

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Allen Eskens is the bestselling author of *The Life We Bury*, *The Guise of Another*, *The Heavens May Fall*, *The Deep Dark Descending*, *The Shadows We Hide*, *Nothing More Dangerous*, and *The Stolen Hours*. He is the recipient of the Barry Award, Minnesota Book Award, Rosebud Award (Left Coast Crime), and Silver Falchion Award and has been a finalist for the Edgar® Award, Thriller Award, and Anthony Award. His books have been translated into 26 languages.

Allen has a journalism degree from the University of Minnesota and a law degree from Hamline University. After law school, he studied creative writing in the M.F.A. program at Minnesota State University-Mankato, as well as the Loft Literary Center and the Iowa Summer Writer's Festival. Allen grew up in the hills of central Missouri. He now lives with his wife, Joely, in greater Minnesota where he recently retired after practicing criminal law for 25 years.

- Author's website

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you experience the book? Were you immediately drawn into the story—or did it take you a while? Did the book intrigue, amuse, disturb, alienate, irritate, or frighten you?
2. What aspects of the novel did the author draw from to come up with the title for *The Life We Bury*?
3. Which character, if any, did you identify with the most? Why?
4. Was there a particular scene that resonated with you or stayed with you after you finished the novel?
5. How did you feel about the character of Carl Iverson when he was first introduced? Did your opinion of him change throughout the novel? How?
6. Would you say that the story is plot driven or character driven? In other words, do events unfold quickly? Or is more time spent developing characters' inner lives? Does it make a difference to your enjoyment?
7. How does guilt affect or influence the various characters?
8. What would you say are Joe's strongest character traits?

9. If you could change the character of Joe Talbert, what would you change?
10. How is the harsh Minnesota winter weather a character in the story?
11. Joe's mother was abusive and neglectful. How do you think such a thing can be prevented, especially in autistic children? What other options do you think there were for Jeremy's care?
12. Where do you think Joe, Lila, and Jeremy will be in ten years?
13. When you look at the nursing home setting and how Carl was treated/judged, what does that make you feel about nursing homes as a whole?
14. Carl sees a difference between murder and killing. Do you think there is a difference? Why?
15. It is never really explained why Carl watched the neighbor girl so closely. What are your thoughts on this?
16. Before it was revealed, did you know who did it?

- <https://alleneskens.com/life-we-bury-bookclubs.php>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

The premise of this gripping thriller isn't entirely believable--a college student transforms himself into a supersleuth--but in the rush to turn pages, readers will be glad to give debut author Eskens the benefit of the doubt. University of Minnesota freshman Joe Talbot visits a nursing home looking for someone to interview for an English assignment in which he must compose a brief biography of a stranger. Carl Iverson, who spent 30 years in prison for rape and murder and is now dying of cancer, isn't what Joe had in mind, but he accepts the challenge and, soon enough, sets out to prove the man's innocence. Meanwhile, his alcoholic mother is incapable of caring for Joe's autistic brother, leaving Joe faced with sacrificing his education to protect his brother. Eskens jumps effectively between both plots, as Joe and his neighbor, a young woman with her own troubled past, are drawn into Iverson's case and begin uncovering details that some would prefer to keep buried. The tension builds to an all-stops-out finale that works on every level. Thriller fans should keep their eyes on Eskens; he's a comer.

Publisher's Weekly

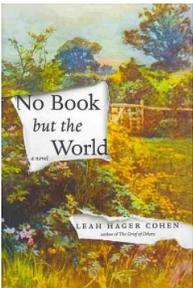
Joe Talbert, the hero of Eskens's masterful debut, has worked hard to earn the money to leave home and pursue an education at the University of Minnesota, but his alcoholic mother, who's unable to provide proper care for his autistic brother, keeps demanding his money and time. Joe's life takes a harrowing turn when he visits a nursing home in Richfield, Minn., in search of a subject for a class assignment—to write a person's biography. Joe chooses one of the only patients not affected with dementia, Carl Iverson, who, he soon discovers, was convicted decades earlier of the murder and rape of a 14-year-old girl. Recently paroled after serving 30 years of a life sentence because he's dying of pancreatic cancer, Carl agrees to tell Joe his story. Prodded by Lila Nash, his attractive college student neighbor, Joe immerses himself in the crime and Carl's trial. As Joe learns more about the events of the murder, he is faced with several threats to his own safety, yet refuses to give up his pursuit of the truth. More

complications ensue, until the novel's satisfying resolution. Agent: Amy Cloughley, Kimberley Cameron Agency. (Oct.) --Staff (Reviewed September 15, 2014) (Publishers Weekly, vol 261, issue 37)

Kirkus Reviews

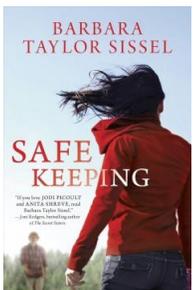
A struggling student's English assignment turns into a mission to solve a 30-year-old murder. Joe Talbert has had very few breaks in his 21 years. The son of a single and very alcoholic mother, he's worked hard to save enough money to leave his home in Austin, Minnesota, for the University of Minnesota. Although he has to leave his autistic younger brother, Jeremy Naylor, to the dubious care of their mother, Joe is determined to beat the odds and get his degree. For an assignment in his English class, he decides to interview Carl Iverson, a man convicted of raping and killing a 14-year-old girl. Carl, who maintains his innocence, is dying of cancer and has been released to a nursing home to end his life in lonely but unrepentant pain. The more Joe learns about Carl--a Vietnam vet with two Purple Hearts and a Silver Cross--the more the young man questions the conviction. Joe's plan to write a short biography and earn an easy A turns into something more. Even after his mother is arrested for drunk driving and guilt-trips Joe into ransacking his college fund to bail her out, he soldiers on with the project, though her irresponsibility forces him to take Jeremy into his care. But it's his younger brother who cracks the code of the long-dead murder victim's secret diary and an attractive neighbor, Lila Nash, who has her own agenda for helping Joe solve the mystery, whatever the risk. Eskens' debut is a solid and thoughtful tale of a young man used to taking on burdens beyond his years--none more dangerous than championing a bitter old man convicted of a horrific crime.

READALIKES



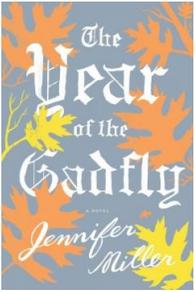
***No Book but the World* by Leah Hager Cohen**

A literary novel about adult siblings, a sister and her autistic brother, and what happens when the brother is accused of the murder of a local boy - who is truly responsible, and could it have been avoided if the brother had been treated differently by his parents, by his sister, by society?



***Safe Keeping* by Barbara Taylor Sissel**

When Tucker, her troubled son, is accused of murder, Emily Lebay and her daughter Lissa set out to learn the truth about Tucker and discover something far more shocking than their darkest fears.



***The Year of the Gadfly* by Jennifer Miller**

A budding teen journalist and her enigmatic science teacher separately work to locate and infiltrate a secret society that threatens their elite prep school with a shady tragedy from the past, an event that challenges the student's allegiances.