

# **And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer Study Guide**

**And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer by Fredrik Backman**

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Pages 1 – 15.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Pages 16 – 30.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Pages 31 – 46.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Pages 47 – 60.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Pages 61 – 76.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>



# Plot Summary

The following version of this novella was used to create this study guide: Backman, Fredrik. *And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer*. English translation. Atria Books, 2016.

*And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer* is a novella by Fredrik Backman that revolves around the relationship between Noah and Grandpa as Grandpa's memory begins to fade. The plot of the novel is simple: Grandpa, while seeking to take the boat out on the lake with Noah, falls and hits his head. This requires Ted (Noah's Dad) to be called for, who in turn will bring Grandpa to the hospital. During the course of these events, several days pass, which bleed together from one set of events to the next, while Grandpa struggles to recall the past and keep his identity.

Much of the novella occurs in the square (essentially the town square) of Grandpa's mind and memory. There, Grandpa and Noah sit on a bench and talk – with some of the conversations actually being real and simply being blurred together with Grandpa's imaginings and struggles to remember. The square is full of familiar things –such as hyacinths, grown by Grandma, now long dead. Grandpa's struggle to remember is made all the more heartbreaking because Grandpa is a firm believer in the precision of mathematics. Everything must make sense. However, Grandpa's fading memory means that not everything always makes sense, and this becomes especially frustrating to Grandpa. Noah does his best to comfort and remind Grandpa of the past, such as a camping trip, while Grandpa considers Noah to be the highlight of his life.

As Grandpa struggles to remember, he returns to the age of 16 alongside his wife, who also reverts to the age of 16, and they recount and share their love. Whereas Grandpa is all about science and mathematics, Grandma is more faithful, emotional, and accepting. For example, Grandma believes in God, while Grandpa can only hope he is real. Grandpa explains the road to remembering who he is gets longer and longer each day. Grandpa even tells Noah that one day, he will be unable to remember anything, and so Noah must say goodbye and never look back. As Grandpa continues to decline, Noah and his Dad discuss what they can do for Grandpa. Dad reminds Noah that they must simply keep him company on the long road. Years later, Noah takes his own daughter camping, and reflects fondly on Grandpa.



# Pages 1 – 15

## Summary

Dear Reader (Introduction) – Frederik Backman welcomes readers to his novella by talking about running out of ideas with age, and the strange idea that humans have where they fear growing old more than dying. Backman explains his novella is one of love, memories, and letting go. Backman explains the novella was only ever intended privately for himself to sort through his own thoughts and explain them to his children with respect to losing the greatest minds he knows. Now, he gives the world the same thoughts.

(novella) In the middle of the hospital floor at the end of life, a man wakes up in a green tent while a young man sitting beside him tells him not to be scared. Grandpa and Noah (his grandson) sit beside one another. Grandpa reflects on how, despite the difference in age between them, they are both kids. They sit on a bench in a square. Noah does not know where he is, for the game he and Grandpa play involves Noah closing his eyes, and Grandpa bringing him someplace new. Grandpa has faith in two things: mathematics for their certainty (such as getting the astronauts home), and his grandson. Noah recognizes some things in the square – such as his grandfather’s desk – but nothing else is exactly familiar. Grandpa realizes the square has gotten small overnight, thoughts that Noah can hear in the square. Grandpa calls Noah “Noahnoah” because he likes Noah’s name twice as much as anyone else’s.

Hyacinth flowers grow under the bench. Noah recognizes them as Grandma’s. They remind him of Christmas. Between the flowers are pieces of shattered glass and keys. Noah asks what the keys are for, but Grandpa cannot remember. Around him, Noah sees many things, such as trees, a dragon, a penguin, and a one-eyed owl. Noah recognizes these things as belonging to him – such as the dragon, a gift given to him by Grandpa when he was born. The people in the square are blurry, and Noah worries about finding the way home because Grandpa has not given him a compass and a map today. Grandpa says it is very hard to remember where they are, and a map and compass will not help them where they are today.

Grandpa encounters Grandma. Grandpa tells her they did not have enough time. They are now 16 again and walking along a beautiful road, while Grandpa tells Grandma he does not know how to explain it to Noah. Grandma tells Grandpa he is bleeding, and dabs his head while telling him to be careful getting into the boat. Grandpa does not know how to explain to Noah that Noah will lose him before he dies. Grandma tells Grandpa to explain it as Grandpa has always explained things to Noah – as if Noah was smarter than him. Grandpa is beside Noah again, who reminds him that he hit his head getting into the boat, and that Dad is coming for them soon.



## Analysis

Memories are our most precious possessions, but even these cannot be kept in the end. This, Frederik Backman contends, is much of the purpose of his novella. Backman explains that he originally wrote the novella as a way of sorting out his feelings relating to his own loved ones slowly losing their minds, in order that he could share it with his own children – but this in turn led to Backman wanting to share the novella with the world. Backman reminds people that memories are things taken for granted until they begin to slip away – and memories must always be valued. This is the case for Grandpa, who struggles to hold on to all of his memories in order to remember who he is.

