



Christina VandePol's
December 2025 Newsletter
The Last Word

Hello, everyone,

So much of the coroner and medical examiner system derives from historical practices. Despite electronic case management systems and online death certification, it's still largely an analog world. After all, death investigators deal with real bodies, not avatars. Death investigators are witnesses in courts that require solid evidence, not hallucinations. But after reading yet another article about AI, I wondered: is AI being used in coroner offices? If so, how?

I was going to skip writing a blog over the holidays. Instead, a deep dive into those questions about AI triggered what may be my longest post yet (don't worry, you can always jump to the conclusions section). I'm glad I took a look, and I hope some of you find it interesting. Please let me know if you have any experience with ongoing AI projects in a coroner or medical examiner context, either by commenting on the blog or replying by email.

WARNING for writers: Right after I finished this month's blog, I was the target of an AI-generated email scam offering marketing support for an as-yet unpublished book of mine. How did I know (other than being a confirmed skeptic) that it was a scam? It was lengthy (over 500 words), the "sender" had no online presence, and it was obsequiously flattering. For example, "Alice" praised my unpublished memoir as one that "aligns perfectly with strategies that deliver strong ROI, steady sales growth, and lasting organic visibility." Yeah, right.

I trashed the email as junk, but marveled at its sophistication and ability to push buttons. If I'd replied, I'm guessing the next communication(s) would have involved some kind of monetary request. Maybe to someone in Nigeria. That's what I learned when I did a search for "AI email scams targeting writers." If you're a writer, particularly an indie or unpublished author, beware!

So, that's a wrap for my AI rant.

As always, thanks for reading my newsletter!

Christina

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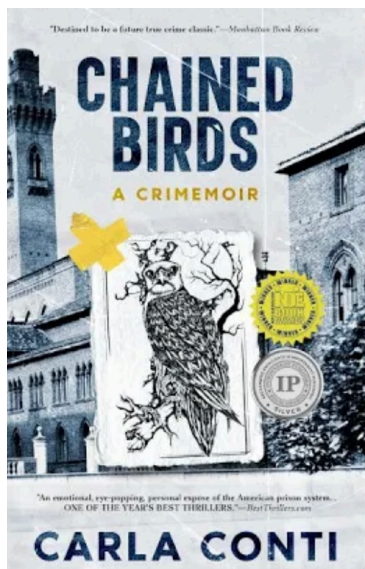


AI in Medicolegal Death Investigation

A look at the current and potential uses of AI in medicolegal death investigation: How could it impact coroners and medical examiners?

[Read it here!](#)

Books



Philadelphia-based writer [Carla Conti's](#) book *Chained Birds: A Crimemoir* (Crimemoir Press, 2025) is a stellar example of this evolving true crime genre. It's the true story of the author's experiences working with a defense attorney on an investigation of a stabbing in a federal prison. As someone who's familiar with the secrecy around prison deaths, I'm in awe of Conti's courage. Bonus: The "prison art" (I just call it art) is amazing.

Forensic Flashback



Old Graveyards

Last year, KFF Health News did a [story](#) on the "forgotten" graveyards that surround old state mental institutions.

The story reminded me of several disturbing months I spent working as an aide at such an institution in 1971. It didn't take long for me to discover that the now historic Western State Hospital in Staunton, VA had, like those other institutions, left behind a cemetery of several thousand graves. That didn't surprise me as much as some of the [horrific history](#) of the place involving mental health "care" and eugenics. Maybe it explains the quiet and oppressive desperation I sensed all around me.

Photo credits: VATraveler and Ken Childers on Find A Grave

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