Chapter Three
The Woodlawn Program: Its First Year

The Woodlawn Program opened its doors on September 7, 1971 with 171 eleventh and twelfth grade senior high school students. As stated in the proposal, "the basic philosophical assumption underlying the creation of the school was that some high school students are capable of assuming primary direction over their own education."[87] Woodlawn students were indeed provided the opportunity to take that responsibility.

Teachers did not teach "down" to their students. Both shared in the learning experience. Internships, independent work, and interdisciplinary courses cut across traditional lines, and students themselves worked to develop educational programs for Woodlawn. Not only did students want to change things in Arlington's public school system, they continued to participate in the educational process that followed the establishment of Woodlawn. Students did not just want to gripe about what they did not have, they wanted to develop new courses and they wanted to remain involved. Not surprisingly, Jeff Kallen was among the more active students in this endeavor. As seniors, he and Bill Hale tried out several "radical revisions of the curriculum in terms of guiding foci, educational milestones, and educational contracts which would emphasize independent study and break down traditional disciplines."[88]

One proposal included a curriculum that was based on different course disciplines: Man's Institutions, Physical Phenomenon, and Self-Expression. There would be no formal classes and no regular subjects. Instead, individuals would contract to do certain things and then be judged by their progress. The idea involved students keeping a journal of the different activities they did each day. If a student worked on a political campaign for one hour, he received one hour's worth of credit for Man's Institutions. If, for two hours he played a game of billiards, a student would experience first-hand how Newton

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[87]A student publication. "Why Naught," Arlington, Virginia, September 1971, page 1.
[88]Kallen interview, 26 February 1996, page 5.

himself came to understand the scientific theories involving force and reaction, and he would earn credit for two hours of Physical Phenomenon.

There was obviously a significant amount of idealism built into the possibilities students had at the school. However, state and county regulations together with Anderson's practicality prevented radical experimentation from taking place. The head teacher posed questions to his students: How do we keep official records of these courses? What course code will be used for Man's Institutions? How will Self-Expression fulfill the English requirement? Anderson was not opposed to student initiatives. If students could solve the problems of meeting regulations, they could proceed with their innovative curricular ideas. However, he did not advocate total experimentation at Woodlawn because to him that was not what the program was about.

While others spoke of an experimental school, Anderson talked about an alternative program. In the context of the times this difference did not amount to much since both concepts allowed for something other than the mainstream school. The disparity did amount to a big difference in terms of what the school could and could not do, what it could hope to achieve, and how it would achieve things. As the Kallen/Hale proposal suggests, some students at Woodlawn had radically experimental ideas about education. For them, the ideal of the New School was replaced by the reality of Woodlawn.

Two limitations were imposed on the new curriculum being developed at Woodlawn: the aforementioned state and county regulations, which had to be met for graduation recognition, and the promise of an education designed to meet individual student preferences. No two students were alike at Woodlawn, and a significant amount of the school population was not interested in radical experimentation. Those who wanted to try new and experimental things were certainly allowed to do so, but they received no more encouragement than the

student who preferred a more traditional education in a non-traditional atmosphere.

A large bulletin board in the front hall had a chart showing when and what courses were offered each week. Instead of the rigid period structure of the traditional high school Woodlawn adopted three modes of teaching/learning: 1) large-group presentations, 2) small group discussions, and 3) independent study.[89] Formal classes in any course met no more than three times a week, which allowed students to structure their free time in whatever way they chose to do so. Large group presentations never exceeded twenty students, and most classes had less than ten students each, which allowed students a voice in deciding the operation of each classroom. Independent study, then, offered students total freedom in education.

Relationships between Woodlawn students and their home school peers varied with the individual. For those who returned daily for sports practice or chemistry class, the home schools were still very much a part of their lives. Some students also remained close friends with students at the home school, while others left and never returned. For Jeff Kallen, "Washington-Lee represented all that he had opposed during the years leading up to Woodlawn," and he rarely returned.[90] The mainstream student did not come to Woodlawn because it was not a mainstream school.

