

## 84-year-old fit as a fiddle and inspiring many with her skills

PENANG

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AT 84, A. Akilambihai shows no signs of slowing down in her active routine.

While most people her age would settle into a slower lifestyle and depend on others for assistance and mobility, she demonstrates the exact opposite.

Akilambihai, fondly known as Mrs Arul Anantham (her late husband's name), also looks radiant and has no illnesses.

She even drives herself to the market.

"I love to wear my sarees before leaving the house too," quipped the soft-spoken octogenarian who was born in Seremban, Negri Sembilan.

Akilambihai, who has three children – A. Shaminy, 64, A. Thayaparan, 60, and A. Rubinee, 50, – is also a doting grandmother of three.

Shaminy, a retired Inland Revenue Board officer, lives in Butterworth. Rubinee, a company executive, lives in Kuala Lumpur while Thayaparan, a retired mechanical engineer, lives in Seremban.

Akilambai stays with her grandson P. Sasitharan, 30, at her home in Western Gardens, off Jalan Utama in Penang as she wants to lead an independent life despite her children's pleas for her to live with them.

She attributes her good health to a vegetarian diet and keeping an active lifestyle, practising her favourite activities such as playing music, gardening, stitching, beading



Akilambihai (left) showing her handmade quilt at her home in Penang. With her are her niece R. Suguna (centre), 72, and her students (from second left) Fauziah, N. Suseela, and Saraswathi.

and cooking, a practice she has been following for the past 30 years.

She started playing the violin, singing and dancing to classical music as a little girl and has taught more than 100 students music, particularly in singing devotional religious songs and classical music, for more than 20 years.

"My students are aged between 18 and 70 years old. Through teaching them, I also learn new songs," she said at her home in Western Gardens.

Without charging fees, Akilambihai also teaches stitching, long stitch, beading, patchwork, traditional cooking and other types of handicraft work.

"Over the years, I have learnt these skills from others and now, I pass on the knowledge to anyone who is interested.

"I see the joy in others when they learn from me and I feel happy too," she said.

One of her oldest students, O. Saraswathi Devi, in her 50s, said Akilambihai is a motivating individual to those around her.

"Usually, people her age tend to complain about a lot of things in life.

"I have known her for the past 20 years and I have never once heard her complain about anything," she said.

Student S. Kharninee, 20, who has been learning to sing devotional songs from Akilambihai for the past three years, thinks of her as her godmother.

"I am blessed to have met her," she added.

Tuition teacher Fauziah Sahjahan, 31, said she enjoys learning stitching and patchwork from Akilambihai.

"She teaches us not to waste anything but instead, to create something beautiful out of recyclable materials," she said.



Akilambihai, 84, playing the violin at her home in Western Gardens, Penang. — Photos: WAN MOHIZAN WAN HUSSEIN/The Star