicated to the gallant
medics of the 648th Medical Clearing Company.
They are the unsung heroes of this story.*



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P R O L O G U E

**S/SGT KRUSZYNSKI JOURNAL ENTRY
SOMEWHERE NEAR BASTOGNE, BELGIUM
DECEMBER 29th 1944**

The American tank took a direct hit from German 88s. The men trapped inside were burned to a crisp, except for one unlucky soul. How he slithered out of the inferno no one knows. But he wouldn't make it either. He knew it, and I knew it.

His face was badly disfigured, and he couldn't speak. When we made eye contact, I knew what he wanted me to do. Still, I asked him the question to be sure. Blink once for yes, or twice for no. He blinked once.

Two syrettes of morphine were all it took. Out here it's called mercy, back home it's called something else.

I closed his eyes, took his tags, and left his body there. Smoldering.

+ + +



PART I



CHAPTER 1:
BRECKSVILLE, OHIO
JUNE 2006



*A "once in 100 years" flood devastated portions
of the town of Brecksville, Ohio.*

MARY WATCHED in horror as the murky water reached her ankles. Her condo had turned into an obstacle course of floating furniture, and water was shooting through the drywall like whirlpool jets. Mary steadily, carefully inched her way toward the front door as fast as her 87-year-old bones could carry her. Stopping to catch her breath, she glanced out the back slider and gasped. The deck was ripped from its foundation, and a three-foot wall of roaring river water pressed against

the glass. Knowing at any moment the glass door could rupture, Mary forced herself to move faster. But by the time she reached the hallway, the raging flood water had already reached her kneecaps. Her face turned a deeper shade of red with each labored step.

The front door stood less than four feet away, yet each step was a vicious struggle. It felt like a victory when she grabbed onto the door-knob with her right hand. Holding it for balance, Mary breathed a sigh of relief when she managed to unlock the deadbolt. But when she tried to pull the door open, it wouldn't budge. With remarkable determination and grit, she anchored her legs to the floor and gave it another try. This time, she succeeded in wresting the door open just enough to whip one leg around the door and use it as leverage to press it far enough open for her to slip through.

"Oh, My God!" she cried. The front porch, lawn, sidewalk and cul-de-sac had turned into a three-foot deep swimming pool as far as she could see through the hammering rain. She braced herself by pressing her arms and legs against the door frame. She was secure for the moment, though she couldn't spy a single soul outside.

Mary knew if she moved away from the door she could be caught in the current and whisked away to God only knew where. Only one option remained. Bracing herself, she screamed at the top of her lungs. "Help! Please someone, help me!" Tears mixed with the driving raindrops when nobody responded to her calls for help. *Is this how it's going to end?*

Mary's life flashed before her eyes and a carousel of memories clicked rapid fire through her brain. But one memory served as the catalyst for the decision she would make next. Mary thought about her husband and his brave group of medics who had launched themselves into the churning water off the coast in Normandy on D-Day.

If Ed could be so brave in the face of such insurmountable odds, so can I! I need to be brave and try to swim to the other side where I'll be more visible.

Holding the sides of the door with her hands, Mary moved her feet away from the corners of the door. Immediately, her lower body became unstable and instinctively, she jammed her feet back into the door jamb

to regain some stability. She wailed as she pinched the sides of her bare feet into the 90-degree door cracks. Now she was truly stuck. She hung there, arms shaking with exhaustion, wondering if she might see Ed in heaven sooner than she planned.

CHAPTER 2 : BRECKSVILLE, OHIO JUNE 2006

JUST AS Mary was ready to give up, she thought she heard a voice. Was she hallucinating? Or was someone coming to her rescue? To her great relief, she heard it again. And this time, the voice clearly yelled, “Hold on!”

Mary cocked her head in the direction of the voice and gasped when she saw a young man wading toward her, the water level up to his belt. Through the pelting rain, he looked almost like a mirage. But she could make out his determined expression, so much like the faces of the heroic young men she met while she visited Ed at Fort Oglethorpe GA in the early 1940s, before the war changed all their lives forever.

Suddenly, the young man disappeared under the water. Terrified for his safety and for hers, Mary watched intently until he reappeared. When he shook the wet hair off his face, grinned, and waved, Mary breathed a huge sigh of relief to know he was unhurt. It took a few minutes, but at last, he reached Mary’s side and latched onto a porch column to steady himself against the onslaught.

