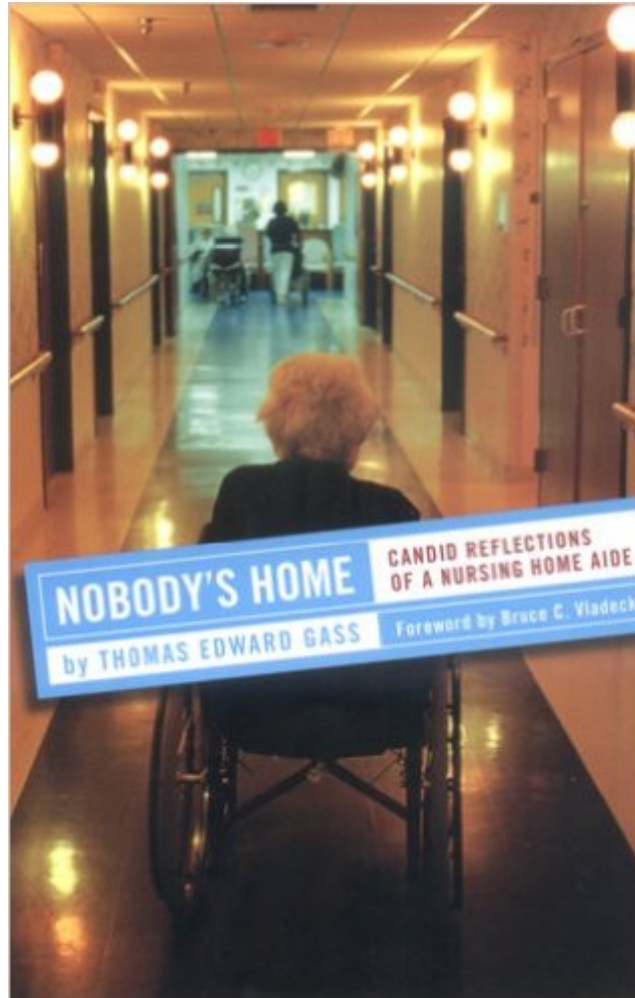


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# Nobody's Home: Candid Reflections Of A Nursing Home Aide



## Synopsis

"At present nursing homes are designed . . . like outmoded zoos. Residents are kept in small rooms, emotionally isolated. Occasionally they are visited by family members who reach through the bars and offer them treats. Aides keep their bodies clean and presentable. . . . America invests huge amounts of money to maintain the body while leaving the person to languish, cut off from all they love." •From *Nobody's Home*

After caring for his mother at the end of her life, Thomas Edward Gass felt drawn to serve the elderly. He took a job as a nursing home aide but was not prepared for the reality that he found at his new place of employment, a for-profit long-term-care facility. In a book that is by turns chilling and graphic, poignant and funny, Gass describes America's system of warehousing its oldest citizens. Gass brings the reader into the sterile home with its flat metal roof and concrete block walls. Like an industrial park complex, it is clean, efficient, and functional. He is blunt about the institution's goal: keep those faint hearts pumping and the life savings and Medicaid dollars rolling in. With 130 beds in the facility, the owner grosses about three million dollars annually. As a relatively well-paid aide, Gass made \$6.90 an hour. Seventeen of the twenty-six residents on Gass's hall were incontinent, and much of his initiation to the work was learning to care for them in the most intimate ways. One of the many challenges was the limited time that he had available for each of his charges—17.3 minutes per day by his calculation. Even as he learned to ignore all but the most pressing demands of the residents, he discovered the remarkable lengths to which aides and their patients will go to relieve the constant ache of loneliness at the nursing home. With Americans living longer than ever before, elder care is among the fastest growing occupations. This book makes clear that there is a systemic conflict between profit and extent of care. Instead of controlling costs and maximizing profits, what if long-term care focused on our basic need to lead meaningful and connected lives until our deaths? What if staff members dropped the feigned hope of forestalling the inevitable and concentrated on making their charges comfortable and respected? These and other questions raised by this powerful book will cause Americans to rethink how nursing homes are run, staffed, and financed—as well as the circumstances under which we hope to meet our end.

