



# Tucky Jo and Little Heart

By Patricia Polacco

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Friendship, loyalty, and kindness stand the test of time in this heartwarming World War II–era picture book based on a true story from the beloved author-illustrator of *Pink and Say* and *The Keeping Quilt*.

Tucky Jo was known as the “kid from Kentucky” when he enlisted in the army at age fifteen. Being the youngest recruit in the Pacific during World War II was tough. But he finds a friend in a little girl who helps him soothe his bug bites, and he gets to know her family and gives them some of his rations. Although the little girl doesn’t speak English, Tucky Jo and Little Heart share the language of kindness. Many years later, Tucky Jo and Little Heart meet again, and an act of kindness is returned when it’s needed the most in this touching picture book based on a true story.

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## **Tucky Jo and Little Heart** By Patricia Polacco Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #34190 in Books
- Brand: Simon Schuster Paula Wiseman Books
- Published on: 2015-08-25
- Released on: 2015-08-25
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 11.00" h x .60" w x 9.00" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 48 pages

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

Polacco shares the story of a World War II veteran who served in the Pacific as a very young man. According to the author's note, her intention was to "tell it as nearly as I can in his own words." Assuming she succeeded, Johnnie Wallen was a thoughtful and eloquent individual whose words convey the horrors of war while also offering glimpses of humanity and hope. Inspired to join the Army after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the "Kentucky Kid," as he was known, was initially teased for his youth but gained the respect of his comrades for his marksmanship and skill with explosives. The colloquial, conversational text skims over the many battles in which Wallen's infantry unit was involved to focus on Johnnie's redemptive connection to an emotionally fragile young Filipino girl. Little Heart's difficult experiences are delicately depicted, allowing young readers to see clearly the impact of war on children and families. In an unlikely, heartwarming (and true) twist, Little Heart eventually finds a way to repay "Tucky Jo" for his help and care. Polacco's illustrations, created with colored pencil and marker, effectively reflect the action and illuminate the emotions of major and minor players without explicit violence or mawkish sentimentality. Once again, this talented author/illustrator brings the past to life for young listeners and introduces them to unforgettable, admirable characters in the process. (Kirkus, \*STARRED REVIEW *June 15, 2015*)

During WWII, a young Kentucky soldier stationed in the Philippines helps a little girl and the people of her village to get food and escape an attack. Years later, the girl, now a nurse, helps the veteran with his medical care. A full-page author's note at the beginning of the book explains that Polacco heard the story from Johnnie Wallen (Tucky Jo) when he was an older man. She puts the narrative in his voice, using a conversational tone and suggesting his accent in the phrasing. Children will need help with some older idioms, but figuring out his meaning helps readers understand the character. This wartime story is serious, and it's best suited to readers slightly older than the typical picture-book audience. The pencil-and-marker illustrations depict anxiety, fear, and fatigue, but do not show the worst aspects of war and death. Since the book presents Wallen's view, there are few details from the perspective of Little Heart/Nurse Zaballa. This book would be a good choice for WWII and Veterans Day programs. (Booklist Online *September 17, 2015*)

Patricia Polacco has done it again with the story of Johnnie Wallen and the little girl he befriended during World War II. Johnnie's unit was shipped out to the South Pacific where a local girl showed him how to treat his bug bites and scratches, and a friendship was formed. While neither spoke the other's language, their friendship became something they each cherished. Johnnie adopted her village and he and his unit helped them when they could. When Johnnie got news that the jungle was going to be bombed, he raced to save the villagers. Later in life, Johnnie went to the Veteran's Hospital for treatment. He met a nurse who took a special liking to him; she told him that "Tucky Jo" deserved only the best. Johnnie realized that he helped shape her life. Young and old readers will again be touched by Polacco's storytelling and pictures.

**Highly Recommended** (School Library Connection *March 2016*)

A 2016 Comstock Read Aloud Honor Book

### About the Author

Patricia Polacco belongs to a family of storytellers, poets, farmers, teachers, and artists. They came from many parts of the world, but mainly Russia. She grew up to be an illustrator, a designer, and creator of many beloved children's books, including *The Keeping Quilt*, *The Blessing Cup*, *Fiona's Lace*, *The Trees of the Dancing Goats*, *Babushka's Doll*, and *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother*. She lives in Union City,

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