



Town Is By The Sea

From my house, I can see the sea.

It goes like this — house, road, grassy cliff, sea.

And town spreads out, this way and that.

My father is a miner and he works under the sea, deep down in the coal mines.



When I wake up, it goes like this — first I hear the seagulls, then I hear a dog barking, a car goes by on the shore road, someone slams a door and yells good morning.



And along the road, lupines and Queen Anne's lace rustle in the wind.



First thing I see when I look out the window is the sea.

And I know my father is already deep down under that sea, digging for coal.



When I go out in the morning, it goes like this — I run out of my house and knock at my friend's door and we head down to the old rickety playground.

There are only two swings left now, one for big kids and one for babies. There used to be four. One broke, and the other one is wound so high around the top post it will never come down.

I don't care.

I stand in the baby one, and my friend swings on the big one.



We go so high butterflies rush through my stomach.

We go so high I can see far out to sea.

Far out at sea, the waves have white tips.

And deep down under that sea, my father is digging for coal.



When I get home for lunch, it goes like this — my mother has a baloney sandwich on the table and a tall glass of milk. I gulp it down and eat a big pile of carrots.

My mom says, I need your help now.

She sends me to the store with a list for the grocer.

The store is only a couple of blocks away on Main Street.

Even walking slowly, I get to the store in no time.



It's so sunny today...

The sea is sparkling.

And deep down under that sea, my father is digging for coal.



In the afternoon, it goes like this — I go to the graveyard to visit my grandfather, my father's father. He was a miner, too.

The air smells like salt. I can taste it on my tongue.

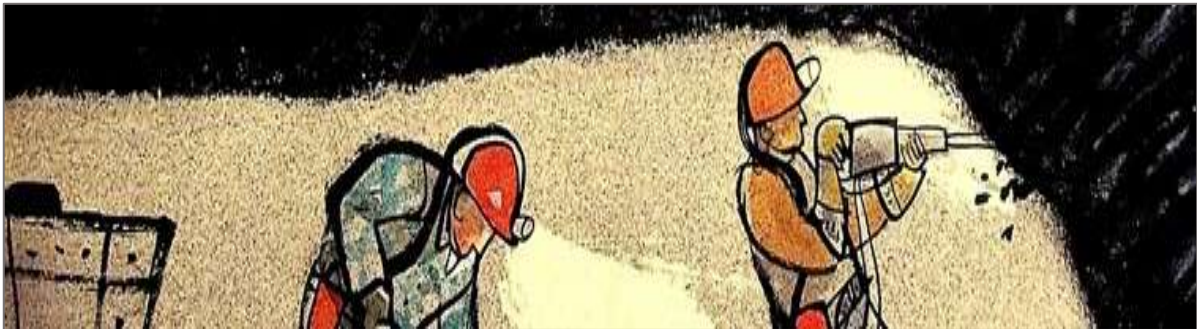
My grandfather used to say, bury me facing the sea b'y, I worked long and hard underground.

When there are big storms here, the waves crash against the shore, battering his gravestone with salt-soaked spray.

That's okay. My grandfather is used to storms.

Today the sea is all calm... and quiet.

And deep down under that sea, my father is digging for coal.



At supper time, it goes like this — my father comes home from work. He has black smudges on his face from working the coal. He looks tired, but he gives me a big smile and a hug.



His long workday is over, and he is home safe and sound.

He showers and puts on clean clothes and comes down to eat.

My mother has been cooking, and the kitchen smells like chicken stew and potatoes.

I listen to the ball game on the radio while I set the table.

After dinner, my mother and father sit on the porch drinking cups of tea and talking.



The sun sets slowly, sinking into the sea.

Deep down under that sea is where my father digs for coal.

At nighttime, it goes like this — as I fall asleep I can hear the whooshing back and forth of the waves.

I think about the sea, and I think about my father.

I think about the bright days of summer and the dark tunnels underground.

One day, it will be my turn. I'm a miner's son.

In my town, that's the way it goes.



Author's Note:

At the centre of the boy's life in coal towns and villages was the mine. He was raised within sight of it.

The smell of coal dust was as familiar to him as the sounds of steam pumps and hoists.

The boy may have seen for years his father and older brothers leave for the pit. For most boys raised within these communities, the day arrived when they too surrendered their childhood to it.



If you were a boy in the mining towns of Cape Breton — or, indeed, a child in any mining town in the world — during the late 1800s and early 1900s, you might well have faced the prospect of going to work in the mines at the young age of nine or ten, enduring twelve-hour days in the harsh, dangerous and dark reality underground.

Decades later, the life of these towns still revolved around the mines. Even into the 1950s, around the time when this story takes place, boys of high-school age, carrying on the traditions of their fathers and grandfathers, continued to see their future working in the mines.

This was the legacy of a mining town.

