

## FROM OUR READERS

### EXPLORING FAMILY LIFE

I'D like to thank Marlea Welton for her article in the October issue about exploring new frontiers. I feel that the literature of Buddhism needs to show more comparisons between the spirit of Buddhist reformation. Of course, President Ikeda has been doing this for years.

I especially liked her quotes from Daniel Boorstin describing the formation of American democracy (p. 9) and his definition of the discoverer and the explorer.

For several years, I felt I needed to get more in touch with the struggles of American pioneers. After seeing a photo book of ghost towns, my family and I visited Bodie, supposedly the worst California Gold Rush town because of daily murders and duels. My anticipation was high to discover some great secret of our past, which the ghost town held.

Instead of any such secret, we found dilapidated buildings, with bits of rusting cars and trucks from the '20s and '30s strewn about. There was a schoolroom with a calendar from the 1930s and a museum on main street. As far as I know, the duels of Bodie are left to one's imagination.

What I discovered is while it may be interesting to explore the past, no matter what we find, the important thing is to create something far better in the future. Ms. Welton's conclusion points in the right direction by emphasizing treasures of the heart and boldness, real secrets of fortune.

RON BAIRD  
San Francisco

I FEEL compelled to respond to Marlea Welton's article on family life in the October 1997 issue.

It is obvious from the article that Ms. Welton has researched her topic well in describing the different types of family that exist throughout the globe. However, I absolutely disagree with her description of the family on the islands in the Caribbean and take umbrage at her statement "families are matrifocal (mother and children living together). Men circulate throughout the community and establish relationships with different women." This description depicts the men as permissive, interested only in bedding as many women as they can and take absolutely no interest or responsibility in the raising of their children. This is totally untrue and Ms. Welton's description equally false.

I can state with certainty that most families in the Caribbean live under the "extended family" umbrella. And I say that with a strong conviction as I am a member of an extended family from the island of Grenada. My parents married before they started their family and they stayed married to each other for thirty-nine years before my father died. My father did not establish relationships with different women and my siblings and I did not grow up with my mother alone.

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And my family was not unique.

I know of many West Indians who grew up in extended families in the West Indies. Conversely, I know of West Indian families where the children are living with their mothers. The same could be said of many families I have met in the United States. While it is true that some men have relationships with other women, I find there is no more of a higher incidence of multiple relationships in the West Indies than in many other countries. Certainly, monogamy is more the norm than otherwise. As I mentioned earlier, Ms. Welton's article is well researched but she should have extended her survey to a larger cross section of the West Indian population.

GEMMA MUNRO  
Reston, Virginia

*Ms. Welton replies: It was a difficult task to condense what I read about families and kinship into an educational but already lengthy article. Anthropological perspectives are arrived at by a method of research called ethnography. Individuals and small groups of people are observed and then theories are drawn (based on scientific principles) concluded from those observations. The full text of the quotation mentioned is from a book by Alexander Alland, Jr. called To Be Human: An Introduction to Anthropology (cited in my article), and it reads as follows: "On many of the islands that dot the Caribbean a large number of families are matrifocal, consisting of a mother and her children. While a percentage of nuclear families does exist, men frequently circulate through the community, establishing relationships of different duration with several women."*

*This description is but one interpretation of a small, indigenous group of people on the Caribbean. It in no way reflects the entirety of contemporary family structure in that country, any more than the indigenous cultures of our country such as the Iroquois Indian, who were famous for having a matrilineal kinship structure, would reflect American family life. What I was trying to indicate by alluding to alternative systems in other countries was that we can all benefit by being open to the possibilities of different structures other than the nuclear one. It was not meant to offend.*