

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## ROGER DANIELS FORSETH

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June 15, 1927-December 3, 2016

A pioneer in the field of addiction and literature, Roger Forseth created a new language for a sensitive topic that is both buzz-kill and vicarious thrill. His language merged concrete experience and science to replace moral judgment with empathy and objectivism. A recovering alcoholic who lived to tell, he survived acute delirium tremens, an episode from which doctors said he would never regain more than half his brain. But rather than lose his mind, he went on to enjoy the first sober and most productive chapter of his career, most notably founding *Dionysos: The Literature and Intoxication Triquarterly*, which was published from 1990 to 2000.

Roger was born on June 15, 1927, in Aberdeen, South Dakota, to Fritz, an insurance salesman from Grand Forks, North Dakota, and Lillian (Daniels) Forseth, an Iowa schoolteacher whom Fritz met on the road at a country dance. Himself without a formal education, Fritz started the Forseth Insurance Company, became one of the first millionaires in the Dakotas, and with his resources funded the higher educations of his twenty grandchildren.

The eldest of three boys and with one older sister, Roger's first love was books, a fact that controversially drew him into academia instead of the family business. After graduating from Central High School in Aberdeen, he

went away to Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, where he met his future wife and fellow English major, Grace Bahr, the child of another first-generation American success story. The couple married and conceived a baby before senior year, making college history when Roger accepted Grace's diploma because she was too pregnant to cross the stage. Prior to Carleton, he served as an electrician in the Navy from 1945 to 1946 at bases in Chicago and Corpus Christi. After graduating from Carleton in 1950, he completed his Ph.D. in English at Northwestern University in 1956 with his dissertation on "The Function Of Imagery In The Lyric: Pope To Wordsworth."

Roger's first teaching post was at Louisiana State University of Baton Rouge (1955-57), where at the time he was the youngest professor in that university's history. Following posts at Southern Illinois University ('57-'61) and LSU New Orleans ('61-'64), in 1964 he accepted an offer from the University of Wisconsin-Superior and moved to the Northland with his wife and children. It was there, in the cold country of Sinclair Lewis, on whose writing and drinking he would later concentrate, that his alcoholism would reach its peak and its end.

With *Dionysos*, Roger was credited with helping to pioneer the field of addiction and literature. He was also instrumental in transitioning the UW-Superior writing program into the digital age, motivated by the service he believed it would be to writers and students. He enjoyed several sabbaticals, including two in London, and with the academic support and editing of his wife, wrote numerous articles and talks that he delivered at literary conferences in the U.S. and England. He retired from full-time teaching in 1991 but continued part-time online for twenty-three more

years, completing his last course in 2014.

Through *Dionysos* and multiple independent articles and talks, Roger dedicated his post-drinking career to a richly literary, profoundly humane, and ultimately optimistic study of the relationship between our greatest writers and their double-edged muse—at once creative lubricant and crippling disease.

In 2012, Pam Lock, a Ph.D. candidate in alcohol studies at the University of Bristol, noticed several references to *Dionysos* in *The Pub in Literature: England's Altered State* by Steve Earnshaw, Professor of English at the University of Sheffield Hallam. She wanted to know more and contacted Roger, only to learn that digital copies of the magazine did not exist and most of the hard copies had been lost in a flood at the UW-Superior. The only place holding *Dionysos* in all of the UK was the British Library. Roger and Jim Harbaugh, S.J. of Seattle University, the successive editor of *Dionysos* from 1996 to 2000, gave permissions to digitize the publication while Pam and Steve sought funding to do so in a high-quality way. Thanks to Steve's department at Sheffield, *Dionysos* now resides on their website: [teaching.shu.ac.uk/ds/sle/Dionysos.htm](http://teaching.shu.ac.uk/ds/sle/Dionysos.htm).

Pam and Steve's recognition of Roger's work was the greatest stimulus of his last years. Their efforts sparked a larger interest in the whole of his scholarship and inspired Roger to ask his granddaughter to assist him with this book. Roger's family is grateful to Pam and Steve and trusts that readers will be, too.

Roger passed away on December 3, 2016. He was possessed of a beautiful, powerful mind and was thought to have total recall by those who knew him. A font of information, his breadth of reading and knowledge turned

most conversations into mini lessons on a remarkable range of topics. He was a doting husband, parent, and grandparent who, as he lay dying, puffed with pride at the way his “big happy family” was turning out. In the years that his eldest grandchildren were long-distance, Cassandra in New York and John in Colorado, five younger local grandchildren, Sarah, Bethany, Deven, Shaye, and Bria, kept him in great company. Roger was a man of science and faith who greatly loved the Anglican Church and its traditions. He left this life surrounded by love with his eldest daughter and grandson by his side.