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A Bittersweet Season: Caring For Our Aging Parents--and Ourselves



Synopsis

When Jane Gross found herself suddenly thrust into a caretaker role for her eighty-five year-old mother, she was forced to face challenges that she had never imagined. As she and her younger brother struggled to move her mother into an assisted living facility, deal with seemingly never-ending costs, and adapt to the demands on her time and psyche, she learned valuable and important lessons. Here, the longtime New York Times expert on the subject of elderly care and the founder of the New Old Age blog shares her frustrating, heartbreaking, enlightening, and ultimately redemptive journey, providing us along the way with valuable information that she wishes she had known earlier. We learn why finding a general practitioner with a specialty in geriatrics should be your first move when relocating a parent; how to deal with Medicaid and Medicare; how to understand and provide for your own needs as a caretaker; and much more. Wise, smart, and ever-helpful, *A Bittersweet Season* is an essential guide to caring for aging parents. Includes chapters on the following subjects: Finding Our Better Selves The Myth of Assisted Living The Vestiges of Family Medicine The Best Doctors Money Can Buy The Biology, Sociology, and Psychology of Aging Therapeutic Fibs

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Customer Reviews

“Unique and lovely. . . . How wonderful to have [Gross’s] mix of sage advice, pithy insights and practical discoveries at hand.” —Abraham Verghese, author of *Cutting for Stone* “Nothing can fully prepare you for the overwhelming experience of caring for your elderly parents, but Jane Gross’s new book, *A Bittersweet Season*,

comes awfully close . . . Gross is an incisive critic of our systems and institutions. —
—The Seattle Times—“A forthright story and trenchant advice. . . . Intimate and affecting.” —
—The New York Times Book Review —“A smart and highly detailed book about navigating the complex eldercare system as it related to healthcare, insurance and end of life. . . . The kind of book social workers might suggest to the family who craves more perspective about the logistical issues mentioned above. . . . Readers will find they are engaged by how much they learn in reading Gross’s account.” —
—Psychology Today—“Hugely informative, and a gripping read.” —
—Betty Rollin, author of Last Wish—“A Bittersweet Season is sure to become required reading for anyone with an elderly parent who depends on long-term care. It’s also a worthwhile read for anyone who is interested in America’s health care system as it braces for the demands posed by demographic changes that include a sharp rise in the group now termed the “old old.” —
—The Huffington Post—“An invaluable guide. . . . Excellent. . . . Jane Gross has taken her own painful experiences and worked hard to give needed help to us all.” —
—Commonweal Magazine—“With great insight and empathy, Jane Gross guides us through one of the most difficult of all life transitions—the decline and death of our parents. Not only does she provide a wonderfully helpful guide for how and what to do, and when. She also enables us to understand what our parents need, and what we ourselves need, during this passage.” —
—Robert B. Reich, author of Aftershock—“This is tough stuff, and Gross writes movingly about the toll it takes on her and other caregivers. . . . She’s serious about documenting the often hidden workload borne by middle-aged daughters and sons.” —
—The Boston Globe—“A Bittersweet Season deals with a sobering topic. But the narrative is so lively and informative that readers will come away feeling more prepared than pessimistic . . . An intelligent guide to handling the onset of old age with sagacity and sensitivity.” —
—BookPage—“This book is an invaluable and comprehensive primer on what most Americans will face soon.” —
—Its honest and loving message is to prepare yourself now.” —
—Jeff Madrick, author of Age of Greed—“Readers may pick up this very well-written book to learn about taking care of their own ailing parents, but will soon realize that it’s also a wake-up call to become educated in order to make informed decisions about their own inevitable aging.” —
—The New York Jewish Week—“A Bittersweet Season is a brave and compelling book by a masterful storyteller.” —
—Carol Levine, director, Families and Health Care Project, United Hospital Fund

Jane Gross was a reporter for Sports Illustrated and Newsday before joining The New York Times in 1978. Her twenty-nine-year tenure there included national assignments as well as coverage of aging. In 2008, she launched a blog for the Times called The New Old Age, to which she still contributes. She has taught journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, and at Columbia University, and was the recipient of a John S. Knight Fellowship. She lives in Westchester County, New York.

