BIRTHDAY SPECIAL

The Maggie Hartwell

PERSONAL EDITION

A BIRTHDAY EDITION

STORIES4EVER FICTIONAL SAMPLE

CELEBRATES 75

TALENT SHOW

Nora Finishes Despite Microphone Failure

Nora was fourteen when a school talent-show performance met an unexpected interruption. Halfway through her original comic monologue, the microphone stopped working. Maggie Hartwell's granddaughter froze.

From the third row, Maggie called, "Project, dear." Nora finished without amplification and received the longest applause of the evening.

Nora later suggested that the applause was probably just relief. Maggie answered, "Relief still claps." The phrase became a family reminder that an imperfect success still counts.

CHRISTMAS ARRIVAL

Seventeen Bells Welcome Aunt Tess

One snowy Christmas Eve, a diverted flight and a long bus ride delayed Aunt Tess for hours. She finally arrived at 9:18 p.m., wearing borrowed snow boots and carrying a gas-station bouquet.

Maggie welcomed her by ringing all seventeen of her brass bells. Dinner was overcooked and the rolls were hard, but the family remembers the evening as one of its best Christmas celebrations.

Seventeen bells do not, in Maggie's view, constitute a collection. She insists otherwise because "a collection requires a stopping point."

COTTAGE LIFE

A Cottage Known by Its Sounds

At Maggie's white cottage at Willow Bend, the screen door supplies more than the sound of an arrival. She can identify who has entered by the rhythm of its slam.

The cottage is strongly associated with her piano and seventeen brass bells. Music, a welcome and a recognizable screen-door slam each have a place in the family memories.

Her musical life has also taken her beyond the cottage: she directed choirs at three churches and one community theater.

MAGGIE'S SAYING

If you know the tune, help the room.

Maggie's saying asks people to join in and contribute, rather than stand back and demonstrate that they already know what to do.

The family's suggested rules for a better room carry that invitation further: welcome people loudly, keep the story going, and remember that an imperfect finish can still deserve applause.

Competition has its own place in the family notes. Maggie once moved the task of teaching Grandma Maggie to lose gracefully into the NOW column on the family whiteboard. The suggested rules offer fair warning: do not expect Maggie to lose gracefully.

The Maggie Hartwell

A BIRTHDAY EDITION

INSIDE / PAGE 2

SONGS, STORIES AND FAMILIAR OBJECTS

A birthday tradition, Samuel's porch swing and a kitchen disagreement.

REMEMBERING SAMUEL

A Familiar Place on the Swing

Samuel, Maggie's late husband, built the porch swing at her cottage. Its left side still rises slightly because that was where he always sat.

He regularly hid handwritten notes inside things he repaired. Some were practical; others offered quiet encouragement. His tools, notes and pencil sharpener remain part of ordinary family life, along with his place on the swing.

Maggie keeps his memory present through those familiar objects and through stories, rather than formal speeches.

KITCHEN DEBATE

Sauce or Gravy Remains Unsettled

Maggie and Rosa Ruiz maintain an affectionate disagreement over what to call a similar pasta dish. Whether it should be sauce or gravy remains their point of difference.

MUSICAL TRADITIONS

One Verse, Deliberately Sung Wrong

Within the family, Maggie helps lead a musical undertaking called the Birthday Wrong Song.

The tradition calls for one verse of Happy Birthday in an intentionally wrong style. Opera, cowboy, robot and whisper are among the possibilities. Maggie also believes that once a song begins, it should generally be finished.

Her ear for music extends to hearing harmony in lawn mowers.

BIRTHDAY NOTICE

Bring a Bell, Song or Story

Guests at Maggie's birthday are invited to bring a bell, a song, or a story.

A PERSONAL MESSAGE

Happy 75th birthday, Maggie. Thank you for teaching us to join the song, applaud the imperfect ending, keep score when absolutely necessary, and make room for every voice in the family.
With love from all of us.