

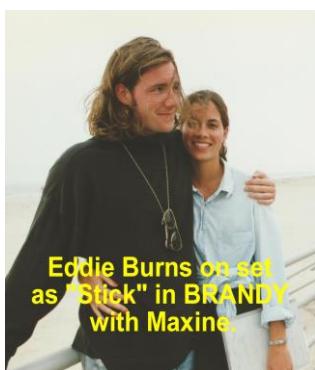
THE BROTHERS MCMULLEN – The true story....

A romantic comedy of epic Irish American proportions, shot on a micro budget, THE BROTHERS McMULLEN launched the career of Ed Burns. The film was shot and edited on nights and weekends by Dick Fisher with his equipment while Eddie was working as a production assistant at ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT. The winner of the Sundance Film Festival's Grand Jury Prize, 1995. A box-office smash, it was the first film released by Fox Searchlight Films. Part of the phenomenal success of the film was due to the efforts of an effective and tireless press agent, Edward J. Burns, Eddie's father. The senior Burns parlayed a long successful career as a spokesman for the NYC Police Department (Sgt. Burns was a fixture of the New York press establishment) into a very efficient press/PR outfit, he called Whitehead Associates. Unfortunately for Dick Fisher, the publicity campaign designed by Eddie's father featured the irresistible story of young Eddie's success, working on his own with the tireless help of his family. The truth, that Eddie Burns had worked for years in full partnership with Dick Fisher, his professional mentor, did not make as good a story. So a more interesting history of THE BROTHERS MCMULLEN was created and Dick Fisher was excised from that story.

This is what really happened....

Young Eddie Burns was working as a production assistant, first at *A Current Affair* (the producer, Fox, was one of his Dad's clients) and then at *Entertainment Tonight*. He had left Hunter College (part of City College of NY) without a degree but with a short film, HEY, SCO, which had aired on Public TV after a showing at the Independent Feature Project's (IFP) 1992 Independent Feature Film Market (IFFM). Dick Fisher had his own production company (Videography Productions, Inc.) and provided location production services to many broadcast programs. While working for *Entertainment Tonight*, Eddie was assigned to work for Dick Fisher. They became friends sharing a common interest in films and filmmaking. Dick was impressed with HEY, SCO, and Eddie asked him to be Director of Photography for his first feature film, BRANDY. It was shot in 11 days on 16mm and stars, Julie Bowen, as an embittered young lover betrayed and abused by her ex-boyfriend, Stick, played by Eddie Burns. A rough-cut of the film was entered as a work-in-progress at the 1993 IFFM, but no buyer could be found. After it became apparent that BRANDY wasn't going anywhere, Eddie and Dick decided to make another film, avoiding the pitfalls they had experienced with BRANDY. Eddie wrote a number of scripts. Together they watched the films of Woody Allen (with special attention to HANNAH & HER SISTERS, and MANHATTAN). They followed with interest the genesis of THE LAWS OF GRAVITY. (Coincidentally, co-star Edie Falco, auditioned for BRANDY!) They agreed to make an episodic film with interconnected stories to avoid continuity problems that would enable shooting the film on

nights and weekends. Dick bought an Aaton 16mm camera and Eddie wrote THE BROTHERS MCMULLEN. They agreed that Eddie would supply the raw film stock and Dick would take care of everything else. (Crew, camera equipment, lighting, transportation, processing, and editing.) Over the next 8 months, on 22 shooting days, they put THE BROTHERS MCMULLEN in the can. There were days when a camera assistant couldn't be found; so they didn't have one. Usually the whole crew fit in Dick's car; the cast drove themselves to the locations. They shot at Eddie's parent's house on Long Island, at Dick's apartment on the Upper Westside, Eddie's apartment in Greenwich Village, and on the streets and in Central Park. If they were asked for a permit, Dick just showed his press pass and said they were shooting news promos.



Eddie Burns on set as "Stick" in BRANDY with Maxine.



During that eight months life went on. Dick Fisher was shooting lots of different shows, Eddie was working at *Entertainment Tonight*. Dick was getting divorced, and his back went out, the result of a herniated disc. Eddie had an emergency appendectomy. They shot a scene at the St. Patrick's Parade (which didn't make the final cut) with the ultimate cut down crew; just the two of them!

After each scene was shot, the footage went to DuArt Film Labs (where Videography Productions had an account) and the film was processed and transferred to videotape (BetaSP). When time allowed Dick would rough cut the scenes using computer based linear editing equipment at *Entertainment Tonight* and *A Current Affair*. (Working at night when show staff was off.) By the summer of 1994, they had over 2 ½ hours of edited scenes. The original script was 127 pages; they had shot a little over 100 pages but there seemed to be more than enough material to complete the film. Dick convinced Eddie that they should stop shooting and concentrate on editing.

