

EVE PORINCHAK

Author of Teen True Crime



ABOUT ME

Since earning a degree in Biology/Psychology from UCLA, Eve has lived all over the planet and spent much of her time in and out of jail – as a creative writing teacher and advocate for teen inmates. A former medical student, child welfare social worker, and public school teacher, Eve writes stories featuring youth she feels have been underrepresented in children's literature, such as those born into gang life, the abandoned, and the incarcerated who – ironically - have the most fascinating tales to tell. Her first book, **One Cut** - a haunting nonfiction story with a juvenile justice bent – launched Simon and Schuster's new young adult true crime line, SIMON TRUE in May 2017.

ONE CUT

THE FIGHT THAT COST SIX LIVES

A backyard brawl, and accidental death, and a murder trial filled with gang accusations turned a small town upside down. After a day of ditching school and partying, a group of teenage friends drove to an acquaintance's backyard clubhouse – a popular hangout spot – in quiet Agoura Hills, California. A brief fistfight erupted, and minutes later one boy was dead. The prosecution depicted some of the boys as gang members and the crime as a robbery gone wrong. A media circus fueled the belief that this affluent neighborhood was in danger of a full-blown gang war. Five boys were charged with first-degree murder, including one boy who never even saw the fight. Four of them stood trial and faced life sentences in prison. What really happened that day? Was it a botched robbery, gang activity, or something else? Would life sentences be fair – or would they be cruel and unusual punishment?

THE FIGHT THAT COST SIX LIVES

ONE CUT

EVE PORINCHAK

Real Stories. Real Teens. Real Consequences.

SIMON TRUE

PRAISE FOR ONE CUT

School Library Journal

Gr 8 Up--On May 22, 1995, teenagers Jimmy Farris and Mike McLoren were hanging out in McLoren's backyard when four other boys from their high school--Jason and Micah Holland, Tony Miliotti, and Brandon Hein--hopped the fence onto the McLoren property. Twenty minutes later, Farris lay dead in the McLoren kitchen from multiple stab wounds, while McLoren was taken to the hospital for cuts. The once quiet community of Agoura Hills, CA, was shattered by Farris's death, and the ensuing media circus did nothing to help the images of the five boys arrested (another, Chris Velardo, who wasn't present at the scene of the crime was also locked up). The prosecution built its case on flimsy eyewitness accounts and blatant hearsay, and at the end of the lengthy trial, four out of the five boys were convicted of first-degree murder. Porinchak carefully exposes some of the failings of the trial, including the biased presiding judge and the selection of jurors who personally knew the victims' families. The narrative keeps the details of what really happened vague, adding to the mystery of the case. Ultimately, this is a story of how four lives were forever disrupted because of prejudice and a flawed judicial system. VERDICT A solid purchase for teen collections where true crime is popular.

Tyler Hixson, School Library Journal

Kirkus

The May 22, 1995, brawl in a white suburb of Los Angeles that resulted in the death of one teen and the injury of another is related matter-of-factly. The account of the police investigation, the judicial process, and the ultimate incarceration of the five boys is more passionately argued. Since the story focuses on the teens' experiences following the brawl, minimal attention is given to Jimmy Farris, who died, although the testimony of Mike McLoren, who survived, is crucial. The book opens with a comprehensive *dramatis personae* that will help orient readers, and the text is liberally punctuated by quotes drawn from contemporary newspaper and magazine coverage as well as interviews with several of the key figures, including three of the accused. Porinchak argues that the proceedings were influenced by the high-profile 1994 trial and acquittal of the Menendez brothers, and unfounded accusations of gang involvement further clouded the matter. Despite the journalistic style, there is clear intent to elicit sympathy for the five boys involved, three of whom were sentenced to life without parole; of two, the text remarks that "they were numbers now, not humans." This is clearly not unbiased reporting, but it makes a strong case that justice in our legal system does not always fit the crime.

