



# HONG KONG'S VULNERABLE LOSE A CHAMPION

*Remembering Mrs Anne Marden, BBS, MBE, JP*

**“Anne was definitely one of the heroes in Hong Kong’s social services field.” - Dr Rosanna Wong**

**T**railblazing social service volunteer and philanthropist Mrs Anne Marden who championed the rights of the underprivileged, especially children, strove tirelessly to improve life and opportunities for Hong Kong’s physically handicapped, and used her personal standing to encourage acceptance of marginalised people - from refugees to women sex workers - has died at her home in Shek O. She was 96 and had been in frail health with Parkinson’s disease, her family said.

Anne, who was married to the late John Marden, “taipan” of preeminent trading conglomerate Wheelock Marden & Co Ltd, was a pioneer of modern social services in Hong Kong’s non-government sector, especially for children and the disabled.

Charitable organisations she helped to launch decades ago are today an integral part of Hong Kong’s social service landscape. Policies she championed for years, such as Hong Kong having a dedicated children’s hospital, have come to fruition, though Anne still pressed in retirement for the appointment of an independent



*© Photo courtesy of the Marden family  
Poised and elegant, Shanghai-born Anne (pictured on her 80th birthday) was known for her heart of gold and keen sense of what needed to be done for those in unfortunate circumstances, as well as for her graciousness and humility.*

children’s commissioner, so that children’s views and interests can be better reflected in Hong Kong policies and legislation.

“Anne was definitely one of the heroes in Hong Kong’s social services field,” said Dr Rosanna Wong Yick-ming, a former

Executive Council Convenor and a leader in social services for the young. The two met through Anne’s children’s advocacy and support group Playright.

“She used a different approach to advocacy,” said Dr Wong. “Anne listened humbly with an open mind to people’s views. She was never loud, complaining, or critical. She was soft and mild, but persistent. She talked to people and influenced them – which I think is sometimes even more powerful. She had the passion, patience, and perseverance to turn nothing into something by quietly proving that it worked. That is not an easy task.” Dr Wong added



*© Photo courtesy of Playright  
Former Executive Council Convenor Dr Rosanna Wong Yick-ming (centre) is pictured with Anne (left) at an event held by the Playright Children’s Play Association, co-founded by Anne in 1987 and of which Dr Wong is patron.*

that Mrs Marden was not an armchair chairman telling other people to do things. “She would take the responsibility to show she was doing the work herself.”

Born in Shanghai in 1926, newly-wed Anne arrived in Hong Kong with her husband in 1947 after a six-day journey from the UK by seaplane. Surrounded at their Pokfulam home by refugees pouring in from China, they offered help to many at a time when the colonial government was overwhelmed and had neither the money nor trained professionals to provide many basic social services.

Anne’s first formal experience of charitable work was in 1956, when Anglican Bishop R.O Hall invited her onto the executive committee of the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society, which was then helping families recover from the upheavals of war and separation.

In 1960, by then an active mother of four children, Anne was invited by Lady Black, wife of the Governor, to become the director of the Hong Kong Red Cross, a demanding unpaid post she held until 1965. She presided over the inauguration in 1962 of the Princess Alexandra Red Cross Children’s Residential School for physically handicapped children, in Kwun Tong, Hong Kong’s first such school.



© Photos courtesy of the Marden family

**For five years, from 1960, Anne was director of the Hong Kong Red Cross. She presided over the opening of Hong Kong’s first residential school for physically handicapped children.**



© Photo courtesy of the Marden family

**Anne was the wife of John Marden, “taipan” of preeminent Hong Kong trading conglomerate Wheelock Marden & Co Ltd. Pictured in the 1950s are three generations of Mardens: (adults, left to right) John, Anne, Wheelock Marden co-founder George E. Marden, his wife Dorothy and the younger Marden’s four children (left to right) Anto, twins Doro and Jennie, and youngest daughter Debs.**

Anne was also an early supporter of the Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth, Hong Kong’s oldest such self-help organisation, established in 1970, of which she was patron. She took a keen personal interest in how individual disabled young persons and their families got on in life, keeping track of their progress over many years at Christmas parties she held in her garden at Shek O.

Among other pioneering roles, Anne was founder, director, and permanent patron of the Rehabaid Society, established in 1979 to bring people with physical disabilities and special needs out into society, improve their quality of life and strengthen their capacity for independent living.



© Photo courtesy of the Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth

**Anne was patron of the Hong Kong Federation of Handicapped Youth. She is pictured in 1984 with distinguished visitor Deng Pufang of the China Welfare Fund for the Disabled and eldest son of then paramount leader Deng Xiaoping.**





© Photos courtesy (left) of the Rehabaid Society; and (right) courtesy of Playright

**Anne was founder, director and permanent patron of the Rehabaid Society, a community service for adults and children with physical disabilities. Persuasive as a fund raiser, she was also a dedicated philanthropist in her own right through the family's Marden Foundation.**

**“She had a heart of gold which touched the hearts of many in Hong Kong. Whatever she did, she did with affection and never for personal recognition.” - Dr Cecilia Lam**

According to the society’s chief executive officer, Dr Cecilia Lam Shiu Ling, Anne always motivated and inspired people by her wisdom, love and selfless efforts to help the needy. “She had a heart of gold which touched the hearts of many in Hong Kong. Whatever she did, she did with affection and never for personal recognition.” Dr Lam added that Anne had helped thousands with special needs to lead a dignified, meaningful life. “Indeed, Anne herself led the most meaningful life.”

For more than 40 years, Anne Marden was active in the Hong Kong branch of International Social Service (ISSHK), of which she was vice patron since 2015. During Hong Kong’s Vietnamese refugee crisis in the 1980s, she played a frontline role in bringing humanitarian relief to closed camps, where ISSHK ran schools for Vietnamese children.

