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Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for being here to honor my mom, Evelyn Grace Carter—Mom to us, Mrs. Carter to so many students, and a steady light to anyone lucky enough to cross her path.

Mom was born on May 6, 1958, raised in a small town in Ohio where the library felt like a second home and where her dreams grew bigger than the streets she walked. She was the first in her family to graduate from college, and I think that says so much about who she was—steadfast, quietly brave, and certain that the world could be opened with a turned page and a willing heart.

She moved to Chicago to build a life, and that’s exactly what she did. She balanced a career and motherhood with a grace that still baffles me. For 41 years, she and my dad, Thomas, built a marriage that felt sturdy and warm—like the quilt she kept draped on the couch, always ready for whoever needed comfort. She raised three kids—my brother Daniel, my sister Claire, and me—and later became “Grandma” to three wonderful grandchildren who believed that her cinnamon rolls and her hugs had some sort of magical power. They were right.

Mom was a high school English teacher, and if you ever had her, you know she could take a shy student and hand them a voice. She could make Shakespeare feel like your classmate, make a poem feel like a mirror. She championed the quiet ones, the overlooked ones, the kids who didn’t yet know they were brave. She saw them. And then she helped them see themselves.

At home, she was the same person—steadfast, warm, witty, endlessly encouraging, and impossibly present. She listened the way some people pray—patiently, attentively, with her whole heart. If you called her on a hard

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day, she somehow answered before the second ring, and if you didn’t call, she showed up anyway. Often with soup. It was like she had a sixth sense for when someone needed to feel cared for, and she met that need before we even knew how to ask.

I keep replaying certain memories—little ones that somehow feel like everything now. Early Saturday mornings, just the two of us in the kitchen, making pancakes while she quizzed me for spelling bees. She’d slide a plate my way and turn the studying into a game, and when I’d stumble on a word, she’d grin and say, “We’ll take it one step at a time.” That was her way. No panic. No rush. Just one step, then the next, steady as breathing.

Her faith was like that, too—quiet but steady. She found comfort in simple prayers and Sunday hymns, the kind you carry with you all week without even realizing it. She didn’t talk about faith as much as she lived it—in her patience, her gentleness, her habit of making room at the table for one more. I think she believed that love is the daily liturgy that matters most.

Mom loved simple joys: baking until the house smelled like a promise, reading classic novels until the characters felt like family, walking by the lake with the wind in her hair, tending her herb garden and then insisting that basil makes everything better. She found meaning in small things, and somehow that made life feel big.

What people will miss most is her reassuring voice on tough days—the voice that could slow your pulse and clear the fog. I’ll miss our late-night talks, the way our laughter could fill a room and make even ordinary moments feel like treasures. And I’ll miss her instinct to show up, arms full of soup and encouragement, saying without saying: you’re not alone.

For Dad, for Daniel, for Claire, for her grandchildren, and for all of us gathered here—she leaves more than memories. She leaves a way of being. She taught us that encouragement isn’t a speech; it’s consistency. That listening is love in action. That wit and warmth can live in the same sentence. That an honest

conversation at midnight can set you right for the morning.

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She taught her students that literature is really about us—about courage and kindness, about how people find each other and keep going. And she taught her family the same lesson, just with fewer essays and more pancakes.

Today, our grief is real. So is our gratitude. We got to be loved by Evelyn. We got to be shaped by her steady presence. We got to watch her live what she believed: We'll take it one step at a time.

So here's what I think she'd want for us now. She'd want us to check in on each other. To read something beautiful and talk about it. To walk by the lake and notice the light. To bake something and share it. To listen—really listen—especially to the ones who are shy to speak. And when the days feel heavy, to breathe, and remember her words: one step at a time.

Mom, thank you for every late-night talk, for every laugh we didn't rush through, for every time you believed we could do the thing we were sure we couldn't. Thank you for showing us what steadfast love looks like over a lifetime—41 years of partnership with Dad, decades of teaching and tending, and a family held together by your gentleness and grit.

You have always been our home. And while we'll carry this ache, we'll carry your light, too.

On behalf of Dad, of Daniel, of Claire, and of your three grandkids who will grow up on your stories and your songs, we love you, Mom. We'll honor you in the way we live—in the way we show up for each other, in the way we listen, in the way we keep moving forward, one step at a time.

Rest easy, Mom. We'll take it from here.

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