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# A Yorkshire Tale

by Susan North

We might have forgiven Dad for leaving if he hadn't taken the dog. Would it have hurt any less if he had left the dog behind? He was a whippet, grey-mottled, with white paws, a beautiful face, white whiskers and a brown nose. We children called him Freddie. He was a good hunter of rabbits and hares, which provided a staple food for us, the poorer members of society. He was an essential member of our family. We needed him.

Dad took Freddie to race against other dogs in Yorkshire. The practice went back to the days when colliers had a free day. It gave them an essential break in the open air, away from the hard labour of the coal mines. Whippets were unfairly classed as poor men's racehorses. We children loved going with Dad and cheering Freddie on; it became a social outing.

If Dad had any money left at the end of the week, he would gamble against other colliers. Later, he borrowed from our relatives. Soon he was in debt, and Freddie was losing. This became too much of a conflict of loyalties within the family. Everything we had was handed down, and my mother suffered the most. We had no spare money coming in.

Our two-up, two-down terrace had no heating, except for the pieces of coal Dad was allowed to bring home. They kept the range going, though, and our kitchen was always warm. We took comfort in that as a miner's family. We children had to scavenge for market leftovers—old cabbage leaves and scabby vegetables—but other children were doing the same. Poverty was rife in the 1920s and 1930s. I believe we could have survived as a family.

Why did Dad decide to leave? Perhaps the mental anguish of betting and owing money became too much; he couldn't see a way out.

We children and Mum would have forgiven him, but taking the dog as well left us grief-stricken. We loved Freddie and Dad, but absolution was beyond what we could give.