(Nonfiction. 14-18)

VOYA Magazine

At 7 p.m. on May 22, 1995, in the Los Angeles suburb of Agoura Hills, seventeen-year-old Mike McLoren and sixteen-year-old Jimmy Farris were exercising outside Mike's backyard fort when four boys jumped the fence into the yard. A brawl broke out in which Mike and Jimmy were both stabbed; Jimmy died a short time later, changing many lives forever. Prosecutors described the boys as "gang members" participating in a robbery gone wrong, while the media fueled rumors of all-out gang violence threatening the affluent community. Jimmy's death became a first-degree murder because it occurred during what prosecutors called an attempt to steal Mike's marijuana. Suddenly, the teens faced life sentences without possibilities of parole. Porinchak, a long-time advocate for incarcerated teens, has produced a fine addition to the new Simon True series. Avoiding sensationalism, she carefully unravels both the conflicting accounts of the incident and the complexities of the subsequent hearings and trials, exposing the flaws of the legal and penal systems. With admirable clarity and impartiality, the author reveals how a frightening combination of reckless behavior, media-fueled fear, prosecutorial fervor, and societal attitudes deprived four teens of their constitutional rights. Carefully and thoroughly researched with strong reliance on original sources, including court documents, trial transcripts, and interviews, this exceptional book belongs in all libraries serving teens. It is also an essential text for those who work with young people in any capacity. Reviewer: Jamie Hansen; Ages 12 to 18.

WHY I WROTE ONE CUT

Micah Holland was just fifteen years old, and had not yet reached puberty, when life as he knew it changed forever. Curled up in a sleeping bag on the floor at his friend Brandon's house, he was jarred awake at three in the morning by a group of police officers waving guns in his face. "You're wanted for murder," they said.

Earlier that day, after skipping school and getting drunk, Micah had joined his eighteen-year-old brother, Jason, and friends Brandon, Tony, and Chris on a short drive to Mike McLoren's backyard clubhouse – a popular hangout spot - to buy some marijuana. Mike and his best friend Jimmy were lifting weights outside when the five boys arrived. When Micah followed McLoren into the dark fort, a brief fistfight erupted. During the fight Jimmy was cut with a small pocketknife. Unbeknownst to the five friends, Jimmy bled out and died minutes after they left. Four of the five had no idea a pocketknife was even used. Tony had never joined the fight and remained in the doorway. Chris was still sitting across the street in his truck waiting for the others to return with the bag of pot. Still, all five boys were arrested and charged with first-degree murder, even though the death was an accident.

I had read about this appalling miscarriage of justice in Randall Sullivan's 1997 Rolling Stone Magazine article, *Lynching In Malibu: Teens on Trial*. The town was Agoura Hills, California; a replica of the town where I grew up, it was sleepy and safe. In fact, at the time it was the number one choice of residence for Los Angeles Police Department officers. The boy who died, Jimmy Farris, happened to be the youngest son of a beloved LAPD homicide detective. The kids in the story were intelligent and creative, all raised in solid loving homes. But the media circus surrounding the trial painted Micah, Jason, Tony, Chris and Brandon as gang members who had gone to McLoren's house to steal his marijuana. According to California's Felony Murder Rule, if somebody accidentally dies during the commission of an intended felony, such as robbery, all parties involved can be tried for murder. Although there was no robbery, prosecutors convinced the jury that the boys intended to steal a small bag of weed. The case was highly political and the District Attorney's office needed a conviction. They set out to make an example of these boys. The judge essentially said that because they skipped school, drank while underage, and participated in hedonistic activities, they must be bad kids. There was only one reasonable consequence, he concluded. He gave them sentences of life in prison.

I was horrified. Any one of the kids I grew up with – not to mention I, myself – could have been in that situation. Ten years after reading the Rolling Stone article, I began teaching creative writing in the Los Angeles juvenile jails. There I met Sharry Holland, who was one of my first mentors. She told me she had gotten involved with teaching teen inmates because she could relate to them. After all, she had two sons in prison, who had been there since 1995. Sharry just happened to be the mother of Jason and Micah Holland, the brothers I had read about a decade before. I was shocked to hear they were still locked up. Sadly, appeals had been lost, and there was no hope. I promised Sharry I'd write a book about her boys someday. I spent many weekends in the state prisons with Micah, Jason, and Brandon getting to know them and hearing their sides of the story. Now middle aged, they are model prisoners, making the most of a heinous situation. One Cut explores how one poor decision can result in a journey through a frightening judicial system that is not always fair.