Most precious to Grandpa is his family. Family matters more than anything – and this becomes a running thematic argument through the course of the novel. Grandpa was always there for his family, even in times of disagreement, and now Grandpa's family is there for him. Of special note to Grandpa is his relationship with his grandson, Noah, which comes to matter to him more than anything else. It is Noah who helps provide great comfort and relief to Grandpa through the novella. Those who age and forget must be treated with love, respect, and patience, Backman argues through Noah. For Noah, this is easy because he loves his grandfather immensely, but he does not yet know how to truly help Grandpa.

Meanwhile, as Grandpa struggles to retain and regain his memory, the very structure of the novel itself becomes important. Readers will note that there are no chapters, and that the background plot of the story – Grandpa hitting his head while wanting to take Noah out on the boat and going to the hospital – is merely foundational. The true plot of the story comes in Grandpa's struggle to hold onto memory, and Noah's attempts to understand and help. Readers will note that solid reality (in the foundational plot) is blurred together with Grandpa's time in the square, where reality and memory meet (the square is symbolic of a town square, with the town square being Grandpa at the center of his own mind), and where Grandpa fully engages in memory – perhaps even with Heavenly intervention on the part of Grandma (this, later, is essentially confirmed). The difficulty in gaining a footing between reality, reality and memory, and memory whole, is reflective of the difficulties Grandpa himself has in distinguishing one from the other, and demonstrates to readers what he is going through.

### Discussion Question 1

What is the square and why does it have such importance? Why is Grandpa in the square? Why does Noah join him in the square?

### Discussion Question 2

What is the background/foundational plot of the novella? Why does this background matter so much to the rest of the novella?



## Discussion Question 3

Why does Grandpa have such a special relationship with Noah? Why does Noah seem to look up to Grandpa so much?

## Vocabulary

memories, admonishes, frustration, anxiously, resolutely



## Pages 16 – 30

### Summary

Noah urges Grandpa not to be worried, and does his best to be brave. Grandpa tells Noah he has grown, and that mathematics will always get them home. To help pass time and be brave, Grandpa and Noah recite the decimal numbers of pi. Noah asks again where they are. Grandpa says they are in his brain, and the square has gotten smaller overnight again.

Grandpa is suddenly younger and in a garden that smells of hyacinth. He is with his son, Ted. Ted does not do well in mathematics, but he does very well with letters. When the boy will not recite pi with him, Grandpa cannot understand why and becomes angry. Ted points out that Grandpa is bleeding. Slowly Ted transforms into a man, telling Grandpa to sit down and relax because he is bleeding. Ted tells Grandpa it is dangerous to go out in the boat. Grandpa tells Ted not to be scared. They are now back in Grandpa's room, but Grandpa does not recognize it as his. Grandpa reminds Ted about the camping trip, but Ted tells Grandpa the trip happened with Noah. Ted explains he does not know how to fish, and that Grandpa never taught him because Grandpa was always working. But Ted explains Grandpa has taught Noah everything. Grandpa asks Ted to tell him how school is going.

Grandpa is now back in the square with Noah. Noah tells him he has a nice brain, drawing on a lesson from Grandma who always said to compliment Grandpa when he got quiet. From the square, Noah can see the lake and almost see the small island where he and Grandpa camped out. There are also some buildings, some which appear strong and working, and others which have fallen apart. Grandpa explains the buildings are where memories are kept, like archives. In the middle of the square is a fountain, and around it on the ground are mathematical equations written in chalk, being worn away by the people rushing back and forth. There are also papers blowing away, which Grandpa says contain all his ideas. Noah asks if Grandpa's brain is sick. Grandpa says that not much about the mind is known, but that it is like a fading star that goes out over time. The mind will often go before the body.

Noah does his best not to cry, so Grandpa asks him about school. Noah responds that the teacher wanted everyone to write about what they wanted to be when they grew up, so Noah wrote that he would rather focus on being a kid, first. Noah says he does not wish to grow up, and would rather be a kid or an old person because they are the only ones who laugh.

### Analysis

Memories are our most precious possessions, but even these cannot be kept in the end, Backman continues to argue in this section of the novella. The fading memories of



Grandpa are symbolically manifested by the shrinking of Grandpa's square. In other words, the extent and reach of his memory is fading, signified by the shrinking of the square. A smaller square holds less, just as a fading mind remembers less. The reader will note that as the novel progresses, it often becomes more difficult to separate or distinguish reality from memory. This, in turn, is reflective of Grandpa's own increasing difficulties in doing so. Consider, for example, Grandpa having difficulty in recalling who he went camping with sometime before –while asking Ted to remember a trip that never happened between them.

