

# My family

by Flo Henderson

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*Flo talks about the importance of her brother, mam, dad and granny in shaping her childhood and early years.*

I WAS BORN IN MYRTLE ROW, Treorchy. The name I was given was Florence May Julia Hawkins. My mother came from a Welsh family of preachers, poets and actors and my father was born in France, to a French mother and an Irish father. He was in the army and fought in the First World War, then came to Wales.

I started life as a happy child. The boys wouldn't let me play so I used to go up the mountain and make mud cakes and take them home for my mother to put in the oven to harden. Mam always had *cawl* on the go in a big saucepan, which went on the fire. We would have it for dinner and sometimes for supper. You couldn't waste anything in those days. Mam, love her, had to go out washing for the big house. She'd go on the rubbing board, and she'd earn five shillings which she sometimes spent on new wellington boots for me and my brother.

I must tell this story about my brother. He wanted to go up the arch where all the water was, so instead of taking his wellingtons, he took mine. I didn't know that until Monday morning when we were getting ready for school. He went out before me. Mam said he was anxious to get to school. I

went to get my wellington boots on and they were soaking inside. He had taken my wellingtons down the arch. I was so mad that I cried. Mam said, 'Don't cry, *bach*. He'll have a hiding when he comes home.'

Mam had a lovely dresser, where all the best dishes were kept. They only came out for funerals or when the preacher came for Sunday tea. One day, Mam said, 'Florence, go to Martha Escort for a fresh loaf.' I said to Mam that I'd be late for school, but I had to go to Martha's and Mam shouted after me, 'I don't want a stale one!' I came back again, and the bread was stale. Mam told me to take it back, but I replied, 'I'm not going Mam, I'll be late for school.' Because I wouldn't go, Mam got annoyed and threw the loaf at me. I ducked, and it hit the dresser with the best china and funeral dishes instead! I didn't go home from school that day as I knew I would have a hiding. Instead I went to meet my father on his way home from work. He worked in the swamp pit and he used to keep a piece of bread for me when he'd been down the pit. Was I glad he had, and I didn't have a hiding.

Saturday's came and no school. On a Sunday morning, Granny would let me do her plaits. Sometimes I would do her plaits and one would be longer than the other, so without her knowing, I would cut the plait. Sometimes, I would answer mum back and I

wouldn't be able to go out. But I didn't mind, as I'd have an apple that Granny had bought from Tom's cart, which came around every Saturday morning. My father took me to the pictures every week. He also taught me to be clean and tidy, never answer people back, and to say please and thank you. My father died when I was seven and my brother was three. Looking back, Mam looked after Granny, went out to work, did the washing on the washing board, worked hard, and yet she was the best mother in the world. I will never come up to her standard. Life today is all switches, carpets, fridges; it has made us really lazy.