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Friends, family, and all who have gathered to honour him, thank you for being here today as we remember my father, Malcolm Edward Wright—Malk to many of us—who was born on 3 November 1952 and left us at the age of 73.

We come together to mourn, yes, but also to give thanks for a life so full and so well used that it seemed, even in quiet moments, to hum with purpose.

My name is James. I stand here as Malk’s son, and as one of many people who were shaped by his example. He was my father, and he was also my mentor. Our bond strengthened over the years—through work, through rugby, and through long talks that started as arguments about who had the better lineout and ended as lessons in patience, fairness, and the gentle art of changing one’s mind.

He was born in Newcastle upon Tyne, and you never really left him wondering where his roots were. He had the voice, the stride, and the stubborn courtesy of the North East. From the beginning he knew the value of graft. He was the first in his family to attend university, and he never wore that like a medal; he wore it like a responsibility. Education, he would say, is a lifelong gift, not a ladder you climb and then pull up behind you.

He spent three decades as a history teacher, and later became a headteacher. If you were taught by him, you will know he could take a dusty date and lift it into the room, lay it on the table between you, and ask, kindly, what you made of it. He believed in questions. He believed in listening to an answer all the way to the end. And he believed in fairness—fairness as a discipline, not a mood. Pupils who misbehaved tended to come back and thank him, years later, for holding a line he held on their behalf. Colleagues remember him as principled and fair-minded, with a knack for making everyone feel seen, including the newest member of staff standing anxiously at the photocopier with a pile of worksheets

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just about to jam. He took joy in mentoring young staff. He never tried to produce replicas of himself. He wanted to help people become better versions of themselves.

When he retired to York, he did not retreat. He retrained himself into a new sort of service, volunteering at the museum. Local heritage made him light up—the stories under our feet, the articles we handle every day without noticing, the inscriptions you might otherwise walk past. He loved to watch a visitor’s face change from indifference to intrigue in the space of a single question. In those rooms, among the artefacts and the footfall, he found another classroom.

Some of my strongest memories of him are outdoors. My favourite is standing with him on Hadrian’s Wall at sunrise. The sky was that pale, hard-edged blue you only get after a cold night, and our breath made small clouds as we walked. He looked out toward the line of the Wall and, with a grin that was half schoolboy and half scholar, began to recite Roman history. Not in a dry cascade of facts, but like a story told to an old friend. He placed us in that story—two figures on a frontier—then fell silent and let the wind do the speaking for a minute. I remember thinking then that this is what a life looks like when work and love meet: a teacher with no classroom and yet teaching, a father with no need to impress and yet making a morning unforgettable.

If you knew him socially, you will remember a different register—the booming laugh at bad puns, often his own. He could tell a joke with a straight face and then break before you did. If you have ever been on the receiving end of his “now that’s truly dreadful” after a particularly egregious pun, you will know he was secretly pleased.

Malk had passions he carried cheerfully and unashamedly. He was a committed rugby union man and a loyal supporter of the Falcons. He had a tidy purist’s love for the set piece and a romantic’s admiration for a winger who had no business breaking the line but did so anyway. He collected books—not as trophies to fill shelves, but as companions he argued with. He left meticulous notes in the margins. Their neatness was a kind of courtesy to his future self: date in the

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corner, question marks where something smelled wrong, a small “hmm” for propositions that needed time to settle.

He worked an allotment with the same seriousness he brought to a staff meeting. There was pleasure in the soil under his nails and in the proper spacing of rows. You could rely on his courgettes to arrive on your doorstep in late summer without comment, as if they had walked there themselves. And then there was singing—choral singing in particular. He never pretended to be a soloist, but he loved to stand in a line and lend his voice to something larger. There was a certain tilt of his head when a harmony clicked into place, and he would hold his music just a fraction higher than his neighbours, as if offering the note to the room rather than keeping it for himself.

