

The following are excerpts from Alice Hallaran's remarks at Westover's Opening Convocation:

I spent much of the summer mulling about what on earth I wanted to say to you today. With time running out I decided that I wanted us to reflect on Westover that September, in 1909, when Miss Hillard, Miss LaMonte, and their faculty, staff, and students opened the school for their first full year. Officially, the school opened on September 24<sup>th</sup>, and on October 4th this Chapel was dedicated. Although I did not discover the year of the first formal convocation, I would like to paint a brief picture of the school, as its members must have sat here 100 years ago.

Imagine yourself as one of those students. You are one of over 100 students, representing 17 states. Most likely you would be from New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, or Ohio, for these states comprise half the student body. All of you are boarders. 24 seniors will go on to graduate in June of 2010. You look very different from today; you are a sea of very pale white faces with long hair piled on top of your heads in a kind of flattened bun, dressed in one of your four uniforms. Believe it or not you were measured and outfitted at Westover by none-other-than an Abercrombie and Fitch representative, and...no one at Westover in 1909 spent any time on-line!

Today, in 2009, you are one of 209 students, representing 19 states and 16 countries. You are about 2/3 boarding and 1/3 day students. You, our students of today, are wearing every style imaginable and your hair, my dears...what a great cacophony of styles!

Students, faculty and staff, we are a sea of diversity!! Languages abound, not only in our course offerings, but also in our daily lives. Spanish, Korean, French, Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Australian English, Senegalese, Japanese, Spanish, Greek, Armenian, Twe, Vietnamese, Thai, Polish, Albanian, Turkish, Italian, Portuguese, the list goes on... I know this well because sometimes, with our 14 student in Spring Outdoor, as we do the warm up exercises you all know and love, we count in different languages. Sometimes we have more languages than people!!! Amazing. Imagine all of us learning to count to ten in 15 languages!

Yes, we are far more diverse than in our early days as a school. Over the years Terry and I have been here, all faces and facets of the school have become more diverse. This is a good thing. It offers us the opportunity over lunch, in classes, on the playing field, in casual discussions to learn about each other, each other's families, cultures, values...and FOOD. I have to admit that I often become so involved in my own agenda that I fail to take full advantage of the time that does exist for me to learn about where you or you or you come from, what you eat for breakfast, and what holidays you celebrate. Sometimes I think I talk too much and do not listen enough. Sometimes it is hard to know what questions to ask that will unleash rich personal history. Sometimes it is even difficult to pronounce a name! Thank you all for being patient. We are not only diverse ethnically but in our roles at the school.

Thank you all, students, staff, and faculty, for your willingness to share your histories, your adventures, what is important to you, and your recipes! When people ask me how long I have been here and I answer 36 years, they wonder how I could do that...Both Terry and I would readily answer we are richer (if not a little fatter) for this experience and are delighted to have been here this long. If you are new to the school and are feeling alone, in addition to seeking a listening ear, reach out and ask questions of your peers or faculty. Your interest in their lives will make them feel important. And they are. And your reaching out will forge new connections.

What do we share with the Westover of 1909? We have a faculty and staff who are totally dedicated to making sure you graduate an educated woman, able to analyze an historical event or work of art, use technology wisely, speak fluently in another language, grasp the finer points of English grammar, stay dedicated and generous alumnae, outwit and outplay opponents on the field, sling a canoe over your shoulders and walk proud. And we have students who are dedicated to their work and take it upon themselves to educate their faculty. Yes, we also are learners.... and if you have been counting my common errors, bless you, but don't tell me!!

What else has remained the same since those early days? The answer is so obvious and so important I almost missed it. We remain a small community, bigger than in 1909, but still small. Bill McKibben, in his book, *Deep Economy*, says, "For reasons of ecological sustainability and human satisfaction, our systems and economies have gotten too large..... What we need is a new trajectory, toward the smaller and more local." I agree with McKibben that our society today, rich in Wal-Mart's, big schools, national radio stations, coupled with the "hyper-individualism" exhibited by our isolated suburban homes and a TV in every room, is starved for community.

At Westover, we will all have myriad tasks that will bring us together this year, freshmen and senior, faculty and student, Chinese and Korean, conservative and liberal, west and over. It is the process of task doing, more than the product that is most important... We all depend on each other, students, faculty, and staff. We give to each other in personal and vital ways, making the school run. McKibbens says for a true sense of community "we need to depend on those around us for something real." Indeed we do. And indeed we always have. The "real" need not be large, either. The 'real' may well be small. A simple smile, or hello, working on a class project for the centennial celebration in April, working in the Soup Kitchen on Wednesday nights, reporting on a radiator not working, picking up litter on the sidewalk and putting it into the right recycle bin, helping a classmate with a computer problem, wiping down the dining room tables, listening to a friend who is missing home, reminding each other to turn off lights... Our community, I hazard to guess (although I have no data), is probably less sustainable than the community of 1909, which grew root crops and stored them in the root cellar opposite the yellow shed for winter consumption. Yet we have Steve Ladd, advocate par none of sustainable solutions, who initiated our second solar panel project which is being installed on the top of the FAC as I speak! By making little changes step by step together our community will be nourished, more sustainable, and continue to thrive into the next generation and beyond.

Lastly, I want you all to close your eyes and picture a Westover convocation in 2109, 100 years from now. It will be here in a flash, geologically speaking, and, unless one of you doing medical research solves the aging phenomenon of shortening chromosomes, we won't be...What will our styles be? Our technology at that time? Our classes? Our values? Our faces?

As we contemplate our journey over the last 100 years and wonder what life was like 100 years ago..... I wonder how those living 100 years from now, in 2109, will view us? How will they view Westover students and staff of today? What image do we want to leave? What do we value? What are our hopes and fears for the world? In this centennial year, I charge each of us to reflect on our current values and our daily lives at Westover, knowing that we are all bound together, whatever our roles, whatever our backgrounds, not only in space but also through time...have a great 100th year!