

**Legends of Freeborn County**  
**Eddie Cochran's life was in the hands of fate**  
by Bev Jackson

Twenty-seventh in a monthly series of Freeborn County Articles - June 2002□  
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Andy Wilkinson has written a song, "Leave It in the Hands of Fate". It tells of Buddy Holly and a charter flight on the night of the Clear Lake Dance Party. It's written from the voice of the pilot who didn't want to fly that night. One of the lines goes like this, "Our paths crossed in a killin' frost, in a corn field near Clear Lake."

The overlying theme of the song is, "A man's gotta do what's gotta be done, and leave it in the hands of fate."

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As I listened to that '50s rhythm, I couldn't help but think of Eddie Cochran. How on earth did that kid, who lived on Charles Street in Albert Lea and whose dad worked in a factory, ever find his way to the international stage? And why does his music, almost 40 years after his untimely death, still have the power to draw people of all ages, and from countries throughout the world?

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In this almost impossible success story, Eddie Cochran is one of those gifted young people whose life circumstances placed him in the right places at the right times. Could he possibly have known of his incredible talent, or was he simply having so much fun with his song writing and his stage performances that he was only living for the moment?

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While the rest of his former classmates from Albert Lea High School were worried about Friday night's football game, or bringing a tuna hot dish to the potluck supper, or paying 25 cents a gallon for gas, or even finding matching anklets to go with the new poodle skirt., Eddie was on stage with girls in the audience swinging and swooning and hoping for his autograph.

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His fan letters showed unabashed adoration. The screaming that went on during his performances was a sign of the times. His chance to do a concert tour in Great Britain with Gene Vincent was only one more step to stardom. His mother said that he would play 24 hours a day if she would let him. Music was so important that he left high school in his sophomore year. He played at supermarket openings, and Knott's Berry Farm, and he teamed up with Hank Cochran to perform on the west coast country music circuit. He was only 16 when they signed a recording contract with Ekko Records. They appeared on the California Hayride TV show and later in Dallas, Texas.

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When Eddie became fascinated with rock' n' roll, the Cochran Brothers decided to go their own ways. Eddie went on to do many recording dates as a session artist, and he began working with Jerry Capehart. His first solo release for the Crest label was called "Skinny Jim."

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Soon after, Eddie appeared in the Jayne Mansfield movie, "The Girl Can't Help It," and later in "Do-Re-Mi" and "Untamed Youth". Early in 1957, when he was only 18 years old, his version of "Sittin' in the Balcony" reached number 18 on the Hot 100. Again on tour, he performed at the Maustbaum Theater in Philadelphia and appeared on American Bandstand. Later that year he toured Australia and Hawaii. He performed with such rock' n' roll greats as Gene Vincent, Little Richard, Buddy Holly and the Crickets, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, and Paul Anka.

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Fans loved his subdued, tweed sports coat - shirt and tie - and slacks worn with loafers, Ivy-league style. His hit "Summertime Blues," rose to number 8 on the Hot 100 and became a

rock' n' roll classic.

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He was scheduled for the "Winter Dance Party Tour" with his close friend Buddy Holly. However, he landed a roll in the film "Go Johnny, Go" and withdrew from the tour.

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In the spring of 1960, Eddie costarred with Gene Vincent on a tour of Great Britain which included appearances in the TV show "Boy Meets Girl." The tour was tremendously successful.

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Following a Saturday night performance, Eddie, Gene Vincent, Pat Thompkins, and Sharon Sheeley left their hotel in a hired car for the trip to Heathrow Airport for a flight back to the U.S. The FCHS biography of Eddie says, "Once on the Bath-to-London Road, the cab hurtled through the night at 70 mph, winding its way through a series of small towns. At approximately midnight, the cab reached the outskirts of Chippenham, a small town 20 miles from Bristol.

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"The road had recently been regraveled, and the driver had taken a wrong turn and was doubling back on the road to Bristol...He misjudged the curvature of the road as the cab emerged from beneath a viaduct, lost control, and hit the curb on the far side. The impact spun the car around careening crazily for about 150 yards before impacting against a concrete lamp standard." Eddie was killed. Gene and Sharon were seriously injured.

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At the time of his death, Eddie had enjoyed three years of intermittent hits, was right on top of the trends, and had found his place in the world of rock'n'roll. He was 21.

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Why did his life end that night?

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Maybe it's like Andy Wilkenson says, "Everyone's got a path to walk, the famous and the common man. Destiny? It ain't in our hands."