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Kia ora koutou,

thank you for being here to celebrate the life of my Gran, Shirley Anne McAllister.

She was born in Dunedin on 3 November 1932, and lived 92 full, curious years.
She'd want me to get the numbers right, and to start with the facts, but then she'd nudge me to tell a good story.
So I'll do both.

Gran was a librarian for forty years, which explains a lot about the way she moved through the world.
She believed a well-labelled box could save a life, that a tidy index card could rescue a lost memory, and that a book in the right hands at the right time could change a person's path.
She proved it, too.
She championed children's reading programmes long before it was fashionable, coaxing shy kids and busy parents alike into a corner with beanbags and stories that would not let you go.
She advocated for mobile libraries because, as she used to say, "if a mountain won't go to the book, the book will go to the mountain."
And she meant that literally, sending vans down gravel roads so no child's curiosity was stranded by distance.

She married Robert, our Pop, a builder with steady hands and a patient smile.
Between them, they built shelves that never sagged and a family that never lacked encouragement.
They raised two children, cheered six grandchildren, and greeted three great-grandchildren with the same delighted, slightly bossy tenderness that made you stand up a little straighter and feel a little braver.

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After decades of work, Gran and Pop retired to Tauranga, and then Aotearoa became their back yard.
They took to the road in a campervan, and from then on, they were never far from a map with small, tidy handwriting in the margins.
Those maps mattered to her.
They were not souvenirs; they were evidence.
Evidence of the small bakeries that made the best cheese scones, the beaches where the sand sang, the op shops with hidden treasures, the libraries where she made fast friends with the librarians, because of course she did.
If you've ever been handed one of those maps, you know there were notes like "turn left at the purple letterbox," or "excellent thermos stop—sheltered from wind," or simply, "good people here."

Good people were her specialty.
She collected them like first editions—carefully, appreciatively, never to sit on a shelf.
Everyone who met her remembers the wit that arrived half a beat after you thought the conversation had ended, the eyebrow that could deflate bluster without a single unkind word, the shock of playful mischief from a woman whose diary was immaculate and whose spare buttons were sorted by colour and size.
She was honest without being sharp, thrifty without being mean, organised without being rigid.
And she showed up—for birthdays, yes, always on time with a neatly written card—but also for working bees, school fairs, book club rosters, and the op shop crew who relied on her eye to spot what could be mended and loved again.

My favourite memory of Gran is simple.
Beach picnics at Mount Maunganui.
A tartan rug that shed more fluff than a labrador, a thermos of tea that could burn your tongue in July, hokey pokey ice cream that melted faster than any sermon on patience, and Gran reading us poetry while the waves did their own applause behind her.
Not the poems we were forced to learn at school, but the ones she thought we

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might grow into—the ones with a question tucked inside them like a peppermint in her handbag.
The page would flap in the wind, she'd put her finger down to hold it, and we'd all lean closer, not wanting to miss the last line.
If I shut my eyes, I can still hear the sound of the surf under her voice.

Gran loved a full life, but she did not need it to be loud.
She took her delight in the ordinary disciplines of joy.
Book clubs that ran on biscuits and fierce opinions.
Knitting jerseys that actually fit, because gauge matters—she would insist I include that.
Cryptic crosswords that taught her to think sideways and laugh when the penny finally dropped.
Summer cricket on the radio humming through the house, a patient soundtrack to peeling potatoes or writing Christmas lists.
And the ukulele club on Thursdays, where she didn't care that she was never going to headline a festival—though she would have memorised the festival programme—she just loved being part of a circle of people making small music together.

If you ever asked Gran what she stood for, she'd deflect with a joke and then quietly show you.
Lifelong learning—because no one is finished, ever.
She'd be in the front row of the free lecture at the library, then home to look up extra references and put her own bookmarks in.
Thrift and re-use—because waste is a kind of disrespect, and someone else can always use what you no longer need.
Honesty—because trust is built in small, consistent truths, not grand gestures.
And showing up for your community—because that's how communities exist, one person at a time choosing to be there, repeatedly, when it counts.

