



# We are from Hong Kong

By Joyce Lau

**L**ong-time philanthropist and honorary Club member Anne Marden, who has supported non-profit groups in Hong Kong for half a century, looks every bit the English gentlewoman. She sits amid manicured gardens and lawns – in a floral dress and pearls, an ageing golden lab at her feet – and serves tea from a porcelain service.

Her colonial-era house is filled with heirlooms and curios, including a mounted boar's head. "My mother-in-law bought the house in the 1950s for about \$80,000," she says.

"I had a completely British upper-class upbringing," she says. "But I consider myself from Hong Kong. I think there are many of us who consider ourselves as being from Hong Kong. I love going to England, but I am not an Englishwoman."

Born Anne Harris in Shanghai in 1926, she has lived in Hong Kong since 1947, when she settled here with her husband, the late Wheelock Marden taipan, John Marden.

Marden has long been a supporter of the Human Rights Press Awards, organised each year by the FCC, the Hong Kong Journalists Association and Amnesty International Hong Kong.

The 88-year-old matriarch – she is the mother of four, grandmother of nine, and great-grandmother of five and counting – is fiercely protective of her family, which is how she became involved with Amnesty to begin with.

"My granddaughter, Katrina, fell in love with a Tibetan, a very nice chap named Tashi," Marden said. "He was studying at a monastery, and he and some friends went to Lhasa to demonstrate. The Chinese picked them up and he was badly tortured. It was Amnesty who got them out."

Today, Tashi and Katrina live with their three children in Katmandu. "He's still suffering," Marden said. "It never leaves you. He suffers from

horrible headaches, and when he is having one of his spells, he cannot work full-time. It's very sad."

As soon as her own four children were settled at school, Marden started helping the city's poor, first as the director of the Hong Kong Red Cross from 1960 to 1965.

"I became very involved with Vietnamese refugees kept in awful camps," she said. "They were run by the Prisons Department, which made them even more authoritarian. It was pretty grim. It was so hot. They lived in great big tents with large bunk beds."

She arranged schooling for children, and set up day trips to get the youngest out of the camps for a day.

Her life branched beyond the exclusive expatriate society into which she was born. She befriended one woman who had fled with her family into the mountains above Vietnam, and made it to Hong Kong. But the family's claim to be resettled in America was rejected and they found themselves in Victoria Prison, awaiting return to Vietnam.

"We pressed our hands on the two sides of the glass, thinking we'd never see each other again," Marden said. But Pam Baker, the human rights lawyer, got them an eleventh-hour reprieve. "They are still in America now, and I still hear from them."

Anne Marden still works with refugees. She has also been involved in opening both special needs and vocational schools since the 1960s.

But she jokes that she's actually "anti-school." She supports groups like the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, which run programmes to help gay and lesbian youngsters. She is also the founder of Playright, an organisation that tries to encourage children out of classrooms, and into playgrounds and parks.

"Children work too hard in Hong Kong," she said.

*Joyce Lau is the coordinator of the Human Rights Press Awards.* **FCC**