

Letter to the Editor

Sir:

John Temple's book "*Deadhouse: Life in a Coroner's Office*" was reviewed by B.G. Brogdon, M.D., in *JFS* (2006:51:201). That book contains many inaccuracies. First, I would like to point out that I had nothing to do with this book. I was never asked to check the manuscript for accuracy by either the author or the publisher. Neither I nor any person in my office received any benefits, financial or otherwise, from its publication.

Some of the inaccuracies are:

- In all my years as the Allegheny County Coroner I have never once heard any of my employees refer to bodies as "debris" or "junk."
- The author's auditory characterization of autopsy sounds is his and his alone.
- There has never been any "sideline business selling T-shirts, sweatshirts, and ball caps out of the coroner's office." Some deputies did this on their own time, which was their legal right. Not one penny from any such sales was ever received by me or the Coroner's Office.
- I do not "jet all over the world—swapping vials of blood, autopsy reports, and crime scene photographs and huddling together over exhumed bodies." I have had the professional

opportunity and honor to be consulted about several controversial deaths in a number of different countries over the years.

- There is no "exclusive group of forensic pathologists" and if there was, I am certainly not a "charter member."

During my time as the elected Coroner (1996–2006 and previously from 1970–1980), the Allegheny County Coroner's Office had an outstanding reputation. This well-earned national and international reputation was a result of our academic affiliations, university and postgraduate educational programs, and our community endeavors.

I am also a believer that a forensic pathologist–attorney serving as an elected Coroner has greater autonomy and independence than an appointed Medical Examiner, insofar as police, districts attorneys, and other government officials are concerned. If someone is appointed, how can it be argued that he/she is autonomous?

I am disappointed that this book with all of its factual errors was reviewed in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, and I would appreciate publication of these comments.

Thank you.

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