

*Dear Brent, Nicolette, Ellie, Claire, Annabelle, Jacob, and Abel, on behalf of Father Charles, myself, and all of us gathered here today, we offer you our deepest condolences as we say goodbye to your mom and grandmother, MaryAnn, our Smoke. She lived a full and faithful life. Born, raised, educated, married, worked, and retired right here in the place she loved most. Evansville has always been blessed with a unique mix of people who shaped its character and spirit. Smoke stands near the top of that list. This town helped form her, and she in turn helped form this town.!*

*Today we hear from Ecclesiastes that there is a time for everything. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to weep and a time to laugh. If anyone understood that, it was MaryAnn, our Smoke. Most of her life she stood behind the bar and watched the whole book of Ecclesiastes unfold right in front of her. There was a time to celebrate. Engagements announced. Babies toasted. Anniversaries, retirements, birthdays, Cardinals wins that felt like holy days.*

*And there was a time to mourn. Quiet conversations. Tears that fell onto a well worn counter. News no one wanted to hear. Smoke stood in the middle of it all. That tavern was more than a business. It was her front row seat to the human story. It was there she became a psychologist. She read people the way others read the weather. One look and she knew if you were walking in to celebrate or to unload the weight of the world. She listened to stories of love, frustration, hope, regret. She heard confessions that never made it to church. She offered wisdom without ever calling it that. No framed diploma. Just decades of watching, listening, and caring. She was also the town's timekeeper. Noon meant noon. The siren rang on time. Traffic stopped when the fire department rolled out. Smoke kept Evansville moving. She saw the days when you could not find a parking spot downtown on a Friday night. She saw the quiet years too. Times changed. She changed with them. Through it all, she loved her home.*

*Her parents started the Tavern in 1941. She worked alongside them. Later she took ownership herself. That is commitment. That is roots. She and Bill raised their family here. Bill was the steady balance to her fire. They worked well together. They built something that lasted. Saint Paul tells us in Romans that the sufferings of this present time are nothing compared with the glory to be revealed. Smoke knew both joy and sorrow. She knew what it was to laugh hard and to carry loss. Paul reminds us that God works all things for good for those who love Him. When you look at a life like hers, you see it. Not perfect. Not easy. But full. Full of relationships. Full of stories. Full of love. Our question for us today. Not whether Smoke was strong. We know she was. Not whether she left a mark. Evansville answers that. The question is whether we believe that death does not get the last word. I have a feeling that when Smoke walked through the gates of heaven, she did what she always did. Took it all in. Sized it up. Asked a few direct questions. Checked if the bells were ringing on time. Found the section where the Cardinals fans gather. And within minutes she was right in the middle of it all again. There is a time to weep.*

*Today is that time. There is also a time to laugh and give thanks. We thank God for MaryAnn. For her sharp memory. For her stories. For her attitude. For her steady presence in a small town that she loved deeply. In the words of the great Jack Buck, "That's a winner!"*