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Friends, family, and all who loved Samantha Leigh Porter—our Sam—thank you for being here today.

We gather with full hearts to remember a life that steadied us in storms and brightened ordinary days. Sam was born on February 14, 1984, and even that date feels fitting—Valentine’s Day—because love and care were the center of her days. She left us at 41, far too soon for those of us who counted on her voice, her notes, her calm, and her humor. And yet, the measure of her life isn’t fixed by years. It’s fixed by the way she lived them.

I stand here as Sam’s close friend and neighbor of twelve years. We raised our kids on the same street, and that street is stitched with her presence. She had a way of making a block feel like a village. Winter, especially, belonged to her: she would organize cocoa-and-book nights on our block—no big program, no fuss—just mugs warming our hands, children curled under blankets, and stories shared until neighbors became friends. She showed us how community doesn’t happen by accident—it happens because someone like Sam puts a light in the window and says, “Come in.”

Sam’s story carried her from New Jersey, where she was born, to Philadelphia, where she studied nursing, and then on to Denver, which she helped to turn into a home for so many. She was an emergency room nurse—the kind you want when the hard news comes and the clock moves too fast. People speak of her calm under pressure as if it were a skill; those of us who knew her understand it was an expression of love. She believed that dignity belongs to everyone, especially in crisis. She advocated fiercely for patients and, just as passionately, for mental health support for her colleagues—the caregivers who carry so much. She held the line for others, and when she spoke up, it was not to be loud, but to be heard where it mattered.

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She was beloved wife to Daniel, devoted mother to Ava and Noah, cherished daughter of Margaret and the late Robert. If you spent even an hour with her family, you could see the shape of her life’s priorities. She loved Daniel with a steadiness that made space for both silence and laughter. She delighted in Ava and Noah—showing up for the everyday: lunches packed just so; a note tucked in a pocket; a question asked and then truly listened to. Her mother Margaret, and the memory of her father Robert, were touchstones for her. She carried their lessons forward with grace.

What defined Sam? Compassion first. The kind that isn’t soft, but strong. Steadfastness, too—she kept commitments like others keep heirlooms. She was organized in ways that made room for living—lists that left space for surprise—and she had a gentle humor that could ease a difficult day without asking anyone to pretend it wasn’t difficult. In the ER, in the neighborhood, at school pick-up—she had that quiet smile that said, “I’m here.” And when she said it, we believed her.

She found strength in quiet prayer. She didn’t announce her faith; she inhabited it. She believed that service is a form of worship—that meeting another person where they are is itself a kind of prayer. If you ever watched her kneel in the garden at sunrise, or saw her pause before a long shift, you could feel the stillness she carried. It was not a retreat from the world—it was preparation to step into it.

We will miss her sourdough that somehow tasted like Sunday mornings, her place in the community book club where she asked the questions that opened everyone up, her yoga at sunrise when the neighborhood was still blue with early light, and the small miracle of her herb garden—basil, rosemary, mint—offered in bundles at our door. But more than any of that, we will miss her steady presence in a crisis and her habit—oh, her beautiful habit—of leaving handwritten notes on our doorsteps. Some were practical, some were playful, all were personal. “Be where your feet are,” she would write, reminding us to be present for what is right in front of us. “Kindness is never wasted,” she’d add, and then prove it again and again.

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There is a particular memory that holds me together today. One January, when the wind felt like it could turn you around in your coat, Sam texted the block: “Cocoa-and-book night—bring a favorite page.” We gathered in her living room, our kids cross-legged and restless, and she poured cocoa like she had all the time in the world. A neighbor—new to the street, new to the city—read a few words and faltered. Sam caught her eye and nodded, just a small nod, and the neighbor took a breath and kept reading. Later, that neighbor told me it was the first night she felt like she belonged here. That’s what Sam did. She created belonging.

To Daniel—your partnership with Sam was beautiful and brave. You two were a team in every real sense: shared glances that said everything, the bright routines of family life, the hard days shoulder to shoulder. To Ava and Noah—your mom loved you with her whole heart. You will see her in a thousand places: in your courage to try again, in the way you listen before you speak, in a garden that keeps surprising you with new growth. To Margaret—your daughter’s gentleness and resolve are gifts you helped shape; to all of you, may her love be the thread you can always follow home.

It is right to mourn. It is also right to celebrate, because Sam’s life did not simply pass through ours—it changed ours. The ER patients who felt seen, the nurses who felt supported, the neighbors who felt invited, the children who felt cherished—these are living testimonies. If you wonder how to honor her, consider the way she lived: be where your feet are. Offer a kindness without needing to know its return. Write the note. Brew the cocoa. Start the book club. Advocate for dignity when it is most at risk. And when the day rushes you, choose steadiness.

Sam taught us that presence is a form of courage. That humor does not erase sorrow but can carry us through it. That faith can be quiet and still move mountains. That love, practiced daily in small acts, becomes a shelter.

We commend her now with gratitude—gratitude for the forty-one years she filled

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so fully, for the hands she held in the longest nights, for the family she adored, and for a neighborhood she turned into a community. We will go on with her words tucked close—“Be where your feet are” and “Kindness is never wasted”—and we will find, over and over, that she is still guiding us.

Sam, thank you for every steady breath you lent to the world. We will carry your light forward. And when winter returns, we will gather with cocoa and stories, and we will remember.

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