“I’m so happy to see you! I didn’t know if anyone could hear me,” Mary gushed.

“How long have you been out here?” he shouted over the driving rain.

“About twenty minutes, I think.”

“I’m Paul. Take my hand.” He reached out, but Mary couldn’t grasp his fingers and was afraid to let go.

“I don’t think I’m strong enough, and I’m not wearing shoes,” she said, tears starting up again.

“Don’t give up,” Paul said. “How do your arms feel? Think you’re up for a piggyback ride?”

Mary's face brightened as she remembered Ed carrying her that way during his Army training. He claimed it was good practice for his 25-mile marches. "Yes, I'm up for that."

"Great," Paul said with obvious relief. "I'll crouch down, and on the count of three, grab on with your arms and legs. Once you're secure, I'll carry you across the parking lot." Paul got into position and began the count. "One, two, three!"

Mary furrowed her brow and bent her knees. She attempted to spring up, but her legs were too fatigued from bracing her body between the door posts; she fell backward and submerged under the water. Luckily, Paul spun around and pulled her back to the surface.

"Are you alright?" he screamed.

Mary coughed up water and shook her head to unclog her ears. "My legs felt like two lead pipes." She wiped her forehead with her shirt sleeve and sensed something was missing. *My wig!* She pivoted and scanned the water, only to see it floating downstream like silvery rat.

Paul's gaze took in the rising water level. "Let's try it one more time."

Mary gritted her teeth. "I'll do it this time if it's the last thing I ever do."

"One, two, three!" he yelled, and without delay, Mary grabbed onto Paul's shoulders and pulled off a perfect bunny hop. As promised, he grabbed her legs and locked them around his waist. Mary circled her arms around his chest like vice grips on a pipe, and they were on the move.

"It's clear from here to the mailbox. You can stop there to steady yourself before you cross the parking lot," Mary yelled over several claps of thunder.

As Paul trudged toward the mailbox, Mary shot a quick look back at her garage. The hood of her car barely poked above the flood waters. They managed to avoid a wheelbarrow and other debris that rushed past them before reaching the mailbox. She gave Paul an extra tight squeeze for moral support as they paused.

Mary raised her voice so she could be heard over the din. "Ten paces from here you'll feel a gradual slope downward. Try to avoid the middle of the parking lot. There's a gully there, so it will likely be the deepest point."

“Aye, Aye, Captain, thanks for letting me know” Paul brushed the water from his eyes. “I think that’s where I ran into trouble on my way to you,” he said sheepishly.

Mary realized that she’d never told him her name. “I’m Mary, but Captain will do just fine.”

Mary held on for dear life as Paul pressed onward. It was a madhouse of sirens blaring, firefighters on bullhorns, condo residents yelling out of windows, and rescue boats entering the parking lot. When dry ground was within sight Mary couldn’t stop fresh tears from flowing, she’d never been happier to be in the midst of chaos and confusion in her life.

Paul sat Mary down on the high ground and plopped on the grass next to her, breathing heavily. Other than having a few lacerations on her feet and being cold and shaken, Mary could hardly believe she’d emerged from this ordeal in one piece.

She placed a hand on her savior’s shoulder. “Paul?”

“Yes?”

“You’re an angel,” she said softly.

CHAPTER 3 : BRECKSVILLE, OHIO JUNE 2006

“GRAM!” MARY’S 24-year-old granddaughter Peach called out as she approached Mary’s place of refuge in the shelter. “I was so worried about you.”

Mary, wrapped in a blanket and clutching a cup of steaming coffee, managed a weak smile. She was grateful to see Peach but felt like she had aged ten years from the ordeal. She and other flood survivors had been conveyed here in official-looking trucks, while Paul, bless his soul, had stayed outside to continue helping with the rescue effort.

“What happened? Are you okay?” Peach rattled off questions like a gatling gun.

With a sigh, Mary retold the highlights of her story.

Peach gasped. “That must have been so scary! How did you end up here?”

“God sent a guardian angel named Paul to save me,” Mary said, “I don’t know how much longer I could have held out if he hadn’t come along.” Mary’s fingers trembled, making the coffee slosh in her cup. She barely managed to place it on the table, and her eyes began to water.

Peach retrieved a packet of facial tissues from her purse and passed it over. “Gram, you must be exhausted. You can stay at my place for as long as you want. Tomorrow, we can sort out our next steps. Let’s get going.” Peach reached out her hand.

