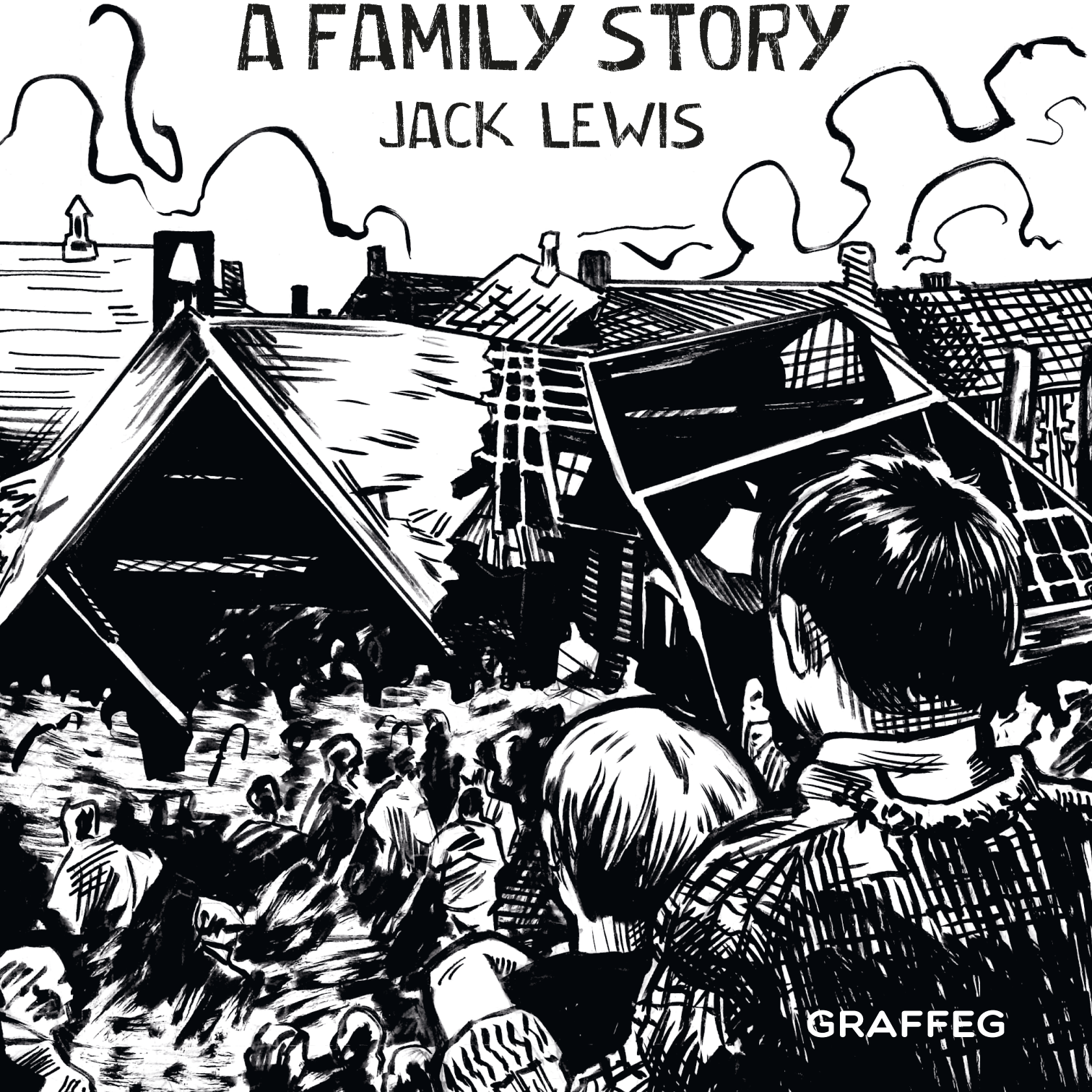
ABERFAN

A FAMILY STORY

JACK LEWIS



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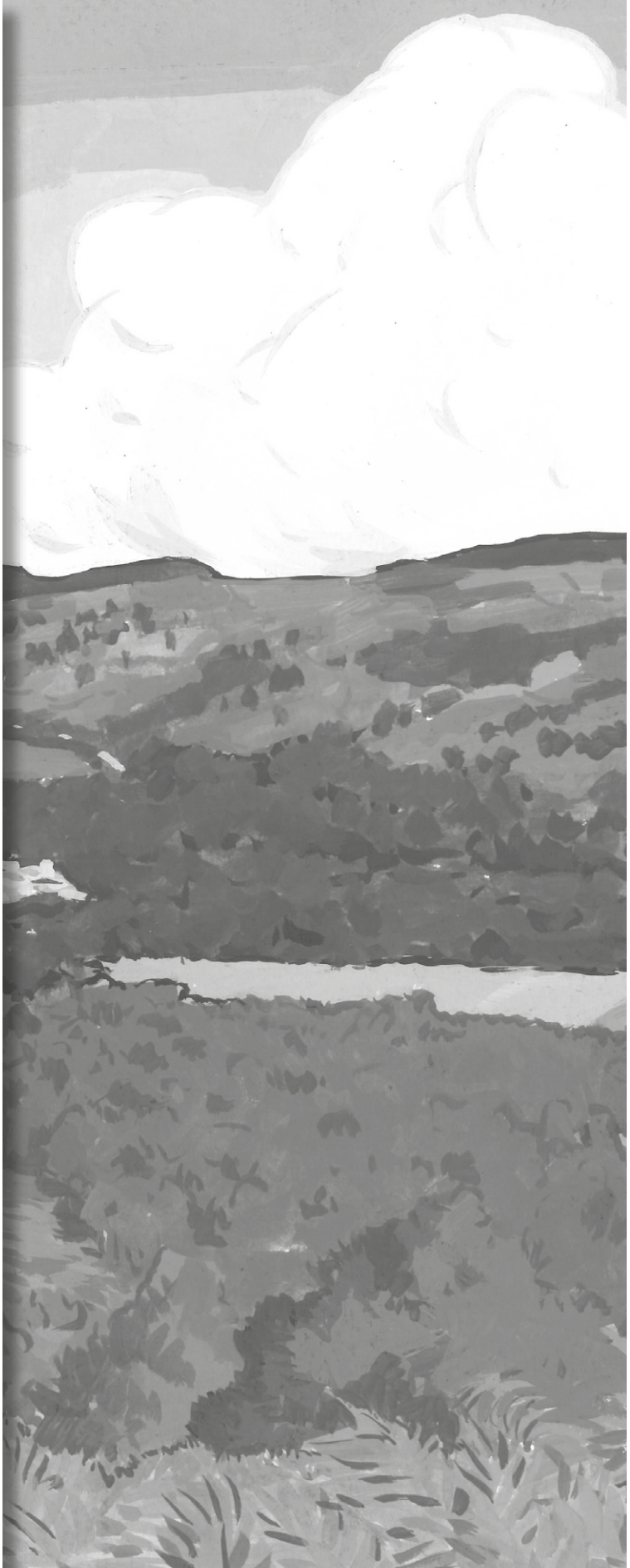
A FAMILY STORY

Special thanks to my family, who were extremely supportive and helpful in the creation of this book.

Thank you to my Uncle Windham, Aunty Alyson and Aunty Anne, whose experiences are the backbone of this story. Without their bravery and kindness, many would be far worse off.

Thank you to my parents, friends and tutors who supported and guided me in the development and resourcing for this story – I am truly grateful.

'Jack's taken a tragic and delicate subject, and written and illustrated a beautiful and compassionate story. We should never forget the real-life tragedy of Aberfan.'
Anthony Bunko, author.



