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Friends, family, and all who loved Jonathan Pierce Bennett—our JP—thank you for being here.

We came together today for a Celebration of Life, and that’s fitting, because if there was ever someone who taught us how to celebrate, it was JP.

He was born on January 14, 1982, and 42 years later he left us with a thousand stories, a thousand seedlings, and a thousand reasons to keep going. He grew up in Seattle with that ocean-in-his-lungs energy—part rain, part laughter. He went off to study environmental science, and from there he didn’t just learn the world, he went and served it. He traveled widely for conservation work, sleeping under skies most of us only ever see as a screensaver, and he came back home to lead a local nonprofit that made streets greener, coastlines cleaner, and neighbors into friends.

JP was my best friend since university—adventure partners and confidants. We were the sort of friends who could speak in shorthand and silence. We were also loud—frequently, joyfully loud—especially when he was rallying volunteers with a smile that somehow meant “we’ve got this” and “you matter” at the exact same time.

If you want the one story that holds all the others, I’ll give you this: we were backpacking the Olympic Peninsula when the sky opened up and decided to move in with us. We were soaked to the bone, boots squishing, fingers pruned, and those noodles—God help us—were colder than the river. And JP—of course—turned dinner into a comedy show. He narrated each noodle like it was a wild salmon returning home, gave my soggy socks a motivational speech, and somehow, in the middle of that rainstorm, he made a tent feel like a theater. I laughed so hard I forgot I was miserable. That was JP’s magic: he could take the worst weather and turn it into a gathering around a fire, whether or not a fire

was possible.

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He loved the kind of life that starts at sunrise. Trail running on ridgelines. A camera around his neck, catching ordinary light doing extraordinary things. Guitar around campfires, the soft riff that keeps your heart steady while the wind picks up. He brewed coffees that tasted like science experiments and sunrises—he'd grin, hand you a mug, and say, "Trust me." And you did. Because trusting JP felt like trusting a good trail: you knew it would take you somewhere worth going.

He found his spirituality not in sermons, but in service and gratitude and the hush right before the sun tips the horizon. He believed in leaving places better than he found them. Forest trails. Beaches. Meeting rooms. Conversations. He left them cleaner, kinder, clearer. That was his liturgy.

He was a connector of people—the kind who remembered names, birthdays, and the detail you swore you hadn't told anyone. He pulled people into the circle. He had a bear-hug greeting that made you feel like a long-lost relative, and a knack for spontaneous road trips that somehow never felt reckless—just right on time. He had magnetic enthusiasm that made even the most skeptical among us sign up for a Saturday cleanup at 7 a.m., and come back the next week with friends in tow.

Professionally, JP was an environmental advocate in the truest sense. He didn't just advocate; he activated. He led urban tree-planting initiatives that turned heat islands into shade, strangers into neighbors, kids into stewards of their own streets. He orchestrated coastal cleanups that left the water breathing easier, and he stepped behind microphones to talk about sustainability with such warmth that people stopped hearing a lecture and started imagining a future they wanted to live in. If you've ever walked down a block that feels cooler, kinder, and more alive, there's a good chance JP's fingerprint is on it—in the roots beneath your feet.

At home, he was partnered with Lucas—and Lucas, you were his harbor. The

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way you steadied him, the way he lit up when he saw you across a crowded room, that was love anyone could see. Emily, his cherished sister, the one who knew him before he knew himself—you were an anchor in his life. To his two nieces: he bragged about you like it was his job, and he taught you to look closely at the small miracles—new leaves, first footsteps, the moon when it's just a fingernail in the sky. And to this circle of lifelong friends—many of us here—he was our compass, our rallying call, our reason for one more mile, one more early morning, one more try.

Courage and curiosity lived comfortably in him. He asked questions that opened doors. He invited people in—especially people on the margins—to take the mic, to take the lead, to take the credit. He was inclusive not because it was trendy, but because he truly believed wisdom is a forest and every tree matters.

He liked to say, "Joy is a responsibility—share it." I've thought a lot about that these past days. Responsibility can sound heavy. But JP carried joy like a lantern—never to keep, always to pass along. If you ever watched him show a kid how to hold a shovel, or teach a volunteer the proper way to plant so roots take hold, you saw it. Joy was not an accident of his personality; it was his discipline. When the meeting bogged down, he cracked a joke—never mean, always light, the kind that lifted the room just enough for the next good idea to get through. When we were tired, he brought snacks. When we were discouraged, he brought a plan. When we felt alone, he brought the crowd.

To the nonprofit team he led: he believed in you so fiercely. He believed that cities can heal when we plant things, that neighbors can change policy when they fall in love with the land beneath their feet, that stewardship is contagious if you put it in people's hands. His legacy in this city is visible, rooted, casting shadows that cool our summers and hold our soil in winter. His legacy in us is quieter, but deeper. We are braver because he was brave. We are kinder because he insisted kindness was practical. We are more curious because he kept asking, "What if?"

To Lucas, to Emily, to the nieces he adored, and to all of us aching right now:

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grief is the price we pay for having loved someone extraordinary. But today, at this Celebration of Life, I can almost hear JP clearing his throat and raising an eyebrow—as if to say, “Okay, it’s raining, but did you see this sunrise?” He would want our tears, yes—he was never afraid of honest emotion—but he would also want our laughter, our stories, our slightly-too-strong coffee, and our plans for next weekend’s cleanup.

I will miss his bear-hug greetings that lifted me off the ground—still not sure if that was affection or a subtle strength test. I will miss the text that said “Drive?” followed by a pin dropped somewhere I’d never been. I will miss the way he turned strangers into teammates in under five minutes flat. I will miss the way he pointed his camera at ordinary moments and made them feel like holy ground.

And I will keep what he gave me. I will keep early mornings. I will keep saying thank you out loud. I will keep leaving a place better than I found it. I will keep sharing joy on purpose. I will keep calling people in. I will keep planting—ideas, trees, hope.

When I think back to that rainstorm on the Olympic Peninsula, I remember how the night finally eased and a thin light edged the ridge. We stepped out into a brand-new morning, steam rising from the ground, the forest shining like it had been polished. JP closed his eyes and took a breath, the kind of breath you feel in your chest for a long time. He didn’t say much—just, “Worth it.”

That was his thesis for life. Worth it.

Worth waking up early. Worth showing up again. Worth learning the names. Worth sharing the load. Worth laughing in the rain. Worth planting what you may never see fully grown.

So let’s honor him that way.

Let’s hug like he did—until the other person laughs and can’t breathe. Let’s say

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yes to the spontaneous road trip, yes to the Saturday you almost canceled, yes to the kid with a question, yes to the neighbor who needs a hand. Let’s brew the ambitious coffee, even if it fails, and toast the attempt. Let’s keep his nonprofit thriving, his mission expanding, his belief in community made tangible. Let’s keep planting.

For JP—for Jonathan Pierce Bennett, beloved partner to Lucas, cherished brother to Emily, proud uncle, devoted friend, bold advocate, generous teacher—let’s carry the lantern forward. Let’s share joy like it’s our responsibility. Because now, more than ever, it is.

Thank you, JP, for every sunrise, every laugh, every trail, every tree, every time you said, “We’ve got this.”

We’ve got it. And we’ll take it from here.

We love you. We miss you. And we will see you in every shade of green.

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