

## Speaker's Stone

### SCHOOL OF LIFE – SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

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Pauline Woodbridge NQDVRS

## Townsville International Women's Conference - AUSTRALIA



3 - 7 July 2002 ~ James Cook University  
"Poverty, Violence and Women's Rights:  
...Setting a Global Agenda"

This international conference is for all who care passionately about improving women's position in the world, who demand justice and full human rights for women everywhere and who believe that a feminist analysis is essential to defining a fairer globalised world.

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I often wonder who we would be as women – what our potential could be – in fact what could we have achieved if we had been unfettered by patriarchy - that dominant, violent self serving system we are taught to live with! An interesting thought sometimes explored by women science fiction writers.

However the school of thought I wish to raise today is the idea that there **is** a school that educates men to use violence against women and children. That school is the patriarchal social system set up so long ago. So long ago that the men who benefit from it, hold the view that this is the 'natural' way to live. But women know what it is like to live under patriarchal rule.

Over years of working with perpetrators of domestic violence, one cannot help but be struck by the similarities of thought, values and attitudes that underpin the men's violent behaviour. I also want to make the point that the same thoughts, beliefs and attitudes are widely held to some degree by most men. Yes I know – not all men are violent, but the pathways that lead to violence are everywhere and men are invited, even encouraged to go along that path.

Over and over again the men in the perpetrator group demonstrate their belief that it is their right to expect services from women and children and that they have authority over them. These services range from physical and sexual services to emotional and intellectual services. The men believe that they are the protector in the family and they have the right to punish according to some internal standard they have learned.

It's an odd thing to say, but the act of domestic violence has nothing to do with the woman - sure she is the victim of the violence and abuse, and yes, she is badly affected by both the violence and the abuse, but the act of violence is his – his pattern, his thoughts, his values and his attitudes that compel him to use his violence. It has nothing to do with what she did, said, failed to do or failed to say. But, we are all taught – it's her fault she provoked him, she wanted it, etc. Convenient school of thought for perpetrators isn't? We all know who to blame.

And the words they use – you would swear they have all been to the same school to learn to call their partners slut, whore, slag, bitch and so on.

The concepts and symbols used by individual perpetrators as they use these words and carry out their abusive deeds, add up to a school of thought that demonstrates the underlying contempt for women that underpins gender relations all over the world.

There is some veneer of civilisation, most men who are violent at home, are perfectly lovely at work or in public, so could we in fact call that 'Finishing School' ? Where good manners and the 'right' behaviour is taught. Some of the perpetrators in our 'school' are taught well, without any finishing touches, but others know well how to manipulate the systems so that no-one holds them responsible and nothing will stop them in their pursuit of total power and control. When we look overall, it is easy to see the Finishing School 'School days' best days of your life.

The universal similarity of thought and words evinced by the perpetrators is given extra fillup by the individual targeting of the partner. If she is good at cooking then the food gets thrown around, if she takes extra care in house-keeping, then she is subjected to white glove inspections, if she is a committed and loving Mum, then she is threatened with losing her kids. Although each case may be different the underpinnings of power and control are evident – do they learn this through the 'school of the air'? It is not likely that the men tell each other how to do the most effective abuse to their loved ones is it? But they certainly learn the lesson well.