



Finding joy in being a woman

BROUGHT TO YOU FROM the women who work at the *Dalhousie Gazette*, it's the International Women's Day supplement.

Coming from us you might expect stories on pornography, sexual harassment or about the sexism in higher education but you won't find them. Today is our day, women's day and a time to find joy in being a woman.

As feminists we spend a lot of our energy fighting in reaction to the sexism in our community.

This year we've decided to make International Women's Day a real celebration. In this

supplement you'll find stories about Wen-do, women in sport, Nicaraguan women, and feminists' attempts to regain their spirituality.

Today we use our energies not to talk to the men of Dalhousie about all the evil they're doing: as feminists we find that beating our heads against the brick walls of patriarchy can get frustrating. This year at the *Gazette* we feel we have some cause for celebration.

At this time last year one woman sat in a staff meeting arguing about pornography in the office against 19 men. Now

with two women editors and a staff made up of somewhat equal numbers of men and women, we feel we've created some sort of space for women on campus.

As women working in the media we want a chance to write about the things women are doing to change our world. We are building in strength and growing—not to some false ideal created by men, and not attempting to somehow be "equal" to them or joining the world of hierarchies they've created.

Instead we want to spin and weave our own future, to build and dream. We are the daughters of Ceridwen, sisters of Eve, creators of life. These thoughts empower us and keep the fire within us burning.

'Let one woman help another' is the motto used by Mount St. Vincent president, Dr. Margaret Fulton. Let us respect each other and not fall into the machismo trap of greedy, competitive isolation. Divide and conquer. We must stand united.

And that's what this supplement is all about. Being united through joy, love, the common bond of womanhood, the life-creating secrets of ourselves. To our sisters, a gift from our hearts.

WEN-DO FOR WOMEN

Preparation for self-preservation

"I feel I use Wen-do every day; how I carry myself, how I talk; with confidence and credibility. I'm not nasty, aggressive, or always on the defensive, just firm and positive."

BY FIONA JEYACHANDRAN

Every year approximately 400 women are sexually assaulted in Halifax alone. Over 50% of these women are assaulted by men they know.

As more and more women become victims of this menace, more and more are searching for a way to cope with it. Some hide away behind locked doors, too afraid to go out alone, thus allowing others to have control of their lives. Some women depend on mace and shriek alarms, which can give them a sense of false security and can prove useless in time of need. Neither approach takes into account the possibility of sexual abuse at home or at work.

Other women try to turn to traditional martial arts, but these take years of practice and may be too violent for many women. Is there a solution?

To a growing number of women in Canada the answer is Wen-do, a course in basic self-defence, tailored to fit the needs of women.

In 1972, a Toronto family of martial art experts designed this course as they realized that traditional martial arts were in many ways impractical for women. The latter stress endurance, strength and years of practice. On the other hand, Wen-do can be taught in a few weeks, and is suitable for all women regardless of age and state of physical fitness. The main objective is to give all women a choice of how to respond to a dangerous or potentially dangerous situation.

There is a lot more to Wen-do than just the physical techniques, according to instructors Meredith Bell and Carol Millet. Verbal techniques and discussions within the group are equally important.

Concerns and fears about responding to violence with physical action, myths about rape, sexual harassment and abuse, the roles of women in general are some of the main topics of discussion. This can help create a better awareness of situations a woman may find herself in.

"Awareness and avoidance" are emphasized during the course, says Millet. Wen-do reaches awareness of yourself and your abilities, awareness of a potentially dangerous situation and avoidance of it, if possible. Not all situations are avoidable and Wen-do equips a woman with the self confidence and defence methods that she needs.

These techniques can range from a quiet but firm sentence in response to a sexist joke to a broken collarbone to keeping someone from knifing you. (The latter would render the assailant useless at the time but far from crippled.) Thus, body language is as important as verbal responses.

One very important lesson in Wen-do is teaching women to yell! Screaming can be ineffective in many cases, so a typical martial art technique, "ki-yi" is taught. This is a deep guttural yell, as opposed to a thin, high pitched scream.

A university student was able to use this type of verbal response to her advantage in an incident in New York. As she walked out of a book store laden with parcels a man began to follow her and whisper abusive things in her ear. At first all she could remember from her Wen-do course was to keep breathing so that she would not panic. This did the trick and a few minutes later she was able to turn suddenly on the man and use her "ki-yi" technique. The roar of "inner strength" and the element of surprise were enough to make the man turn tail and run.

The main part of the course is devoted to the teaching of the physical techniques. These include various chops, kicks, and blocks, as well as different holds and releases. The idea is to depend on your own body for defence. The element of surprise, the ability to go with your assailant's force rather than against it, and the knowledge of his vulnerable points (no matter how big he is) are all types of defence methods.

Not only will you be able to escape a situation, you can do so with minimum

injury to yourself and your attacker. Millet stresses this point, "Wen-do teaches response to aggression, not aggression and violence itself".

Sometimes a verbal response is not enough, as in the case of Meredith Bell on a trip to France.

While she was sitting on a park bench writing home, a man sat beside her and began asking harmless questions. Suddenly he was very close to her, restraining her hands and whispering obscenities.

After using a simple wrist release, Meredith elbowed the man in the solar plexus. This was an effective yet harmless method of escaping to her hotel safely.

For Meredith Bell, there is more to Wen-do than just physical responses like the above example.

"I feel I use Wen-do everyday; how I carry myself, how I talk; with confidence and credibility. I'm not nasty, aggressive, or always on the defensive, just firm and positive" she says.

For more information on Wen-do call 454-0570.

Safety tips:

- o Avoid walking alone in unlit parks or alleys.
- o Walk confidently on the street.
- o Be aware of who and what is around you on the street. Look and listen.
- o If you think you are being followed, cross the street and go to the nearest restaurant, shop, or well-lit home and call the police.
- o If a car is following you when you are on foot, turn around and go to other way. It is easier for you to do this than it is for the car.
- o Always have your keys ready in hand for your home or car door.
- o Don't keep your keys and ID together. If your purse is stolen, the thief will have both your keys and address. If this happens, change your house locks.
- o Keep hands free of too many parcels.
- o On the bus sit near other women. If someone bothers you, tell the driver immediately.

In your car:

- o If you have car trouble in a dark/deserted area, lift the hood. Then get back into your car and lock the doors. If someone stops to

help, ask them to call the police. Don't get out of your car.

- o Don't stop for others in apparent need of assistance. Go to the nearest phone and call for help instead.
- o When in your car, lock the doors. Don't give someone a chance to come in uninvited.
- o If you leave your car parked, lock the doors but always look in the car before getting back in.
- o Don't pick up hitchhikers. Don't hitchhike.

In your home:

- o Keep your doors and windows locked. Draw your blinds at night.
- o Don't open your doors to strangers. If a service man or police officer wants entry, ask to see his identification and/or phone his company or division to verify.
- o If someone wants to use your telephone, offer to make the call yourself.
- o Keep doorways and garages well-lit.
- o Keep emergency numbers and your own address taped near your phone. Being afraid or upset might make you forget when you are calling for help.