Students came to the school for many reasons. Some came to Woodlawn for the academic freedom the program proposed to offer. Independent study worked well for this type of individual. Bill Hale, a senior at Woodlawn during its first year, explained that students were given "a chance to set up their milestones for the year and to choose the means by which to achieve them. For instance, if a student wanted to receive a credit in government he could

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[89]A student publication. "Why Naught," page 2.
[90]Kallen interview, 26 February 1996, page 3.

work in a congressional office and gain some meaningful insight into the workings of government instead of sitting in a classroom for 53 minutes each day."[91] Elisa Stacy was attracted to Woodlawn because of its flexible curriculum policy. As a junior she "wanted to take a survey of English Literature, but at Yorktown [she] wouldn't be allowed to take it until [she] was a senior."[92]

Other students were attracted by the advantages of having a small school rather than a large one. They may have suffered from lack of motivation, or had difficulty adapting to discipline. When Mark Osmun of the *Arlington News* visited Woodlawn to get an inside look at a 'free-form' high school he sat in on a French III class that "had a total enrollment of five students," which provided "exceptional student-teacher attention."[93] Students were given the opportunity to get to know their teacher and the learning process was personalized. David McIntyre, the foreign language teacher, finished teaching classes at 11:00 a.m. He had the rest of the day to help students individually. He felt his efforts were "more effective teaching a few students in a small classroom setting, than trying to teach many large classes where two-thirds of the students may be sleeping."[94]

"The emphasis at Woodlawn was on providing an alternative environment."[95] Toward that end, teachers contributed immensely. Adelaide Rusch, the part-time art teacher/part-time office secretary, inspired individuality in students. In addition to involving non-artistic students in the art craft by having them restore old chairs or work on woodcarving, "Ma

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[91]Staff Writer. "'New School' Opens Today." *Northern Virginia Sun*, September 7, 1971.
[92]Mark Osmun. "Experimental School Under Way." *Arlington News*, November 23, 1971.
[93]Ibid.
[94]Ibid.
[95]Ray Anderson and Jeff Kallen. *The Woodlawn Program: Report on the First Year of Operation*, Arlington, Virginia, August 17, 1972, page 3.

Rusch," as she was called, was an unofficial counselor to students on various personal matters. "She provided a good atmosphere for people to talk about anything and everything, and she always had a coterie of art students and hangers-on."[96] David McIntyre was very popular with the school's language enthusiasts. He taught six different languages, and he was always very enthusiastic about each of them. His enthusiasm rubbed off on his students who would frequently stay after class to practice their speaking skills. David Lloyd, who taught both physics and math, worked in a very creative way. In the first year Woodlawn had no science lab whatsoever. He "would do things like make lab equipment. Then when students were done they would throw the 'equipment' away because they didn't have the necessary materials to actually use it, but they would have learned what the equipment was supposed to test."[97] *Arlington News* reporter Mark Osmun observed that "by joking and abandoning formal mannerisms, Lloyd appeared to be able to make students forget that they were listening to a physics 'lecture.' Beyond using a causal approach to engage his students, Lloyd nudged them towards independent research claiming 'that he was not sure of the laws of physics, and that if anyone could prove any of them he'd be really interested to hear about it.'"[98] Though unconventional and non-traditional, teaching methods at Woodlawn worked. Not only did students open up to the arts and voluntarily spend free time speaking a second language, but they also found that learning was fun.

Credit/no credit courses encouraged students to explore a wider range of subjects. This type of grading allowed students to take courses that they were interested in without being penalized with a bad grade if the subject was too difficult. "Credit/no credit meant that if a course was completed successfully,

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[96]Kallen interview, 2 March 1996, page 2.
[97]Anderson interview, page 40.
[98]Mark Osmun. "Experimental School Under Way." *Arlington News*, November 23,1971.

it would show up on the student's report card and give him/her credit for it. If, however, a student did badly (that means failed), no record would ever appear of a student taking that course."[99] Woodlawn was required to give a letter grade (A,B,C,D,E,I) for the state required courses (English 11 and 12, History and Government, but all other courses could be either for a letter grade or credit/no credit. Each student made the decision himself.

