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Family, friends, and all who loved her—

Thank you for being here to honor my grandmother, Eleanor Grace Whitfield—our beloved Nana Ellie.

She was born on September 3, 1939, in a small Pennsylvania town, and even as a girl she carried that steady, small-town kindness that never left her. She married her high school sweetheart, Robert, and together they built a life of 62 years of marriage that taught the rest of us what devotion really looks like. In the early 1960s, they moved to Boston, and that city gained a librarian who believed books could change a life—and often did.

I’m her eldest grandchild, and Nana helped raise me. She was my safe place. If life felt noisy or sharp, her front door was the quiet in the storm. She had a gentle way, a quick wit, an endless patience, and a fierce loyalty to family and friends. What a combination: soft voice, sharp mind, loyal heart.

So many of us knew her as a librarian, but that barely covers it. She poured decades into community libraries and literacy programs, championing reading for all ages. She believed that poetry could keep us human, and that local history could help us belong to one another. She wasn’t just cataloging books; she was stitching people to their neighbors and to themselves. If you ever saw her with a child learning to sound out a word, you saw her face light up like she’d discovered a secret. She knew every book was a doorway, and she held it open for anyone who came by.

At home, she was still the quiet magician. She knit shawls for new mothers—each one soft as a blessing. She coaxed roses into bloom, not by force but by that same patient noticing she gave people. She did crosswords in pen—of course she did—and baked shortbread that never lasted as long as she

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pretended it would. There was always a birthday card sent right on time, a note tucked with a joke or a poem, and somehow the perfect piece of advice delivered in a calm voice that slowed your heart rate just by listening.

One of my favorite memories lives in the summer light on her porch. We'd sit there in the evenings, a book of poems between us. She'd read a line, then hum an old jazz tune, and the words would float on that melody like they were meant to travel together. I grew up learning that poems are a kind of prayer, and that humming can be a form of hope. It's there I learned how to listen—to poetry, yes, but also to people, to the pauses between their words. Nana had a way of hearing what you meant even when you didn't know how to say it.

Her faith was quiet but steady, like a candle that never flickers. She found comfort in evening prayers at her Episcopal church, and I think that same calm faith carried her into every ordinary day—into the library, the garden, the kitchen, and into the tough moments too. She never pushed her belief on anyone; she simply lived it. Kindness was her liturgy. "Be kind, always," the note on her fridge read. It wasn't a slogan for Nana. It was a practice.

She loved fiercely and particularly—Robert her partner in all things, her three children who were the stories she never stopped telling, and us seven grandchildren, each of us convinced we were her favorite. Maybe we were all right. That was her gift: to make room big enough for everyone to feel held. She remembered every birthday. She remembered what you were reading. She remembered your small victories and your silly heartbreaks. And she taught us to remember each other.

If you met Nana at the library or at church or in the garden aisle, you'd remember her, too. People will miss her calming voice most of all. I will miss the way she could take a tangled problem and say one wise, reassuring sentence that made it something we could carry. She had a phrase for that. "We carry each other forward," she'd say. She meant it. She lived it.

Eighty-five years is a long time, and yet today it feels too short. But this is a

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funeral service that Nana would want to feel like a celebration, not only a goodbye. So let me say what we celebrate.

We celebrate a girl from Pennsylvania who fell in love with her sweetheart and built a life in Boston that nourished a whole community.

We celebrate a librarian who championed literacy so that a first-grader could read to a grandparent, and a new arrival could find a home in a second language, and an elder could rediscover the poem they loved in youth.

We celebrate a grandmother who knit warmth into shawls and into sentences and into the very air of her living room.

We celebrate a woman who tended roses and people with the same care—prune gently, water daily, turn toward the light.

We celebrate a faithful soul whose evening prayers still echo in ours.

And we celebrate the countless small kindnesses that added up to a beautiful life.

To Grandpa Robert: sixty-two years is a library of love. Your partnership with Nana taught us what it looks like to choose each other every day. To her children: your mother’s wisdom is in the way you speak to your own kids, the way you show up for friends, the way you do the right thing without announcing it. To all seven of us grandchildren: the best way to honor Nana is to keep reading, keep listening, keep showing up with a birthday card and a real conversation.

I can still see her on that porch, closing the book and setting it on her lap. She’d look out at the street, at the roses by the steps, and hum the last line of the tune. Then she’d say, “All right now—what did that poem give you?” Not what did it mean—what did it give. Today, what does Nana’s life give us?

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It gives us patience when we’d rather rush.

It gives us wit when the world feels heavy.

It gives us courage to be gentle.

It gives us loyalty to our family and friends, even when it’s inconvenient.

It gives us faith that doesn’t need to be loud to be strong.

It gives us the reminder on the fridge, the one we need more than ever: Be kind, always.

And it gives us a charge we can carry together: We carry each other forward.

So we will. We will carry forward her poetry and her shortbread recipe, her rose clippers and her crossword pen. We will carry forward the habit of calling each other just because. We will carry forward the birthdays remembered, the advice offered softly, the willingness to sit on a porch and listen until someone feels less alone.

Nana Ellie, thank you for being our safe place, for raising me with love and laughter, for teaching us that books open doors and kindness keeps them open. Thank you for the humming and the prayers, the wisdom and the warmth. Your calming voice is in us now.

We love you. We will miss you. And we will carry you—together—forward.

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