

CONTENTS

Foreword / 11

I. AND SO, TIBET

A Brief History of TRAS & Didi's Story / 19

A Detour to Destiny / 33

"I Can't Not Do It" / 59

Victims of Innocence / 85

Tibetan Refugees in a Decade of Exile / 97

II. THE INTERVIEWS

John Conway / 113

Dorothea Leach / 125

Daphne Hales / 135

George Woodcock / 147

III. THE HOME FRONT

Knowing the Woodcocks / 171

Canada India Village Aid / 208

The Woodcock Fund & Woodcock Award / 225

Tibetans & the Dalai Lama in British Columbia / 231

An Inventory of TRAS Projects / 253

FOREWORD

Motivated by their first meeting with the Dalai Lama, George and Ingeborg Woodcock created the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society, or TRAS, in 1962. It was followed by a similar non-profit society, Canada India Village Aid society, or CIVA, derived from their friendship with an Indian philanthropist named Patwant Singh, and formed in 1981.

I have chosen to write a small book about the Dalai Lama, the Woodcocks and their humanitarian work to mark the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising against the occupation of Tibet by Chinese Communist troops, and to recognize the importance of small organizations of unselfish people in contributing to world peace on a grass roots level.

Long before the Internet facilitated fundraising for micro-aid projects, TRAS and CIVA were models for “mutual aid” organizations dedicated to empowering people to help themselves. Always taking care to be apolitical, TRAS alone has, since 1962, undertaken more than 300 projects, often cooperating with the Canadian In-

ternational Development Agency (CIDA). Administrative expenditures, as George Woodcock once proudly noted in the early days, amounted to “only a cent out of every two dollars we received.”

George Woodcock was Canada’s most prolific and remarkable man of letters. Various described as “Canada’s Tolstoy,” “quite possibly the most civilized man in Canada,” and “a kind of John Stuart Mill of dedication to intellectual excellence and the cause of human liberty,” he arrived from England in 1949 to build a cabin in Sooke, British Columbia, with his German-born wife Ingeborg.

The story of how George Woodcock wrote and edited 150 books has been well told in a 1988 biography by George Fetherling but this biography does not investigate Ingeborg’s role in the Woodcocks’ highly unusual marriage and the couple’s inspirational role in creating two charities that have outlived them both.

I knew the Woodcocks—but not well. I was on their periphery towards the end of their lives. Like most of their friends, I “owe” them. They bequeathed me their no-nonsense car (a Toyota Tercel) and all the signed editions in their extensive library including, most significantly, George’s rare, signed first edition of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. I sometimes keep it under my keyboard as I type. The Woodcocks have disappeared but they definitely have not gone away.

George and Ingeborg Woodcock did not have children, ostensibly by choice, so they adopted strays and cultivated friendships. In doing so, they were both extraordinarily generous and uncannily selective. They cemented loyalties by lending their house to people whenever they went away on their many research trips. Nearly everyone who looked after their cats ended up on the board of directors of either TRAS or CIVA.

Neither was an angel or saint. George could hold a grudge. And, in some respects, Inge could be a bully. Both were secretive. Although they operated their voteless meetings on anarchistic principles, it was their way or the highway. They never suffered fools gladly. They were semi-nocturnal. They drank a lot. They believed

in ghosts. And they were *really* interesting people.

George never drove a car and voted only once. Both believed in reincarnation and past lives. Ingeborg fed the raccoons by hand and felt fellowship with rats. They never visited Africa because George once had a dream that he would die there. Their two charities pertaining to India have helped millions of people and they donated nearly \$2 million to help Canadian writers via the Writers' Development Trust (renamed The Writers' Trust of Canada).

I hope this modest book about the Woodcocks and their friendship with the Dalai Lama convinces the reader that George and Ingeborg Woodcock are worth celebrating—and that organizations such as TRAS and CIVA, which continue to emulate the Woodcocks' convictions, must be encouraged and supported because they epitomize the essence of Margaret Mead's famous saying: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."



When asked to explain how he and his wife came to be involved with the Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees, George Woodcock explained, "Our Tibetan friends insisted that it was not chance at all, but Karma the appropriate working-out of destiny."

This appropriate working-out of destiny began in the 1930s, in London, when George Woodcock was still very unhappily employed as a railway clerk, having rejected a relative's offer to pay his way through university if he would agree to become an Anglican clergyman.

Proud and poverty-stricken, Woodcock, a would-be poet, quarrelled in print with a new writer named George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair). This spat proved fortuitous. In an interview conducted one year before he died, George Woodcock told me the details of how he met Orwell, the subject of his biography, *The Crystal Spirit*.

"I got into a disagreement with him over something he'd said about my pacifism in the *Partisan Review* in 1942. In response, in



After his spat with George Orwell, George Woodcock (left) participated in a BBC broadcast to listeners in India on September 8, 1942, accompanied by Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand, George Orwell, critic William Empson, Herbert Read (seated left) and poet Edmund Blunden (seated right).

Mulk Raj Anand turned out to be an important connection when the Woodcocks travelled to India.

the *Partisan Review*, I pointed out that after all he was a former police officer in Burma. He himself had been a pacifist one year before. And so I wrote this down and Orwell wrote a furious reply. Then somehow or other, through an Indian writer named Mulk Raj Anand, he invited me to take part on his India program at the BBC. So I did and we were very formal.

“And then I was getting on a double decker bus on the top deck at Hampstead one day and I saw a familiar crest of hair. It was Orwell. He’d seen me come across the street. He turned and patted the seat beside him so I went up. He said, ‘Woodcock, Woodcock, we may have differences on paper but that doesn’t mean anything derogatory to our relationship as human beings.’ And with that our

friendship started. It was the most extraordinary kind of thing.”

As the two Georges participated in BBC radio programs, they increasingly rubbed shoulders with expatriate writers from India. These literary associations bore fruit for Woodcock decades later when he and Ingeborg Woodcock travelled to India on a research trip for his book *Faces of India, A Travel Narrative* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964).

In 1961, in Delhi, Woodcock accepted an invitation to be interviewed on All India Radio with India’s leading novelist of that era, R.K. Narayan (Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan). After that interview in the radio station, Ingeborg Woodcock noticed a sign on a door: TIBETAN SECTION.

As a German-born pacifist who had supported her husband’s anarchism during World War II, Ingeborg Woodcock had met some Tibetans in Seattle and started to learn their language. “Ingeborg had been fascinated with Tibet ever since she read Sven Hedin at the age of eight,” George Woodcock wrote. “Later—seven years



Dekyi and Lobsang Lhalungpa (1926-2008) became the first Tibetans brought to live in Canada by TRAS after a chance meeting with the Woodcocks in Delhi in 1961. That meeting led them to the Dalai Lama.

before we reached India—she had learnt at an American university [University of Washington, in Seattle] to read and—as she thought—to speak Tibetan.”

And so there, in the Delhi radio station, Ingeborg knocked.

Behind that door they met scholar-turned-broadcaster Lobsang Lhalungpa, who introduced them to his wife Dekyi. The friendship of these four people started a chain of events that led the Woodcocks to form the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society.