All of this was anchored by family. He was husband to Patricia for 49 years—nearly half a century of partnership that wore its devotion lightly. If you ask my mother, she will say they learned, early on, the power of small rituals done consistently: a shared pot of tea after long days, the evening walk even when it rained, the car packed for a weekend away to somewhere that wasn’t exotic but was theirs. He was father to me and to my sister, Lucy, who bears his calm and his patience in ways I recognise more with every year. And he was a delighted grandfather to Theo, Isla, and Freddie. He stood in playgrounds with the authority of a former headteacher and then promptly abandoned it to push a swing harder, to kneel in gravel and build a castle that immediately fell down, to pretend to lose at a board game and then take mock offence when caught.

He had faults, of course, as all good men do. He expected punctuality, and he didn’t hide his dismay when it failed to appear. He could be particular about the placement of a comma. He kept to-do lists with an almost theological seriousness. But even these were expressions of care, of the belief that time matters and that words should earn their keep.

He was scholarly yet warm, principled but never pedantic, witty without malice. He possessed the rare talent of making people feel seen. The caretaker who had had a hard night, the parent who was mortified by a call from the school, the

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newly qualified teacher bracing for their first Year 9 on a windy Friday afternoon—he found the human being in front of him and addressed them as such. That, more than any policy or plan, is why he was a good headteacher.

What will we miss most? We will miss his wise counsel—the way he could unpick a knot with two questions and a raised eyebrow. We will miss that booming laugh, especially when a pun was so bad it became, by his logic, excellent. We will miss those meticulous margin notes—those small conversations with himself that any of us could open and enter. We will miss the sound of his voice singing a bass line that kept the rest of us honest. We will miss the sight of him, coat done up against the weather, striding ahead and then pausing so we could catch up, but never calling it that.

He believed education was a lifelong gift. He believed in fairness and punctuality, not as scolds but as ways of showing respect to others. He believed service to community is not a grand gesture but the steady practice of turning up. He lived those values in the classroom, in the office, at the museum desk, on the touchline, and at the allotment gate.

I have found myself, in the days since he died, returning to that morning on Hadrian’s Wall. Beyond the landscape and the history, I think what I was learning then—and what I hope I have learned now—is that we honour the past not by embalming it, but by carrying its best demands into the present. He did that. He asked, of himself and of us, to be curious, to be fair, to be on time, to be of use. It is a simple list. It is not easy.

He made one or two requests of us for today. He asked for his favourite hymn, Abide with Me. If you knew him well, you will not be surprised. It is a hymn that walks with both hope and honesty. And in place of flowers, he asked that donations be made to a literacy charity. He taught history, but he understood that reading is the key that opens every subject’s door. It seems exactly right that, even now, he would wish to place a book in someone’s hands and, with that warm directness, invite them to begin.

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To my mother, Patricia—thank you for the texture of the life you built with him. It gave him ballast and joy. To Lucy—I know you will hear his voice in your own when you reassure a child or when you set your watch five minutes fast and smile at yourself. To Theo, to Isla, to Freddie—he loved you in a way that had no edges, only room. He has left you shelves of stories, and some of them are written in the margins.

As for me, I will keep going back to the places he loved. I will watch the Falcons play and, at an unpromising scrum, hear him mutter something about body position and intent. I will plant something and pretend I know as much as he did about soil. I will open a book and find his habit tugging at my hand to take a pencil to the page. And when the sun lifts over a line of stone somewhere in the North, I will listen for the quiet hum of facts becoming meaning, and I will be grateful.

Malk, Dad, thank you. For the work you did that few saw. For the example you set when no one was asking you to. For the kindness you extended when it slowed you down. For the courage to hold a fair line. For the laugh that made bad jokes good. For the notes in the margins that will keep instructing us, gently, for years.

We let you go with love.

We carry you with love.

And we promise to do the small things well—on time, fairly, and in service of others—so that your legacy is not merely remembered but lived.

Rest well, Dad. We will take it from here.

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