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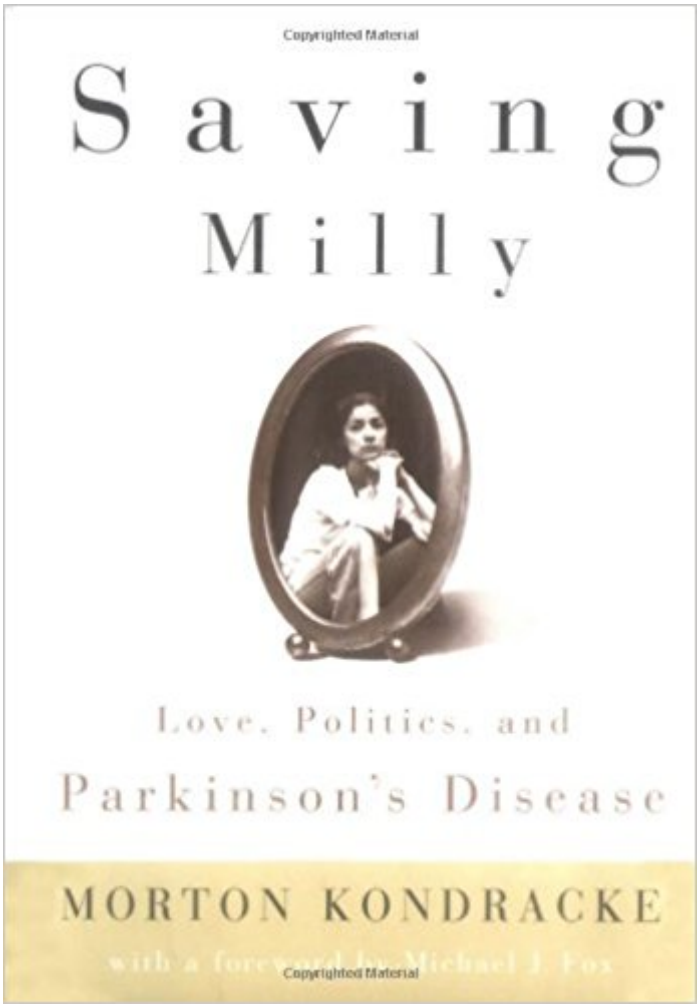
Saving Milly: Love, Politics, And Parkinson's Disease



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Synopsis

Morton Kondracke never intended to wed Millicent Martinez, but the fiery daughter of a radical labor organizer eventually captured his heart. They married, raised two daughters, and loved and fought passionately for twenty years. Then, in 1987, Milly noticed a glitch in her handwriting, a small tremor that would lead to the shattering diagnosis of Parkinsonâ ™s disease. Saving Milly is Kondrackeâ ™s powerfully moving chronicle of his vital and volatile marriage, one that has endured and deepened in the face of tragedy; it also follows his own transformation from careerist to caregiver and activist, a man who will â œfight all the way, without pause or rest, to â ˆsaveâ ™ his beloved Milly.â • *(* Linda Bowles, The Washington Times)

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Customer Reviews

Morton Kondracke chronicles his wife’s 13-year battle against Parkinson’s disease with the same attention to nitty-gritty details and shrewd understanding of how power works that distinguish his political commentary. Kondracke doesn’t airbrush how horrible it is to have Parkinson’s (the squeamish should avoid the passages about Milly Kondracke’s two rounds of deep-brain surgery), or how difficult it is to live with someone who does (the mere recitation of his caretaking activities will exhaust most readers). He provides unvarnished accounts of the battles among members of the Parkinson’s Action Network and other disease activists competing for limited federal research funds, until they got real and decided to fight to double the National Institutes of Health’s budget so everyone would get more money. And he refuses to offer a feel-good ending charged with false

hope; the book’s closing pages include a grim account of the Kondrackes’ discussions about what to do if she becomes unable to swallow. (They settled on refusing the feeding tube and allowing her to starve to death, which "is not painful if the patient doesn’t take liquids.") Offsetting this bleak material is a vibrant, loving, and equally candid portrait of the indomitable Millicent Martinez Kondracke, who began up-ending the admittedly self-absorbed, drivingly ambitious Kondracke’s life from the moment they met in 1966. He’d planned to marry an Ivy-educated heiress who could further his career; instead he was swept away by a Mexican Jewish American firebrand who challenged authority on everything from a botched car repair to the school system’s poor handling of their daughter’s dyslexia. Seeing how powerful she once was, we share her anguish as she descends into disability--and her husband’s hope that, despite all the current scientific projections, research will provide a breakthrough in time to save Milly. --Wendy Smith

The author, formerly a panelist on The McLaughlin Group and currently a columnist for Fox News, has written a deeply personal and bracingly honest account of how he and his wife, Milly, have coped with her diagnosis of Parkinson’s disease. The Kondrackes met and were wed in the mid-1960s after Morton overcame his desire to marry up (Milly was a probation officer from a poor Mexican-American background). They appear to have had a stormy though loving marriage, raising two daughters. An extremely strong and powerful woman, Milly fought hard to obtain a good education for dyslexic daughter Andrea and forced her husband into treatment for alcoholism. Milly’s passionate enjoyment of life made it very difficult for her, at the age of 47, to accept a doctor’s opinion in 1988 that the tremors she was experiencing were the beginnings of Parkinson’s disease. The Kondrackes finally came to terms with Milly’s condition and began searching for a treatment. Milly underwent several operations and has had various drug therapies, but her condition continues to worsen. She is now dependent on others for physical care and can barely communicate. Kondracke provides a harrowing overview of how organizations for other diseases such as AIDS or breast cancer compete with Parkinson’s advocates for badly needed research dollars. He describes his involvement with Michael J. Fox (diagnosed with Parkinson’s) and Fox’s political lobbying for funds. Drawing on his spiritual faith, Kondracke does his best for Milly, who is deeply depressed about her illness. He agonizes about when she will have to be fed through a tube and may no longer want to live. Photos. (June 12)Forecast: To promote his book to an audience beyond his primary D.C.-based constituency and to increase readers’ awareness of Parkinson’s disease, Kondracke is appearing on C-Span’s Book Notes with Brian Lamb and the Today Show during the second week in June, which will help sales.Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