## Book Information

Series: Culture and Politics of Health Care Work

Paperback: 224 pages

Publisher: ILR Press (July 28, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 080147261X

ISBN-13: 978-0801472619

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.6 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,075,151 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #71 in Â Books > Medical Books > Nursing > Long-Term Care #109 in Â Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Allied Health Services > Caregiving #120 in Â Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Nursing Home Care

## Customer Reviews

At 189 pages, the book does a wonderful job of telling the story of a CNA who goes to work in a nursing home in the Midwest after the death of his mother. He wants to do meaningful work that would gain depth to his character. He is not the typical aide, having spent years working and learning in a variety of areas. His past experiences and education allow him to write about the job, the nursing home, his colleagues and the residents with beautiful insight and compassion. These words in his Epilogue have stuck with me. "Few of us are prepared for what happens. First we grow up and get stronger by the day. Then one day the process reverses. At first we deny and resist, but eventually we all surrender." Gass has some wonderful insights for people working in the LTC industry and for those of us who will one day be admitted.

I am a male college graduate who has been working as an aide in a nursing home for two years (history major - go figure). In this sense, I am similar to the author because I am more educated than the typical nursing aide. This book is an exceptionally insightful observation on the conditions of nursing homes. I found his descriptions so accurate and true to my own experiences I felt like he was stealing the words from my mouth. There are some very eloquent and moving passages in this memoir, which makes this a real page turner. His philosophical musings on aging and life in general are compassionate and sensible. Warning to the weak of stomach: the author's descriptions are candid, and sometimes have a bit of dark humor that will be familiar to anyone who works in nursing.

I added this book to my library while preparing a "reading list" of sorts for my entry into the world of managing assisted living. Although Mr. Gass' residents are skilled nursing folks, there is strong

overlap if you're dealing with a high care needs population and the caregivers who work with them. For my situation - turning around a badly run facility and getting perspective on the CNA's position, it's ideal. Tom Gass is clearly an "in the trenches" story teller - but do NOT be put off by that and assume he's naive or unanalytical. Sure, the book is full of stories of coping with incontinence (aka the "poop factor"), but he has outstanding perspective on the health care and labor practices that lie behind the "incontinent war zone" he's writing about. If I have any criticism at all it's that the author could have written a bit more on the "big picture" while discussing the minute. He clearly has the mind and writing talent to tackle it. Buy this book for anyone who is underpaying a caregiver for an elder. Buy this for yourself if you are working with elders in residential care. And let's hope Mr. Gass writes some more. Honestly, there are so many learned writers out there who write badly! It's a pleasure just to read his prose. I put the book down feeling touched, energized, politicized, and in love with Tom Gass' writing style. Come on, buddy - time to write another! He belongs on the same shelf with Anne Lamott probably - although book sellers would never do that. Wry, irreverent, but ultimately in love with his subject - old people. I'm not sure what the book is doing relegated to the arcane category of "culture and politics of healthcare work." It should be sold with books on aging for non-professional readers, healthcare practice etc.. Those readers need to hear these stories - and will be grateful for the introduction. This is not a wonk's book.

Mr. Gass has truly captured the emotional hardship present within the American nursing home. A candid, unbiased look at the system which provides us with our eventual destination, "Nobody's Home" speaks to the mind as well as the spirit. Never have I been so moved by one man's everyday experiences.

From an actual nursing aide! The author has now moved on, but he writes about his experience working as a nursing assistant (sometimes called CNAs - certified nursing assistants), in an elder care nursing home. CNA's are the backbone of a nursing home. All the unpleasant work that docs don't do, and now that nurses (RNs, LPNs) don't do are passed on to the CNA. Feeding, showering, toileting, dressing, and basically dealing with all manner of bodily fluids from adults who are no longer able to live on their own. This book is a real look at the hard facts of both living and working in a nursing home. Although he was very clear about the hard work and unpleasantness of the job, the book still managed to have a good amount of humor and touching moments. Found myself smiling several times. After reading, you should have more compassion for both workers and residents of nursing facilities. I could see this book being required reading in some college classes.

My mother went into a nursing home a little over a year ago. It is a 'good' nursing home, yet even so I have been disturbed by several things related to her care (or lack thereof). The author gave a realistic picture of daily life in a nursing home from the perspective of someone who works there. I found his book to be very helpful in clarifying my own thinking about the nursing home. I recommend this to anyone who has a loved one in, or about to go into, a nursing home.

As an Aged Care nurse in Australia, I found this book to be absolutely fantastic. It was interesting to find that the problems faced by aged care staff in the USA are exactly the same as in Australia. The book was informative, confronting at times, sad and happy. It should be read by all aged care staff.

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