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Family, friends, neighbours, and all who found a home in Tommy’s orbit—thank you for being here today.

We have gathered for a memorial service, but also for a reckoning with a life that kept showing up for others, and kept making room for those who needed it most.

I’m here as Tommy’s twin sister.
We shared a birthday—November 5, 1988—and, in ways that feel impossible to explain, we shared a rhythm.
There were years when we could finish each other’s thoughts.
Years when we argued like mirrors.
And more evenings than I can count when the lights in Winnipeg had long gone blue with winter and we were still talking, planning, wondering what might be possible if we simply kept at it.

Tommy passed on April 3, 2026.
He was thirty-seven.
Saying the numbers feels too small for the person.
But details matter, because he cared about details—the mispronounced name he made sure to say correctly the next time, the careful text back after midnight to a kid who was worried about a parent’s shift or a math test, the groceries he carried for a newcomer family through a late snowfall because the bus was slow.

He was the beloved son of Lan and Minh, my twin, and big brother to our younger sibling, David.
He was partner to Avery Clarke, who matched his quiet steadiness with a fierce loyalty, who made space for his long hours and championed his belief that a community centre can be a second home.

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Tommy was born and raised in Winnipeg, and you could hear it in him: the soft vowels, the weather humour, the way he remembered which rink had the best hot dogs.
He studied social work at the University of Manitoba.
It wasn’t a straight line—he took detours like the rest of us—but he found his footing in service.
He became a community outreach worker focused on youth and newcomer families.
He brought patience to forms and waitlists and complicated systems.
He brought humility to rooms where it would have been easy to posture.
And he brought fairness as a kind of compass, nudging us all back to what was right, not just what was easy.

He had the gift everyone names today: he made people feel seen.
Not in a grand way, but in the way that counts—by remembering that a kid who “acts out” might actually be hungry, or tired, or scared; by asking the second question after the first answer came out too fast; by noticing who was left on the bench at pickup basketball and making sure they got the next pass.

Many of you met him at the community centre, where he helped build a free after-school basketball league and a homework club.
The league started with a dozen kids, some cracked balls, and a gym booked on a hope.
It ended up with waiting lists and hand-me-down jerseys that the kids wore like they were made to measure.
The homework club lived in the quiet corners after the last buzzer—someone puzzling over fractions, someone else writing a first paragraph, the gym still echoing with layups and laughter while Tommy corrected a verb or explained slope.

His leadership was gentle.
He didn’t need a megaphone; he used a whiteboard and a dry-erase marker that always seemed to be running out.
He set up water stations before anyone asked.

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He stacked chairs without being told.
And every now and then, when the room grew tense, he’d release a one-liner so dry that it took a second to land, and then the smiles came.
Quietly funny—that’s how we’ve always said it.
Never a performance.
Just that look, that timing, that small turn of phrase that made a hard moment a little easier to carry.

My favourite memory with him is simple.
Skating at The Forks on the kinds of evenings that make the air crystal and the night sound hollow.
We’d loop the paths with our faces burning and our eyelashes catching frost.
We’d grip hot chocolate like it was a hand warmer and a lifeline.
He would tell me what a kid at the centre had said that day that made him rethink a policy or a plan.
I would tell him what I was worried about next.
We’d make promises to do better by a family, to check in on someone’s grandmother, to remember to call Mom.
Lan and Minh, he adored you for the ordinary and the brave—the food you made when money was thin, the stories you told us about your own beginnings, the insistence that we look people in the eye.
He got his steadiness from you.
He got his stubborn fairness from you too.

Tommy loved pickup basketball, but he played like he learned on public courts: pass first, then pick your spot.
He strummed an acoustic guitar not to perform, but to fill a room while people were setting up tables or finishing their homework.
He curled on weekends with a group that made more jokes than takeouts, and he was fierce about prairie road trips—the long horizons, the pit stops for perogies, the way the sky could hold a whole mood and then change its mind.
He told the kind of stories that didn’t centre him.
He told the stories that traced other people’s grit, other people’s good days and better days ahead.

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He was resilient.

Not loud about it.

Just the kind of resilient that gets up early, packs the forms, and goes back to City Hall for the third time.

That sits on the bleachers while a teenager fumes and lets the storm blow through, then starts again with, “Okay, so what matters most right now?”

That keeps a spare pair of mitts in his bag for the kid who lost theirs, and a granola bar for the one who forgot to eat.

To David, our younger brother—your texts with Tommy were a running thread of basketball trades, guitar chords, and small victories.

He was proud of you, and not in the casual way people say it.

He said it with the receipts: the workshop he wanted you to teach, the link he sent you at 1:12 a.m., the way he bragged about your patience when I wasn’t around to hear it.

Avery, he loved the world you were building together—a world of bike rides along the river, shared calendars that somehow worked, and the mutual understanding that Friday nights were for leftovers and debriefs.

He trusted your judgment.

He leaned on your laugh.

He loved that you were unafraid to tell him when to rest.

People often ask what we will miss most.

I think it will be the quiet counsel—those few, well-chosen words that helped rename a problem and make it solvable.

It will be the way he bent down to tie a loose shoelace without making a show of it.

It will be the sound of his storytelling at the end of a long day, when he’d take the sharp edges off by remembering something good someone did.

For the kids he mentored, it will be his gentle leadership—the consistent eye contact, the “text me when you get home,” the steady expectations that held them to their best selves.

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Tommy believed in fairness.
He believed in service to others.
He believed that humility isn’t decoration; it’s a practice.
And he believed in showing up when it mattered most.
If we are looking for a way to honour him, that’s a pretty good blueprint.

We will also honour him in another way.
A scholarship for youth leaders is being established in Tom’s name through his community centre.
It will help the next generation of mentors—those who carry clipboards and dreams, who listen more than they speak, who build trust one ride home at a time.
It feels right that his name will open doors for someone else.
It feels like him.

Grief can pull time apart.
One moment we are skating at The Forks, and the next we are here, holding a space that no one else can fill.
But there is comfort, too, in counting what was real.
He was here for thirty-seven years, and in that span he made a habit of choosing people.
He did it with patience.
He did it with humour that needed no spotlight.
He did it with a backbone that wouldn’t bend when fairness was at stake.

I am his twin, which means part of me still expects a text to land, a joke to arrive with a raised eyebrow, a plan to unfold for the next weekend curling draw.
What steadies me is the knowledge that what he built was not fragile.
The league is still running.
The homework club still meets.
The volunteers he trained are still opening the gym doors.
The kids are still lacing up, still asking their big questions, still learning to pass first.

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So today, as we say goodbye, let’s also make a promise in the way he would have understood—a practical one.
Let’s be the person who shows up, not just the person who says they will.
Let’s learn the names and say them properly.
Let’s ask the second question, and wait for the real answer.
Let’s make the long drive if someone needs us to.
Let’s stack the chairs without being told.

Tommy, you taught us that leadership can be soft-spoken and still firm, that fairness can be kind, and that service can be joyful.
You taught us that laughter can arrive like a small rescue boat.
You taught us that the smallest, steady acts change the texture of a day, and sometimes a life.

On those frigid nights in Winnipeg, the ice at The Forks would groan under us and we would keep moving anyway, finding our line and holding it.
That’s what we will do now, with you stitched into the way we move.
We will keep the lane open for others.
We will pass first.
We will make room at the table and in the gym and in our calendars for the people who need us.

Thank you, Tommy, for every late-night talk, every carefully packed bag of snacks, every call answered, every story told with care.
Thank you for showing us how to belong to a place by serving it.

We love you.
We carry you.
We will keep showing up.

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