

**BURIED, from page 7**

out the other.”

Edwards, who was born to a middle-class family in Dublin, set up Walking Free after getting clean at age 36.

“I used to have a very serious problem with drink and drugs,” he said. “In the early 1970s, my father had to section me. I’d been my parents’ pride and joy, and it devastated them.” (“Section” refers to being detained under the UK Mental Health Act.)

He said he takes “full responsibility” for the fact that he ended up with an addiction.

“I was 12 when I first stole a Valium tablet from my mum’s handbag. Taking it helped my terrible stammer and gave me more courage. That was the start of it. Twenty years later, I was taking up to 150 Valium a day. I progressed from Valium to cannabis to LSD and eventually to barbiturates, which are the drugs they use in assisted suicides. We injected them into our veins. I was totally addicted to them.”

Edwards beat cancer twice and had a liver transplant.

“I never tried to commit suicide, but I overdosed more than 20 times. I was in a coma for four days, and I almost died.”

The day of his father’s funeral was his rock bottom.

“My dad died, and my family didn’t want me at the funeral, because I’d upset everybody,” he said.

He knew that day that he had a choice: suicide or life.

“I couldn’t go any lower, and I couldn’t take any more.”

He went to rehab and stopped drinking, smoking and taking drugs. That was 26 years ago.

“After that, I dedicated my life to helping others,” he said.

“These days there’s a lot of hardship. We might have prosperity, but there’s lots of pressure. People live in darkness. Society doesn’t teach people how to walk in darkness; it doesn’t teach people how to see in the dark. But after what I’ve been through, I can tell where the light is at the end of the tunnel. I’m not afraid to go into people’s darkness, take them by the hand,

until they can see the light at the end of their tunnel. There’s no such thing as a hopeless case. By reaching out to people and sharing your problems, there will always be help there.”

Edwards’ biggest fear while in the coffin was that a rat might jump down one of the holes.

“I got a bit paranoid about that. I thought I’d have to catch it and kill it. I couldn’t share a coffin with a rat. I had a little stick down there so I could knock a rodent out.”

During the three days and nights, he had to keep himself very focused or risk flipping out.

“Your mind tries to go to a place of claustrophobia, of panic attacks,” he said. “I learnt to not let my mind go there. It’s a challenge, especially when you get very tired.”

He said that as much as he laughs about it, he’s not Superman. “It was a long time to be underground.”

When he did sleep, he had strange dreams about the world he’d left behind.

“One in particular I remember: I was at a

friend’s house and it was summer, and I was in their back garden, and there was a barbecue. I was laughing and enjoying myself. Then I woke up, and I was in the coffin. I thought, ‘Oh, my God.’ That freaked me out a bit,” he said.

Edwards said the best part about emerging into the world again were the simple things.

“It was quite surreal to come out,” he said. “I was a bit tearful. It was nice to give my wife a cuddle. It was nice to go to the toilet. I was very glad to be above ground again.”

And how do people react when he tells them what he’s done? “People think I’m off my trolley, but for the sake of reaching out to people, I wanted to do it.”

People also told him this couldn’t be done. “You should see my risk assessment and insurance,” he joked.

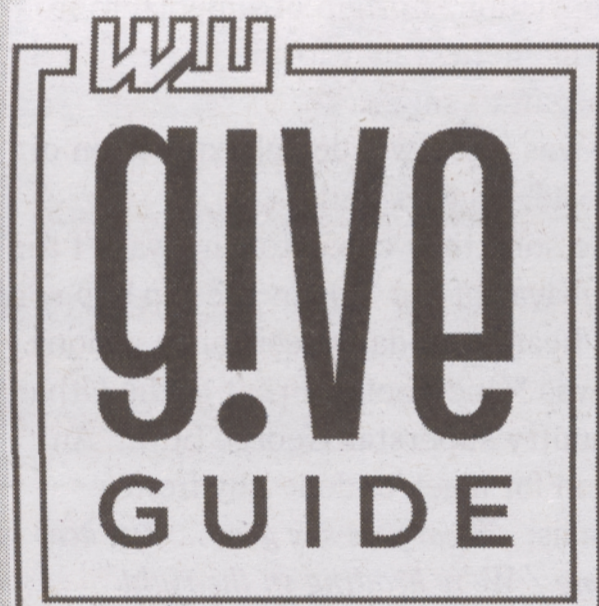
Did he ever question his sanity?

“People call me nuts,” he said, “but I say I’m screwed to the right bolt. To be creative, you have to be a bit on the edge.”

*Courtesy of Big Issue North / INSP.ngo*

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