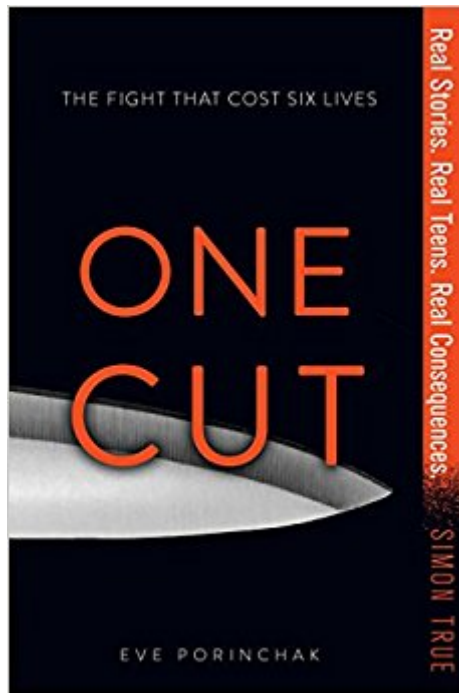




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## One Cut (Simon True)



## Synopsis

Real stories. Real teens. Real crimes. A backyard brawl turned media circus filled with gang accusations turns a small, quiet town upside down in this second book in the new Simon True series. On May 22, 1995 at 7 p.m. sixteen-year-old Jimmy Farris and seventeen-year-old Mike McLoren were working out outside Mike's backyard fort. Four boys hopped the fence, and a fight broke out inside the dark fort made of two-by-four planks and tarps. Within minutes, both Mike and Jimmy had been stabbed. Jimmy died a short time later. While neighbors knew that the fort was a local hangout where drugs were available, the prosecution depicted the four defendants as gang members, and the crime as gang related. The accusations created a media circus, and added fuel to the growing belief that this affluent, safe, all-white neighborhood was in danger of a full-blown gang war. Four boys stood trial. All four boys faced life sentences. Why? Because of California's Felony Murder Rule. The law states that a death is considered first degree murder when it is commissioned during one of the following felonies: Arson, Rape, Carjacking, Robbery, Burglary, Mayhem, Kidnapping. • In other words, if you or somebody you are with intends to commit a felony, and somebody accidentally dies in the process, all parties can be tried and convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to life without parole, even if nobody had any intention of committing a murder. What really happened that day? Was it a case of robbery gone wrong? Gang activity? Or was it something else?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

VOYA, June 2017 (Vol. 40, No. 2) - Jamie Hansen 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. School Library Journal 06/01/2017 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; an additional purchase otherwise.--Tyler Hixson, School Library Journal- Kirkus Review April 2017 Porinchak recounts how the legal system fails five teens who commit a serious crime. 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)

Since earning a degree in biology and psychology from UCLA, Eve Porinchak has lived all over the planet, including third-world countries, and spent much of her time in and out of prison as a creative writing teacher and advocate for teen inmates. Eve serves as an aid worker in Tijuana orphanages and quenches her thirst for all things literary as an agent with the Jill Corcoran Literary Agency in Los Angeles. A former medical student, child welfare social worker, and first grade teacher, Eve grew up on a steady diet of *Unsolved Mysteries* and *In Search Of*, inspiring a lifelong desire to dissect complex true crime stories in pursuit of truth. She writes stories featuring youth she feels have been underrepresented in children's literature, such as those born into gang life, the abandoned, the incarcerated, and war refugees, who "ironically" have the most fascinating tales to tell.