Family matters more than anything, Backman continues to contend –and this is clear in the patience and love that both Noah and Ted give to Grandpa. Family is family, and family matters more than anything to Ted and Noah. Those who age and forget must be treated with love, respect, and patience –and this is exactly what Noah and Ted seek to provide. Part of this love, respect, and patience comes in a willingness to understand. Rather than writing Grandpa off as not worth their time or futile to comfort, Ted and Noah do all they can for him by simply being with him and seeking to learn more about what Grandpa is going through.

Noah himself directly asks Grandpa about his brain being sick, to which Grandpa confirms is true. This becomes illustrated symbolically by the buildings located in the distance on the square –some are standing and lighted, while others have crumbled. Grandpa describes these buildings as memory archives –and crumbled buildings clearly reflect lost memories and the sad fact that all those buildings will one day crumble. Other symbolism includes mathematical equations being worn away, bleeding from the head, and idea papers blowing away in the wind –all reflecting memory loss.

## Discussion Question 1

What is represented by the shrinking of the square? Why does this worry Grandpa and Noah so much?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Grandpa's fading memory confuse his understanding of the past and the present regarding Ted and the camping trip? What does this cause both Ted and readers to realize regarding Grandpa?

## Discussion Question 3

What are the buildings located on the edge of the square? How do these buildings indicate what Grandpa can expect in the future?



## **Vocabulary**

pi, exaggeratedly, archives, masterpiece, ideas



## Pages 31 – 46

### Summary

Noah tells Grandpa he is bleeding again. Noah does his best to breathe in time with Grandpa. Noah asks if they are there to learn how to say goodbye. Grandpa is afraid they are. Noah reflects on how Grandma never let him say goodbye after visits were over, and in the present, he tells grandpa he is not good at goodbyes. Grandpa reassures him that they will have plenty of chances to practice. Grandpa and Noah hold hands, while Noah thinks about space because it never ends and never leaves. Noah then realizes there are numbers on all the keys below them. Noah then asks Grandpa why he is holding his hand so tightly. Grandpa explains it is because everything is disappearing, and he wants to hold onto Noah longest of all.

Grandpa is suddenly with Grandma again, both 16, and holding her hand while telling her he does not want to lose her again. Grandpa explains losing his memory is like trying to read a book with a missing page. They then go to the place they met, a café where Grandma accidentally caught Grandpa's hand in a door. They then go by the church they were married in, and the house where they first lived. Grandpa explains Grandma was always new to him, and always lovable. Grandpa reflects on how they disagreed on many things, such as the universe (Grandpa believed it happened by chance, while Grandma believed it was intended), but still always slept together. Grandpa remembers taking on the mission of showing Grandma that mathematics and science could be beautiful by creating a beautiful garden at the first house they bought. Grandpa recalls finding an old, abandoned fishing boat over the hedge, and Grandma setting up an office for him in the ship's cabin. Grandpa also reflects on how he hated to sleep, because he could not share his sleep with Grandma. Now, Grandma looks forward to arguing with Grandpa in Heaven.

### Analysis

Family matters more than anything, Backman continues to argue –and Noah continues to demonstrate. Noah refuses to leave Grandpa's side so long as he can help it. Noah, as he continues to learn about Grandpa and what Grandpa is going through, becomes increasingly understanding and desirous of helping Grandpa in whatever way he can. But exactly how Noah can help is still unknown. Noah himself comes and goes in Grandpa's memories, which continues to fade and blur the past, present, memory, reality, and the distance between these things. Indeed, things blur together to such an extent that distinguishing becomes even more difficult as the novella unfolds –thus reflecting the deterioration of Grandpa's memory. Still, he wants to hold on to Noah.

Family matters more than anything, Grandpa believes –and this is why he wants to ensure that Noah will be able to look forward happily despite the sadness of the current circumstances in which they find themselves. Grandpa's continued attempt to keep



Noah in his life –and to remain relevant in Noah’s own life –coincides with one of the strongest bursts of memory Grandpa can remember –and it is very possible here Grandpa’s memory is also a window into Heaven. As Grandpa recalls the past with Grandma, Grandma looks forward to arguing with him Heaven. In Heaven, time does not exist, so it makes sense that the past and eternity should be synonymous in Grandpa’s recalling of Grandma.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Grandpa’s current visit with Grandma so poignant –especially where Heaven is concerned? Is Grandma merely a memory to Grandpa now, or is she visiting him from Heaven? Explain.

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why do Noah and Grandpa begin speaking about goodbyes? Why is Noah not good at goodbyes?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why does Grandpa hold onto Noah’s hand so tightly? In turn, why does Noah always appear on the bench beside Grandpa?

