

**Women We Buried, Women We Burned**  
**A Memoir**  
**Rachel Louise Snyder**

**Book summary**

From the author of the groundbreaking, award-winning *No Visible Bruises*, a riveting memoir of survival, self-discovery, and forgiveness sure to captivate readers who loved Tara Westover's *Educated* and Jeanette Walls' *The Glass Castle*.

For decades, Rachel Louise Snyder has been a fierce advocate reporting on the darkest social issues that impact women's lives. *Women We Buried, Women We Burned* is her own story.

Snyder was eight years old when her mother died, and her distraught father thrust the family into an evangelical, cult-like existence halfway across the country. Furiously rebellious, she was expelled from school and home at age 16. Living out of her car and relying on strangers, Rachel found herself masquerading as an adult, talking her way into college, and eventually travelling the globe.

Survival became her reporter's beat. In places like India, Tibet, and Niger, she interviewed those who had been through the unimaginable. In Cambodia, where she lived for six years, she watched a country reckon with the horrors of its own recent history. When she returned to the States with a family of her own, it was with a new perspective on old family wounds, and a chance for healing from the most unexpected place.

A piercing account of Snyder's journey from teenage runaway to reporter on the global epidemic of domestic violence, *Women We Buried, Women We Burned* is a memoir that embodies the transformative power of resilience.

**Author bio**

**Rachel Louise Snyder** is the author of *Fugitive Denim*, the novel *What We've Lost is Nothing*, and *No Visible Bruises*, a *New York Times* Top Ten Book of the Year, winner of the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award, the Hillman Prize, and the Helen Bernstein Book Award, and finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, LA Times Book Prize, and Kirkus Award. Her work has appeared in the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Slate*, and elsewhere. A 2020-2021 Guggenheim Fellow, Snyder is a Professor of Creative Writing and Journalism at American University. She lives in Washington, D.C.

**For Discussion:**

1. Do you believe it was the author's father's overwhelming grief that drove him so deeply into the church, or were there other psychological factors that resulted in his new commitment? What could those be? How does the church influence his approach to other things in his life aside from family, like work and money?

2. Why was Karen Jones so important to the author? What kind of an impact did she have, and how is that impact felt in the present day?
3. Rachel and her father experience a shift after he slaps her for the first time. This sets off a new phase of corporal punishment for all the children in the household. Why do you think he turns to this type of punishment? Why does he continue it?
4. What do you think of Rachel's parents' attempt to reform the family dynamic with their binders of rules? What do you think of the final rule about "no child or parent abuse"? Do you see that as truly trying to do better? Why do you think they did that, only to follow it with such a drastic decision?
5. Why do you think Rachel's father tells her about her lost college fund? Do you think that a sense of misguided guilt was at the root of some of his abuse?
6. There is a noticeable shift in the author after she enters college. What was it about education that changed her? In what ways did it change how she thought about her present? Her future?
7. While the author is on her Semester at Sea, she observes that she and many of her peers have a shared experience. What is that experience? What does her professor say might be the reason many of them have ended up in the same place?
8. On her visit to China as part of the ship's theater troupe, a tour guide claims that the Tiananmen Square protests were peaceful, and that no one died. How did this impact the author's view of language and its power? Why do you think this resonated so strongly with the author? In what ways do you see language as powerful in your own life?
9. After the author and her friend witness a man's self-immolation in Cambodia, she reflects that the nation itself showed signs of trauma in everyday life, in "public displays of private pain." Would you say that there are also collective traumas in American culture? Are there any that the whole nation has experienced, or only some groups? In what ways do they show themselves?
10. How would you describe Rachel's choice of subject matter as a journalist? What are her reasons? What kinds of affinity draw her to these subjects?
11. During the author's visit to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum she experiences the "limits of her own courage," and she feels the presence of something beyond her five senses. How does Cambodia's cultural belief in ghosts figure into *Women We Buried, Women We Burned*? What ghosts does the author recognize in her own life? Does she welcome them?
12. As an adult, the author eschews any kind of religion, refusing even to enter churches during her travels. But while in Cambodia she begins to view religion

differently. What is it about her changing views that allows her to better understand her father's religious fervor?

13. Rachel's choice to care for her stepmother allows her to experience what she hadn't been able to as a child. How was this healing for both Rachel and Barbara? What is similar about her father's behavior towards both her mother's and stepmother's illness? Does this kind of behavior extend to other parts of his life?
14. Which "women" do you think the title of the book refers to? How do you understand the verbs "buried" and "burned" in the title?