
Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Spring Newsletter

March 2004

TRIBUTE TO INGE WOODCOCK CO-FOUNDER AND PATRON OF TRAS

Inge Woodcock, who, with her husband George, founded TRAS in 1962, passed away December 11, 2003. We mourn her passing, but remember with gratitude and amazement her indefatigable efforts on behalf of the Tibetan refugees and Indian villagers. From the early garage sales to the successful operation of two humanitarian aid societies, Inge worked harder than anyone, and her passion rubbed off on all who came in contact with her. We remember her in this issue through tributes

from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Canadian Tibetan community and from her long-time friend and co-Patron, Dorothea Leach.

Inge was first moved to help the Tibetan refugees when she saw the pitiful state of the Tibetan orphan children in India in 1962; and throughout her long association with TRAS, she also never forgot the elderly refugees

who had nowhere to turn in their declining years. To honour Inge's commitment to children and the elderly, we highlight the work TRAS continues to support in these two fields.



HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA REMEMBERS INGE

His Holiness sent this message to Vancouver when he was informed of Inge's passing.

"I am deeply saddened to learn of the passing away of Mrs. Woodcock, in Vancouver on 11 December 2003. I would like to express my deep condolence to family members and friends. Mrs. Woodcock and her husband,

the late Prof. George Woodcock, because of their deep concern for the plight of the Tibetan refugees formed the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society in order to provide the basic daily necessities to the Tibetan refugees in the early years of our exile. It is because of the selfless efforts of people like the Woodcocks that we have been able to establish a viable community in exile. We Tibetans owe a great debt of gratitude to these two kind souls

from Canada for their interest, sympathy and dedication in helping the Tibetans for many years. The memory of the Woodcocks will always be cherished by the Tibetan refugees".

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THE TIBETANS SAY THANK YOU

A tribute to the Woodcocks by TC Tethong, Victoria, BC.

Mrs. George Woodcock, known to her close friends as Inge, passed away in Vancouver, B.C., on the 11th December, 2003 after a long illness; eight years earlier her husband, Professor George Woodcock, internationally known Canadian writer, poet, critic, activist, philosopher and professor of English literature, died. Both Prof. Woodcock and Inge had a special affinity towards the Tibetans and developed a close friendship with the Tibetans after their trip to India in the early 1960's, shortly after the 1959 Tibetan uprising in Lhasa, against the Chinese Communist military occupation of Tibet.

George and Inge's trips to India brought them in close contact with Tibetans and led to an audience with the Dalai Lama. Through these meetings they realized the plight of the Tibetans and decided to seek help for the Tibetans who needed humanitarian assistance. So, they formed the first Canadian aid organization for Tibetan refugees, TRAS (Tibetan Refugee Aid Society), to assist Tibetan refugees in India. Tibetans were in urgent need of help, because they were not accustomed to the Indian climate nor the food habits; and because of lack of biological resistance against the tropical diseases, they were extremely susceptible to all kinds of illnesses. The large majority of the refugees from Tibet spoke only Tibetan and the language barrier was a big problem for the Tibetans in India in finding suitable employment. Hence the aid that came from TRAS Canada and other aid agencies helped overcome many of these adversities. Inge Woodcock's active fundraising efforts and the dedication of the members of the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society, made it possible for many Tibetans of all ages to overcome these hardships they were facing. The majority of the Tibetan refugees now in exile escaped during the 1960's to mid 1970's. It is important to know, however, that the flow of refugees from Tibet still continues to this day. This indicates that all is not well in Tibet as Beijing claims.

