# Tonight you are on a dark backroad

Tonight you are on a dark backroad, your headlights the only sign of civilization. You pass signs you can’t read. The road never curves, yet you can’t see more than a few yards ahead. Before you know it, you’ve been pulled over, the red and blue flashes destroying the sanctity of your mirrors. A deer walks up to your window on its hind legs, knocks with a hoof. You’re trying to explain that you haven’t done anything, when its face splits open and the skull drips blood as it orders you to get out. There is a deer in your back seat staring at you with empty eye sockets. There is a pain in your heart like an antler. You’re not going to make it home. You’re as good as a skull on a wall.

JeFF Stumpo

JeFF Stumpo’s *these are the waterfalls in my head* was awarded the 2026 Granite State Poetry Prize by Diannely Antigua and is available through Yas Press (University of New Hampshire). Poems in it have appeared in places including *Prairie Schooner, The Journal, Salt Hill Journal, DMQ Review,* and *Subnivean,* where they won the 2025 Subnivean Award for Poetry. He’s a survivor of psychosis and PTSD, husband to a PhD chemist, and father to an amazing trans son. He has a (poor) website at www.JeFFStumpo.com.

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