Laetitia is 87 when I first visit her. She has a kind face with soft eyes and always wears beautiful clothes and make-up. She'll tell me her ‘beauty secrets’ later. She loves listening to the news on the radio while grooming herself: ‘then you always have something to talk about over a cup of coffee.’ (C01.2, C01.3)

She tells me she was born in Surinam and spent a happy youth there. Laetitia moved to the Netherlands in the 1970s. She was widowed twice and has been living alone for many years now. She goes out a lot, sometimes with her sister who lives nearby, and together with a group of friends. They meet at many organised activities for the elderly. ‘We go everywhere. It’s always fun. It is important to go out, to move around.’ (C01.1, C01.2, C01.3)

She also likes going out on her own, buying nice food to make herself a good meal. ‘I was born alone. I do what I want, eat what I want, go where I want. I don’t have a lot of money. I live a happy life.’ (C01.1)

The second time I visited her she had been to a traditional Surinamese party on a city square and enjoyed the music. She tells enthusiastically: ‘I went by in the afternoon and then in the evening I thought: I want to go again, and I was there till 10 o’clock, relaxing, dancing a bit.’ (C01.2)

Her faith is important for her. Laetitia chooses a photo of praying hands. She prays regularly herself. ‘When I go out I say A wani fu Gado – in God’s will. I ask God to lead me and bring me home safely. He guards and protects me’ (C01.1, C01.2, C01.3)

Laetitia thinks of herself as a friendly person: ‘I am confident within myself and confident with who I am.’ (C01.2) ‘I am not a difficult person. I am not jealous. I don’t want anything from others. I am like my grandma, a giving person. I always keep some sweets in my bag to offer someone. I like to help others. That’s how I am.’ (C01.1, C01.2, C01.3)

Although her mobility is declining, she manages with elastic stockings and a walker. ‘It is alright. That’s how older persons are. I have a little pain here and there. I live healthy.’ (C01.1, C01.2, C01.3)

Her family is important to her as well (three daughters, two grandchildren and her three brothers and four sisters). A brother and sister died recently. She likes to spoil her grandchildren. She shows me many pictures of people who are close to her. Her dead sisters and brothers have been inserted into a photo of her and her family.

Laetitia thinks back at her life now and then: ‘I have led a normal life, I didn’t do any evil, I have been an honest person. I have peace of mind.’ (C01.1, C01.2, C01.3).

Last week, as more often in recent years, one of her friends died. She realises her death may be near too: ‘You never know, death may be around the corner. I am aware of that, it doesn’t make me feel sad.’ (C01.3)