Eddie wanted to use contemporary Irish rock music, like the indie Irish band, *Black 47*, but Dick, a musician and folk music fan, had another idea. He convinced Eddie that traditional Irish music would add an arty feel to what might be seen as a low budget soap opera. His friend and occasional soundman, Andrew Yarne, had a family friend, Seamus Eagan, who was an accomplished musician who had a CD on Shanakee Records, *Traditional Music of Ireland*. Using almost all of the tracks (which were instrumentals) they put together a 2 hour rough-cut and after being rejected by many film festivals, took it to the 1994 Independent Feature Film Market at the Angelica Theatre in New York City. So far the actually out of pocket expenses for the film was between \$20-25,000, almost entirely for raw stock and processing.

[Seamus Egan](#) was finishing a new album *A Week in January* while the soundtrack for THE BROTHERS McMULLEN was being put together and additional tracks were taken. Sarah McLaughlin wrote lyrics to Egan's song, *Weep Not for the Memories* and called it, *I Will Remember You, The Brothers McMullen Theme* and recorded it for the soundtrack. Her later live release of *I Will Remember You* became a huge hit.

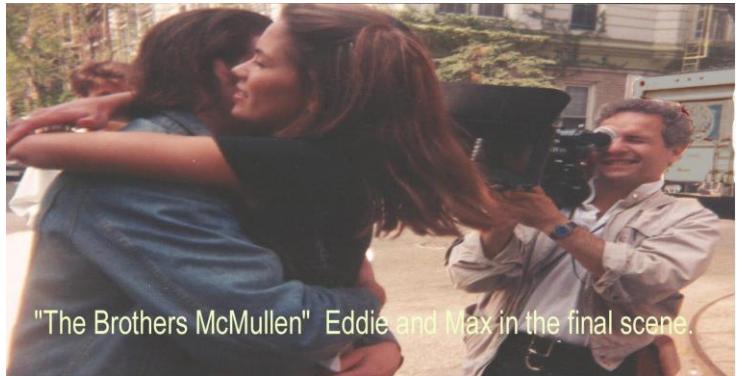
It has been reported often reported (by Eddie) that Robert Redford was instrumental in placing the film in the Sundance Film Festival. Here's what really happened. When Mr. Redford was on the junket promoting his film QUIZ SHOW (which coincidentally Dick Fisher worked on, pictured to the right in costume with functioning period TV camera), *Entertainment Tonight* did the obligatory interview. Dick Fisher drew the assignment with Eddie as his production assistant. After shooting, as Mr. Redford was leaving, Eddie passed him an envelope containing a VHS copy of the rough cut. Whether or not he viewed it or had influence in its acceptance to the festival is not known. But events at the Independent Feature Film Market (IFFM) seems to have been the motivating factor.



Amy Taubin, wrote in her annual **Village Voice** overview of the IFFM that Bob Hawk, an Advisory Selection Committee member from the Sundance Film Festival, recommended THE BROTHERS McMULLEN to her and she loved it. Bob Hawk had seen both HEY, SCO, and BRANDY and had socialized with Eddie during the film markets. Apparently he had become THE BROTHERS McMULLEN's champion. The rough-cut was submitted to Sundance and became the last narrative film to be accepted for the 1995 Festival. Dick and Eddie had a little over two months to finish the film.

Being accepted to Sundance changed everything. James Shamus and Ted Hope of Good Machine offered their services as sales representatives, attorney John Sloss came on board, SoundOne, DuArt, and many other service providers offered open credit accounts to get the film done on time. Finally, 20th Century Fox called and offered a \$35,000 advance for a first look/last offer deal. Dick and Eddie locked themselves in the edit room and cut the film down to 92 minutes.

The experience at Sundance was magical for Eddie and the film, but bittersweet for Dick. THE BROTHERS McMULLEN became the little film that could, adored by the audiences, and loved by the judges. The press, the agents, and the distributors could not get enough of "triple threat," "Irish Woody Allen," boy wonder, Edward Burns. His father, an NYPD spokesman with his own the press agency, played the story brilliantly and Eddie dutifully thanked, "my family" for helping him make his film. When accepting the Grand Jury Prize on the stage next to Eddie, Dick said, "last week he was my P.A., today he's my hero!" But while Dick had stood by Eddie for the many years leading up to this remarkable success, Eddie was not going to return the favor.



"The Brothers McMullen" Eddie and Max in the final scene.

The partnership that began in the crew lounge at *Entertainment Tonight* four years earlier ended that very night. Dick was never to see Eddie again. Pledges over countless bottles of beer to work together when the good times rolled were quickly forgotten. Eddie played the part his father cast him in as the brilliant “auteur filmmaker” and continued to embellish the revisionist history of the genesis of THE BROTHERS McMULLEN. In this new story, Dick Fisher was just another friend who had lent a helping hand.