The Rose
A Multi-Genre Paper on Connecting with Loved Ones Lost

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In Loving Memory of Lucy Carney,
and to my Mom, who made me see.
Lucille Carney
October 23, 1927 – March 1, 2008
My Grandma sat in pain, my Mom at her side.

My Mom's final request to the person that gave her life: "Please send me a sign. Let me know that you are in Heaven, and that you're happy. I need to know you're okay after your soul is no longer in your body."

Grandma: "Nanette, I will send you a Rose."
Confirmation is a Catholic sacrament of mature Christian commitment and a deepening of baptismal gifts. It is a time in your spiritual development for you to mature in your faith and to begin making important religious decisions for yourself. A sponsor is someone who you trust, respect, and look up to as a model of how you wish to live your life. For this reason, I chose my Grandma to be my Confirmation sponsor.

Another traditional practice in the Church at the time of Confirmation is choosing a name that will remind you of this sacrament. A Confirmation name identifies you in a unique way, not just your physical self, but who you are as person. I chose the name Rose because St. Rose was a charitable woman who I respected and wanted to model my life after. I also chose the name because it just "felt" right. Some things cannot be explained, yet as my Grandma always said, "A person's intuition can be a very powerful thing."

“What name are you going to choose, Ellen?” asked Grammy.

“Rose. It just feels right.”

“I was hoping you'd pick that name. Our mutual love.”
Dear Reader,

For those of us who are left behind, death is a difficult time. People deal with death in different ways and this is the story of how I dealt with my Grandmother’s death. Throughout the next few pages you will meet Lucy Carney. I hope that you will come to see the kind of woman she was, but I’m also hoping you will see something else. The difference about this story concerning death is that it has a happy ending. Love exists regardless of circumstances. Although our circumstances might change, love remains. Just because a person dies does not mean they stop thinking of you. The bond of love continues. Eventually I came to feel connected to my Grandma in a way I never was even while she was alive. I hope to encourage people to do the same in their own lives.

Even if one wants to feel this connection to their loved one, they may have some reservations about doing so. At first I felt afraid of connecting with Grammy. It confused me. We’ve grown up hearing hundreds of ghost stories but never stories about actual loved ones who have died. However, one of the greatest gifts a loved one who has passed away can give to those left behind is feeling comforted. Although we may not physically experience them again the way we once knew, we can always keep their memories alive in our minds and hearts and by realizing that, as spirits, they can often be around us more than ever before. Love is the bridge that connects us to each other - across the miles, across the years, and even across the barrier of death.

I hope that you walk away knowing that special relationships, much like the ones you have in your own life, can help you cope with a death in the family. I hope that you will become open to forming a connection to loved ones who have died and realize that, rather than bringing pain, these connections can bring great comfort.

Sincerely yours,

Ellen Conrad
Lady

Sitting on your long vanity bench
Strawberry blonde hair
Brushes large with handles larger
Venetian-blown glass.

Gold earrings dangling
Irish eyes twinkling
a smile and a dab of rouge
the smell of musky roses dipped in honey
A hug that makes my head spin with flowers.
The Lunch Date

I was born during a blizzard. On the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, to be exact.
But this was June. And we were in Florida, ten years later.
“Let’s do lunch” Grammy says.
Like it’s a verb. A fun activity that breaks the rules.

“How do you do that?” I ask, confused.
“Do you still fit into your yellow dress from Easter? Put it on,” she sings.

We drive to the pier. Strutting our Sunday best.
But it was a Wednesday. In June.
“We’re celebrating a birthday, today!” she announces to the hostess.
My jaw drops but I say nothing, Grammy in her element.
We get a table by the window, a dazzling view of the ocean.

Rolls. Shirley temples. Shrimp cocktails.
The only fancy things I loved but I could make an entire meal out of them.
It was allowed. We were doing lunch.

