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Friends, family, and all who loved Michael Andrew Bennett—our Mike—thank you for being here today.

We gather in sorrow, yes, but also in gratitude. Gratitude for a life lived with principle and warmth, for a man whose words built bridges, whose counsel steadied many, and whose laughter—often with that mischievous twinkle in his eye—could turn an ordinary moment into a cherished memory.

Mike was born on 7 November 1966 and left us on 21 August 2025, at the age of 58. Fifty-eight feels far too soon. And yet when I look at the span of his life, I see a fullness that time alone can't measure. Raised in Leeds, he made his way to Durham to study law, and then to London, where he forged a respected career as a commercial solicitor. He was known for his integrity—never a fashionable kind of virtue, but a steel-true kind. Colleagues remember his clarity of thought, his fairness in negotiation, and the way he mentored trainees with patience and faith that they would become their best selves. He believed, with all his heart, in access to justice—not as a slogan, but as a daily duty.

When the time came, he chose to retire early to the Kent coast. He could have rested. Instead, he gave more of himself. He devoted his time to local charities, quietly and consistently, because service to others was not an occasional gesture for Mike; it was the rhythm of his life.

Mike was a son, a brother, a husband, a father, and a grandad. He was the devoted son of Margaret and the protective, ever-amused brother of James. He was my husband—my partner for twenty-five years—and he was the loving father of Oliver and Grace, and a cherished grandad to little Isla, whose face would light up whenever he entered a room. In our home, he created a harbour: safe, steady, full of laughter. He sent his punctual good-morning texts—those three little words, “Morning, my loves,” arriving with the reliability of

sunrise—and he presided over Sunday roasts with ceremony, carving as though it were a sacred rite. The knives were sharpened, the jokes well-practised, and the gravy had to be “just so.” It was ordinary, perhaps, but in the best sense of that word—the kind of ordinary that holds a family together.

To speak of what defined Mike is to speak of character. He was principled, articulate, thoughtful. He prized fairness, loyalty, and public service. He believed that words should be used to build, not break. He never confused wit with unkindness; he could be dry and funny, but never cruel. Even in disagreement, he left people with their dignity intact. And there was that twinkle—just when conversation got too stiff, there it was, a spark that reminded you he saw the human side of everything.

In our marriage, we found joy in simple things: weekend rambles with a rucksack and a flask of tea, plotting routes as though we were crossing the Alps when in truth we were only navigating Kentish bridleways. Cricket at Lord’s—he loved the hush before a bowler’s run-up, the companionship in the stands, and the slow ceremony of the game itself. Classical music on quiet evenings—Bach when he needed order, Elgar when he needed uplift. He tended his roses like old friends; he would stoop with such care, almost as if consulting them. And then there were the cryptic crosswords—his idea of bliss and battle in one, pencil in hand, that slight smile when a clue finally yielded.

Of all our shared memories, the one that returns most vividly today is our vow renewal on our twentieth anniversary. A tiny chapel on a cliff-top as the sun sank into the Channel. The air was salt and gold. We spoke familiar words, but they felt new again. We promised—again—to choose one another, every day, with respect, with laughter, with courage. It was not grand. It was perfect. If you ask me where love lives, I will always think of that little chapel and the quiet joy on Mike’s face as the light faded.

He was brave in ways that didn’t require a stage. In professional storms, he was steady. In family challenges, he was quietly courageous. In the times when life asked more than seemed reasonable to give, he gave it anyway. I am grateful

beyond measure for his steadfast love, for the security he created for our family, and for the courage he showed when the path turned steep. He taught me that courage is sometimes simply turning up—again and again—with a good heart.

For Oliver and Grace: your father believed in you, fiercely and gently in equal measure. He delighted in your successes and met your stumbles with patience. He wanted you to know that doing the right thing matters even when no one is watching, that loyalty is a form of love, and that you should never use your sharpest words for the people you love most. For Isla: your grandad adored you. He would have read you stories with the voices, carved extra crispy bits just for you, and sent those good-morning texts for years to come. In the stories we tell you, you will know him.

To Margaret and James: he carried Leeds in his bones—the humour, the straight talking, the sense that a promise is a promise. He admired you both. To the colleagues and trainees who are here: he was proud of you. He believed that the law is at its best when it protects the vulnerable and restrains the powerful. He hoped you would keep those scales balanced, long after he stopped weighing them himself.

What will we miss most? His wise counsel—the kind that never told you who to be, but asked the questions that helped you see it for yourself. His morning messages. His Sunday roasts. The reassurance of his presence. The way the house felt when he was in it—lighter, safer.

And yet, let us not measure his life only by what we have lost, but by what remains. We keep his values when we choose fairness over convenience. We keep his humour when we answer tension with kindness. We keep his example when we use our words to mend, not to wound. We keep his legacy when we look for ways to serve—quietly, locally, faithfully—like he did on the Kent coast and throughout his working life.

I have been asked, more than once in these last days, how to go on. I don't have an easy answer. But I know what Mike would say. He would tell us to look after

one another. He would tell us to show up, on time if possible, with sleeves rolled and hearts open. He would tell us to take a good walk, breathe the sea air, put on some Bach, phone your mum, write the message, say the apology, make the tea. He would tell us that love is not what we say at the cliff-top chapel; it is what we do when no one is looking, over and over again.

He would also, I think, remind us to celebrate—because his life was a good one. He loved and was loved. He worked with integrity and left people better than he found them. He saw beauty in roses and rightness in rules fairly applied. He fought for access to justice and modelled how to mentor without condescension. He laughed with his family and carved the roast with ceremony. He renewed his vows at sunset and meant every word.

So we will celebrate him. We will celebrate the boy from Leeds who became the young man at Durham, the principled solicitor in London, the volunteer by the sea in Kent, the husband to Sarah, the father to Oliver and Grace, the grandad to Isla, the son of Margaret, the brother to James—our Mike.

And when the ache sharpens, as it surely will, we will remember that mischievous twinkle; we will hear the cadence of his voice; we will feel the steadiness of his hand at our backs. We will carry him forward—in our choices, in our service, in our gatherings around the table on Sundays, when the carving knife glints and someone says a line he might have said, and laughter ripples in the room he loved.

Mike, my love, thank you—for twenty-five years of partnership, for respect, for laughter, for shared adventures and quiet days. Thank you for the security you created, for the courage you showed, for the love you gave so freely and so faithfully. The sun went down over the Channel that evening of our vows, and we walked back from the chapel with the light behind us. Today, I imagine you walking into another kind of light, one we cannot follow to the end just yet.

We will meet you there, in good time. Until then, we will honour you the way you taught us: by being fair, loyal, and kind; by using words to build; by looking after

each other; by living with purpose and a gentle humour

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Rest well, Michael. Thank you for everything. We will miss you every day. And we will carry you, always.

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