

# The Echo

---

Volume 2021

Article 34

---

2021

## The Overlapping Years

Lara Rudman

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/echo>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), and the [Photography Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rudman, Lara (2021) "The Overlapping Years," *The Echo*: Vol. 2021 , Article 34.  
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/echo/vol2021/iss2021/34>

This Prose is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in The Echo by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact [scholarexchange@furman.edu](mailto:scholarexchange@furman.edu).

# The Overlapping Years

Lara Rudman

Birth often makes me think of death, but maybe that is just the morbid side of me. Since the birth of my niece, I have thought a lot about the death of my great-grandmother. Family is a gift, but the nature of death and family is a source of great suffering. You will probably only know four generations at a time. Even if you could trace your lineage back to before your ancestors came to America, those individuals would only be names on a sheet of paper. You have no connection to them other than a surname. The more removed the family member, the less you know them. However, as I have gotten older, I wish I had taken the time to get to know the ones whose lives overlapped with my own.

Grandma Winnie was my paternal great-grandmother, and the only living great-grandparent who was nearby. I was often uncomfortable around her, something that I feel terrible admitting. I rationalize that, as a child, I was often uncomfortable around many people. Maybe it was because I was so young and she was so old, but her fragility scared me. My dad used to drag me to the nursing home to see her, and I, never one to disappoint my dad, would begrudgingly go with him. He said she was lonely and wanted to see me, one of her two great-grandchildren, my older brother being the second. But I do

not remember him having to visit her as often as I did.

She lived at a nursing home called Cedar Lane, which was a rather generic nursing home name. It was the only place I ever remember her living, other than the hospice where she lived during the weeks leading up to her death. I cannot recall the name of the hospice, or what it looked like on the inside. All I remember is the dreary atmosphere, muted colors, and Grandma Winnie in a hospital bed, death not far off.

But the nursing home I remember well. Her room smelled like that of an old person: strongly perfumed, as if to mask the smell of age that grew on her with each passing year. I would hesitantly go to hug her, and she had so much lipstick on it would leave a mark on my face when she kissed my cheek. She would then rub the deep-red lipstick mark off my face with her wrinkled and papery fingers, stretching the skin of my cheek painfully. She had so many stuffed animals on the couch it was hard to find a place to sit. I guess she did not have guests often enough to have a permanent spot on the couch cleared off. I usually chose the spot next to Thumper, the bunny from Bambi. I would sink into the couch when I sat down, the stuffed animals surrounding me, as if they would engulf me if I sat back too far. Grandma Winnie would always sit in her recliner, which had a good view of the TV. The TV would always have Walker, Texas Ranger or Judge Judy on.

Funnily enough, the other day, I was scrolling through the TV channels and stumbled upon a rerun of Walker, Texas Ranger. I was shocked to find that I still remember the exact words and tune to the theme song.

Sometimes when we visited her, we ate lunch with her in the cafeteria decorated with yellows, blues, and pinks. Some residents were also eating with their visiting loved ones, while others ate alone, silently. I do not remember liking the food. I was not a fan of green

beans or Jell-O. Awkward silences would ensue, at least they felt that way to me, as everything seems more intense as a child.

If I did not see her at the nursing home, then I would see her for the occasional family dinner at my grandparents' house. She slowly walked towards the door with her walker, as if each step caused her pain, my dad or grandfather lending her an arm. The air of the house changed when we all knew she was coming. A hushed whisper would travel through the rooms of my grandparents' house. Grandma Winnie is here. I would watch her approach the house from a window in the dining room. When she finally got to "her spot" on my grandmother's striped couch, she would sit there silently in the L-shaped corner with a red, knitted blanket across her lap and survey the room, waiting for someone to interact with her. Her eyes would lock on me, and I would walk over to say hello, as my father had instructed me to do in the past. I cannot remember what we would discuss. I was always itching to walk away, but I knew if I was rude, my dad would scold me.

After we all sat down at the dinner table, my grandmother would ask if anyone wanted to say Grace before eating. Without missing a beat, Grandma Winnie would quickly say, "Grace." It was a joke that had probably gotten old for everyone else at the table, but that always got a chuckle out of me.