A sparkler in my chocolate cake.
Lunching with my Grammy. Just the two of us.
In our Sunday best.
GRAMMY'S ESSENTIAL FOOD GROUPS

Bridge Mix.
Burnt Peanuts. Dark Chocolate.
Chocolate covered cherries. Fudge and Beer.
Poached Eggs on Toast. Pecan Twist. Coffee Cake. Butter Pecan Ice Cream.
Capri Pants

Taking the comb out of her French twist, pulling her hair back, refastening the twist with bobby pins; powdering her nose and touching up her lipstick when she hears the garage door opening because Pop Pop is coming home. Smiling when he walks through the back door and says, “Hi, Babe.”

Running the vacuum quickly because it’s “only dirt and we have better things to do.”
Walking to the bank and the public library with Grammy because a 5 year old needs a savings account and her own library card.
Subscribing to the conservative Chicago Tribune and the liberal Daily News because, as in all other things, it’s best to be balanced.
Letting her kids stay home from school if they just asked her. She said she thought the time off would be good for them and besides, they already knew what they would have learned that day.
Taking her kids to confession on Saturday afternoons, telling them she knew they had nothing to confess.
Running down the stairs, Capri pants

Laughing and putting on red lipstick all at once
Brown fur around the tops of rubber pull-on zipper boots because whatever you do, you should do it with style.
Whistling, playing double solitaire while eating fudge and beer
Dipping her buttered toast into hot coffee at breakfast
Always buttering the bread before making a sandwich, even peanut butter sandwiches.
Breakfast for dinners, especially pancakes.
The Reason

She’s the reason I read.
The one that I exchanged books with. Like a secret book club.

She’s the reason I have Irish pride.
Always praising my rosy cheeks, freckles, and green eyes.

She’s the reason I bake.
A pinch of sugar and a dash of love. Her secret recipe.

She’s the reason I travel.
Camels in Egypt were her favorite. Parisian cafes are mine.

She’s the reason I love candles.
They are for every occasion: happy, sad, or celebratory, she’d say.

She’s the reason I’m me.
Even in death she is still with me, a part of me.
she always smelled of tobacco and cigars but she never smoked she never followed recipes but always threw in a pinch of salt for good measure she never cursed but sometimes she mouthed it she was Irish, superstitious, and possessed the "gift of eloquence" her name was Lucy
Esophageal Cancer

It starts in the inner layer of your esophagus, the tube that connects your throat and stomach. The most common symptom is difficulty swallowing and a sensation of food getting stuck in your throat or chest. Cancer cells develop in a tube-like structure that runs from your throat to your stomach. Where the food goes.

And then it spreads.

Difficulty and pain when swallowing. Coughing. Hoarseness. Indigestion. Heartburn. Weight loss. Pain in the chest. The causes are smoking and heavy alcohol use - She did neither.
**Shaking** as she served the mashed potatoes, my Grandpa carving the turkey. She never sat down to eat with us, always up and about: serving, clearing, cleaning, serving, clearing, cleaning. She made mint chocolate chip pie and homemade apple pie. I helped her make it once – a pinch of everything. “If you can’t measure life why measure a pie?” she’d say. Quivering voice, a tiny frame, and shaky, frail hands. Each swallow a contraction of pain. She couldn’t eat what she cooked for us. The cancer in her throat a barrier to the meal she labored over the stove making.
**Selfless Even in Death**

My Grandma decided to go home. She had fought the battle valiantly. Round one – Grammy. Round two – cancer. She wasn’t giving up, though. She could have done that a long time ago. When the chemo had made her lose her strawberry blonde hair and when she could only drink nutrient-drinks like Boost because she couldn’t swallow anymore – that’s when she could have given up. But the surgery that would have made her completely lose her ability to talk and swallow was too much, she decided. She wanted to be at home with her things, with her family.

The hospital bed was placed horizontally to their king-sized mattress. If you put the railings on the sides down it almost passed for a regular cot, like the kind you use when you’re a guest in someone else’s house.

But she was a guest in cancer’s house. And she was in so much pain. The cancer had eliminated all of her ability to taste. Every swallow was a battle: saving enough saliva, taking a sip of Boost, clenching her eyes shut and then trying to force the taste-less substance down her throat.

