



I Wasn't Strong Like This When I Started Out: True Stories of Becoming a Nurse

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This collection of true narratives reflects the dynamism and diversity of nurses, who provide the first vital line of patient care. Here, nurses remember their first “sticks,” first births, and first deaths, and reflect on what gets them through long, demanding shifts, and keeps them in the profession. The stories reveal many voices from nurses at different stages of their careers: One nurse-in-training longs to be trusted with more “important” procedures, while another questions her ability to care for nursing home residents. An efficient young emergency room nurse finds his life and career irrevocably changed by a car accident. A nurse practitioner wonders whether she has violated professional boundaries in her care for a homeless man with AIDS, and a home care case manager is the sole attendee at a funeral for one of her patients. What connects these stories is the passion and strength of the writers, who struggle against burnout and bureaucracy to serve their patients with skill, empathy, and strength.

I Wasn't Strong Like This When I Started Out: True Stories of Becoming a Nurse Details

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Laura says

It will be hard for me to feel that I am giving an unbiased review for this collection as I am a nurse myself, but I'm going to try. Lee Gutkind has interviewed nurses from the country, and asked for many other nurses to send in their stories. He chose the ones that resonated best with him for this collection. Some of the stories are extremely well written, poignant even, while others show a more average writing skill. Certain themes are universal though, and will resonate with all nurses...and those who love a nurse.

In a way, it's amazing to me that there are so many misconceptions surrounding the role of a nurse. According to the most recent survey, there are 3.1 million nurses in the US (or approximately 1 nurse for every 100 people). It's no wonder then, that most of us know at least one nurse. Often these acquaintance/family nurses are known as the person to call with random medical questions. We're asked to look at rashes, asked about medications, asked about vague symptoms, and asked to be present for discussions with doctors. Often though, families don't understand what a nurse actually does. TV shows rarely (if ever) showcase the nurse role properly. Typically doctors are doing jobs that fall to nurses. They hover over bedsides, answer call lights, reassure families, and come running down the hall to calls for help. In real life, nurses do all of the above. Lee Gutkind himself admits in the forward that he knows nurses provided care, but he can't remember what they looked like.

Perhaps this lack of remembering says the most--if a nurse is doing her job well patients are comfortable, their care is well-coordinated/organized, symptoms and side effects are recognized early, outcomes are measured and adjusted for, doctors are notified of unusual findings before they blossom into a bigger issue, and ultimately the patient is restored to the highest possible function. But all this happens quietly, in the periphery. The patient may not know that many of these things were occurring. Hence the need for books like this one--they showcase, in memories, the contributions that each of these nurses have made.

Sometimes, as in "Becoming a Nurse", we have to force families and patients to learn to live without us--teach them to care for themselves despite all their objections that they can't. "It's not in the glossary of any guide to nursing interventions, but it's as important as any other skill. A good nurse must know how to attack". Sometimes, as in "Next of Kin", we are the sole source of support to patients who (through their own fault, or no fault of their own) have alienated or lost all their family. We sit and hold hands, we listen, we share humor, we honor memories, we attend funerals. "Healthcare providers are supposed to maintain a healthy emotional distance: a distance that prevents us from becoming so overwhelmed by our emotions that our provision of proper healthcare is crippled: a distance that prevents the professional burnout to which nurses are prone. It sounds good in theory, but there's no way to teach the location of that boundary to someone else, or to know where it is for yourself. There's no Berlin Wall or Rubicon River to clearly mark the divide. The business of nursing brings us into the messy swampland of human suffering, illness, and death. it is impossible to erect walls or channel rivers within a swamp."

Bottom line: Read this book if you are a new nurse and want to see testimonials from those that have been doing this awhile. Read this if you are a seasoned nurse, and want a reminder of why you have been doing this awhile (and get inspiration to keep doing it). Read this if you love a nurse, and want to know why she/he can't think or feel, or sometimes communicate after a 12 hour shift. Read this if you want to know why your loved one sometimes bubbles over like a volcano and vents events that happened during their shift because it's impossible to bottle up the emotions any longer. Read this if you have been a patient, and learn that your

nurse loves what they do, and would chose the career over again in a heartbeat. Given 4 stars or a rating of "excellent".

As it turns out, I haven't saved the world. I've had a hand in saving some lives and have, I hope, made small differences in the lives of many. Occasionally, patients express their gratitude. some send us cards, some leave us chocolate. But external validation, the adoration and accolades of others, can't sufficiently make my job feel worth it. My job is worth it because I go home, on most days, with the feeling that I've at least broken even--I've put back at least as much as I've withdrawn from the karmic bank. It's a blessing in my life that I've been given the opportunity to be useful in my corner of the world. Today, that's enough for me.

Petra X says

All of the essays in this book were written by nurses who are writers too, nonetheless the quality of the writing varies considerably. The stories illuminate both nursing as different from doctoring and the nurse's own experience.

Most of the nurses are very caring people who don't flinch from some of the nastier jobs of looking after people with horrible personalities and/or disgusting illnesses that involve nausea-inducing exudations, vomit, pus and all the rest. One or two of them are very entitled people who seem to think that if nurses were put on pedestals and paid as much as investment bankers (they surely deserve that) it wouldn't be enough, their feet should be licked clean by the masses.

