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Family, friends, neighbours, thank you for being here to honour our Gran Eileen — Eileen Grace Mitchell — who was born on 3 March 1942 in Durban, and who left us peacefully at 82.

I’m Sarah, her first granddaughter.
I had the privilege of weekly tea dates with her, and long phone calls that always ended with, “Right, my girl, you’ve got this.”

Today we say goodbye, and we also say thank you.
Thank you for a life that made room for others, quietly and without fuss.

Gran grew up in Durban and trained as a nursing sister, the kind of nurse who could lower a fever with a cool cloth and a sentence.
In the 1970s she moved to Johannesburg, and for nearly forty years she served at Charlotte Maxeke Hospital.
People often use the word dedicated; with her, it was measurable — early buses, extra shifts, and the phone kept charged on the bedside table in case someone needed calm at 2 a.m.

She married Robert — our Gramps — for 56 years.
Side by side they raised Catherine and Andrew, and then welcomed us grandchildren: Luke, Emily, and me.
It’s impossible to speak about Gran without speaking about that steady partnership — two hands in one garden, two chairs at one tea table, two voices doing the crossword and arguing cheerfully over whether a clue meant “stern” or “staid.”

She was steadfast, witty, practical, deeply compassionate, and unflinchingly fair.
At work, that meant she told the truth, even when it was uncomfortable, and in a crisis her voice never rose.

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At home, fairness looked like making sure everyone got a peppermint cream from her handbag, even if you pretended you didn't want one.
And yes, that handbag was never without those peppermint creams — I can still hear the soft crinkle of the wrapper as she leaned over in church.

Some of my favourite hours of my life were spent in her kitchen on rainy Sundays, baking rusks.
Flour in the air, an apron tied a bit skew, and the radio murmuring Springbok rugby from the lounge.
She'd test a piece of dough with a tiny pinch, raise an eyebrow, and declare, "It'll do."
Then the teapot would appear, and we'd sit under the jacaranda, purple blossoms settling onto the table, while she told stories from the ward.
Not sensational stories, never for effect.
Just human ones — a mother who found her courage, a nurse who learnt a new trick for calming a tiny chest, a reminder that small acts, done properly, can be the difference between fear and relief.

Service was her compass.
She volunteered with St John Ambulance, belonged to the neighbourhood watch, and was a pillar of her Anglican church — not the loud pillar, the load-bearing one.
She sang in the choir in that sure alto that could hold a line true.
Her favourite hymn was Abide with Me.
We all know the line "fast falls the eventide."
For Gran it wasn't a metaphor; it was an invitation to be present and kind when the day grew difficult.

Her hands were rarely still.
She grew roses and aloes with equal affection — beauty and resilience sharing a bed.
She knitted baby beanies for NICU wards, row after row, soft cotton in patient colours.
I once asked how she kept count through the interruptions.

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She said, “I don’t count rows, I count heads that will be warm.”
That was Gran — practical tenderness.

If you ever asked her what mattered, she’d list values, not achievements.
Service to others.
Honesty.
Punctuality — which in her dictionary meant being five minutes early and bringing a spare pen.
And a quiet generosity that insisted on dignity — groceries left at a door without a note, a lift offered before anyone asked, a batch of rusks wrapped and labelled for a nurse coming off nights.

She listened properly.
In a family wobble or a late-night worry, she didn’t give big speeches.
She’d pour tea, ask two good questions, and then say one sentence that somehow made the room feel larger.
That’s what we’ll miss most — her warm laugh, those peppermint creams appearing at just the right moment, and her steady advice when everything felt wobbly.

Gran also loved the small joys that stitch a week together.
Her cryptic crosswords — pencil only, never pen.
Springbok rugby on the radio, because the imagination supplies its own slow-motion replay.
And the garden, where she and Gramps would decide which rose needed a firm word and which aloe had earned its pride of place.

She was not sentimental, and I can hear her now, clearing her throat if I turn this into a string of adjectives.
So here are some small, true things:

She boiled the kettle before bad news and after good news.
She wrote thank-you notes for the effort rather than the gift.
She knew the names of the security guards on night shift at the hospital and

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brought them biscuits in winter.
She turned up.
On time.
Every time.

To Gramps, Catherine, and Andrew — and to Luke and Emily — she loved you with her whole, sensible, generous heart.
She loved you in casseroles and lifts and mended hems and the right word when the wrong words were crowding in.
And she loved this community — her church family, her colleagues, her neighbours who walked the evening streets in bright vests and swapped news by the gate.

Grief is heavy today.
But what she leaves us with is not only the ache of absence.
It’s an inheritance of habits.
We can carry on by doing what she did so well:
Show up when it’s inconvenient.
Tell the truth kindly.
Keep a peppermint cream in your bag because someone will need it.
Be five minutes early.
And, when the day grows long, hum a bar of Abide with Me and make tea.

If you’re looking for a way to honour her, the family invites donations to the neonatal unit in her name.
It is exactly where she poured so much of her care, one tiny head at a time.
Details will be shared with the family, or you can reach us at cto@kuchventures.com for information.

Gran Eileen, thank you for your calm in our storms, for your laugh that made rooms feel safe, for the rusks and the roses, the beanies and the brave, ordinary days.
You showed us that a life doesn’t have to be loud to be large.

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Abide with us, in memory and in practice, as we try to live with the steadiness you taught.

We will miss you fiercely.

And we will honour you — not with fuss, but with service, with honesty, with punctuality, and with love that turns up, kettle on, ready to help.

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