

Disasters, Mimeographs, Skiing

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Christina VandePol's
February 2025 Newsletter
The Last Word

Brains, Anniversaries, An Old Poison

Hello, everyone,

What I love most about writing my blog is how much I learn as I research each one. I didn't plan to write about brain autopsies this month, but stumbled across the subject while writing my post about [private autopsies](#). The post now includes information about some great (free!) brain donation programs out there that more people should know about. We don't know much about diagnosing neurological diseases, so both medical research and families will benefit from more brain autopsies.

Today—February 24, 2025— happens to be the third anniversary of Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Anyone else remember those Twitter posts like #flowersforukraine? As an avid gardener, I posted several photos of yellow and blue flowers in my garden back then. Today I'm thinking of the Ukrainian people as they continue their struggle.

As we navigate (again) unprecedented times, my survival plan is to write, to learn, to use my skills to help where I can, and to enjoy beauty in all its forms.

Christina

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Latest Blog Post



Private Autopsies in 2025



As hospital autopsies become a thing of the past, will more families turn to private autopsies in 2025?

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Looking Back



I'm thrilled that *Months to Years* magazine just published [Guilty Verdict](#), my flash nonfiction piece about an experience I had as a coroner in April of 2020. It was one of the few times in those dark days where I felt like I was making some kind of difference.

Months to Years is a quarterly online magazine "that explore(s) mortality, death, and dying-related topics." Co-founded by Renata and Tim Louwers in 2017, it publishes creative nonfiction, poetry, and photography. I highly recommend it for beautiful writing and essential human stories.

The Poison Coroners Ignore

Cotinine: I saw it all the time when reviewing toxicology reports, but after I learned it's a nicotine metabolite, I ignored it. Less commonly I'd see both nicotine and cotinine on a tox report. Of course, this person must have been a smoker, I thought.

Then I read [James G. Wigmore](#)'s January 2025 Commentary in the journal *Forensic Science Review*. "Nicotine: The Neglected Forensic Drug" has completely changed my perspective. I've always considered tobacco products, like alcohol, "slow" killers (COPD, cancer, heart disease) resulting in so-called natural deaths. But high levels of alcohol can also kill quickly and so, it turns out, can high levels of nicotine.

Nicotine is, after all, a pesticide that can, as Wigmore (a forensic toxicologist) states, "cause symptoms similar to organophosphate poisoning." There are reports of its use in homicides and suicides. Wigmore warns that the availability of high-nicotine e-cigarette liquids "may be a forerunner to further use of this poison."

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