Similarly, the teachers at Woodlawn had freedom to make decisions for themselves. Each teacher ran his/her class differently. Classes like English and history were very flexible. The Elective Program, in particular, enabled students to vary from the prescribed courses of English and Social Studies to take innovative topics such as creative writing, revolutions, yoga, and the political process. "Students were offered as much freedom as they desired to modify the large-group instruction of their classes."[100]

One example of the options available to the students at Woodlawn was an interdisciplinary course on the woman's movement. Largely based on the literature of Betty Friedan, D.H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, and Germaine Greer, the course studied the significance of the movement in contemporary American society through assigned readings and ensuing discussions. The course also included invited speakers such as a woman lawyer, a man from personnel in one of the airlines, and a woman from a lesbian movement. It was partly literature, partly history, and partly social studies - not a bad interdisciplinary course, and very fitting for the times.[101]

Math classes, however, did not adapt easily to the individualized learning environment at Woodlawn. They operated very much like the courses given at any other high school. Paula Banta's Algebra/Trigonometry

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[99]Blair Reischer. Woodlawn Program Handbook, Arlington, Virginia, June 1975, page 1.
[100]Ray Anderson and Jeff Kallen. *The Woodlawn Program: Report on the First Year of Operation*, page 5.
[101]Jeff Kallen interview, 22 February 1996, page 3.

class was "conducted almost identically with the 'normal' high school course. Students factored polynomials and listened to the theories behind the processes."[102] What was alternative about the class was the teacher's attitude toward her students. She did not hound them to do the assigned work; instead, the decision was left entirely up to the student. At Woodlawn students were expected to behave responsibly. "At first some of the students had to get adjusted to the increased responsibility, but for the most part, students [at Woodlawn] let themselves learn more."[103]

Self-discipline and self-motivation were stressed at Woodlawn. Students managed their school work, and their free time without continuous adult supervision. Instead of a system of rules governing their use of time and behavior, Woodlawn students were accountable for the consequences of their actions. Some students left school to work at real jobs and make money. Others like David Tarttar chose to spend their free time on special interests "like working on the school newsletter."[104] Of course not all of the students used their free time productively. Some did abuse their freedoms at Woodlawn, but "the majority of the students were genuinely interested in learning" and in exploring new ways in which to learn.[105]

Everyone was on equal footing at Woodlawn. Attendance was not checked daily; instead, it operated on the honor system. "It was up to the student to go to the office and record any absence(s)."[106] The honor system was also a component of Woodlawn's grading policy. Students and teachers met at the end of each quarter to discuss what grade each student deserved. The

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[102]Mark Osmun. "Experimental School Under Way." *Arlington News*, November 23, 1971.
[103]Ibid.
[104]Ibid.
[105]Ellen Kurcis, interview by Christy Mach, Arlington, Virginia, 23 February 1996.
[106]Blair Reischer. Woodlawn Program Handbook, page 2.

teacher gave a grade and the student graded himself, and then the two compared notes. "Generally the student graded himself harder than the teacher," but if there was a conflict, a discussion ensued until both parties reached agreement.

Some of Woodlawn's political students used their free time to become involved in Virginia's nominating convention in the Fall of 1971. The political students "supported McGovern who was running on an anti-war platform. They went to a local attorney whom one of the parents knew, and they got some office space, and they ran an office. If they could help start a school, surely they could help run a political campaign,"[107] and they did. The students approached Ray Anderson and asked him and his wife to run as. delegates to the State Democratic Convention because they needed more support. Ray said "okay, and [his wife] Sarah said that she would do it, and so the students put together a slate and organized for Arlington's convention that May."[108]

Of the 104 delegates and 35 alternates that Arlington sent to the state Democratic convention at Roanoke on June 4-10, 1972, a "total of 17 delegates and 2 alternates were Woodlawn supporters. Among that group [were] 11 Woodlawn students (nine delegates and two alternates), Ray and Sarah Anderson (both delegates), 3 Woodlawn parents (all delegates), and 3 other friends of Woodlawn (all delegates)."[109] The Woodlawn gang drove Ray's Volkswagen Bus down to Roanoke for the Convention with "big 6x6 posters covering the windows which read 'Power to the People' and 'Stop the War.'"[110] The next day's headline on the local newspaper was a picture of the car with

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[107]Anderson interview, 26 January 1996, page 21.
[108]Anderson interview, page 22-23.
[109]A student publication. *The Woodlawn Canoas*, May 1972.
[110]Anderson interview, page, 23-24.

the headline: "McGovern Radicals invade Roanoke."[111] Though this episode was not typical, particularly after the first year, the story does illustrate how students created options for themselves within Woodlawn's flexible learning environment. The episode also reveals the types of relationships that were forged between the students and teachers at Woodlawn. In many cases they were friends.