Mussoorie, a hill town in northern India, was the hill station where the Dalai Lama resided when he first sought asylum in India. That was the town where Prof. Woodcock and Inge met the Tibetan refugees initially. The first Tibetan Children's Homes Foundation was established in Happy Valley, Musoorie, and later a home for the old and disabled refugees was established in Mussoorie too and the financial assistance from the

Tibetan Refugee Aid Society and other aid organizations helped immensely in running these institutions. Tibetan refugee help projects initiated by the Woodcocks were followed up by the other directors of TRAS such as Dr. John Conway, Dr. Barry Leach, etc., and assistance for the Tibetan refugees spread beyond the Homes Foundation and old people's homes in the years to come. TRAS funds helped to run several small industries and major agricultural settlements in South India. Tibetans owe much to these two kind souls from Canada for their initiative and dedication in starting the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society in Canada. Because of the help from Canada many Tibetan lives were saved and hundreds of children were able to attend schools and find shelter, food and care.

George and Inge Woodcock met His Holiness for the last time in 1993 at the Hotel Vancouver, when His Holiness came to Vancouver B.C. at the invitation of the Tibetans who had settled in British Columbia. Let this tribute to George and Inge be also a reminder to the Tibetans, many of whom do not know the Woodcocks, that these two Canadians and their friends helped the Tibetans in our hour of need and always remained close friends of the Tibetans.

A TRIBUTE by Dorothea Leach

Inge Woodcock 1919 - 2003

Our patron, Inge Woodcock, died on the 11 December last year. She had not been well for many years, suffering from arthritis. When she was not able to look after herself any more, she very reluctantly decided to leave her home which she had shared with her husband George for several decades and move to a good care facility. Inge had always been a very private person and she never made any friends there but appreciated the excellent care given by the staff and continued to indulge in her lifelong passions of reading and smoking! As she tired easily and had impaired hearing, she only liked some close friends to come for short visits. Inge always had been a perfect hostess and even here was gracious, never complained and showed a lively interest in the latest news of TRAS and CIVA, both organisations founded by her and George. We shared a laugh and memories of those early days which at times brought frustrations but mostly positive results in

fundraising and encouraging reports of the progress in the Tibetan camps and settlements. On nice days Inge enjoyed an outing in the car or in her wheelchair through the neighbouring tree lined streets. Inge died of cancer quite peacefully in her sleep.

In an obituary by Barry Leach when George died in 1995 he said "...he provided a vehicle for Canadians to express their concern for the plight of the Tibetan people" With George's high literary profile and his connections with the media TRAS was able to attract members willing to help and provide considerable donations for the work in hand. However, we all agree that Inge's incredible energy, her brilliant ideas for moneymaking schemes and her iron hand with which she ruled us contributed just as much to the success of the organisation. Even if one did not feel like wrapping bulk Christmas cards or going to the fleamarket, only a broken limb would be accepted as an excuse! No matter how impatient and prickly she could be, we all knew that behind this crusty facade was a kind heart and great compassion for all living things.

None of us knew much about Inge's past except that she was born in Weimar, a beautiful town in Germany and that she had a brother who with his wife had visited here once or twice. I phoned Dieter Linzer with some hesitation but was so pleased to receive a most friendly and willing response to my queries. We had some long talks on the phone and he offered to refresh his memories of their childhood together and write them down, and also send us the one photo he had of Inge. She absolutely refused to be photographed and so this picture of her is a rarity. Inge was a very good student and matriculated in languages, mathematics, art and domestic science at the age of 18. The parents suggested that Inge pursue a training in languages to be a foreign correspondent. She most enthusiastically agreed and through a connection a place was found as an au-pair with two elderly ladies in Ipswich in England. It was not a happy time for her as she was quite exploited and had to work hard. It was therefore no wonder that she sought the company of young people. She met a journalist whom she married



*photo: Inge taken by her brother,
Dieter Linzer*

against the wishes of her parents and moved with him to St.Ives in Cornwall, a place where many artists lived. The marriage did not last but because she was now a British subject it saved her from being interned in the coming war. Inge and George met at a party in London in 1943 and soon married. George, a well known anarchist who refused to join the army was a target for the police and the army. They almost lived underground, moving from one address to the next. It must have been a difficult but rather an exciting time for them in the interesting company of people such as George Orwell.