## **Vocabulary**

goodbye, infinity, terrified, lightheartedly, probabilities, improbable, mobilize, equations, diplomatic



## Pages 47 – 60

### Summary

Noah asks Grandpa what losing his memory is like. Grandpa explains it is like losing things in a pocket. At first, one loses keys, and then one loses people. He explains it is a struggle to remember, which is why he gets so tired. Grandpa explains that sometimes he does not realize he has forgotten something, but the worst kind of forgetting is when he knows he has forgotten something. Grandpa explains it is like being lost in space, and that every day, the road gets longer and longer to get home to who he is. Grandpa explains that directions and places are the first things to be forgotten. Noah tells Grandpa he will send a balloon to Grandpa in space which will make him laugh because there is no need for a balloon in space. Grandpa says it will be the best present ever.

Noah then sees a road that has been blocked off. Grandpa explains that road was blocked off when Grandma died, and it is too dangerous to think about now. Grandpa explains that the road used to be a shortcut. Grandpa asks Noah to tell him more about school. Noah dislikes how the teacher forces everyone to focus more on writing than on math. Noah explains he had an assignment where he had to write about the meaning of life, which Noah said was company and ice cream.

Grandpa is 16 again, with 16-year-old Grandma. Snow has just fallen. Grandpa tells her he always knew who he was with her, because she was his shortcut. Grandpa says he now misses the ordinary things, such as dawn and weeds in the flower beds. Grandpa and Grandma know they have lived an extraordinary life because it was ordinary. They dance until the night comes on. People then rush through the square again. Among them is Grandma in her younger form. Grandpa explains this to Noah. Grandpa explains he never knew how Grandma fell in love with him. Grandpa and Noah remember when Grandma died in December, and how they both sang for her. Noah asks Grandpa if he is worried he will forget Grandma. Grandpa explains this worries him a lot. Noah urges Grandpa not to think about the funeral, but beyond. Grandma, Noah explains, believed in God, but Noah knows Grandpa does not. He asks Grandpa if he will go to Heaven because of this, to which Grandpa explains he will if there is a Heaven. Noah promises to remind Grandpa about Grandma when Grandpa forgets.

### Analysis

Memories are our most precious possessions, but even these cannot be kept in the end, Backman continues to explain through Grandpa's own memory loss. Noah continues to ask Grandpa about what is happening, to which Grandpa explains that losing one's memory can happen in one of a few ways. Sometimes, people forget they have forgotten, but sometimes they remember they have forgotten and cannot remember what they have forgotten. The latter is what typically happens to Grandpa, and this makes things all the more frustrating because he knows he has forgotten



something he should remember. (This, as Grandpa intimates, is a kind of pain.) Coupled with Grandpa's love of science, reason, and mathematics, the forgetting becomes all the more heartbreaking because it is like Grandpa is seeking answers to a problem that is not even totally understood. Readers should also note that even the simplest memories –such as weeds in the garden –become the most important when memory at large begins to fade. For this, in part, Grandpa asks Noah about school –because it gives Grandpa something new to remember, but also allows Grandpa to demonstrate his love and interest in Noah and Noah's life. Learning new things, ironically, helps Grandpa to forget that he is forgetting.

It is in conversation with Noah that the novella gains its title. Grandpa describes the process of returning to find his memories like a journey down the road to get back home –but each day, the way home gets longer and longer because it becomes more and more difficult to recall as the square gets smaller and smaller. Here, a poignant part of the discussion turns to thoughts of Grandma and God. While Grandma believed in God, Grandpa does not. Now, he hopes for Heaven less for fear of his own soul than his desire to see Grandma once again. Family matters more than anything to Grandpa, both in coming death as well as in life. The same is true for Noah. Noah's conversation with Grandpa has less to do with Noah's belief in God (Noah himself believes in God) but Noah's concern about whether or not Grandpa will go to Heaven if Grandpa does not believe in God. This is an especially touching moment in which the younger generation worries for the happiness of the older.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Grandpa continue to ask Noah about school despite everything else going on? Why does Noah continue to tell Grandpa about school despite everything else going on?

## Discussion Question 2

What different ways are there of forgetting? What, according to Grandpa, is the worst? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Noah speak to Grandpa about God and Heaven? What fear is foremost on Noah's mind in such a conversation? Why?

## Vocabulary

barrier, extraordinarily



## Pages 61 – 76

### Summary

Grandpa tells Noah that once Noah perfects his goodbye, he must say goodbye and promise not to look back. Grandpa tells Noah that Noah must live his life because it is awful to miss someone who is still here. Noah says the one good thing about forgetting is that Grandpa will be really good at keeping secrets. Noah tells Grandpa if he ever forgets him, Grandpa will get to know Noah all over again.

