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Kia ora koutou,

Thank you for coming, in your bright shirts and big hearts, to celebrate the life of my dad, Peter John Sullivan — Pete to most of you, Dad to me and Isla, and the love of Mum’s life for 28 years.

We’re here to laugh as much as we cry.
We’re here to remember a man whose default setting was “how can I help?” and whose toolkit seemed to rattle before dawn, as if the day itself needed waking up.

Dad was born in Dunedin on 14 November 1970.
He grew up with salt air in his lungs and ideas in his hands.
He studied mechanical engineering at Canterbury, because of course he did — he wanted to know how things worked, then see if they could work better.

He started out as a marine engineer on the Cook Strait ferries.
He loved those crossings: the hum of the engines, the sudden quiet when the swell eased, the way the crew became a family because the sea insists on that.
He used to say the Strait is a stern teacher — it rewards preparedness and punishes shortcuts.

Later, he co-founded a renewables firm.
If you ever talked to him about clean tech, you know what happened — his eyes lit up, the napkin sketches came out, and your coffee went cold while he redesigned a turbine on the back of a receipt.
He wasn’t chasing headlines. He was chasing cleaner air for other people’s kids.
He believed ingenuity wasn’t a party trick, it was a responsibility.

He married Mum — Kate — and somehow managed to be both anchor and sail.

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They made a home where the front door was rarely closed and the kettle seemed to refill itself.
Together they raised me and Isla, and gathered the sprawling Sullivan clan into something both loud and deeply steady.

If you want to know who Dad was, start with his hands.
They built our bach at Ōhope, board by board.
No shortcuts there either.
He measured twice, cut once, then laughed when he measured again “for luck”.
That place isn’t just timber and nails; it’s the shape of his hope for us — that we’d have a place to return to with sand still between our toes.

He taught apprentices with the same patience he used on me as a kid learning to hold a spanner the right way.
He never made anyone feel small for not knowing.
He just rolled up his sleeves and said, “Let’s find out.”

He was a generous neighbour, the guy who turned problems into projects before you’d finished explaining them.
The fence that wouldn’t stand? He was there with a brace.
A leaky pump at midnight? He’d turn up with a torch and a joke about surge pricing.
He believed community wasn’t a noun, it was a verb.

He was curious.
He was inventive.
He was honest to a fault.
And he was famous for truly awful dad jokes.
If you ever asked him how his home brew was going, he’d say, “It’s ale-right” and wait, grinning, until you groaned.
We groaned a lot.
We also kept going back for refills.

Some of you knew him on the water.

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Sailing was his happy place — well, sailing and barbecues, with weekend cricket jammed in there for good measure.
He loved the dance of a good tack and the way a coastline reveals itself slowly, like it’s deciding whether to trust you.
He loved photographing those wild edges, the kind of shots that smell like salt and rain when you look at them.

My favourite memory lives out there.
A blustery run to the Marlborough Sounds, the sort of day the wind talks back.
I was nervous, hands clumsy on the lines.
He showed me knots until my fingers understood them, told me which ones were for load and which were for letting go, and then he said something I’ve repeated to myself a hundred times since:
“Trust the wind, but tie good knots.”
That was Dad’s whole philosophy, really.
Have faith in the forces you can’t see, and do the work you can.

He believed you should leave places better than you found them.
That went for campsites and boardrooms, for borrowed workshops and heated meetings.
He didn’t tidy up just for the look of it.
He tidied up so the next person could begin.

He loved cricket with the local club, he loved the ritual of whites washed questionably bright, he loved catching up on the sideline gossip as much as the gentle sting of a well-timed cut shot.
He was not shy about discussing questionable umpiring decisions — in the friendliest possible way — and he never minded fielding in the sun if it meant someone else got a turn to bat.

He loved barbecues with mates, the long kind where the onion slices just keep appearing and the tongs become a conductor’s baton.
He believed every barbecue needed one experiment and one certainty.
The certainty was sausages.

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The experiment might be home-brew-infused mussels or “smoke-kissed pineapple” which, to be fair, was better than it sounds.

