

## World exclusive

For 31 years, she was married to one of the world's most powerful men, News Corp chief Rupert Murdoch. Since their sudden break-up three years ago, Anna Murdoch Mann has retained a dignified silence. Now, in this exclusive interview, she speaks to The Weekly for the first time about what really happened to their marriage and opens up her magnificent home in the Hamptons which she shares with new husband, financier William Mann.

Anna Murdoch Mann relaxes beside the pool of the house in the Hamptons, Long Island, which she shares with her new husband, William Mann. "He's very different from Rupert," she says.

There are a number of ways a woman could break her silence. She could call a media conference and then settle the score in the most public of ways. She could auction herself to the highest bidder – in this case, a most unlikely option. She could divulge her thoughts to a trusted friend and, like the late Diana, have them leaked to a journalist of choice. Or she could, three years after the event, and only after she's truly recovered her poise and sense of well-being, agree to a one-off interview where she could do two things at once – reveal herself anew and finally put forward her side of the story.

Anna Murdoch aka Anna Murdoch Mann aka Anna Mann, has chosen the latter course. On a golden summer's afternoon on Long Island, recently, the former wife of the world's most powerful media figure decided to speak her mind about the spectacular break-up of their marriage three years ago.

In so doing, she has, in a manner both dignified and deadly for its aim, accused her husband of nearly 31 years of misrepresenting his relationship with Wendi Deng, and of dealing with her, the mother of their three children, in a ruthless and implacable fashion.

Twenty minutes into our interview, fixing me with her cool, pale blue eyes, she declares that as far as she's concerned it was Rupert's infidelity that led to the separation. "I think that Rupert's affair with Wendi Deng – it's not an original plot – was the end of the marriage. His determination to continue with that. I thought we had a wonderful, happy marriage. Obviously we didn't."

This claim sits uncomfortably with the public position taken by Rupert Murdoch over the past three years ►

**STORY BY DAVID LESER**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY EDDIE SANDERSON

# ANNA & her kingdom



– that his relationship with the Chinese-born Wendi Deng began after his separation from Anna Murdoch in April 1998. Anna begs to differ.

“He behaved badly,” Anna says now without rancour. “However, for my children’s sake I have said nothing ... I’ve waited all this time for him to make it right again, but he never took the opportunity.”

**I**T WAS BILLED AS one of the bust-ups of the century. Rupert Murdoch, the Citizen Kane of our times, owner of newspapers, television stations and film studios across the globe, possessor of unimaginable riches, wielder of almost unparalleled power, had separated from his closest confidante, the woman who had helped make it all possible.

The announcement came in April 1998, courtesy of Liz Smith, America’s pre-eminent gossip columnist and an employee of the Murdoch-owned tabloid daily, the New York Post. In a three-paragraph news item, she assured the world that, after 31 years of marriage and three children, the Murdochs had decided to have an “amicable separation”, so amicable that Anna Murdoch would remain a non-executive director of the News Corporation board, on which she had served since 1990.

It was humbug. Six months later, in October of that year, Murdoch announced in his 1998 annual report that, far from staying on the News Corporation board, his wife would be leaving it altogether.

“Anna’s support has been enormously helpful to me in what I must admit is a demanding and turbulent career,” he said in the report. “Her contribution to News Corporation notably includes, but goes far beyond, our three children, Elisabeth, Lachlan and James, all now working in the company and making significant contributions.”

What Murdoch failed to say was that he’d forced his former wife off the board.

“I wasn’t given a choice,” Anna says now. “I was told.”

How did he put it?

“You get off the board ...”

What did you say in reply? (Long pause) “Well, there’s no point being there if you’re of no use and it’s embarrassing to everyone else on the board. They’re nice

and good and strong people [on the board]. And my children were involved, too. My son was on the board. Lachlan. So I thought that it was better to be dignified and resign.

“And I spoke at the board the day that I resigned. I explained how I had worked for the company since I was about 18 years old ... and that this was not just the end of my marriage. It was the end of a whole life.

“I said I wished News Corp the best and that ... Rupert’s children were my children, too, and that I had always tried to do my best for News Corporation ... and that I was very sad to be leaving.”

