

Marina Mahathir has managed to chart her own destiny as writer, entrepreneur and activist independent of family ties, writes JUNE H.L. WONG.

FOR someone who comes across so confident and outspoken, it comes as a surprise that Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir came into her own only when she turned 40. That was in 1997, which she describes as a "really incredible year".

"I was awarded the datuk padukaship, the honorary masters from Universiti Sains Malaysia, the Avon-Tan Sri Fatimah Woman of Distinction Award ... suddenly I was getting recognised (for my work)," she explains.

Before that, she used to be plagued with doubts as she always wondered whether she was valued for her own abilities or because she was the Prime Minister's daughter.

"When I was working in public



Datin Paduka
Marina Mahathir

In her own right

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relations, whenever the company got into trouble, they'd send me to talk to the client because they reckoned the client wouldn't scold me. It wasn't very nice or fun but I felt I couldn't say no to my boss," she explains.

That was always the context she was seen in - the eldest daughter of the Prime Minister.

What she is most recognised for is, of course, her tireless campaign against AIDS, a cause, she says, that came to her almost by chance.

"I didn't set out to be a public figure but I set out to find something I could care about. I remember feeling very dissatisfied 10 years ago; I had read somewhere that everyone should be an expert in something and I wasn't in anything," she says.

"Then the AIDS issue happened, and although I can't say I am an expert now, I know my stuff and I can talk knowledgeably about it and the related issues."

Marina points out that she did not start the Malaysian AIDS

Foundation or Council, the two organisations she heads. The groundwork was laid by the National Council of Women's Organisations' Ramani Gurusamy, Pink Triangle Foundation director Hisham Hussein and former Deputy Health Minister Datuk Mohd Farid Ariffin.

"They brought me in because they thought I could help with fundraising which I had done before and I thought that was all I knew how to do. Then I got into the issue. Looking back, I believe it was my destiny to work in AIDS and I'm very grateful for my involvement. It helped me grow a lot, to travel and meet people.

"I actually value it a lot more than being the Prime Minister's daughter and I guard it jealously. That's why when someone at the 4th International Congress on AIDS in the Asia Pacific (ICAAP) in Manila suggested getting all the First