

# After Eddie - an interview with Lesley Morris

**Eddie Morris died on 3 July 2015 when the microlight plane he was piloting crashed at an airfield in Oxfordshire. Eddie had been a GP in the town of Witney since 1984 and was a Quaker and social activist. In the words of one of his GP colleagues 'Eddie was a moral and rebellious man'. After his death, his wife of 35 years, Lesley, started writing poetry about her bereavement. Around two years later she has drawn together 15 poems into 'After Eddie – a book of mourning' that she is hoping to publish. Lesley says 'We all grieve differently but I want to reach out to let others who may be having feelings like mine know they aren't alone'.**

Lesley Morris was interviewed by Jessica Mitchell.

**Jessica:** The day of Eddie's death had begun in celebration hadn't it Lesley?

**Lesley:** We'd had a birthday tea here for my dad. Everybody was here, both of our daughters – Katy with her children and Matilda with her girlfriend Sarah. We had tea and cake and they went round to Katy's house while my dad and I went over to the airfield with Eddie, he was taking my cousin Keith up for a ride in the microlight. It was a slightly blustery day but Eddie had flown in similar weather before.

It all happened so fast. Eddie took off with Keith and did a complete circuit of the airfield and came down and landed. At this point Eddie usually did a 'touch and go'. Eddie always did this with people when they hadn't flown before so they wouldn't have to worry about the landing.

We are all sure he was about to take off again but he didn't. They just went off the end of the runway into all of the rubbish including an old lorry that was parked at the end. My dad, my cousin's wife Jane and myself had been watching and when the crash happened we tore across the grass. The inquest a year later went into it all and it was a combination of individual things that came together to make an accident that killed them both.

**Jessica:** What was Eddie like?

**Lesley:** He made me laugh. We'd fall about together. One time I was having a domestic moment. I opened

the fridge and someone had eaten the last sausage and just put back the empty plate. I was going on about if only some people could put empty plates in the sink then other people wouldn't have to do it for them. He just peered around the fridge, slapped his forehead and started saying 'naughty Dobby, naughty, naughty Dobby'. It cracked me up – he was always good at defusing if I was having moments of high dudgeon.

I think if you have a marriage and no one has a sense of humour then it's going to be doomed. In spite of the fact that we were very different personalities we had a great marriage. I mean, we annoyed each other as well, we were a normal couple. But, we had the same ideas about bringing up children and the same feelings about a spiritual life.

## The Accident

consumes me still  
angles its shadow  
on everything I see

I wear it  
like a black felt hat  
arranged suitably,  
with poise,  
since I watched death  
settle in a swoop  
down from the sky  
two men, wings  
a runway and a lorry

I wear dark glasses  
under my black felt hat

Sometimes we had different words for things; I'll give you a perfect example. We went once to some standing stones, you know, one of those prehistoric burial grounds. We both stepped into the centre of the stones and absolutely simultaneously – I said 'I feel giddy' and he said 'There's a sensation of rotation'. We really liked that because we had the same experiences but these were framed differently. This would occasionally lead to arguments but because we knew the ground underneath us was the same, that made for a strong glue. Neither of us took ourselves too seriously and we liked to see the funny side of things.



Eddie and I on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route a month before the accident.

**Jessica:** So, humour was important to you both?

**Lesley:** Yes, but there's no funny side to the accident and he would be so appalled at the chaos the whole thing has made. Well, he is in my dreams, he is still. I mean, in my dreams he wouldn't believe he was dead for ages afterwards. I had to tell him about the accident and the funeral. It must've been such a shock to him dying so suddenly on a summer's evening. No wonder he didn't really know he was dead. I sometimes wonder whether he had any time to have any words in his head at all. There came a time in my dreams when he sort of knew it and I had some weird, escapist dreams that he'd stuck himself back together and crept out of the morgue in the middle of night and come back. I think this was all about me struggling to come to terms with the reality of his death. I spoke to somebody yesterday and she told me her husband had been dead for 19 years and I realised I didn't believe Ed would be dead for 19 years. So, I thought – there is still something in me somewhere that is not taking it in, or is taking it in slowly, drip by drip. I feel I'm in a transition phase at the moment between that long, long first step and waiting to see if it's going to be a long, long second step.



Driving our daughter Katy to the church on her wedding day - in Eddie's beloved Morris Minor.

### **Bereavement**

I try to tidy up my feelings  
put them in a poem  
give them a beginning  
and an end

I try to find a shape, a form for them  
but they take up all the space  
and cling to the surfaces around me

I try to cut them down to size,  
but being slippery and devious  
they rise at the flick of the cat's ear

I try to lift them off the floor  
where they rage, or languish, limp  
like fallen women with their faces in the mud

sometimes I hand them to a friend  
who cradles them a while,  
but I have to take them home again

when one catches me by surprise  
we look each other in the eye  
and sink with the weight of the grave

**Jessica:** How did you start writing?

**Lesley:** It has always been a drive. In childhood, whenever I had a very intense feeling or experience I would want to capture it and crystallise it. If I chose the right words, it meant when I read a poem over again, it would take me back into the moment and that was the point. But, after Eddie died I didn't write for months. The first thing I wrote was 'The Accident' – and that was when I went for a week alone to a cabin in Sweden in the October after Eddie died.



The family was together on the day Eddie died as we were celebrating my dad's birthday. We had cake in the morning and then set off for the airfield so Eddie could take my cousin Keith up for a ride.



Our grandson with Eddie and my father in the garden on the morning of Eddie's death.

