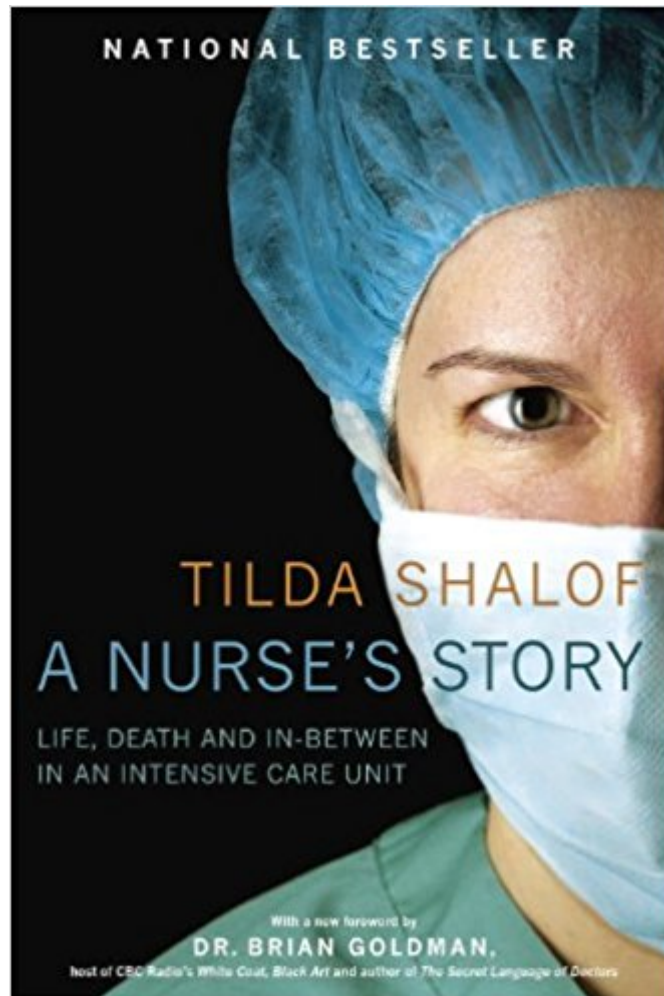




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# A Nurse's Story



## Synopsis

The team of nurses that Tilda Shalof found herself working with in the intensive care unit (ICU) of a big-city hospital was known as “Laura’s Line.” They were a bit wild: smart, funny, disrespectful of authority, but also caring and incredibly committed to their jobs. Laura set the tone with her quick remarks. Frances, from Newfoundland, was famous for her improvised recipes. Justine, the union rep, wore t-shirts emblazoned with defiant slogans, like “Nurses Care But It’s Not in the Budget.” Shalof was the one who had been to university. The others accused her of being “sooo sensitive.” They depended upon one another. Working in the ICU was both emotionally grueling and physically exhausting. Many patients, quite simply, were dying, and the staff strove mightily to prolong their lives. With their skill, dedication, and the resources of modern science, they sometimes were almost too successful. Doctors and nurses alike wondered if what they did for terminally-ill patients was not, in some cases, too extreme. A number of patients were admitted when it was too late even for heroic measures. A boy struck down by a cerebral aneurysm in the middle of a little-league hockey game. A woman rescued too late from a burning house. It all took its toll on the staff. And yet, on good days, they thrived on what they did. Shalof describes a colleague who is managing a “crashing” patient: “I looked at her. Nicky was flushed with excitement. She was doing five different things at the same time, planning ahead for another five. She was totally focused, in her element, in control, completely at home with the chaos. There was a huge smile on her face. Nurses like to fix things. If they can.” Shalof, a veteran ICU nurse, reveals what it is really like to work behind the closed hospital curtains. The drama, the sardonic humour, the grinding workload, the cheerful camaraderie, the big issues and the small, all are brought vividly to life in this remarkable book. From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

"Tilda Shalof's *A Nurse's Story* is the first time the work of nurses has been documented in print in Canada in such an honest, no-holds-barred account. . . . Shalof has seen it all, and writes about it, too. "The Calgary Herald" "But her book isn't a doom-and-gloom account of overworked nurses. Interspersed with tales of tragedy are accounts of the funny, often bizarre events that transpire on an ICU. "Canadian Press" "A compelling book laced with humour. "Times & Transcript" "There are genuinely heart-rending, disturbing and thought-provoking stories to be found in the pages of *A Nurse's Story*. If this book doesn't give you pause, you're made of stone. "Edmonton Journal" "In a post-SARS world where nurses are finally being recognized for the heroes they always were, *A Nurse's Story* is the best-seller no one can put down. "Montreal Gazette" "This is a difficult book. Its content is difficult. Its tone is difficult. But it is also difficult to put down, so compelling and beautifully written are these stories. "Shalof's stories are naked and vulnerable. Nothing is held back in her portrayals of her most memorable experiences from the early '80s to the SARS crisis. "Shalof's colleagues point out during one of their ongoing discussions about the value of their work, that eventually everyone needs a nurse. And for that reason alone, *A Nurse's Story* would worth reading, in order to understand where it is most of us will end up sooner or later, what it is that might be visited upon us and just who it is that will be looking after us. "A *Nurse's Story* helps us understand where it is most of us will end up sooner or later. "Winnipeg Free Press" "Readers may approach this book with the hope of reading dramatic tales such as those seen on television shows such as "ER. "While such readers are not likely to be disappointed, they are likely to discover more than they had hoped. "By turns sad, funny and touching, the author has done an admirable job of providing an insightful look into the real world of an ICU. "Brandon This Week" "A cracking good read. "Despite the overt moralizing, this is undoubtedly a strong memoir. I hope it's not the only story Shalof has to tell. "Quill & Quire

