

The bounty of living life for the sake of others

BY SUZIE CHIDO
FOR THIS WEEK

BEAMSVILLE-Lilian Hadsley sits in her cozy room at Albright Manor in Beamsville, looking around at the place she calls her 'hotel'. For her, the luxurious care home is just another sign that God is looking after her – as He has done throughout her far-from-average life.

The 85-year-old has had malaria, dengue fever and pneumonia. She has ridden on horseback through snake-infested jungles. She has single-handedly fed and educated 10 children, and provided spiritual sustenance to hundreds of people.

It all started when Lilian was a young woman. While the dust was settling after WWII and the soldiers were coming home, the adventurous 20-something was planning to leave for Indonesia.

When most women her age were more likely to get married and settle down, Lilian sacrificed everything.

"I wanted to give my life to help people," she explained.

"I thought it was important that the children get a good education."

And so Lilian boarded a US troop ship and sailed for Indonesia as a Salvation Army brigadier.

After working in the office in Java for several years, she transferred to an island in the Celebes Sea to be where she felt she belonged – with the people.

As if being responsible for 14 churches wasn't enough – with 12 days a month spent on horseback riding between them all – Lilian also took in 10 children and became their teacher.

Lilian and her new family raised animals and grew their own vegetables.

"We had peanuts and coconut trees, and lots of fruit," she said. "Banana trees, papaya, pineapple, mango, passion fruit, star fruit. We ate beautiful fresh corn and caught fish from the lake."

With two horses, two dogs, a parrot, chickens, ducks and swans – not to mention Mary the monkey and Betty the pig – their makeshift farm was "more like a zoo."



Beamsville resident Lilian Hadsley with some of the 10 children she helped to raise and educate during the years she spent living and working in Indonesia for the Salvation Army. The photo was taken sometime in the 1970s.

It is hard to imagine how someone with no knowledge of Indonesian culture could be so resourceful and fit in so well. But a peek into Lilian's past explains a lot.

She was raised in Vancouver during the Depression. Money was scarce and Lilian's father died when she was just

eight years old, so the children had to help find food. Little Lilian dug clams and shrimp on the beach and picked berries, doing everything she could so her family wouldn't go hungry.

"I was so glad I had that experience," she said. "It helped me adjust overseas – I was used to having next to nothing."

Leaving the children was the hardest thing Lilian had to do when she came back to Canada in 1981.

"I missed them terribly," she said. "For a year I couldn't eat at the table alone, because I was so used to eating with all the children. I sat in front of the TV instead."

With only three suitcases and hardly anyone she knew, Lilian was consumed with loneliness. She had nothing to survive on but her Salvation Army pension – it was almost as if she was back where

She also knew the value of food and ate everything she was given in Indonesia, no matter how strange it looked or tasted. This made her an instant hit with the women.

"Right away I ate their food and enjoyed everything," Lilian remembered. "I loved the bean curd, all orangey and crispy. They used to watch me eating and that made them happy."

Lilian never regretted coming to Indonesia and never wanted to go home. She was an orphan, having lost her mother at sixteen, and so "I had no home to be homesick for." Instead, she became a mother to the children in her care. They called her 'ibu brigadier' ('ibu' means 'mother') and one woman still refers to her as 'mama'.

Watching the children growing up and getting a good education was the best part of her job, she said. "They all met nice spouses because they were capable and clever," added Lilian. "They've become ministers, school teachers, nurses and midwives. It's wonderful to see the children doing so well."

Many of the six girls and four boys now have families of their own, but they still keep in touch with their ibu. Lilian gets cards every Christmas, as well as letters and even phone calls. She has also returned to Indonesia to visit.

"I didn't know what I was going to do or where I could live," said Lilian. "But the Lord looks after us if we do the right thing. And it all turned out right in the most wonderful way."

Someone who knew Lilian as a young girl had kept her in mind all those years she was in Indonesia – and left the retired missionary a substantial amount of money in her will.

"I couldn't believe it – I got such a shock," recalled Lilian. "That's why I can afford to stay at Albright Manor now. God looked after me."

Lilian now has everything she needs at her fingertips – a café, a library, a gym, and constant outings and activities.

But one look at her eyes will tell you she'd rather be in Indonesia – with memories of fish barbecued on the beach, wading through vast rivers and torchlight processions down forest-covered mountainsides.

And her fondest memory? It's the people, said Lilian: "I have had the joy in my heart of being able to help them."