At work, he was the one you called when the problem felt knotted beyond saving.
He’d listen, ask two careful questions, and then he’d find a thread to pull.
He liked elegant fixes.
He liked solutions that would still be working in ten years.
And he liked bringing apprentices into the room to see how it was done, because what’s the point of knowing something if it dies with you?

At home, he showed his love by showing up.
By turning the radio down when you needed to talk.
By checking the weather report like a prayer before a school camp.
By learning to make pancakes the way Isla liked them, even though the first attempts were questionably shaped maps of New Zealand.

He had a booming laugh that started in his chest and pushed the rest of us along for the ride.
You could hear it from the shed, over the clatter of tools at dawn.
That sound was our family’s unofficial alarm clock.
Even the gulls seemed to pause for it.

He was also the kind of man who took Coastguard New Zealand personally.
He’d say, “If the sea has your heart, you owe it your best.”
So today, in lieu of flowers, please donate to Coastguard — Dad would be chuffed knowing that help will be there when it counts.
It meant a lot to him.

He wasn’t perfect, and we didn’t need him to be.
He could underestimate how long a “quick job” would take, and if he said “just pass me that 10 mil” you knew you were in for at least an hour.
He had a stubborn streak when a design offended him.
He’d rewrite a shopping list to improve clarity.

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But those edges gave us grip.
They made him real, and they made his care specific.

He told the same stories, and they got better each time.
The night the ferry hit that rogue wave.
The apprentice who wired a switch backwards and lit up the morning tea trolley.
The photo he nearly missed because a penguin strutted into frame like a runway model.
He didn’t just tell them; he filed them under “lessons” and pulled them out when a moment needed one.

He believed in honesty.
He believed in ingenuity.
He believed in helping others before they had to ask.
He believed in a good knot, a good tool, a good laugh, and a good neighbour.

He loved Mum — Kate — with the kind of steadiness that makes you breathe easier when you walk into a room.
Their teamwork was not subtle.
It was right there in the way they read each other’s faces across a table, in the way they booked holidays around tides, in the way the bach holds them both in its beams.

He loved Isla and me with backing that felt like wind in the sails.
When I changed course, he backed me.
When I stalled, he gave me a gentle nudge and a biscuit.
When I wanted to be brave, he stood where I could see him.
That’s a gift I’ll spend the rest of my life trying to pass on.

And he loved the mess and marvel of the extended Sullivan clan.
Family gatherings were sports events with cutlery.
He would end up fixing something — a wobbly chair, a flickering light, a knot in someone’s shoe laces — and he’d crack a joke while he did it, and we’d roll our eyes and love him for it.

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What will we miss?
The laugh, for sure.
The clatter of tools that told us Saturday had begun.
The way he could turn a worry into a to-do list and then into a memory we were proud of.
We'll miss the text that said "On my way — bring a socket set," which never really meant "on my way"; it meant "on our way, together."

Dad passed at 53.
There's no pretending that number feels fair.
But he filled those years like a well-packed kit — everything needed, nothing wasted.
He didn't keep love in the wrappers.
He used it.

So what do we do with a man like Pete?
We carry him the way he carried us.
We tie good knots.
We check in on our neighbours before they wave.
We teach what we know without making a fuss about it.
We take a young apprentice — or a young niece, or a new mate at work — and we say, "Come have a go."
We clean as we go.
We fix the thing we can fix and we don't shy away from the wind.

And we keep the colour.
Keep the bright shirts.
He would have loved looking out over this room today — looks like a summer's day at the bach, just without the sand on the floor.
Well done, team.

On behalf of Mum, Isla, and the whole Sullivan crew, thank you for being here.
Thank you for the meals dropped off, the stories, the photos of coastlines he

loved, the messages that sound a lot like his laugh.

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Thank you, too, for supporting Coastguard in his name — he’d say that’s exactly the sort of practical kindness that keeps a community afloat.

Dad — Pete — my adventure buddy —
I will hear you every time a winch squeals and a knot holds.
I will find you in a clean bench at the end of the day and in the way a coastline straightens after a storm.
I’ll keep trusting the wind.
And I’ll keep tying good knots.

Arohanui, Dad.
We’ll leave this place better than we found it.
You showed us how.

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