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Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for being here to honor the life of my grandmother, Eleanor Grace Bennett—our beloved Nana Ellie.

She was born on March 5, 1939, and at 86 she went home with the same quiet grace with which she lived.
If you knew her, you knew warmth and steadiness—gentle hands, patient eyes, and a wit that could lift a heavy day just enough to let the light in.

I am her granddaughter.
She helped raise me.
She was the place I went when the world felt too loud—the person who could hear what I was trying to say, even when I couldn't quite say it.
Being with her felt like sitting in a room where the lamp is always on and the kettle is already warming.

She grew up in Savannah, Georgia, where magnolias and front-porch conversations shaped her love of hospitality.
She married her high school sweetheart, Arthur, and for 61 years they built a life together in North Carolina—a home that was close-knit, faith-filled, and open to anyone who needed a chair at the table.
They raised three children, and somehow she found a way to be fully present for six grandkids, including me.

Professionally, she was an elementary school librarian, and I don't think it's an exaggeration to say she changed the arc of many little lives.
She didn't just shelve books—she opened doors.
She had a gift for matching a hesitant reader with the exact story that would make their eyes widen and their shoulders lift.

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And she didn’t stop at school.
She poured herself into community literacy programs, believing that reading is both refuge and launchpad—a way to be safe and a way to become brave.

Her faith was the steady heartbeat underneath it all.
A devout Christian, she led the church book circle, prayed with the same sincerity in her kitchen as she did in a pew, and taught us—without sermon—how to find strength in prayer.
If you spent five minutes with her, you felt that her faith wasn’t a performance.
It was a quiet anchor.

She had hobbies that felt like extensions of her heart.
She knitted soft blankets for new babies at church, welcoming them to a world she hoped would be gentle.
She tended her garden with patience, delighted in the birds that visited, and waged playful war against the Saturday crossword.
And then there was the kitchen—the place where her laughter knitted the family together.

My favorite memories are summer afternoons, the two of us making peach cobbler.
She’d show me how to fold the batter, how to listen for the whisper of boiling fruit, and while we worked, she told stories—little legends of our family.
Somehow, as the kitchen filled with cinnamon and sunlight, I learned where I came from and who I could be.
She never rushed the moment.
She didn’t just teach me recipes; she taught me a way of being—slow enough to notice, loving enough to remember.

She had signature wisdom.
She would say, “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”
And then she’d add her own benediction: love leaves a light on.
If you’ve ever felt that it was easy to talk to her, to cry with her, or to simply be quiet beside her, that’s it—that’s the light she left on for us.

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What will we miss most?
Her warm hugs—the kind that told you before words did that you were safe.
Her quiet wisdom—the way she could ask one gentle question and suddenly your problem had edges you could hold.
And her laughter in the kitchen—how it rose like steam and made everything smell like hope.

To Arthur—Granddad—thank you for loving her so faithfully for 61 years.
You showed us what steadfast looks like, day after day.
To her three children—who carry her strength and her humor—and to us six grandchildren—who carry her stories—please know that the best parts of us were shaped by the best parts of her.

If you ever wondered how she did it—how she held so many people and tasks and worries at once—here’s what I think.
She listened.
She waited for the right word.
She found a way to make room—at the table, on the bookshelf, in her schedule, in her heart.

Savannah gave her roots.
North Carolina gave her a home.
Her faith gave her courage.
And love gave her purpose.

Today is heavy—of course it is.
But it is also, in the way she taught us, a day to be grateful.
Grateful for a librarian who believed stories could unlock a life.
Grateful for a gardener who knew beauty requires tending.
Grateful for a grandmother who somehow remembered every birthday, every favorite cookie, every quiet prayer we never told anyone else.

If you are looking for her legacy, it’s easy to find.

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It’s in the children who learned to read because she believed they could.
It’s in the blankets wrapped around newborns—tiny lives warmed by patient hands.
It’s in the gardens that will bloom this spring because she taught us when to prune and when to let things grow.
It’s in each of us, passing along her small acts of kindness as if they were family heirlooms.

She often reminded me: love leaves a light on.
And I believe it.
I see that light in Granddad’s eyes.
I hear it in the laughter that still echoes from her kitchen.
I feel it when we hold each other a little longer than usual, because she taught us to do that.

So we will grieve—because love makes room for grief.
And we will celebrate—because love also makes room for joy.
We’ll make cobbler in the summer and tell her stories until the cinnamon reaches the hallway.
We’ll read to our children and to anyone who needs to be read to.
We’ll lead with gentleness, practice patience, and be just witty enough to soften a hard day.

Nana Ellie, thank you—for every prayer, every book, every soft blanket, every garden row, every answered phone call, every hug that sent us back into the world braver than we arrived.

We love you.
We will miss you.
And we will carry your light forward, one kind act at a time, until we’re home and the door is already open, and the light is still on.

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