Good morning family and friends. Welcome to this celebration of the life of my Mom Patricia O’Connor. Mom impacted each of us gathered here this morning in one way or another. I know that she is smiling down on us as we assemble here at St Mary’s, her favorite church on her favorite island home. Mom and Dad, and my brother Sean are together at last, and I know they appreciate your presence.

My intention today is to share some of the highlights and memories of Mom’s life as I saw them and as she shared them with me. You will have your own memories, your own moments to cherish and remember. Today is a day of reflection for us all – both publicly as I will now, and privately within your hearts. Think of Mom fondly as we now reflect upon her life together.

Mom was born in The Bronx in 1937, the youngest of three children of direct Irish immigrants. She was proud of her upbringing, surrounded by the love of her parents as well as the love of her brother John and sister Mary.

As a student at St Nicholas of Tolentine High School, Mom was always proud to point out that she was once a cheerleader. I actually still have her varsity letter “T” from Tolentine. While I choose not to picture Mom doing splits or cartwheels, it is of course easy for all of us to picture her as a cheerleader. She rooted for everyone she ever met, with the possible exception of anyone that ever dared to bad-mouth Tom Brady. She was also known to cast a disparaging eye at any waitress foolish enough to bring her a glass of water with ice in it!

Mom graduated in 1955 and furthered her education in secretarial school at Grace Institute in New York. It was during this time in 1956 that Mom met the woman that would become her dearest lifelong friend in Anne Flinter. Mom and Anne hit it off immediately. They’ve shared some stories of their escapades on the Jersey Shore that I wish I didn’t know. I will spare you those stories today. Anne and Mom chose 1963 to settle down, at least a little, and get married. If you look at the wedding picture of Mom and Dad displayed before you, I want you to know that Mom is wearing Anne’s veil from her wedding earlier in 1963. Yes, they were that good of friends. They’ve become even closer over the decades.

Mom and Dad were married the day after JFK was assassinated in Dallas. As our nation mourned, they brought love and hope into the lives of family and friends. They started a family and quickly found themselves raising five children while Dad embarked on a career in the Navy and Mom became the consummate Navy wife. Dad was always proud to tell us that Mom once won the Navy Spouse of the Year award, and this surprised none of us. She moved four of us from Maryland to Okinawa, Japan by herself, and gave birth to her fifth child, our sister Eileen, in Japan. Mom rose to every challenge, including caring for us while Dad was in Vietnam. She taught her children well, and raised us right.

In 1976, we lived in Doylestown outside of Philadelphia for this country’s bicentennial. It was great to live there, as we were close enough to visit Mom’s brother John’s family, the O’Shaughnessy’s in Staten Island and her sister Mary’s family, the Mulligans, in Mahwah often. I am so happy to welcome John, Joseph and Susan O’Shaughnessy here today. Aunt Pat is smiling down on you. Thank you so much for being here. It was from Doylestown that Mom and Dad packed up us kids for a move across country to the state of Washington. Mom drove a blue VW minibus, usually with 3 or 4 of us kids while Dad drove the others in his green Volvo. They had CB radios to keep in touch with each other. I’ll never forget one day as we headed west. I was in the car with Dad and we stopped for gas. Dad lost track of Mom and frantically started calling her on the CB. He was irate, assuming Mom had left and gotten lost. After he yelled into the CB a few times, there was a brief silence. Then I heard Mom’s voice come over the line “Look to your right Peter” she said calmly. We all looked over and the blue VW minibus was right next to us! I laughed out loud. Dad didn’t, and Mom never let him hear the end of that one.

Washington State was Dad’s last tour in the Navy. After retirement, he and Mom again put the five of us in cars heading east. We drove through Canada and eventually made it to Cohasset, a beautiful seaside town south of Boston. Mom quickly became a lead member of the Welcome Wagon Committee. For those that don’t know, the Welcome Wagon was a group that would bring food, and trinkets from local vendors to people who were new to town. Mom loved to meet these families and gossip with them about their new home. Those that knew the chatty side of Mom know how perfect she was as a Welcome Wagon queen!

Mom was the mainstay at home, again raising five kids alone at times, particularly when Dad took a job in Saudi Arabia. Mom stayed home and made far too many peanut butter and jelly sandwiches; a lunch I haven’t had in over 35 years due to overdose in the 80s. She made sure we all got to Irish Dance lessons, and soccer and football practices, and all the other activities of five children living near the ocean. Mom never really liked the sun or the beach, but she made sure we got to the town pool and the harbor as often as we liked. She taught us to venture out on our own, and we all became comfortable in town from sunrise to sunset without supervision. We learned to be independent, and this has served us all well.

It was during the 80s that Mom and Dad began coming to this beautiful island. Maggie and Eileen were the first to enjoy it with Mom when they visited our Grandmother Emily on Hornblower Lane. Anne and Bill Flinter had discovered paradise as well, buying their first home here in Harbour Oaks in 1983. It seems fitting to me that two sparkplug girls from The Bronx found their own way to this special spot on the earth. They have enjoyed many laughs and many rounds of Mahjong together with their friends here. Our family visits to Longboat Key occurred more frequently, and usually included a day trip to the happiest place on earth in Orlando. Sean, Tim and I often slept onboard GrandJock’s boat “Fancy Free” docked in the canal behind Hornblower Lane. Life was good. We were fortunate children – owing our good fortune to Mom and Dad.

