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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 1

Born in '21, and on 21 June, my Dad, Edward, will be 100 years old in 21 days' time. I thought I'd write 21 things about him between now and then.

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10 Jan, 1940. Edward was alone on fire duty outside Portsmouth's Guildhall when the Luftwaffe bombed it to smithereens. He tried, but, equipped only with a broom, there was nothing he could do. Eighty years on, you can still see the fear in his eyes when he remembers that day.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 2

Dad was born in Glasgow, but the family moved to Paris where his father, Antonio, had work as an electrician. Sadly Antonio died of a mysterious fever when Edward was only five, leaving his widow with four mouths to feed and no breadwinner.

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The family wound up with relatives in rural Italy. Top of the class at school, Ed won a scholarship worth 25 lire to pay for shoes and uniform for "big" school. But he was the eldest, and the family was starving, so the money had to go on food, not uniform.

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Instead of progressing to secondary school, he worked for a farmer, helping to tend buffalo in the fields. Edward's education had ended, with only three years of elementary school.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 3

When he was 18, Edward was offered the chance to return to the UK and work in an ice cream factory in Portsmouth. I asked him once if he really wanted to go. He looked at me in disbelief: "We were starving. Of course I did."

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In Portsmouth, Edward, being British, was soon called up. Invited to choose his force, he chose the RAF. The recruiting officers said his "dual nationality" meant that might not work. After all, he spoke mostly Italian with a smattering of French. He didn't seem very British.

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"Then I'll join the Navy." That might not work either, they said. "Then I'll join the Army." "Good choice," they said. And so Edward found himself in the Royal Army Medical Corps at Aldershot.

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The fields where Edward had tended buffalo did not fare so well. By the end of the war, the town - Cassino - had become a major battleground between the retreating

Germans and the advancing Allies. Cassino was quite literally obliterated.

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And I read recently, in Mary Contini's wonderful books about the Italian diaspora, that the retreating Nazis, laying waste to their abandoned territory in southern Italy, killed the buffalo.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 4

Edward would say the army made him. I might come back to that. It can't have been as easy as he makes out. But what happened after the war made him too: meeting my mum, Gloria. It happened like this.

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Edward's boss in Portsmouth had a son, who was 'courting' a girl in Ryde on the Isle of Wight. In those days you needed a chaperone, and my Dad was volunteered to go with. The girl also needed a chaperone, and that was her sister, Gloria. The chaperones fell in love.

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Gloria had also grown up without a father, but hers was absent through choice, not untimely demise (a whole 'nother story). It coloured her opinion of men, especially Italian men. She vowed never to marry one. She married Edward Minghella when she was still nineteen.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 5

Edward was ambitious. He invested his demob and army pay into the beginnings of an ice cream factory at the back of Gloria's family-run tea shop opposite Woolworth's on Ryde High St. Minghella's Ice Cream was to become legendary.

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alamy stock photo

C54JFE
www.alamy.com

21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 6

Alongside business, Edward became a pillar of the community. He stood as an Independent councillor and won on personality and charm rather than politics. He served for decades. In those days, there was no pay, only expenses - which he never claimed.

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He chaired committees, sat on countless schools boards of governors, promoted trading organisations, and supported charities. Many of his contributions remain, including facilitating the hoverport at Ryde.

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He was Deputy Mayor in 1970 and took a stand which prevented him becoming Mayor the following year - story linked. As president of the IW Save The Children he hosted a major fundraising event at Carisbrooke Castle, with the patron, Princess Anne.

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Beating a path up the High Street

My Dad gave me these cuff-links last week. They're precious for obvious reasons, but also there's a little story to them. As you might be able to see, they commemorate his appointment to Deputy Mayor

<https://www.minghella.com/beating-a-path-up-the-high-street/>

Until around 1980 there was never a day, and scarcely a night, when he was not working or attending a meeting. I don't think he wanted a medal for his public service, but he got one - sort of! - when in 2016 he was made Freeman of Ryde, the only such honour in recent memory.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 7

Edward and Gloria - one from a broken home, one from a bereft home - were all about family. They had five kids, by far the most brilliant, talented and beautiful of whom was me.

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But I wouldn't want to take anything from my lesser siblings, Gioia, Anthony, Edana and Loretta - after all, everyone is gifted "in their own way", right? 😊 Seriously though, the boy with no shoes and only three years of elementary school in pre-war rural Italy ..

