



## **Nicolette Hardwicke named Evolving Eve for 2008**

by Kim James

In the midst of trying circumstances, Nicolette Hardwicke held onto her vision of transforming early childhood education and opening the Paddington British Private School.

Hardwicke is the recipient of the Evolving Eve award for accomplishing a significant, positive change in her life, improving not only her status in life but also the lives of

those around her.

She was nominated by Laura Phillips who says Hardwicke is a, “quiet, gentle person, yet underneath that exterior is a strong, courageous lady who, despite adversity, never gave up.”

Hardwicke’s dream was to create a “truly unique, child-appealing school” that instilled in children a love of learning.

“I came 5,000 miles across the world alone with 2 babies to a country I knew little about and opened my school with a dream, a vision and a lot of courage,” Hardwicke says.

The adversity Phillips mentions arrived not long after Hardwicke arrived in America.

Hardwicke was robbed of all she owned, but that didn’t stop her from opening her school. For transportation, she purchased a bicycle and attached a children’s trailer to it. She purchased all the equipment needed for the school on credit cards.

Her school would be unique because of its attention to fine arts as well as academics. Hardwicke believes, “the more a child is exposed to music and the beauty of the world around them, the more the brain is stimulated.”

Hardwicke comes from a fine arts upbringing. She grew up listening to classical music and opera, and her mother was an opera singer. At age 16, Hardwicke became a professional dancer. She received her certificate in ballet from the Royal Academy of Dancing and later graduated from the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. She was a ballerina and modern dancer for many years. Her last public performance was for Prince Charles.

Once she had a family of her own, Hardwicke turned her focus to children. She studied early childhood education, the Montessori technique and child psychology.

“When my career as a dancer ended, dance was left behind, but not entirely,” she says. “It was then that I came up with the idea to include that along with all aspects of fine arts into my program.”

The Paddington British Private School's program includes exposure to classical music throughout the day, ballet, dance and movement, as well as an advanced academic syllabus, computer lab with educational games, introduction to French and Spanish and a child-friendly science lab.

Paddington students are on track to be reading by age four. They are introduced to the orchestra, the instruments and their sounds, and are taken to Jones Hall every year to hear the symphony. In visual arts classes, children learn to recognize the works of Monet, Van Gogh, Matisse, O'Keeffe and others.

The Paddington British Private School opened 20 years ago in a church portable building with a handful of children. Today, the school is considered the leading preschool in The Woodlands. Enrollment is around 350 students. The 40 staff members are from all around the world.

Hardwicke says to go from a small building to where the school is today, educating thousands of children must be her greatest achievement. She credits her success to God and says he has made her the person she is today.

"If you believe in God, all dreams are possible and can come true," Hardwicke says. "His intangible, invisible presence was the motivating force behind all of my creativity. He was the wind beneath my wings and the voice that gave me the courage to keep going."

Hardwicke says that being recognized for her years of hard work and dedication to children is extremely rewarding.

"It's an acknowledgement, a tribute, to anyone who sets their mind on certain goals, that through determination, conviction and perseverance, all goals can be realized."