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Good afternoon, and thank you for coming to celebrate the life of my mum, Judith Mary O’Connor — our Jude.

Mum was Melbourne born and bred, arriving on 5 May 1955 and farewelling us on 22 February this year, aged 70. She loved this city in a way that got under your skin — its schools, its footy, its laneways and libraries. She built her life here with Dad, Patrick, her beloved husband of 47 years, and together they raised the three of us — Sarah, Brendan and me, Maeve. She was Nanna to Isla, Finn and Ruby, and sister to Maureen and Declan. She held us all with that fierce, organised love of hers — lists in one hand, a mischievous sparkle in the other.

Mum trained as a primary school teacher and taught in the northern suburbs for more than forty years. She had time for every child, but especially for those who thought reading wasn’t for them. She quietly built something beautiful — a program that paired retirees with early readers, giving kids patience, presence and a listening ear. It grew beyond her classroom and into nearby schools, the kind of legacy that doesn’t make a fuss but changes lives all the same.

She taught me to back myself. Not with big speeches, but with small, steady nudges — “Have a go, love. I’ll be right here.” Quick-witted, brave and fiercely loyal, she arrived early, stayed late, and turned ordinary days into occasions with a single one-liner and a perfectly timed eyebrow.

My favourite memory is a long one stitched from little moments: our Great Ocean Road trip. Windows down, Mum belting out John Farnham, pointing out every koala like it was the first she’d ever seen. Sun, sea spray, and Mum laughing so hard she had to pull over. That was Jude — present to the joy in front of her, determined we wouldn’t miss it either.

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She was a Collingwood tragic who could quote stats and heckle with impeccable manners. She knitted jumpers for the grandkids that somehow fit even as they outgrew everything else. She ran a book club where the biscuits were organised by genre. And on weekends, she led precision-planned op-shop raids, emerging triumphant with a teapot no one needed and everyone loved.

Her principles were simple and immovable: education changes lives; show up for people; leave places better than you found them. If you want to honour her, start there. Read with a child. Call the friend you've been meaning to call. Tidy the hall as you leave.

We will miss her sparkling one-liners, her unwavering belief in us, and the way she could make a Tuesday feel like a festival. But what she poured into us doesn't vanish. It keeps talking — in every classroom she shaped, in every grandchild wrapped in a woolly jumper, in every quiet act of showing up.

On behalf of our family, thank you for the love and support. If you wish, donations in Mum's memory can be made to The Smith Family, a cause close to her heart. After the service, we'll gather for the wake at the local RSL in Brunswick to share stories and, no doubt, a few Jude-worthy zingers. And if you notice the banksias today — her favourite — think of her tidy hands and that playful glint, already looking for the next way to make a small thing better.

Mum, thank you for championing us, for teaching us to back ourselves, and for filling the everyday with light. We'll carry it on.

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