Raymond Carver was the most beloved American short-story writer of the late twentieth century. Two decades after his death, this definitive biography tells the story of Carver's uncanny ambition, legendary life, and enduring work. When Raymond Carver died at age fifty, readers lost a distinctive voice in its prime. Carver was, the Times of London said, the Chekhov of middle America. His influence on a generation of writers and on the short story itself has been widely noted. Not so generally known are how Carver became a writer, how he suffered to achieve his art, and how his troubled and remarkable personality affected those around him.

Carol Sklenicka's meticulous and absorbing biography re-creates Carver's early years in Yakima, Washington, where he was the nervous, overweight son of a kindly, alcohol-dependent lumbermill worker. By the time he was nineteen, Ray had married his high school sweetheart, Maryann Burk. From a basement apartment where they were raising their first child and expecting their second, they determined that Ray would become a writer. Despite the handicaps of an erratic education and utter lack of financial resources, he succeeded. Maryann's belief in Carver's talent was unshakable, as was her willingness to support the family and see her experiences transformed in his fiction. Sklenicka reveals the entwined histories of this passionate, volatile marriage and Carver's career. She describes his entry into the literary world via little magazines and the Iowa Writers Workshop; his publication by Esquire editor Gordon Lish and their ensuing relationship; his near-fatal alcoholism, which worsened even as he produced many of the unforgettable stories collected in Will You Please Be Quiet, Please? and What We Talk About When We Talk About Love. The biography also depicts Carver's warmhearted friendships with scores of writers, including Richard Ford, Tobias Wolff, John Gardner, Joy Williams, Al Young, William Kittredge, Leonard Michaels, Chuck Kinder, and Hayden Carruth. Sklenicka shows how his stories about unemployment, drinking, marital trauma, divorce, troubled children, and suburban malaise, dubbed minimalistic by critics, won readers with their precise and humane portrayal of ordinary lives. She examines the dissolution of his first marriage and his partnership with poet Tess Gallagher, who helped him enjoy the full measure of his success. Ever grateful that he'd been able to renounce alcohol, Carver shunned pity and considered himself a lucky man as he faced death from lung cancer in 1988. Carol Sklenicka draws on hundreds of interviews with people who knew Carver, prodigious research in libraries and private collections, and all of Carver's poems and stories for Raymond
Carver, which took ten years to write. Her portrait is generous and wise without swerving from discordant issues in Carvers private affairs. Above all Sklenicka shows how Carvers quintessentially American life fostered the stories that knowing readers have cherished from their first publication until the present day.

Features:
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My Personal Review:
Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life may be better thought of as a deeply revealed slice of The Writer's Life (or of the VERY Talented Writer's Life). It exposes all the severe difficulties of being a writer and leading a normal life, of staying focused on writing, facing publication rejections, and dealing with family intrusions. Not to mention competing with other writers, who may be friends!

The author has depicted all the stress of that struggle so very well, leaving a reader to appreciate the struggle that lesser writers can expect when the VERY talented Raymond Carver faced so many very large obstacles. To me this was the real crux of the story, even overshadowing Carver's terrible struggle with alcohol, which he finally overcame. The wonder of it was that he became a softer and more humane man after having conquered alcohol.

The great achievement of this book, though, is the way the author compellingly tied Carver's stories and poems to the experiences of his own life, and explains how these works helped him understand the positives and negatives of his life and relationships -- if not his precise role in them.

I highly recommend the book, which has already won a great deal of critical praise.

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Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life by Carol Sklenicka - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!