

Securing the Future of Woodstock

By David Jeffery, Principal

I believe in schools. When I was a young teacher, fired up with reforming educational zeal, I was dead set against the fashionable view that decried the ability of schools to make a difference in the lives of young people. One distinguished (British) Sociology professor wrote a defining article on this opinion, entitled "Education Cannot Compensate for Society". This view prevailed for some time, both in the UK and USA. In the harder-nosed eighties, another distinguished professor published research that indicated the opposite – that good schools could transform lives and student opportunities. The study's title reflected the time an individual student spent in school in an educational lifetime – "Fifteen Thousand Hours". If, in this much time, schools could not change lives for the better, then what was the point of them?

I believe that good schools transform lives. A Woodstock student spends 1,400 hours a year in school, but another 4,700 hours in the social and physical environment that is Woodstock. Without resorting to cliché or hyperbole, it is a unique experience. Not only is the programme distinctive and the staff distinctively caring and committed, but the diversity of the student body is itself an educative process. A Woodstock education has the potential to be a uniquely positive and a uniquely life-changing experience.

I believe, finally, that transformed young people can and do make a difference. There are plenty of reasons for pessimism and negativity in our brave new world. It is easy in the contemporary climate of pervading materialism for schools to abandon their moral and educational visions and resort merely to preparing young people for personal success and self-aggrandisement. But Woodstock's story is made up of families who have selflessly made a lasting impact for good in India and of graduates who have gone on to make a difference in their chosen sphere, in their community and even in their country. It is a tradition that we aspire to continue today.

I believe in Woodstock. I'm not an alumnus, nor am I either a visionary or an



ideologue, but I am sure, after a quarter of a century in education and almost five years at Woodstock, that this school has and represents something unique, and uniquely worthwhile.

I almost completed that last sentence with the phrase: 'and uniquely worth preserving'. There is a great deal of nostalgia attached to this old and enduring institution, but the point about Woodstock is that it is *not* a preservation society. It is a school that has shown a remarkable ability to survive, to adapt, and to change in its 150-year history. This is not the case with many of its contemporaries in India. Today, Woodstock is not just a school. It is both an ideal and a genuinely worldwide community which, although distinctly differentiated through the changing demography of its history, still has special characteristics and values shared over the generations.

As a relative newcomer, I think I can see these commonalities clearly. They include the social assumption that humanity is one family; the educational understanding that unless you know something for yourself, you don't know it; the moral value that it's normal to talk about beliefs and values as the motivating factors in life, and not money or success. In addition, Woodstockers care about the fragile balance of the environment and about human responsibility for both the natural world and for social justice amongst its inhabitants. Woodstockers value individuality and community, intellectual

achievement and creativity. They appreciate India, the country and the culture and the particularly enduring human qualities that it represents and continues to show to all those who come here.

Like many of our staff, I think it is worth devoting a significant portion of my life to the support of this vision. Why? Firstly, because it is a uniquely interesting thing to do. Secondly, because it is a worthwhile enterprise. And thirdly, because there is a challenge here. The challenge is to try to take a 150-year old institution which has made its distinctive and changing contribution to two different centuries of sub-continental history, and to set its course for the next half-century. This is what the Board of Directors set out to do in 'Service through Excellence', and the "Woodstock 150 Plan" aims to implement.

This is a crucial time for Woodstock. For most of its life it has been a mission school, supporting and being supported by Christian organisations that were in India for their own purposes. The school has actually been independent for a shorter time than the country which hosts it. Today, Woodstock has an independent Board of Directors representing its major stake-holders, including parents, students, staff, alumni, Christian organisations, higher education and the professions. It has strong support from its friends in KWI and in WOSA-USA and a developing relationship with WOSA-India and Europe. At the start of a new century, Woodstock has its own aims and purposes and, like the country, the school has to find its own way in the world, including the responsibility of bringing together the resources necessary to support its vision.

The other thing that has changed in recent years, perhaps most noticeably, is the student body that it serves. Just twenty years ago it was a predominantly white school educating an expatriate population. Today, it is a predominantly Asian school educating an Asian-International population. Twenty years ago the parents were foreigners serving in the sub-

continent. Today, our parents include Asians serving in India or other parts of Asia, including Korea, Bhutan, Nepal and Thailand – and not only these, but also Russians, Mongolians, Japanese, Africans, Europeans and North Americans, from 35 different countries in all. Our priority continues to be serving families in service, whom we categorise as ‘nation-builders’, and these can be either Christian or non-Christian. The essential point in common is that these families wish for their children the distinctive experience that is a Woodstock education.

Change is difficult and dangerous, but it is necessary and needs to be undertaken with faith and confidence. Over the next decade, Woodstock will need to continue its transformation in three major areas if we are genuinely to fulfil our mission. Firstly, we will need to transform our student body, both in terms of those whom we recruit and the outcomes they achieve. At present, the best of Woodstock’s graduates are fine young people who can compare in terms of character and achievement with the best in the world. But the majority should be like the best – and this will require us to continue to review our admissions and financial aid policies, which determine the composition of the student body, and our programmes and staffing, which determine the outcomes.

We need to transform our staffing. Woodstock has been heavily reliant for international staffing in the past on mission support, which provided long-term,

committed teachers and residence staff. Today, this is no longer the case. Woodstock needs to be able to recruit and retain committed and competent contract staff from India and overseas, to maintain its international character and curriculum. The costs in compensation and continuing professional training are significant additions to our traditional budget.

Thirdly, we need to transform our physical plant, facilities and infrastructure. Many of our buildings are very old and, although sound and solid, in serious need of renovation. Much of our infrastructure is out-dated and needs replacement or upgrading to meet additional needs and contemporary standards of health, hygiene and safety. And we have to respond to new needs in the physical facilities, such as the computer networking of the campus, which will see fibre-optic cable spreading out over many of our 250 acres of jungle hillside.

Each of these has its cost. Some of these needs we can provide from our own resources. The rest will be met by friends and supporters around the world who think that, among the many thousands of schools, Woodstock is still distinctive enough to merit their special attention. The “Woodstock 150” Campaign, which begins its public phase during 2003, has already raised pledges of over \$5 million. We at the school, who have given a part of our lives to this place and these students, thank you for your giving in support of this vision, our work, these young people.

LEGACY

old buildings told me stories of the past
trees whispered memories from before
then
rocks hummed of the beginning
mountains gave me beauty
walking them gave me strong legs
loneliness taught me to read, to write, to dream
fear taught me to pray
the library brought me silence
the Himalayan thrush brought me song
some teachers taught me to learn, to live well, to know myself
some teachers taught me brokenness
some, the grace of God
the dhobi greeted me by name
the bearer-jis taught me respect
the bazaar taught me Hindi and the pleasure of Indian sweets
treks taught me to carry all I need
Parker Hall stage gave me passion
the sometimes applause gave me pride
the sometimes jeering gave me perspective
longing for home taught me the love of family
homelessness taught me the love of friends
a nurse showed me compassion
an artist showed me how to see
the winterline spoke to me of forever
the night of stars sang holiness
it was terrible and beautiful
but more beautiful
the pain is fading
the love grows

— *Merryn Glover, Class of 1987*
September 2002

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KW International, Inc.
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E-mail: mail@kwi.org
Visit our website! www.kwi.org