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Good morning, everyone.

I’m Emily, Helen’s daughter, and I want to thank you for being here to honour my mum—our Nana Helen—together.

Mum was born on May 3, 1958, in Winnipeg, and she left us peacefully on March 10 of this year, at 67.
Those numbers mark a life on paper.
But all of us gathered here know her life wasn’t lived on paper.
It was lived in kitchens and clinics, in snowy driveways and church pews, on long phone calls and quiet car rides, with a calm voice and a steady hand.

She was my anchor and my gentle guide.
Not flashy.
Not loud.
Just present.
When others hurried, she slowed down enough to notice what was needed—and then she did it without making a fuss.

In her twenties, she moved from Winnipeg to Ottawa, finished nursing school, and went on to serve as a registered nurse for 35 years, mostly in paediatrics and community care.
Imagine the number of frightened parents, sleepless kids, and overwhelmed neighbours who met her patience and her quiet wit.
She had a gift for finding the simple, solid thing to say that settled a room.
If you ever heard her say, “Let’s just take this one step at a time,” you know it wasn’t a line—it was a way of caring.

Service was her north star.
Public health education, emergency preparedness, community clinics—these

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weren’t abstract ideas to Mum.
They were places where she showed up, sleeves rolled, clipboard in hand, a thermos of tea never far away.
She volunteered for years with the Canadian Red Cross, and I grew up thinking everyone’s mum kept first-aid kits like other people kept cookie tins.
She taught us that preparedness isn’t worry—it’s kindness in advance.

At home, she lived the same values she taught: kindness in action, fairness, humility, service to our neighbours.
Sunday evenings, she would make her check-in calls—Daniel and I both knew the phone would ring—and she’d ask the same three questions: Are you eating? Are you sleeping? How can I help?
If you tried to dodge the third one, she’d show up anyway, usually with soup.

She was married to my dad, Robert, for 42 years.
They were partners in the truest sense: different in some ways, perfectly in step in the ways that mattered.
Together they built a family—Daniel and me—and then she became Nana Helen, a title she wore with joy and a running tally of the grandkids’ latest drawings on the fridge.
To her three grandchildren, she offered the same steady presence she gave her patients—only with more sprinkles and extra hugs.

My favourite memories with Mum are simple ones.
Baking butter tarts on snowy Saturdays, the windows fogging, the radio low, Mum talking me through the recipe like a secret she was entrusting to me.
And summer days at Lake of the Woods, when we’d share thermoses of tea and say almost nothing for long stretches, just watching the water.
Those silences were never empty.
They were full of her calm.
If you were lucky enough to sit beside her in a quiet moment, you know what I mean.

She had a way with the living things that rely on our patience.

Children, of course. Create your own personalized speech at eulogyai.ca
But also gardens.
She planted native perennials because they belonged here and needed less fuss, and she liked to say that a good garden teaches you to wait.
In the winter, her hands kept moving—knitting scarves for shelters, counting rows like prayers.
In the spring, the choir robe would come out, and on Sunday mornings her voice would braid itself into the hymn, steady and sure.
And in February, you'd hear her cheering for curling bonspiels with a level of commentary that bordered on coaching.

What defined her?
Compassion, certainly.
Endless patience.
A quiet wit that slipped in at just the right moment—often when the rest of us were frayed.
And a steadiness under pressure that made you breathe easier just because she was in the room.
She didn't announce strength.
She lent it.

Many of us will miss the same things.
Her warm hugs—the kind that landed between your shoulder blades and told you to unclench.
Her calm voice when the news was bad or the baby had a fever or the plan had fallen apart.
And those Sunday evening check-in calls that reminded us someone was keeping gentle watch.

If you worked with her, you'll remember the way she steadied a team in a crisis, asking the clear question that moved everyone forward.
If you sang with her, you'll remember the way she leaned into the altos and stood a little taller when the descant came.
If you gardened beside her, you'll remember how she knelt close to show you a

new shoot and said, “Look—good things are still happening.”

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I want to speak, just for a moment, to those of us carrying the sharp edge of this loss—my dad, Robert; my brother, Daniel; her three grandkids; our extended family; her friends from the church and the clinics.
It is okay to feel the rooms where she is missing.
It is also okay to fill those rooms with what she has left us: the habit of checking in, the courage to take the next right step, the instinct to serve before we’re asked.
Grief can make life feel smaller.
Mum’s life invites us to widen it again, to make room for someone else at the table and to notice who needs a lift.

She didn’t want a fuss, so I won’t make one now.
But I will say thank you.
Thank you, Mum, for the bedtime cups of tea when deadlines loomed.
For the spare mittens stashed in the car.
For the humour that softened hard conversations.
For teaching us that fairness isn’t theory—it’s the way you divide the last butter tart.

In her honour, and according to her wishes, in lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Heart & Stroke Foundation.
And after the service, there will be a reception in the church hall.
Please come.
Share a story, hold a hand, and have one of her favourite lemon squares.
She would love that—people together, talking, laughing softly, taking care of one another.

Mum liked to end a call with, “All right then—one step at a time.”
So we’ll do that.
Today we take the step of gratitude for a life lived in service.
Tomorrow we take the step of kindness in her name.
And in the days after, we carry forward what she taught us—that a calm voice

and an open hand can change more than we think.

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Thank you, Nana Helen.

Thank you, Mum.

We’ll keep going, one step at a time.

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