This book is an invaluable guide for those who find that they have become caretakers for someone who can no longer care for themselves. The knowledge and the insights are both professional and personal. Ms. Gross is the founder of the New York Times' "New Old Age" blog, and -- before it became personally relevant to her -- knew a whole lot more about aging in the U.S. than most of us do. But it is the personal that dominates. After her 85 year old mother suddenly needed help (lots of help) she found that there was a great deal she didn't know, and a host of unpleasant things she had to learn. Having had a similar experience, I only wish that I had read this book sooner, rather than midway through the process of arranging someone else's new and diminished life. In my case the person who needed help wasn't a parent, it was a dear friend with ovarian cancer and a traumatic brain injury and no contact with her family. But the many of the problems are the same, though the emotional impact is doubtless far less. Many other reviewers have listed Ms. Gross most important pieces of advice, but the one I most wish I had known early on is -- FIND A DOCTOR WHO WILL BE IN CHARGE. My fellow caregiver and I spent a massive amount of time trying to deal with miscommunication between doctors, trying to make sure that our friend was getting all the care she needed, and trying to be sure that her basic needs were attended to. As so many have said, most of the individuals we dealt with were reasonable, professional, caring people. But the system that is supposed to link them together doesn't work. This means that you, the caregiver, must do so. If you can't, as we could not indefinitely, finding a skilled and responsible care manager can be a godsend. But it's not cheap. A final note: as one goes through the caregiving experience, and as one reads this book, it becomes increasingly clear that there are very good odds that one (really!) will become the care-givee oneself, or that one's spouse will do so, or that both will! This has made me think about some very hard-edged choices that I may have to make in the not-too-distant future. Best not to be taken by surprise. In this sense, as well as in others, this book is a godsend.

I wish I'd read Jane's book (and gone to her website!) at least three years ago. What a goldmine of

useful information and heartfelt advice is provided here! Each of these caregiver stories is going to be so individualized that it's difficult to judge for each scenario. Jane's book is poignant and above all full of truth-everyone with an aging parent should read it. After I read this book I realized the pressing need for a blog/website/television/radio station that is a 'one stop shop' for dealing with aging parents. This process is so difficult because (a) the boomers are finding and publicizing the way through this life transition and (b) most people are so exhausted emotionally and mentally after going through the process that they're just too burnt out to deal with it afterwards. Kudos to Jane for her blog AND for this incisive and very necessary book. PS as an author-I'm more than willing to start this one stop website. Who's in? Denise

This is a good personal story with lessons for a great many people who must deal with elder care -- their parents or even their own. While the author admits upfront that she and her brother had financial assets that many do not, the book is still useful in many ways -- explaining Medicare, Medicaid, why doctors accept (or don't) elderly patients, who knows what and who doesn't, what nursing home (and assisted living) motivations are....extremely depressing but a strong dose of reality. The author shares the cost of her mother's end of life care. It'll shock you. The author also does a good job of describing the emotional rollercoaster -- for her and her mother during this time. If you're in a similar situation, you'll find comfort in knowing you're not alone. If you're not in it yet, brace yourself. The bottomline is if you plan, it could go much better. If you don't, it could go very badly -- and unless you or your elderly loved one gets hit by a bus or other sudden death, it's likely to go very badly. The medical and end of life system is ill-prepared to deal with the aged and infirm -- and we, personally, have to make up for it. In the meantime, those who are politically and activist motivated should consider adopting this issue to fight and fix some fixable issues in this area. Your grandkids will thank you for it.

The reality is a little depressing, but living thru a similar situation with my aging parents I found the book to be an accurate accounting of a terrifying situation. (I.e. Living too long and dying too slowly) A must read for anyone with living parents ,or anyone planning to live beyond their physical ability to care for one's self. You must have a plan! Dying at home in bed is not a plan. It's wishful thinking. Unless you are VERY rich ,or have family members to care for you 24/7, the reality is being shipped off to some for the elderly " place" -where their employees look after you. Think bland, soft food spoon feedings, toilet assistance,diapers, swallowing pills to keep the body going ? , and staring at a tv,in bed, all day long ,without being able to change the channels,without help. And my

parents are paying over 100k a year for this! Not a "free" ride type of dorm style warehousing-a nicer place with a fancy English name, in middle America.They have their own room! One room. Like a motel room.They are well treated but they are bored and miserable and not happy to have relinquished all control. Financial and otherwise.Not the end of "life" they envisioned.Or that I would want for them, or me! Read this book!

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