Grandpa and Grandma are young and sitting on the grass again. Grandpa tells Grandma that Ted is angry with him, but Grandma says Ted is just angry at the universe. They go on to talk about how Noah takes after Grandma, and how Noah, too, believes in God. Grandpa worries that being a busy man has rubbed off too much on Ted, who is now also a busy man. Grandma tells Grandpa it is never too late to ask Ted about something he loves. Grandpa hopes he is wrong about God and Heaven, and that he will have the ability to argue with Grandma in Heaven.

Ted and Noah walk through a hospital corridor. Noah wants to know if Grandpa is in pain. Ted explains that it is hard to explain. He tells Noah they must be careful with Grandpa because Grandpa's brain is slower than it used to be. Noah tells him the road gets longer every day. Ted tells Noah he loves him so much the sky will never be as big. Noah asks what they can do to help Grandpa. Ted explains, in tears, that they can walk down the road with him and keep him company.

Grandpa and Ted argue about Grandpa's cigarettes, even though Grandpa stopped smoking many years before. Grandpa cannot find them, while Ted reminds him that he no longer smokes. Ted takes hold of Grandpa gently, and Grandpa calms down, saying they should return home before Grandma worries. Grandpa wakes up in a tent, then comes to in a hospital. A person sits beside Grandpa who introduces himself as Noah. Noah gently begins to remind Grandpa about who he is, and who Grandpa is. Grandpa slowly remembers, then asks Noah how school is going. Noah tells him the teachers are better now.

Time shifts suddenly, and Noah is a father, camping out with his daughter, who prefers language and music to mathematics, just like her grandfather.

### Analysis

Family matters more than anything, Backman continues to argue through the end of the novel. This is made apparent in the gentleness with which Ted approaches Grandpa, and in the gentleness with which Noah approaches Grandpa. Neither Ted nor Noah would be alive without Grandpa, and while there is life left with Grandpa, Ted and Noah will dedicate themselves to Grandpa. Indeed, in a touching moment between Noah and his Dad, Noah asks what they can do to help Grandpa. Noah's Dad responds, simply,



that they can only be there for Grandpa as he journeys down that road. But the road now is not toward remembering, but in the other direction toward eternity.

Readers should note that, while things may have been difficult at times between Ted and Grandpa, things are not difficult between Ted and his son. Indeed, Noah and Dad seem to be very close themselves, and are made only closer by their mutual love for Grandpa. What is clear to Noah –and heartbreakingly so –is that Grandpa tells Noah that Noah must be willing to say goodbye when the time comes, and Noah must never look back. Here, Grandpa essentially sets Noah free, telling Noah that it will be okay to say goodbye and let Grandpa himself fade away like his memory is currently fading away.

When Grandpa finally loses his memory and says goodbye, and when Grandpa passes away, are things left unaddressed by the novella. Sooner or later, readers know such things will have happened. Interestingly enough, the novella jumps ahead by years to a time when Noah is now married and camping out with his daughter in a tent on the same island he and Grandpa camped out on many years before. Noah's daughter takes after the best of Grandpa, just as Noah took after the best of both Grandpa and Grandma. The closeness of Noah and his daughter seems to be reflective of the closeness between Noah and his Dad. The loss of Grandpa, as readers will remember, seemed to have brought Noah and the very busy Ted closer together –and now Noah is determined to be close with his own children –making memories that will last as long as life allows.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Grandpa tell Noah that, when the time comes, Noah must say goodbye and not look back? What does this say about Grandpa's character as a person? How does Noah respond to Grandpa's instruction? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you believe that Grandpa's goodbye instruction with Noah coincides with one of the greatest and clearest bursts of memory with Grandma?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Grandpa influence the relationship between Noah and Dad, and later, between Noah and his daughter? Why does Grandpa prove to be so important with respect to family?

## Vocabulary

obstinate, pain, adventurer



# Characters

## Grandpa

Grandpa is the husband of Grandma, the father of Ted, and the grandfather of Noah. Grandpa is hopeful despite his circumstances, optimistic to keep Noah's spirits up, and is a kid at heart. Rational and fascinated by numbers, Grandpa does not believe in God –but his journey toward losing his memory and death has him reconsidering his belief as he experiences Grandma in the space between the past, the present, memory, and current reality. The light of Grandpa's life is Noah, and it is Noah he keeps closest to him even when every day, his memory fades faster and faster. Eventually, Grandpa must be reminded of who Noah is before he remembers Noah. Grandpa's struggles also come to bring Noah and Ted closer together.

## Noah

Noah is the son of Ted, and the grandson of Grandpa. Noah is curious, inquisitive, and loving. The best parts of Grandma and Grandpa are found in Noah –from Grandma's faith in God to Grandpa's love of science and mathematics, and it is Noah who proves to be of extra comfort to Grandpa as Grandpa finds himself on the journey toward losing his memory and toward death. Noah's heart breaks for Grandpa, and this helps draw him closer to his father, who has until now been very busy.