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... didn't do too badly parenting the next Master of Clare College, Cambridge, or the writer/director of *The English Patient* and *The Talented Mr Ripley*. (Other children - and 12 grandchildren! - are available.) Here are stills of Edward in the aforementioned films.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 8

Edward, in case you're wondering, is fit. He looks after himself. He cooks. He has neighbours round for coffee. (He makes it strong.) His hands are big and vice-like -

beware if you decide to shake.

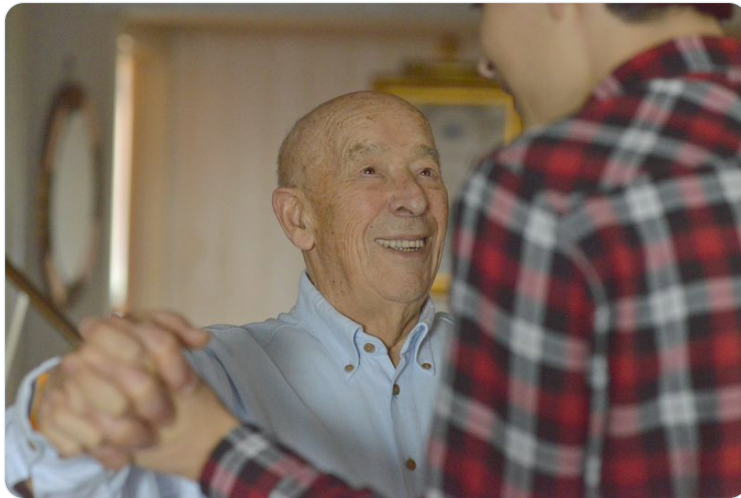
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His mind is formidable, too. He follows the news. He despairs at the news. He has big, infrastructure-scale ideas. He's excited about green energy. If you ask him which, of the ten, was his favourite decade to be alive, he'll tell you, "This one - it's amazing!"

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A coffee with Edward is a hand-scrunching, mind-stretching, caffeine-dizzying triple shot of wonder. To cap it all, he'll tell you a joke that's actually funny. Maybe that's his secret. Touching his toes, reading the paper - all good stuff. But perhaps fun is the real elixir.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 9

Edward plays to win. Here he is, pretending he's not collecting nines when he damned-well IS collecting nines. He insists on his own (excellent) version of 13-card rummy. Never play him. You will lose your shirt.

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You might think you could at least beat him at Scrabble, given that he only had three years of elementary school. Before the bloody war. In rural Italy. You'd think he wouldn't stand a chance. You'd be wrong about that. He'll take your fancy degree and

use it as a dishcloth.

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Here's a teeny story about him beating me at Scrabble in the 1980s, which I remembered last year, at the time of his 99th birthday.



A 99 with that?

Today is my Dad Edward's 99th birthday. In the old days on the ice cream vans, he would cheekily ask his customers whether they wanted a 99 with that, or just a flake. Both answers

<https://www.minghella.com/a-99-with-that/>

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 10

We used to have a couple of fruit machines in our cafe. One customer, I'll call her June, clearly became addicted. I liked her, and she let the boy me hit the buttons for her sometimes. I'd stand with her for hours as she played, and run to the corner

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shop to replenish her supply of Player's as she puffed her way through several packs a day. (Our poor lungs!) She was an older lady, a widow. Eventually Edward realised she had a problem, and calculated she had lost a huge sum in a couple of days.

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I can't remember the amounts, but in my head it was the equivalent of, say, £500 these days. He found out where June lived - a flat in Lind Street - and quietly went and gave her the money back. She wasn't grateful. She cursed him, and never returned to our cafe again.

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Edward said he knew there had been a risk he might upset her, and lose a customer, but he'd just had to try and help her. I like him for having that instinct. I love him for it. As for June, she was seen playing the machines elsewhere.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 11

Edward's experience of abject poverty - and it always hits me when he talks so simply about hunger - has stayed with him, and perhaps become even more important now that he has time to reflect.

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A few years ago, on holiday, we were harassed by African street sellers at

Civitavecchia. Dad went up to them and bought remote controlled cars for my kids. Dad knows how to make a deal, so I asked what price he had settled on. "I gave them what they asked for," he said.