You didn't have to guess what Gran thought you should read.
Her recommendations were so accurate it was a little uncanny.
She'd tilt her head, look at you the way librarians do—somewhere between

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gentle assessment and conspiracy—and then put a book in your hands that would slide a window open in your mind.
She remembered your birthday every year, the card arriving with handwriting as even as her temperament.
Inside was usually a line from a poem or a novel, a sentence chosen just for you.
We will miss those cards, and the way they always arrived in good time, and the corner of the envelope folded neatly where the glue never quite behaved.

We will also miss the maps.
The campervan atlas with place-names circled and comments like “camp early—tūī at dusk” or “ask for Mary—knows the tide.”
The pencil marks weren’t just directions; they were invitations.
Her maps taught us how to navigate—roads, yes, but also the bigger routes through grief and celebration.
Be practical.
Pack the thermos.
Stop for the view.
Write down what matters so you can find your way back if you need to.
And never underestimate the kindness of strangers—who are only strangers until you say hello.

Gran had a way of grounding a room with humour.
If things got too solemn, she’d find a seam of lightness and pull it gently.
She understood that levity isn’t frivolous; it’s a tool for carrying weight.
It’s the laugh shared over a sink full of dishes after a long day, the pun that sneaks into a condolence note because she knew the person would have liked it.
There was mischief in her, and we were better for it.

I’ve been thinking about what she would want today to feel like.
Not just the shape of the day, but the texture of it.
I think she’d want us to tell the truth—that we are sad, and that she mattered to us, and that there’s a gap now where a dependable, steady presence used to be.
But I also think she’d want us to notice what is still here because of her.

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We carry her in the way we browse a bookshelf for the thing that fits, in the way we turn up on time with a slice and a smile, in the way we keep a spare set of knitting needles and a spare bed made up, just in case.
We carry her in the way we speak plainly and kindly, and in the way we find each other in rooms like this and say, “I’m here if you need.”

To Gran’s children—your mum taught us that you can be both soft and strong, and that routines can be a kind of love.
To us grandchildren—she made every milestone feel like a national holiday.
She was at the school plays and the sports days and the graduations, cheering—not booming, but that steady clap that said, “I saw you do that, and I’m proud.”
To her three great-grandchildren—when you’re older, we’ll show you the maps and the jerseys and the books with corners turned down, and you’ll see where you come from.

I know many of us will keep reaching for her in small ways.
We’ll listen for the summer cricket and expect to hear her chuckle at a commentator’s terrible joke.
We’ll open a book and half expect her to appear over our shoulder, saying, “Just wait for chapter three.”
We’ll glance at the calendar as a birthday nears and think, “Gran will ring,” and then remember.
That ache is the cost of loving well and being loved well.
But even in that ache there is gratitude, because very few people manage the balance she did—of being utterly dependable and still full of surprise.

Gran, thank you for the picnics, for the poems, for the full thermos and the hokey pokey and the way you steadied the page in the wind.
Thank you for the counsel we didn’t always ask for and needed anyway.
Thank you for your lists and your laughter, your labels and your levity.
Thank you for showing us that community is not an abstract idea—it is a calendar entry, a casserole, a card in the post.

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In honour of how she chose to live, the family asks that in lieu of flowers, you consider a donation to the Cancer Society.
And because it would delight her no end, we invite you to share a favourite book quote in her memory—something that comforted you, challenged you, or simply made you grin.
Write it down, tell it to someone today, pass it on the way she always did.

We’ll finish as she might have finished a storytime, by looking up.
There is more road ahead, and she would be cross if we stood in the carpark dithering.
So we’ll pack the thermos, check the map, and go—curious, organised, a little mischievous.
We’ll keep learning.
We’ll keep showing up.
We’ll keep the door open and the kettle on.

Goodbye, Gran.
We’ll find you in the libraries and on the long quiet beaches, in the scratch of a pen across a birthday card, in the hum of a summer afternoon and a poem at the edge of the sea.
You taught us how to read the world, and we will not stop turning the page.

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