

## Best Friends



When Ed Sheeran was a teenager, he didn't look like a future popstar. He was short, had shaggy red hair, and wore glasses. "Nobody took me seriously," he says. "Everyone kind of saw me as a joke. Guys like me don't become popstars. It's unlikely, so you have to work harder. You have to wait for one person to say, 'That's great.'"

For Ed Sheeran, that person was Jamal Edwards. Jamal was only in his early 20s, but he already had a reputation for discovering musical talent. When he found new musicians he liked, he posted their videos on his YouTube channel. The channel had hundreds of thousands of followers.

One day Jamal came across a video of Ed Sheeran on social media and saw something in Ed that others did not. He posted the video on his channel. During the next year, Jamal helped Ed Sheeran make 20 more music videos, which he posted on his channel.

"At that time," Ed says, "Jamal's channel was the coolest channel to be on. As soon as he put me on, everything started to fall into place. My manager found me, and a record label got in touch." Many successes followed: a record album, concerts, hit songs like "Thinking Out Loud," and a world tour that sold almost 9 million tickets.

With success came many changes in Ed's life. But one thing never changed: his friendship with Jamal Edwards. The first time they met, Ed told Jamal that he was new to London and had nowhere to live. Jamal invited him to live at his house, and Ed moved in. He later found his own place to live, but Jamal remained his best friend.

On February 20, 2022, Jamal Edwards died suddenly. Later tests showed that he had died of an accidental drug overdose. He was 31 years old.

Ed was overcome with grief. Both he and Jamal lived in West London, and they used to see each other often. Everywhere Ed went, he thought of Jamal. A line kept running through Ed's head: *Everywhere I look, I still see you*. That line was the origin of the song "Eyes Closed."



Ed says the song is about sadness: "It follows you around, filling the rooms you're in. You can feel and see it, but no one else around you can." Sadness finally stopped following Ed around when he began writing songs about it. "Music," he says, "helps heal."

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Ed says the song is about sadness. "It follows you around, filling the rooms you're in. You can feel and see it, but no one else around you can. Ed finally found a way out of his sadness by writing songs. "Music," he says, "helps us heal."

Ed says the song is about losing someone—someone who broke up with you, or moved away, or died. "Everything reminds you of them and the things you did together. Music can help us heal."

"I think music helps heal," Ed says. "I wrote this song to get my feelings out. And I danced with my eyes closed."

The song "Eyes Closed" is about Ed Sheeran's loss of his friend Jamal, but it can mean different things to different people. "Everybody's got a story," Ed says. "For example, for some people, this song is about a breakup." Writing the song helped Ed heal. He is hoping it helps other people heal, too.

He decided to put that line in a song. The song was "Eyes Closed."

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In the video for the song, a big blue monster follows Ed around. "follows you around

Ed says the song is about losing someone—someone who broke up with you, or moved away, or died. "Everything reminds you of them and the things you did together. I guess music helps heal, so I'm dancing with my eyes closed to try get through it."

**anything any major thing that happens in my life brings me down most positive thing I can do from that is is write a song**

Jamal Edwards enjoyed discovering new musical talent.

When he found artists he liked, he posted their videos on his YouTube channel. Jamal saw a video of Ed Sheeran on social media and saw something in him that others did not. He posted the video on his YouTube channel.

"At that time," Ed says, "Jamal's channel was the coolest channel to be on."

Jamal Edwards liked discovering new musical talent. He had a popular YouTube channel with hundreds of thousands of followers. He looked for talented unknown musicians and put their videos on his channel. Jamal saw a video of Ed Sheeran on social media singing a song that Ed had written. Jamal saw something in Ed that others did not. He posted the video on his channel. And he did more for Ed than post the video. The first day they met, Ed told Jamal he was new to London and had no place to live. Jamal invited him to live at his house.

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others did not. He posted the video on his channel. And he did more for Ed than post the video. The first day they met, Ed told Jamal he was new to London and had no place to live. Jamal invited him to live at his house.

During the next year, Jamal made 20 videos of Ed and posted them all on his channel. "At that time," Ed says, "Jamal's channel was the coolest channel to be on. As soon as he put me on, everything started to fall into place. My manager found me, and a record label got in touch." Many successes followed: a record album, concerts in the United States, hit songs like "Thinking Out Loud," and a world tour that sold almost 9 million tickets.

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("It was the coolest channel to be on," Ed Sheeran says.)

When Ed Sheeran was a boy, very few people expected that one day he would be a popstar. When was young, Ed Sheeran didn't look like a future popstar. He was really short, had bright red hair, and wore big glasses. When he was a teenager, he wanted to be in a band, but he couldn't find a band that wanted him. He eventually gave up on the idea of joining a band and started to play his guitar solo.

"Nobody took me seriously," he says. "Everyone kind of saw me as a joke. Guys like me don't become popstars. It's unlikely, so you have to work harder because there's always someone who wants it more than you. You have to wait for one person to say, 'That's great.'" For Ed Sheeran, that person was Jamal Edwards.

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When Ed Sheeran was a teenager, nobody looked at him and thought, "There's a future popstar!" He was short, had bright red hair, and wore big glasses. He wanted to be in a band, but he couldn't find a band that wanted him. He eventually gave up on the idea of joining a band and started to perform alone, mostly on street corners.