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Sunday November 11, 2007

Very much a mother at heart

By AUDREY EDWARDS and LISA GOH

**Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah raised her children with a firm hand and a warm heart, just like the way she herself was raised. If there is any quarrel it must be resolved by the time they get to the dinner table.**



All smiles: Jeanne shares a strong bond with her daughters Nadiah (right) and Nadene.

THE Prime Minister's wife brought up her children the strict way, just like how her own mother raised her.

Datin Seri Jeanne Abdullah, who shares that she is very close to her two daughters, thinks they too are likely to raise their own children in a similar manner.

"I brought up my girls the way my mother brought me up. My mother was strict so I tend to emulate her.

"I find myself repeating many of the things my mother told me. And I think my girls will be repeating them to their children in time to come."

She says she shares a strong bond with Nadiah, 29, and Nadene, 27, even though they no longer live together as they make time for each other and are constantly in touch via the phone.

Jeanne, 54, married Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in June. Abdullah's wife of 42 years, Datin Paduka Seri Endon Mahmood, who was Jeanne's sister-in-law, died in October 2005 after a long battle with breast cancer.

"We (my daughters and I) are still very close. It is just that we do not stay together anymore. If I am home for dinner, they come home. Or they will come over if there is a good three hours between schedules and they are not busy at home. Otherwise, we are on the phone a lot."

She relies on her daughters to help out with shopping if she is hard pressed for time, especially when it comes to cosmetics. "Whenever I know I am running out of anything, I will call my daughter and she will get it for me. I let her decide what to get and whatever she gets for me, I will use," she says with a laugh when asked whether there was any specific brand of make-up she preferred.

One important family practice she picked up from her parents Mathew Danker and Caroline Alves is that one should never

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quarrel in front of the children.

“I have never seen my parents quarrel and they have always made it clear that they don’t want us to quarrel among ourselves. If we argued about things like kids do, my mother made sure that we were on talking terms by the time we got to the dinner table,” she says.

“So, we never kept anything inside. When it was over, it was over. I taught my children that too. And they are very close to each other.”

There was a motherly and approachable air about Jeanne throughout this interview, which was done in the midst of the Umno general assembly and questions were centred on her attending it for the first time as the wife of the Prime Minister.

It was also peppered with other questions including whether she was a “strict” mother, how she is getting used to public life and organ donation.

During the general assembly, she took time out to sign up as an organ donor. Jeanne also donated blood at the Health Awareness Centre in the Putra World Trade Centre where the assembly was held.

And during the interview, which went on for about 30 minutes, she even shared two recipes – for rambutan curry and a modified version of *ikan assam pedas* – after one of the journalists casually asked her about the dish. (Note: whole sour rambutans are used for a dish such as *ikan masak lemak* instead of pineapples.)

A piece of advice that she has for young Malaysian women is that they always have faith in God because that will be the anchor in their lives.

“When you have religion in your life, be it Islam, Christianity or Buddhism, you will know when you have done something wrong. I tell my children what my mother told me, which is to always look into the mirror, ask yourself and be honest with yourself. As long as you have faith, honesty, respect, patience and you are humble, there is nothing to worry about.”

Jeanne says she and Abdullah never looked at their marriage as a reflection of Malaysian unity because they feel race did not play a part in it.

“We talk of ourselves as one,” she shares.

When asked about whether she planned to head any charity in the near future, she says while she would support good deeds, it was not possible for her to lead because she did not have the time to commit herself 100%.

However, she reveals that she decided to donate all her organs following the recent double heart transplant operation on Tee Hui Yi. She says she was touched by Hui Yi’s mother’s plea for the organ to save her daughter.

“If one of my daughters needed an organ, I would also be doing the same thing,” she says.

“When you become a mother and have your own children, then you will understand.”

She adds that Nori, Abdullah’s daughter, was supportive of the idea and that Nadiah and Nadene have taken the forms and planned to be organ donors.

And while she has increasingly been seen at public functions and featured in the media, Jeanne laughingly says she will never get used to the publicity.

She says the trick was to “ignore” the photographers because it would otherwise be “quite stressful.”

“Some are so used to it, but I am not. I am quite fidgety, actually,” she adds.

On her make-up, Jeanne admits she is "not very good" with it.

"I never really bothered to touch up my make-up. I used to leave it there until it was time to come off.

"Now, it takes more time. My make-up for day and night is the same. I wish it would stay on the whole day."

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