

Fall  
2023

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**Funeral Consumers  
Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge  
Annual Meeting September 2023**

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge held its annual meeting on September 12 at 7:15 p.m. in the Christiansburg Public Library. Seventeen members and guests were in attendance. After enjoying coffee, tea, and cookies, the members sat in a circle and made brief introductions. President Dianne Rencsok presented a summary of the Annual Report (see page 3) and invited Cynthia Luke to present our speaker, Paula Markham.

The term Death Doula is new to many people. Ms. Markham spoke about her experiences as a death doula—giving care to the dying, modeled on the concept of the birth doula who guides the mother from pregnancy through delivery. In discussion, Phil Olson revealed the difference between his academic preparation to be a death doula and the speaker's more experiential training.

After the talk, members voted on and endorsed three nominees for the Board: Dianne Rencsok, Ben Crawford, and new member, Tiffany Carpenetti, who joined us by phone, since she was unable to attend in person.

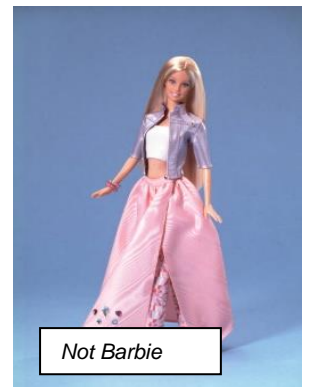
**Board of Trustees**

Welcome to our new Board member, Tiffany Carpenetti, Associate Professor of Anatomy at the Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. Dr. Carpenetti chairs the Faculty Senate and sits on the Virginia State Anatomical Program Ethics Committee. As course director for anatomy courses, Tiffany supervises the cadaver lab, including procurement of donors, coordination of cremation and return. Her interest in FCABR is "to serve on a Board to help inform the public about our state-wide donor program as an end-of-life option. I am passionate about not only disseminating knowledge, but also ensuring that our donors are treated with the utmost care and respect."

Congratulations are due to another board member. At the Salvation Army Post of the New River Valley banquet, Ben Crawford was honored for his service as the Salvation Army Advisory Board Chair from 2017 to 2022. In addition to serving with the FCAVBR, Ben is also active with AARP, BSA, and Ruritan.

# “Barbie—a Movie About Death”

While Greta Gerwig’s “Barbie” is, first and foremost, a Hollywood romp about a doll, the plot of the film is framed by Barbie’s thoughts of death and her subsequent journey to find the unhappy human who is sending these thoughts.



Several reviewers commented that the single greatest scene in the film shows Barbie gasping “You’re beautiful!” at a seated old woman. According to reviewer Leonard Maltin<sup>\*1</sup>, “the older woman whom Barbie meets at a bus stop is legendary costume designer Ann Roth, who’s still going strong at age 92.” While the plot meanders from patriarchy to corporate greed, Barbie’s awakening is an acknowledgement that old age and death are part of what gives value to human life.

A very different thinker, biologist George Wald, gave a popular lecture called “The Origin of Death.”<sup>\*2</sup> In a version in the 1960’s, he asked us to consider something immortal, such as a test tube. The tube has no fixed life span, but if we want it to last forever, we can put it in a drawer and never use it. So, what is the point of its long life? Wald went on to say that organisms with a limited life span need to be in a hurry to reproduce, “and that the preparation to reproduce is simultaneously the preparation to die.” The lecture went on with a more scientific example of immortality, germ plasm. We don’t get emotional about germ plasm, but “we have fallen in love with the body. That’s that thing that looks back at us from the mirror. That is the repository of that lovely identity that you keep chasing all your life.”

Longtime members of FCAVBR know that we encourage members to accept that no human lives forever, and that we can make life better for ourselves and our loved ones by making realistic plans for death and dying. These ideas are nothing new, but filmmakers and scientists may give us new ways to think about them.

Linda Plaut

2023 Fall

## Citations:

\*1 <https://leonardmaltin.com/barbie-its-about-time/>

\*2 <https://www.elijahwald.com/origin.html>

-Not Barbie from internet free copyright site-

Bouquet from <https://www.joincake.com/blog/death-puns/>

tangled from <https://www.sharingloveandlife.com/blog/2016/3/23/untangling-grief>



## **2022-2023 Annual Report of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge**

*An abbreviated version of this report is below. Please see our website, [fcavbr.org](http://fcavbr.org), for more details.*

The mission of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge has been successfully met in this past year. Helping our neighbors make informed end-of-life decisions has been accomplished in several ways. Our newsletters have highlighted information on the actions of the Federal Trade Commission and of the Virginia Legislature. The website, [fcavbr.org](http://fcavbr.org), has been revised to make information more current and easier to access, such as direct links for recommended books that are available in the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library system. Meaningful information has included what's new (alkaline hydrolysis) and what's historical (green burial). We have continued to provide guidance and information through participation at public events and response to inquiries on our information phone line and email account. Increased active participation from more individual members has helped achieve our goals this year.

**Outreach** Outreach has included community events such as the Senior Care Fair, Facebook, a visit to the newest green (natural) cemetery, and sponsoring a presentation by Kevin Bradley from Final Exit Network. We are especially proud of the revisions on our website to make it more current and more accessible. The website now includes a direct link to retailers approved by Virginia for obtaining DNR Jewelry (Do Not Resuscitate).

