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Good afternoon, family, friends, neighbors, and all who cared for Samuel Richard Harris—our Pop-Pop. Thank you for gathering to honor a long, generous life and to steady one another in its wake.

We come together with clear eyes and full hearts, not only to mourn what we have lost, but to recognize what we were given for ninety remarkable years.

Pop-Pop was born on February 14, 1935, on the South Side of Chicago—Valentine’s Day, which amused him in a dry way. He would say the calendar made a promise he tried to keep: to treat people with kindness and care, even when the world did not make it easy.

He was the first in his family to attend college, which he regarded not as a personal triumph but as an opening of a door. He did not walk through it alone. He held it for those behind him.

For twenty years he taught high school history—chalk on the cuffs, dates and questions on the board—and then he became a principal, steadying a building full of young lives with the same patience he used to stake his tomatoes.

He advocated, not with speeches but with persistence: for educational equity, for neighborhood literacy programs, for libraries that felt like second homes rather than locked rooms. He believed a city becomes kinder when books are reachable, when a teenager can find a quiet chair and a story that tells them they matter.

He married Eleanor and stayed married for fifty-seven years. Their partnership had the unshowy grace of two people unafraid of ordinary days. They built a life that made room for more lives—three children, David, Mark, and Rachel, and then five grandchildren who learned early that questions were never an

imposition at their table.

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I stand here as his first granddaughter, the child whose curiosity he encouraged with the seriousness some reserve for treaties. If I asked, “Why is the sky blue?” he did not say, “Because it is.” He would ask, “What do you notice?” and wait, letting silence teach me to look again. With him, questions did not end a conversation; they began one.

He was inquisitive, principled, witty, and deeply compassionate. He listened the way a scholar reads a footnote—attentively, knowing that what is small may carry the key to everything else. He liked to say that most corrections are best offered in a whisper. His gentle corrections—on grammar, on strategy, on life—have saved some of us from bigger stumbles than we realized at the time.

Some of my most vivid hours with him were summer evenings on the porch. We read Steinbeck aloud—he assigned me chapters the way others assign chores—and between paragraphs he would whistle old jazz tunes, a bar or two of something he loved. The lamplight drew a small circle on the pages, and cicadas kept time. If I hurried a sentence, he’d place a finger on the margin and say, “Let it breathe.” I thought he meant the paragraph. Now I think he meant everything.

The porch was only one of his classrooms. There was also the chess table at the park, where he wore the look of a man visiting old friends—the black squares, the white, the line between haste and patience. He played not to crush but to reveal, leaning back if a child wandered near, inviting them to name the knight or call out a fork they spotted. I never once saw him gloat over a win. I saw him praise a good idea, even when it came from the other side of the board.

He gardened like someone writing a thank-you note to the earth. Tomatoes, beans, the stubborn zucchini that survived a late cold snap because he tucked a bedsheet over the vines at dusk like a blanket over a child. In August he would carry a colander of tomatoes into the kitchen and hold one to the light as though its shine were an argument for hope.

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He kept a shelf of classic jazz records—Monk, Ellington, Ella—and lifted each from its sleeve as carefully as if it were a letter from a friend. He did the Sunday crossword in pen, not because he believed he could not be wrong, but because he believed you should stand by your best thinking until evidence tells you otherwise. If evidence did, he would shake his head, smile at himself, and fit the truer word into place.

You will hear, in the stories we trade today, about the envelopes he mailed—newspaper clippings with a sentence circled, a margin note scrawled in his neat, teacherly hand. He did not send them to show what he knew; he sent them to show that he was thinking of you, that something in the world made him think of your work, your argument, your laugh. How many of us still have those envelopes tucked into cookbooks and desk drawers? I can open one now and hear him asking, in ink, “What do you make of this?”

Faith, for him, was more verb than noun. He was spiritually inclined and community-centered, most at ease in circles of service and in conversations where belief met responsibility. He found meaning in interfaith dialogue, in shared efforts to stock a pantry or tutor a student, in the small ecumenical miracle of neighbors deciding together that no child would be left out because a form was confusing or a bus never came.

He did not confuse gentleness with indecision. His principles had ballast. When the budget cut a program that kept the library open after school, he wrote letters, made calls, gathered parents and students, and showed up—calm, persistent, inconvenient for anyone hoping the issue would fade. When a colleague faltered, he protected their dignity first and then helped them repair what needed repair.

He loved Eleanor with a care that knew the difference between romance and devotion and valued both. Their banter had a lightness that comes from trust. If you looked closely, you could see the quiet ways they gave each other room to keep growing. Theirs was a long argument on behalf of one another.

