

BURIED ALIVE

In an effort to prevent drug-related deaths, an addiction recovery advocate spent three nights in a coffin, delivering wisdom from 'beyond the grave'

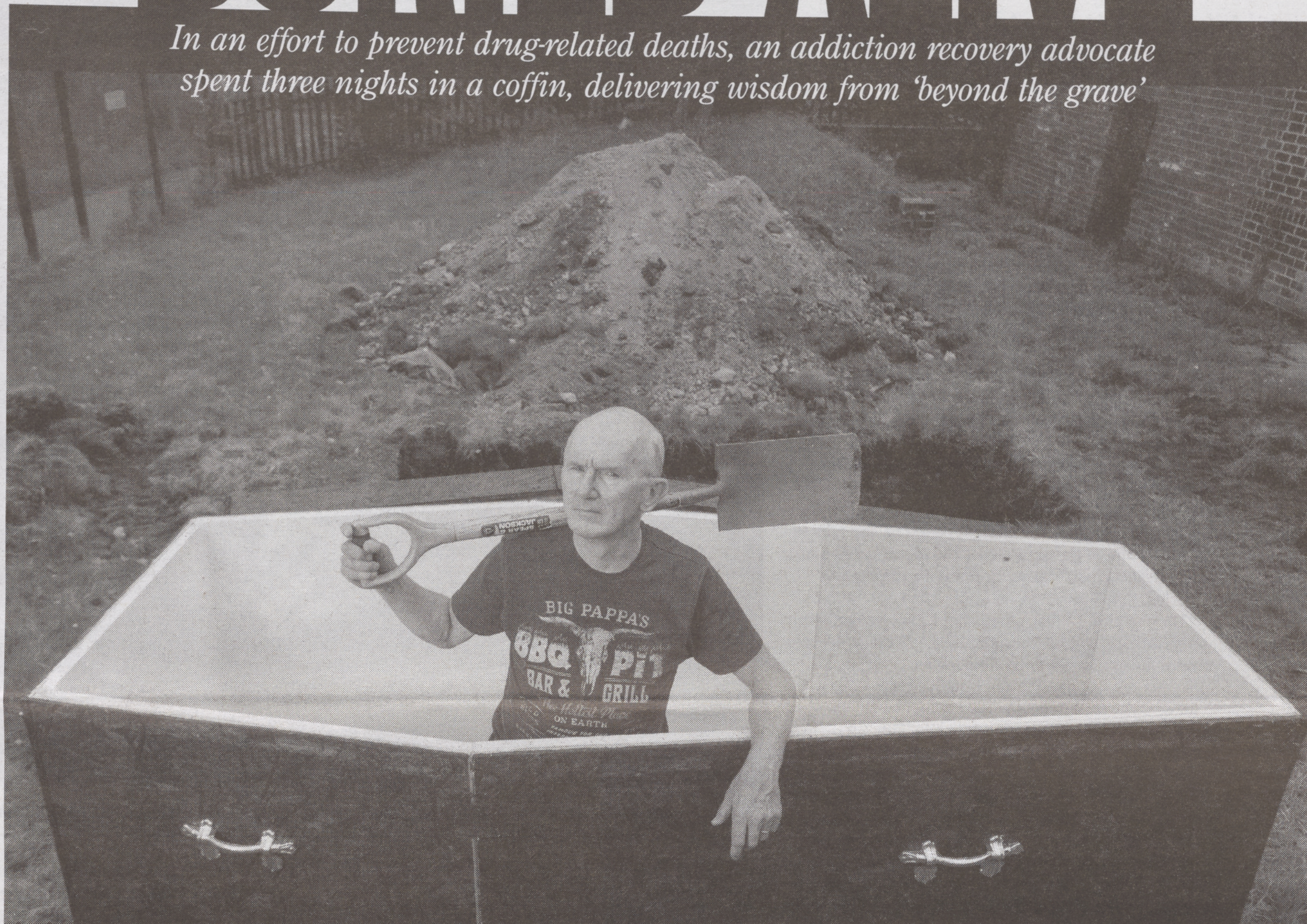


PHOTO COURTESY OF BIG ISSUE NORTH

John Edwards, of Halifax, England, spent three days and nights buried in a specially made coffin to discourage people from "going into a premature grave."

BY SOPHIE HAYDOCK
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It's most people's worst nightmare – being buried alive. But John Edwards did it on purpose for three days and three nights.

Edwards kissed his wife goodbye and took a step into his specially made coffin. The lid was lowered, everything went dark, and he heard a layer of soil being scattered on top.

"That was really freaky," he said. "I was thinking, one day I'm going to be in one of these coffins, and my body won't come out again."

Edwards' stunt in the grounds of a Belfast, Northern Ireland, church was a bid to stop people from losing their lives to addiction. Edwards, who has been sober for 26 years after experiencing addiction and homelessness, is the founder of Walking Free, a faith-based charity that provides support for people battling addiction. His burial stunt in March was his way of "speaking to people beyond the grave."

And it's not the first time he's done something like this. He also spent three days buried underground in his adopted town of Halifax, England, last year.

The 72-year-old wants to prevent people

"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."

JOHN EDWARDS,
FOUNDER OF WALKING FREE

who are lonely, depressed or addicted to drugs and alcohol from "going into a premature grave," he said.

"I thought, if I want to stop people going into a grave, I've got to go in before them and talk to them from there."

Edwards shared his experience on social media, live-streaming his time underground using #gravechat, so people could connect from around the world.

"Technology can alienate people," he said, "but it can really connect people, too."

The campaign, he said, reached thousands of people. There was a huge response on social media. The downside was that it was very tiring.

"I barely got any sleep down there – about six hours over three days. Lonely, suicidal people contacted me from all over the world – Mexico, Albania, Australia – calling at all hours of the day and night. I acted as a counselor to them. It was very tiring, but very rewarding, too."

The custom-made coffin was bigger than average – 8 feet long, 3½ feet high and 4 feet wide. And unlike most coffins, his came equipped with modern conveniences.

"It was quite comfortable down there," he said. "I had a duvet and a memory foam mattress, a light, and fiber-optic broadband. I took a thermos flask in, so my wife, Trisha, kept me supplied with hot drinks. I had a little shelf for tea. It wasn't meant to be an endurance test."

Edwards' intentions may have been altruistic, but the first question people have isn't about the charitable side of things but how he dealt with calls of nature.

"For a start," he said, "I didn't eat much before I went in, so luckily, I didn't have to do a No. 2. There was a camper-style toilet, and the coffin was designed with tubes out the top – food came in one, and I sent waste

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