

after death, skipping a viewing, even for family members,” Chris says, adding that he thinks this is a mistake, as it doesn’t give the closure that is necessary to fully process a loved one’s death. “People are missing the important work of grief,” he believes.

“At the very least”, he recommends, “a time of spiritual reflection” among family and friends, which “doesn’t cost a penny”, and might include a ceremony commemorating the deceased’s life. He believes that something permanent, even if it’s just on paper, or a crude wooden cross, or something homemade, should be done in the deceased person’s name and as a remembrance.

“We (Tharp’s staff) stay in touch (with clientele) for up to two years after the death of a loved one,” Chris says. “We’ve learned that six months to a year later, the grief is worse for families that skip this grief work.”

He also recommends that along with a Will, and Health Care Power of Attorney, everyone should have a funeral plan for family members to follow. Tharp Funeral Home’s website offers a funeral plan workbook that people can download.

Some families today are turning back the clock, and holding home funerals, which were typical in rural areas not so many years ago. Many of us today can still remember grandma being “laid out” in the family parlor or her bedroom before being moved to the funeral home or cemetery.

In early America, home funerals were commonplace, and each community had a group of women who came in and helped to prepare the dead. Visitation was held in the front parlor, followed by a procession to the church and cemetery. Besides such a front parlor, Colonial homes frequently had a special door leading to the outside, through which a casket could be passed. There were no steps from this door to the ground. It was considered bad luck or in poor taste to move the casket through an area in the house where others walked. Also, either out of respect or due to superstition, the deceased was always moved head first out of the house.

Before you consider a home funeral, you should check the laws of your state. In Virginia, death laws are quite liberal, according to Chris. Embalming is not required, but if the body is not being embalmed, it must be buried within 48 hours

or else it should be refrigerated, which replaces embalming. There is no law requiring a casket, but the cemetery may require some type of container for burial.

If the deceased is being cremated, you do not have to buy a casket; any box can be used, including cardboard. You may even be able to bury your deceased loved one on your own property, but you should check with the local health department and the town and/or county clerks’ office first, for approval and related requirements.

There are no laws in Virginia regarding the scattering of ashes on your own property. If you wish to scatter ashes at sea, however, you must be at least three nautical miles from land. Notification of various agencies is also required. Before scattering ashes here on the Lake or any other public areas, you should first check with local authorities. Some cemeteries offer special gardens, where ashes can be scattered. Of course, you should always respect other people’s property when it comes to scattering ashes.

Chris left a career in education to join his father in the family funeral business in 2001.

This career change represented a return to the place where he had worked as a teenager. In those days, he had been in charge of keeping the building and vehicles clean, as well as “working” visitations. He still remembers his grandfather’s stories of the days of the “on call” ambulance drivers, who played cards in the front room at night to pass the time between calls for their service.

No matter how much our funeral rituals have changed over the years, or will change in the years to come, these grand old funeral homes, such as Tharp’s, and the men and women who own and manage them, deserve our deepest respect. With compassion, dignity and elegance they have, for generations, faithfully performed a valued and necessary service that many of us would find nearly impossible to perform ourselves, especially when we are most vulnerable.

