

## In My Father's Footsteps

by Chris Rose

This is the day. Today's the day.

Andy knew it the moment he woke up that morning. This was the day he had to make a decision. The sun came in slowly through the red curtains in his bedroom and made him wake up earlier than he wanted to. It didn't matter. It didn't matter because today was the day. Andy stayed in his bed for some time, thinking about what he should do.

It didn't matter – he had lots of time – he had woken up very early this morning. He lay in his bed thinking about the day that was to come. He lay there thinking about what he should do. The sun shining in through his red curtains became stronger and stronger and eventually he got up, stretched, yawned and went into the bathroom to get washed.

When he was in the bathroom washing his face he looked at himself in the mirror. "What shall I do today?" he asked his reflection in the mirror. "Should I stay at home, like every Saturday, or should I go?" His reflection didn't reply to him. He looked at his face, his hair, his eyes. He thought about how much he looked like his father. He was now 32 years old. This was the same age that his father was when Andy was born. 32 years old. Was today the right time to make the journey? When Andy's father was 32 years old he had already made that journey hundreds of times. For Andy, it was going to be the first time.

Andy went back into his bedroom and carefully took his clothes out of his wardrobe. He had made the decision. Yes – his lucky shirt. And then, his favourite trousers. He hoped his trousers were going to be lucky trousers too. Then he went into the kitchen to make himself a cup of tea and some toast for breakfast. As he was eating he thought about other people in other parts of the world who went on journeys like the journey he was going to do today.

He was still thinking about it when he went out of his house and walked down the road to the train station. Such an ordinary beginning for such a special day! he thought. This day, he thought, was more than any ordinary journey. Today was a pilgrimage. Today – for Andy – was a day like going to Rome, or sick people to Lourdes, or the people walking to Santiago de Compostela, or even Mecca.

Perhaps this was a wicked thought, but that's how he felt. He thought about his father and he felt how extremely important this day was to him.

The train arrived and he saw a lot of other people getting on the train who were also making the same pilgrimage as he was. Even though he didn't know them, they smiled at each other and nodded their heads at each other in a greeting. They recognised each other even though they didn't know each other. The train started to move out through the town where he grew up – he saw the school where he went when he was little, the park where he played football with his father, and eventually the cemetery where his father was now buried.

His father had made this pilgrimage many times, but Andy had never gone with him. Andy hadn't had a good relationship with his father when he was alive, but since he had died a year ago Andy found himself thinking more and more about his father. Now he was going to make the same pilgrimage that his father made so many times because he wanted to understand and remember his father. His father had made this pilgrimage, and his father's father before that. And now he was doing it. It was a tradition which he felt happy – no, more than happy – he felt proud to be a part of.

Andy smiled again at the other people on the train. One man smiled back at him. "I haven't seen you here before", he said, "Is this your first time?"

"Yes, yes it is" replied Andy.

"I've been coming here for years" said the man. The train arrived at the station and they all got off. Now there were hundreds – no, more than hundreds – there were thousands of people there. They were all dressed in the same colours. They were all walking in the same direction.

"Makes you feel proud, doesn't it?" said the man to Andy. He was right – Andy did feel proud. They walked together out of the station and onto the main road. The place of pilgrimage was there in front of them, only a few hundred metres away now. The thousands of other people became tens of thousands of people, everybody

walking in the same direction, everybody together, lots of people singing old songs. Andy remembered his father singing some of those songs. He was happy now that he had come. He knew he had made the right decision.

As the tens of thousands of people walked slowly together along the road, Andy finally understood why his father and his grandfather had made this journey so often. It wasn't the object of the journey that was important – it was the journey itself that was important. It was important to do the same things with lots of other people sometimes, to feel a sense of a shared faith, and shared ideals. Andy turned round and smiled at the man beside him. The man smiled back at Andy. Even though these two men didn't know each other, they could see that they had something in common. They were walking in Andy's father's footsteps.

They walked in and up the concrete stairs. The noise of the tens of thousands of people was so loud that it was deafening. Andy started to laugh. He had made the right choice this morning. He was happy that he had come. He could almost feel his father standing there beside him. The teams ran out onto the pitch. There was a huge cheer.

The match was about to begin.

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