Imagine never seeing a sunset again. Never gazing at the moon or stars. Never hearing a dog bark again. Never kissing a girl. Never eating a home cooked meal again (or even a remotely satisfying one). Imagine living in complete isolation for several years straight, never touching a human hand, being fed slop at odd hours, and sleeping on a hard slab with no blankets. Picture this, and you'll get a good idea of the life Micah Holland has lead for twenty two years. His crime? Drinking beers with his buddies then getting beaten up by a boy who was three years older, three inches taller, and thirty pounds heavier. In fact, by all accounts Micah never even threw a punch. Somebody died and somebody had to pay the price. Unfortunately for Micah, Jason, Brandon, and Tony that price amounted to cruel and unusual punishment.

10 Little Known Things About Eve

- 1** ~ My death row meal is cake and gummy bears.
- 2** ~ I've jumped out of an airplane at 18,000 feet, and lived!
- 3** ~ I've been teaching kids in jail since I was in college.
- 4** ~ I was born in London.
- 5** ~ I used to be able to name every single bone, muscle, ligament, vessel, and organ in the human body.
- 6** ~ I can play the drum lines to every Duran Duran song (including the extended remix Euro versions).
- 7** ~ I'm afraid of the ocean, the dark, and frogs.
- 8** ~ I can sleep for 20 uninterrupted hours straight.
- 9** ~ I pride myself on coming in last place every time I do the Los Angeles Marathon.
- 10** ~ I was a severely reluctant reader as a child, and always wanted to write books that I would have liked to read instead of the ones they assigned us in school.

CONTACT ME

Eve Porinchak

Email: EvePorinchak@gmail.com

REPRESENTATION

Literary Agent

Jill Corcoran

Jill Corcoran Literary Agency

Email: Jill@JillCorcoranLiteraryAgency.com

Q and A with Evie P

Have you always been drawn to reading and writing?

Yes and no. I was a severe reluctant reader as a kid. Like, to the point where I made stuff up when I had to write book reports because I couldn't ever finish a whole book. I was slow reader with low comprehension and embarrassed to tell anybody. I had a family full of obsessive speed readers who devoured books. However, I did love Mad Magazine and The Family Circle comics, so that's where I really learned to read. Strangely, I loved writing and spent much of my childhood in my room propped up against my orange vinyl toy box writing and illustrating my own hilarious books. But it wasn't until I went to medical school that I actually learned how to "read" properly and digest and comprehend efficiently.

You went to medical school? Like, to become a doctor??

Yes, when I was young and silly it sounded like a good idea. Because I couldn't read well growing up, I always felt I was dumb. I worked my butt off in high school to get into UCLA. Once I was in college, I felt *really* dumb because I was surrounded by valedictorians. I'm pretty sure I wanted to prove to the world (and myself) that I was actually smart enough to become anything I put my mind to. Also, my sister and I had a good friend in college who was diagnosed with a brain tumor. He was pre-med and we used to study together. I always marveled at his positive nature and drive despite going through gnarly cancer treatments all four years. I think hanging out with him and joining him in his chemo appointments gave me a hero complex. I remember thinking, "If I was his doctor, I would have cured him by now." He died soon after we graduated. Maybe I believed that if I became a doctor, people like Pete Morey wouldn't have to die so young. I'd work harder than anybody. And I'd find a cure.

So, why did you quit medicine?

Turns out, curing people is much tougher than I'd expected. I was going into pediatrics, and I saw some awful stuff. Everybody told me I'd get used to it. Once I realized I didn't want to get used to it, I quit to become a first grade teacher. Also, to be honest, I love sleep too much. Medical doctors don't sleep. It's not healthy. Nobody makes good decisions while sleep deprived!

How did you get into writing professionally?

As a first grade teacher in a severely impoverished New England district, I had no budget for books in my classroom. We had a handful of easy readers and anthologies provided by the district, but they were super valuable commodities because we all wanted our own classrooms to score the highest on the state exams. Teachers got competitive, and started hoarding and hiding the few books we had. It was insane! I problem-solved by writing my own picture books and easy readers with my very own illustrations. They

were dreadful. Still, my kids learned to read and I fell in love with the process of writing for children.

In 2002 I quit teaching to write full-time. I joined SCBWI (Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators). From 2002 to 2015 I attended every conference, seminar, and retreat available. Turns out, I wasn't meant to write picture books. They are concise and poetic, and I am neither. Once I switched gears to writing young adult books, everything fell into place. I've taught in the juvenile jails for many years, and have also worked with foster youth in various capacities. Once I began writing their stories I really found my "voice."