**Legal advocacy** The FCAVBR has participated in the Federal Trade Commission review of the Funeral Rule which provides standards and oversight to Funeral Homes. Our FCA monitored actions of the Virginia Legislature and provided information on legislation pertinent to our mission. These topics included alkaline hydrolysis, historic black cemeteries, and state requirements for disposition of unclaimed bodies. We continue to monitor the Virginia Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. For many years, FCAVBR Board members have presented information on green burial to the Blacksburg Town Council. This year, an FCAVBR board member spoke at a public meeting in favor of a green burial section in Westview Cemetery. The Blacksburg Town Council approved this change unanimously.

**Helped consumers** The FCAVBR continues to offer information and reference, via telephone (540-953-5589) and our email ([fcavbr@gmail.com](mailto:fcavbr@gmail.com)) account. One such contact involved advising a family on a funeral home complaint. We participated in three Death cafes and plan to increase the availability of these interactions. See the website for the newly created document "What to do when a family member dies".

This past year, five (5) new families were welcomed as members to the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Blue Ridge. The success for this past year is due to the willingness of individuals to take responsibility for specific tasks. Thanks especially to Kim Marye and Bill Baker as well as the Board of Trustees. It is hoped that as members continue to see the FCAVBR as an important resource, more will continue to help with the various monitoring and information activities, achieving the goal of making death a part of life.

Respectfully submitted,     Dianne Rencsok, President, FCAVBR



**As the holidays approach, specifically Christmas, my grief feels like a tangled and jumbled ball of Christmas lights.** Lights that once wrapped around the tree of life shining brightly are now dim, cloudy and look more like a ball of yarn than anything else. <https://www.sharingloveandlife.com/blog/2016/3/23/untangling-grief>

### **Mission and more**

This is how the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge (FCAVBR) Website describes our organization: *We are the equivalent of Consumer Reports for the funeral industry. We are your funeral consumer advocates, researching, insisting and holding funeral homes and cemeteries accountable for accurate and transparent price listings.*

The Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge has appreciated the support we have received from our members. In the last two years our organization has been reorganizing and clarifying the ways we can meet the above description. Several members have provided amazing financial support. We plan to use that support for a public presentation in the coming year. In December, FCAVBR has usually sent a letter asking for contributions. This year, thanks to those generous donors, **we are not asking for dollars but for time**. It turns out that a nine (9) person board of trustees cannot do it all. Several who are not board members have stepped up, but we need more.

For instance, one member currently investigates how the Virginia Legislature can affect our end-of-life decisions and reported on some of these in the Summer newsletter. However, the 2023 legislative session had 2500 bills from the House and 1547 from the Senate. More members are needed to review some of these bills and determine what effect they may have. Review could be done on your own computer at your own home. Reviewers would be given designated areas of review and report to a Coordinator. That Coordinator would determine what needed to be followed and what needed advocacy. Advocates are also needed. These people would be provided with information pertinent to a bill's subject and assure that the legislators involved were made aware of this information. As a 501 (c) (3) organization, it is not our place to lobby for a specific outcome. The organization goal would be to assure accurate information was provided. However, individuals can advocate in many forums.

Research is another task that could be accomplished on your own time at your own home. Research would be ongoing at a time and frequency convenient to the Researcher. Periodically, one would do internet searches on end-of-life subjects (funerals, death, etc.). That information could be communicated in newsletters or special presentations. Of course, this also means that Editor positions are needed. These people would create the content from Researcher data. (Or a member could suggest a more effective title that would encourage others to read and contribute.)

Since 2005 and until 2023, the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge has done price surveys for cemeteries and funeral homes. In 2022, fewer Funeral homes were included, as less volunteer help was available. In past years, we have added locations when requested by members. One of those members noticed that a requested home had not been included. That person has volunteered to help with future price surveys. However, this is a task that could use several people covering various aspects of data collection and reporting.

Then there is our mission to provide “consumer education and outreach”. Over a dozen PowerPoint presentations have been created. Many people became members because they attended one of these presentations. Volunteers in more geographical locations are needed to be Presenters. The venue for these functions is usually a public place or organization such as churches, libraries, Rotary. Do you like to talk and share important information? Then, perhaps, you would like to present some of these programs and benefit others in your area.

There is one more way that members could help share information. Health Fairs, Death Cafes, and Community events such as Christiansburg Wilderness Days often provide opportunities for our organization to have an impact. That usually consists of being there with pamphlets and materials available for anyone who inquires. That designation could be Event Staff. And of course, all our activities need to be publicized. Wherever you live, you can help tell your local resources about our activities.

Can you give an hour of time to help continue the mission of the Funeral Consumers Alliance of the Virginia Blue Ridge? (Or even ten hours of your time?) Which of the tasks described above matches your interest and availability? We are all volunteers in this mission. End-of-life planning makes a difference to individuals and families. Instead of an end-of-year letter seeking donations, our letter includes a postcard. Please check a task on the postcard and drop it in the mail. One of the board members or other member volunteers will contact you by spring.

Thank you so much for giving consideration to this need,

Dianne Rencsok, FCAVBR President

Legislation Review	Researcher	Funeral Home Price Survey	Event Staff
Subject Coordinator	Editor	Cemetery Price Survey	Publicity
Program Presenter	Advocate	Survey Data Collation	Board Member

**Funeral Consumers Alliance  
of the Virginia Blue Ridge**

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Legislation Review	lets you know what is going on in Richmond
Subject Coordinator	a task for those who like patterns
Program Presenter	good information already for you to show
Researcher	do you like surfing the internet at home?
Editor	did my writing need improvement?
Advocate	also from home, send a letter
Funeral Home Price Survey	easy, send mail, record numbers
Cemetery Price Survey	same as Funeral Home but fewer businesses
Survey Data Collation	you get to organize those numbers
Event Staff	be the smile at the health fair
Publicity	let more people know what is important
Board Member	and best of all, help us plan the future