

# Forensic Reflections Through Poetry

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One of my sons, a writer, urged me to broaden my audience and turn my forensic experiences into fiction instead of writing yet another book on forensic psychiatry. I gave it a try, but my arthritic thumbs protested. Poetry with its economy of words and motion then became the obvious medium. I had never written any poetry until a few years ago, and found it very gratifying. The endless play with words and quick resolutions, in contrast to the elephantine gestations of books, appealed to me.

My work as an examiner for the Maine State Forensic Service involves a lot of driving to far-flung courthouses. The trip to Aroostook County was 10 hours round trip, but provided a window of opportunity for observations and reflections. Writing poetry has become a means of processing some of the vicarious traumas I encounter in my work and allows me to view them from many perspectives. It has also helped me deal with personal losses and those I encounter in the course of my work as a Hospice volunteer at Maine State Prison and in the community. I hope this sampling of forensic poetry may inspire the muse in readers of the *Journal*.

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## Reflections

### Flames

Randall Roop went up in flames  
Amid the charred and twisted metal  
Of the trailer he called home as his  
Junked cars bore witness to his fate

Four volunteer firemen delayed by  
Winter storm struggle to bend their  
Hoses stiffened by arctic air and ice  
But arrive too late to alter his fate

Randall Roop lies in a palace of ice  
His humble home transformed into  
Fantastic apparitions such as he  
Might have seen while on a toot

Tongues of fire leap to the sky  
As if to warm the sweep of night  
While Randall Roop grows cold  
His coffee brandy at his side.

### Papillon

An errant Monarch butterfly  
Alights with grace on a  
Plum colored coneflower,  
In this not quite barren yard

Indifferent to their crimes, he gratefully  
accepts the fruit of inmates' labors  
A yard is a yard, as long as  
You are a butterfly

As quickly as he alighted, he is gone  
Having touched persons less  
Fortunate with hope and  
The promise of freedom.

### The Glove Compartment

The police search through  
Looking for clues of  
Who she was and  
How she got there

An old lottery ticket  
With numbers she picked,  
A purple schrunchy with a few  
Red hairs that still cling

One small bottle of cheap perfume,  
One unpaid parking ticket,  
Thirteen cents in change and a  
Pack of Menthol Lights

A greasy napkin from  
Dunkin' Donuts with  
Directions to Amy's house  
Scrawled upon it

A broken fortune cookie  
With hatched fortune beside it  
Offering assurance that  
"You will soon be famous"

Such is the detritus of  
Her short life as  
She lies dead in her car,  
The victim of a homicide.

**Sunday Hospice Vigil**

I sit as a stranger in  
The house of a man of God  
He has left to tend his flock  
Trusting me with his dying wife

His tidy house speaks of a life  
Well ordered and caring  
With God's word hanging  
From each and every wall

Yet, I am unsettled by the  
Fifties' décor, knickknacks of old  
And death-defying plastic flowers  
At standoff with the passage of time

But it is the absence of any print,  
Other than spiritual books or Bible,  
That startles and causes me to realize that  
Some men live by God's word alone

Christmas cards lay still unopened  
And stillness is repeatedly broken  
By the chiming of a clock, as death  
Hovers like an early morning fog.

## Aroostook County Unfolding

Dense fog enfolds me as  
I head south on U.S. Route One  
Following on blind faith  
The distant lights of a truck  
While scanning shoulders  
For early morning moose

By Presque Isle, bathroom and  
Kitchen lights signal that dawn  
Is on its way and the harvest beckons  
Soon, I can make out roadside stands  
With pumpkins, new potatoes,  
Yukon Gold and a few stray chickens

Pickups and tractors punctuate the  
Vast, rolling fields and Full  
Gospel churches keep these  
Families from straying too far  
A sign for Bert's Salvage suggests  
That more than souls get saved up here

The landscape shifts to young pine and  
Tamarack then Houlton's strip malls as  
I turn onto the beginning of Interstate 95  
A color guard of deciduous trees still  
Muted by fog is my constant companion for  
The next two hours on this barren highway

Flocks of crows hop from road kill  
To safety with alacrity and agility  
As I disrupt their early morning  
Routine, the avian equivalent of  
Morning coffee, donuts and  
The latest gossip at Tim Hortons

The vistas are few and the promised view of  
Mt. Katahdin is not to be seen today. I am  
Left reviewing yesterday's trial in Caribou  
And the weight carried by the judge who must  
Sift through days of testimony and decide the  
Fate of a man charged with killing his father.