



ST PHOTO: TERENCE TAN

Madam Krishnavani (foreground) set up the "Golden Gals" dance group for women aged 40 and over to learn Indian cultural dance. The high-spirited senior was one of seven people honoured yesterday with an Active Agers award for leading an active life in their twilight years.

Life's an adventure for gung-ho great-grandmother

Jermyn Chow

Madam R. Krishnavani has survived a war, worked in more than 10 jobs and taught Tamil in more than 30 schools.

Born in 1938, the 70-year-old has five children, nine grandchildren and a great-granddaughter. It's a good time to just dote on the little ones, some might say.

But she still leads an active life, running a dance class, giving tuition and acting on stage.

To the septuagenarian, age is just a number. "I don't want to just sit at home waiting for death. I want to continue living my dreams and being happy," said Madam Krishnavani.

It is this gung-ho outlook that made her one of seven people honoured yesterday for living their greying years to the fullest.

They received their Active Agers awards from Minister for Com-

munity Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan in a ceremony at Cavenagh Bridge.

The occasion was part of the on-going Active Ageing festival which promotes a meaningful lifestyle. The festivities are organised by the Council for Third Age, an independent body that promotes active ageing.

Council chairman Gerard Ee said there were more than 400 nominations this year, twice the number last year.

"As Singaporeans start living longer, having longer healthy life expectancy is of great importance and active ageing is one of the key ways to achieve this. I think seniors are beginning to recognise this themselves," he said.

Madam Krishnavani is a testament to this.

She said "life" began for her only when she was 32 – when she decided to hit the books again, after a 15-year hiatus to start a family.

Relatives and friends, expecting her to be a homebody, had scolded her then.

But she stood by her decision because her husband was jobless at the time and she saw education as the way for her to have a more stable job as a breadwinner.

She had quit school at 17, on her parents' insistence, to marry a 37-year-old odd-job labourer.

Madam Krishnavani put the awkwardness of being the oldest in her night class behind her to get her O-level qualifications.

She became the sole breadwinner and took on multiple jobs. She was a radio announcer and actress with the then-Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, a relief teacher in schools and a tuition teacher. The family of seven lived on her income of \$1,400 a month.

In 1980, she was widowed when her husband died from a brain aneurysm.

Looking back, she is proud to

have put her children through junior college.

Now, her daughter and two sons take turns to house her every week. Her two other sons migrated to Canada in 2003. She visits them once every two years.

The dance enthusiast's can-do attitude shone again in 2002, when she was once again criticised for not staying at home.

She set up the "Golden Gals" dance group for women aged 40 and over to learn Indian cultural dance every Sunday at the Thomson community centre.

The group of 12 students – mostly 40-somethings – has performed in Malaysia and Indonesia's Karimun Island.

"Nowadays, so many older women just stay at home to cook, clean, watch television or sleep. It is not healthy and very mind-numbing," she said.

The matriarch still has two more "peaks" to scale. She wants to learn how to send e-mail and surf the Internet.

And she wants to pick up a few tips from her grandchildren on how to use the 3G mobile phone she received as a present last year.

"I told them I want to learn how to send text and pictures to them and my friends."