



## The Life We Bury

*Allen Eskens*

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## **The Life We Bury** Allen Eskens

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. Joe, along with his skeptical female neighbor, throws himself into uncovering the truth, but he is hamstrung in his efforts by having to deal with his dangerously dysfunctional mother, the guilt of leaving his autistic brother vulnerable, and a haunting childhood memory.

Thread by thread, Joe unravels 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?

*From the Trade Paperback edition.*

## **The Life We Bury Details**

Date : Published October 14th 2014 by Seventh Street Books (first published 2014)

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Author : Allen Eskens

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## From Reader Review The Life We Bury for online ebook

### jewels [Books Bejeweled] says

This book has been in my Audible wish list for at least three years. From the summary, it looks like a book I would enjoy: mystery, suspense, rave reviews for the storytelling. The only thing holding me back was the Vietnam War veteran as a character. How ridiculously picky is that? I was secretly afraid it would be too graphic in retelling old war stories. And it was a bit graphic, but thankfully very brief. As it turns out, Carl Iverson the paroled convict and war veteran, is a major reason this book is so lovable!

The heart tugging, suspenseful book centers around Joe, a street-smart college student. He has had to struggle for everything in his life. He never knew his dad, his mom is a raging alcoholic and his almost grown brother, Jeremy, is a perpetual seven year old due to his autism issues.

Our guy, Joe, literally stumbles onto a mystery while writing a biography essay on a nursing home resident, Carl Iverson. If solved, the mystery may exonerate Carl of crimes that sent him to prison for 30 years. Carl doesn't particularly care if he is exonerated or not, which makes the mystery even more compelling. Joe, however, does care. That is the kind of guy he is. Principled, caring, compassionate. And tough as nails.

Allen Eskens is a first rate storyteller and a natural born writer! The story flows effortlessly from Carl's life story to Joe's back story. They seem to not have anything in common with each other, but as they talk, their stories become intertwined. The ending is a little bit of a twist and 100% reader satisfying.

**I can't tell you how engrossed and invested I was while listening. I could not stop listening and the book made packing up for a big family move almost bearable!** There was just enough of everything I love in a good story: mystery, suspense, likable (lovable) protagonists, real emotions and struggles, and a rewarding ending! I also adored the Minnesota setting, the cold, snowy weather provides the perfect tone to the story. I finished this little beauty in less than 2 days.

This book won all kinds of awards as a debut novel for Eskens. Deservedly so. You will not regret listening or reading this one!

The audio book is narrated by a talented actor, Zach Villa. I felt he perfectly captured the voice of Joe and Carl. Not an easy task, considering the age and life differences of the two characters. If you like audio books, I highly recommend this one! If not, you must read it!

Lucky for all readers, there are three more books in this Eskens series. They are touted as possible standalone books, but most of my Goodreads friends say the back stories are so interesting that you will want to read all of the books. That's enough for me, I already borrowed the next audiobook from the handy dandy Overdrive app (free!!!) and started listening to THE GUISE OF ANOTHER.

Sadly, we are still packing and moving, but thank God for writers like Eskens for making it less painful!

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### Cathrine ?? says

Based on the reception by most, lucky for some new authors I'm not the one approving their debut manuscripts or on the nominating panel for Anthony Award books. Maybe I'm just a jaded, hard to please reader? It's true my mother would sometimes refer to me as a spoilsport. Perhaps there should be a warning label on my thoughts: *Readers under a certain age should just ignore Cathrine's opinions*. Well, I liked the cover and it was on sale at Amazon for \$1.99 so on my e-reader it went.

Initially we have a young college student who is easily manipulated by his abusive alcoholic mother, can hardly say more than one word to the girl next door he's attracted to, then quickly turns into a smart-young-man able to refigure a 30-year-old murder case, then turns back into a not-very-bright college student stupidly confronting a man he believes to be a murderer with all his evidence and no backup. From my POV it bordered on YA and lacked depth and substance for a seasoned reader. Perhaps a good travel book or beach read where there are many distractions. I do enjoy the occasional light read but this one failed to deliver the expected pleasure usually derived. The good? The interactions between Joe, Lila, and autistic brother Jeremy. I would have liked more of that.

