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Good morning everyone, and thank you for being here to honour my dad, Peter James O'Connell — our Pete.

Dad was born in Geelong on 22 August 1958, and we said goodbye to him on 5 March this year, at 66.

It still feels impossible to say those words out loud.

But looking around and seeing so many faces he loved — family, mates, apprentices he mentored, fellow lifesavers — I can almost hear him say, “Righto Em, chin up. Let’s get on with it.”

Dad grew up in Geelong, learnt his trade the old-fashioned way — apprenticed as an electrician — and he never stopped learning.

He started O'Connell Electrical with a second-hand ladder, a stubborn streak, and Mum at his side keeping the books and the peace.

In 1983 he married Helen, my mum, and not long after they moved to Torquay to raise us.

He loved that we measured the seasons by the surf, the shed projects, and the smell of tomatoes on the vine.

He was many things — husband to Mum for 42 years, Dad to me and my brother Liam, Pa to Ruby and Jack, brother to Michael and Siobhan.

But if you asked him, he'd probably say he was an electrician who liked things done properly, a bloke who turned up when it counted, and a very proud volunteer with Surf Life Saving.

He wore those red and yellow patrol colours with quiet pride, because keeping people safe mattered to him.

He also backed the SES whenever he could — the orange overalls and the people in them had his full respect.

If you knew Pete, you knew he was dependable.

The ute started because he'd serviced it the day before.

The lights worked because he'd wired them right.

And when something broke — at home, at the club, at your place — he'd be there with his toolkit before you finished the sentence.

He had a cheeky sense of humour that never tipped into unkind.

He could defuse a tense moment with a raised eyebrow and a one-liner.

And he was generous with his time in a way that made you feel less like a favour and more like a standing arrangement: that's what we do for each other.

He mentored apprentices like they were family.

He taught them the trick of tracing a fault by listening, not just looking.

He taught them to leave a site cleaner than they found it.

And he taught them to ring their mums.

Some of my happiest memories with Dad start in the dark, in the old ute rumbling towards the beach.

Windows cracked a fraction, the heater stubbornly warm, the sky just beginning to bruise towards morning.

We'd park, walk the sand in our thongs, and stand side by side watching the sun climb up over the water.

He didn't say much.

We didn't need to.

Then later, after Sunday patrol, we'd grab hot chips, too much salt, fingers sandy, and he'd grin when the seagulls got bossy.

It was ordinary and perfect, and it taught me that showing up — early, often, together — is love in its most useful form.

Dad had a way of stitching joy into the everyday.

He was a mad Cats fan — thank you to those wearing a touch of blue today, he would've loved that.

He'd listen to the footy on the radio while slow-smoking brisket out the back, lifting the lid for a whiff like it was a religious ritual.

He grew tomatoes so sweet he'd eat them standing up over the sink with a little salt.

He tinkered in the shed forever — fixing things that didn't know they were broken, turning offcuts into useful bits, and turning useful bits into something even better.

When the surf was kind, he'd go fishing at first light, and come home with sun on his face and a story about the one that actually did get away.

If you were lucky, you got one of his reassuring phone calls.

They always started with a practical question — “How's the car running?” — and ended with you feeling steadier, because his voice had that effect.

People will miss those calls.

They'll miss his laugh that filled a room, that rolling, infectious sound that made everyone look up.

They'll miss the way he could fix anything — appliances, fences, a dodgy mood — with the same thoughtful patience.

Dad's values weren't complicated.

Work hard.

Be fair.

Back your mates.

Turn up when it counts.

He didn't put them on a poster; he practiced them, day after day.

He didn't talk about integrity; he wired it in behind the walls, where it matters most.

To Mum — you and Dad built a life that was sturdy and warm.

You were his home, and he was yours.

To Liam — you carry his steadiness and his eye for doing a job right.

To Ruby and Jack — your Pa adored you.

He taught Ruby to check the rips and Jack to hold the torch steady.

He was so proud of you both.

To Michael and Siobhan — his love for you was threaded through every story he told about growing up in Geelong, every gentle ribbing, every shared memory.

Grief has a way of making everything feel broken.

Dad would have looked at that and said, "Let's start with what still works."

And plenty still does.

The lessons he left us.

The way we treat each other.

The small, good routines — a cuppa after a long day, checking in on a neighbour, showing up early.

The sea at first light, doing what it's always done.

If you want to honour Pete, do it in ways he would recognise.

Teach someone how to use a multimeter.

Give a weekend to your club.

Call your sister back.

Set a chair in the garage and talk rubbish while you sand a piece of timber.

Wear your blue scarf and barrack loud when the Cats run on.

And when someone needs you, don't write it down — just turn up.

Dad, you were my steady anchor.

You taught me that calm is an action, not a mood.

You showed me how to find the fault and how to make it safe.

I will miss your voice in my ear, the warm weight of your hand on my shoulder, and the way everything felt more possible when you were near.

Thank you for the life you built, the people you loved, and the shore you helped keep safe.

Thank you for the sunrises and the hot chips and the long, ordinary days that turned out to be the treasures.

We'll carry you with us — in the shed, on the sand, in the stands at Kardinia Park, in the way we turn up for each other.

Rest easy, Dad.

We've got it from here.

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