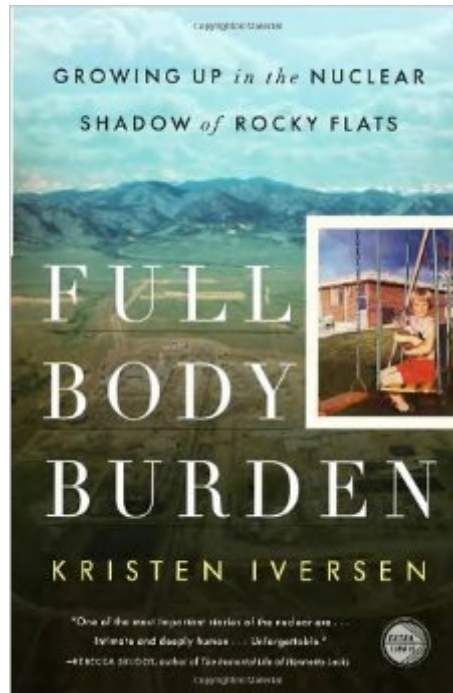


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Full Body Burden: Growing Up In The Nuclear Shadow Of Rocky Flats



Synopsis

Full Body Burden is Kristen Iversen's story of growing up in a small Colorado town close to Rocky Flats, a secret nuclear weapons plant. It's also a book about the destructive power of secrets—both family secrets and government secrets. Her father's hidden liquor bottles, the strange cancers in children in the neighborhood, the truth about what they made at Rocky Flats—best not to inquire too deeply into any of it. But as Iversen grew older, she began to ask questions and discovered some disturbing realities. As this memoir unfolds, it reveals itself as a brilliant work of investigative journalism—a shocking account of the government's sustained attempt to conceal the effects of the toxic and radioactive waste released by Rocky Flats, and of local residents' vain attempts to seek justice in court. Based on extensive interviews, FBI and EPA documents, and class-action testimony, this taut, beautifully written book promises to have a very long half-life. Now with Extra Libris material, including a reader's guide and bonus content

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Customer Reviews

Author Kristen Iversen's 12 years of research is evident in this fairly epic look at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapon's factory, and the contamination, cancer and dishonesty the facility left behind. But, this is the price for a nation's protective nuclear arsenal - the weapons have to be built somewhere, and Rocky Flats was the source for the nuclear warhead's plutonium 'triggers.' The 'villain' of the piece is of course the government and the private companies - Dow Chemical, for example - that willfully kept secrets from the close-by Denver population, pretending the facility was much safer

than it was, and that the health effects were minimal. A grand jury's recommended criminal indictment was ignored, and at the book's conclusion, an appeals court overturns a mammoth legal judgement in resident's favor. None of this is really a surprise. But it's depressing to see how local communities are ignored - or worse, how decent jobs are considered more important than long-term health. Thousands of perfectly content workers are at the plant; had they up and quit one day in protest, maybe they could have changed things. But that never happens; in fact, Iversen shows several cases where whistle-blowers were threatened by their fellow workers, scared the plant would close and take away their jobs. So it's easy to blame the companies and the government, but we're the ones who sit idly by. This part of the story should anger and disgust readers, but we should not be surprised that a nuclear program designed to try and protect the entire country would have been unwilling to sacrifice the health of a few towns. The book's parallel thread is Iversen's childhood in the community, and dealing with an alcoholic father.

There is absolutely no way to do this book justice in a brief review. It accomplishes what would seem to be impossibility - combining an intimate and elegant personal memoir with a powerful and incredibly important documentary. Although I was not brought up in the near vicinity of Rocky Flats, my own childhood was indeed overshadowed in more ways than one by "The Bomb". I was a six-year-old living in Gallup, NM, at the time of the Trinity Test. My mother was pregnant with my younger sister at the time. The pre-dawn concussion of that blast woke her out of a sound sleep, and she always swore that it was the first time she felt the baby kick. The commandant of Ft. Wingate Ordnance Depot where my father worked as a civilian employee was panicked because he thought the explosion must have occurred on-site in some of their munitions bunkers. I remember the ongoing nightmares of a child with the threat of nuclear weapons being discussed on the radio (we didn't have a TV). Of course, with Sandia National Labs in Albuquerque where my parents lived after the war, and Los Alamos only 70 miles or so to the north, we always knew we'd be in one of the primary target areas in case of attack. But - and this is the crucial point made so brilliantly in Iversen's magnificent narrative - there was no inkling of the incredible cover-up of the dangers of simply BUILDING the bombs that were meant to provide our deterrent capability. Although I lived in New Mexico and Arizona during a good part of the time so carefully described in this story, I had no clue about anything of significance occurring at Rocky Flats.

Be prepared to be terrified, amazed and astounded as you read this book about the Nuclear horror of Rocky Flats near Denver, Colorado. Like Los Alamos, it is a research facility, builder of plutonium

triggers and this site was initiated to fight our part of the cold war. Right in the back yard of this nuclear test site and plutonium harvester, were homes where children played in the smudge of plutonium, rode horses across contaminated land, and drank water from poisoned wells. Kristen Iversen intersperses the history of Rocky Flats with the story of her Nordic Family - a family that keeps secrets and does not speak out of turn - and do they ever have a lot of secrets to keep. Kristen's father is an attorney who is heading down the deep slope of alcoholism, her mother refuses to acknowledge what is happening at Rocky Flats. She talks about cleaning agents being manufactured there. Despite the workers coming down with epidemiological markers for cancer, the government just won't take the people seriously. There are more agencies of the government than I could have ever imagined and each one is there to protect another agency. They work in tandem to keep the public relations good and the people fooled. Kristen has spent years writing this book, interviewing people, going over court cases and following the problems from the very start. She opens with the Manhattan Project which began in 1942 and closes with the classic poem, 'Plutonium Ode' by Alan Ginsberg. I grew up listening to Ginsberg and he was a brave poet who knew when to speak up and how to do it. He feared nothing and told the truth. Even in the days when homosexuality was in the closet, Ginsberg was out of the closet. Ms.

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