She frequently visited the camps, sitting on bunks, listening to internees, observing conditions



© Photo (above) courtesy of the Marden family and (below) International Social Service Hong Kong Branch

**Active for more than 40 years in the Hong Kong branch of International Social Service, Anne played a key role in bringing humanitarian relief - including playgrounds and schools - to Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong’s closed camps during the 1980s and 90s.**



firsthand and then lobbying authorities for better amenities. She personally took up individual cases of Vietnamese with serious medical issues or more extreme circumstances, bringing these to the attention of whoever would listen, from top officials and their wives to the “Letters to the Editor” page of local newspapers.

As situations changed and the focus of ISSHK evolved – to include asylum seekers, migrant workers, ethnic minorities, and new settlers – Anne stood up for them with equal passion and determination.

“Her efforts, notable for their common sense and grounded in humanity, spanned international boundaries,” said Mr C.P. Ho, who chaired ISSHK from 2002 to 2019 and, from 2015 to 2018 chaired the ISS Governing Board in Geneva from Hong Kong. “Her involvement was such that it ignited, and continues to ignite, efforts on behalf of distressed children and families from Greece to Haiti, Burkina Faso to Vietnam and now Ukraine.”

Troubled at the sight of Vietnamese refugee children languishing in camps, Anne was one of the founders in 1979 of the charity TREATS, taking refugee children out for a day at a time to a beach, a picnic in a park, or some other carefree activity.

Anne's Marden's eldest daughter, Mrs Jennie Edwards, who has been



with TREATS since the beginning, says that, before long they were also giving “treats” to Hong Kong children living in crowded resettlement estates. “Today, carrying on my mother’s vision for social inclusion, we offer many programmes that bring together children with different abilities and backgrounds.”

Anne believed passionately that it was a basic right of all children to have a childhood, no matter how



© Photo courtesy of Playright

Anne considered it “marvellous” that initiatives she launched were adopted and further developed by local executives, staff and volunteers. Here, the Playright team celebrates the organisation’s 30th anniversary in 2018 with (front row) Chief Secretary Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, Anne and son Anto.

underprivileged their background, as enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1987, she helped to found the Playright Children’s Play Association to help safeguard that right. Later, she was Playright’s honorary president.

Dr Rosanna Wong, who is Playright’s patron, recalls that when Anne started the association, play was not a common thing, particularly for Chinese families. “They didn’t believe in play, thinking it a waste of time. Usually, they asked their children to work hard and study hard.

“Anne came in with, at that time, a very new concept that children have a right to play, should learn through play and therefore play is not only about a child’s development it’s about teamwork; how to train a child to be positive and collaborative.” Dr Wong said that by persisting in her belief, Anne Marden helped change the mentality of Hong Kong people on what play is all about. “Now,

if you ask a younger family, they believe in play,” she said. “This alone is an outstanding legacy.”

At home in Shek O, Anne was a poised, elegant hostess charming visiting royalty, international celebrities, local VIPs, and others at private dinners with her husband John. Despite their position at the top of Hong Kong society, both shared a commitment to social service and to improving life for struggling local families.

They established the Marden Foundation in 1973 to build three pre-vocational secondary schools - in



© Photos courtesy of the Marden family

Among many awards for her service to the community, Anne received an MBE in 1991, presented (left) by Governor Sir David Wilson, and in 2006 the Bronze Bauhinia Star, presented (right) by Chief Executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen.

Tuen Mun, Shatin and Chai Wan - for students better suited to practical education and skills training. Later, the Foundation supported initiatives for children with special education needs, among other causes. John Marden died in 1999, aged 80.

Anne unstintingly lent her name and patronage to concern groups helping those beyond the traditional reach of most charities – including women sex workers (Action For REACH OUT, of which she was patron), individuals living with HIV (AIDS Concern, a patron) and teenagers with issues over drugs and alcohol (KELY Support Group, honorary patron). She believed these individuals had the same human rights and needs as all people, including the need for acceptance. She also supported a charity providing services to the dying and care for the bereaved (Comfort Care Concern Group, honorary patron), and was a life member of the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society.

Appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1973, Anne Marden was awarded an MBE in 1991 and the Bronze Bauhinia Star in 2006. In 2007, she was made an Honorary University Fellow by The University of Hong Kong in recognition of her support for education, and for creating educational opportunities for children. She was the recipient of many awards for community service. Accepting these with humility, she was often genuinely surprised that she had been honoured at all.

Anne thought that it was simply “marvellous” when local employees she mentored went on to take up the leadership of initiatives she started. Though regretting she did not speak Cantonese, she happily became the sole non-Chinese face at many of their events as time went on.



© Photo courtesy of the Marden family  
**John and Anne Marden, pictured in 1972, shared a deep commitment to social service and improving life for struggling local families. They established the philanthropic Marden Foundation in 1973.**

Born Anne Harris, she was educated in Shanghai, Switzerland, and England, where she graduated with a Joint Honours degree in English and Philosophy at the University of Bristol. The Mardens had a son and

three daughters, born between 1948 and 1951, all of whom are involved in philanthropy. Anne has 10 surviving grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren to whom she was devoted.



© Photos courtesy of the Marden family  
**Anne had 10 surviving grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren to whom she was devoted. She is pictured (left) with nine of her grandchildren in Italy in 2011 and (top) at a four-generation family gathering in Austria to celebrate her 90th birthday in 2016.**



**“We are blessed to have had Anne as our mother - someone loving, brave, optimistic and generous, an example to us all!” -**

**Jennie, Doro, Anto and Debs**