## Grandma

Grandma is the wife of Grandpa, the mother of Ted, and the grandmother of Noah. Long dead by the beginning of the novel, Grandma appears as the 16-year-old girl Grandpa first met her as many years before. Grandma is a very loving, but very sensible woman who believes in God and helps to comfort Grandpa when she visits him in his memories of the past from Heaven. It is Grandma who urges Grandpa to use what time he has left to be closer to his son and grandson.

## Ted

Ted is the son of Grandpa and Grandma, is the father of Noah, and is the grandfather of Noah's daughter. Ted is a kind and loving man who takes after his mother more than his father, preferring words and music to math and science. Ted, taking after his father, has been a very busy man, but has recently grown closer to both his father and to his son because of Grandma's death and Grandpa's worsening condition. It is Ted who speaks to Noah of the importance of family and love, and being there for Grandpa as he begins his journey to eternity.





## Noah's daughter

Noah's daughter appears only very briefly at the end of the novella. She is camping out with Noah on the island where Noah and Grandpa used to camp, and she is snuggled up beside Noah, indicating absolute trust, love, and closeness between them. Noah's daughter takes after the best parts of Grandpa, including her love of math and science.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Mathematics

Mathematics symbolizes both absolute certainty and utter frustration on the part of Grandpa. Grandpa loves mathematics for its precision and logic, because there is always an answer to a problem. As Grandpa struggles with losing his memory, his mathematically-attuned mind struggles with forgetting. For someone so dependent on absolute answers, losing memory is like losing the answers, and becomes utterly frustrating because the answers cannot be found.

## Keys

Keys symbolize memories. Each numbered key represents a different memory in Grandpa's life. The keys, contained in a glass jar, have been dropped and lay beneath the bench. Noah asks Grandpa what losing his memory is like while the two sit together in the square. Grandpa explains it is like losing things in a pocket in that at first, one loses keys, and then one loses people. Losing each key –or each memory –is like losing a key to oneself.

## Bleeding

Bleeding symbolizes the loss of memory. Set to go out in the boat with Noah, Grandpa falls and hits his head, from which he bleeds. The bleeding from Grandpa's head symbolizes the loss of his memory. Blood is necessary for a body to sustain itself; memory is necessary to Grandpa for proving who he is. The blood comes to symbolize memories that are leaving his mind just as the blood itself leaves his head.

## Hyacinths

Hyacinths symbolize love, Christmas, and Grandma. Hyacinths were grown by Grandma before her death, and she always decorated the house –including at Christmas –with hyacinth. Noah in turn came to consider hyacinth reflective of Grandma's love and Christmas with Grandma and Grandpa. Hyacinth comes to grow beneath the bench where Grandpa and Noah sit, for it is one of their favorite memories of Grandma, and also represents her always being with them in their hearts.

## Buildings

Buildings symbolize memory archives in Grandpa's mind. Buildings are seen in the distance, at the edge of the square. Some are working perfectly, some are standing but



not working, and some have collapsed. This demonstrates how Grandpa's memory is failing him, as one building (or set of memories) falls apart after another.

## **Noah's accounts of school**

Noah's accounts of school symbolize learning something new, and provide a way for Grandpa to forget about forgetting. Grandpa frequently asks Noah about school throughout the course of the novella because it gives Grandpa something new to remember about someone so important to him, but also allows Grandpa to reveal his love and interest in Noah and Noah's life. Learning new things, ironically, helps Grandpa to forget that he is forgetting.



# Settings

## The square

The square is the central hub of Grandpa's mind and identity, which resembles a town square in certain ways. From a bench in the square, much of the novel occurs as Grandpa and Noah sit and watch Grandpa's memories and mind slowly falling apart. Each day, the square gets smaller and smaller as Grandpa's ability to remember diminishes, and Grandpa forgets more and more. In other words, Grandpa's shrinking memory means his world around his square is also shrinking. The square commands views of important places in Grandpa's life as well –from the lake to the island to the country road where he and Grandma walk.

## The country road

The country road is where the 16-year-old versions of Grandma and Grandpa walk, talk about their love and the past, and talk about the future and Noah. The country road is absolutely beautiful and peaceful, and serves as a window into Heaven and what awaits Grandpa. The beauty of the place is not only reflective of Heaven to come, but is reflective of the beauty of Grandma and the beauty of the love she and Grandpa shared.

## The road home

The road home, as Grandpa initially describes it, is the struggle to remember the past and to remember who he is. Each day, the road gets longer and longer as Grandpa forgets more and more. By the end of the novel, the road home no longer leads to Grandpa's identity, but to Heaven. Dad explains to Noah that they can keep Grandpa company on the road on which Grandpa now travels – a road which will take him to eternity.

