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Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you for being here to celebrate the life of my grandmother, our beloved Dorothy Ann Mitchell—though to most of us, she will always be Grandma Dot.

She was born on July 14, 1942, raised in a small Iowa town where the streets were a little quieter, the stars a little brighter, and neighbors still waved from their porches. That town gave her roots—sturdy ones—and she built a beautiful life from them. She married her partner in everything, Harold, and for 48 years they showed us what devotion looks like in daily practice. Together they raised a daughter and a son, and the family tree kept growing—five grandchildren, and one lucky great-grandchild who already has a legacy of love wrapped around them like a quilt.

Many of you knew Grandma first by her cinnamon rolls. Yes, those cinnamon rolls. The kind that made grown adults plan their Saturday mornings with military precision. She took a simple dream—a small local bakery—and kneaded it into a community staple. People came for the pastries, but they stayed for the way she remembered their names, the way she cut an extra generous corner piece for anyone who looked like they'd had a rough week. And when there was a need in town, she organized charity bake sales for local shelters, making sugar and spice serve something bigger than themselves. If you ever wondered what kindness smells like, it smells like her kitchen before sunrise.

When she retired, it wasn't to slow down. She traded bakery hours for train schedules and maps dog-eared at the corners. She traveled with friends, collecting stories the way some people collect figurines—set on windowsills of conversation, brought out to catch the light when you sat with her over coffee. Her camera was always ready, her bag always half-packed, and her heart always open to wherever the tracks might lead next.

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If I had to choose the thread that ran through everything she did, I'd say she was vibrant, generous, adventurous, and fiercely loyal to family. Fiercely loyal. She showed up—at recitals and graduations, for casseroles after tough news, for quick hugs in parking lots, and for celebrations that she sometimes invented out of thin air just because a Tuesday felt too ordinary. She was the rare kind of person who could build a crowd out of three people and a record player.

I was lucky enough to be her granddaughter and her Saturday-morning market buddy. We had a ritual: coffee in hand, a list we never followed, and the unspoken rule that berries taste better when you sneak one before you buy them. My favorite memory is the one that plays in my mind like a film I never want to end—us dancing in the kitchen to old records while the dough rose, laughing until we cried. She'd point at the timer, say "We've got three songs," and then we'd spin on the tiles, our socks slippery, flour in the air like confetti. If joy had a soundtrack, it was the hiss of a record and the thump of our heels on her kitchen floor.

Grandma's faith was a gentle, steady flame. She was spiritual in a heartfelt, inclusive way—no gates, no guardrails, just a daily practice of gratitude and noticing blessings. She taught me to look for them everywhere: in the steam on a winter window, in the kindness of a stranger, in a loaf that rose better than you expected. She'd bow her head over a meal and say, "Thank you for what we have, and for what we have to give." Then she'd look up and mean it with her whole face.

She wasn't just a baker. She was a maker—of jam that tasted like August, of photographs that caught someone's true smile, of costumes for community theater when they were short a seamstress. She loved traveling by train because it let her watch the world without rushing past it, and she loved theater because it gave people permission to be larger than life. But my favorite of all her roles was "instigator of joy." She had a gift for turning an ordinary day into a celebration—a paper crown at breakfast, a candle in a Tuesday muffin, a spontaneous road trip to see the sunflowers because somebody needed

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cheering up. Those are the things we'll miss most: her unscripted adventures, her bear hugs that squeezed out the worry, and the way she could spot the celebration hidden inside any day.

She had sayings—her own little philosophies—that we'll keep hearing long after today. She'd wink and say, "Life is sweet—taste every bite," whenever someone hesitated to try something new. And she'd remind us, "Leave a place better than you found it." She lived those words. She left the bakery better than she found it, the shelters better resourced than they would have been without her, and every room better simply because she walked into it smiling and left behind a little trail of laughter.

Family came first, last, and in between. She was the grandmother who could be all things at once—soft shoulder, fierce defender, honest advisor, and secret-keeping co-conspirator. She was the one who texted to check if you'd eaten, showed up with jam "by accident," and slipped you ten dollars in market tokens even though you already had a pocket full. She believed that love is a verb, and she practiced it daily.

When I think about the arc of her life—from that small Iowa town, to the bustling bakery, to trains clicking across new landscapes—I see the same woman at every stage: brave in her way, generous with what she had, and endlessly curious. The milestones matter—starting a business that became a home base for a whole community, organizing bake sales that turned sugar into shelter, retiring not from purpose but toward exploration—but the measure of her life is also in the smaller, quieter proofs: warm rolls pressed into waiting hands, a camera pointed toward your best angle, a seat saved for you at the table even when you weren't sure you deserved it.

To Harold—Grandpa—thank you for 48 years of love that taught us what partnership looks like when it's real. To her daughter and son—thank you for sharing your mom with so many of us, for letting her become everyone's "Grandma Dot." To my cousins, to our little great-grandbaby—her love is yours to keep, and it reproduces every time you share it. That's the math she lived by.

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Grief is heavy today. It should be. But this is a Celebration of Life, and if we listen carefully, she's still helping us plan it. I can hear her now, utterly herself: Put on the record. Pour the coffee. Take the picture. Pack the bag. Taste the berries. Hug like you mean it.

She taught us how to show up for one another. So let's honor her by doing just that—by checking on neighbors, by buying from the small shops that keep a town alive, by passing a plate across the table with a few extra baked too long on purpose because someone always likes the corner piece. Let's organize another bake sale when the shelter needs blankets. Let's make jam in July and label the jars with jokes. Let's hop a train just because the map looks interesting. Let's leave every place better than we found it.

I believe she'd want us to remember that gratitude is a practice, not a mood. That adventure can be as close as the kitchen floor. That a community can be built from flour, sugar, yeast, and a little elbow grease—if you add generosity and turn the music up while it rises.

Grandma, thank you. For the cinnamon rolls and the courage. For the charity tables and the train tickets. For being vibrant when the world felt gray, generous when the world felt scarce, adventurous when the world felt small, and fiercely loyal when someone needed a champion.

Thank you for choosing joy and inviting us along.

We will miss your spontaneous road trips, your bear hugs, and your gift for turning ordinary days into celebrations. But the celebration doesn't end here. It continues in the way we live, the way we love, and the way we taste every bite of this sweet, precious life.

So here's our promise to you, Grandma Dot: We'll keep dancing in the kitchen while the dough rises. We'll laugh until we cry. We'll take care of each other. We'll pass on your sayings to the next little ones who toddle into the bakery of

our lives and ask for something warm.

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And when we gather—at markets, at porches, at long tables with mismatched chairs—we'll save you a seat in the stories we tell. Because you're in every good story we know how to tell.

Life is sweet, you always said. Today it is sweet and salted with tears.

Thank you for teaching us to taste every bite.

We love you, Grandma Dot. Travel well. We'll meet you at the next stop, where the coffee is hot, the light is kind, and the music's already playing.

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