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I was alarmed. It was WAY too much. "You're supposed to haggle, Dad!"
"Son, they're hungry. That was me once."

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In the 1970s, Edward was President of the IW Branch of Save the Children, and led a major fundraising event, bringing the patron, Princess Anne, to the Island. He still supports Save the Children. Here's his 100th birthday justgiving page.

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Edward Minghella's 100th Birthday

Help Edward Minghella raise money to support Save the Children

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/EdwardMinghella>

21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 12

You might think I am guilty of excessive admiration for my father. It's possible. But imagine how lucky we have been to have such a man for a parent, who was not just wonderful in all the ways described, but also a footballing hero.

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It's true, Edward was a post-war legend at our local club, Portsmouth. Some say he only had a try-out, and was complimented on his running ability, while little was said about his ball skills. But this absolutely genuine photo of your man in a Pompey shirt proves them wrong.

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In some ways, it's a shame he had to add sporting prowess to his other talents. It's just too much to bear, too much to live up to, too much to follow on from. Couldn't he summon up the decency to fail at just this one thing, for heaven's sake? He'd have been easier to love.

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Okay, okay, he did only have a try-out for Pompey. He never wore the shirt, and his boots never graced the hallowed turf of Fratton Park. Thank God. The bloke is real, not Forrest Gump.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 13

Mind you, if I could go back and be a fly on the wall in one part of his life, I might choose his somewhat Forrest Gump-esque part-time gig at The Savoy during the war, where he waited for tips on his days off from the army.

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The place was full of spies, conspiracies and femmes fatales. One such lady evidently realised he was listening, called him over and, reclining on a sofa, invited him to pull off her heels and tell her what he had heard of her conversation.

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She was evidently sufficiently dazzling that he only remembered the moment, and not

the conversation. But, knowing what we know now about the Savoy during the War, you'd want to have noted down every single thing you heard, wouldn't you? Dad slipped up there.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 14

Edward's mantra was not "Life's a box of chocolates" but "There's no such thing as plain vanilla". It always bemused him that his customers would choose interesting flavours for themselves, but request "just a plain vanilla" ...

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for the kids. Edward always thought kids deserved interesting flavours too, but more than that: vanilla is actually the yardstick by which you measure a true gelatiero. Real vanilla is expensive, and it's hard to get right.

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Over the years, "There's no such thing as plain vanilla" has become one of those family in-phrases for us, used as a reminder that if a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing well. Edward led by example, winning so many awards for his vanilla that he ran out of wall space.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 15

Speaking of ice cream, in the very early days of building his business, he spotted an opportunity on Asheys Downs, where tourists would stop to admire the view onto Sandown and Shanklin bays, and southern Wight.

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He thought it would always be a good spot (and Islanders will know he was right) so he applied to the council for a long-term (not cheap) concession to sell ice cream there. Once granted, he found an ice cream van for sale in Wales, bought it, and drove it back to the Island.

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With his van painted and stocked - was it this one? - he set off from Ryde to Asheys Down. But as the hill began to steepen, so the van began to slow. It didn't have the power to go up the hill, even in first gear. His dream was scuppered, his concession unusable!

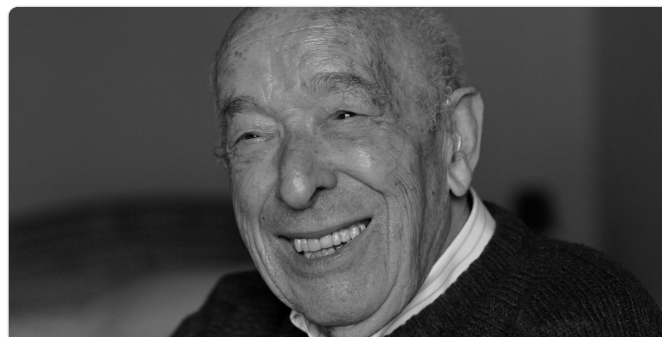
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As he turned to give up, something occurred to him: maybe the ratio of reverse gear was better? It was! He found he **COULD** get up Ashey Down - but only in reverse! I guess in the early 50s that was just about safe (!), and that's what he did until he could afford a better van.

