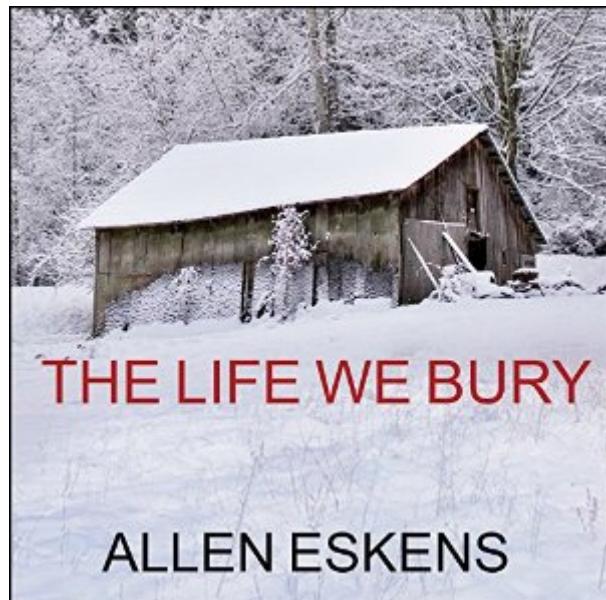


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# The Life We Bury



## **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**

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 24 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: June 9, 2015

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00Z96QRFM

Best Sellers Rank: #6 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Mysteries & Thrillers #15 in Books > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Thrillers & Suspense > Psychological Thrillers #23 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature

## **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.

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.

Minnesota writer Allen Eskens' first novel is tense, engrossing and fast-paced reading--an excellent

debut. College student Joe Talbert has been given a seemingly simple writing assignment for an English class: Go interview and write a brief biography of a stranger. True to college life, Joe waits almost too long to begin working on the task. Then he hurries over to a nursing home, hoping to find someone interesting. The man he interviews, Carl Iverson, turns out to be a Vietnam War veteran who is dying of pancreatic cancer. Iverson, Joe learns, also is a convicted rapist and murderer who has been medically paroled to the nursing home to spend his final days. As Joe begins to dig deeper into Iverson's story, he starts turning up proof that Iverson was wrongly convicted three decades ago. Meanwhile, Joe also has become attracted to his next-door neighbor, Lila. Soon, he pulls Lila into his investigation of Iverson, too. And together, they keep digging deeper, until they finally get themselves into ugly danger that seems to offer no possibility of escape. No big spoilers here, but this mystery thriller's heart-thumping, nerve-jarring conclusion has more than one clock winding down to the final, deadly seconds. *The Life We Bury* is superb investigator fiction, with action. (My thanks to Seventh Street for the review copy.)

"*The Life We Bury*", is a popcorn read of sorts. From the angle of story telling, it gets an A. It has an immaculate pace, and I never felt that I was yawning while reading this. There are different reasons why people like to read a novel, and I try and review accordingly and not blanket describe a book. This is a great novel if you want a coherent, fast paced story that will keep you interested, which in my view is the most important element of a good novel. That said, I can't give it four or five stars, as I find the story relies to heavily on over done formulas. The young person meets the old person, and listens to the story of that persons past, and learns something along the way, and/or solves a mystery. I say "How Many Times"? Though I very much liked the admirable qualities of the main character, most notably his loyalty to his autistic brother, and his inner battle about where to draw the line between him living his own life, or being responsible to take care of his disabled brother, it wasn't explored nearly enough. Most notably when involving his alcoholic mother and the role that she played in this dilemma. Somehow the elements of the story that really could have added a lot of meat to the bone, were treated more as passing thoughts, then fully realized aspects to what otherwise is a pretty engaging story. This novel suffers from an over edit content wise. It's too short I say, and sometimes that is a good thing, but in my opinion, not in this case. That is also a compliment of sorts, as I did enjoy this authors style of writing. Very direct and clean.

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