Even while sick she had made my Grandpa his favorite foods: Meatloaf, Potatoes, Flank Stank, Apple Pie. She was a warrior. Together they would sit down at the dining room table, candles lit, music playing. My Grandpa would savor his steak and Grammy would sip her Boost, trying to conceal her discomfort. My Grandpa unfailingly badgering her for not “eating up... that’s how you’ll get your strength back.” But my Grandma never argued back. I think she knew that comments like this from my Grandpa weren’t battles worth fighting.

The days went by slowly for her. Tying up loose ends with her five kids, mentioning how they didn’t need two cars anymore, asking my Mom to be in charge of her will. I had thought she had just wanted to stay busy. But she was preparing. I see that now. And
this was her gift to us – hanging on, staying alive for us, not her. Helping us become aware of the reality of the situation.

One day she began to falter, slipping in and out of consciousness. My family rushed into town from all over the country to be by her side. She mostly slept during this time but when she woke she would smile her movie-star smile and ask questions like nothing was wrong: “Did Michael win his basketball game?” she’d ask.

When at last all the family had arrived she smiled one last time and drifted off into a coma. Uncle Larry took out his guitar and began singing “Oh Danny Boy” in his beautiful tenor voice. The rest of the family began to sing and join in. The lyrics of a song my Grandma always hummed soon mixed with tears and shaking hands. Some were ready to let her go. Some not quite. She held on for a few hours like this, letting everyone cling to her, selfless even in death. And then, when people were finally able to see that she was hanging on for them, that she was ready, she let go.
Grammy

Goodbye
I’ll pass you in the sky
I’ll miss you.

It’s time
Don’t come home for me
I am with you

Yes you did.
Travel the world like I did

It’s my time
I will send you a rose

I love you.

Me

Don’t Go
I should come home
I miss you.

Wait...
I feel so alone
I didn’t get to say goodbye

Come with me

Stay with me

I love you.
Please don’t go.
“Help!” I screamed. “Please somebody help me!” I could feel its hot, sweaty breath; it smelled like foul waste. I dug my nails through the snow and into the hard ground. With each shriek I let out its eyes grew darker. With every plea for help it grew, getting larger and more massive. Soon it was looming overhead, blocking out what was left of my view of the moon. I could see my reflection in its eyes. I broke out into a cold sweat. I prayed to feel numb. I didn’t want to feel it’s teeth sinking into my flesh. I tried to scream but now nothing came out. I tried to run, but the walls of the snow bank were too steep, too tall. I was trapped. I was like a fish hooked on a line. I could see my route of escape just over the snow bank walls but I couldn’t reach, it was too high. Its whiskers looked like knives that could skin me alive. Its fur was grey and white. It was a wolf.

Just as it opened its jaw to devour its prey an image came into my mind. A picture of my Grandma, laughing and running down the stairs in her Capri pants. She was smiling and nodding, as if to say that everything would be alright. Alright? A wolf was about to tear me apart and she was nodding in approval? But for some reason I felt better, warmer. I felt safe. I wasn’t scared anymore. The wolf didn’t look the same to me and I began to hear it’s breathing again, the thudding of my heart in my ears finally subsiding. And then, after this roller coaster of emotion...I woke up. It had all been a dream. But why had I thought of my Grandma? And why was there a wolf in my dream? I would have to wait two weeks before the answer would finally dawn on me. The answer was worth waiting for.
Abandonment

Alone. In a foreign country. Fourth floor bedroom. 
Not with my family, who are by her bedside. 
Screaming into the phone my goodbyes. 
Sobbing. Barely audible on speaker phone. 
They hear me. I feel ashamed that this is how I say goodbye 
When they are there singing their goodbyes.

Her favorite songs, to calm the pain. 
But my pain sinks in deeper each second. 
The walls are thin in my host family’s house. 
I scream into my pillow. 
Can she hear me? I should be there. 
Guilt that’s hard to swallow. 
I’m not there.

