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Playing For Courts And Kings

"I have a holistic outlook on life — you can't just do things for the sake of doing them." **By Robin Bower**

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER BOWERILL

I have a holistic outlook on life — you can't just do things for the sake of doing them. You have to tie them together so that they make sense." Annie Livesey has done just that with her career both in Malaysia and now in Hong Kong. At the Consumers Association of Penang, she identified a need for health regulations in the optical industry, and the government subsequently implemented these regulations. She has taught English at university level, and occupied a high level public relations position which involved writing speeches for the Prime Minister and the King of Malaysia. "I was known as the 'cosmopolitan lady' because I would dress in Malaysian national dress, then Western. Thai and anything that was different and colorful." This was unprecedented at conservative Coopers & Lybrand in Kuala Lumpur where she was the training and PR manager.

The enthusiasm Annie has for her work is uplifting. Ten years of teaching brought great personal rewards. "I have a very different approach to learning a language. It's not just grammar — I would get my students to read, to think, to analyze. Bahasa Malaysian was the language of tuition in schools, not English and when English was taught it was drill, drill, drill. I taught communication English that would help the students get ahead in their careers," she explains.

Annie moved on to develop the new image for the 25th Anniversary of the Malaysian Institute of Management. "I developed a new logo

and tagline which was approved by the Prime Minister and unveiled at an official ceremony last year." She also wrote the speech for the Prime Minister at that unveiling. One of Annie's major clients was the Public Relations firm Eric Pringle and Associates. "They asked me to write a column for the Malaysian national newspaper, *New Straits Times*, and *Utusan Malaysia*. The column was called *Insurance and You* which I wrote every Sunday for a year. It was a hard year with me learning as much as I could about insurance!" Annie's concern was to give a different perspective on insurance. "I cared about who was deemed responsible for environmental accidents and deforestation and what happened with liability. It got to the stage where the Central Bank got so worried about their liability that they asked me to vet my writing!"

At around age thirty-six Annie realized her career was buoyant but her personal life was floundering. She met husband Kevin in Malaysia at, she says, just the right time in her life. "Kevin never tried to change me like other men — he was not threatened by me." A couple of months after they met Annie went to Hong Kong, where Kevin is based, for a holiday. After being a national tennis coach for eight years in Wales and then twelve years in Hong Kong, Kevin retired from on-court tennis in 1991 and turned his attention instead to its promotion, and runs, with Annie, a small company, Asia Pro Tennis, which promotes tennis all over Asia and Australia. "I didn't like the look of Hong Kong — it was too busy," laughs Annie. She returned, though, after resigning from her job to be married in June 1994. "I wasn't at the stage of my life where I wanted to go charging around Hong Kong promoting myself. I was ready for life with Kevin and I was happy with that. We moved to Sai Kung which gives me the benefit of both worlds. I love it. But I still needed some worthy intellectual stimulation."

They have a balanced complementary relationship. Kevin is clearly aware of Annie's expertise in gaining corporate sponsorship — and her dogged persistence. "We were on holiday in Langkawi," tells Kevin, "and Annie couldn't resist explaining our sponsorship ideas to the manager of the hotel we were staying at! He was hooked."

There was a void in women's and junior tennis which Asia Pro Tennis is filling. "Sponsors want to sell their product so it is not just a matter of giving them a couple of banners on court or them giving us a couple of free air tickets," explains Annie. "What we offer is cross promotion. For example, we might call an event the Volvo Women's Open, have a Volvo car in a local petrol station with Dunlop tennis balls on the back seat. We then hold a competition where the public has to guess the number of tennis balls to win the car. Or we might get a hotel to host an event." "More than lateral thinking, I consider it thinking outside the circle," emphasises Annie. Asia Pro Tennis promotes 1000 professional women players. "We need long-term support so that we can help the sponsor help us. I call it value-added service. We are in a service industry. If a client (sponsor) wants 1, 2, 3, 4 — we give him 5 and 6," says Annie. "Organizing everything is the easy part!"

Asia Pro Tennis, with Annie's expertise, has helped promote Asian tennis from a former low level to the creation of eleven women's events and participation in events in ten Asian countries. Asia now boasts one woman in the top ten in the world, and seven in the top fifty. The Hong Kong government is now giving tax exemptions to any private business putting money into sports development for youth. "I really have a sense of satisfaction now. I am calm and doing something close to my heart," muses Annie, looking at Kevin.