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### **Linda says**

"His dying declaration.....that's what he called it. It's a statement that's true because you don't want to die with a lie on your lips."

Joe Talbert is a struggling Minnesota college student just trying to get by. An English class assignment is handed off to him to write a biography of a stranger. Easy stuff? Oh, not hardly.

The minute that Joe's car pulls into the parking lot of a local nursing home, it becomes a trajectory into a different time, place, and circle of life. Joe is assigned to Carl Iverson who has been released from prison because he is dying. Carl had been convicted of rape and murder many years ago. Now what kind of conversations would take place in the presence of a murderer?

Joe's feet are like sandbags as he makes his way into Carl's dimly lit room. Just how does one uncork the bottle of crimes of the past? But with each visit to the nursing home, Joe and his girlfriend, Lila, are convinced that there is far more to Carl's story than the willowy seaweed floating on the surface of this ocean.

Allen Eskens does a fine job of presenting believable characters. Joe has an autistic brother who lives with their mother. Ol' Mom stares at the bottom of a booze bottle on a daily basis much to the exasperation of Joe. Joe seems to be the major caretaker here while balancing college classes. We, as readers, feel for the lack of oxygen in his life. And we also stand side-by-side with Joe as he pursues all the faulty circumstances throughout Carl's disjointed life.

This was a very engaging read in which Eskens takes us down a very original storyline. The scope of the story widens from the simplicity of a college assignment into the dangerous footholds of a treacherous past. What I especially liked is the author's ability to see goodness where it often doesn't reside. We readily connect with this story because of it.

Will be checking out any future offerings by Allen Eskens. You've reeled me in!

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## **PorshaJo says**

Rating 4.5

The Life We Bury is a book that took me by surprise. I knew a bit about it, saw some reviews, but didn't rush to get it. I put it in my audio queue awhile back and again, didn't think much when it arrived in my inbox. Then I started listening and was immediately hooked.

Joe Talbert is a young college student who you can say, is struggling to keep it together. His mother is a drunk, frequently arrested, or off gambling someplace. His brother, is autistic, and needs supervision, which he sadly does not get from his mother. Joe seems intelligent at times but then quite aloof and dimwitted at others. He has to write a biography of an elderly person for a course. Naturally, he waits so long on starting, and he ends up going to a local nursing home to find a person to write about.

Carl Iverson is the man that he meets in that nursing home. Carl is a convicted murderer, rapist, and arsonist who served 30 years in prison and is now in the nursing home, dying of pancreatic cancer. He's accused of the murder of a 14-year old girl who lived next to him long ago. He agrees to tell Joe his life story, calling it his 'dying declaration'. And there is where the story took off. Joe begins to hear Carl's story, dig into the evidence, and do his own investigative work. Helping him is his neighbor, Lila, who Joe is infatuated with, and his brother, Jeremy (unwittingly helping him). Jeremy brought some much needed relief to this heavy story.

Wow! This one kept me on the edge of seat the entire time. The audio was great, the narrator really brought the story to life, as well as, all the characters. He did an amazing job. A true highlight of an audio. I listened to this while in the kitchen, cleaning, baking, anything just to keep listening. Every chance I got, I would listen to this one. I had to know how this story would end. Yes, at some point I had an idea of what would happen. But it didn't matter. The ride of getting to that point was intense and I loved it. A great story, audio, and thriller. One, I'm sure, I will remember for sometime.

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## **Holly B says**

3.5

A homework assignment turned murder investigation! 30 year old murder investigation!

I loved the plot and the character of Joe Talbert. He is a 21 year old college student and he has not had an easy life growing up in Minnesota. His mom is an alcoholic and can barely care for his younger autistic brother, Jeremy(adored this character).

Joe has an English assignment and ends up interviewing Carl, a man convicted of murder 30 years prior. Carl went to Vietnam and was awarded a silver cross and a couple of purple hearts. Joe's research leads to questions about the murder and he starts digging.

