Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for being here to honor my mom, Eleanor Grace Mitchell—our Ellie.

She was born on March 5, 1957, raised in Des Moines, Iowa, the first in her family to go to college. That alone tells you something about her—gentle strength wrapped in steady optimism. She married my dad, Robert, and together they set out for Chicago, where she made a home, made a family, and somehow, somehow, balanced motherhood with night classes until she became what she was meant to be: a beloved elementary school teacher for thirty years.

Ellie believed in small lights that make big rooms brighter. She championed literacy like it was a love story—organizing book drives, stocking classroom shelves, and mentoring new teachers with the patience of someone who knew that one good word, one good book, could change a life. If you ever got a handwritten note from her, you still have it somewhere. She tucked those notes into lunch bags and coat pockets, tiny maps back to courage. “One page at a time,” she’d say, and she lived it—turning hard seasons into chapters we could get through.

At home, she baked banana bread that tasted like Saturday mornings. She grew roses that somehow bloomed longer than the calendar allowed. She read historical fiction with a pencil in hand, underlining phrases she wanted to remember, and she always had a puzzle half-finished on the dining room table, as if to say there was joy in not having every piece in place yet.

She passed on August 21 of this year, at 68. And while we will miss her every day, we stand here surrounded by the life she built. My dad, Robert, her husband of 42 years. My brother, Daniel. Me, her daughter. And three grandchildren who knew exactly where to run for a soft lap, a snack, and a

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story. We were her proudest chapters, but make no mistake—she wrote herself into thousands of other stories too, the ones her students and colleagues are telling each other today.

Mom’s faith was quiet and steady, like the way she hummed hymns while loading the dishwasher. She attended our local Methodist church and found comfort in the music—those familiar melodies that move with you from one season to the next. She never insisted faith be loud. She insisted it be lived—with kindness, with service, with a humor that arrived right when the room needed it. Her quick wit could unknot a tense moment in a sentence or two, and her compassion never seemed to run out.

When I think of her, I think of late-night tea at the kitchen table before big life moments. She’d sit with me, listening more than she spoke, and when the words ran out, she’d just squeeze my hand. That was her superpower—knowing when presence was better than advice. I can still hear her voice on the phone, that calm-in-a-storm tone, the one I reached for without thinking. I can’t lie—that may be what I miss most. That voice, those notes tucked into a bag, her unwavering calm. The everyday mercies that felt ordinary until they were gone.

To my dad—thank you for loving her so well. Forty-two years of partnership, laughter, and a thousand small acts of care that were the real vows. To Daniel—she adored your heart and your humor. To her grandchildren—you were her delight; she saved her best smiles for you. To her colleagues and the young teachers she mentored—carry her torch. Keep the shelves full, the doors open, the words flowing. She believed kindness is never wasted, and classrooms are where kindness multiplies.

Mom’s life teaches me this: gentle strength changes rooms. Steady optimism changes days. And compassion—the kind that notices, that listens, that writes a note and shows up anyway—changes people. She didn’t measure success by grand gestures; she measured it by who felt seen after they’d been with her.

So how do we honor Ellie? We do it the way she taught us—one page at a time.

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We check on someone. We read to a child. We send a note, in our own handwriting. We cut a slice of warm banana bread for a neighbor. We plant roses and accept that blooms take their time. We keep a puzzle out and let others help finish it.

Her story doesn’t end here. It’s in every student who learned to love a book because she put the right one in their hands. It’s in every teacher who stayed the course because she said, “You’re doing fine—keep going.” It’s in our family, in the way we gather at a kitchen table and steady one another with a hand-squeeze and a cup of tea.

Ellie, Mom—thank you for being our safe place and our constant encourager. Thank you for showing us that goodness can be soft-spoken and still unshakeable. Thank you for every margin note, every hymn hummed, every rose coaxed into bloom.

We will hear your voice in the quiet. We will carry your wisdom in our pockets. And when life asks too much of us, we’ll remember what you always said: “One page at a time.” And we’ll add yours: “Kindness is never wasted.”

Rest in peace, Mom. We’ll keep reading forward. We’ll keep turning pages. And we’ll make sure your grandchildren know the story of Ellie—how love, done simply and steadily, can fill a life to the brim.

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