Inge managed to get permission to visit her parents as a correspondent of a newspaper in 1946. They met in west Germany and she tried to persuade them to leave the Soviet zone, which they finally did to live in Bavaria. With the threat of another war Inge and George emigrated to Canada. Not so surprising a choice as he had been born in Winnipeg but was taken back to England when only a few months old. They lived on Vancouver Island, built their own house, grew strawberries and tried to make ends meet with diverse undertakings. George continued his writing and slowly made a name for himself. They started extensive travels which resulted in very successful books. It was on a trip to India that George and Inge first met Tibetans and were honoured to obtain an audience with the Dalai Lama.

Eventually they moved to Vancouver where the story we are familiar with commenced.

Inge will live in the memory of those who knew her as a wonderful friend with great courage to fight for the betterment of the underprivileged in many parts of the world, for animal rights and for the environment. Yes, she was difficult, but thousands of people who never knew her benefitted from her great generosity and compassion. That is the message that she left us.

THANK YOU, INGE.

SPONSORSHIP REPORT *by Joan Ford, Sponsorship Secretary*

When Inge Woodcock first saw the pathetic scene of little Tibetan orphans huddled, several to a bed, under sacks for blankets, with no shoes, little warm clothing and meager food rations, she knew something had to be done immediately. A collection was rapidly made at the University of British Columbia - and that was the start of TRAS. Today, TRAS is still offering help to children in need through our sponsorship project.

Thank you, sponsors, for being so prompt in sending in your sponsorship dues for this year. It makes the office work so much easier.

I am happy to say that two of the three children featured in the last newsletter have been sponsored. I always have a list of children who need sponsors. If you have some spare funds it is a simple way to make a huge difference for a child. There are so many tragic situations in the world today beyond our control, but this is one way we CAN help.

NORZING WANGMO is from a poor family who live in Lo Menthang, Mustang, in northern Nepal. She was born in 1989. They have a small field where they grow barley and potatoes if they get good rainfall. They also have a few goats. As there is no school in their village, the family wishes that at least some of their children could go to school. This girl was brought to Kathmandu by one of their relatives, to the Buddha Memorial Children's Home, where her sister is. One of our board members has recommended the school to help Norzing, because it would be very difficult to send her back to Mustang. She is in Class Five, and we are looking for a sponsor for her.

KUNGA JUGNEA has been taken in by the school run by the Rinchen Zangpo Society in the remote Spiti Valley in northern India. He was born in 1991. His mother is Tibetan and his father is from Spiti. His mother is uneducated, and although his father has a small government job, really the family is very poor. His parents cannot give Kunga or his older sister and younger brother a good education. Please help him.

TSERING DOUWA is also at the Spiti School. He comes from the village of Hurling, very close to the Tibetan border. He has one older brother. His mother keeps house and his father is a farmer, but they are very poor. Your help will fulfill his life.

THE OLD PEOPLE - DO THEY STILL NEED OUR HELP?

In the 'good old days' elderly Tibetans were looked after by their families, their village, the local monastery or the lord of the district. But in India, what is an elderly, sick, poor Tibetan to do? The answer has been to do the nearest thing to the old way, and many have gravitated to the large Tibetan orphanages in northern India and to the Tibetan agricultural settlements in south India. To answer the obvious need, the Tibetan government in exile asked the Tibetan Homes Foundation in Mussoorie and the Doeguling Tibetan Settlement in Mundgod, south India, to open Old People's Homes. TRAS helped build both facilities, a new building in Mundgod and converted stables and outbuildings in Mussoorie. And for many years now, TRAS has been sending a quarterly payment to these two Homes. Mundgod receives \$1600 and the Tibetan Homes Foundation receives \$1100 each quarter. TRAS also sends \$350 per annum to the Tibetan Homes Foundation to maintain the buildings.