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He loved his children fiercely and with humor. To David he would send science articles with the note “file under: marvels.” To Mark he’d underline a line in a sports column and write, “Coaching is teaching in good shoes.” To Rachel he’d clip a poem and scrawl, “For days when the world feels too loud.” When grandchildren arrived, he learned each of us as if we were new subjects he had chosen to study for delight. He would tilt his head, listen to our theories on everything from dinosaurs to debate club, and say, “Convince me.” The verb said, “I believe you can.”

We will miss his questions. We will miss the way he could make us revise a sentence and feel grateful for the chance to say it better. We will miss those envelopes, the underlines and arrows, the firm checkmark by a phrase he admired. We will miss the porch, the whistled choruses between Steinbeck’s chapters. We will miss the sight of him at the park chess table, one hand hovering over a rook as if listening for what the piece itself advised.

Pop-Pop did not measure a life by grand moments. He measured it by the accumulation of honest ones. He believed the work that “doesn’t make the paper” is often the work that repairs a life.

In recent years, when walking grew slower, he did not rush. He would pause at the garden gate and take stock of the beans, and then of the sky, as if both deserved equal attention. If I asked how he was, he would say, “I’m learning to be surprised again,” and point out a bird I had not noticed or the way a neighbor’s child carried a backpack too full of books to be required reading.

He did not lecture about grief. He taught us how to meet it by the way he met other hard things—by naming them, by inviting people to speak, by refusing to let the difficult word be the last word. Today, as we steady ourselves, he would likely ask us a sincere, practical question: “What will you do with what you loved in me?” And then he would wait, confident we could answer.

Here is one answer we have built together: a scholarship fund in his name to

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support first-generation college students. It feels right—an open door, held wide. If you ever received one of his clippings, one of his careful notes in the margin urging you to keep going, you know what this fund intends to be: a hand on a shoulder, a thoughtful nudge, a proof that someone believes you belong at the table.

And because he trusted books to widen a life, we will also gather your favorite lines. During the remembrance, guests are invited to share a book quote that has stayed with them. He would love that—voices rising not in argument but in chorus, each of us offering a sentence that helped us stand a little straighter.

Pop-Pop’s death at ninety was not a surprise in the way youth is stolen. But absence can still astonish. You reach for the mailbox and half expect an envelope with a clipped article, a question mark in the corner. You hear a jazz riff and turn, almost ready to see him at the kitchen table, tapping a pencil to the rhythm, the crossword open to a section he swore was trickier than usual.

Let that astonishment be a tenderness we keep. Let it send us back to his ways:

- Ask a better question, then listen longer than is comfortable.
- When you correct, do it in a way that preserves the other person’s dignity.
- Bring a book to a porch and a tune to your breath.
- Write the note. Circle the line. Mail the envelope.
- Show up for the small meetings where decisions that shape lives are made.
- Keep a garden, or at least a basil pot on a windowsill, as insurance against despair.

If you want a measure of a life, look around this room. Former students who learned that history is not a fixed museum but a crowded hallway where each person carries a choice. Colleagues who discovered that leadership can mean pulling up another chair rather than standing on a higher step. Family who were raised on questions and care—on the brave practice of thinking twice and loving first.

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To Eleanor—who shared the long road and built a home spacious enough for books and people and unhurried conversation—thank you. To David, Mark, and Rachel, who carry his thoughtfulness in different keys—thank you. To my cousins, who know the sound of his whistle as surely as I do—thank you. It is our turn now to keep the circle unbroken not by insisting nothing changes, but by choosing what must endure.

In the last porch summer we shared, we reached the end of a Steinbeck novel just as the streetlights came on. I closed the book and asked what he thought the story meant. He smiled and said, “It means we begin again, knowing more, and still willing to be kind.” Then he whistled something soft and familiar. We sat without speaking, and the quiet felt full, like a page with its meaning written in the margins.

Pop-Pop would want us to begin again from here, knowing more, and still willing to be kind.

May we honor him not only with our memories but with our habits. May we honor him in classrooms and kitchens, at chessboards and garden beds, with questions asked in good faith and answers offered with care.

Samuel Richard Harris—teacher, principal, husband to Eleanor for fifty-seven years, father to David, Mark, and Rachel, grandfather to five, neighbor, reader, whistler of jazz, grower of tomatoes, and keeper of thoughtful margins—lived his ninety years as if the world could be improved by the way we speak to one another.

Let us prove him right. Let us keep the door open, the questions honest, the pencils in ink when it matters, and the music in our breath between chapters.

Thank you, Pop-Pop.

And thank you all for being here to remember him, and to carry his work forward, one careful, generous act at a time.

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