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Tēnā koutou katoa.

Thank you for coming together here at St Michael’s to honour the life of my grandfather, Arthur James McKenzie—our Grandad Art.

He was born on 15 March 1942 in Dunedin, and he left us in Christchurch at the age of 82.
Those dates bookend a life that was steady, useful, and generous, the sort of life that quietly strengthens families and neighbourhoods.

Grandad grew up in Dunedin and found his way early: an apprenticeship in carpentry, a craft that would become his calling.
In the 1960s, he moved north to Christchurch and built more than houses; he built a future.
He started McKenzie Builders with a battered ute, a few good tools, and a promise he kept for decades—do the job properly, price it fair, finish what you start.

In 1967 he married Margaret, and for 57 years they were companions in the truest sense—partners in work, in humour, in the ordinary tasks that make a shared life.
Together they raised Fiona and Daniel, and later welcomed us grandchildren—Liam, Sophie, and Maya—into a home that smelled of fresh timber, tomatoes ripening on the windowsill, and a Sunday roast that never failed.

As his eldest grandson, I spent countless weekends with him.
He taught me practical skills and a kind of quiet courage—the kind you need to admit a mistake, fix it, and carry on without drama.

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One summer we built a treehouse in the backyard.
He laid the boards out on the lawn and handed me the tape measure.
“Measure twice,” he said, “and then measure once more for luck.”
When I miscut a board, I braced for a lecture.
Instead he smiled—just a crease at the corner of his mouth—and showed me how to square a line, plane an edge, and make it right.
No fuss, no point-scoring.
Later that day, up among the branches, he knocked the final nail and gave me that quiet nod of his that meant “well done.”
I learned more in that afternoon than from any textbook: about effort, patience, and the satisfaction of work done properly.

Grandad had the temperament that holds a team together—steady, humble, with a dry Kiwi wit that could loosen tension like a well-timed tap on a swollen door.
He was a patient teacher.
Many apprentices came through McKenzie Builders; several still send messages about the man who taught them how to set a line, sharpen a chisel, and keep their word.

He loved restoring old villas, bringing life back to timber others had given up on.
He said you could tell the story of a house by the grain of its floorboards and the way the morning light fell across a skirting board.
On weekends he’d be in the shed in Cashmere, long after he retired, sorting screws by size, putting an edge on a plane iron, working on a stubborn bit of kauri as if time itself might soften if you were patient enough.

The shed was his place, but he never kept his skill to himself.
After the earthquakes in 2011, when so many of us felt adrift, he spent days—then weeks—moving from neighbour to neighbour, shoring up fence posts, planing doors swollen with damp, bracing verandahs, making little temporary fixes that turned out to be lifelines.
He never walked past a broken gate; he never ignored a worried face.
He just put the kettle on, listened, and got on with it.

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His pleasures were simple and faithful.
Fishing at Lake Tekapo before sunrise, a thermos of tea and a yarn about the one that got away.
Tramping in Arthur’s Pass, boots muddy and spirits lifted by the first patch of sun after rain.
Tomatoes and beans in the garden, staked straight and watered early.
Rugby on the radio, volume set just so, a running commentary muttered in that low voice we learned to tune in to.
And, occasionally, the patient resurrection of a classic wooden boat, ribs and planks coaxed back into shape until the water agreed to carry it again.

Grandad lived by a handful of principles that didn’t change with the weather—hard work, integrity, keeping your word, looking out for the neighbours, and finishing what you start.
He didn’t speak about these things much; he showed them.
If he said he’d be there at eight, the ute pulled up at ten to.
If he promised a job by Friday, you could set your watch by it.
And if you were flustered, he’d sit you down for a cuppa, listen longer than you expected, and offer a sentence or two that cleared the fog.

What we’ll miss most are the small markers of his presence.
His calm advice over a cuppa at the kitchen table.
The smell of sawdust on his jersey after a day in the shed.
That quiet nod—no fanfare—when you’d finally got something right.

To Nana Margaret, to Mum and Dad—Fiona and Daniel—and to my cousins Sophie and Maya:
your grief is deep because your love is deep.
But look how much of him is already in you.
In the way a tool is cleaned and put back where it belongs.
In the way you show up for a neighbour without being asked.
In the way a promise, once given, is kept.

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Grandad would not have asked for speeches or fuss.
He would have asked that we take care of each other, that we keep the kettle full, that we mend what can be mended.
He would have smiled, perhaps, to know that instead of flowers we're supporting the Volunteer Fire Brigade—the kind of practical kindness he admired.

When I think of him now, I return to that treehouse.
I'm up among the branches, holding a hammer too big for my hand.
He is below, steadying the ladder, letting me try, letting me learn, trusting that I could do it and standing ready if I couldn't.
That, to me, is the shape of his love—a steady presence that gave confidence without crowding.

We grieve today, but we also give thanks.
For a life that built up rather than wore down.
For hands that left beauty wherever they worked.
For a gentle humour that never needed to be loud to be heard.

If you want to honour him, do something the way he would have done it.
Turn up on time.
Keep your word.
Finish the job.
Help the neighbour.
Make the tea.
And when someone does well, offer that quiet nod that says more than any speech.

Moe mai rā, Grandad Art.
Your work here is finished, and it holds strong.

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