## The island

The island is located on the lake, and is where Grandpa and Noah go camping. It becomes one of their favorite shared memories. During this camping trip, Noah was able to learn about fear and have the courage to deal with it while bonding with Grandpa. Many years later, Noah and his daughter go to the island to camp, so that Noah may share an extraordinary experience with the person he loves most. Thus, the island becomes symbolic both of the past, the present, and the future.



# Themes and Motifs

## Family matters more than anything

Family matters more than anything, argues Fredrik Backman in his novella *And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer*. The love and loyalty of family members toward one another will be present when no other love and loyalty may be. Indeed, Backman is so supportive of family that only family members actually appear in the novel.

The two main characters of the novel – Grandpa and Noah – are family. Grandpa considers Noah the light of his life, while Noah admires his grandfather in a way that he admires no one else. Grandpa is so happy with his grandson, and values him so much that he keeps Noah closer than anyone else in his heart and in his mind, and holds Noah's hand the tightest so that he will not forget Noah. The loss of Grandma, and Grandpa's own losing of his memory, has renewed the love and closeness of the relationship between Grandpa and Ted as well as renewing Ted's own commitment to Noah.

Noah, in turn, deeply loves his father and his grandfather. He asks Grandpa about losing his memory, and asks what he can do to help. It is Dad who explains to Noah that all they can do for Grandpa is to be there with him to comfort him and keep him company as he travels down the road to eternity. It is a kind of love that can only be born of family, and one that Grandpa himself recognizes when he tells Noah not to look back when Noah finally says goodbye.

## Memories are our most precious possessions, but even these cannot be kept in the end

Memories are our most precious possessions, but even these cannot be kept in the end argues Fredrik Backman in his novella *And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer*. Memories – recollections of the past – influence a life in many different ways, including when a person comes to consider who they are and what their life is like. People can lose everything in life, but memories – the things people keep closest – can also be lost.

This is true with Grandpa. Grandpa's memories are symbolically manifested in the square in which Grandpa finds himself with Noah – a square that everyday gets smaller and smaller as Grandpa forgets more and more. Readers will notice in the novel that there are no possessions which Grandpa clings to the way he clings to his memories. He can live without his boat office and his desk, but he cannot recognize himself without his memories.



Fortunately for Grandpa, at the time the novella takes place, Grandpa still has some ability to remember. This, however, is a struggle that grows with each passing day. Much of Grandpa's frustration in his inability to remember has not only to do with his love of those whom he is forgetting, but in that things are becoming blurred and uncertain whereas Grandpa has lived his life believing in the precision of mathematics and science where things are clear and answers are possible.

## **Those who age and forget must be treated with love, respect, and patience**

Those who age and forget must be treated with love, respect, and patience, argues Fredrik Backman in his novella *And Every Morning the Way Home Gets Longer and Longer*. Each person, as a creation of God and as a human life, is deserving of love, respect, and patience, especially when they near the end of their lives. All people face the same fate (death) in one way or another, and that is why it is so important for one generation to care for another as it ages, because that same generation will one day need caring for.

Much of the novella concerns Noah's desires to help his Grandpa. Just as Grandpa is frustrated with his inability to recall the past easily, Noah is frustrated by the desire of being unable to help Grandpa. Noah wants to take care of Grandpa, and to make Grandpa's burden easier on him – but helping anyone in such a situation is difficult at best, and the ways of helping are not always the same. Even Noah's Dad struggles with how to help Grandpa, at first doing his best to restrict Grandpa's movements while according Grandpa respect as a person – such as telling Grandpa it is dangerous to take the boat out without him.

Ultimately, Grandpa ends up in the hospital when he falls and hits his head while seeking to take the boat out. Noah and Dad end up having a long conversation about the importance of loving and caring for family as Dad reveals that Grandpa is losing his memory, and that there is no way back down the road which Grandpa has begun to travel. Dad tells Noah that all they can do is keep Grandpa company as Grandpa journeys down that road. It is a simple but unfailingly important thing to do.

# Styles

## Point of View

Frederik Backman tells his novella *And Every Morning The Way Home Gets Longer and Longer* in the third-person limited-omniscient perspective from the point of view of Backman, who doubles as an unidentified narrator. Backman explains early on the novella is his way of sorting through his feelings regarding aging and memory loss not only for himself, but for his own children. As such, Backman follows the aging and memory loss of Grandpa, and the struggles of his son and his grandson to handle the situation. The third-person narrative mode allows readers to be present throughout the novel, from memory to present-day reality to a mixture of the two as Grandpa's memory blurs, and the past and present comeingle. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narrative also serves to demonstrate the difficulty Grandpa has in distinguishing past from present, place and reality and memory, as readers are not always immediately sure where the narrative currently exists.