And it is because the editor chose to include those people whose voices might be true and deserve inclusion but who leave a really bitter taste in your mouth, that it is a four star book. Without them it would have been a paean to self-sacrifice, all Mother Theresa before Christopher Hitchen's book by society's acknowledged angels. The salt of reality is a seasoning books benefit from.

Gina says

I am always drawn to medical memoirs, and have long thought if I had to do it again, I would definitely be in the field of medicine in some capacity. This particular book is a collection of stories written by nurses. They tell how they came to be in the medical field, share their memories, both good and bad, and speak to what it really takes to be a good nurse. Although they are forced to hide their emotions much of the time, they are human and cannot help but be touched by what they witness every day. They see people at their worst and at their best, facing death, and witnessing miracles. With a son who has an extremely rare condition, I can attest to the fact that a good nurse makes all the difference in the world. I greatly enjoyed reading this book.

Ethan Martin says

Very well written , very real stories . I can't wait to write my own.

Josie says

Basically Chicken Soup for the Nurse, and I've never enjoyed those books, although I know many who do. Admittedly, I only read three stories in, but couldn't see myself finishing it.

Alexandra says

if you know anyone who just graduated nursing school or who is about to embark on their first nursing job or if you yourself are that person, buy them this book/read this book! this is such a wonderful, honest, heartfelt look into the day to day lives of nurses from all fields. most are women, a couple are men, some work in the ICU, some in emergency, OB/GYN, psych, long term care, you name it.

some are new nurses, some are students, some are experienced nurses who have been at it for thirty plus years. these are their stories of what it truly is to be a nurse.

this book discusses all the fears that come along with being a new nurse with a brand new littman stethoscope, just starting out. brand new pair of scrubs, walking down that hospital hallway and feeling like a big fat fraud or a little kid in a halloween costume. *am i really sure i am meant to be holding someone's life in my hands? can i even do this? what was i thinking? i could just leave now...*

these women and men talk about their feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, fear of potentially killing a patient through a medication error or simply not assessing them accurately enough, and so many more fears and emotions. and triumphs too! this is not a debbie downer of a book, far from it.

the feeling of satisfaction when you get through to someone, or are able to answer their questions correctly and in a timely manner, or when you can just be there for somebody when they're going through immeasurable pain/loss.

i LOVED pretty much all of these stories (with the exception of one or two that were just kind of boring or..lacking)

this would be a fantastic gift for a new nurse who is just starting out on their journey ???

Ela says

A really great collection of stories, especially for someone heading into nursing. Some stories are funny, some are heartbreaking, but I think anyone could find something in this collection that spoke to them personally.

Kevin McAllister says

Defiantly an interesting title. And reading this book it becomes very clear that nurses have to be strong. Nursing is one of the most physically and emotionally challenging jobs out there and sadly their voices aren't always heard. This book is long over due. Doctors grab all the glory in the medical field and nurses are all too often the unsung heroes. This book sings their songs; loud & strong.

Elisabeth Manley says

I honestly think anyone could read this book and enjoy it. It was a great collection of real stories from nurses when they were starting out and anyone could appreciate them. As a current nursing student it was great to read about things I'm going through now in my clinical placement. Or to read about research processes and "nursing diagnoses" and know that what we've learned will actually be applicable down the road. I loved every story in here and both laughed and cried at what they had to say. I can't wait to relate to even more of the stories as I finish my program.

Denise says

No other career do I admire more than that of a nurse. This book only reinforces my admiration. A fabulous read!

Ioana Voicu says

Wonderful collection of essays! Not only is this book extremely versatile - as it gives an insight into various types of nursing approaches - but it is also an endearing testimony of what this field is really about. This book focuses on the struggles of a nurse, bringing some light onto the real meaning of caring, which is revealed throughout every single story.

This book is great for people who are in the nursing field because it will help them identify different emotions that they have experienced or will be experiencing in the future. It is also a great book for people who know a nurse and want to understand him/her better. And, most importantly, it is a fascinating book for those who have no idea what nurses do and how they feel about their job.

You will not get bored reading this book, I can assure you!

Deborah Wellum says

This audiobook made me laugh and made me cry. It struck such a deep chord in me as a nurse because it was pure, raw and true. It was therapy for my nurse soul. So glad to not just read but to have experienced this book.

Heather says

This book was a compilation, so some of the essays were better than others. It was an interesting look at the emotional strain of being a nurse and an inside view into the world of nursing. Reading it gave me an even greater respect for people who choose to go into nursing. It is not a career for the fainthearted.

Sal4gal says

I listened to the Audible version.

"Different than I expected"

My son is in nursing school so I knew that I would enjoy this book. However, it deals more with the mental trials and feelings associated with nursing. I think that if you understand that going into the book, it will be more enjoyable. There are a few gross parts but they are very tame compared to the real world of nursing. I also enjoyed it because my son is an adrenaline junkie and is so different than those featured here. He lives for the ER. These stories are mostly touching and show the nurturing, caring side of nursing.

Emily Pittsley says

Very much enjoyed. Makes me feel like I'm not alone w/the feelings I still get sometimes as a "new" nurse. I recommend to any nurse, new or old!