I absolutely enjoyed this multi-layered plot and know many have raved about this one. It is graphic with

some disturbing passages as the plot thickens. If you enjoy gritty crime novels, I'd say this may be a must read!

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### **Mischenko says**

This book is featured on Throwback @  
<https://readrantrockandroll.com/2018/...>

Loved it from beginning to end...

Joe, a college student, has an English assignment to complete that requires him to interview someone for a biography. He chooses a man named Carl, a Vietnam veteran who's also a convicted rapist and murderer. Carl has an interesting background including some secrets. He's been released from prison only because he's dying of cancer. Everyone already knows his story—or do they? As Joe discovers more about Carl and gets him to open up about his past, he realizes that there's a lot more going on and must uncover it all.

Joe and Carl are the main characters and the book focuses primarily on these two. There's so much happening with Carl's story in addition to Joe's struggles with his alcoholic mother and autistic brother. I truly enjoyed all the characters, the plot with the twists, and the suspense. The characters are all well written and everything felt realistic to me. I had to find out what the outcome would be and for that, this will always be a favorite. 5-stars

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### **Elyse says**

Audiobook... narrated by \*Zack Villa\*.....WAS TERRIFIC! Zack was a flawless voice!!!Something about the way Mr. Zack Villa read this novel, was absolutely the perfect combination of real - calm - not too phony or hyped - but always held my attention. I felt like I was in the same room with him while he was talking to me. AND I liked the story AND characters - equally. ( maybe the characters a little more).

This was a 'daily deal' chance-buy - knowing nothing about it except what the Goodreads blurb said....along 'with' 52,852 ratings - and 6,103 reviews with an average of 3.94 stars.

So.... ( laugh with me?) .... so I can take a December holiday break and not write ANOTHER REVIEW ( maybe a few more breaks this month too while on vacation with Paul for our 39th anniversary), ....  
.....now that all my stitches are off my nose and forehead - both eyes are fully open - swelling is down enough to fit a pair of glasses on for driving - I'm allowed to drive finally after almost a month. I can get out of this house today and drive myself up to a trail —( with my new sunblock clothing and sunblock hat and listen to another audiobook) .... instead of being online writing this review... lol  
THERE ARE SO MANY GREAT ONES ALREADY.... many 5 and 4 Star reviews ....  
Jennifer Masterson, Annet, Linda, PorshaJo, Susanne Strong, TANYA, Vanessa, to name a few. — and MANY MORE  
Cathrine gave it 2 Stars ... read hers too.

KEPT ME ON THE EDGE OF MY TUSH! Enjoy it!! 5 stars for me!

Happy Holiday season to the Goodreads Community!!!

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### **karen says**

3.5 stars!

this is a very good mystery debut, with memorable characters and a fairly standard/familiar plot, but it's got enough promise in it that i am very confident his second book will be remarkable.

joe talbert is a 21-year-old college student tasked with writing a biographical piece on an elderly individual for his writing class. having no family members fitting the bill, he goes to a nursing home to find a willing participant. the only resident with enough cognitive capacity to take part is carl iverson, a vietnam vet and convicted rapist/murderer released from jail on medical parole after thirty years; he is dying of pancreatic cancer and has been sent to the nursing home to live out his remaining months.

iverson agrees to be interviewed as long as joe agrees to complete transparency in all of their dealings.

*I'll be truthful with you. I'll answer any question you put to me. I'll be that proverbial open book, but I need to know that you are not wasting my limited time. You have to be honest with me as well.*

knowing he is going to die soon, he feels an urgency to come clean about his past - all of his past.

