

The Challenge

Imagine you are a schoolboy, the second child of coal-miner Philip and his wife Alice, living in a miner's cottage in South Wales. Your brother Philip is two years older than you, and as time passes, you will welcome twelve other brothers and sisters.

They are a happy family, with a house full of love and fun, despite the hard life and perpetual dangers in the coal mines. Miners' families respect, trust and help each other. That's a happy boy, happy family, and happy, secure community.



You love playing football with your friends; you love the mountain behind the terrace of houses where you live; you like school, because you are doing well in the lessons. And you know how to use your fists to keep your place among the other boys. That is how a boy's life is in a coalmining community.

The Wesleyan chapel is the centre of spiritual and social life, and your father preaches on Sundays in the chapels in the nearby villages and towns, but your yourself will not come to faith till you are 19 years old.



When you are 12 years old you win a place in the grammar school in the big town nearby: only one other boy achieves this. But your father is not rich; there is not enough money to send you to the big school: the family needs you to work. So you go and work in a foundry, perhaps because your grandfather is a blacksmith – a man who seems very old who was born in 1842: by now it is 1915. This is another step out of boyhood into being a man, and you work there for two years.



But when you are 14 years old the time comes to join the men by going down the mine. The day dawns – your first day below ground – and you are afraid. You walk to the mine with your father, and enter the cage with him: it is dark, the mine is deep, everything is unfamiliar and frightening, the cage is closed.

Then, in the darkness and fear, you feel your father's hand covering your hand, and you begin to feel calm, safe, and peaceful. Now you can face the challenge of becoming a man, a true Welshman. Afterwards, you will never forget that moment – your father's love, nearness and protection.

More than a hundred years later, your son will tell the story to a congregation in a chapel in Rhosllanerchrugog. He will the words of Jesus about God, the Father of those who believe in Jesus: "I give them eternal life, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father had given them to me, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."



In fond memory
Dinsdale Thomas Young
1903-1997