

‘We arrived in Darwin in 1999’

Aged care recipient ADRIANA CLARA is a former stock trader, the daughter of a king and always as independent as she can be, she tells NATASHA EGAN.

NE: Can you tell me about your background?

AC: I was born in Dili, the capital of East Timor. I have two sisters and four brothers. My father was the King of Fatumea, a small province. At age one, I was promised to the King of Naitimu’s son for an arranged marriage.

At age seven, my aunt schooled me. Once the Japanese invaded East Timor, I returned to my father for safety. When the Japanese retreated to Indonesia, I resumed schooling until I was 15 and then married. I was a little girl. We didn’t know how to do anything, least of all love each other.

I experienced three miscarriages and at 20, I had my only biological child, Mary. My marriage declined and it was difficult to keep food on the table. At 22, Mary and I went to live with my aunt for six months.

My father would not accept our separation and took my husband under his wing to teach him how to buy and sell buffalos, cattle and horses. My husband placed false names on receipts for sales and was misappropriating proceeds. When discovered, he fled to his country, Haleluk.

Indonesia’s war occupied East Timor. Government officials helped people escape the war. Selling my belongings to survive, I requested assistance for myself, Mary and my two nephews Oscar and Julio, whom I adopted to provide them a better life.

We arrived in Darwin in 1999. Unable to find work, I was sad on arrival. My sister and brother-in-law supported us.

What was your life like after you came to Australia?

I caught prawns and fish directly from the sea and grew fruit, vegetables and plants. I bought and sold at local markets and worked hard to provide for my family. My sons sold newspapers to assist with money.

I moved from Darwin to Melbourne to Brisbane. Oscar still lived in Darwin. After three years in Brisbane, Julio moved to Melbourne. I remained in Brisbane on my own for seven years and then arrived in Melbourne to live with my daughter Mary. This arrangement did not work out and I eventually bought a home with Julio in Deer Park where I remain to this day.

Mary passed away last year.

Can you tell me about your profession and interests?

I bought and sold stock to put Mary through boarding school, located far away. Every year, I travelled to pick up Mary for the Christmas break. She became a schoolteacher.

I love all plants, in particular an edible garden. Eating only organic food, I propagate my own vegetables and plants.

I’m Christian and read the bible every day. I speak Tetum, Portuguese and English.

Can you tell me about your day-to-day life now?

I still live with Julio in Deer Park, where I eat organic foods, grow my own vegetables and keep chickens. Because of



an unsuccessful operation on my right leg, I can’t walk. However, I move around with an electric wheelchair and am as independent as possible.

What difference do aged care services make to your day?

Australian Multicultural Community Services (AMCS) support me to live at home. I’m in a wheelchair due to Osteoarthritis and I suffer from a chronic skin condition that causes itching.

Support workers assist me with personal care and home care such as vacuuming, mopping, cleaning and meal preparation. They collect eggs and fresh vegetables from my garden and support my lifestyle of eating organic and healthy foods.

What do you most like about the services you receive?

I couldn’t manage without the help of the girls AMCS send me. My wheelchair cost is reimbursed through my Home Care Package. AMCS also provide cab vouchers to attend medical appointments and shopping. I couldn’t be happier with the support workers at AMCS.

Is there anything you miss about your birthplace?

The culture and a sense of family. In East Timor, I ate many different animals. In my culture, when a king dies, he stays at home for three years in a coffin. A servant cooks for the king every day and prays during mealtimes. I bought a home in Dili where I took in relatives and several Portuguese people because they had nowhere else to go. We lived together in harmony until the war.

However, there’s more freedom here. After living with my aunt, I wished to return to my father’s home. I had to seek a permit to enter his province, six hours away on horseback. Officials advised they could not give a permit because my husband may shoot them. It was not acceptable for a married woman to cross the border on her own. I appealed to my husband to obtain a permit on my behalf because I missed my family.

And while I love Australia, I really miss the Chinese, Timorese and Portuguese food of my homeland.

What would make your life better?

I would love to walk and have a younger body. I miss doing everything for myself.

AMCS is also matching me with a volunteer for the Volunteer Visiting Program. I asked for someone who speaks Tetum. It’s lonely during the pandemic and I look forward to someone with mutual hobbies visiting me. ■