

Woodstock School Distinguished Alumna 2007 Award
Dorothy Irene Riddle
Acknowledgement at a Special Student Assembly
September 21, 2007

Good afternoon....I want to thank the Board for the honour of this award. My grandfather was Allen Parker, and it is very special to me to receive this award here in Parker Hall (which was named after him).

He was principal of this school during a critical period of transition. He guided the school in its growth from a small girls' school and teachers' college to becoming first co-educational, then inter-denominational, then international, and finally the challenging stretch of becoming inter-faith. Woodstock's history and legacy to all of us is the importance of moving from exclusion to inclusion.

It was here at Woodstock that I learned from my teachers and classmates that there are many ways to live and to express our faith in the One Life of which we are all a part and "in which we live and move and have our being." I learned to move beyond the beliefs and practices with which I was familiar and comfortable and to become curious about different values and ways of looking at the world. I learned respect for others regardless of whether or not I agreed with them. I also learned the hard way that we can cause tremendous pain by arrogantly believing that we know how others should live and then being afraid or judgemental if they make different choices.

Since leaving Woodstock, I have had the opportunity to raise uncomfortable questions and challenge traditional assumptions and help communities become more inclusive. I have helped governments rethink social and economic policies. I have empowered very small businesses to become competitive in world markets. I have advised Presidents and Prime Ministers. I have worked with women in small hill villages.

Sometimes I have despaired that things would never change and have wondered if the 40 years I have spent listening and coaching and taking unpopular public positions were just a waste of time. And then I will meet someone whose life has been transformed by my work, or I will hear of a new programme that would never have been conceived without all those years of laying the groundwork.

The most important lesson I have learned in working in over 80 countries around the world is this: If we think only of ourselves and if we believe that there is not enough for everyone (a "scarcity mentality"), we become fearful and suspicious of all those who appear to be different from us ... and we divide our world into good/bad, rich/poor, us/them. But if we understand that we are truly all one ... and that, while we each play different roles, we are all equally important parts of this abundant universe, then we live with dignity and joy and our world becomes rich with limitless possibilities.

Because of the choices I have made, I am not wealthy by material standards; and some might judge me as not having been very successful. But in terms of how I have been privileged to touch people's lives, I am rich beyond measure.

I would like to leave you with this thought: Each of you will make a difference in this world. The question is – what kind of difference? We are all part of a common cosmic energy field, and so what you think or feel or do affects all of us. You each have a unique contribution that only you can make. That contribution come from how you treat each person that you meet each day.

Woodstock provides you with a wonderful place to learn about different perspectives and develop the values and habits that will help you learn and grow and contribute all your lives. And, in this beautiful setting, you can experience the physical abundance that is possible if we are good stewards of this earth.

So ... what will you choose? Will you choose the easy road of criticizing or bullying or shunning others just so that you can feel superior to them? Or will you choose the harder road of goodwill and inclusiveness, of compassion and love, of advocacy for positive change and acceptance that we are all one?

Remember that all journeys begin with a single step, that each day we can make new choices, that we are all in this cosmic experiment together. Choose wisely and, no matter who you are, you will help to create limitless possibilities.

Thank you.