With that, Anna Murdoch had walked from the fourth floor office, accompanied by Lachlan, leaving in her wake her ex-husband and a board room of shaken and, in some instances, moist-eyed

**Top left: The sumptuous living room of Anna and William Mann’s house, bought last year from Yasmin Aga Khan. Top: A stylish Anna poses with a favourite antique chair. She has decorated the house with an eclectic mix. Above: New husband William takes pride of place with son Lachlan and Sarah.**

directors.

She then collected herself with a  
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strong cup of coffee and went off to have lunch with William Mann, the Wall Street financier who had already lost two wives to cancer and whom she would end up marrying one year later.

"I knew it was going to be a shitty day," she says now, "and that I needed something nice ... I just sort of knew there was something there that I really liked [about Bill] and, in fact, we had lunch together [with a friend]. It was all very proper ... So one door closes and another door opens. Sometimes you just have to open the door."

**A** NNA MURDOCH MANN was born Anna Torv in Glasgow in 1944, the first of four children of a Scottish drycleaner, Sylvia Braida, and Estonian-born merchant seaman, Jacob Torv. Torv was on the look-out for a better life and, just before World War II, had arrived in the United Kingdom and fallen in love with the young Sylvia through the window of her parents' dry-cleaning shop.

In 1953, he decided to chance his arm by moving the family to Australia. Anna has said previously that the sea voyage which took them to the Antipodes via the Suez Canal was the first time in her life she had felt warm.

And yet Australia proved no Promised Land. In an attempt to break out of the dry-cleaning business which had sustained them in Scotland, Jacob and Sylvia tried to establish a picnic park outside Sydney. It went bankrupt and the family ended up moving into a high-rise in Sydney's outer-west.

Not long afterwards, Anna's mother walked out on the family. Today, she lives in a nursing home in rural NSW, suffering from Alzheimer's.

"She didn't mean to hurt anybody," her daughter says now. "I think she was rather a lost soul. I think she always thought the grass was greener somewhere else and, of course, it wasn't."

"The sad thing is that afterwards she would say to us that perhaps she shouldn't have done it, that she should have stayed with Dad. It didn't work out to be the lovely bed of roses she thought that it would be."

(Anna's father died in 1989 at Cavan, the Murdoch farm near Canberra, where he had come to live 15 years earlier. He was 77 years old, and in his memory Anna planted 77 yellow box gum trees near where his ashes were scattered. She told *The Weekly* she was grateful her father was not alive to see her marriage collapse. "I took comfort in the fact he wasn't there because he would have ►



Opposite: Anna bought this Mexican painting of Archangel Gabriel in Santa Fe and brought it from her ranch in Carmel, California. Top: In the dining room, a primitive-style painting by Mexican artist Esau. Above: The former journalist and author's light-filled sunroom looks out to the pool and garden.



Above: A formal parterre garden of clipped hedges leads to the entrance of the Manns' lavish Hamptons home. Right: Anna on the patio, the outdoor area where Bill celebrated his 75th birthday in June. The open-air living area is unusual for its large open fireplace and a bust of Neptune made from seashells.

been devastated.”)

Anna Torv became the replacement mother to her two brothers and sister. She admits it made her bossy. “I had to take responsibility. I mean [I was] the one taking them to places or making sure they went to the dentist and that kind of stuff ... so if they didn’t get out of bed in the morning to go to school, it was [my] responsibility.”

As a Catholic, Anna had been educated by nuns at the Sister of Mercy School, but by the time she was 16 she was hungry for adventure. She dreamt of being an actress or a journalist.

Within a year, she’d been offered a job as a clerk in the finance department of Sydney’s Murdoch-owned Daily Mirror, and, as Murdoch’s biographer, William Shawcross, has pointed out, “once at

the Mirror, it was not difficult to get to know the journalists – for she was both beautiful and ambitious.”

She was also highly talented. Within a short time she’d become editor of the cadet newspaper and had decided she wanted to interview none other than her boss. Murdoch was to say later: “I thought she was a very pretty girl. Her writing skills were not going through my mind.” For her part, the young Anna said she found Rupert Murdoch attractive from the start. “He was like a whirlwind coming into the room. It was very seductive.”

In 1967, Anna and Rupert Murdoch were married. It was Murdoch’s second marriage. Eleven years earlier he had wed Patricia Booker, a former airline hostess. She, too, was an attractive

blonde, although not as compatible with Murdoch as his second wife would prove to be.

