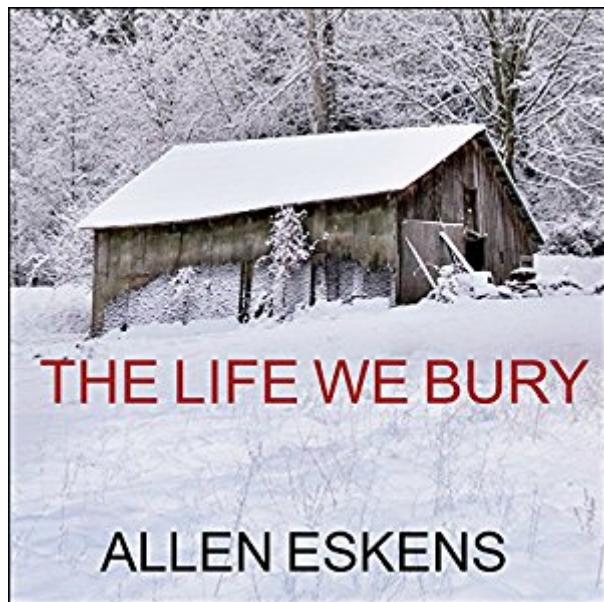


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The Life We Bury



Synopsis

College student Joe Talbert has the modest goal of completing a writing assignment for an English class. His task is to interview a stranger and write a brief biography of the person. With deadlines looming, Joe heads to a nearby nursing home to find a willing subject. There he meets Carl Iverson, and soon nothing in Joe's life is ever the same. Carl is a dying Vietnam veteran-and a convicted murderer. With only a few months to live, he has been medically paroled to a nursing home after spending thirty years in prison for the crimes of rape and murder. As Joe writes about Carl's life, especially Carl's valor in Vietnam, he cannot reconcile the heroism of the soldier with the despicable acts of the convict. Aided by his skeptical neighbor, Lila, Joe throws himself into uncovering the truth. Thread by thread, he begins to unravel the tapestry of Carl's conviction. But as he and Lila dig deeper into the circumstances of the crime, the stakes grow higher. Will Joe discover the truth before it's too late to escape the fallout?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The back-jacket summary drew me in and proved (unlike so many novels) to be an honest pitch: A story about a student writer who, somewhat by chance, locates the subject of his biographical (college class) project at a nearby nursing home. The biographical subject, a Vietnam War vet who was convicted of rape and murder 30 years earlier, is dying of cancer thereby introducing an added, looming deadline to finish the writing project. The writer begins with the weary task of documenting the life of a murderer but, through his research, revises his mission to that of uncovering the buried

truth of the old murder. This novel is probably classified as a thriller but I consider it a literary thriller. There's thrills and spills to make it a page turner but it doesn't over rely on such action. For me it was the rich character development, character interaction and psychological aspects that make this a great story and read. My only disappointment (albeit minor) is that the story never reveals if the class project (the biographical paper) was a success with the English professor and whether the student decided to become a journalist or professional writer. As a reader I was left to draw my own favorable conclusions for these minor questions. I seek out debut novels as they tend to be more honest than the writing of more "experienced" writers who often seem to be lured off course by fame, fortune and laziness. This novel is genuine writing and I'm looking forward to this author's future work, hoping to find similar honesty. I'm recommending and/or gifting copies of this novel to all of my reading friends.

As a 100 percent disabled Vietnam Veteran, due to Agent Orange exposure, I fully related to Carl Iverson. For years I couldn't speak about the war, whether because of the shame the American public cast upon our service, or because of my participation in the war itself. Sprayed and betrayed by our own government, then shunned by the rest of the country, no wonder so many of us went insane or turned to self-medication. I loved the plot of *The Life We Bury*, Mr. Eskens' mastery of detail and his mastery of the art of storytelling, I would have given it a 5-star rating, if it weren't for some details, and editing issues that struck me as not quite hitting the mark. For example, nobody who had ever graduated from Army recruit training would ever refer to it as "Boot Camp". His spelling of the Vietnamese town of Khe Sanh (the site of one of the deadliest and costliest battles of the war) as Que Son, would leave any Vietnam Vet scratching his head, and wondering why. One other glaring example was referring to the M16 as a gun. No military personnel would ever call his weapon a gun. There were some other editing issues that detracted from a great story by a first rate storyteller. Mr. Eskens, my hat is off to you, for telling a tale, that from my perspective, symbolically exonerates Vietnam Veterans. Thanks to you sir, from me and all that deserved better when they came home. May we all come out of the shadows, take our place as proud Americans, and look closely at the life we bury. Robert Romaniello, Author of *Marble Mountain Memoirs*.

It's not particularly often that my wife reads and enjoys any of the books that cross my path. Whilst I endeavour to read what she reads (eventually) she doesn't feel the same need to reciprocate, nor should she. Our last shared and loved book in common was Jess Walter's *Beautiful Ruins* last year, until Eskens debut *The Life We Bury* fell into her hands after mine. Fair to

say we both loved it and it was fun checking in on her progress as she devoured it knowing what was in store. A college assignment morphs into an investigation into a 30 year old murder mystery, that touches on a lot of things—family, relationships, affection, abuse, parenting, autism, communication, guilt, loyalty, friendships, Vietnam, war, death, alcohol abuse, cancer—and a whole lot of other things besides. Great story line, superb characters that you care about, especially Joe and his neighbour Lila. I think the family dynamics and the evolving relationship between Joe and Lila and the part Jeremy unwittingly played was one of the most satisfying parts of the book. A close second to that would be the developing friendship between our murdering, cancer-stricken, veteran Carl and Joe. I do like the odd book where the investigation into the mystery is conducted by a non-professional sleuth. It makes for a refreshing change from the police or more usually PI books, I read. Eskens arranged an interesting puzzle, which I was keen to see resolved, which it was. Intriguing, entertaining, gripping and totally satisfying. Definitely recommended if you like your mysteries, on the whole fairly straightforward, but with a lot of character and heart. Debut author Eskens has two new fans in the UK! 5 from 5 Allen Eskens hails from the US. Many thanks to Seventh Street Books for my copy.

Trigger warnings for abuse. Compelling. Short review: read it. Stand-alone that pulls the reader into the characters and scenes. Some graphic violence, no drag-you-down drama. Believable characters with distinct personalities. Each one haunted by actions in their past that created and somewhat controls their behaviors. Informative, interesting, memorable and realistic dialogue. 'It started gradually, but eventually she took to slapping me across the face whenever her tea-kettle brain started to boil.' I may re-read this story and look forward to other works by this author.

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