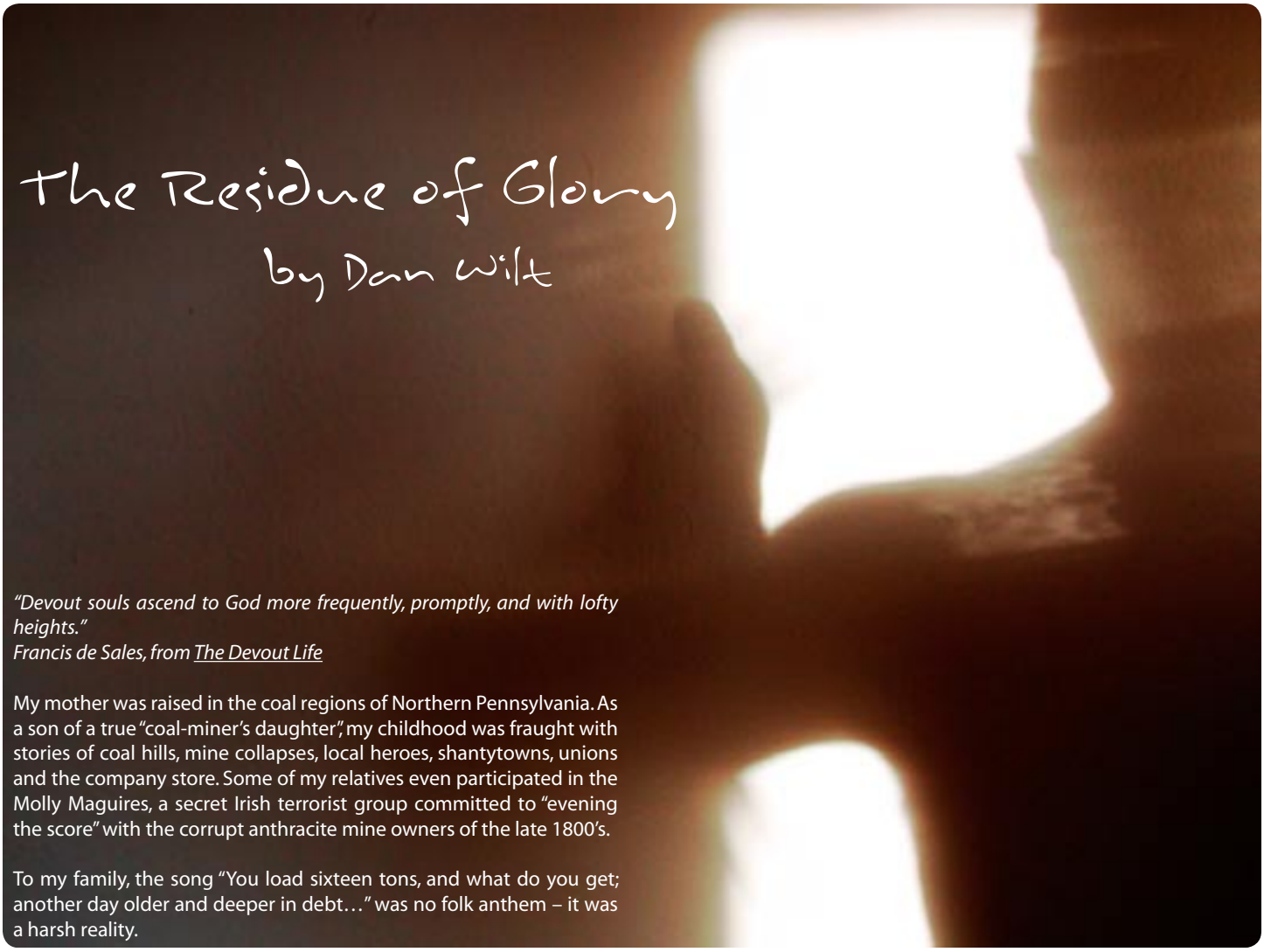


The Residue of Glory

by Dan Wilt

"Devout souls ascend to God more frequently, promptly, and with lofty heights."
Francis de Sales, from The Devout Life

My mother was raised in the coal regions of Northern Pennsylvania. As a son of a true "coal-miner's daughter", my childhood was fraught with stories of coal hills, mine collapses, local heroes, shantytowns, unions and the company store. Some of my relatives even participated in the Molly Maguires, a secret Irish terrorist group committed to "evening the score" with the corrupt anthracite mine owners of the late 1800's.

To my family, the song "You load sixteen tons, and what do you get; another day older and deeper in debt…" was no folk anthem – it was a harsh reality.

I think I learned to draw near to God riding with my grandfather around the steep, deadly bends that encircled Big Mountain. He was a soft-spoken man with laughing eyes, a wizened face and rough hands that spoke of decades of hard labour. Every time we would near an edge in that old rusty truck, I found my infantile spiritual life awakened as I cried out to God as I understood him to be: my Rescuer from Grandpa's erratic driving. Grandpa's hand on mine made my divine connection seem more real, I think.

My mother recounts how she and her siblings, along with the families of the other coal miners, would come to the worksite every day to wait for the horn to blow, signalling a long day's end. The men (and boys) would ascend from the blackened depths, pouring out like a wave of velvet water from the rocky hole, and the children would eagerly wait for each face to softly contrast with the black, gaping door of the mine.

As their game, the miner's children would guess which black-sooted body was the frame of their father. Covered from head to toe in the dust of the coal they spent their days seeking, these men were all but unrecognizable from the residue of their search.

I find worship to be like that. I readily descend into the mine of God's heart, and it seems that nothing comes easily to me. I must choose to lift every song, wrestle for every revelation, dig through emotional rock and clay, with blood on my hands and trembling weakness in my heart. Some times, rare times, I leave with a whole barrow full of precious encounter. Some times, most times, I come out with nothing in my hands but more blood and more dirt to show for my venture.

Yet, when I ascend from the mine of worship, I find that I am not the same as when I entered. Others may be the only ones who see the difference. I am covered from head to toe in that which I sought. The residue of his glory is the treasure I leave with, and the reward for another moment, God-lived.

Over time, I believe the residue of such worship builds, and a wiser pursuit of God reveals to me his love, found both in the heavy riches of his power, and in the light dust of his beauty. The presence of God is not so much found in the nuggets I desperately intended to leave the mine with, but rather in the lingering presence of his love now covering my sweaty brow. ■

Recomended Books



Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups

by Richard J. Foster

(Harper SanFrancisco)