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What a pleasant surprise to discover this gem of a book. Truly written and not too "smooth" so that you know this is a real person writing. As a member of the profession I found that Tilda presented many of the things we often feel and struggle with, and that our leaders tend to miss. Working in a socialized medical system, the same dilemmas arise all over the world and are no different in Canada than in Israel, England, or elsewhere. The only difference may be in the way that each society chooses to address them or resolve them. and the bottom line is that we as nurses are the ones who have to implement the decisions, whether they are to our liking or not. We have not chosen an easy profession. I felt that Tilda had the courage to say many of the things that I feel, and that are not acceptable in the modern world. Yes, I choose to care for people even when they are revolting to me as a person. I believe, as Tilda appears to, that learning to accept them and to

exercise compassion is of the essence in our profession. And with these acts we also grow as human and nurses/ Loved it and would recommend it to anyone who asked.

Being a nurse who is now retired & worked 40+ years in the profession, I can empathize with Tilda! I worked nearly every day with staffing issues, too many patients, not enough help & MD's that felt they were gods! We had trouble with a lot of MD's (thankfully not ALL) that wouldn't listen to us, and would then "question" what we were telling them! They spent - for the most part - a very short time with the patient, and we were there 12+ hours/day! Anyway, am enjoying the book & reliving my time at work. I worked with some of the best nurses who really CARED about their patients & co-workers, and we worked as a team! Throw in the RT's, CNA's, PT's, housekeeping, etc. and that made it good.

Every nurse should read this book because it is good to know that you are not alone. You are not the only person who desires to help. You are not the only person who feels inadequate, at times. You are not the only person who second guesses yourself. You are not the only person who has ever wondered, "Why?" As a retired nurse who has faced burnout several times over in my career, I understand how that cycle works. I also learned about rejuvenation from burnout. The conclusion I draw from this book is this: Nursing is more than a job, a career or even a profession. Nursing is a way of looking at both life and death from the physical to the spiritual and back again. I am grateful for the years and experiences I've had; however, I will only return as called by the needs of my immediate family and closest friends. Nursing is a precious and painful gift.

Tilda Shalof writes in a manner that makes me believe that I am in the ICU with her. The relationships between nurses, doctors, and families of patients is a dynamic and shifting force. The patient is caught in between. However, the nurse is the one that is closer than any of these parties to the patient, even the families, as they are in their current state. How do the nurses handle such a huge responsibility and role? In different ways but not lost on them is the importance of their job. Ms. Shalof writes honestly about the dilemma of nurses and the changing focus in their profession. Education, training, layoffs, cost cutting, replacement with less skilled workers, pushy families, patient satisfaction surveys. It's all there but the reader gets to know the personalities caught up in this storm and not from a journalistic detachment. Ms. Shalouf is right in there in the story, getting involved and admits when she is wrong and can see her shortcomings. Her honesty is a great positive in *A Nurse's Story*. For instance while she relays how some viewed her as too sensitive, for

a patient that can be a welcome character trait in an uncertain world. A Nurse's Story should be read by anyone considering nursing as a profession, for those in nursing, and for anyone who wonders what goes into the care of really sick people. It helped me understand what nurses endure and how they cope. As if the ICU nurse wasn't already high on my respect list, A Nurse's Story pushed it higher.

I enjoyed Tilda's book very much. As a kid growing up, I had many surgeries on my right leg. Even back then, as young as I was, I noticed how busy all the nurses were. I had Hip Replacement surgery in Feb. 02. As a grown-up, I can really appreciate and understand just how dedicated these men and women are to the nursing profession. Read this book! You will see just how demanding and difficult both mentally and emotionally, this job can be. Lastly, I would like to say Thank-you to all the nurses who took such good care of me when I was hospitalized years ago.

This book made me think more about if i should become a nurse or not. I still feel passionate about becoming a nurse. Im just not sure if i want to work in the icu.

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