Wait, did you say you teach in jail??

Yes, I've taught creative writing to incarcerated youth since 2007. Actually, in college I tutored in a juvenile prison camp and fell in love with working with that population.

Are you ever scared to be in jail?

Gosh, no! First, kids who are incarcerated are the most friendly, polite, well-behaved teens you've ever seen. They are super stoked to be out of their cells and doing something fun and productive. Second, kids who are locked up are just like you and me. They've got insecurities and fears and crushes and hopes and dreams. Unlike me, the vast majority of them were born into extreme poverty or criminal families or gangs. Those who weren't generally made one stupid impulsive decision that led them to jail. You may be shocked to hear that I've witnessed more beauty, bravery, and humanity in jail than I have just about anywhere else in my life.

Where do you get your ideas for books?

I like writing about the "forgotten" youth. Kids who are locked up, or in foster care, or who crossed the border into America alone and illegally. Because I had such a safe life growing up, I was always drawn to the kids who had the opposite. I always knew that their stories could have been mine. Circumstance gave me the winning lottery ticket. When I started writing kid's books in 2002 I was struck by the appalling lack of characters who came from marginalized populations. I'd worked with gang kids and those from the inner city for as long as I could remember. Yet, we could never find books that reflected their experiences. I started writing their stories, both fiction and nonfiction.

Back in 2005 I helped edit an anthology of true stories written by Roosevelt High School students through Dave Egger's 826-LA program. Most were impoverished kids from Boyle Heights who had incredible stories of family struggles. In the year I spent with them I learned that many came from undocumented families who had fled their beloved countries and crossed the border out of fear for their safety. America was supposed to provide a better, safer life. Instead, they found themselves deeply involved with gangs or criminal activity just to put food on the table.

Once I started writing their stories and talking with editors about the "real" America that many don't see, people became interested. Still, there was a perception that

nobody would care to read these stories. After all, the bulk of children's books are bought/read by upper middle class Caucasian people, is what they said. I was horrified. I've been horrified. Thank god for the WE NEED DIVERSE BOOKS movement. These kids. These forgotten, invisible, underrepresented kids need to see books about themselves. The idea that kids who are poor or kids who are marginalized don't read is ludicrous. Finally, the Kidlit publishing world is catching up.

Funny thing is that my incarcerated kids want nothing more than to read a good book. That is the number one thing they request I smuggle in for them – books! More than gummy bears, more than photos of their families, more than giant Diddy Reese cookies from Westwood (although, I smuggle all those things in as well ☺). They want books. As long as they give me permission to tell their stories, I will.

How do you think your debut book, *ONE CUT*, has been received?

For the most part, reviews and feedback have been very positive. The one common response I get from teens is that *ONE CUT* incredibly depressing. One girl told me she wailed crying at the end and hurled the book across the room and broke a mirror. That was the best reaction I could have hoped for! I want people to be outraged. I want people to scream and throw things. Then, I'd like for them to consider how we can bring change to the juvenile justice world. All prisoners deserve to be treated with humanity. But our kids, some as young as 12, are being tried as adults, treated like animals, and locked up forever. It's insane. I want people to get visceral reactions when they read *ONE CUT*. I want people to know that falling into the rabbit hole of criminal justice can happen to *any* teenager at *any* time. And it's not okay. It needs to change.

What's next?

I've got another nonfiction project about a young girl who was bullied to death, which is out for consideration. I've also got two fiction books, one middle grade adventure about foster youth and one young adult contemporary story about incarcerated kids in an innovative writing program. Both are full of humor and tragedy, but mostly humor. It's a nice change for me.

What do you enjoy in your free time?

Free time? What is that?? I work full time in the children's court recruiting and training guardians appointed to foster youth. Then I'm still writing and agenting with Jill Corcoran Literary Agency. And then I've also taken on developing and teaching courses on how to get published in the Kidlit world for the University of California Extension system. So....when I do get a rare day off, I love to hike, bike, watch movies, go to sports events with my friends, paint, and play poker with my UCLA buddies. When I take real vacations, I travel the world with my sister, who is also my best friend. Life is good! ☺