Over the next 31 years, as Rupert Murdoch’s dazzling trajectory transformed him from a southern hemisphere media mogul to arguably the most indomitable figure on earth, Anna would become his staunchest defender and best friend.

In England, where he had become a pariah – the “Dirty Digger” they called him because of his newspaper’s salacious preoccupations and intrusions into the private lives of others – Anna was forever the loyalist. This, despite her feeling shunned, lonely and, on occasion, scared.

In one well-documented, harrowing incident, Muriel McKay, the wife of News Ltd executive Alick McKay, was abducted

from her home in Wimbledon, after being seen driving the Murdochs’ Rolls-Royce. (The car had been lent to them while Anna and Elisabeth were in Australia for Christmas.)

Assuming that the woman in the Rolls-Royce was Anna Murdoch and, therefore, believing her husband was more than well cashed up, the kidnappers demanded a ransom of a million pounds. When they discovered their mistake, they murdered Mrs McKay and reportedly fed her body to farm animals.

Asked now about the ostracism she felt at the hands of British society, not to mention the terror of being a target for abduction, Anna says, “It seemed like it happened to someone else. That whole sort of period was somebody else ... another lifetime, [but] I’m sure that had

an effect on me in the way I felt about England.”

America, on the other hand, was different. By 1973, Murdoch had established his first beachhead across the Atlantic by buying three Texas newspapers. Anna was pleased. She liked America, felt freer there, and over the next 25 years, as her husband proceeded to acquire more newspapers, magazines, a major book publisher, a national television network, a film studio – Twentieth Century-Fox no less – not to mention baseball, basketball and hockey teams, she found herself spending more time either at their ranch at Carmel, their lodge in Aspen (with the swimming pool in the living room!), their apartment in Manhattan or their mansion in Beverly Hills.

(There was also the London apartment,

the house in Sydney, the farm near Canberra and the luxury yacht, Morning Glory. Total value: about \$125 million.)

During the height of Murdoch’s American blitzkrieg, a major newspaper headline screamed: “WHAT DOES THIS MAN WANT?” The answer was simple. The world – especially a world increasingly defined by the information revolution and the furthest reaches of global communications. After America would come Eastern Europe. After Europe, China, then India, then perhaps the whole Asian sub-continent.

Perhaps no single individual in modern times had ever had such a long arm. If he wanted the President of the United States on the line, he could get him, and did. If there were favours to be called in from the British Prime Minister, he ►

could call them in, and would. If he wanted a government elected or defeated, well, he could see about that too.

And always alongside him was Anna, his chief sounding board as well as beautiful, charming foil for those endless working dinners he would have at one of their seven properties around the world.

Apart from the time in 1990 when a bank in Pittsburg had the temerity to threaten his entire global empire – they refused to roll over a \$10 million loan – Rupert Murdoch was seemingly invincible, unstoppable.

And therein lay the seeds of destruction for the Murdoch marriage. Anna wanted her husband to slow down. Rupert couldn't help but keep moving. Anna wanted to know where home really was.

Rupert didn't care. Anna wanted their three children to be free from huge, dynastic expectations. Rupert seemed to revel in creating them. Despite being a loving father, he spent more time in a plane or on the phone than he did with his family.

"Is Daddy going deaf?" their younger son, James, once asked his mother. "No, he's just not listening," replied Anna.

Anna once said she could have complained and become a whining wife. She chose not to, instead turning his long absences into a positive use of her time.

She began studying the violin and cello, but gave them away because she felt she was not talented enough. She went to university to study literature and mythology, eventually getting her degree from New York University. And, of course, she became a novelist, notwithstanding her husband's initially "devastating" criticisms of her writing.

By the time she was 40, she had written her first book, *In Her Own Image* – about women and their need for faith and courage in a man's world. A few years later, her second book, *Family Business*, hit the shelves. It was a thinly disguised account of her husband's takeover of the racy British tabloid *News of the World* in the late 1960s. Then, in 1991, her third book, *Coming to Terms*, was published. It was loosely based on her father.

To the world, it looked as though Anna Murdoch had achieved the near



Anna and William Murdoch on a skiing trip to Vail, Colorado last year – "I don't think he'll let me down."

