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Family and friends, thank you for gathering with us here, under this open sky, to honour and farewell my father, Robert John McKellar—Bob to most of you.

We stand at the place where words must do careful work.

They cannot bring him back.

But they can point to the life he made, and to the traces of that life that endure in each of us.

Dad was born on 9 February 1950 in Fremantle.

He died on 2 April 2026, aged seventy-six.

Between those two dates is a story of service, steadiness and curiosity, told in the plain, unshowy way he preferred.

At eighteen, he joined the Royal Australian Navy and served aboard HMAS Melbourne.

Those years shaped him.

If you ever watched him coil a rope without thinking, or square a corner of any room he entered, you saw the Navy still living in him.

Discipline, yes—but also the particular kind of mateship that comes from bad weather, confined spaces and shared responsibility.

He never dramatised his service; he simply regarded it as a privilege to have contributed to something larger than himself.

On discharge, he went back to study and found his second calling: history.

He became a high school history teacher in Perth and spent thirty years in classrooms, staffrooms and corridors, where he was a patient explainer and a firm believer in the power of a good question.

There are past students here today who will remember his fairness—the way he could correct you without making you small, and the way he could praise you without making you complacent.

He taught content, of course—dates and causes and consequences—but more than that, he taught attention:

to the evidence on the page,

to the person in front of you,

to the facts that didn't fit your first idea.

He believed that how you learn shapes who you become.

In 1976 he married Mum—Margaret—and together they built the kind of ordinary, daily goodness that is anything but ordinary to live.

They gave my brother Daniel and me a home that was secure and expectant: we were expected to try, to apologise properly, to help clear up.

When Mum died, Dad wore his grief with restraint and honour.

He kept her present in small, exact ways: the recipe card still in her handwriting, the garden bed she loved, the story of a shared joke told at the right time and then let rest.

He was a widower, but the word never captured the warmth with which he carried her.

To his grandchildren, Ella and Noah, he was Pop: a safe lap, a ready listener, a teller of stories with twinkling eyes that gave away the punchline a heartbeat before it arrived.

To many nieces and nephews, he was the uncle who remembered your subject choices, your first job, your team's ladder position, and asked about them the next time you met.

Some of my clearest memories with Dad sit under southern stars.

On camping trips down the south coast, he taught me to find the Southern Cross and to read its long axis toward south.

He showed me how to feel for a change in the wind in your skin before you could see it in the trees.

When the sky turned that particular pewter and the air went still, he'd say, "Let's bring the lines in now, while it's our choice."

We never packed in a panic.

We learned to read what was coming and to move early, together.

I hear a lot of Dad's life in that lesson.

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He loved the water.

On the Swan River he was never reckless and never bored.

Sailing with him meant quiet competence:

a rig checked twice,

a reef tied properly,

and a running commentary on the river's history that made the landmarks feel inhabited.

He was happiest when wind and tide and company came into rhythm.

At home, his hands were rarely idle.

He was a meticulous woodworker—dovetail joints that sat flush, shavings that curled like ribbon, oils applied with patient strokes until the grain answered back.

If a piece left his shed, it was finished, and if it wasn't finished, it didn't leave.

He didn't boast about it; he'd simply blow the sawdust from a groove and nod if it pleased him.

And then there were his cryptic crosswords.

A pencil sharpened, a corner of the paper folded back, that furrow settling between his brows.

He liked a clue that played fair and a setter who respected the reader.

It appealed to his sense that life rewards attention and that precision is a kindness.

Service was not theory to Dad; it was a habit.

After the Navy, he volunteered with the RSL and organised ANZAC Day commemorations with the same care he gave to a lesson plan or a mortice joint.

He believed that remembrance is meaningful only when it honours the people inside the stories.

He attended dawn services as a matter of course, not spectacle.

If you stood beside him at first light, you might have noticed the small tightening of his jaw at the Last Post—and the way, afterwards, he would turn to

check on the youngest in the crowd.  
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Are they warm enough?

Do they understand why they're here?

That was Dad—service braided with responsibility, always bending toward those who looked up to him.

If I had to name the values that held him steady, I would start with honesty.

Say what is true, even if it takes longer, even if it costs something.

Respect: for time, for people's efforts, for the work of those you never see.

Curiosity: a willingness to learn something new and to change your mind when the facts require it.

And lifelong learning: he had library cards the way others have loyalty cards.

Even in retirement, there were notes in the margins, questions on the back of receipts, a list of "things to ask" folded into his wallet.

He was principled and disciplined and fair.

But those traits never made him severe.

They made him reliable.

You could count on him to show up, on time, prepared, present.

He was a warm storyteller—and his eyes did that unmistakable thing when a memory he loved came knocking.

He had a teacher's patience and a sailor's caution and a grandfather's mischief.

And he had the small habits that stitch themselves into the fabric of a family.

We will miss his steady presence at the edge of noisy rooms.

We will miss the handwritten notes he would leave on the kitchen bench—just a line or two, in that neat hand:

Proud of how you handled yourself today.

Keep going.

We will miss the quiet whistle he did while the kettle boiled—three or four repeated bars of nothing in particular—that somehow made the house feel fully itself.

For me, he was more than my father.

He was my moral compass.

Not because he lectured, but because he lived in alignment with his words.

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In moments when I have been unsure, I have often asked myself,

What would Dad consider fair here?

What would he do if nobody was watching?

The answers have guided me more than any speech ever could.

There is a great deal to be grateful for in the life we mark today.

Bob was a husband who loved well, a father who stood steady, a Pop who delighted, a teacher who formed minds, a volunteer who kept faith with those who served, a friend who showed up.

He leaves behind work that endures:

a generation of students who learnt to think more clearly,

pieces of timber that will outlast us,

traditions that will be kept because he kept them,

and a family that knows what a good man looks like without anyone having to say it.

Grief will do its work with us.

It already has.

But even here, at the graveside, we can recognise the gifts we carry forward.

The way he checked the wind.

The way he gathered early.

The way he wrote a note when a note was needed.

The way he made the kettle's whistle an invitation to sit down together and talk things through.

In a few moments, our service will conclude with the Naval Hymn and an RSL tribute—tributes he honoured in life and which now honour him in turn.

Afterwards, at the wake, our family would be glad to hear your memories of Dad—your stories, your small moments, the notes he wrote you, the advice he gave that arrived at just the right time.

If you wish to share something in writing later, you're welcome to send it to [cto@kuchventures.com](mailto:cto@kuchventures.com), and we will gather those words for Ella and Noah to read when they are older.

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Dad, on clear nights we will look for the Southern Cross and remember how you taught us to find our bearings.

On blustery afternoons we will take in the air and think of your quiet counsel to prepare while it is still our choice.

In the stillness between the Last Post and the Reveille, we will remember your service, and in the rattle of cups and the low whistle by the stove, we will remember your kindness.

Thank you for the life you lived, Bob.

Thank you for the standards you set and the gentleness with which you held us to them.

We will try to be worthy of what we have received.

Fair winds and following seas.

Rest well.

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