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Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for being here.

We’re gathered for a Celebration of Life, and that feels right for my mum.
For Kathleen Murphy.
For Kay.
My beloved mum, the heart of our home and my greatest teacher.

She was born on 14 February 1942, Valentine’s Day.
Trust Mam to arrive on a day devoted to love and then spend eighty-two years proving how much of it a single person can give.

She grew up in Co. Limerick, where the hedgerows seemed to know her by name.
She’d tell us about walking to school with a slice of bread still warm from the range, the Irish clouds behaving themselves for once, and the girls trading stories as if they were prized sweets.
Those early days set her compass: love of learning, love of music, love of people.

Mum became a primary school teacher and taught for forty years.
Forty years.
That’s a lifetime of laces tied, fears soothed, and sparks kindled.
When she moved to Ennis, the job didn’t stop at the bell.
She led the school choir, she organised the book fairs, and she had that gentle way of making a shy child brave enough to sing the first note or open the first page.

If you were ever in her classroom, you remember the tone she set.
Warm, a bit mischievous.
“Go on so,” she’d say, with that glint in her eye, “give it a try. We’ll fix the

mistakes together.” Create your own personalised speech at eulogyai.ie
Children leaned into that kind of safety.
So did young teachers.
She mentored more of them than we can count, never with a grand speech, just a quiet, “You’re made for this,” followed by a practical tip and a reminder to breathe.

Her life with Dad—Seamus—was steady as the tide.
When we lost him, she showed us that grief and gratitude can share the same kitchen table.
She missed him, God knows, but she kept the kettle on, kept the choir singing, kept checking the library order list with a pencil behind her ear.
That was her way through hard times: humour, a plan, and a loaf of soda bread cooling near the window.

To name our family is to write the map of her heart.
Kay was the widow of Seamus.
Mother to Niamh, to Declan, to Orla.
Grandmother to seven small universes, each properly adored and gently teased.
Beloved sister to Brid and to Tom—her co-conspirators since Limerick lanes and Sunday shoes.

If you were lucky enough to call at her door, you never stood on a threshold.
You’d barely touch the bell before the door was open and she was shepherding you—coat off, sit down, how’s your mother, and are you eating at all?
The kettle was never more than a breath away from the boil.
She made everyone feel seen, not with fanfare, but with exact attention.
She’d remember the exam you were dreading, the neighbour’s name you couldn’t place, the song your father liked best, and she’d bring those threads together like careful knitting.

Speaking of knitting—those Aran jumpers.
My God, the pride she took in them.
You could step out into a Clare gale in one of Mam’s and come back with both

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dignity and circulation intact.
She didn’t knit just patterns.
She knit stories—cables for strength, diamonds for hope, moss stitch for the stubborn loveliness of ordinary days.
If you own one, you know what I mean:
it’s a hug you can wear.

Out in the garden she was happiest on her knees, coaxing life from stubborn soil.
She talked to her roses as if they were shy children, and they responded the same way:
blushing with gratitude.
In spring she’d hum while weeding—little snatches of songs from choir practice—and you could trace her path by the neatness left behind and the faint scent of rosemary on the air.

She kept the Irish language alive in our house with a cúpla focal at the right moment.
“Slán go fóill,” at the gate.
“Go n-éirí an bóthar leat,” when someone set out on a new chapter.
And always, “Buíochas,” gratitude, woven into her day like the good tea towel that never wore thin.

My favourite memory?
Every St. Stephen’s Night, when the washing-up was nearly done and the chairs were pulled close, Mum would lift her hand for quiet.
“Right,” she’d say, eyes dancing, “we’ll have The Parting Glass.”
She’d start the first line, soft and sure, and the rest of us would find our harmonies like homing birds.
The kitchen would fill with sound—rich, ringing, generous—and for those few minutes we were exactly who we wanted to be:
a family in time with itself.
That moment is stitched into me as surely as any cuff she finished after midnight.

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She was warm, and witty, and generous.
Endlessly patient.
She had a way of letting silence do some teaching, then sliding in with one question that changed everything.
And yes, she carried mischief like a secret spice—never mean, just enough to lift the whole recipe.
She could take the sharp edges off a hard day with a single look that said, “We’ll manage. Have a slice first.”

To the generations she taught—many of you are here—thank you for coming.
How many first books did she press into small hands?
How many shy songs did she coax into the light?
How many school plays ran from chaos to curtain-call because Miss Murphy had a timetable, a tool kit, and a joke ready at exactly the right moment?
She believed that education wasn’t a privilege—it was a promise.
For all children, in every circumstance.
If there was ever a budget shortfall, she’d meet it with a raffle, a cake sale, and the unshakeable belief that books change lives.

To her friends from Irish language nights, from the choir stalls, from the library queues and the garden centre—thank you for being her circle.
She loved the talk, the tea, the swap of cuttings and recipes.
She loved the way a room feels when people are paying attention to one another.
That was her measure of a good evening:
did someone go home lighter?

As her daughter, I learned my best habits at her elbow.
How to look a person in the eye and really listen.
How to say thank you, and mean it.
How to use humour as a bridge, not a weapon.
How to make a pot of tea strong enough to steady you and kind enough to comfort you.

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We’ll miss her kettle-on welcome.
We’ll miss her sage advice, offered without judgement and always with that little “try this” that made a knot loosen in your chest.
We’ll miss the way she stood at the gate and waved until you turned the corner, as if sheer will could keep you safe all the way home.

And yet, this is a celebration of life, and there is so much to celebrate.
She set a table that kept growing.
She kept the music going.
She left her fingerprints on a thousand small acts of kindness.
Not grand gestures—though there were those too—but the quiet consistencies that form a life of substance:
a loaf delivered when a baby arrived,
a lift given in rain,
a phone call at the exact right moment,
a cardigan mended before you even noticed the snag.

To Brid and Tom—your bond with her outlasted distance and time.
To Niamh, to Declan, to Orla—she was proud of you in that careful, specific way: not because you were perfect, but because you were yourselves.
To her seven grandchildren—you have her eyes, her laugh, her insistence that there’s always room for one more at the table.
Carry her forward by reading the extra chapter, by singing the harmony no one expects, by remembering to bring a spare cardigan in case someone’s cold.

Mum asked, if people were minded, that in lieu of flowers donations be made to the Irish Cancer Society.
She liked the idea that even now she could help put a lamp in someone else’s window.
And a tree will be planted in her memory in the school garden.
I can see her smiling at that.
A living thing to shade small heads, to host birds, to mark the seasons—just as she did.

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If there’s a charge she’d leave us with, it isn’t complicated.
Put the kettle on.
Open the door wide.
Keep a book by the bed.
Sing the chorus even if you don’t know all the verses yet.
Mind your neighbours.
Give thanks—out loud—for the ordinary mercies.
And when the road narrows, make a joke that isn’t at anyone’s expense, and take the next right step together.

I can hear her now, that half-laugh when the room gets too solemn.
“All right now,” she’d say, “have your cry, and then tell me something good.”
So here’s something good, Mum:
because of you, classrooms are friendlier, kitchens are warmer, gardens are braver, and songs are louder.

When we gather next St. Stephen’s Night, we’ll raise The Parting Glass again.
We’ll find our harmonies.
We’ll feel the old courage rise—your kind, the kind that sits close and holds steady.
And as the last note settles, we’ll do what you taught us best:
turn towards one another,
make space,
and carry on.

Thank you, Kay, for every lesson, every laugh, every loaf, every lullaby.
Thank you for the love you gave without counting.

Slán go fóill, Mam.
We’ll mind each other now.
And we’ll keep the kettle singing.

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