

# Grand old 114, going by her identity card

**Madam Lau eats simple meals, drinks herbal tonic and loves durian**

By **THERESA TAN**

ASK Madam Lau Pay how old she is and she says in Hokkien: "Hundred-plus."

Her family is unsure of the great-grandmother's real age.

All they know is that she was born in the Chinese Year of the Tiger, which could make her 106.

But her identity card says she was born in 1894, which would put her age at an amazing 114 years.

That would make her one of Singapore's oldest living persons. She was the oldest among 19 centenarians to have their wishes granted by the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation.

To mark the centenary of the birth of the late banker and philanthropist, foundation staff visited various old folk's homes to fulfil the wishes of this special group of seniors.

They found 19 centenarians in seven homes – aged between 100 and 114.

Singapore has some 500 people who are 100 or older, but the Registry of Births and Deaths says it does not know who the oldest living Singaporean is.

If the age on Madam Lau's IC is correct, it might well be her.

Her grandchildren had no trouble revealing the secrets behind her longevity: an easygoing personality, a daily shot of herbal tonic and a lifetime of eating simple home-cooked meals.

Her youngest daughter, Madam Tan Ah Lian, 59, said Madam Lau was born in China and came to Singapore in her teens to join her husband.

They had five sons and three daughters,

and were farmers in what is now Jurong.

Madam Tan said: "My mum led a hard life. She raised pigs and ducks to sell. And she took care of eight of us all by herself."

But no matter how tough her life was, she was never one to complain.

Granddaughter Julie Lim, 41, said: "I have never seen my grandmother lose her temper. She's very easygoing and a very kind person."

Madam Lau has outlived her husband and six of her children.

Until three years ago, when she fell and fractured her hip, she led an active life.

She would wake at the crack of dawn and spend her days cleaning her flat, washing clothes by hand, preparing meals and chatting with neighbours.

She had a weakness for fatty pork, but kept mainly to a diet of rice porridge with vegetables and fish.

For decades, she also downed a daily glass of "Chun Sheng Yao Jiu", a Chinese herbal tonic. And she was in bed by 8pm every day.

"She rarely fell ill," said Madam Tan. "And even when she was down with a cold, she would refuse to see the doctor because she said medical fees were costly. She would buy some Chinese herbs and take them instead."

After she injured her hip, Madam Lau's health went downhill quickly.

She now needs a wheelchair to get around, has diabetes and dementia, cannot see or hear well, and is no longer as alert as she used to be.

Since 2006, she has been living at the Villa Francis Home for the Aged, where she spends her days watching television and participating in the home's various activities, including physiotherapy.

And she loves durians, said Sister Maria Sim, the home's administrator.



Easygoing and kind... that's how Madam Lau's family describe her. With her are daughter Tan Ah Lian, granddaughter Julie Lim and grandson-in-law Benson Low. ST PHOTO: ALAN LIM

*Teresa Hsu going strong at 110*



SINGAPORE'S most famous centenarian, Teresa Hsu (above), is still "going strong" at 110.

"She's unbelievable," said Mr Sharana Rao, her co-worker at Heart to Heart Service, a charity founded by Ms Hsu.

At 110, she still practises yoga daily and visits the poor every week. She said in an earlier interview: "I have jumpy legs, I can't sit still, and anyone who is needy is my brother or sister."

Ms Hsu is one of 500 centenarians in Singapore, as Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong revealed last year.

In 2002, Madam Tay Kiong died of pneumonia at age 112. At that time, she was believed to be Singapore's oldest person.

The all-time record holder for longevity is a Ms Jeanne Louise Calment who died at age 122 in 1997.

The French woman was said to have enjoyed a daily glass of port.

According to the Guinness Book of World Records 2009 edition, American Edna Parker, 115, is the world's oldest living person now.

So for Madam Lau's treat, the Tan Chin Tuan Foundation organised a buffet lunch, complete with durian and ice cream, to which she and other residents were invited last month.

There are three other centenarians at the home: Mr Loy Kai See, 103, Miss Agatha Koh, 101, and Madam Teo Say Geok, 100.

The Foundation's programme director, Ms Yap Su-Yin, said the centenarians wanted only very simple things such as milk powder and Tiger Balm when asked for their wishes.

She added: "One centenarian just wanted to eat at a restaurant with her family." [theresat@sph.com.sg](mailto:theresat@sph.com.sg)