I haven't had much contact with the United States Justice System and after reading this book, I am sincerely grateful. Justice isn't always just. After the fight between six teenagers ends with one boy dead, the lives of everyone involved change forever. As the author does a great job of showing, the intentions of the four boys who came to see stab victims Mike McLoren and Jimmy Farris are widely assumed to be that of robbery and murder. The author goes through the series of events that occurred that day in May 1995 from the perspectives of both Mike McLoren and his friend, Jimmy, and the four boys who came to Mike's fort for drugs. A major part of the debate that arose once the four boys were charged was did they come to buy marijuana or steal it. If they came to buy, Jimmy's

death looked like manslaughter, which would have had the four boys out of prison in 5-12 years. If the incident was viewed as a robbery (which is how the prosecution saw it), the death became a murder, which could mean life in prison or even death. A case like this results in a lot of strong emotions coming out and as a reader I felt some of those emotions. The grief of Jimmy's family that lead them to condemn the four boys (Micah, Jason, Tony, and Brandon) and their driver (Chris) completely. The sorrow of the boy's families as they watched their loved ones face complete condemnation and the assumptions and wrong information that went with it. The major irritation I felt as the judge and jury took the word of an untrustworthy witness who'd changed his version of events over and over (Mike McLoren). The anger I felt at the whole incident being connected to gang activity that scared the jury into requesting police protection, even though there was no proof of actual gang involvement. A judge who showed no mercy, who let the verdict stand despite evidence of jury misconduct. I found this to be both a fascinating book to read and a hard book to read. To read about the tragic consequences of young people using drugs and alcohol about broke my heart. To read about the awful punishment that the five boys received and to feel that it was not just punishment for what amounted to an accident in the heat of the moment in which all six boys participated. What the book does supremely well though is demonstrate the power of seemingly small, insignificant choices and the power they have to change one's life forever. One inch more or less and the knife would have missed Jimmy's heart and Jimmy Farris would still be alive, and four boys wouldn't be sitting in jail with little to no chance of every being free again. Note: Content wise it's pretty much what you would expect: swearing, teenage drinking and drug use, brief reference to sex, and the brief violence that lead to Jimmy Farris's death.

Terrific read! So well conceived and clear, especially in terms of putting things in context historically. The author really takes the reader inside the world of the boys and their families with compelling and detailed storytelling. Great beach read too even though the circumstances are tragic.

Excellent book! Wonderful writing skills, as well as a fascinating, unbelievable series of events. This is a book everyone should read to become more aware of the ineptitude of our legal system. I could not put the book down. Highly recommended.

Excellent book. Such a sad tale. Hopefully some young reader will think twice about who they choose as friends.

One Cut is a deeply disturbing true story of how quickly a young life can completely change direction. This is not a tale of complete innocents finding themselves randomly caught up in a situation they have no control over, but one of boys dabbling in petty crimes, cheap thrills, and local disputes with other teens – all of them clueless about how quickly these things can escalate. Eve Porinchak’s well-researched, if somewhat biased account, places us in a football field-sized backyard in sleepy Agoura Hills on the outskirts of Los Angeles on a chilly Monday night in May, 1995. When two groups of local youths clash over a misunderstanding, it tears apart a community and destroys any chance of a normal future for each of the young men involved. Porinchak takes us inside the homes of the horrified teen’s families, revealing their backgrounds and influences. She follows with a not-very-pretty picture of sensational media reporting, and a prejudiced legal community who base their prosecution case on ill-considered precedents. The result is an outcome that makes little sense. This is an uncomfortable read for parents of teenage boys, but an important one.

Full disclosure - I know the author because I volunteer at a place where she works. I was able to read a pre-print edition. I expected to slog through the book but ended up reading it in two sessions over a couple of days. It is a true story, told extremely well. This is a tale of young boys who, in a moment of thoughtless violence, change all of their lives forever. The story is compelling about the awful consequences of bad choices and the political nature of our justice system. It is a search for truth which, like most searches, finds it difficult to come to a clear conclusion - reality is messy. But the author’s writing style and her extensive research make this story come to life for me.

One Cut by Eve Porinchak is a nonfiction story on riveted.com. This true telling of a young man’s death brings all sides into the light and shows how complicated seeking justice can become. The media attention and heresy escalated the case that didn’t have much solid evidence. Regardless of the lack of evidence and even the fact that the young man driving never left the vehicle, they were all still charged with homicide. The book felt one sided and I believe it was written that way to help show the injustice of the entire case. I read it and still haven’t come to any conclusions about where the guilt should be placed and I can’t imagine the jury’s frustration with this case; 3.5 stars.

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