



Current position:

Forensic Pathologist/Medical Examiner

Education history:

Undergraduate Education: Edinboro University of Pennsylvania

Medical School: Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine

Residency Program: University Hospitals of Cleveland

Fellowship: Cuyahoga County Coroner's Office

Other: Master's in Health Service Administration, 2018
Master's in Medical Education, Current (Graduation 2023)

HOW DID YOU INITIALLY BECOME INTERESTED IN FORENSIC PATHOLOGY?

Unknowingly, my first introduction to forensic pathology was as a tween in the 80s watching "Autopsy" on HBO with Dr. Michael Baden. The only case I remember was a young lady found decomposed in a bathtub. The only thing left was her long brown hair. Maggots were scooped out of the tub and sent for toxicology. It was determined she died by an overdose of barbiturates, and it was a suicide. I thought that was the coolest thing ever!! I am embarrassed to admit that I did not know forensic pathology was a specialty until I was in medical school. A classmate lent me DiMaio's Forensic Pathology textbook and I read it cover to cover. I thought it was interesting, but I was interested in emergency medicine #traumajunkie. Halfway through medical school, my personality changed. I do not function well in "chaos". The thought of being in a fast-paced emergency scared me. I thought I was too old to complete a 5-year pathology residency and then a forensic pathology fellowship, so I decided to go into family medicine. The month before I graduated, I had a conversation with a resident about why I was going into family medicine, and he said to me "after all the money you spent, the time you invested, and the sacrifices you made, you don't want to wake up in 10 years and hate going to work." He was right. It was then that I made the decision to go into forensics. I am grateful every day for that conversation.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CASE AND WHY?

My most memorable case was when I was the elected Coroner in Columbus, OH. It was the case of Ariel Castro. He was the man who held 3 girls captive in his basement for 10 years. He died by suicidal hanging in prison. There was nothing exceptional about the autopsy, but the media frenzy that followed was overwhelming. I fielded hundreds of calls from newspapers, television stations, and radio stations around the world. I even did an interview on a Spanish radio station. Before finalizing the case, I met with his son for 2 hours going over everything and explaining how I determined the cause and manner of death.

Months later, the prison put out a report stating that Castro's death was not a suicide, but autoerotic asphyxiation. The media floodgates flew open. I was so glad I had had that conversation with his son. I called him and asked if he had any concerns about his father's death. His reply was "No Dr. Gorniak. I know the truth."

WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST UNEXPECTED FINDING YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED DURING A CASE?

During fellowship, I had a case of a young man that was hit by a Rapid Transit Authority train. Many people were on the platform when it happened. The problem was that many different accounts were given: he jumped; he was pushed; his pant leg got caught in the door; he was walking between the cars and fell; he dropped something on the tracks, jumped down to get it and yelled "don't move the train!" His cause of death was obvious, blunt force injuries, but what was the manner? At autopsy, we found a 5 centimeter pituitary adenoma. His mother confirmed that his eyesight was "terrible," and that he should have been using a cane. After the scene reconstruction, it was determined that the man mistook the opening between the cars for the door. His death was ruled an Accident.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

Work-life balance has to be intentional. After carrying 2 phones for 10 years and getting frustrated while on vacation because I couldn't access VPN, I knew I had to change. I do not bring any work home. I do not check any emails after I leave work.

I have both a Peloton bike and treadmill, so I enjoy working out. My favorite hobbies are doing jigsaw puzzles (1000 pieces) and diamond dotz art. But usually, you can catch me watching reality tv shows (90 Day Fiance, Love After Lockup, Top Chef, Married at First Sight, etc).

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WORK SOUNDTRACK AND WHY?

My favorite Pandora station at my desk is Vitamin String Quartet. For those that are not familiar, it is classical string covers of popular songs of varying genres. If you have seen

Netflix's "Bridgerton," you have heard it. It is great background music and pairs well with my essential oil diffuser.

In the autopsy room, anything goes... from hip hop to country to pop.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST-LIKED MEAL AT YOUR FAVORITE LOCAL RESTAURANT?

Double cheeseburgers from White Castle!