She died when I was in middle school; I did not cry. My dad picked me up from school to go to the funeral, and when it was over, I went back to school for the rest of the day. I did not have a strong enough connection with her to cry, and I think my dad knew that.

I think that if she were alive now, we would get along well. Grandma Winnie as I have come to remember her, and me as I am now. That's what my grandmother tells me. Apparently, I am a lot like her. I am told that every time my grandmother watches me put a ridiculously unhealthy amount of butter on my bread at restaurants.

I find it strange that those little, inconsequential characteristics that I have are what reminds my grandmother of her mother-in-law, but maybe they are what really sticks out after all these years.

Grandma Winnie was a stubborn woman; she was opinionated and told everyone what she thought, even if they did not want to hear it. I cannot say I am the same in that regard, as I loathe confrontation; I do much better to stew and wallow passive-aggressively. I am of the mind that Grandma Winnie was never that way. My dad said that when he was a child, she would come out of nowhere and turn his computer games off if he was not listening to her. And when he got older, he would have to fight her for the check when they went out to eat. Despite all that, everyone who knew her thought she was wonderful. I just wish I had gotten to know her better, rather than hearing these stories in retrospect.

I was not allowed to see her during the open casket part of her funeral. My dad told me that was not how he wanted me to remember her. I thought that was an interesting sentiment because I do remember the last time I saw her; she was in hospice a couple of days before she passed away. Her nails were unpainted. She looked weak and frail, and her red hair, which was always perfectly done, was graying and not so perfect anymore.

I only went to the funeral after the casket was closed. It was a sullen and somber day, as it had been raining that morning. I do not remember any of the eulogies, or if my father cried. She was cremated, something that now makes the Catholic in me cringe. I was told that she had always wanted to be cremated and have her ashes spread at the top of a mountain. Then, when you would get a piece of dirt in your eye, and you would flick it out, you would say to yourself: "I had a piece of Grandma Winnie stuck in my eye."

Years after she passed, my grandfather and his siblings scattered her ashes at the top of some mountain in Colorado. Now and

then, I get something stuck in my eye, and I think of her.

My niece will never know about Grandma Winnie, even less than I knew about her. I think about how she will probably never really know my grandparents, her great-grandparents. She will be relegated to remembering them the way I do my great-grandmother, a ghost that floated into my life just as quickly as she floated out. A distant person who shares my blood but who has no real connection to me. I am forced to remember her through the lens of others. Through their memories and stories, I craft my idea of Grandma Winnie. I do not put much stock in my memories; they are the scattered musings of a shy child who was too naïve to understand the opportunity she had. My great-grandmother deserves better than that. Grandma Winnie deserves to be remembered differently than I can manage on my own.

I think about what wonderful people my two pairs of grandparents are, and I think about all the happy memories I have shared with them. When I see the joy in my grandmother's eyes when she holds my niece, the tears that I can see forming in her eyes, I wonder if this baby will ever know how quickly they fell in love with her. The scene reminds me of a photo in an album in my closet that shows Grandma Winnie holding me as a baby. I am struck by how the expressions of my grandmother and Grandma Winnie are the same; the look of unconditional love gracing their faces with a youth neither my niece nor I will ever remember. I hope I can do my grandparents justice with all the memories I have collected over the years. I think about how my dad talks about his grandparents, the smile that lights up his face as he thinks about the time he spent with them, the love they gave him that I will never feel. He tries his best to impart their memories to me, but it will never be enough. Although, it does not stop me from trying.

So, I ask my dad what he remembers and grill my grandparents about the times that I was not alive to witness. My grandfather begrudgingly gives me little details of what his childhood was like, growing up in Chicago under the iron fist that was his mother. I fill the gaps of Grandma Winnie with the memories and characterizations of others. And over the years, I have created a clearer picture, mixed with both my memories and theirs. I know she loved me, more than I will ever be able to love her in return. And maybe that is all that really matters.