Mom’s love for Longboat Key was planted in the 80s and it bloomed. After the five of us were all out of the house on our own, Mom and Dad started coming more often, buying a small condo in the high-rise buildings at Sutton Place. My brother Tim once slept on the lanai there while visiting, and reportedly nearly froze to death during a cold night. Mom disputed that claim with a wave of her hand and a roll of the eyes we all came to know well. Some of my son Ryan’s first nights on this island were spent on that same lanai in a crib. Mom loved having her grandchildren here. Christina and Anthony probably hold the record for the most visits. Boy did Nana love her Christmases on Longboat Key with the Gerominis. Their visits were followed closely by her beloved Mark and Valerie. She spoke so lovingly of all of you. My own time in the Navy made visits from Ryan and Emily a bit more of a challenge, but Mom and Dad always welcomed each of us with open arms. Longboat Key loved Mom back as she became very active here at St Mary’s. Mom called the firefighters she worked with here at the firehouse her boys, and she loved them so much. She convinced Dad to buy a bigger place at Sutton so everyone could visit often in comfort. Ron was the biggest fan of the louvered doors Dad installed in the bathrooms, quickly depriving all of what little privacy there once was. We all fell in love with this place, watching the golf course expand, the Publix get rebuilt, and Mom’s favorite restaurant, Pattigeorges, disappear.

But they found new favorite places together, and in recent years, you’d be hard pressed not to find Mom and Dad at the Cortez Café after daily Mass. Mom knew each of the employees by name, and she loved to tell me their life stories, both magic and tragic, when we went there together. One year recently, I was visiting them alone on Good Friday. We went to Cortez Café and they asked their friend Marvin to join us. They ordered light meals of oatmeal and grits and toast. I ordered a Western Omelet, loaded with delicious ham. Mom gave me a quizzical look which I ignored while wolfing down that tasty omelet. It was only on the drive back to their home on Bayou Way that I realized I had ordered and eaten meat on a Friday during Lent – and Good Friday no less! I apologized to Mom. She reached over and slapped me in the back of the head and exclaimed “You old fool!” True love.

When Stacey and I got married in 1993, I danced with Mom to You’ve Got A Friend. The song was written by Carole King, and we played the James Taylor version. Mom was one of my early musical inspirations, as she always had John Denver or Joan Baez or Simon and Garfunkel on in the car. Every Saturday growing up, WROL in Boston played Irish music all day, and Mom had it on in the kitchen from start to finish. I danced to You’ve Got A Friend with Mom on my wedding day because she had become more than my mother. She was my friend. In the middle verse, JT sings “If the sky above you should grow dark and full of clouds… and that old North wind should begin to blow… keep your head together, and call my name out loud. Soon I’ll come knockin upon your door.”

As COVID enveloped the world in 2020, clouds gathered over Mom and Dad and a North wind began to blow as their health declined. I won’t ever forget a day when I had to take Dad to the Doctor from their home on Bayou Way. Stairs were our enemy. I asked Anne if a firefighter could help get Dad down the front stairs in his wheelchair. Anne said no need, she would help. So Anne and I wheeled Dad down those stairs. It was a decision I regretted, as we were all at risk. But I know it is something Anne would do again today. That is who Anne Flinter is.

After Dad passed in 2021, we saw a need to knock upon Mom’s door and help her. The family decided to move Mom to an Assisted Living facility near me in Virginia Beach. Her life at Harmony was special. I was the lucky one, truly, along with a few others in Virginia Beach that got to spend the last two years living and laughing with Mom.

Regular medication, sleep, and a healthy diet did wonders for Mom even as her cognition declined. She was so happy and so fun to be around. I quickly found a delightful habit of Mom’s whenever we drove around in the car. She would point to the sky and ask me if I saw what she saw in the clouds. In Joni Mitchell’s words, sung so eloquently by Judy Collins – “Rows and flows of angel hair, and ice cream castles in the air, and feather canyons everywhere – I’ve looked at clouds that way.” Mom pointed out puppies and waves and people to me that she saw in the clouds. It was beautiful. On those drives, whenever we came to a red light as the first car, she would giggle and hold up her finger and say “We’re number one Patrick!” What a positive way to look at life. Mom was so thankful for the many visits of Eileen. And she so loved having Tim, and Maggie and Ron come see her in Virginia Beach. She cherished seeing Emily and Ryan more.

I was fortunate to have Mom so close, but so were others. Tim and Julie Riegle are mine and Stacey’s best friends in life. Thank you both so very much for being here. They welcomed Mom into their home and into their lives. Mom and Julie became good friends, with solo trips to the Dollar Tree to buy things Mom didn’t need. Stacey did the same and correctly told me it didn’t matter what Mom bought. She loved being out with the girls again. I can’t express how much the love of Stacey and Julie meant to Mom. They brought her shopping for a dress to wear to Ryan and Melissa’s wedding last October. Mom loved that shopping trip and laughed when she told me about it. She is wearing that dress today as she goes to Heaven.

Mom broke her hip at the end of May and she simply was never quite the same. The doctors successfully repaired it, but Mom was tired. We returned to her home at Harmony under comfortable and kind hospice care, and the love of family. On Saturday, June 10th, it seemed to me that the end was near. Mom had a chance to say goodbye to her children and grandchildren. Late in the afternoon, I called Mom’s sister Mary and held the phone to her ear so she could hear the sweet, gentle words of her sister. Then I called Anne Flinter to do the same. As Mom listened to Anne, there was recognition in her face and she said very softly “I love you.” Those were among Mom’s last words, and she passed peacefully five days later.

**Cherish your loving relationships.**

I know I’ll forever cherish the one I had with Mom. (PAUSE)

Mom…

May the road rise to meet you

May the wind be at your back

May the sun shine warm (but not too bright!) upon your face

May the rain fall softly on your fields

And until we meet again…

May you keep safe in the gentle loving arms of God.

(PAUSE)

I love and miss you, Mom. Rest peacefully.