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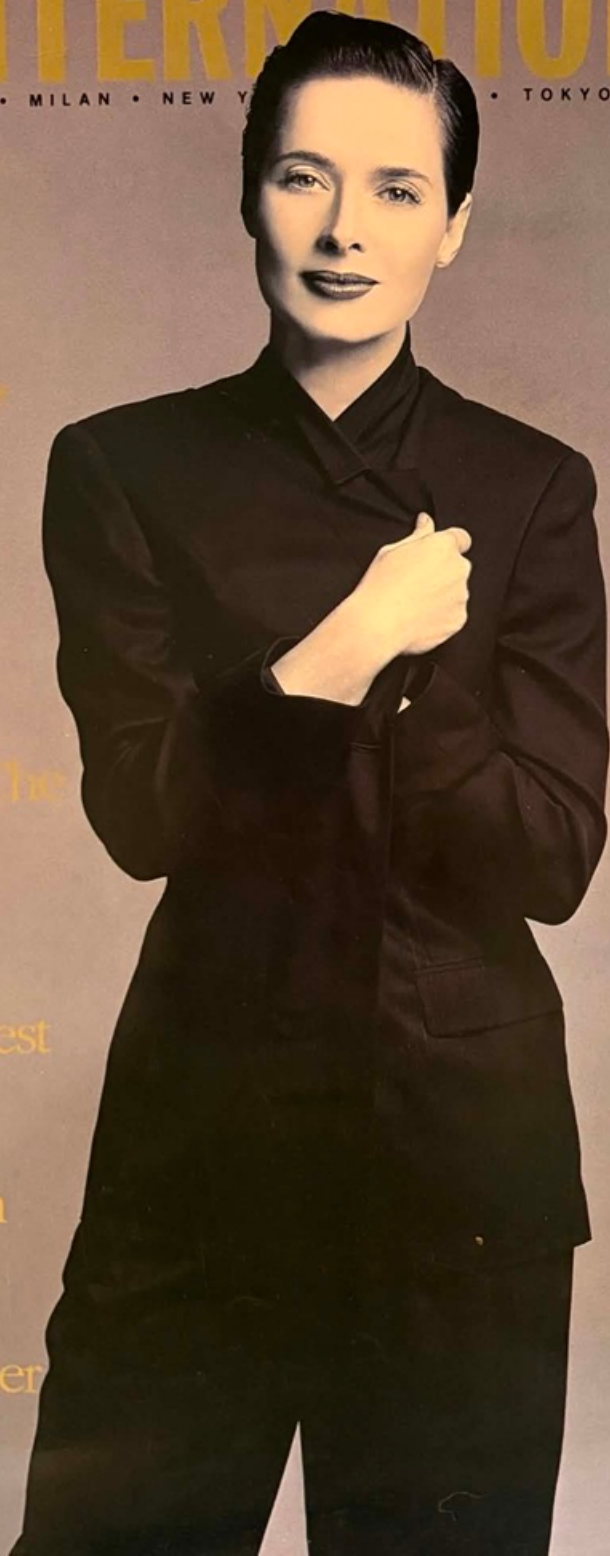
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First Lady Of Hong Kong

Pat Loseby—first woman solicitor, first woman notary public, first woman Justice of the Peace and first woman vice-patron of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club—looks at a Hong Kong of the past before saying goodbye.

By Robin Bower

Pat Loseby was eighteen months old when her parents brought her to Hong Kong from recession-ridden England. After a lifetime here, she intends to return to the place of her birth. Says Loseby, "Being old and ill in Hong Kong is not so easy. All my friends are leaving and I'm alone." Loseby has experienced Hong Kong's many different moods. She has seen colonialism, the riots of 1967, the Japanese occupation during World War II, and now gradual localization. "I don't get involved in issues. As a JP (Justice of the Peace), I visit prisons, Vietnamese camps and homes for wayward girls. I have to stay uninvolved," she says.

"The war years were very traumatic. I was sixteen and working in the auxiliary nursing service when the Japanese took Kowloon on December 12, 1941. My mother was a vet and had to put all the animals she tended to sleep. She never practiced again. I was allocated to a hospital but a few days before we arrived we were told we would be going to a camp. We could only take what we could carry." The camp was Stanley Camp, not a POW camp but a garrison for civilians placed there by the Japanese for the duration of the war. "The Japanese allowed us to use a Chinese gardener's hut on the grounds that had room for two. I stayed where I was in the camp and visited my parents every day." When her parents became ill with beriberi sixteen-year-old Loseby cared for them and drew the rations for the camp. The family stayed at Stanley Camp for over three and a half years. In 1945, they began shuffling from country to country as refugees. Her father was a solicitor and in the home guard so was able to stay in Hong Kong but had to live in his office. His wife and young daughter were sent to Sydney, then South Africa and finally to England before being allowed to return to Hong Kong where they lived in the Gloucester Hotel for nine years.

"Schooling in camp was basic. I didn't want to go back to school so I went to work with my father as an article clerk. I got special dispensation from the court to get my standard of matriculation. I was an article clerk for

five years and then went to England to take exams and qualify. It was very difficult as I had never taken a public exam in my life. There were no law tutors in Hong Kong so I had to do it by correspondence." Her parents were a great influence in her life and most of the careers in her family have been as solicitors or barristers. Her father became ill and died in 1967 after the riots. Early in his career, he was Ho Chi Minh's lawyer and was able to get the future Vietnamese leader out of prison. "I was invited to Hanoi when the Ho Chi Minh museum opened in 1990. I saw pictures of my father on the wall with the story of how he saved Ho Chi Minh's life," remembers Loseby. She took over the family business, Russ and Company, from her father and ran it for the next twenty-three years. She closed the firm in 1990 when rents skyrocketed, and joined Sinclair Roche & Temperley as Justice of the Peace.

Loseby is small, hunched and frail but has profound inner strength. She speaks with a resigned, unemotional determination about a past that is full of change. She worries about her health, and sometimes falters in her speech, but despite her concerns, Loseby is still a keen yachswoman. Vice-patron of the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club she recently sailed in the Around-the-Island Race in her twenty-nine-foot dragon, a class of sailing boat. "It's not a dragon boat," she insists. "I have the oldest wooden dragon in Hong Kong. I bought it in 1956 when only ten were built. It's slow against the new fiberglass ones, but I sail for pleasure not for speed!"

Did she find it difficult as a woman to build a career in Hong Kong? "I didn't find it hard. I was very accepted. I was the first lady solicitor, first lady notary public, first lady JP and first lady vice-patron of the yacht club. I've done everything I've wanted to do." Now, however, the mother country beckons. "Hong Kong has grown so much, traffic is chaotic, everything being built is tiny and the rate of inflation has gone up. I don't want to retire here." Hong Kong will have to say goodbye to an impressive first lady, who unfortunately, won't be able to take her dragon with her.

PHOTOS BY JENNIFER BOWRELL

