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Kia ora koutou,

thank you for being here to farewell and celebrate our Mum — Helen Mary McKenzie, our Nanna Helen, born 12 August 1961, who left us on 28 February this year, aged 64.

I’m Emma, her daughter.
We were incredibly close.
She was my anchor, my first call for everything — the person who could turn the loudest storm into a forecast you could handle, one phone call at a time.

Mum was born in Dunedin, the middle child between Margaret and Colin, and from early on she had that mix of kindness and practicality that never left her.
She trained as a nurse at Otago Polytechnic, packed her courage and a small suitcase, and moved to Wellington in her twenties.
The city suited her — big wind, big heart, plenty of people to look after.

For 35 years she served as a community nurse.
If you’ve ever seen a little hatchback pulling up a steep street in the rain at 7am, that might have been her, thermos on the passenger seat, bag of dressings by her side, ready for a home visit.
She knew the hills, the shortcuts, the dogs that barked and the ones that just wanted a pat.
She mentored younger nurses with patience and straight talk:
“Ask the second question,” she’d say. “That’s where the real answer hides.”

Her work had shape and purpose.
She was passionate about women’s health and elder care.
She knitted tiny hats for NICU babies — rows upon rows, like soft commas in a hard paragraph — and she organised flu-jab clinics at the local marae, because

health care, to Mum, was most real where it met people on their own ground.

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At home she built a life with Dad — Ian — her husband of 40 years.
Together they raised my brother Liam and me, and later became the most delighted grandparents to Ruby and Jack.
To our kids, she was Nanna Helen, part storyteller, part snack dealer, part quiet magician who could make a scraped knee feel like an adventure briefly interrupted.

Mum loved tramping in the Tararuas.
She'd check the weather, pack the scroggin, and come home with that particular grin you get from mud, effort, and a view.
She gardened native plants with a patience I'm still learning — kānuka and kōwhai coaxed into being — and every spring she'd do a tour of the yard pointing out small triumphs like a curator with a very local exhibition.

Sundays were hers.
A roast on the go, grandkids underfoot, and those roast potatoes that we'll all be trying to replicate forever — crispy, salty, just right.
She'd knit while the rugby was on, needles clicking in rhythm with the commentary, cheering the All Blacks and muttering at the ref like a seasoned coach who also happened to make excellent gravy.

What defined Mum wasn't volume or drama.
She was compassionate, practical, and quietly determined.
She had a cheeky sense of humour that arrived on a tilt — the raised eyebrow, the grin that told you she'd noticed what needed saying and would say it gently, but firmly.
And she was endlessly patient, even when it would've been easier not to be.

My favourite memory is an early morning at Lyall Bay.
She woke me before sunrise — "Tide's right, let's go" — and we went boogie boarding while the water looked like brushed steel.
I was small and a bit scared of the bigger sets.

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Mum kept close, showed me when to kick, and whooped every time I caught one.
Afterwards we ate hot chips in the car, towels around our shoulders, telling stories with sandy feet on the dashboard.
I can still smell the salt and vinegar and hear her laugh in the steamed-up windows.

Her values were simple and demanding in the best way:
manaakitanga — care that shows up and stays —
honesty —
and the belief that small things, done with great care, change lives.
She didn’t need to be the headline; she was the reliable paragraph underneath that made everything make sense.

What we’ll miss most are the everyday gifts:
her reassuring phone calls — “Right, let’s make a plan” —
her roast potatoes, obviously —
and the way any worry felt lighter once she’d put her steady hand on it.

To Dad — Ian — you and Mum showed us the long, sturdy shape of love.
To Liam, to Ruby and Jack, to Auntie Margaret and Uncle Colin — she adored you, each in the way that belonged only to you.
She was never general; she was specific.
If she knew you, she knew your favourite biscuit, your current worry, and your next step.

Mum would hate a saintly version of herself.
She was human — sometimes stubborn, occasionally late because she’d stopped to help someone else.
But those human bits are what made the love feel real.
They are what let us recognise her in ourselves.

To the team at Wellington Hospital — thank you.
Our whānau is deeply grateful for your care and your kindness.

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And in lieu of flowers, please consider donating to the Cancer Society, who walk alongside so many families like ours.

I’ve been thinking about the shape of her legacy.
It isn’t in a single grand moment.
It’s in the habits we keep because she taught us to.
Check on your neighbour.
Cook too many potatoes.
Ask the second question.
Wear a warm hat — especially if you’re very, very small.
Turn up when it matters.
And laugh, even when it’s raining sideways.

Mum, you showed us how to make a life good not by making it easy, but by making it cared for.
You held us to the ground when the wind picked up.
You taught us to catch the wave and then to share the chips.

We love you.
We’ll carry your steadiness, your humour, and your care into every room we enter.
And when the phone feels too quiet, we’ll try to speak to each other the way you spoke to us — with manaakitanga, honesty, and those small acts that make everything lighter.

Haere rā, Mum.
Thank you for the thousand ordinary miracles.
We’ll keep showing up.
We’ll keep doing the small things with great care.
And we’ll save you a seat at Sunday lunch, just in case.

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