

# MY COUSIN'S IN U2 BUT HE HAS ANOTHER SIDE TO HIM

U2 guitarist, the Edge, 52, and his cousin, Ciara, 34, who works for Mencap and has a learning disability, talk about family gatherings in Dublin, glitzy parties and why they have such a strong bond

**CIARA:** I have a learning disability, I call it my label. I was very badly bullied to begin with and, for a long time, I didn't feel safe around people. I'd often just go up to my room, shut the door and turn my stereo on. Music was my escape. I loved music. That's the reason why Edge and I became so close.

I was still only a toddler at his first wedding, so my earliest memory of him is just after The Joshua Tree came out. I was about five and he gave me a T-shirt, which I've still got. It said: "To my Cuz, Love Edge."

His dad is my Uncle Garvin and my dad's only brother. They grew up in Llanelli, South Wales, in a hardworking family. They were very close, they still are. When my brother, Hugh, and I were growing up, our family used to go to Dublin for our holidays to see them.

Edge was getting quite famous by then, so when I'd see him on TV, I'd get so excited. I couldn't believe that this man playing guitar on Top of the Pops was my cousin.

When I was about seven, I went to the premier of U2's movie Rattle and Hum. I remember sitting at the Empire Leicester Square in London,

watching all these celebrities — Naomi Campbell, Dennis Hopper, Michael Hutchence — and I was like: "I'm partying with these people, how amazing am I?" My dad said, "Ciara, behave," but Edge laughed. He loved it.

Then when I went to a special-needs boarding school, we'd phone each other and chat. I used to get homesick and he was always very supportive, very sweet, very caring. He'd listen... he understood me.

During this time, he also became a dad and as I got a bit older he'd take me and his daughters to the cinema during the holidays.

When I was old enough to see U2 perform, he'd take me backstage after the show and introduce me to my idols. During

the Achtung Baby tour he introduced me to Jason Donovan — I was a huge fan of his. He'd always say: "This is my cousin, she's here with me and she'd like to say hello to you."

Although Edge takes his famous friends in his stride, I kept going up to him saying, "I've just met this person!" and he'd say, "Brilliant", and encourage me. And now when I see him, we still have these

namedropping competitions, but he always wins. I'll say, I met the Cheeky Girls and he'll say he was playing golf with Bill Clinton.

I do know, though, that when all the family are together, he's happy. One occasion was at his mum and dad's golden-wedding anniversary. He held a party for them at the château he owns with Bono. It was a really wonderful day.

Sadly, his mother died last year. She was my Auntie Gwenda. We all went to Dublin for the funeral. After my grandparents died, Auntie Gwenda and Uncle Garvin had become like grandparents to me. I was very close to Gwenda. She was like the glue in our family. And he absolutely adored her... we all did.

I see a lot less of Edge right now because he spends a lot of time in LA. He also has two children with his second wife, Moreleigh. I'm still close with Aislinn [the Edge's first wife], and I see their three daughters.

I have been working at Mencap now for ?? years. I remember the day I asked Edge if he'd be an ambassador for the charity. I was at his brother's house having Sunday lunch and I was nervous about it. But as soon as I asked him, he said yes straightaway. He didn't even think about it.

I knew he'd be a great ambassador for us, and it's just one more reason why I'm so proud of him. He has been such a big part of my life. And he always will be.



**THE EDGE:** As a young teen, Ciara was deeply affected by what people thought about her. I was always concerned that, because she was so trusting and outgoing, she was wide open to the cruelty of others.

Before Ciara went to a special-needs school, she went to a regular school and it was only recently that she told me about the terrible bullying she suffered there. It makes me so angry knowing how much pain she went through.

Ciara was like a puppy when she was younger. Her enthusiasm and energy were amazing. When I'd see her, there would be so many questions about U2 and what we were up to that her parents would try to calm her down. But there was no need.



## 'When I see Edge, we have namedropping competitions, but he always wins. I'll say I've met the Cheeky Girls and he'll say he played golf with Bill Clinton'

I can't remember the first U2 show she came to; she was about 12 and into Boyzone. It was a thrill for me as the older cousin to make things happen for her, so, by her teens I'd always take her backstage with me.

Once she came to the Brit Awards, and, knowing she loved Kylie, who was performing, I went: "Come on, girl, let's meet her." So we did and off she went chatting to her. In the end, I said: "Ciara, I think we may have to go now." Kylie loved her.

If anyone is uncertain about the

value of what Mencap do as a learning-disability charity, just look at what's happened with Ciara, and how she has developed since working with them. They utilised the things she always had and now she's much more confident, much more able. And that's about her being in a place where she and her skillset are valued. The effect has been profound.

She's really a great communicator. She's amazing at connecting with people in an unselfconscious and direct way. She has barrelled

through a lot of nasty stuff by sheer strength of personality — I wouldn't have been able to do it. In fact, one of the things I've learnt about her is how courageous she is. I know, at times, she's challenged but, as an advocate for other people like her, she has the balls to walk up to a politician and tell them how it is.

My older daughters hang with her; they went to her hen night and she's a dancing-on-tables-type of girl. They have a good sense of how being different can be a positive

### BEAUTIFUL DAY

Left: Cara and the Edge in Dublin. 'She has barrelled through a lot of nasty stuff by sheer strength of her personality,' the guitarist says of his niece. Inset: a young Cara enjoys a private concert from the U2 star

thing, and can make society richer. It's a litmus test for humanity.

Ciara got married to Mark earlier this year. She had the full-on meringue — she wasn't gonna be short-changed on any front. The vows are a profound moment, but even more so with Ciara and Mark, given her learning disability. It was poignant... there were tears.

I used to be quite protective of Ciara, making sure she got looked after, and was understood. To an extent, I'd gently guide her back to earth if she got over-excited. But at a certain point, I realised I didn't have to do that any more. It was a great realisation.

In my role as a Mencap ambassador, Ciara invited me to No 10 recently. We got a photo, of course, outside the famous door; it was such a moment to savour. My little cousin Ciara taking me to No 10 as part of her work.

The concept of "normal" is such a dangerous idea because we can all, in small ways and big ways, become persuaded that we are abnormal. To embrace your own failings and know that they're just as important as your strengths takes a certain wisdom and perspective.

To be a person who can shrug off the crass judgements of the world can be difficult. I'm really proud that Ciara has made that jump ■

*The Edge is an ambassador for Mencap. Visit: [mencap.org.uk](http://mencap.org.uk)*

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