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Thank you all for being here today to say goodbye to Oliver James Bennett — our Oli.

We met in sixth form and, almost before I knew it, he'd become the first person I called with good news or bad.
That never really changed.
He had this calm, steady way of answering the phone that made everything feel a bit more manageable.
Even if he couldn't fix the problem — and usually he could — he'd help me make a plan.

Oli was born on 3 March 1987, and we lost him far too soon, on 14 February 2026, aged 38.
Those numbers land hard.
But they frame a life that was full of purpose, warmth and a quiet kind of courage.

He grew up in Brighton, with the sea breeze and the South Downs setting the rhythm for his days.
He took that sense of space with him to the University of Bristol, where he studied civil engineering not because it sounded impressive, but because it was useful.
He wanted to build things that made everyday life easier and safer.
Later in London he did exactly that — community infrastructure projects, safe cycling routes, accessible public spaces.
He mentored young engineers, too, because he believed skills were to be shared, not hoarded.
He liked it when people felt included around a drawing board.

At the heart of his life is his family.

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Emma, his fiancée — the way he said your name had a softness I never heard anywhere else.
He was so proud of the life you were building together, so full of plans and the small rituals that make a home.
To Simon and Ruth, he remained the considerate son who never forgot to put the kettle on, who'd fix a door before you noticed it stuck.
To Hannah, his younger sister, he was part co-conspirator, part protector, and always a safe place to land.

If you asked people what defined Oli, you'd hear the same notes over and over.
Steady.
Generous.
Quietly funny — the kind of humour that slips out like a well-placed bolt rather than a firework.
And reliable in the old-fashioned sense: first to show up, last to leave, still there when you checked again in the morning.

My favourite memory is a wild, rainy weekend on Helvellyn.
The weather had turned on us; everything was soaked, tempers short.
Oli, perfectly unbothered, set up a tiny stove in the lee of a rock and brewed tea strong enough to stand a spoon in.
He handed round steaming mugs, water dripping off his fringe, and said in that even voice of his, "We'll go on when we can see ten metres. No heroics. Have a biscuit."
It was leadership without the badge — kindness wrapped in competence.
By the time the cloud lifted, we were laughing again.
He carried that same patience into his work and his friendships: never dramatic, always useful.

He had a shed the size of a wardrobe and a belief it could fix the world.
Bikes went in wonky and came out straight.
Shelves, lamps, the hinge on a neighbour's gate — if something was broken, he was already turning it over in his hands, figuring it out.
On Sundays he'd play five-a-side with the same cheerful grit he brought to

everything else: running, passing, never one to shout.
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In the evenings he might cycle the Downs when he was home in Brighton, or head to a tiny venue for an indie gig, crowd half-listening, Oli completely present.
And no day truly began until the builder’s tea had been made to spec.

His values showed up in the small choices.
Kindness over cleverness.
Community before convenience.
Doing the right thing when no one was watching.
If there was an easier route and a better one, he chose better.
Not to make a point — it was simply who he was.

People will miss different things.
Emma will miss the daily shape of him — shared lists, quiet jokes, the way he reached for your hand without thinking.
Simon and Ruth, that gentle voice at the door saying, “Put the kettle on?”
Hannah, the brother who’d text at midnight, “Still up? Want to talk?”
Friends and colleagues, the practical help — an allen key appearing from nowhere, a spreadsheet made tidy, a walk around the block that ended with a solution you didn’t know you had.
I’ll miss phoning him in a flap and hearing, “Alright. Let’s break it down.”

There’s comfort, too, in what carries on.
Walk through the streets he worked on and you’ll see parts of Oli: a safer corner, a wider kerb, a cycle lane that means a parent can ride with their child without fear.
He liked those everyday victories best — the sort that never made headlines but changed someone’s morning.
That’s a legacy you can point to.

He asked that, instead of flowers, we consider donations to a cycling safety charity.
It’s exactly the sort of choice he’d make — practical, forward-looking, aimed at

keeping someone else safe on their way home.
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If you want to honour him, that’s one way.
Another is gentler: ring the person who needs ringing.
Boil the kettle.
Make a plan that brings people along.

In a moment we’ll step back into February air and the sound of our own lives.
They’ll feel different.
Grief does that: it redraws the map and steals the shortcuts.
But Oli taught us how to navigate.
Slow down when you can’t see far.
Wait for ten metres.
Share the biscuits.

He loved “Here Comes the Sun”.
Not a grand anthem — just a promise held in a simple tune.
I like to think of him there, somewhere beyond our sightline, grinning that small grin as the clouds thin.
Not gone from us so much as woven in: in the calm voice on a late-night call we try to imitate, in the shed we finally tidy, in the way we choose the better route over the easy one.

Oli, we are heartbroken to stand here without you.
But we are so grateful to have stood here at all.
You showed us how to be useful, how to be kind, how to keep going without fuss.

We’ll carry your plans forward.
We’ll look after Emma, and we’ll look after one another.
And when the weather turns, we’ll put the stove on and make the tea the way you taught us.

Thank you, mate, for every steady step.
Here comes the sun.

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