## **"Anna married the 72-year-old Wall Street financier at a surprise ceremony ... the mood was euphoric."**

impossible – she had carved out an independent existence for herself, while at the same time remaining the loyal, dutiful spouse.

But the walls came tumbling down in 1998, when her husband fell for the daughter of a factory director in Guangzhou, China. At 31, Wendi Deng was less than half Rupert Murdoch's age. She had joined the Murdoch-owned Star TV in Hong Kong in 1996 as an intern. She was smart, beautiful, fluent in English and Mandarin and the perfect person to play the role of unofficial diplomat for News Corp in China, a country where business success and good relations with government were inexorably linked.

By early 1998, she'd begun appearing by Murdoch's side as his interpreter on his trips to Shanghai and Beijing. By July, Anna Murdoch had filed for divorce.

Anna reveals now, however, that although she was the one who initially filed for divorce, it was her former husband who, in the end, obtained it.

She had tried desperately to save the marriage, but to no avail. "I don't want to get too personal about all this," she says "... but [he] was extremely hard, ruthless, and determined that he was going to go through with this no matter what I wanted or what I was trying to do to save the marriage. He had no interest in that whatsoever."

In despair, Anna Murdoch turned to her good friend, the late Cardinal John O'Connor, the Catholic Church's then spiritual leader in New York. He told her she had little choice but to initiate divorce proceedings.

On June 8, 1999, the Murdoch divorce was finalised. By this time, Rupert Murdoch had become the petitioner. "It was important to me," Anna says now, "for no reason except I believe when you take a vow to be loyal to someone and look after someone all your life, that you try and stick to that. You don't hurt other people for your own happiness.

"So on the papers ... you would see that he was the petitioner for the divorce, and he was granted the divorce, not me."

Seventeen days later, Rupert Murdoch and Wendi Deng married in a secret wedding aboard his yacht on New York

harbour. In October of that year – six months later – Anna Murdoch married the 72-year-old Wall Street financier William Mann at a surprise ceremony in the Lady Chapel of New York's St Patrick's Cathedral. The mood was euphoric.

Today, Anna Mann is loathe to discuss details of her divorce settlement or elaborate on claims that the proceedings only turned acrimonious after she learned of her husband's relationship with Wendi Deng. Until then, she had reportedly been prepared to accept as part of the property settlement around \$US100million as well as several of their homes.

This, of course, was almost spare change compared to the \$12 billion in assets the couple was thought to have accumulated during their 31 years together – assets which, under Californian law, Anna Murdoch was surely entitled to half of.

Except for one crucial thing. As *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported in May 1999, Murdoch owned next to nothing. He had managed to store his wealth – and his children's – in an intricate network of trusts and private companies in which, technically and legally, he had no involvement.

All Anna Mann will say of this is, "I'm very comfortable and my children [including Prudence MacLeod, ►

Rupert Murdoch's daughter by his first marriage] are protected and that was really what I was most anxious about – that my children and their inheritance would be protected. And that's what took so long – between the separation and the divorce – to get that right."

Asked whether she received \$1 billion in the settlement, as some rumours would have it, Mrs Mann says politely but firmly, "No comment."

Pressed further on the somewhat vexed question of a successor to her former husband, Mrs Mann agrees that her main concern was that a successor not come from his new family.

So it can't be Wendi Deng?

"Not at all."

And it can't be Wendi's children?

"Not at all, not at all."

Asked more pointedly for her thoughts upon learning that her ex-husband is about to become a father for the fifth time, Anna said, "No comment".

So who of her three children would she think best suited to take over from her ex-husband? Lachlan, the deputy chief operating officer of News Corporation? James, currently chief executive of Star Television in Hong Kong? Or Elisabeth, mother-of-three and currently running her own independent television production house in London?

"Actually I'd like none of them to," she says. "I think they're all so good that they could do whatever they wanted really. But I think there's going to be a lot of heartbreak and hardship with this [succession]. There's been such a lot of pressure that they needn't have had at their age."

Under the terms of the divorce settlement, Anna Mann would have also been entitled to some of the seven homes she created and shared with Murdoch.

She reveals now she walked away from them all. "It was time to move on," she says. "I knew I could create something of beauty again without all the painful memories."