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By the way, celebrations for Edward's 100th birthday have, of course, had to be postponed. He's lived through war and loss. He'll survive the disappointment. But I bet he'd love some birthday messages. To send him one, go here:



Edward 100!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

On June 21st, Edward will be 100 years young. BIRTHDAY MESSAGES Please wish him a happy birthday in the LEAVE A REPLY box below.(Your m...

<https://www.minghella.com/edward-100>

Thanks! ♥

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 16

Speaking of loss, I have to touch on the sorrow he has known. Of course, 100 years, however well lived, yield a trail of pain. So just two: the sudden death of Anthony, in

2008 nearly broke us all. But how hard for the parents to see their son taken?

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Anthony loved his Dad, as the photo attests. He called every day, and shared his life with our parents. He once said he phoned so assiduously because our Dad was approaching retirement age, and you just never knew how long you had. Oh the irony. That was about 35 years ago.

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(I was trying to be brave, by the way, when I said it nearly broke us. It broke us.)

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And then, in 2014, Gloria, his wife of 65 years, whom he had nursed to the end, again with sublime dignity. Perhaps Edward had imagined, being ten years her senior, and male, that he would not see that terrible day. She was a shining, shining star, and like Edward...

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she more than compensated for the shortcomings of her education, which she'd had to leave prematurely in order to help her single-parent mother make ends meet in wartime Glasgow. Gifted with an incredible ability to connect with people from all walks of life,

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and a facility with story - a love of story, founded on a love of people and profound empathy - she was affectionately known as the Island's "Queen Mum", and together they were quite a couple. They had lived and worked side by side since 1950. So I was pretty sure

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he wouldn't cope when she died. But on that very day, dazed as he was, he said, "I'm going to cancel the paper delivery." I said I thought that was a bad idea, and he needed to keep on living, keep connected. "No," he said, "I'll keep reading it. But I'll make myself..."

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.. walk into town to get it. That way I'll see people every day." And then I knew that somehow he'd find a way through the pain, stay positive, and carry on living.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 17

Despite life's trials, Edward's always positive. He's a prankster. If he knows you're expecting a call, he might call you himself, pretending to be the person you're waiting for. Or he has been known to befuddle people into believing they had to ...

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switch off everything in their homes, on account of there being a "serious gas leak" on their telephone lines. He's always in search of the joke, the fun, the tease, the laugh. I spoke to him just now and he ended the call with, "Keep on smiling". When we were kids...

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if you hurt yourself and you were crying, he would help you out of it by asking, "Are you really crying? Or are you laughing on the wrong side of your face?" And after a bit you couldn't help smiling with him, and soon you WERE laughing - but on the right side of your face.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 18

Edward is a walking advert for the power of belief. Not just literal faith, which he has

(and without which, let's face it, as the last of 5 kids, I might not be here!) but belief in our capacity to achieve, to create, to effect change.

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He's always looking for what he might do better. Or - be warned - what you might do better. If you haven't fixed the world, why haven't you? If you have too much to do, work harder, work longer. Don't sleep. "Nessun dorma!" he says with his cheeky smile. But he means it too.

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Perhaps that's another secret to his longevity. Inexhaustible ambition. A mind constantly producing ideas, grand and prosaic. He just can't help himself. And it impacted all of us too. If your report read straight As and a B in Art, he would ask, "What went wrong?"

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A joke, such was his delight. But also not. Do better. Because you can. There is no mystery where the drive behind his children's (and their children's) achievements comes from. Some god-given gifts, of course. But also lots of sweat, and a family culture of ambition, rooted

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in a powerful collective memory of pre-war poverty, and above all that sense of belief: you can do it. If your van won't go up the hill in a forward gear, try reverse gear, but go up the hill. I wouldn't say it was a perfect philosophy, but it's the one Edward taught us.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 19

Crikey. Number 19. I was worried I might run out of things to say, but in fact I'm running out of slots. I thought I'd tell one or two of his Army anecdotes. One that stays with me is how, in the RAMC, he had to give injections.

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The men would line up and he would have to inject them in batches using the SAME needle. After a couple of dozen arms, the needle would be blunt. The mind boggles. I don't think anybody even knew what the medication was for.

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Once, with the needle blunt, he was struggling to inject a guy, and hurting him. Edward turned to change the needle, and as he did so, a 6ft-something big guy, who had been next in line, fainted and had to be stretchered away.