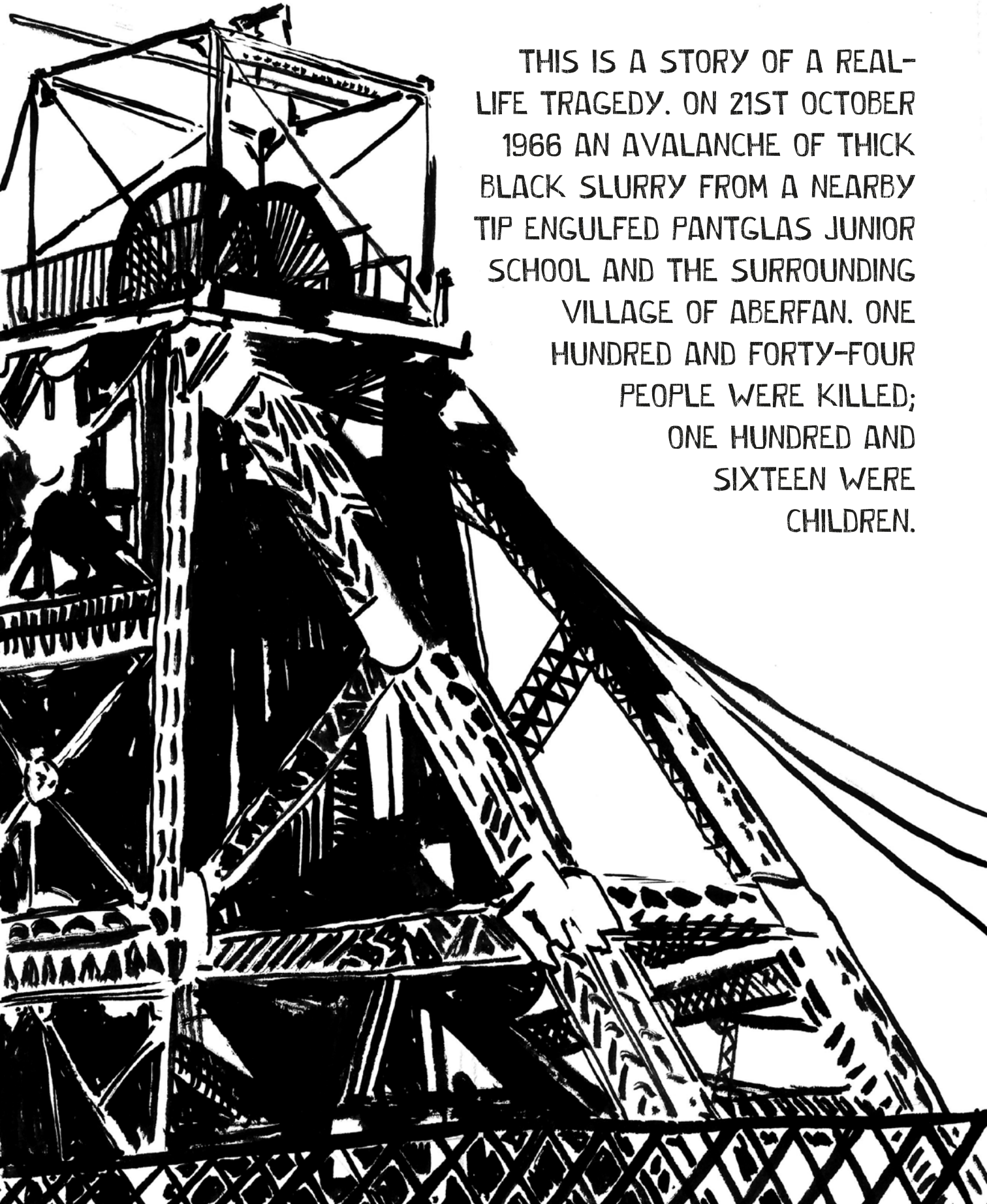
ABERFAN

A FAMILY STORY

JACK LEWIS



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THIS IS A STORY OF A REAL-LIFE TRAGEDY. ON 21ST OCTOBER 1966 AN AVALANCHE OF THICK BLACK SLURRY FROM A NEARBY TIP ENGULFED PANTGLAS JUNIOR SCHOOL AND THE SURROUNDING VILLAGE OF ABERFAN. ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR PEOPLE WERE KILLED; ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTEEN WERE CHILDREN.