As she has done, in great style. Her house, which she and Bill Mann bought from Yasmin Aga Khan last year for a reported \$5 million, is a place of beauty and grandeur, nestled among spruce and Atlas cedars and cherry trees in that well-known New York refuge for jet-setters, powerbrokers, billionaires, actors and aristocrats known as the



Rupert Murdoch with third wife Wendi Deng in March 2001. They are expecting a

## "I've got sadness about me, and hurt. But I hope I haven't got bitterness ... there's no point in that."

Hamptons.

All through the house you can discover choice offerings from her old life as well as new: lanterns from Sydney; naive paintings from South America; Buddhist statues from Thailand; carved sea-horses from Italy; chairs from Scotland, cherub figures from up-state New York. And nearly every room filled with light and views across pale fields and orchards to the Atlantic.

"I'm going to be here for a long time," she says with undisguised glee. It is here she wants to return to her writing and her gardening and the sharing of crosswords, long walks and leisurely lunches with her new husband.

It is here, too, that she wants her children to come and stay and, of course, her three grandchildren – Cornelia and Anna from her daughter, Elisabeth's, first marriage to Elkin Pianim – and Charlotte, Elisabeth's daughter with Matthew Freud, great-grandson of psychoanalyst Sigmund.

Says Anna laughing: "I thought, 'What on earth is this baby going to be like with the blood of Rupert Murdoch and Sigmund Freud running around in its veins,' [but] Charlotte is the most happy, sanguine child that you could ever imagine."

ANNA MANN WAITED three years to give this interview. The reason she

has spoken now is because, as she says herself, she didn't want to come across as a victim.

"You're in such a state of shock ..." she says. "I mean, in a way you're sort of mentally ill because you're not absorbing everything. I think it's a way of nature protecting you from it."

"I think I even began to lose my ability with words, which is amazing for me because I am usually quite good with words. But I would forget the names of things. Other people I have talked to who have gone through [divorce] say that's what happened to them, too. You really go into a state of shock. I feel now I'm coming out of a deep mental illness."

Anna also says she chose to break her silence with an Australian magazine because of her love for Australia and because of the number of concerned inquiries she has had from this country over the past three years.

"I've had other offers from other places to do interviews and I haven't

done them," she says. "I thought, 'I want to do it for Australia,' because a lot of Australians have written to me and asked, 'How are you?' or, 'What are you doing?' And I thought this was a nice way of letting everyone know I'm okay. More than okay."

It would appear so. During the nearly four hours we spent together, it was impossible not to be struck by the grace and dignity of this 57-year-old woman; by the ease and propensity of her laughter – deep, infectious waves of laughter that filled the air and percolated the space that she now calls her true home.

Despite the pointedness of her words, despite the sometimes long, painful silences and monosyllabic answers during our interview, you would never come away believing that this was a bitter woman. Quite the contrary.

"I've got sadness about me, and hurt," she admits in a voice that still bears the lyrical strains of her Glaswegian past. "But I hope I haven't got bitterness, because I think that reacts against yourself. There's no point having that."

What she will admit to though is a feeling of relief – "a great relief now not to have to defend some of those actions all the time. It's really lovely, actually. I think, 'I don't have to do this any more'"

Were you play-acting then? "I don't think it was play-acting. You could publicly defend certain actions and privately you

could say, 'Look, I really think that was wrong.' But publicly and as a supportive wife you would do that."

When I ask her whether she thinks that some of the critics might have been right all along about the man for whom she helped secure a papal knighthood in 1998, she says, softly, yes, perhaps they might have been.

"I began to think the Rupert Murdoch that I loved died a long time ago. Perhaps I was in love with the idea of still being in love with him. But the Rupert I fell in love with could not have behaved this way."

Was it possible that he might wake up one morning and realise he'd lost his best friend? Anna Mann pauses for a moment and then says with a smile and a shrug, "Well, perhaps, who knows? The truth of it though is that, now, I have found a best friend. I have found a man who loves the companionship that I offer. And the comfort. And we do things together. I don't always have to find something to do because I'm lonely. I have been terribly [lonely], but I've been terribly lucky to find this.

"He's very different [from Rupert]. He's a kind, gentle, very spiritual man. I don't think he'll let me down. I think he'll be there for me." W