**Jessica:** So the writing has been a part of your grieving process?

**Lesley:** Yes, something happens when I have so many words in my head and so much feeling in my heart. They kind of join together and go down the arm, into the pen and out onto the paper and then I look at them and can see them a bit clearer and it makes sense of what I'm feeling inside. In between these fifteen poems I have put together into the book, there were thousands of words in the two years since Eddie died. But, I don't need to remember all of them because when I read these it takes me back into the feeling of the moment.

### **Bridge**

I'll cross the bridge  
when I come to it  
I know it's time to say goodbye  
and let you walk away  
I'll go north, find some ice  
to freeze my tears  
look for lights in the northern sky  
and angels in the snow

children play in the snow  
darkness fills the northern sky  
my tears are hot



Eddie and I in our student days in London. I was studying at the Guildhall School of Music and he was studying medicine at St. Bartholomew's.

and melt the ice, I'll go south  
and let you walk away  
I know it's time to say goodbye  
when I come to it  
I'll cross the bridge

Often the poems tell me more clearly what I have been feeling inside than my brain can tell me. I can understand and be more tolerant of myself when I am thinking something like 'Oh I should be getting over it faster' or 'I shouldn't be feeling so bad now'. I am always suspicious of other people thinking that and, in fact, it's probably just me thinking things like 'Don't bring the conversation around to Eddie, people must be bored of you talking about him'. No one has ever shown any sign of that but I guess I am scared of rushing myself and when I see what I am writing, then I have more patience with myself.

**If**  
If you walked through the door right now  
would I pause before I run to meet you  
afraid that we would have to start all over again?

If you walked through the door right now  
would your dead time have made us strangers?  
would we already have travelled too far alone?

If you walked through the door right now  
What would I say? '*I mourned for you my love*'  
Or '*Great you're back – how was it in heaven?*'

If our shared life, ruptured by death, with a slam  
Were to be resumed – how would it be?

I've learned to say I instead of we

**Jessica:** It's important for you to take all the time you need?

**Lesley:** Actually, I'd give anything to be able to do it faster but I know it takes the time it takes. But, neither would I want to not be thinking of Eddie. It was the suddenness you know. Eddie had only just partly retired in the year before he died and was doing some part time work as a medical adviser to the tribunal service. We had plans and ideas we were talking about. He wanted to travel a bit more but I wasn't sure as I was really happy working at home and was starting to get more into writing. He loved being at home too – he used to get up on the kitchen table and put linseed oil on the ceiling beams and he was forever out in the garden climbing up a rickety ladder in flip flops to prune a tree branch. He was a real Englishman in that way – he loved his house and garden.

I don't know how it might've been. We both really liked the idea of growing old together. We used to quote that Thomas Hardy line to each other 'And at home by the fire, whenever you look up there shall I be - and whenever I look up, there will be you'. That was a mutual dream. We used to talk about looking at old photos of us together in our young, hippy days when we were studying in London. We're both romantics by nature.

### **Wings and wheels**

I'll skin my poem now  
peel away the smooth words  
let the bones and sinews  
be bared and take their place

I'll not speak softly-softly  
nor be oblique or smudged with tears

I'll use the angry words  
that gut themselves  
across the page

I'll write in blood red ink  
of wings and wheels  
of death, hand in hand  
with a pilot's glove,

and such a violent end

The job now is not to let it be the defining thing for the rest of my life because that would be easy in a strange kind of way. Difficult but easy. I will always be Eddie's widow but I don't want to just be Eddie's widow and he would want me to be continuing to grow and develop and finding new and fun things. I would want that of him if it had been the other way around. I wouldn't want him to suddenly screech to a halt for the rest of his life to be looking back at me. I will always carry him with me.

I felt recently, when I finished the book, that some step had been taken. Very clearly. I am not sure what the step is but it was a very clear feeling as if something had been completed and now I have the same sort of conviction that I'm starting a second step.

### **Villanelle**

I try to wear my widow's weeds with flair you know  
go out into the world a bit, not stay indoors and hide,  
but grief sits on my shoulder like an old black crow

In many ways I am the same, though days now feel so slow  
I've done my time – I've mourned enough and cried  
I try to wear my widow's weeds with flair you know

I'll never tangle up my hair, rend my clothes, or show  
the living fury deep inside, the one that weeps and tries to hide  
but grief sits on my shoulder like an old black crow

I'll keep his house and garden well, and watch the seasons flow,  
make-up my face, go out and shop, refuse to let things slide,  
I try to wear my widow's weeds with flair you know

his death was shocking, a violent, piercing, blow,  
the tremors, they ran far and wide that sunny Friday when he died  
and grief sits on my shoulders like an old black crow

so in this house, and in this town, I watch the children grow  
they run and swing, play and hide, I pace the room from side to side  
I try to wear my widow's weeds with flair you know  
but grief sits on my shoulder like an old black crow

**Jessica:** Is it your hope that the poems could help support other bereaved people?

**Lesley:** I would love it if the poems spoke to others. Every death is different and everyone feels a death differently but I think it must be useful for all of us to know we aren't alone in something. Some of the poems feel more for me but 'If' and 'Villanelle' are two that are very much for other people as well as me. I know there must be other people doing the same things and thinking similar thoughts. Trying to keep their chin up when they go out and putting on a good face must be so common. You feel you should and not just for others. You do it for yourself. I think that any creative way people can find to say – 'here is what grief might look like on the outside, but here also is how it feels on the inside' – is useful. It's important to know that one can put on a good face but also to accept that there is the underside to grieving: there is an underbelly too that can last a long time and needs our acknowledgement, care and respect.

### **Acknowledgment**

Lesley Morris is the author of the poems in this interview. She gives her permission for them to be reprinted here but retains copyright. ■