

At Collin College Book-in-Common welcomes author Kristen Iversen

A COLORADO SMALL TOWN NESTLED between picturesque mountains, a pristine lake, small ranches, and a factory created the idyllic childhood for author Kristen Iversen.

A gaggle of animals were daily companions, and her neighborhood was one where neighbors actually knew each other.

But the community had a dirty little secret. The "factory" at Rocky Flats, located a mere three miles away, was no factory. Rather, it was a nuclear weapons facility that was leaking contaminants and plutonium.

In Collin College's 2014 Book-in-Common selection, *Full Body Burden: Growing up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats*, Iversen chronicles the story of a community shattered by nuclear damage.

"Every one of us has to think very carefully about the kind of legacy we're leaving to our children," Iversen said.

Book-in-Common coordinator and Collin College English professor Betty Bettacchi said Iversen's enthralling story made the book stand out.

"The committee found *Full Body Burden* to be a captivating story which was also well written," Bettacchi said. "It is both a book about nuclear weapons and the culture of secrecy."

For Iversen, voicing her thoughts about nuclear contamination in *Full Body Burden* took more than 10 years to complete and required vast amounts of research and study.

Now a professor at the University of Memphis, Iversen details in the book her experiences growing up unaware of the nuclear facility just miles away. She claims that many in her neighborhood and even in her own family have had

cancer and other health problems because of lax regulations at the facility.

"Rocky Flats was the big secret of my childhood," Iversen said. "Even

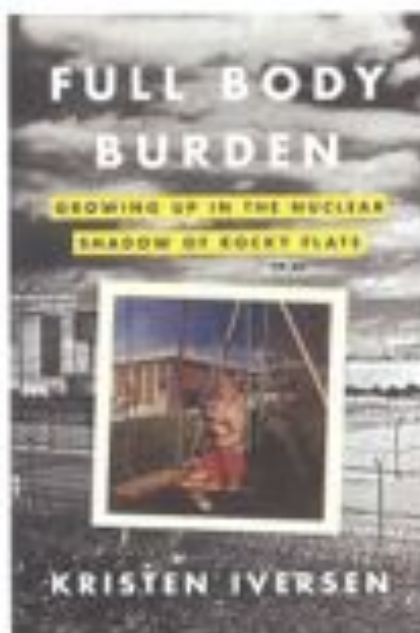


Author and professor Kristen Iversen.

when I worked at the plant myself as a young woman, like many workers I was unaware of the dangers. It was a huge wake-up call for my family and me. And it was a frightening feeling to know you're being seriously affected by something you have no control over."

As part of the upcoming Book-in-Common series of lectures and workshops, Iversen hopes to encourage people to become involved in issues important to them, just as she has taken up a cause that affected many.

"Look at ways to you can get in touch



with local politicians to support causes on a local level that are important to you," she advised. "Use Twitter, Facebook and email to voice your opinion and make your voice heard."

Even in the face of adversity, Iversen champions pushing through and not letting challenges get in the way of a pursuit. Bettacchi said Iversen provides a strong example of not giving up.

"*Full Body Burden* shows students that they need to critically question situations which arise and not blindly accept given explanations," Bettacchi explained. "A single voice can be important in righting a wrong."

For Iversen, leaving a lasting legacy starts with being aware of the past and preserving it.

"I really want students and community members to have an understanding of this country's history and our environmental legacy," she said. "This topic of nuclear power is current and crucial—it's not just something that happened in the past or some faraway place. People have to be aware of what's going on in their own backyard and how things affect them."

Iversen will visit Collin College March 4-6 where she will discuss and sign copies of her book. All events are free and open to the public. Visit collin.edu/academics/bookincommon for more information. ■

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