

## Life of a Nurse: An Insider's View of What Really Happens in a Hospital, through the Eyes of an RN

**Alice Marlett**

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*Life of a Nurse is an illuminating memoir about the difficulties of working in the field of nursing.*

Alice Marlett's *Life of a Nurse* is an enlightening memoir about the realities and difficulties of being a registered nurse.

While going through a divorce, and upon finding that her job as a salesperson wasn't enough to pay her mortgage and bills, Marlett decided to go back to school. She heard that there was a nursing shortage and that the pay was good, so she applied for a nursing program. She soon became a registered nurse (RN) and began working at various hospitals. What followed was demanding and underpaid work, chronicled in these diary entries spanning the decade from 2000 to 2010.

Marlett's entries are detailed in their accounts of what her RN job entailed. She worked in different units and fields, including in oncology and psychiatric care. She noted that some general patterns emerged regardless of the department: nurses were overworked because of continued scarcities in their field. Details as about a \$25 bonus for four hours of time stand to shock audiences, and a note about a \$0.35 per-hour annual raise is dispiriting.

The book maintains general interest via these and other surprising details, as with stories of ugly interactions with fellow medical personnel and administrators who disliked having their authority questioned. Some stories strike sensationalist tones, as with the book's coverage of an oncology unit manager who was unaware of the particular difficulties of working there and who seemed to revel in humiliating his staff. Personal grievances are recorded as well, as with an account of being forced to resign after an injury and being refused a reference.

Indeed, as the book progresses, its work becomes wearying—indicative of Marlett's feelings of burnout and exhaustion. Statements about feeling career satisfaction become less believable than the book's expressions of frustration as it records the many difficulties that Marlett faced.

The book is often too clinical to sustain wide interest: its tone is flat, and its language is direct. Whether detailing a patient's death or describing a car accident involving Marlett's child, the entries convey little emotion. The text becomes monotonous, and its entries blur together regardless of their topics. This dispassionate presentation is somewhat improved upon by the more personal closing entry, which covers a personal loss with more feeling and which reflects on Marlett's plans and hopes for the future.

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CAROLINA CIUCCI (May 15, 2023)

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