

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*The Life We Bury*

by Allen Eskens

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## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

*Reprinted from publisher.*

Allen Eskens is the USA Today-bestselling author of *The Life We Bury*, *The Guise of Another*, *The Heavens May Fall* and *The Deep Dark Descending*. He is the recipient of the Barry Award, Minnesota Book Award, Rosebud Award, and the Silver Falchion Award and has been a finalist for the Edgar Award, Thriller Award, and Anthony Award. His debut novel, *The Life We Bury*, has been published in 16 languages and is being developed for a feature film.

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. He is represented by Amy Cloughley of Kimberley Cameron and Associates Literary Agency, and published by Seventh Street Books.

Allen grew up on the hills of central Missouri. He now lives with his wife, Joely, in out-state Minnesota where he has recently retired from his law practice to devote the entirety of his energy to writing novels.

## **BOOK SUMMARY**

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*The Life We Bury* tells the story of Joe Talbert, a junior at the University of Minnesota, who receives a class assignment to write a biography of someone who has lived an interesting life. At a nursing home he meets Carl Iverson, a man dying of cancer who has been medically paroled after spending thirty years in prison for the murder of a fourteen-year-old girl. Carl agrees to tell Joe his story, and Joe sets out to unravel the tapestry of the thirty-year-old murder.

To complicate things, Joe's bi-polar, alcoholic mother has taken up with a low-life who hits Joe's eighteen-year-old autistic brother. Joe is torn by the guilt of going to college and abandoning his brother. Throughout the novel, Joe has to intercede to protect his brother and is conflicted every time he has to once again leave his brother behind. The power of that guilt weighs heavily upon Joe and will demand a resolution of its own.

*The Life We Bury* is full of tension, twists and turns, and has a powerful, climactic ending sure to gratify. But in the end, it is the bond between Joe and his brother Jeremy that gives this novel its big (albeit tormented) heart.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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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?
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?

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