School the next day is a blur. 
Bus ride, train ride, walk. 
Classes, teachers, quizzes. 
My friends ask what’s wrong. 
I tell them the news. 
They look sorry for me. They are polite. 
As they walk away and I can hear them ask what’s for lunch.
White.
Pink.
Red.
Yellow.
Lighting Up A Room.
Happiness.
Love.
They Are
When roses die you can
Even dry them out and
Beautiful keep them. Even in
In death their smell
Death. lingers.

I See A Rose
I Will Think Of You.
I Love You.
For those of us who are left behind, death is a very difficult time. However, it is also the most common time for our loved ones to communicate to us from the other side. It is a time when their spirits want to reassure us that they are all right and that they love us very much. When a loved one sends us a sign, it’s nice to know they’re there, they’re okay, and they still love you. It’s also a wonderful feeling to know that you’re being protected on a spiritual level by the people you knew while they were living. Doesn’t it make sense that some of our guardian angels are the relatives that have gone before us? Love is the bridge that connects us to each other—across the miles, across the years, and even across the barrier of death.

When a loved one passes, take a few moments to send them off with all of your love for them. If you want, ask them to give you a sign of their presence. If they choose to come through to you with a sign, you will almost certainly be able to tell it’s them. Every spirit has its own energy. When we die we do not lose our personalities or our sense of humor. If you are open to a sign and ask for one, your loved one will answer. Physical manifestations of a spirit’s presence can take many different forms. These communications can come in the form of feelings, noises, strange experiences, “coincidences” that are too striking to be ignored, etc.

Love exists regardless of circumstances. Although our circumstances might change, love remains. Just because a person dies does not mean they stop thinking of you. The bond of love continues. Although we may not physically experience them again the way we once knew, we can always experience them and have them share in our lives by keeping their memories alive in our minds and hearts and by realizing that, as spirits, they can often be around us more than ever before.
Five Reasons Why Connecting After Death Isn’t "Hokey"

1. You won’t see a zombie version of your loved one, or even a sheet with black holes for eyes. You might not "see" anything, actually. Usually it’s just a feeling or an ordinary object, an inside joke, a symbol or an object that reminds you of them.

2. Spirits aren’t going to send a singing telegram or shoot off fireworks to get your attention. Because they’re not doing it to get attention. They’re doing it for you, not them.

3. If you could feel your loved one’s presence then, why not now?

4. Sometimes everyone needs a little reminder that they are loved.

5. Death is hard to deal with, especially if you’re not with the person when they die. But death is physical, merely physical. Some people deal with death by accepting it and moving on. That’s fine. Some people need a little more help. That’s fine too. Loved ones know when you need that extra help. Better yet, you should ask for that help. You’re not asking for miracles, you’re just asking for some way to know that they’re okay after they’ve passed. Many find comfort in knowing that their loved ones are safe.
“She’s going to Interlocken this weekend, right Nan?” said Grammy.

My Mom: “Yes. She wanted to go skydiving
but now she’s not so sure.”

“Well you tell her to go. We can pass each other in the sky. That way
we can say goodbye.”

I didn’t get to go skydiving in Interlocken. I tried three times that
weekend and three times I was refused. The wind. The rain. The
equipment. Something was always wrong. We decided to rent
scooters and ride up into the mountains instead. All it took was
signing a waiver. Then they handed us the keys and off we went...

The first curve looms ahead. My friend is on the back making our
balance wobbly, at best. I began to turn the handles but barely begin
to veer right. I turn a little more. My friend behind me doesn’t lean
with me, we almost tip. I steady us and continue to turn the handles.
Time slows. I can hear my friend screaming behind me. I can feel her
nails in my sides. I see the black, shiny car driving towards us as we
go over the median into oncoming traffic. I try to turn. I hear the
horns. I think – “Great, dying from skydiving is one thing but dying
from a scooter accident? Come onnnnn.”

And then my thoughts change: I think of my Grandma. I pray to her.
Almost everything is done within a second but it feels like five
minutes. Somehow we are able to get back over to our side of the
road, our legs brushing the headlights of the oncoming car. I pull over
and my friend is sobbing and running away from me. Apparently she thought it was “all my fault.”

