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Health & Leisure

Ilcsi knows what you need

Moni Oyeyele interviews Hungary's favorite beauty guru, the unstoppable Aunt Ilcsi

IF it was possible to clone Ilcsi *néni*, I would as for one copy and keep that one forever in the peaceful, leafy garden of her bungalow near Budapest.

Then I would book as many busy, hasty, stressful Budapesters as possible to spend an hour with Aunt Ilcsi under her lilacs and ginko trees: sitting with her and listening to her endless thrilling stories, tasting her home made cakes, enjoying her wisdom and wit can itself successfully compete with any of today's modern anti-stress treatments.

"I am from a rural farmer family," the aged, but forever young, woman recalls. "Running and playing within the borders of Nagykökényes [a small village in Nógrád county], and also from the villagers that used natural methods for every health and beauty problem, I learnt plenty about plants and herbs.

"Throughout my life, I have remembered the scents and the beauty of wild flowers, and their healing usage." Eventually, her family moved to Budapest, and Ilcsi soon found herself in a vocational school for beauticians.

"Vocational training at that time was much better than it is now," she claims. "Firstly, we were given more practical and less theoretical information than today's beautician students, secondly, and unlike them, we were allowed to practice on real people. "How would one learn the profession if they cannot practice? I dyed most of my relatives' eyelashes, depilated them, massaged them. And finally, we were taught a great deal of chemistry and laboratory work."



CREATIVITY REQUIRED

She then worked in a well reputed beauty saloon for more than 20 years. Being a beautician in Communist Hungary required a lot of creativity, as, without the access to expensive cosmetics from the west, one had to prepare ones own beauty products.

Based on her childhood experiences, her studies and with the help of some pharmacist friends, she started mixing natural cosmetics.

"It was important to use simple, easily accessible and cheap, basic materials," she explained.

"I went for materials to the forests, the meadows, the pharmacy, the honey product shop and sometimes even the neighbor grocer.

"As my mixtures were very effective, colleagues stared asking for some for their own practice. Eventually, I was mixing for the best beauty saloons in Budapest."

She was invited to lecture colleagues in Hungary and, later abroad. And, when it was finally possible, **Ilcsi Beautifying Herbs Ltd** was founded in 1984, by Ilcsi *néni* and her son, Ferenc Molnár.

Since then, she has been creating and developing Ilcsi professional natural cosmetics, as well as Ilcsi electro-cosmetic devices.

In 1999, Aunt Ilcsi was honored with the Small Cross Order of Merit of the Hungarian Republic for her efforts in disseminating and popularizing the usage of herbs within cosmetics, and for her work as a business woman.

HEALING TOUCH

"Beauticians carry quite a big responsibility," she claims.

"They are a stranger that can touch your face, something you do not normally allow of people other than your mother, child or spouse.

"So the beautician's touch must be a fine one, a healing one. And when it is accompanied with a smile, it can also touch the soul."

Ilcsi *néni's* preservative and artificial additive-free preparations use 100% natural materials, such as fresh fruit pulp, petals, herbs, leaves, honey wax and even Hungarian *paprika*.

Her other elixirs include pure black mineral soap, muscat hydrating foam cream and tomato sun lotion.

Ilcsi's fans are many, and they are not just the end-user: Ilcsi Beautifying Herbs was officially chosen to be a member of the international Superbrands club that gathers numerous famous companies and groups such as **Audi**, **National Geographic** and **Zsolnay**.

Perhaps a good, although also sad, illustration of her success is the fact that fake products have appeared in the US and Canada.

But that does not dampen the enthusiasm of the Hungarian company. Indeed, it is now working on developing a bio-farm where it can grow even more "beautifying herbs."

"Today, we produce and sell 140 types of natural cosmetics in 27 countries throughout the world," Ferenc, the General Manager, said.

"Believe it or not, so far we have not had to look for any business partner abroad: they looked for us!

"Our most important partner countries include the US, Canada, Australia and Japan; and we are building up our market in the UK and Ireland."

www.ilcsi.com