*So this...this conversation with you...this is my dying declaration. I don't care if anybody reads what you write. I don't even care if you write it down at all...I have to say the words out loud. I have to tell someone the truth about what happened all those years ago. I have to tell someone the truth about what I did.*"

so joe finds himself becoming a sort of amateur sleuth, listening to what iverson is telling him, but also tracking down the primary sources of the long-ago crime to find out what really happened, along with a pretty, but guarded, neighbor named lila.

joe is also dealing with a heap of personal problems - his bipolar alcoholic mother has shacked up with a man who has been abusing joe's 18-year-old autistic brother jeremy, and joe finds himself having to step in and care for jeremy and bail his mother out of jail while iverson's life keeps ticking inexorably away.

the relationships between joe and carl and joe and jeremy are very realistically rendered, although the relationship between joe and lila is somewhat less so. jeremy is very sensitively depicted, and the backstory involving joe's grandfather added a nice horrifying but then tender element.

there's a little The Ploughmen: A Novel here, a little The Silence of the Lambs in the quid pro quo element, and the vietnam scenes are particularly strong. it doesn't ultimately do much more than be a serviceable mystery novel with interesting characters, but it's well worth a read, and stay tuned, because i predict his second book will have tightened up some of the formulaic bits and i am eagerly awaiting it.

this kind of annoyed me: (view spoiler)

but apart from that - a good book and an author to watch.

and the book also made a great eternal flame-stand at BEA!!

also, did you guys know that erin is as cute as a button??? it's true.

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## **Susanne Strong says**

4.5 Stars

An Intense Novel that Makes Your Blood Pressure Rise and Your Heart Beat Out of Your Chest. Highly Recommended!

Joe Talbert hasn't had an easy life. He is a college student whose mother is a drunk and whose younger brother is autistic. He never met his father and unfortunately, he lost his grandfather years ago. He only recently transferred to the University after taking classes at the Community College. He has worked like crazy ever since he could remember, supporting his alcoholic mother and younger brother. Now, he works as a bouncer in order to pay for college. For an English class, he receives an assignment that he has put off for a long time: to interview a stranger, and draft a biography. Not knowing where else to go, Joe drives to a nursing home, thinking someone there will have the life experience he is looking for. He is right. There he meets Carl Iverson. Carl served 30 years in prison for murder, rape and arson and was let out to serve the remainder of his sentence at the home because he has stage 4 cancer and only has a few months to live.

Carl Iverson has never told anyone his story. Upon meeting Joe Talbert, he decides that Joe will be the first. That he will tell Joe his "dying declaration," though no one else will probably hear it or ever know the truth. He has a few requests: That Joe listen and not judge him (which Joe promises to do), and that Joe be honest with him about his life and his secrets as well.

In interviewing Carl and in finding out more about Carl's past, Joe learns that Carl was a Vietnam Vet, and that he won awards. Does this jibe with Carl being a murderer and a rapist, Joe wonders? Then Joe and his neighbor Lila obtain Carl's trial file and both begin to dig deep to find the truth. This takes both Joe and Lila into places neither expected and things go awry. In the midst of this, Joe has to deal with familial problems making things even more difficult.

In the Life We Bury, sometimes Joe Talbert, seems intelligent beyond his years. His thoughts and his vocabulary are far wiser than those of most twenty-one year olds. This may be because he is the man of the family and basically raised brother. That said, he also comes across as being quite naive in several situations that arose and in those situations I found my heart beating, my blood pressure rising and my stomach churning. Carl Iverson is a very complex man who, at times appears cold and emotionless. In uncovering the life he buried, you come to understand why.

What struck me about this novel was how well written each character was. You could picture each one in your mind, fully fleshed out. From Joe's alcoholic mother. To Jeremy, his brother. To his neighbor, Lila. And for a debut novel - this was even more incredible. Allen Eisken nailed it. Further, I thought the narrator, Zack Villa, did an excellent job narrating the voices, changing the tones for each character, especially Joe and

Carl.

I listened to the audiobook, in my car, doing chores and during work lunch hours (basically whenever I could) and I had a hard time controlling my emotions especially during the last 1/4 of the book. I was basically crawling out of my skin, (though I admit, I understood something important midway through) and still found that I was unable to tear myself away. This was by far, one of my favorites books of the year and I recommend it (and especially the audiobook) to anyone looking for a story with compelling characters who draw you in.

Published on Goodreads and Amazon on 4.30.17.

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### **\*TANYA\* says**

I cannot believe this book gets anything less than 5 stars!!! It was FANTASTIC from beginning to end. A must read and I have so much to say but don't want to give anything away either. I'm casting Jeremy Irons as Carl and Logan Lerman as Joe.

