

## Meat Without Illusions



*Edward Allen.*

**"If you eat meat, you have to make compromises with violence,"** said Edward Allen, a 40-year-old graduate student, first novelist and former butcher. **"The meat business is stripped of all illusions."**

**"Straight Through the Night"** is Mr. Allen's first attempt at fiction. He left the Iowa Writers'

Workshop in 1975 after studying poetry for one semester and embarked on a nine-year odyssey that took him through at least 24 jobs. His search for work included the butcher shops of lower Manhattan, and his novel was "produced out of the ashes of that experience, the only really good thing that came out of it."

He and his protagonist Chuck Deckle (a butcher's term describing a shoulder cut) do share "some autobiographical elements," Mr. Allen said by telephone from his home in Athens, Ohio, "but his story is not my story."

Deckle's transformation into a seething anti-Semite and sometime vandal, despite all his efforts to cling to WASP virtues of his youth, marks him as "an American type, a potential John Hinckley," Mr. Allen said. "Some explode in violence, others explode in violent bigotry." Confronted by unremitting rancor from his boss at a kosher butcher shop, Deckle "is just not strong enough to keep that demon from rising in himself, and the reader should be horrified as well. There's a little Hitler, a little Mao, in everybody."

Mr. Allen, who expects to have his Ph.D. in English this spring, said nowadays he is in an eerily familiar position: "I hope you'll say that I'm looking for a job."  
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