

## POLICEMAN POET

By Larry Tyle

Often cops are characterized as hardcore, gun-totin' dudes, Dirty Harry types. Portland poet Jim Fleming hardly fits the role—though, during his lengthy career with the Portland Police Bureau, he brought down one of Portland's more sought-after underworld thugs. He did this while working undercover and, surprisingly, serving as president of the Oregon State Poetry Association (now Oregon Poetry Association).

Realizing his writing skills, the Portland Police Association pressed him into service as editor of their newsletter, *The Rap Sheet*.

Looking further back through his 88 years, Fleming's resumé includes a wide variety of jobs, including farmer, merchant seaman, infantry sergeant in World War II (serving in the Battle of the Bulge), and author.

As poet, Jim Fleming has authored numerous chapbooks, and his poems have been published in periodicals and anthologies, many on the shelves at the Oregon State Library, where the Oregon Poetry Collection is housed.

Two poems from a recent book, *The Zen of Wood Chopping*, attest to his worldview and depth of experience:

### **Burglar**

Foreign and toxic as a poison toad,  
I scale the walls of your fortress home  
To prowl the catalogue of all you own.  
I find it empty of any grace.  
What I steal will leave a space  
Which you can fill  
With bitterness and hate,  
Things of more substance  
Than what I will take.  
I will sell your onyx ring

For coffee and a piece of cake.  
In my book of virtues,  
Is a justice that keeps me whole,  
That says you must atone  
For crimes far greater than my own.

### **The Zen of Wood Chopping**

Don't attack the wood.  
Picture the perfect wedge  
Traveling through the grain  
Like the bow of a ship  
Dividing a calm sea,  
The water unresisting,  
The ship steady.  
The iron will drive to the block  
Like the moon slipping through  
The clouds.  
Wash your face in a blue bowl.  
Tie back your hair  
With a piece of swamp grass.  
The firewood is stacked  
Behind the red house  
Before the ax falls.

Jim Fleming now lives in Lake Oswego, where he has conducted workshops for aspiring poets at the senior center.