The relationships made in the classroom extended outside of them. Ellen Kurcis had a few of her students over to help her and her husband Steve decorate their Christmas tree. Outside of school David Lloyd and his wife were involved in consciousness raising discussions with students on women's rights, relationships, and sexuality. Student/teacher relationships were loosely defined at the time, and because the age difference between them was so slight it was easy for friendships to develop. Some staff even felt comfortable stopping by student parties for a beer.[112]Though such unorthodox relationships would be scorned at the end of the century, they were permissible in the early seventies.

Early on in the program Ray Anderson made an impassioned speech to the school warning all participants of the experiment to act responsibly. He encouraged student and faculty innovation and energy. He commended the Woodlawn community on the progress it had made up to that point. He also addressed his concerns with regard to the future of the program. "If the school closed down," he said, "because no one was learning that would be okay. That would be a valid reason to close the program. But if Woodlawn was closed because some students 'hot rodded' their car down the small neighborhood street, or because someone brought drugs into the school and was caught, the school would be closed because of the Woodlawn community's stupidity, and

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[111]Roanoke Times, June 10, 1972.

[112]The legal drinking age in Virginia was 18. The State Assembly did not change that law until 1986.

that would not be okay."[113] Anderson implored everyone to be on their best behavior, and they all were.

Students and teachers alike protected the "special place" that they created.[114] "Most of the students the first year took the school very seriously, because [they] built it, and it was [theirs.]"[115] Students themselves enforced the only one rule at Woodlawn which was the county-wide 'no smoking in the school building' rule. Town Meeting designated one of the three phones in the building as the student phone to be used for local calls. After the school received a large phone bill from long-distance calls that were made from the student phone, the culprit was temporarily ostracized by the rest of the student population for breaching the confidence of the student phone. The students created the school, and they were dedicated to making it work.

Town Meeting was the official forum that gave students a voice at Woodlawn. The weekly meetings were open to all participants of the program: students, teachers, and parents, and each person was allowed one equal vote. At the beginning of each week the TM agenda was posted on the wall outside the office. Anyone who had anything to be discussed was free to write the issue on the agenda. A chairman was selected from among those who volunteered and any new issues were added before the proceedings began.[116] TM discussed everything from the hiring of new teachers to setting up the date for a school fund-raiser.

Perhaps the most significant decision the group make the first year was the addition of Advanced Placement (AP) courses to the curriculum. Students enjoyed AP classes at their traditional schools, and they wanted to have them at

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[113]Anderson interview, page 54.
[114]Ibid.
[115]Blair Reischer, interview by Christy Mach, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 11 March 1996, page 4.
[116]The chairman was usually a Woodlawn student. However, teachers did sometimes fill the role.

Woodlawn as well. The chairman announced the topic, a discussion followed, then a student made a motion, and another seconded it before a majority "yea" (vs. a "nay") passed the motion and AP classes in English and History were added to Woodlawn's curricula for the following year.

The decision-making body was judged by the Woodlawn community "to work quite well" that first year.[117] In only two instances did students question the lack of involvement by TM in a decision made by the head teacher. In both cases the "head teacher explained that he made many such decisions each day, but that the town meeting could over-rule or revise any decision he made because it alone was the fundamental policy making body of the school."[118] Anderson's response appeased those who feared he exercised too much power, and TM always had the final word.

"Upon entering the Woodlawn plant, a visitor found quickly that things were different."[119] In the nine classrooms, students sat on pillows or on the carpeted floor and took notes while their teachers lectured.[120] In addition, various projects reflected the school's make-do spirit. In the Winter, students realized that a coat room was needed. In order to make it easy to find coats a hat-check type of system was tried. Hangers had tabs on them (the hard plastic closing tabs that hold together the plastic wrapper on a loaf of bread) which would be marked and correlated to the tab and given to the coat owner by whoever was checking in coats at the time. The idea did not work very well or for very long, but it is an example of what kinds of innovative things students were doing.[121]

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[117]Ray Anderson and Jeff Kallen. *The Woodlawn Program: Report on the First Year of Operation*, 17 August 1972, page 6.
[118]Ibid.
[119]Staff Writer. "'New School' Opens Today." *Northern Virginia Sun*, September 7, 1971.
[120]It should be noted that there were chairs and couches for the more conventional students and increased personal comfort.
[121]Kallen interview, 22 February 1996, page 3.

