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Kia ora koutou,

thank you for being here to celebrate the life of my dad, Robert James McKenzie — Rob to pretty much everyone, Dad to me.

He was born on 22 March 1962 in Christchurch,
a South Island boy who later packed his toolbox and his hopes
and moved to Wellington in his twenties.
He trained as an electrician, worked hard, learned faster,
and before long he'd started his own small firm.
That was Dad — steady hands, no fuss, just getting on with it.

He married Mum, Helen, and for 35 years they built the sort of partnership that makes a home feel anchored.
Together they raised us three noisy, opinionated kids — me, Emma, and my brother and sister, Liam and Sarah —
and in recent years Dad wore his new title, Pop, with a grin that started in his eyes.
Two grandkids who knew exactly where to find the best hugs in the room.

Dad was a master electrician, but he was also a master at showing up.
He mentored apprentices like they were his own,
coached junior rugby with a whistle that somehow carried across wind and rain,
and he volunteered with the local surf lifesaving club.
When the school sent out a note about a working bee,
he didn't just turn up —
he arrived early, with spare gloves, a thermos,
and that cable tie magic he claimed could fix the world.

He was humble and generous with his time.

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If there was a crisis, people rang Rob.
Not because he'd make a big speech or take over,
but because he'd quietly make a plan,
hand you a spanner,
and give you a look that said, We've got this.
He was dependable in a way that made everyone around him braver.

My favourite memory with Dad is a simple one.
We were on a South Island roadie and he decided it was time I learned to drive.
We found a hill.
I stalled. Repeatedly.
Each time I waited for the lecture,
and each time he just laughed, that warm, cheeky laugh,
and said, "Right, Em, let's try that again,"
as if every shudder and stall was a small victory worth celebrating.
By the time I made it to the top, I wasn't just driving.
I'd learned what patience feels like when someone believes in you.

You could spot Dad on a Saturday by his uniform:
faded club cap, hoodie with a paint smear,
and those hands that always had a nick or two.
He loved tramping in the Tararuas —
never rushed, always with a slow map-check and a bit of scroggin to share.
He'd head up the Kapiti Coast for a surfcast,
happy to come home with a fish or just a good yarn about the one that got cheeky and slipped the hook.
At home there was always a DIY project on the go,
and some weekend he'd have the bonnet of a classic Holden open,
tinkering, whistling, utterly content.

His values were simple and firm:
hard mahi, integrity, keeping your word,
whānau first, and fairness to everyone.
He didn't use big words for any of that.

He just lived it.
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If he said he'd be there at 7, he was there at 6:50.
If a neighbour's lights went out, he'd pop over "for a quick look"
and emerge an hour later with the problem sorted and a joke about sending a very reasonable invoice —
which of course never arrived.

People will miss a thousand things about him,
but I know a few will echo around us for a long time:
his bear hugs that reset a bad day,
that reassuring sideline whistle that could settle a nervous kid before a conversion,
and the way he could fix almost anything with cable ties and calm.
If he gave you a wink and said, "That'll hold,"
you believed him — and somehow it always did.

Dad wasn't perfect — and he would hate me pretending he was.
He could be stubborn in the exact way a person is when they care deeply.
If a job wasn't done right, it wasn't done.
But his stubbornness was tethered to kindness.
He was cheeky, yes — a throwaway one-liner, a raised eyebrow —
and then back to work, grinning.

He loved Mum with a steadiness that made the rest of us feel safe.
He loved us kids the same way,
and he doted on his grandkids with a softness that surprised even him.
If you asked what he was proudest of,
he'd probably shrug and say, "The lot of them,"
and then he'd change the subject before anyone got teary.

We will each carry our own set of moments.
For me, it's early-morning coffees before school,
the quiet car rides where he let me talk and never rushed to fix what couldn't be fixed with a screwdriver,

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and that phone call most afternoons — just to check in, just to say hi.
We talked most days.
There’s a space where that call should be.
I think many of us feel a space like that today.

But this is not only a day of spaces.
It’s also a day for what remains solid:
the apprentices who wire a board the way Rob taught them,
the juniors who run out onto the field with a bit more courage because they learned under his watch,
the lifesaving crew who know he’d be the first to the waterline,
the family who understands what “whānau first” feels like,
because he showed us.

To Wellington Free Ambulance —
thank you for your care and dignity.
To Dad’s mates from the lifesaving club —
thank you for the way you’ve wrapped around our family.
Your support has meant more than we can say.

If you want to honour Rob, keep it simple.
Turn up.
Keep your word.
Offer your hands before you offer your opinion.
Carry a few cable ties in your glovebox — you’ll be surprised how often they help.
And when you’re standing on a blustery sideline,
let your whistle be the kind that steadies,
not the kind that shouts people down.

Dad, you taught us that strength doesn’t need volume,
that fairness is a daily practice,
and that the best kind of love is practical and present.
You gave us your steadiness, your humour,

and the kind of example that keeps working long after the job looks finished.

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We miss you already.
We will keep talking to you in the small ways —
at the top of a hill start,
on a track in the Tararuas,
on the beach with the wind in our faces and the line out.

Thank you for everything, Rob —
Dad, Pop, mate.
Haere rā.
Go well.
We’ll take it from here.

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