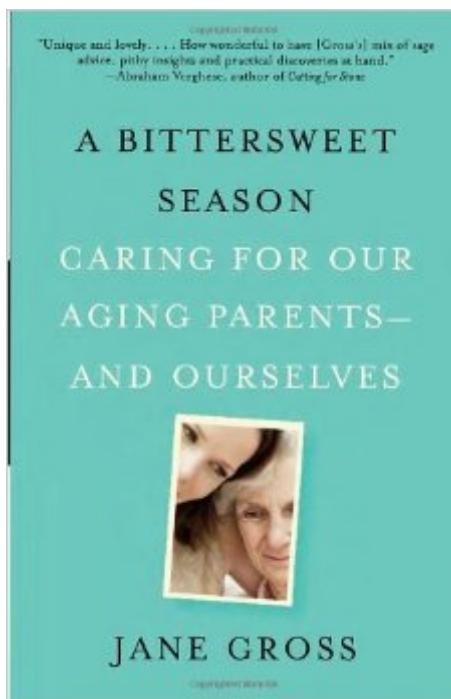


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# A Bittersweet Season: Caring For Our Aging Parents--and Ourselves



## 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, heartbreak, 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*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is a memoir about the final years in the life of the author's mother - AND a guide to the Rube-Goldberg-like complexities of Medicare, Medicaid, assisted living facilities (great for those who need no assistance), and nursing homes. It's about how the system is broken - a ridiculous maze of conflicting and unrealistic rules that (unsuccessfully) try to make a for-profit health care system

humane. It's also about how, as Phillip Roth put it, "Old age isn't a battle - it's a massacre." The number one killer in the US is heart disease - number two is cancer. After a motley assortment of other diseases causing "early" death, we are left with that large group where everything is wearing out but the body refuses to die. This group is subjected to endless serial humiliations - physical and financial. Even if older couples enter their golden years with a million dollars they can die bankrupt and on Medicaid. Enlightened ones might even plan for it and give their assets away early. The wealthy and the destitute have less to worry about. Gross definitely gets it right. My wife and I (mainly my wife - as Gross succinctly points out, the primary family rep is female at least 80% of the time), are going through this for the third and fourth times now. We have faced or are facing most of the issues she covers. Her chapter about Thanksgiving dinner in the nursing home (touching on a pecking order resembling a high school cafeteria) was perfect. She could have been describing our exact facility - with one dining room for those who could use a fork and another for those who required "feeders." In her words, "The elderly hate that you have to visit them in these surroundings on a holiday, so act like you're having a decent time even if you're not.

The worst nightmare of most adult children is that their parents will die a lingering death, suffering a drawn-out and humiliating series of losses and depleting all financial reserves. Yet somehow, we think, "It won't happen to OUR family." Wrong! In Jane Gross's important new book, she reveals that approximately 40 percent of Americans, generally past the age of 85 will follow this course - and that number will only grow with improvements and prevention and treatment of cancer, heart disease, and pulmonary disease. Those of us who are baby boomers - used to being in control - must stand by and (as one of Jane's bloggers stated), "watch our mothers un-live." Yet we are stuck in a medical world where old age is considered a disease with a cure...when in reality, precisely the opposite is true. There ARE no heroics and there IS no cure for aging. Jane quotes Dr. Sherwin Nuland in saying, "The very old do not succumb to disease, they implode their way into eternity." This one is PERSONAL for me. Like the author, I was thrust into an unanticipated role of moving my vibrant mother halfway across the country to a senior facility nearby. It upended my life, causing never-ending cycles of guilt, resentment, frustration, overriding terror and exhaustion - along with the days of feeling unaccountably blessed to have the chance to be a part of my mother's world again. I trusted my intelligence and management skills and believed I was making all the right choices. I wish I had read this book two years ago! Among the insights that Jane Gross reveals: \*The Medicare fee-for-service system is broken. To get paid, doctors must recommend a billable procedure; recommendations on lifestyle changes, for example, translate to no payment.

This book is particularly pertinent to me. My Mom is 84 and has just moved to be near me and lives in an independent living facility. However the author points out, if you are in your 40s and your parents are in their 70's it may be time to have that difficult conversation on how they want to finish out their days. The story starts out, with the author Jane Gross moving her Mom from Florida to NY state to be near her after some medical issues. This book tells of her ensuing struggles and mental angst that we will all face someday. If you are in your 30's-60's and have living parents, this book will provide you one example of what you may well face as your parents age. There are many questions and choices that have to be made. This is a combination memoir and cautionary tale of the end of life struggles in our and our parent's futures. The author writes of what she went through with her Mom very specifically, but also provides information and discussions on aging in the US. Some things unique to the author and her Mom, that she acknowledges:<sup>\*</sup> The author's Mom knew it was time to move nearer to family, there was no resistance. This is not the most common situation.<sup>\*</sup> The author's Mom was of sound mind and quite practical.<sup>\*</sup> The author's Mom purchased long term care insurance and had assets of her own<sup>\*</sup> The author had a brother who worked with her at this time<sup>\*</sup> The author and her brother have upper middle class jobs<sup>\*</sup> The author and her brother are childless<sup>\*</sup> The author and her brother live near New York City, so prices as well as availability of services were high. To many of us, this situation is much better than we will face.

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