



Otilie Abrahams

by Laura Sasman • photographs Contributed

When Otilie Abrahams walked into a room you knew it. In fact you would have sensed her coming from the corridor. Slight-ish of posture, she was not especially loud, but she had an aura, a certain presence that preceded her. With her grey hair as a wave that became her trademark, (she wore this 'do' forever) she usually was dressed in what perhaps could be described as 1950s classical-Hausfrau style, with her steel-rim glasses perched on her nose. However, her looks belied the firebrand community activist who earned respect and acknowledgement throughout Namibia and beyond.



I came to know Tillie when I was still a young woman. She must have been about the age I am now. By then she has had a political life and the experience of internment, separation from her family and exile behind her. While these events would have left many bitter and broken, it only strengthened her resolve to serve and improve her community. And she was passionate and compassionate about it. A feminist, grass-roots activist, and political person she was deeply committed to her chosen service.

I understand that for many, she has been "Aunty Tilly". As almost a life-long companion and comrade of my own mother, I was always amused about how these two outwardly mundane women preferred to refer to each other as "Abrahams" and "Sasman" respectively. This I believe was their special terms for endearment and recognition. They worked together for decades and accepted and respected the person and function that each one had in the community to which they have committed their life work to.

Convinced that every child deserved a decent education, Tilly initiated the establishment of a kindergarten and school along the principles of Ayi Kwei Armah. She believed that true liberation was attainable only when people were educated to think critically in a non-sexist and participatory democratic context. She was dedicated to these principles her lifelong.

I cannot imagine what it would have been like to have had Tilly as a mother. Her children always had to share her with the whole community. Still they did it with the same selfless stoicism that she afforded herself. By sharing their mother, they did her proud.

Otilie Abrahms died at the age of 80 while still in service of her community. To our comrade I say Hamba Kathle Otilie, it was a privilege to have known you. ♀