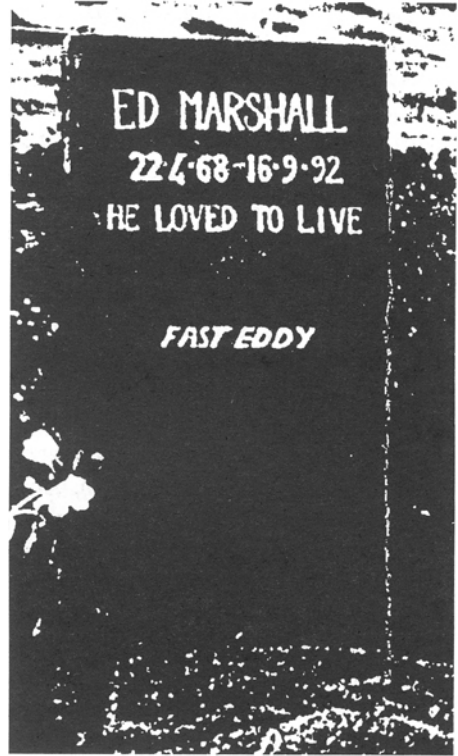


Fast Eddy's Funeral

*An interview with
Mary Maguire
by Beth Shaw*

Edward Marshall, a 24-year old furniture designer, was killed in a motorbike accident in September 1992. A few weeks later, I heard by chance about his funeral from Mary Maguire, a jewellery-maker, when I went to collect costumes and props which she was donating to my domestic theatre. This is what Mary told me.

It was very fortunate that the people with whom Ed was staying in Galloway were really open to all his friends as well as his family coming up for the funeral. By the time Andrew and I went up there, they were already relaxed about having Ed's body in the house, and they often went in to have a chat and a drink with him. We found people were making a big paper chain and everybody wrote things about Ed, or to Ed, on the paper chain. There were all sorts of little memories, like about his smile. Ed did have an absolutely fantastic smile. Someone wrote about an argument he had at college with a tutor about this table he'd designed which was a totally collapsible table, all that fixed it



together was a lorry clamp. The tutor threw it across the room at him and Ed had said, 'Don't get your hair up, you could dance a jig on this table'. The paper chains were all linked together and they were going to be used to line the sides of the graveyard. So we were all sitting round a table making these and then in the other half of the room there was a little shrine to Ed with pictures of Ed at different ages, things that he'd made, photograph albums, letters.

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During the evening different people went in to see Ed in his open coffin. There was a bottle of whiskey and some tobacco so that you could have a drink or a smoke with him. People brought things to put in the coffin with him, such as a bottle of Newcastle Brown and Andrew put in a 33rpm hillbilly record by Tennessee Ernie and a little model of a man on a bicycle he'd made. It was funny seeing him in the coffin and it was really a good experience because it made you realise that it wasn't Ed lying there, it was just the shell of a person. After the initial fear of going in, that fear wore away and you could accept it was just the shell of a person. And it also gave you a chance to say goodbye. I didn't know Ed well, Andrew knew him much better. I think it was good to see him because it brought Andrew's grief to the surface which he'd sort of had on hold up till then.

The next day was the funeral and they'd said already to the funeral directors that they wanted to carry the coffin themselves over fields. But then the funeral directors arrived early in the morning and said that coffins these days aren't actually made to be carried anymore. The brass handles are just a decorative hangover because mostly they're wheeled on trolleys, and that the bottom of the coffin is only chipboard or plywood stapled on. So there was a moment of macabre hilarity at the thought of carrying Ed across the fields and him falling out the bottom. This was quite apt as Ed had quite a good sense of humour.

So they fixed a strap around the bottom of the coffin and they made it so that there were poles going through the strap at the side, so you could have up to five

people on each side carrying it. At this point the coffin lid was on the coffin. This was because the funeral directors warned us that, because of his neck injuries, it was better to carry the coffin with the lid closed. They would take the lid off and arrange him before we buried him.

Because Ed used a lot of ash wood in his work, everyone was given a piece of ash to carry with them and his uncle played the flute. We set off with the coffin through the fields towards the village. When we came to a place which was too muddy to cross, we changed direction and all the cows started coming towards us. I had visions of us having to drop the coffin and run, because they looked like bullocks, but someone got some branches and shooed them away. Another fitting touch of humour. The Celtic tune Ed's uncle was playing on the flute was really beautiful, and the movement of people's feet through the stubble of the corn, this 'swoosh, swoosh' was really meditative.

It had been arranged that we would get to the centre of the village about the time that the Sunday omnibus edition of the Archers came on. Ed was dyslexic, quite badly dyslexic, and he really depended on the radio for his information on the world. He was a great follower of the Archers. So when the theme music of the Archers began, we all stopped in the middle of the village and turned the music up loud and stopped for a little bit. Then we turned the radio down quietly and walked through the village up to the cemetery.

I don't think that Ed had any particular belief or any particular religion so they didn't want to take him into the church at all. We arrived at the cemetery

and all the paper chains were hanging up from wooden stakes. They dipped a bit like how you hang Christmas decorations.

The hole was already dug and they put the coffin next to the hole and then different people came forward to talk about Ed, including someone from the Scottish free school he'd been to, wearing his kilt. His first teacher from when he was educated at home before he went to the free school recalled asking him and his brother one day what they wanted to make, and they both wanted to make a sporran. That was quite funny and typical of Ed, wanting to make something like a sporran at the age of 6.

His mother came and talked about him and kissed him and said goodbye, then his father talked about him. Then they put the radio in the coffin with all the other things that were there. The lid was off and his friends lowered him into the grave. They had asked people to bring shovels with them and so there he was in the bottom of the grave with the coffin open. Radio Four was playing when the coffin was lowered in, after about the third shovelful it seemed to go off. His brother Will said Ed would have to tune it in himself. Everyone shovelled earth in and filled the whole grave completely and stamped down the ground.

After this the headstone was propped

up by the side of the grave. This had been carved the night before. His brother had carved most of it — the date he was born and the date he died. He put 'Edward Marshall: He Loved to Live'. They asked if his college friends wanted to carve anything. Ed had always wanted to be known as Fast Eddy, which was a bit ironic as he died in a motorcycle accident, so they carved 'Fast Eddy' on the headstone.

Afterwards we all came back to the house and they planted an ash tree in the back garden as a memorial to Ed because he'd used a lot of ash in his work. There are plans to have a seat built so that people can sit under Ed's ash tree. Afterwards there were tea and sandwiches.

I think the reason the funeral happened that way was that Ed's brother Will was very close to him, they were really close in age and I think he was so devastated that he said, 'I only have one brother, I'm going to make sure I do it my way'. This really set the whole tone of it and the parents wanted it to be done the way Ed would want it. Everyone seemed to deal with Ed's death in a healthy way. I felt people were determined to come to terms with the whole thing and weren't trying to deny it. I found it all incredibly moving, even though I didn't know Ed that well — I cried buckets all the way through.