Mary motioned for Peach to come closer. She cupped her granddaughter’s ear with her hand and whispered, “I lost my wig.”

Peach smiled. “I’ll take you shopping once the rain stops. We can get you a new one along with some fresh clothes and anything else you need.”

Mary nodded her head in relief. “But we have to go back to my condo as soon as possible.”

“Why?” Peach asked, eyebrows furrowed.

Mary shook her head, fighting internally about what to tell her granddaughter. “I just need to.”

Peach sighed. “It’s impossible to go back there now. Let’s go to my house so you can get some rest.”



Finally, after three days of monsoon-like rain, the fourth day dawned with sunshine. There were still standing pools of water in the streets, and yellow tape and orange barrels prevented drivers from entering the condo complex. In the meantime, Peach took Mary shopping and purchased toiletries, clothes, and of course, a new wig. In the evening, the family convened at Peach’s house.

Kory, Peach’s mom, was the elder of Mary and Ed’s children. She and Peach’s dad, Stan, also lived in Brecksville. Their house had survived the flood, but their cellar was filled with standing water. Mary’s son—Peach’s Uncle Dean—lived a few towns away and missed the full brunt of the storm. Over sandwiches and beer, the five of them discussed what to do next.

“I have to get back to my condo,” Mary said, interrupting the conversation.

“Are you going to tell us why?” Peach blurted.

Mary looked at the expectant faces of her children and grandchildren. She realized she owed it to them to share general information about what she’d been hiding for so many years. “On the floor of my closet, I kept a cardboard box containing all my important papers, and I pray the box is safe. I can’t rest until I find out.”

“Wouldn’t your bank or lawyer have copies of your important documents?” Kory asked.

Mary lowered her head and stared at her hands. “This box contains other items which are extremely valuable to me, including some cash.”

Dean paused, his sandwich mere inches from his mouth. “How much money? A hundred?”

Mary blushed. “Well, it’s a little more than that.”

Dean put the sandwich down. “A thousand?”

Mary pointed her thumb at the ceiling.

Stan spit out a mouthful of beer, "Five thousand?"

Mary's thumb went higher.

Dean leaned forward in his chair. "Ten thousand?"

Mary nodded.

Kory stood abruptly. "You tossed a box on your bed with \$10,000 in it? Are you crazy?"

Stan broke into hysterical laughter, while Dean kept repeating, "\$10,000, I don't believe it!"

"Mom, why in the world do you have so much cash hidden in your house? You should have kept it in the bank!" Kory said, her cheeks turning bright red.

Mary shrugged. "After living through the depression and watching the banks fail and savings become worthless, I've always kept some cash stashed at home for peace of mind. My parents did it, and it worked out fine for them. Up until now, it worked for me, too."

"These days, banks have FDIC insurance, and your savings could have grown with interest," Kory said, breathing heavily. "It galls me to think all that money might have been sucked down the storm drains."

Mary met Kory's eyes. "Some things are more valuable to me than all the money in the world."

"Like what?" Kory's voice softened.

Mary had tucked away Ed's love letters, countless wartime photos, many of which showed the two of them together in happier times before the war. The box also contained his war journal, which was full of atrocities too hard to imagine.

"The box contains correspondences and pictures of your father and I during the war years. If those keepsakes are lost or ruined, I don't know if I can bear it."

Mary furrowed her brow and made eye contact with each family member around the table. The implied message was clear: *no more questions.*

After an uncomfortable few seconds, Stan leaned forward and rubbed his hands together. "Who wants some *Peach Cobbler* for dessert?"

Peach burst out laughing, "Way to change the subject, Dad!"

Stan winked, and the discomfort around the table evaporated.

CHAPTER 4 :

BRECKSVILLE, OHIO

JUNE 2006

A FEW days later, the phone rang while Mary and Peach were enjoying their morning coffee. It was the Fire Department notifying residents it was safe to go back to Mary's condo complex.

Mary's eyes lit up. "Let's go now! I've been on pins and needles waiting for the green light."

Peach grinned. "Sure thing, Gram." They slipped on the rubber galoshes and hopped into Peach's car.

