

When her Ford Anglia made heads turn

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SHE was heavily pregnant with her fourth child but nothing could stop her from embarking on the long journey before the crack of dawn.

Teacher Azizah Ahmad, who was then 38, left Johor Baru with her cousins in a Ford Anglia for an almost seven-hour trip to Kuala Lumpur.

Azizah, the Johor Umno Kaum Ibu (women's wing) secretary who was in the third trimester of her pregnancy, wanted to be there when Merdeka was proclaimed on the morning of Aug 31, 1957.

"We had no relatives in Kuala Lumpur. So, we stayed in the home of a friend, Siti Hawa Zain, who was a radio announcer," recalls Azizah, 88, at the home of her son, Luqmanulhakim, in Port Klang recently.

It was raining cats and dogs on the morning of Merdeka.

"We could hardly sleep the night before as we were so excited," remembers Azizah, whose arthritis takes a toll on her now.

"We woke up early and left Siti Hawa's house in Kampung Pandan about 4am to go to Merdeka Stadium. We wanted to get there early to get good seats.

"It was pitch dark when we arrived at the stadium. As we were looking for a place to park, a traffic policeman directed us to a parking lot in the stadium grounds.

"We parked there, not realising that it was reserved for VIPs.

"Imagine our surprise when our Ford Anglia was surrounded by luxury cars when we were leaving the stadium after the celebrations.

"People lined up on both sides of the road to wave at the VIPs in their cars. They waved at us, too. They must have thought we were from some royal family!"

Azizah's Merdeka celebrations did not end in Kuala Lumpur. She travelled to Bentong, Ipoh and Penang to witness the state-level celebrations.

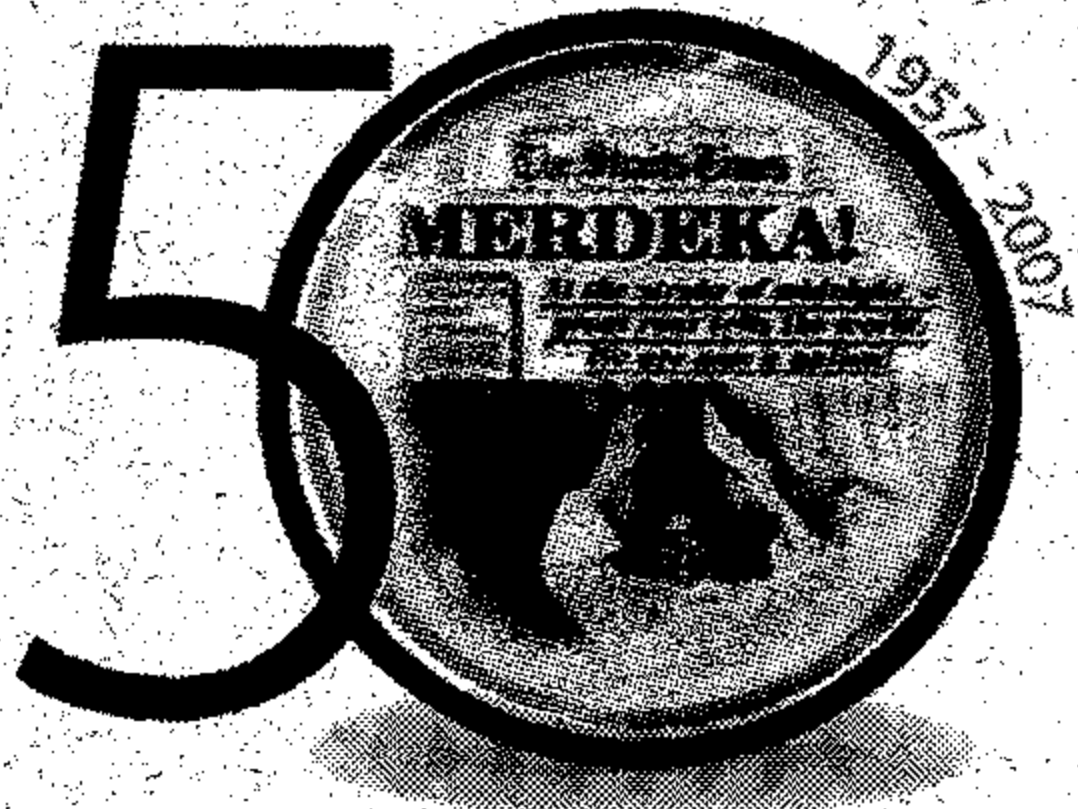
Azizah gave birth to her third daughter Habibah (now an associate professor) 42 days after Merdeka.

For Azizah, who was the Umno Johor Baru Kaum Ibu secretary from 1946 to 1951, Aug 31 was what they had been working for and she was in the thick of it.

Each time you look at the Umno flag, think of Azizah as it was the young woman who hand-stitched the original version.

She not only stitched the flag but also wrote down the Umno constitution

In the pioneering days of Umno, she was known as Datuk Onn Jaafar's 'right-hand woman'. P. SELVARANI catches up with this remarkable woman who, among other things, stitched the first Umno flag



in Jawi as party founder and first president Datuk Onn Jaafar dictated it.

The flag was designed by (Prof Dr) Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, Onn's 17-year-old nephew.

"Datuk Onn, who was then the menteri besar of Johor, asked me to sew the flag. I went to Singapore with (Tun) Hussein Onn to shop for the materials.

"We were chaperoned by Mak Dek, a friend of Datin Onn because it was improper for a young Malay girl to be seen alone in the company of a *bujang* (bachelor)."

Azizah stitched the flag, including embroidering the logo (a green keris in a yellow circle). It took her two months to complete the job.

"Datuk Onn then asked me to transcribe in Jawi the Umno constitution, which he dictated while I wrote it in an exercise book at his office in the menteri besar's residence.

"He sourced ideas for the constitution from the constitutions of the Conservative and Labour parties of Britain."

Azizah was actively involved in Umno, especially the Kaum Ibu movement with her mentor, Ibu Zain (Tan Sri Zainon Munshi Sulaiman) who was the head of Kaum Ibu, even after

her marriage to Ashari Abdullah in 1948.

The Umno membership then was largely made up of members of the royal families and the children of statesmen and other dignitaries.

It was also Ibu Zain, the then superintendent of girls' schools in Johor, who drew Azizah into the teaching profession.

Azizah, who was then 16, drew a salary of \$18.

"She gave her mother \$15 and used the balance to buy her first 'make-up' — Hazeline Snow — a product she uses until today," says her daughter Halimah.

Azizah held the post of Johor Baru Kaum Ibu secretary until 1951 as family responsibilities made it difficult for her to be actively involved in politics, especially at the national level.

But she never stopped being an Umno member. She is till today the permanent chairman of the Kampung Dato' Onn Umno branch in Jo-

hor Baru.

Apart from her love for teaching and politics, Azizah was also a prolific writer, contributing articles and short stories to magazines such as *Mustika* and *Ibu Melayu*.

Despite being confined to her bed most of the time these days, reading brings much joy to her.

"Her face lights up every time we bring her newspapers or magazines," says Habibah, who is the director of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia's International Education Centre.

Azizah's eldest daughter, Mariam, 57, is a teacher in Washington, while her second daughter, Halimah, 55, is a retired teacher in Kuala Lumpur.

Another daughter, Hamidah, 52, is a diplomat in Jakarta, while Luqmanulhakim, 42, is a businessman.

"Our mother comes from a family of teachers and educationalists, who did not amass any material wealth.

"To her, the best legacy she could leave us is a sound education," adds Habibah.



Azizah Ahmad's legacy to her children is a sound education.