I don’t cry. I don’t speak. I just repeat “Thank you Thank you Thank you Thank you” over and over in my head. The boy behind me on a scooter tries to high-five me for a “sweet move.” If he only knew how sweet it was.

No air.

Heart panicking.

The car.

The horn.

Too fast.

Yet slow.

A presence.

Trust.

Safety.

It was her.
On the one year anniversary of my Grandma’s death my Mom happened to be visiting me at college in Oxford, Ohio. She asked if I would go to Mass with her. Although not one to usually go to Mass, I was happy to go in remembrance of my Grandma and, more importantly, to be there for my Mom during this difficult time.

The Mass went on as I usually remembered. It was March 1, 2009, right in the middle of the Lenten season. The priest was teaching about making sacrifices during the 40 days of Easter. Soon it was time for Communion. The Lector announced that the song would be number 301, *On Eagles Wings*. Immediately my Mom and I froze. We had always associated this song with my Grandma and it was a song that was played at her funeral. It was also a song that, as raised Catholics, we knew was never played during Lent. With our shaking hands and tears rolling down our face we knelt together and knew that she was with us. As if we weren’t sure enough, my Mom’s sister, Therese, who lives in a suburb outside of Chicago, called an hour later. She said that *On Eagles Wings* as well as another song that was played at Grammy’s funeral, *Hosea*, were both played during her mass that day. Music has always spoken to me but never in the way that it did that day.

*Hosea*

Come back to me with all your heart
Don’t let fear keep us apart
Trees do bend though straight and tall
So must we to others call

*Refrain*
Long have I waited for
Your coming home to me
And living deeply our new life

The wilderness will lead you
To the place where I will speak
Integrity and justice
With tenderness
You shall know.

*On Eagle’s Wings*

You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,
Who abide in His shadow for life,
Say to the Lord, "My Refuge,
My Rock in Whom I trust."

*Refrain*
And He will raise you up on eagle’s wings,
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,
And hold you in the palm of His Hand.

The snare of the fowler will never capture you,
And famine will bring you no fear;
Under His Wings your refuge,
His faithfulness your shield.
A wolf lives in a pack, a family oriented structure. Wolves communicate with each other more by harmony and integration rather than by aggression and submission. My Grandma was a part of a women's book club called The Wolves. For 15 years they met twice a month and talked about books and their families. They saw each other through happy times of grandchildren being born and the sad times of husbands passing away. When my Grandma got sick they were there for her. They drove her to her doctor's appointments. They moved the meeting times to whenever she felt up to them. They were her rock. My Grandma loved The Wolves and I loved them because they were there in a way that I couldn't be.

Cold snow.

No escape.

Heart panicking.

Looming overhead.

The wolf.

Fear.

And then a presence.

Trust.

Safety.

It was her.
My Mom has always felt a close connection to Native Americans. She admires their connection with nature and their spirituality. A few years ago she began telling Grammy about this. She explained that she had an inexplicable connection to feathers.

"Why feathers?" asked Grammy.
"I have no idea. With my allergies it makes no sense" my Mom laughed. "I just think they are beautiful, and they bring a kind of calmness over me."
"That, Nanette, is called feeling the spirits."

After my Grandma passed away my Mom began seeing feathers. In her closet. In her books. On her walks with the dog. And they were always pure white, fluffy, delicate feathers. Soon it was my Mom’s birthday – only ten days after Grammy had passed. In a moment of particular sadness my Mom looked out her window in our 14th floor apartment on Lake Shore Drive. A cascade of feathers was raining down outside. Immediately she sprinted to the window and could see no source of these feathers. It was as if they appeared out of thin air to gracefully dance in front of our window.

Although amazing, the real extraordinary event was how my Mom felt. She felt like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders and a huge calm had come over her. She felt comforted. And that, I think, is the greatest gifts a loved one that has passed can give to those left behind.
We have always been the “out of town-ers” in the family. My entire extended family has lived in Chicago, Illinois their entire lives. When my parents married, my Dad’s job brought us to Ohio. This resulted in extended family time being limited to Christmas and holiday celebrations. We were never able to have our Grandparents over for a last minute dinner; or have them come and baby-sit while my parents went out for the evening. The time we did spend with family was always special but it never seemed like enough.