I was swept away by this book and read it in one sitting. For readers familiar with Morton Kondracke through his appearances on television or through his writings, this is a suprisingly warm and touching account. It is greatly to his credit that its warmth and honesty shine so clearly.Kondracke is open, honest, and extremely candid in his assessment of his marriage and himself. Here is a man who clearly gained insight from his own therapy experiences and from the loving and constant pressure from his wife to force him to grow. For an example of how one's narcissism can gradually be overcome, this book is worth reading. But it is so much more.One gets a vivid picture of the intimate workings of a marriage, the strengths and weaknesses of their child rearing, and the battle between career and family. One also comes away with great affection for both Morton and Milly and their deep love and devotion for each other.But there is still more. The description of the insidious progression of Parkinson's disease, the phases of wishful thinking, despairing realization, heroic fighting, valiant perseverence, and ultimately honest recognition of where things will lead, constitute an inspiring if also discouraging saga. The direct discussion of the alternatives facing Milly and Morton as they peer into the dark future are bracing -- chilling in their implications and invigorating in their honesty and bluntness.There is still more. The story of the politics of medical research, the duplicity of politicians, the disproportionate allocation of research resources, and even the difficulties and disagreements of the "good guys," such as the conflicts between the Fox foundation and the PAN, are wrenching for the reader. "Why can't potentially curable diseases get the resources they need?" the reader asks in frustration. It seems that only those personally touched by tragedy rise to the occasion, as is the case with politicians who are as different as Tom Harkin and Connie Mack.Yet there is still more to this book. There is the story of love and friendship. There are friends who stand by in generous support at the times of greatest trial and others who fade away. Always there is the deep love between Morton and Milly.Finally there is God and philosophy. I found Kondracke's "Christian Stoicism" to be very much in accord with my own views. One does the best with the hand one is dealt, asking God to help keep us strong during the ordeal. Whenever Kondracke asks God what he should be doing, God answers, "Take care of Milly." We don't often get miraculous divine intervention to take away our trials. But we can ask for and receive strength from God to deal with them in a loving and even heroic way.Milly Kondracke is the hero of the book, but so is Mort Kondracke. So too are their friends and everyone working for the cure of Parkinson's and other degenerative diseases. The book itself is sometimes harsh, sometimes sad, sometimes infuriating, but always uplifting and inspirational.Very highly recommended.

Paperback includes both a reading guide and a compelling interview with Kondracke by his comrade, Fred Barnes. In particular, it is interesting to learn about what Kondracke wishes he had done a bit differently in telling the story. In a sense, Kondracke stands outside the story to evaluate how faithfully he told it, an extraordinary exercise.Maybe this book is less about Milly and more about "saving Milly" and what that meant: pragmatically, socially, politically, spiritually. It's a useful distinction to bear in mind. There is some background information about this brave and lovely woman, but inasmuch as the topic is an encounter with a disease she has, this is not a biography of Milly. It is a picture of sickness and its impact: not of the woman, herself.There are plenty of books about people with illness: fewer, by far, about the very flawed, though devoted, individuals who care for them. Kondracke seems no longer to flinch at the shadows of his inadequacy and pomposity, which might encourage the reader to consider a similarly brave examination of conscience. Many of us will be called to be caregivers. This is no map, but it is a clear narrative of costs, rewards, pain, and delight that bubble up in the dynamic between cared-for and caregiver.I liked the book a lot and absolutely recommend the paperback edition because of its additions.

I first saw the movie, I admit. I then read the book and it is wonderful. I was riveted. You will not be bored or disappointed. This man loved this woman so much. When they first got married, he was impatient and when she got the diagnosis, he really came through. It is not an easy thing to be caring for an invalid, which is what she literally became, changing her diaper, hand feeding her, etc. This book made me realize that everything is not just about me, but about those I love. The problem with most folks is they think everything is about them, when in reality, no one cares. Think about it folks. If you are a person that "always worries about what people think", trust me, they don't care. They're too busy worrying about what "other people think about them". LOL. Truly, think about this. THIS BOOK IS WORTH READING!!!!

Reading this book was like sitting at a kitchen table and letting Mort just pour his story out over a cup of coffee (like Mort, I am a recovering drunk so we can't do it over a beer). His is a story of passion, love, commitment and clear proof that there is nothing in my life I can ever complain about again.Millie is an extraordinary woman, her struggles with life, faith and Parkinson's come alive in this real narrative. You can't help but feel her pain, and Mort's immense love and commitment to her.I have always liked Kondracke as a pundit - I am a liberal republican, he a conservative democrat. We share similar feelings about nearly every issue except who we are most likely to initially vote for in a Presidential race. His struggle to get government officials to hear his plea for

funding pissed me off - and I am sure you will share his frustrations in the reading.Most critically, you will absolutely be moved by the openness, honesty and devotion in this story.

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