

## **Remarks from Mayor Stephen H. Hagerty, Mayor Lorraine H. Morton Funeral Service**

*September 22, 2018*

Elizabeth and members of the Morton family, Mayor Tisdahl, Mayor Lytle, and honored guests. We come here today to celebrate the life of a remarkable woman.

Mayor Morton loved bringing people together, and today, looking at this chapel filled with so many wonderful people from all over our community, I know she's happy to have brought Evanston together one more time. I also know she'd be delighted that her funeral occurred immediately after 2,000 NU freshmen marched through the arch.

Even though we were blessed to have Lorraine with us for nearly a century, it doesn't make this day any easier. All of those who were fortunate enough to spend time with her over the last 99 years—family, friends, students, colleagues—know what a special person she was, and what a terrible loss this is for our community. But being the incredibly positive, optimistic person that she was, Mayor Morton would want us to move forward.

There's a wonderful saying attributed to Maya Angelou, "People don't remember what you did or said, they remember how you made them feel." Mayor Morton personified that expression. You always felt good being in her presence.

She was genuine. She was direct. She had an opinion, which she didn't hesitate to share. But most of all, she cared about you and what you had to say. She cared so much, in fact, that a quick chat could often turn into a two-hour conversation. If you were in a hurry, she's the last person you'd want to bump into.

Lorraine was an active, engaged, energetic, and vibrant person—and that comes from me, someone who only got to know her in her late 90s.

My wife Lisa and I met her for the first time when we won the opportunity to have dinner with the mayor as part of a fundraiser. We met her at Pete Miller's Steakhouse, so she could enjoy the jazz music, which she loved, and I remember being surprised that she also brought along a boyfriend, Byron Wilson. I didn't even know 80 and 90-year-old women had boyfriends. But Lorraine didn't let age—or anything else for that matter—stop her from living and enjoying all of her 99 years.

A few years after our dinner, when I decided to run for mayor, I knew I first had to pay a visit to Mayor Morton. She knew Evanston better than anyone else, and her support mattered.

So I went to her house and rang her doorbell. She answered, took my arm, and walked me back to her sunroom where she offered me a glass of some very delicious raspberry lemonade.

We began to talk, but her TV was on so loud that I had trouble hearing her, so I asked her if we could mute it. She said "sure."

As she's regaling me with stories about her life as a teacher, principal, alderman and mayor in Evanston, and giving me her take on all the candidates for mayor, including myself, she suddenly stopped. This was

2016, and there was breaking news that Hillary Clinton was not going to be indicted by the FBI. Wolf Blitzer was about to interview Secretary Clinton. We turned the TV back on.

Mayor Morton watched Hillary skillfully handle the interview, saying, “Oh, she’s good. She’s really good. You should be taking notes! You should be taking notes!”

I remember thinking, “Is she serious? Does she actually want me to take notes?” It dawned on me that yes, she probably did. So I took out my notepad and began scribbling down words like “pivot,” “dodge,” and “evade.” I’m still not sure what she expected me to write down that day, but that was the teacher in Mayor Morton. She wanted to make sure I was learning and improving, just like so many of her students.

I don’t recall if that was the meeting she gave me her endorsement, but I do know it was the start of our friendship. There aren’t many people still making new friends in their late 90s, but Mayor Morton had many of those relationships. It’s who she was.

Mayor Morton greatly valued her relationships, and she also valued history—both her family history and the history of our city. I’ll never forget when she brought her long-lost niece, Denise, who’s with us today from Alaska, to visit her old office at City Hall.

Despite living nearly 100 years, Lorraine was never afraid of progress and change. She faced many barriers in her life as an African American and as a woman, and she knew that people, places and institutions had to change in order to adapt and grow. As the first educator to break the color barrier at Nichols Middle School, as our City’s first black mayor, and as our first Democratic mayor, not only was Lorraine Morton not afraid of change—she was the change.

And while she broke barriers, she was all about building bridges. As mayor, she brought our diverse community together. She improved our City’s relationship with Northwestern. She helped revitalize our downtown. She helped Evanston youth get summer jobs. She believed that people could accomplish a whole lot more if they stopped arguing and just started working together.

Lorraine Morton was positivity. She was progress. And she left our city a much better place than when she arrived.

It is an honor to work in the Lorraine H. Morton Civic Center, a building appropriately named after her, in the office that she held for 16 years, representing the city that she loved so dearly.

If there’s anyone I should have taken notes on that afternoon in Mayor Morton’s sunroom, it was her. She had so much to share with us about leadership, civility and service. And even though she’s passed on, I know that her incredible spirit, optimism, and wisdom was instilled and lives on in so many of us here today. We will help carry on her legacy of progress, partnership and community for many, many generations to come. For that, I’m eternally grateful.

God bless you, Mayor Morton. May you rest in peace. And may your spirit shine bright in all those you touched throughout your long life.