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Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for being here to honour my mum, Helen Margaret O'Connor.

Born in Ballarat on 15 May 1958, and leaving us peacefully on 12 March 2026, aged 67.

She was "Mum" to me and Liam, "Helen" to so many in the community, and "Nanna" to Ruby and Jack.

Patrick's partner in life for 42 years.

Sister to Aileen and Michael.

The heart of our family.

Mum grew up under big Ballarat skies, where practicality wasn't a personality trait, it was a way of getting on with life.

She took that steady, no-fuss spirit to Melbourne when she moved for nursing school, and from there she spent forty years caring for other people.

First as a community nurse walking the streets, ringing doorbells, and finding a way through with whatever was at hand.

Later as a palliative care coordinator, the person families looked to when the room was full of fear and silence.

She had a way of making complexity simple and unbearable moments bearable.

She'd sit, hold a hand, and in that calm voice say, "Let's take this one step at a time."

It wasn't magic.

It was patience, skill, and a quietly brave heart.

Home for us was Brunswick.

Our little weatherboard was always warm, even in July, because Mum kept it that way.

Not just with heaters, but with open arms and a kettle that never cooled down.

There were always extra plates set, just in case a mate of Liam's wandered in or

a neighbour needed feeding.

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Her ANZAC biscuits lived permanently on the cooling rack, as if the house itself might get peckish.

She knitted baby blankets for local mums she barely knew, because in Mum's world, a new baby meant the whole street had a job to do.

On weekends, we'd pack up early and head to the coast.

Torquay was our compass point.

Mum would stand with us at the water's edge, squinting into the morning sun, teaching us to read the waves.

She thought the ocean had moods, and that if you listened properly, you'd be alright.

We'd share hot chips on the sand, vinegar dripping down our fingers, and she'd laugh at our seagull negotiations.

Those mornings were simple, and perfect.

That's the version of Mum I carry everywhere—barefoot, practical, eyes on the horizon, making sure we were safe and free at the same time.

Mum loved her garden with a fierce gentleness.

She understood that nurturing takes time, and she gave it gladly—to roses, tomatoes, and people.

You could spot her by the dirt under her nails and the way she'd pass you a punnet like it was a christening gift.

If you came by for advice, you left with cuttings and a plan, and probably a bag of lemons you didn't ask for.

She believed in compost, in second chances, and in little signs of life pushing through.

Her values were simple and unshakeable.

Kindness first.

Fairness and hard work.

Look out for your mates.

And generosity without any fuss.

Mum didn't do grand gestures; she did the everyday acts that stitch a

community together

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She volunteered with the hospice long after her shifts were over, and she could run a CWA cake stall like a field marshal with a tea towel.

If there was a family in need, somehow there'd be a roster, a lasagne, and a quiet envelope passed across without anyone making a big deal of it.

At home, she was our anchor and our fiercest supporter.

When life wobbled, her hugs reset the world.

Her phone calls could slow your breathing in three sentences flat.

She had that dry Aussie humour that snuck up on you—one eyebrow up, a tiny smile, and a line that took the heat out of an argument.

If something went wrong, she'd say, "Righto. Kettle on," and it never failed to help.

She cheered on the Tigers with loyal optimism, which taught us that faith is sometimes wearing yellow and black through thin years and thick.

Mum's work in palliative care showed us the bravest kind of courage.

Not noise, not drama.

Just showing up, day after day, for people at their most fragile, and holding a space for love and truth.

She didn't talk much about what it cost.

But when I asked her how she kept doing it, she said, "Every person deserves to be met with dignity. That's the job."

It was her life's work—meeting people with dignity.

Patients.

Colleagues.

Family.

Strangers at the door.

All of us.

There are so many small memories that have become enormous in these last days.

The way she'd rub a thumb over your knuckles when you were rattled.

How she'd stand on the front step in her gardening jumper, waving until your

car turned the corner

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Her quiet pride when Ruby and Jack came barrelling in—Nanna on the floor,
blocks and books everywhere, time suddenly unimportant.

Her voice on the phone, steady as a lighthouse.

The smell of eucalyptus and vanilla in the house after a baking day.

None of these things were flashy.

That's why they mattered.

They were real.

Today, there is a space where Mum should be.

We feel it sharply—Patrick, who shared a lifetime of ordinary miracles with her.

Liam and I, who learned our measure from her.

Ruby and Jack, who will grow up on stories of their Nanna's garden and the
beach.

Aileen and Michael, who knew her from the beginning and loved her all the way
through.

And the rest of us, who were fed by her hands and steadied by her presence.

But the truth is, she hasn't left us empty-handed.

She's left us instructions, even if she didn't write them down.

Start with kindness.

Make room at the table.

Take the call.

Drop the cake off without a fuss.

Watch the water, read the waves, and don't panic—there's a rhythm you can
trust.

Grow things.

People, especially.

What will we miss most?

Her hugs, her calm on the line, the way every guest felt at home within five
minutes.

But grief, Mum would remind us, is the proof of love.

And love has a stubborn way of sticking around.

It's in the garden she coaxed into bloom

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In the neighbours' babies wrapped in her wool.

In the patients who found courage in her quiet.

In the family traditions we'll keep—ANZACs cooling on the rack, Tigers scarves at the ready, and early starts for the coast.

Mum didn't chase applause.

She'd be rolling her eyes at all this attention.

She'd tell us to look after each other, check on the neighbour, and please don't overwater the basil.

And then she'd kiss our cheeks and send us out the door with leftovers we swore we didn't need.

So we'll do what she taught us.

We'll hold each other a bit longer.

We'll keep things simple and good.

We'll keep the kettle on.

Thank you, Mum, for every steady day, every brave choice, every gentle nudge towards the light.

We'll carry your spirit in the way we love, the way we work, the way we open our doors.

And when we stand by the shore at Torquay, hot chips warming our hands, we'll read the waves like you taught us.

Eyes on the horizon.

Together.

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