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Friends, family, neighbours,

thank you for coming to stand with us here, by Seán's resting place,
to remember his life and to let him go with love.

My name is Maura.

For forty-one years I was married to Seán Byrne —
our Seánie —

a steady, loving partnership built on shared humour and mutual respect.

We learned, over four decades, that the good life is mostly the ordinary done well:

a kettle on,

a walk taken,

a promise kept.

Seán was born on the 22nd of January 1948 in Dublin,

and he died peacefully at seventy-eight.

He would have liked that word — peacefully.

He trusted peace more than victory,

and conversation more than noise.

He was a Dubliner to the bone.

Synge Street gave him his early discipline and his appetite for learning.

Trinity gave him history, properly — not the pomp of it, but the questions.

He carried those questions into a classroom in Crumlin and stayed there for thirty-five years.

Generations of students met Mr Byrne at the blackboard and discovered that history was not a list of dates,

but people making choices,

and consequences that mattered.

He was fair to a fault in that classroom

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He was patient with the ones who found it hard, and demanding — kindly demanding — with the ones he knew could do better.

He believed every young person deserved to be taken seriously.

And he had a way of all of a sudden making the past feel like the present — a rebellion you could hear through the window, a treaty you might still be able to amend if you thought it through.

When Seán retired,

he didn't retire from learning.

He simply changed venues.

He walked the lanes with a notebook for the local heritage society,

tracked down the names in old photographs,

and put stories back where they belonged — with the people who lived them.

He loved our public libraries and defended them the way some people defend their football club.

A library card, he used to say, is a small passport.

He thought everyone should have one.

At home he was husband to me and the kind of father Cian, Darragh, and Eoin could count on.

If a crisis came, he would put the kettle on first.

It sounds simple, but that was his way: create a pause, make room for sense.

Our five grandchildren knew him as a doting Grandad who could mend a toy, plant a seed, or name a bird in the hedge without fuss.

And to his sister Nuala, he was the big brother who remembered birthdays and brought news, properly told.

He had a soft whistle in the kitchen that threaded through our days,

a contented little tune that made the house feel steady.

People talk about a person's presence —

Seán's presence was calm.

He had passions, of course.

His allotment was a classroom of its own.

He taught the grandchildren to put the bean in sideways and to thank the rain even when it made a mess of plans.

Birdwatching sat with gardening very naturally:

robin, wren, goldfinch,

and the odd day by the sea for the curlew if he was lucky.

He read endlessly,

and tackled the Irish Times crossword in pen —

not out of arrogance, but because he took pleasure in the commitment.

He liked words that asked a little of you,

and jokes that arrived quietly and stayed awhile.

He was, at his core, principled and curious.

Integrity wasn't a slogan with him; it was a daily practice.

He believed in equality, in education for all, and in the kind of good manners that are really about respect.

He would leave a queue to hold open a door and lose twenty minutes happily if a neighbour needed a hand.

He thought small daily kindnesses were the bricks and mortar of a decent life.

My favourite memory — and I think his too, if pressed — is our rambling campervan trip along the Wild Atlantic Way.

By day we mapped old ruins, peered at weathered stones, and guessed the stories they weren't telling straight away.

By night we shared tea under the stars,

the van windows steamed,

the whole sky ours,

and not another sound but the sea and his soft whistle.

Every lay-by was a lecture and every cup a toast.

We never rushed it.

We let the days do their work.

He brought that same unhurried attention to people.

Many of you will miss his thoughtful counsel.

He didn't give advice like a verdict.

He asked questions until the heat went out of the problem,
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and then, with a small smile,

he'd offer a sentence that let you see the next step.

At family gatherings, when the craic got lively, he could ease a room back to sense simply by listening first.

Fair to a fault, yes —

but fairness shaped by kindness.

To his students who are here today — and I know there are a few of you by the back —

thank you.

You made teaching a vocation for him.

He carried your progress like quiet trophies.

To our neighbours,

your meals and lifts and those gentle check-ins over the last while have been grace for us.

You made hard days manageable, and we are grateful more than we can say.

He died as he lived — without drama, with dignity.

We're standing here by his grave, and it would be easy to let sorrow fill all the space.

But Seán wouldn't allow that.

He didn't confuse seriousness with gloom.

He'd want us to speak plainly about what was good, and to be truthful about what hurts, and then to keep going with purpose.

What will we miss?

His counsel, certainly.

His soft whistle in the kitchen in the early evenings.

The way he brought calm to the table just by sitting down.

The sight of him on the allotment path, hat on, returning with stories and a fist of herbs like a bouquet.

The rustle of a newspaper and a muttered triumph over a clever clue.

What remains?

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More than we can list.

Remains are everywhere we look:

in Cian's patience with his own children,

in Darragh's careful way with an argument,

in Eoin's habit of taking time before he speaks.

In the grandchildren who know what a linnet is.

In the neighbours who will forever ring the doorbell twice in the exact way he did.

In the shelves of books with pencilled ticks beside lines he wanted to come back to.

In the quiet insistence that schools and libraries are not luxuries,
and that communities are made, not found.

And there is this:

we can honour him by living the things he believed.

We can be fair even when it costs us a little.

We can mind our manners on the road and our words in a row.

We can make room for questions,

and be unembarrassed about learning, no matter our age.

We can plant something and tend it.

We can carry a few coins for the donation box at the library desk.

We can remember that listening is a practical skill.

Seán asked that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the Irish Cancer Society.

It was typical of him to turn even this moment outward.

If you are able, please consider it.

In a moment we'll lay Seánie down,

but not before I say, on behalf of our family:

Cian, Darragh, Eoin, our five beloved grandchildren, and Nuala —
thank you, my love,

for the long partnership and the laughter that steadied us,

for the shared glances that rescued whole evenings.

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for the kettle always warm and the world always interesting.

Thank you for choosing the kind of life that, in the end, is fully lived.

We'll finish with a few lines he cherished from Patrick Kavanagh.

They feel right here, under the open sky,

with water not far away and birds' voices carrying:

"O commemorate me where there is water,

Canal water, preferably, so stillly

Greeny at the heart of summer.

...

Leafy-with-love banks and the green waters of the canal

Pouring redemption for me..."

May we remember Seán where there is water, and books, and conversation.

May we carry him in the ordinary days he valued most.

May we go home and put the kettle on,

and, for once,

listen to the whistle.

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