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Hello everyone,

I’m Zoe, CJ’s daughter — one of the lucky two who got to call him Dad.

Thank you for coming today in bright colours to celebrate a bright life.
It feels right that we’re gathered with music and laughter in the air — he was born on 5 May 1965 in Manchester, grew up between there and Salford, and left us on 28 November 2025, aged 60 — but he never did anything in greyscale.
He lived like a brass section.

If you knew him as Colin James Whitaker, you likely met him with a handshake.
If you knew him as CJ, you left with a bear hug and a full plate.

He started at the sink as a kitchen porter, learned by watching and asking too many questions, and worked his way to head chef — sleeves rolled, tea towel slung over the shoulder, grin on.
Then he opened his own neighbourhood bistro, the place where birthdays, first dates and Tuesday nights all got treated with the same care.
He mentored apprentices who came in nervous and left calling him “honorary dad.”
He ran charity suppers because he believed food should travel further than the bill — that a good meal could open a door.

At home, his gospel was simple: everyone deserves a seat at the table.
Generosity. Second chances. Food as love.
He was big-hearted, exuberant, creative, inclusive, endlessly encouraging — the kind of person who remembered your favourite song and your favourite pudding.

My favourite memory?

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Motown on the record player, pancakes in the air, and Dad in his socks attempting a spin while flipping a perfect circle.
On Sunday mornings the kitchen smelled of batter and oranges and sounded like Aretha.
He'd plate pancakes like a shy tower, kiss the top with his homemade marmalade, and say, "That's your five-a-day — joy counts."
Later, he'd head to five-a-side, then to the allotment to sweet-talk tomatoes, and on the way home he'd swap recipes over the fence like contraband.

He loved seasonal, local produce.
He loved Linda — his partner and co-conspirator — with quiet steadiness and loud laughter.
He loved us — me and Hannah — and he loved his big, sprawling extended family and that unofficial family of apprentices and neighbours who popped round "just to borrow sugar" and stayed for brunch.

What will we miss?
Those legendary Sunday brunches that turned strangers into old friends.
The bear hugs that reset the week.
The way he made room at the table without making a fuss of it.

Today we'll play a playlist of his favourite tracks — please sing badly and proudly.
And when we raise a glass, we'll do it with a spoonful of his marmalade — sweet, sharp, completely CJ.

If you're moved to honour him, he'd be chuffed with donations to Shelter UK.
He believed home begins with a welcome, and he practised that belief every day.

Dad, thank you for teaching us that ordinary days can be a celebration.
We'll keep the music on.
We'll keep the table long.
And we'll keep your seat warm.

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