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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

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CHOOSING A FORENSIC CAREER IS EASY NOW

Forensic Science Careers, 1st Edition, *by* Blythe Camenson. Paperback, 5.5" x 7.5".
VGM Career Books (A division of the McGraw-Hill Companies), 4255 West Touhy Avenue, Lincolnwood, Chicago, Illinois 60712-1975, USA. Publication Date 2001. x + 149 pages, ISBN 0-658-00102-7. Price US $12.95, Canada $18.95

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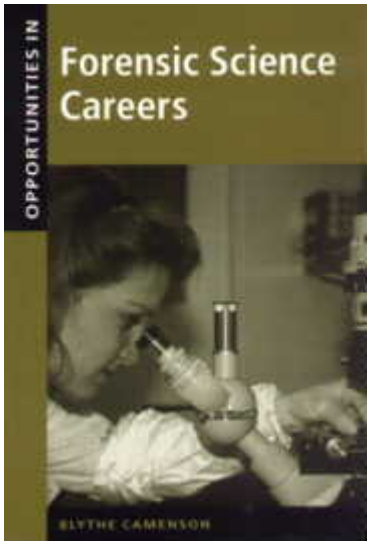


One of the commonest E-mails I receive daily is from youngsters who have seen one or other of my forensic pages. They are so taken in by the glamour of the specialty that they immediately write to ask how they can enter it. A stage came when I got tired of replying to them individually. How

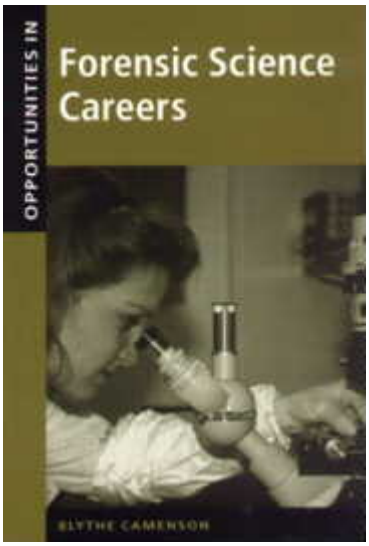
simple would it have been - I used to think - if there had been a nice little book on forensic careers. I would then not have to go through the rigmarole of it all; I would simply ask them to buy and read it. But alas there was no book on forensic careers that time. Things came to such a pass that I had to create a website of my own on forensic careers. I would ask all prospective youngsters - wanting to enter the forensic world - to visit that site and get the requisite information. That site at http://www.geradts.com/anil/others/fc/career.html still exists and is visited by a number of youngsters everyday, as told to me by the counter placed at its bottom.

But it was not the end of my woes. They returned with fresh queries. Okay, I know I can become a forensic scientist, but how much salary would I get? What kind of challenges would I face? Would you kindly agree for an online interview? Would you give me a first-hand account of your typical day's work? Would you...?

God! I was back to square A. I was only getting a new set of questions, but they were very much there. For reasons of space, I could not possibly put all that information on my site, and more than ever before I longed for a book on forensic careers.

View this book on Amazon

EXCERPTS



Among other things Camenson explains is *what the work is like*. And this section comes from the experts themselves most of the times. This is what Sandra Ramsey Lines, a Forensic Document Examiner has to say on this topic on page 33.

A forensic document examiner conducts the examination of questioned documents. We analyze and compare questioned handwriting, handprinting, typewriting, commercial printing, photocopies, papers, inks, and other documentary evidence with known materials to establish the authenticity of the contested (or questioned) material, as well as the detection of alterations.

Another aspect that Camenson deals throughout the book is *Upsides and downsides* of each forensic career. And this information too comes from the horses' mouth themselves. Here is what Jack Murray, an Accident Investigator has to say on this topic (*downsides*) on page 48.

Unfortunately there are times when after doing the investigation or reconstruction you just have to

tell some clients you can't help them. The facts of the case are not in their favor. Clients do not like this, especially when they have paid a lot of money for your services.
And finally here is something on the salary structure (*I know you are all dying to read this!*). This information appears on page 50. These *bon mots* are from Jack Murray - the accident investigator we mentioned above.

While you won't gain instant recognition in the field, you can make a very good living after a relatively short time....
A qualified reconstructionist usually charges somewhere between $100 and $150 per hour. An experienced accident investigator usually earns somewhere between $75 and $100 dollars per hour!
Sorry, did I see you rushing to the bookshop!

That's why my joy knew no bounds when one day I found this book in my mail. Written by Blythe Camenson - an author with more than four dozen books to her credit, most on the subject of various careers - and published by VGM Career Books (A division of McGraw-Hill Companies), it is a remarkable little book, which gives information on forensic careers. To be honest, even I did not have some of the information contained in this book! Yes, I am right, and you got to read this book, if you don't believe me! This is a book which every youngster wanting to enter the world of forensics must possess.

The book is divided into six chapters and gives four appendices at the end. Chapter one deals with explaining the youngster the various forensic fields. Among the number of fields listed are forensic accident investigation, forensic pathology, forensic coroners or forensic death investigators, forensic medicine (the one this reviewer specializes in), forensic odontology, forensic nursing, forensic anthropology, forensic psychology, forensic psychiatry, forensic social workers, forensic psychiatric technicians, forensic mental health workers, forensic counselors, forensic computer examination, forensic accounting, forensic economics, wildlife forensics, forensic engineering, forensic architecture, forensic administration, research, rehabilitation, laboratory investigation, field investigation, communication, forensic education, forensic photography, questioned document analysis, toxicology and drug analysis, DNA....

Phew! May be you would want to read the book itself. I haven't been through half the list. The other five chapters each specialize on five most commonly sought after branches - Criminalistics, accident and fire investigation, forensic medicine, forensic anthropology and forensic psychology and forensic psychiatry. The interesting thing about each chapter is that the author takes pains to visit several specialists in the respective fields and give first hand account experiences of experts. She describes their salary structure, what a typical day in their life is like. In addition, she discusses sample cases, sample jobs, what the work is like, how to get started and so on. Most importantly the upsides and downsides of each forensic specialty. Words of advice from each working specialist are also included.

What are the four appendices on? Well, Appendix A gives you the names, addresses and websites of a number of professional forensic associations. So if your queries are not met with by the book, you can perhaps visit their site, or may be write to them for more information. A typical entry reads like this (this one is from page 123):

American Association of Colleges of Nursing
1 Dupont Circle NW, Suite 530
Washington, DC 20036
www.aacn.nche.edu
Contact them for a list of B.S.N. and graduate programs.

Appendix B, gives the names of a number of books and journals which one can read to get further information on forensic science (not necessarily on careers - the current book remains the first book on forensic careers as far as I know). Appendix C gives the names and addresses of a select number of forensic laboratories and Institutes. Although some of them are from such far flung countries as Japan and Singapore, most of them are from the US only. And finally Appendix D gives the reader a number of Forensic Science Undergraduate programs.

While going through this book, I noted that this book is remarkably American in flavor and character. Most of the schools and colleges, and programs it refers to belong to the US. Thus if you happen to be a youngster from, say, Brunei, this book is not likely to help you much. Until and unless of course you want to leave your country and come to the United States for studies. This is not very surprising though. The state of forensic science, the admission criteria and requirements in various forensic courses differ so much from nation to nation - and even from region to region within the same nation - that a book of universal appeal is perhaps not possible. May be one day, Camenson would think of writing a book for the students of other nations.

I would yet fully recommend this book to prospective students from all nations, if just for discovering what the exciting world of forensic can offer to them. For students hailing from the US and Canada, it is undoubtedly a boon.

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