Recently, we asked if our help was still needed. Surely, after forty years of exile in the host country of India, the current elderly Tibetans would have families or settlement communities to turn to. But the answer has come back loud and clear - there is still a need. Many have no family in India; elderly monks must be cared for; and there are still new arrivals each year - old people struggling over the Himalayas to get away from the present control in their beloved country and to get to a place where they may practise their religion in peace. So our payments to the two Homes will continue, and we ask for your financial help in providing the necessities of life for these old people who risked everything for their religion and their culture.

Here are the two replies, from Mussoorie and Mundgod.

From Mussoorie, Karma Tsering writes:

"Dear Mrs. Daphne Hales,

Tashi Delek and thank you very much for your mail. We are very glad to learn that you have taken over the Old People's Project and would also very much like to update you with the information on the old people's care at Tibetan Homes Foundation. We would at first answer your questions that have been put forward :

- *It is indeed very true that over 40 years have passed for Tibetans to be living as refugees in India. Major of the Tibetan settlements are well settled and there are*

quite many families living in these settlements looking after their elders. However, there are still many elderlies who have no one to look after them and thus the need for the care of the old aged people is very much necessary. At this point we have two major categories of elderlies needing the old age assistance a) One category consists of elderlies who are physically very weak and do not have anyone to look after them, although they could be having a home or not b) In the second category are elderlies, who can manage by themselves but have no source of income. It is these two categories of elderlies that we are assisting. In our present program we have a total of 140 elderlies in the first category who are living with us at the old aged homes and another 176 in the second category where we provide the elderlies a monthly stipend to meet their daily requirements. These elderlies belong to different Tibetan settlements and quite many of them who are living at our homes are such who have escaped Tibet recently and have taken refuge in India. Apart from the elderlies to whom we provide support, there are over 20 elderlies who are still awaiting a home.

- *The Tibetan Homes Foundation presently has over 140 elderlies living in the old aged homes and the amount sent by TRAS is used towards the maintenance of these old people and the maintenance of the Gephelling old age home in Rajpur.*

- *Apart from the funds sent by TRAS, we also receive funds from Help Age International, Help Age Canada, German Aid to Tibetans and Miriam Dean Refugee Trust. However the total funds are presently unable to*





meet the overall expenses of the old age program.

- THF is presently running three old age homes, of which two are in Rajpur and one in Mussoorie. The elderlies living in these homes are such people who if not taken into the homes would be simply left to die. They have no income and no one to look after them and thus they have been admitted into our homes. The admission procedure for these old aged people is very strict. On the recommendation from the Tibetan Settlement officer the General Secretary of THF personally visits the needy old people and after verifying the facts personally grants admission to the elderlies. For these elderlies all round care is given: their food, clothing, health needs and home; everything is provided to them. In an old age home the elderlies live in double or triple shared rooms. At the old aged home there is an overall caretaker of the homes who is supported by

ayahs, cooks and helpers. The health care centre of the THF meets the medical needs of the elderlies, major cases are referred to bigger hospital. At the old aged homes, some of the elderlies who are a little well off with their health help with the daily chores of the home while the rest of them do not have any particular work as such. The Elderlies spend most of their time with prayers, they visit the nearby temple, recite prayers and circumambulate the temple. The homes also have a village garden, so some of the elderlies assist with gardening and growing seasonal vegetables. From time to time different programs for the elderlies are organized so that they remember that they are valued. Programs such as games with children, outdoor visits, invitations for entertainment and so on are organized. Since our work also involves looking after over 2400 children and the campus of the two sections are nearby, there is a lot of exchanges between children and elderlies. The food at the homes is very simple and every effort is made to provide a wholesome balanced diet. Bedding and clothing are provided to the elderlies as and when needed.

Some of the activities arranged for the elderlies last year included:

The 40th Anniversary of the Tibetan Homes Foundation was celebrated in April. His Holiness the Dalai Lama blessed the THF by attending the program. This visit was very special for the complete Tibetan community in Mussoorie and especially for our elders who have always been looking forward to receiving blessings from him. Games Day in June saw the elderlies take part in a balloon bursting game! They were overjoyed with their performance and the game reminded them of their childhood days. It was wonderful to see everyone laughing heartily.