When they arrived, firemen were using high-pressure hoses to clear muck from the parking lot. Mary was amazed that the pavement was visible, as were the flower beds and grassy areas. Piles of debris were pushed off to one side, creating a safe pathway for the residents to get back into their units. But as soon as they walked into the condo, her heart sunk: a five-inch-thick layer of muddy sludge covered the floor, and the drywall in the hallway was torn away, exposing the wall joists. Still, Mary was determined to learn the full extent of the damage, and most importantly, to discover if the box had miraculously survived unscathed. Peach followed, their boots sinking ankle deep into the gooey brown muck as they trudged down the hall. Reaching the kitchen, they stopped to look around. Spoiled food mixed with overturned trash and muddy sludge produced a nose curling odor.

Peach pinched her nostrils and tried not to gag. "Oh, that's awful." Mary agreed, though luckily, her sense of smell wasn't as strong as Peach's.

The living room was also a disaster, the sofa and love seat flipped over and saturated. Every few steps, Peach had to move an end table or basket out of the way to clear a pathway to the bedroom.

Mary felt something crunch beneath her foot. She bent down to pick it up and discovered it was a picture of Ed dressed in his military uniform, ruined beyond repair. The realization that her most sacred keepsakes might all be destroyed hit Mary like a ton of bricks. She hunched over and rested her hands on her thighs, overcome with grief. The last few years had been challenging times for her and Ed. They had sold their family home and moved into the condo, then Ed got sick, and Mary became his primary caretaker. He passed away only six months after the move, turning 60 years of marriage into a memory.

Mary felt a hand tenderly caressing her back. "I know this is hard, but I promise you don't have to face this alone."

Mary stood and rested her head on Peach's shoulder, her emotions still raw. After composing herself, she lifted her head and took Peach's hands. "I've lived a full life. The only things I really care about are my family and the special keepsakes I've saved throughout the years." She let go and lifted what was left of the framed photo from the floor.

"This was a picture of your grandfather, so handsome in his uniform. I've looked at this picture every day for the past 60 years, and now it's ruined. It sat on top of two beautiful handmade white doilies your grandfather sent to me from Belgium during the war. Now the doilies are gone as well as so many other things I'll never be able to replace."

"I'm so sorry, Gram," Peach said, blinking back tears.

Mary shook her head to banish her melancholy. "Let's try to find the box and get out of here."

Moving toward the bedroom, they peeked inside the hall bathroom. The tub and toilet were filled with muddy water. "Gross," Peach uttered.

Across the hall lay the master bedroom. When they peered inside, both Mary and Peach gasped. The bed frame rested at a crooked angle. From the dark line on the wall, it was clear the water had reached the same height as the headboard. The mattress and comforter were completely waterlogged.

Peach's lips formed a grim line. "There's something on the floor." She bent down to pick it up.

"What is it?" Mary asked breathlessly.

Peach stood; a muddy \$100 bill clutched in her fingers. "Finders-keepers!"

“Very funny, smarty pants!” Mary said. “The smell and mess are starting to get to me, so please keep looking.”

Peach bent down again, her hands deep in the muck. “There’s another \$100 bill! And another! It looks like it’s forming a trail toward the closet.”

Heart pounding, Mary followed Peach to the open closet door. There it was, laying on its side with the lid off. Mary couldn’t believe it survived, and she let out a sound somewhere between a laugh and a sob. Mary was so transfixed, she barely noticed when Peach lifted a discolored envelop and counted out six wet \$100 bills. “Is all the money loose like this?”

“That’s my mad money for shopping and playing bingo with the girls. The rest of the money is on the bottom of the box, double wrapped inside two plastic shopping bags,” Mary said. “But please, I need to see what else survived.”

Peach tossed the shredded cardboard off to the side, and everything inside the box sat on the floor of the closet. Piled beneath two books was a plastic grocery bag filled with bundles of one-hundred-dollar bills. “Yay! We found the money!”

Mary didn’t share Peach’s enthusiasm. “Can you hand me the two albums which were on top of the money bags?”

The photo albums were caked in mud, waterlogged, and heavy. Mary put them both on the nearby dresser and sighed. It had been nearly six decades since she had laid eyes upon these albums. She held her breath and cracked open the book on top.

Mary choked back tears to discover that muddy water had seeped between the plastic inserts and damaged the old photographs. As she turned each page, every picture was soiled and discolored. The second album was no better than the first. These pictures had captured the most magical, romantic, and harrowing times of Mary’s younger life in the 1940s, and now they appeared to be ruined and lost forever.

Mary closed the second scrapbook, her tears making the cover even muddier. “It might have been easier if I’d destroyed them after all,” she whispered to herself.