## Language and Meaning

Frederik Backman tells his novella *And Every Morning The Way Home Gets Longer and Longer* that is simple and gentle. There is no coarse language or curse words, and there are no incredibly complex words. This is done for several reasons. First, the subject Backman tackles – aging and memory loss – is delicate. He intends to reach out to the hearts and minds of readers to discuss the subject and provide comfort, and so simple, gentle language is key to this objective. The simple and gentle language also allows Backman to even begin to approach such a delicate subject at all. Second, the simple and gentle language allows Backman to make his points clearly – such as the thematic argument that family matters so very much in such situations. Third, Backman's simple and gentle language reflects the intimacy, tenderness, and kind of relationship Grandpa and Noah have with one another.

## Structure

Frederik Backman structures his novella *And Every Morning The Way Home Gets Longer and Longer* as one, long, unfolding narrative without parts or chapters –though there are small breaks in the text as the story unfolds. This is done for at least two different reasons. First, the narrative of the novella blurs together places, people, times, memories, and reality – and chapters or parts would provide a kind of order that memory loss patients do not have. Instead, one situation, memory, or event, blurs directly into the next. The lack of chapters allow a continuous cascade of memories, events, and situations. Grandpa cannot distinguish things so clearly, and so neither can readers. This brings up the second reason, in which readers are given a direct glimpse of what Grandpa's memory loss is like. This creates a genuine sense of understanding,

so that readers might have patience with those in their own lives or whom they encounter that suffer from memory loss.





## Quotes

This is a story about memories and about letting go.  
-- Frederik Backman (Dear Reader (Introduction))

**Importance:** Here, the author of the novella, Fredrik Backman, introduces and welcomes readers to his book. He explains that the reader is about to experience a story of love, fear, memory, aging, and letting go. Backman reveals he wrote the story to sort through his own personal thoughts on these subjects, and losing the greatest minds he knows, so that they might be explained to his children.

That's... I... I can't remember, Noahnoah. It was so long ago... I think...  
-- Grandpa (n/a)

**Importance:** Early in the novella, Grandpa and Noah come to the square of Grandpa's memory. Each day the square gets smaller, reflecting his failing memory. Here, Grandpa's frustration and heartache at being unable to remember the past is on full display.

What do I say to Noah? How do I explain that I'm going to be leaving him even before I die?  
-- Grandpa (n/a)

**Importance:** While recalling memories with Grandma from when they were both 16, Grandpa asks Grandma how he will explain the present situation to Noah. It pains Grandpa that Noah will have to lose him twice – first, when his memory goes, and second, when he dies. Grandma encourages Grandpa to explain it to Noah anyways, as Grandpa has always done.

Are we here to learn how to say good-bye, Grandpa?  
-- Noah (n/a)

**Importance:** As Grandpa struggles to recall the past, and make sense of the past and present, he sits with Noah in the square. Noah realizes Grandpa is not well. He also realizes that there must be something important about the square in which they are sitting, and the realization dawns on him. He asks Grandpa if they are there to say goodbye, and Grandpa responds that he believes they are.

Because all of this is disappearing, Noahnoah. And I want to keep hold of you longest of all.  
-- Grandpa (n/a)

**Importance:** Noah asks Grandpa why he is holding his hand so tightly. Grandpa admits to Noah that everything is disappearing on him quickly, but that he does not want Noah to disappear. Noah is something he wants to hold onto more than anything, and so the



mental desire to hold onto a memory becomes physically manifested in Grandpa gripping Noah's hand so tightly.

It starts with keys and ends with people.  
-- Grandpa (n/a)

**Importance:** Noah asks Grandpa what losing his memory is like. Grandpa explains it is like searching for things in one's pocket. He tells Noah it is like losing one's keys at first, and then losing people in the long run. Small things are forgotten at first, followed by bigger and bigger things as time goes on.

That's the road that's getting longer and longer every morning, the way home from space.  
-- Grandpa (n/a)

**Importance:** Grandpa goes on to explain about losing his memory, likening it to having to find his way home every day, with home being himself and his memories. Each day, the journey gets longer and longer, because more and more is being forgotten. It becomes more work to remember, and it tires Grandpa out more and more.

Noahnoah, promise me something, one very last thing: once your good-bye is perfect, you have to leave me and not look back. Live your life. It's an awful thing to miss someone who's still here.  
-- Grandpa (n/a)

**Importance:** As Noah begins to perfect his goodbye, Grandpa makes him promise that once he says goodbye, he will never look back. Grandpa does not want Noah to live his life missing him, or to live his life dwelling on something that can never be again. Grandpa is essentially setting Noah free from the sadness of the situation in which they find themselves.

We can walk down that road with him. We can keep him company.  
-- Ted (Dad) (n/a)

**Importance:** When Noah asks his dad what they can do to help Grandpa, Ted explains they can keep him company as he walks down the road. There is little else they can do for him but give him their love, patience, and respect. This becomes a core thematic argument in the novella, that those who are losing their memory must be afforded tremendous kindness.