One of their past times is gardening. This year we purchased many new flower pots from the market and issued them to all three homes.



The elderlies enjoyed transplanting flowers to the new pots.

October 1 is Elderly Day and this year we organized a Religious Tour for our elderlies. We booked our school bus and the elderlies visited four buddhist monasteries in the Doon Valley. It was a full day, with the treat of lunch in a restaurant - they enjoyed the many blessings of the day.

The Tibetan Homes Foundation is deeply grateful to TRAS for its kind financial help. This aid has brought immeasurable joy to the elders' lives and also has taught them the happiness of sharing and being loved at the evening of their lives. As the needs of the Tibetan exile community increases in respect of support required for elderlies, we request that you continue assisting us to provide a good, happy life for the needy elderlies. The regular help from TRAS brings much relief and smiles to the faces of our elderlies".

From Mundgod, Dhondup Dorjee writes:

“The Old People’s Home of our Settlement was constructed in 1971 and it has 10 old blocks and one new block. At present there are 175 residents with 22 staff, a small dairy and a sick room unit. Still we need to admit grans in the Home as we have new arrivals from Tibet, grans from our Settlement who have no one to depend upon, old aged monks and grans recommended from the Tibetan Government in Exile, Dharamsala. So, the

Old People’s Home here is very helpful and most genuinely needed to care for and look after the grans. Earlier, till 1985, the Government of India provided Rs.60/- per month per person as their sustenance fund, but unfortunately from the year 1985, the Government of India stopped its aid to the Home. At present, besides TRAS, our Tibetan Government in Exile provides a stipend to a few residents and we have a few NGOs who are providing sponsorship assistance to the grans.

The TRAS quarterly payments are as usual and earlier being spent on medical expenses for all the grans and monthly these expenses are around Rs12,000. *So the generous contribution from TRAS is very helpful for the Home, specially to the individual grans so they can receive proper medical care and attention during their sick and needy moments. I would like to thank TRAS specially for this gener-*

ous act and request you to kindly provide your support in the future, too.



The first elderly arrivals at Mundgod, by the Stupa

The Old People’s Home is these days still cooking on the gas stove provided by TRAS. It is still in good condition and working well. The Home has two common kitchens, one for the old blocks, and one for the new. Grans are provided with 3 meals a day and their main activities are

doing prayers and rotating round the stupa which is in their Home. In the evening they listen to His Holiness’ speeches, Tibetan songs and other music through tapes which are broadcast over loudspeakers so that all the grans can hear them well. Almost all the grans have no children to look after them and most have relatives and family members only in Tibet. So, this is the present situation of the Old People’s Home and if you need any other information, please do let me know and I will be available to inform you as much detail as I can.

Thanking you and with warmest wishes to TRAS”.

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

TRAS EXECUTIVE

Patron Mrs. Dorothea Leach
 President Dr. Marion Tipple
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 Secretary
 Treasurer Ms. Gabriela Sava
 Sponsorship Dr. Joan Ford
 Project Director Dr. Lynn Beck

Trans - Himalayan Newsletter

Editor Daphne Hales

TRAS Office
 5885 University Blvd.
 Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1K7
 Office Secretary - Bridget Bird
 Tel: 604-224-5133
 Fax: 604-676-2554
 e-mail: tras@portal.ca
 TRAS website: www.tras.ca



DIRECTORS

Dr. Frank Beck	Dr. Videsh Kapoor
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Trans - Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

Yearly Membership donation (\$20)..... \$20

Possible Additional Donations:

Annual Donation of \$360 for the "Child Development and Education Project"
 at a residential school or in a settlement.

Donation to the Old People's Fund, which supports a "Self-Help Project"
 for the elderly and infirm

Donation to the general fund or other specific area of your choice.....

TOTAL\$ _____

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