

# One-Off Press

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## **How the Incredibly Lucrative Nursing Home Industry Exploits, Defrauds and Is a Model for the future of Healthcare**

John Milton, Thomas Paine and Frederick Douglass were reformers. Their ranks swell with the likes of Upton Sinclair, Jacob Riis, and Jessica Mitford. Some of their works remain in print because they were not only effective but literary (*The Jungle*), darkly humorous (*The American Way of Death*), photographic (*How the Other Half Lives*), astounding and inspirational (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*). Most are forgotten, while some should not be.

Today we find ourselves in a world of causes that compete for media attention by proclaiming victimhood. A group that has no voice are the elderly caught in the inexorably meshing gears of long term care. They have no voice, no power, few advocates—no way to proclaim their tragic fate. When stories surface, if the anger is great enough, new laws are passed. But in practice, they remain powerless. However, with beltway arrogance associate counsel to the Senate Subcommittee on Long-Term Care, Val Haramandaris said, “Like hell, [they have] the right to sue.”

“Patients already have more rights, in the abstract, than they can use,” wrote Mary Adelaide Mendelson in her 1974 George C. Polk award winning exposé *Tender Loving Greed*. “No bars keep the patient in a home where he is abused; he is a prisoner of his own helplessness. He is in theory free to leave, but he cannot because he is sick or feeble, he is old, he has no money (not even small change, if the operator is keeping the patients' personal expense money), and he has lost contact with the world outside. So he stays and accepts his abuse. No patient organization, no guarantee of legal rights, is going to change the realities of the nursing home patient's plight.” But they have “the right to sue.”

Nursing home and long-term care abuse and fraud continue because they can. The chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Long-Term Care tried to kill the publication of *Tender Loving Greed*. Regular bomb threats, break-ins, and threats of violence followed its publication and continued until Mendelson's death in 1997. And yet according to the Henry Kaiser Family Foundation, nursing home care represents 6% (\$150 billion) of the total healthcare industry, \$2.5 trillion. Is it possible that there is less temptation for crime and government enabling in the remaining \$2.35 trillion?

Mendelson reported on organized crime; fraudulent tax, mortgage, and construction cost manipulations; drug theft and trafficking; and government indolence, enabling, and cover-ups. She reported on nursing home owners moving into HMOs, hospitals, and ancillary services. Those things have not changed.

Mendelson has few answers, no one does, but *Tender Loving Greed* shines a light on the creatures of the dark, seamy underbelly of long-term care, and in that sense, on healthcare in general. Anyone listening to the current debate on healthcare cannot think it honest when no one mentions those creatures.

*Tender Loving Greed*, reissued by One-Off Press, with 68 pages of notes by Walton Mendelson; 358 pages, paperback, \$18.95. Available from Amazon.com.

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Jpg's for download: Mary Adelaide Mendelson portrait, <http://www.12on14.com/tlg/mam.jpg>, TLG cover: <http://www.12on14.com/tlg/tlg.jpg>.