WYNDHAM



ANNE



ALYSON

This is also the story of a real-life family. Wyndam Lewis, the author's uncle, was a coal miner in Aberfan, one of the first on the scene when the tragedy happened. His niece Anne was a child in the village, the eldest of four and a pupil at Quakers Yard Grammar School in a village nearby called Treharris. Alyson, Anne's sister, was a pupil at Pantglas. It is their words you will hear as you read this story, along with narration from the author, Jack Lewis.

Wales has a long history of mining disasters, but what made this disaster so tragic was its victims. These weren't miners, these were children and teachers attending school for the last day of term, supposedly safe from the dangers of the coal mining industry.

A spoil heap is a huge pile of waste material. In Aberfan the spoil heaps were made of waste from the coal mines. There had been many warnings about the safety of the colliery spoil heaps, or 'tips', that towered over the village. In particular, Tip 7, which had been built on naturally-occurring springs, had shown signs of movement. After a lot of heavy rain, the soaking wet tip started to slip, and an avalanche of slurry 25 feet high and travelling at 20mph swept through the school and village.

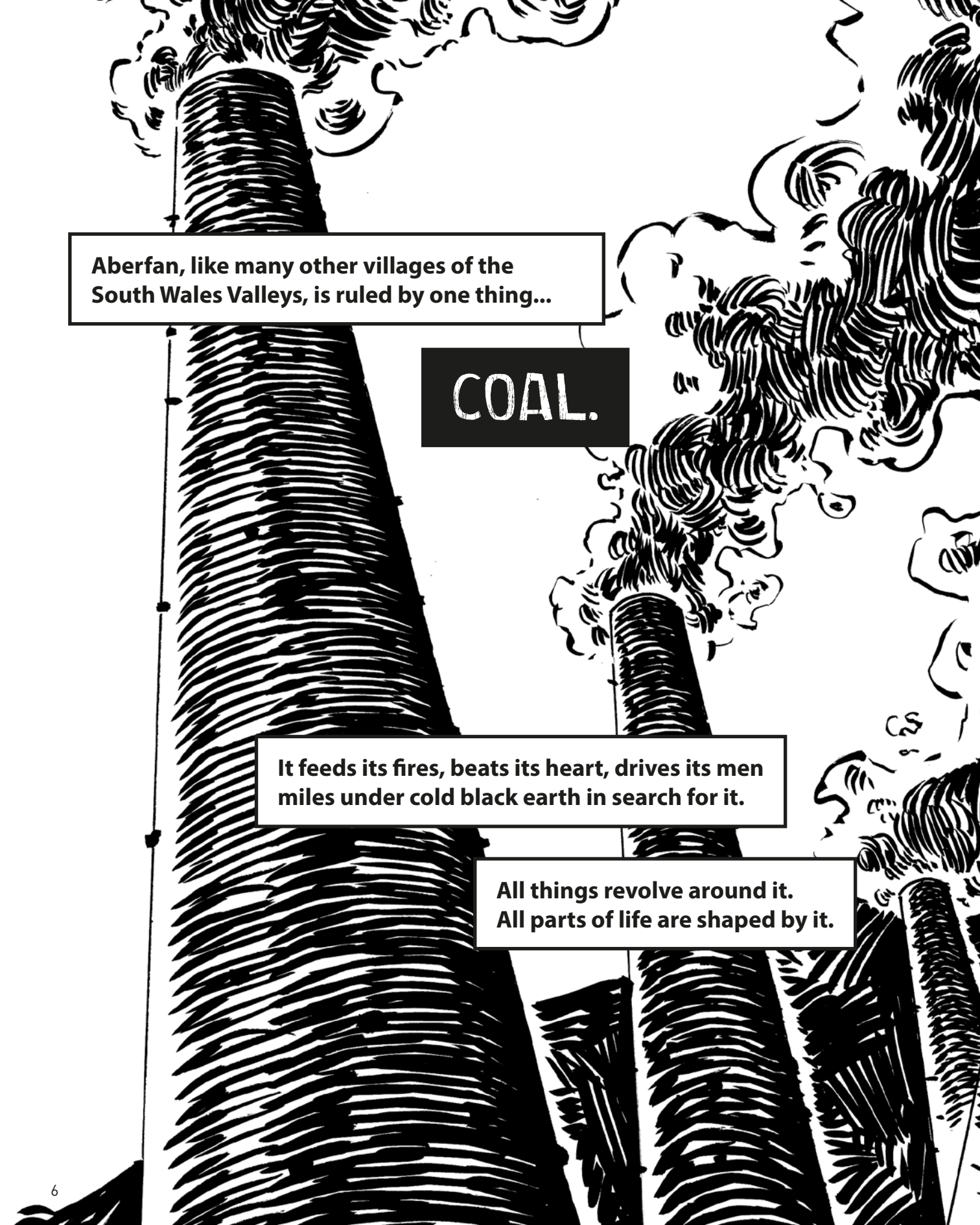
The rescue operation was led by thousands of miners and other residents of the South Wales Valleys and beyond who came to dig, some with just their bare hands. But people across the world were sad to hear of the disaster too. A total of £1.6 million was donated to the disaster fund – that would be the same as £20 million today.

