



Her true calling

PHOTOGRAPHY MULOY LUIB MAKEUP & HAIR GRACE CHEONG
 LOCATION THE EMPIRE HOTEL & COUNTRY CLUB
 STYLING RACK & BREW PRODUCTION STEPH NAMBIAR



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 BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

LILY Ng didn't expect she would one day own a health store. Neither did she plan to become an advocate of urban gardening nor a one-woman support group for people with cancer. Like most chartered accountants, she pursued a career in finance, climbing the corporate ladder in an international bank. She thought this would be the life she would lead until she retires. But in 2007, she was diagnosed with Stage 2 breast cancer. This would push her to move to another direction, and in the process she found her true calling.

"At that time, you think that's the end of your life," she recalls. What worried her most was her two young children. *Who would be taking care of them when I'm gone?* After going through weeks of depression, she picked herself up and resolved to overcome cancer. She consulted doctors, went through chemotherapy and took medication. She also gathered more information about cancer by reading books, surfing online and asking health professionals.

"When I read more I became more confident about it. When you have more information, it makes more sense to you," she says.

What made sense to Lily was that one of the ways to overcome cancer was to maintain a healthy diet – eating meals made from organically-grown herbs, fruits and vegetables. She took this idea to heart and in 2011 enlisted two permaculturists to learn more about composting, rainwater harvesting and crop management without using chemical fertilisers and pesticides. They also set up Lily's organic fruit and vegetable garden. The health benefits of eating organic food have encouraged Lily to promote urban gardening.

"I wanted to do something more meaningful so I was thinking of ways (of making organic produce more affordable). People wanted it cheap, but you couldn't get it here. So why not grow our own?" Lily then started a Facebook group and held meetings to encourage urban gardening. That idea, however, failed to take off as most Bruneians were either too busy or not too keen on gardening.

What she did learn, however, was that most people knew that organic food plays a role in having a healthy diet. They want to be healthy. They just don't want to grow their own crops and prefer to buy ready-made health food. That pushed her to offer another option – to open a health shop by

THE
**BRUNEI
 TIMES**

People

bringing in a franchise of Natural Health Farm (NHF). Lily is a regular client of the Malaysian health retail chain and can personally vouch for its products.

In 2014, Lily launched the first NHF outlet at Times Square Shopping Centre. The public response was positive, encouraging Lily to open a second branch the next year at The Mall, Gadong to reach out to more clients.

Her business, so far, is thriving. But what fulfills Lily more is the fact that having a health shop gives her a venue to continue her advocacy for organic food and to meet and support people who have health problems. As a cancer survivor, she knows the hopelessness and fear that one feels after getting diagnosed with a serious illness.

"A lot of times when you get diagnosed with cancer, it's like a death sentence. A lot of times, the fear is already damaging you even more," she says.

But Lily believes in being proactive, and taking charge of one's health by getting all the support and information that one can get in order to prevent, if not overcome, cancer.

Lily in fact has made one step further by telling her doctors to give her contact number to any of their patients dealing with cancer. She welcomed the phone calls that she received and has spent hours discussing her experience and supporting people with cancer.

"Life throws you all these challenges (but) you just need to learn from it and grow," she says, noting that while fear will always be there, that shouldn't deter one from taking the next step towards your own healing and lifelong wellness.

The Brunei Times