It wasn’t until my Grandma passed away that I realized how many moments I had missed out on – how many moments I missed sharing with her. Despite this, my Grandma and I had a special connection. I always felt like she got me, in ways even my own parents did not. It was okay that we did not live in the same city because we secretly knew that we had a bond that distance couldn’t touch. But after she passed away I couldn’t help but feel a tinge of guilt. I regretted not being there when she died and for not calling her more often. I began to pray to her about this and soon found that it was the one thing that could make me feel better.

Growing up Catholic I’ve been raised to pray quite often. But when I started to pray to Grammy it felt different, like we were having a conversation. I explained my regrets and asked her to watch over me. I thanked her for letting me connect in this way and because I could talk to her any time I wanted, I felt a closeness to her I had never experienced before. It was our new secret, our new bond that distance again could not touch. Of course this difference was a little different than state lines, but that’s all it was – distance.
It’s not easy losing a loved one. It’s normal to feel remorse for moments not shared together, for I love you’s not uttered. But if you can realize that your loved one is not gone and that their spirit is still around you, you can come to feel them in a way you never did even while they were alive.

I never thought I could be “okay” with someone being dead. I thought it was a wound that never healed, a badge of sadness you wore forever. But it doesn’t have to be. Death is part of life, but it doesn’t have to become your life. My Grandma isn’t gone, she just isn’t physically here anymore. As hard as it may be to come to accept this, it can also be a very liberating feeling. Everyone deals with death differently but hopefully they will be able to bask in the memories and not the regrets. Connecting to those that have passed away takes courage, but if you do it, you can feel whole again.
Four hours after she had passed away there was a knock at the door. Three large, ominous knocks.

The coroner was here
to take Grammy’s body away.
My Mom crawled to the door, shoulders hunched.
Although she knew that Grammy’s soul was no longer in her body, this act seemed so definite, so finite.

With tears streaming down her cheek my Mom opened the door. A woman stood with long flowing hair. Her cheeks were flushed and she had a look about her that made my Mom snap into focus. They stood for a moment, neither saying a word. Then the woman spoke. Three words....
“Hi, I’m Rose.”
Notes Page

Page 5:
The information on the Sacrament of Confirmation was taken from the website

Page 7:
"The Lady" – Contemporary Free Verse poem

Page 8:
"The Lunch Date" – Flash Fiction

Pages 9 & 10:
"Grammy’s Essential Food Groups" and "Capri Pants" – These two poems were crafted after speaking with various members of my family. For Grammy’s 80th birthday, family members contributed memories that were compiled into a scrapbook for her. These are the memories of both Grammy’s children as well as grandchildren.

Page 12
"she always smelled of tobacco..." – Prose poem

Page 13:
"Esophageal Cancer" – Form Poem. This information was taken from https://ssl.search.live.com/health/article.aspx?id=articles%2fmc%2fpages%2f1%2fDS00500.html&q=Esophageal+Cancer.

Page 14:
"Shaking..." – Prose poem

Page 19:
"Help!..." – Contemporary Free Verse poem

Page 22:
"For those of us..." – Expository piece. The books listed in the Bibliography greatly contributed to this piece. After much reading and high-lighting in various books on the subject, I crafted a short summary of what I felt were the most important messages pertaining to my particular topic.

Page 27:
The moment I first realized the significance of the Wolf in my dream was during an in-class writing session. Thanks to a prompt about dreams, I realized that the dream left such a lasting impression on me because Grammy had been in the book club, The Wolves.
Bibliography


“What God tells us in the Bible about trying to communicate with the dead, ghosts, with other spirits, Reincarnation and Psychics.” [http://www.creationists.org/spirits.html](http://www.creationists.org/spirits.html).


*Other Sources*: Family Members Nanette Conrad, Therese Carney, Colleen Carney, Jean Carney, and Larry Carney.