The disaster left deep scars in Aberfan. A whole generation was lost; mothers, fathers, friends and siblings were left bereft. Yet the mine owners, the National Coal Board (NCB), refused to admit they were to blame. Instead, it was only after much criticism that they raised their offer of compensation from £50 to £500 for each child lost, but only if their investigation found that bereaved parents were 'close to their dead children'. There was no help for those who survived but struggled with their mental health after the tragedy they had seen and experienced.

After much protest the remaining tips were removed from around the village, but to pay for this the government seized £150,000 from the Disaster Fund. This money was not paid back until 1997.


Friday, 21st October 1966. A heavy fog lies over the village of Aberfan. It has rained for days, but from the depths of the fog, the unending grumbling of the pits continues.


Day and night, the pit churns out tons of coal, and the tips that loom over the village grow larger and larger.
The manmade mountains of black slurry rest on the steep slopes of the valley.


Aberfan, like many other villages of the South Wales Valleys, is ruled by one thing...
COAL.
It feeds its fires, beats its heart, drives its men miles under cold black earth in search for it.
All things revolve around it.
All parts of life are shaped by it.



IN MEMORY OF WYNDHAM LEWIS

My uncle Wyndham was a truly kind and brave man. I sincerely thank him for all the love and support he gave me in his life, and I hope through this story, others may recognise him as one of the countless unknown heroes of the Aberfan disaster. Men and women who gave everything to help others and built a community to be proud of. I will always love and remember you fondly.

THANK YOU

Thank you to my Aunty Alyson, whose resilience and strength pushed through the tragedy of the disaster and who was always ready to tell her story so none may forget. Thank you to my Aunty Anne, whose warmth helped to guide her family and younger sister though countless hardships and never struggled to find goodness in all things.

Finally thank you to all of those who helped me through the process of the creation of this story, especially to the kind people at Graffeg who gave me the opportunity to share this story with all of you.

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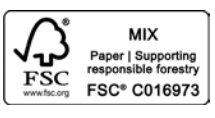
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JACK LEWIS

I spent my early life in Aberfan surrounded by the mountains and imbedded in the warm community of the village.

When I was younger the cloud of the disaster loomed large over the community and I never truly felt I understood what it really meant to me and my family. My Uncle Wyndham was a striker at the Merthyr Vale Colliery. He was one of the first to discover the disaster, after he was called to the school about a wall falling. My aunty Anne was a child in the Quakers Yard Grammar School, and she had to deal with the results of the disasters and protect her young siblings. My aunty Alyson was a survivor. No older than seven, she crawled her way out of the wrecked school as it slowly collapsed around her and faced a life marked by that tragic day.

ABERFAN

A FAMILY STORY



'Jack Lewis has created a visual and poignant account of the Aberfan disaster that is a realisation of a moment in time that changed lives. And changed history. It is a story that must never be forgotten.'
Steve Spiers, actor and writer.

On 21st October 1966, a mountain of slurry rushed down the hillside and engulfed the small village of Aberfan, Merthyr Tydfil, causing the deaths of 144 people, most of them children. Jack Lewis's own family members lived through this disaster, now recognised as one of the largest mining disasters in history. This book tells their story, whilst also reflecting on the impact it had on the village as a whole.

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