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Today I asked Edward for more details of this, thinking I might be able to share a richer story with you. But, such is the joy of oral history, we got onto a far more fascinating memory he had never shared: he once put a fake Churchill on a boat.

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You read that right. He was sent to Liverpool discreetly to show the press Churchill boarding a boat bound for the Isle of Man. The idea was that they were privy, but it

was a secret. Apparently they bought it. But it was a fake Churchill, a double.

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What an amazing thing to be part of, and only to come out with it two days before your 100th birthday. I wonder if any historians can tell us a bit more about what might have been going on with the phony Winstons?

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The psychology of those who served in the war is mysterious. Edward only ever told us funny stories - the big guy fainting before his injection - or overtly made up stories, he'd show us a scar and say that's where he was "run over by a tank", or "hit by a cannonball". Ha ha.

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But clearly there were extraordinary, significant stories too. I wonder how many more might surface, if I probe. And there must have been dark ones too, if, for no other reason than that, for a period, Italy was the enemy, and here, in the British Army, was a very Italian

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sounding and looking man. Almost never does he talk about times then, or since, when he has been discriminated against. And almost never does he talk about the dark side of war. Only one story recurs, and that's about his mother's distress, not his.

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Edward and his brother, Vic, had left her and their sisters when they returned to the UK at the start of the war. Towards the end of the war, with Cassino torn apart in the stand off between the Nazis and the Allies, they had lost contact. When, finally, they returned to the

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obliterated town - think Dresden - they were told that their mother had convinced herself that her boys would have been among the fighting soldiers, and for months, she had turned over every dead body she found, fearing the worst, that it might be her own son.

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I think the mental picture of his mother, mad with anxiety, turning bodies over every day, upset him profoundly. I'm not sure what conclusions to draw from the way he processed his wartime memories and selected his anecdotes. But

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one thing's evident: his mother need not have worried. Today, he received his letter from the Queen; he's still here, very much alive, very much kicking, and still with so much to give. Mind you, there's one thing I hope he doesn't give more of - and that's injections.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 20

He's got the world's best hands. Solid and chunky and reassuring. My brother had them too, and they are one of the things I'll always cherish about him.





A wave to my brother

My brilliant brother, Anthony Minghella, would have been 67 today. He had our father's hands - big and chunky and reassuring. He became quite famous, and everybody wanted a piece of him. It was frustr...

<https://www.minghella.com/a-wave-to-my-brother/>

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Those are Dad's hands. They're so much part of him. To take Edward's hand, just as it was to take Anthony's, is to feel safe and unassailable, bonded and at peace. It is to find home. It's Father's Day, and I know I am blessed to have such hands to hold.

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21 THINGS ABOUT DAD: 21

And so, a few days later than advertised, I should bring this whistle-stop tour through a hundred years of memories to a close. I'm not sure how. I'm not sure I want to.

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First thing is a massive thank you. To you, for reading and so evidently enjoying. The comments and birthday messages and cards are going back to Edward in phases over the coming days. And thank you to those who sent gifts - so many - and who donated

to Save the Children on

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his behalf. Truly madly generous. Second thing is to share a couple of photos of the big day. Here he is at lunch, where we enjoyed lovely capesante and the restaurant played "Isola di Wight" on its muzak system - a gorgeously naff '70s fusion of our caulkhead and old country

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roots. (If you don't know that song, especially if you're from the Isle of Wight, you have to hear it once. But maybe once is enough!!) And here he is when the Mayor showed up to present him with a gift from the town.

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And here he is with his children and his card from HRH.
So what's the final anecdote? Is it some defining moment in those 100 years? Is it some secret to good health and longevity? I don't think so.

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It doesn't feel very "him" to punctuate his story, to deliver finality. Because what in the end is "pure Eddie" is his forward-looking, sometimes quite infuriatingly

impatient nature. He's always pressing: "So what's the programme? What's the agenda? What's next?"

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So maybe I shouldn't have been surprised when, birthday hardly begun, Queen's birthday card still in his chunky paws, he turned to me and said, "When can you take me on a trip? Let's make a plan!"

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Bravo Papa. Viva Papa! I'll take you, my friend. I'll take you.

/90 Thanks for reading!



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