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### **Brenda - Traveling Sister says**

I listened to the audio version of The Life We Bury after a tip from a Goodreads friend who also listened to it while doing chores. While listening to this I was mostly shoveling snow which made that task a little bit more tolerable. This book was an excellent choice for listening to as the pacing of the narrative kept my attention throughout and my mind didn't wander.

The Life We Bury is a rewarding tale of two characters, Joe and Carl that are bonded together by buried secrets and the burdens they carry. Joe who takes on responsibilities way beyond his years unravels the tale of Carl's conviction and his past secrets.

The tale is told through Joe's eyes and ears and we learn part of the tale as Carl is telling his story to Joe. This made the audio version very enjoyable for me. It was like hearing the story for myself first hand.

I highly recommend the audio version of The Life We Bury for those times you want to get lost in the tasks and chores that need to be done.

<http://www.twogirlslostinacouleereadi...>

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### **Annet says**

Wow, what a great book! Highly recommended: 4.5 rating. Note: just upgraded to 5 stars. Just really enjoyed this book, unusual and great story.

What drew me to this book was the unusual story of a student, Joe, who has a biography assignment for his studies and decides to interview Carl Iverson, a dying Vietnam veteran and convicted murderer and rapist in a nursing home. Carl has been released from prison because he is dying from cancer. Joe has just left his

home to live near college and try and finish his studies. At home he left his alcoholic and dysfunctional mother, her abusive boyfriend and his vulnerable autistic brother Jeremy, which is really tough on him. So there are several elements in this story, part of which is the 'crime part', where Joe is trying to figure out if Carl did the murder years ago. Great writing, great story. Sensible, intelligent, tender, creepy at the same time. Will definitely go and find this author's other books.

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### **Jennifer Masterson says**

Let me just say that the narrator of this book is awesome! I mean 5 Star! This book is excellent in audio!

Really good debut novel. Fun mystery with likeable characters and some good twists and turns. I loved Lila and Joe! You need to be able to suspend disbelief for this one.

Recommended for mystery/thriller lovers!

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### **Jaline says**

*“ . . . maybe [the high-school guidance counselor] knew who my mother was and figured that no one can change the sound of an echo.”*

College material or not, that's where Joe is. Neither Joe nor his autistic younger brother Jeremy have ever met their fathers. Their mother is an alcoholic who also has a mental health disorder and refuses to seek out or accept help. At ages 11 and 9, the death of Joe and Jeremy's grandfather was also the end of mitigation in their mother's behaviors. Although Joe is in a different city at college, he is close enough to go home in case of emergencies. Despite his school workload and working evenings and weekends to pay for school, Joe is doing well – except life keeps sending him curve balls.

One of his assignments in College is to write a Biography about someone that includes two corroborating references. Joe gets the idea to go to a Seniors home, convinced that long lives would hold more information, especially about times long past.

Out of the possibilities to interview, only one intrigues Joe by the uniqueness of his story: Carl Iverson, convicted rapist and murderer. He is dying, and although skeptical at first, he sees Joe as an avenue for telling the truth of his story as a killer and as a murderer, while Joe learns the difference between the two and is on a mission to write about Carl's role as both.

This book grabbed my attention from the beginning. The way the story unfolded was very engaging and I was quickly fascinated by Joe's own story and could not wait to find out more about Carl Iverson. As intriguing as the characters are, the plot also moves at a brisk and steady pace – except for the times when we are racing through a scene that is filled with suspense and danger. And there are a few of those.

The writing in this novel is exceptionally good. The author uses a light hand with imagery, metaphors and similes that pop up like little surprises of silvery clarification. The personalities of his characters and the smooth flow of the plot are the driving forces that held my rapt attention, while the poetic moments touched my heart.

It has only been four years since this debut novel broke out and touched so many readers with its story. Since then, the author has written three more novels, and I can hardly wait to explore each one of them. Highly recommended to everyone.

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### **Starjustin says**

Excellent book and author. Great reading! A real page turner to the end. Looking forward to this authors latest novel.

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