

A lifetime of struggle

Florrie de Villiers, General Secretary of the South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU) has spent her life juggling the demands of her commitment to the struggle and her home life.



I was born on one of those apple farms in the Elgin, Grabouw area. We were nine kids. When I was two years old my father decided we should move, as we were not going to get a good education on the farm. So I grew up in a village called Hawston, where I attended the Anglican missionary school.

My father was a farmer, but when we moved off the farm he did all types of work. We had our own big grounds that he worked on. At night he would go fishing. He also cut wood. I would go with him to sell wood and vegetables at the market.

My childhood was poor, but stable. My parents taught me to respect and care about other people. My mother would never cook a

pot of food for us only – she always cooked for those who were on the road who you didn't know, but were still coming. She was the midwife in the village. My father passed away about 21 years ago. My mother is 80 now. She lives in the same village and visits all the children she brought into the world.

I did well at school – I passed standard six at the age of 13 – but my parents could not afford high school. My aunt got me a job in Cape Town. You can imagine my frustration – I was only 15, but in those days there were no bursaries.

My aunt was a domestic worker. I helped her and looked after her employer's children. From there I automatically went into domestic work. Although I enjoyed the work