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Dennis Moody: Death is no Different

by David Cecelski. "Listening to History [2]," *News & Observer.* Published 10/13/2002. Copyrighted.
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Dennis Moody has been laying souls to rest since 1932. When I visited him at the Moody Funeral Home [3] in the small town of Mount Airy, in the lovely foothills of Surry County [4], he described how funerals and the mortuary trade have changed in his lifetime. He also guided me through the inner workings of the funeral home. He showed me displays of caskets and urns, the parlors with open caskets waiting for wakes that evening, and the embalming room, where a beautician carefully applied eyeliner and lipstick to a woman who had died the night before.

I have to confess I found the experience a little unsettling. But Dennis Moody's manner was very reassuring, and I could see how our ways of approaching death say a great deal about our changing ways of life. Now 83, he recalled the days before most people trusted strangers to care for the dead, when funerals were held at home, when a man's neighbors dug his grave.

Dennis Moody. Photo by Chris Seward. To request permission for further use of this photo, or to purchase a print, please contact the News & Observer.

> Used to, out in the country where somebody died, they would ring a church bell in the morning and everybody would come in to help dig the grave. Two could show up, 10 could show up. They'd hear that bell and go down and see what's hap
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> The first man that was in the funeral business here in Mount Airy was named Mr. Hannah. He needed horses to pull his funeral coach, so he went to my grandfather to buy two horses. Mr. Hannah told my grandfather, if you'll get somebody to
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> In the old days a lot of funeral directors come from people that opened up a furniture store. That was true all over the United States. They got into the funeral home by being in the furniture business -- display, furniture, chairs, things like that.
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> Most of the people who died back then were not moved from the home at all. They wanted to be fixed up at home. You would go out to the home and bathe them and you set the features and you'd leave them on a cooling board -- it was a litt
>
> When the call would come in that so-and-so had passed away, we would take the hearse and go over to the home, and we'd talk to the family about some information to put on the death certificate. Once you did that, we would ask the family
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> At first, a lot of times they'd say we don't want no embalming. Well, that's fine, then we won't do it, because some people just didn't want it. They didn't know why anybody wanted to be embalmed. But if they don't want embalming, they usuall
>
> A lot of them come and pick the casket up and carry it home themselves. When they did, they'd bring in a string or a little sapling the length of a person, and they could use that string or that sapling to pick a casket that's long enough.
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> Everybody that died up until 1940, somebody sat up with them all night. That way the person that was dead was not there by themselves. Most of the time it was three of them. They'd sit there and talk all night. People would come by and spe
>
> Funerals would be at the home too. They'd have two straight-back chairs, turn them around, the seats would be facing each other, sit the casket right on them. A preacher would come to the house and have a service just like you would today
>
> If they wanted us to, we'd stay for the burial. A lot of times they'd say, well, we don't need that. We'll just do it ourselves. They would dig their own grave, then you take two ropes and lower the casket down into the ground.
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> When World War II come along, there wasn't enough people at home to stay up with the body all night. They had to quit doing that. We had to dig graves, too. The people did it themselves for a long time, but finally they couldn't get nobody to
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> Used to, the family and the neighbors done it all. Seems like each generation became a little bit more liberal. Every generation the funeral home would do more of it, 'til they got where we are today. All you do is tell the funeral director what yo
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> The people who is graduating out of college now, they don't care too much for fanfare about funerals. They don't exactly care that much about the wake at the funeral home at night. In the future, I feel a lot of people might just want graveside
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> A lot has changed in the funeral business, but you know, there's not much difference in how people show their grief. I can remember people back in 1932 real upset about a death and the same thing happens today. No, I don't think we had a

Update from NCpedia Staff:
Dennis Moody lived from March 28, 1919 - February 19, 2007.

Obituary: Dennis Wade Moody, February 19, 2007. Moody Funeral Services:http://www.moodyfuneralservices.com/obituary?id=98725 [5]

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