In the Spring of 1972, all internal indicators pointed to a successful year of operation. Although long hair and barefeet may have offended some, student behavior never threatened the school's existence. Seniors met all necessary requirements for graduation, and student response was positive. In the report on the first year of operation that was prepared by Ray Anderson and Jeff Kallen, "eighty-five percent of the Woodlawn students felt they had learned more than they would have at a traditional school. The program helped them to develop greater self-confidence and had been effective in creating opportunities for self-realization and understanding. Seventy-seven percent of the students identified with Woodlawn as a personal, intimate, friendly, healthy, unique place to be. In the best use of the word, Woodlawn was a family."[122]

The completion of its first year of operation did not generate new critics of the alternative program, and the only negative comments made came from the school's constant opposition within the Arlington school system. "There was a little discontent and a little grumbling," but no one ever went to the school board to try and close down Woodlawn."[123] These critics never organized into a block of concrete opposition, and their individual complaints never seriously threatened the school. The conservatives were preoccupied with the renovation of Washington-Lee High School, and proposals to adopt classes on business and capitalism in the mainstream classrooms. Woodlawn was simply not important enough for them to want to organize in order to try and close the school down.

Permissive administrators contributed to Woodlawn's success that first year. Lack of direct supervision allowed the alternative program to develop according to the ideals of the students and teachers involved, rather than as a

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[122]Ibid., page 8-9.
[123]Harold Wilson, interview by Christy Mach, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2 April 1996.

response to outside pressures. Superintendent Chisholm "and his whole cabinet walked in the back door the first week of school. They stood and watched TM for about 5 minutes, then they turned around, walked out, and never came back."[124] From the very beginning the school was allowed virtual autonomy in its operation.

Associate Superintendent Wilson also advocated the Superintendent's policy. The school board had accepted the proposal for the new school and the administrator believed that "Woodlawn should be allowed to run free of outside interference to see what the school would produce."[125] As a result the central office did not bother Anderson when he failed to attend high school principal meetings. After all, he was not officially a principal. Instead, informal meetings between the head teacher and associate superintendent remained a suitable substitute.

Though unconventional and non-traditional, the Woodlawn Program proved itself in the 1971-1972 school year. Parents often expressed their appreciation for the positive responses they saw in their children, who judged themselves "more mature, more independent, more stable, and more outgoing as a result of attending Woodlawn."[126] Many also believed the Program was a good transition from high school to college.

Woodlawn received many visitors from many parts of the east coast including: HEW officials, a high school principal from Georgia, college students and professors from Virginia, New Hampshire, Maryland and Pennsylvania who were curious about the new alternative. Newspaper articles were written about Woodlawn in the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Star*, the *Washington Daily News*, and the *Northern Virginia Sun*. Overall the

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[124]Anderson interview, page 42.
[125]Ibid., page 55.
[126]Ray Anderson and Jeff Kallen. *The Woodlawn Program: Report on the First Year of Operation*, page 2.

school was a source of favorable publicity for the Arlington County schools.[127]

The response was so favorable, in fact, that a group of parents went to the school board and asked for an alternative at the junior high school level. Both Woodlawn and Drew Model School received favorable reviews, and with alternatives at the elementary and high school levels, parents wanted an alternative at the junior high school level as well.

Anderson's concept of an alternative program, with its undertones of libertarianism and its lack of commitment to remodeling the whole concept of education, proved itself in 1972, and has since proven to fit better with the goal of setting up an institution to endure at the secondary school level within the Virginia public school system.

Woodlawn was allowed to continue its program of alternative education. The school year ended with an informal graduation ceremony. Students and teachers read poetry, and the graduates each received a diploma that two of the seniors designed themselves. The diploma did not have a state seal, and it was not signed by a county administrator. It was simply a picture of the front of the Woodlawn building with the words: "Not with sorrow, not with joy, but with a little bit of each, we leave."

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[127]Ibid., page 7.