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Friends, family, colleagues, and all who loved Barbara June Parker—our Barb—thank you for gathering here today.

We are here to mourn, yes, but also to bear witness to a life well lived, a life that steadied so many of ours,
a life that believed deeply that education is a ladder and that a community rises when we lift one another.

Barb was born on 21 November 1951 in Cape Town,
raised in Rondebosch,
the eldest daughter who kept timetables on a fridge and humour in her back pocket.
She studied English and Education at UCT,
not as a stepping stone to a job,
but as a calling to a vocation—words and young minds, the two great causes of her public life.

She began in the classroom as a passionate English teacher
and retired many years later as a respected school principal.
In between, she built reading programmes that turned hesitant readers into book borrowers for life,
and she fought for bursaries that opened doors where there had been only locked gates.
If you ever saw a pupil slip a novel into a blazer pocket with the quiet pride of ownership,
you saw her legacy at work.

She married my father, David, and kept that partnership for 47 years—
not by accident, not by habit, but by daily generosity, shared wit,
and the practical tenderness of two people who knew when to talk and when

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simply to put the kettle on.
She was mother to me, Michael, and to my sister, Claire.
She was “Gran” to Ethan, Lily, and Noah,
and “Aunt Barb” to a lively extended clan who knew exactly where the biscuits were kept
and where the most interesting conversation would be—at her dining room table.

If you asked what defined her, I would say principled and organised,
warm-hearted with a quick wit,
and carrying an unwavering integrity that did not bend to favour or fashion.
She believed punctuality was a form of respect and fairness a form of love.
She could cut through nonsense with a single raised eyebrow,
yet she would make space for everyone’s say before a decision was made.

In our home, Shakespeare sat not in a glass cabinet but at the table with the rest of us.
Those evening study sessions are the memory I hold closest:
Barb with her rooibos, notebook open, asking what Macbeth feared most,
and then, very gently, shifting the question to us—what do we fear, and what does fear make us do?
Suddenly, iambic pentameter turned into life skills.
She had that gift:
to make literature a mirror and a map, not just a set of lines to be learned for a test.

Her career never lost sight of the individual child behind the class list.
She supported school debating because she believed every young person should learn to think aloud with courage and courtesy.
She loved the choir because harmony taught us how to listen.
And she mentored new teachers with the same measured patience she gave her pupils:
notes in the margins, a steady hand on the shoulder,
and a reminder that a good lesson stays with you long after the bell has rung.

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Home for Barb carried its own rituals.
Crosswords with her morning rooibos, neatly completed, rarely with a smudge.
Birdwatching along the West Coast—binoculars at the ready, a field guide tucked under her arm,
and that quiet satisfaction when a call she had been listening for finally revealed itself from the reeds.
Choral music on the radio on a Sunday,
and the Springboks with the family when the test started—calm for the anthem, animated for the breakdowns,
and always a post-match debrief that landed on “what mattered was the team”.

In the last years, cancer entered our vocabulary.
Barb met it not with slogans or noise, but with the same steadiness that marked her life.
Courage, in her case, looked like continued attention to others:
notes to staff, voice messages to a grandchild about a school project,
and, on difficult days, a humour so dry it could not be argued with.
As a family, we extend our sincere thanks to the oncology team at Groote Schuur.
You treated her with skill, with respect, and with the human kindness that lets a family rest between storms.
We are in your debt.

What will we miss?
Her counsel at exactly the right moment—never late, never pushy, always precise.
Her meticulous birthday cards—chosen weeks in advance, written in a hand that meant you mattered,
arriving exactly on time because punctuality did not make exceptions for celebration.
And that knowing smile, the one that could settle a room,
that told you to breathe, find your point, and carry on.

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We will tell the grandchildren that Gran's way with words was matched by her way with time:
that she arrived early to school assemblies, early to church,
early even to doctor's appointments, because being early meant being ready.
We will tell them that she believed in fairness not as a debating stance, but as a daily habit:
listen first, decide after;
lift as you climb; and keep the door open behind you.

For me, she was a devoted mother and a steady mentor—a firm but fair compass.
There were days I came to her with a mess of doubts,
and she would simply slide a clean sheet of paper across the table.
"Start again," she would say. "But this time, put your headings in."
It sounded like school. It felt like rescue.
I cannot count the number of times that simple instruction has got me moving again:
tidy your thoughts, set your priorities, and begin.

Claire and I remember the same rhythms, the same rules delivered with warmth.
If you wanted to convince Barb, bring evidence.
If you wanted to fix something, start with what you could control.
And if you missed the point, she would return to it with that quick flash of wit that made you laugh before you blushed.

Her influence ran well beyond our family.
There are young adults—no longer so young—who will recognise their own stories in these words.
The learner who spoke too softly and became a debater who now speaks for others.
The choir member who found confidence by holding a note with friends.
The teacher who nearly gave up and instead found a calling.
Barb did not put her name on any of that. She didn't need to.

She believed that the best work often has quiet fingerprints.

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She loved this country’s potential with clear eyes.
Education was her chosen instrument, equity her constant aim.
She did not ask if it would be quick. She asked if it would be right.
Programme by programme, child by child, she answered yes with her time.

It is right that we celebrate her today by doing something she would approve of: continuing to build the ladders she spent a lifetime setting in place.
In that spirit, our family invites you, if you feel moved, to share a book for donation to the school library in her honour.
Place a story in a young hand, and you will keep Barb’s work alive.

To my father, David:
you have been the gentlest of constants.
Forty-seven years is not a statistic; it’s a daily choice we witnessed and learned from.
To Claire:
you inherited Mum’s organisation and her kindness; she knew it and was proud of it.
To Ethan, Lily, and Noah:
your Gran loved each of you particularly, never in generalities.
If you listen for it, you will still hear her voice in the way you read, in the way you listen, in the way you look after your friends.

Barb passed at 72.
It is too soon for us,
and yet when I look at her life, I see a completeness that is not measured in years alone:
students taught,
colleagues guided,
a family gathered,
and a standard set—fairness, punctuality, integrity, and warmth—with no footnotes, no compromises.

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Grief has its own timetable. Mum would have respected that.
But she would also, I think, ask us to keep our appointments with the living.
Phone the friend.
Write the card.
Be five minutes early.
And when someone needs a ladder, hold it steady.

Mum, you turned Shakespeare into conversation and conversation into care.
You practised what you praised.
You showed us that a life can be both ordered and open-hearted,
disciplined and generous,
serious about standards and light in spirit.

We will carry your knowing smile into rooms that need settling.
We will set our headings and start again, as you taught us.
And we will keep your seat at the table by making sure there is always one more chair for someone who needs it.

Thank you, Barb, for your constancy,
for your counsel,
for the birthday cards that arrived exactly when they should,
and for the belief—quiet, durable, unwavering—that we could be a little better tomorrow than we were today.

Go lightly in our memories, Mum.
We will do the work.
We will keep the time.
And we will lift, together, in your name.

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