

LETTERS

Eight-Cow Wife

Holly Welker's article, "A Price Far above Rubies versus Eight Cows: What's a Virtuous Woman Worth?", 43, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 37–58, is an entertaining but misleading article on the popular LDS movie *Johnny Lingo*.

Johnny Lingo is a handsome and popular Pacific Island young man who is mocked by his fellow islanders when he pays eight cows to marry Mahana. Mahana blossoms from an awkward and unattractive young girl into a beautiful young woman because Johnny Lingo believes in her. Johnny demonstrates his belief in Mahana by paying, to the surprise of the village, a high price for her hand in marriage.

In today's politically correct environment it is easy to criticize such a simple plot and examine the story through feminist theology as Ms. Welker did. However, such a review is misplaced and neglects to acknowledge the time frame within which the movie was made (1969) and, more importantly, the powerful message it conveys.

Simply stated, we all have experienced the positive influence of someone "believing in us." For me, I was told by a respected law professor in my first year of law school, that I did not have the intellectual capability to succeed in law school let alone as an attorney, and should pursue another field of study. Fortunately for me, I had other mentors who thought otherwise. They recognized my legal ability and encouraged me to continue to study law. After thirty years of a highly successful law practice, which has included two separate assignments in

the U.S. Supreme Court, service in the U.S. Senate, authoring over a dozen law review articles, and numerous special achievement awards for my work as a federal attorney, I can testify that the simple message of *Johnny Lingo* is very important.

It does make a difference if someone believes in you. Many members of the Church have been influenced by their bishop, Young Men, or Young Women leaders to attend college, go on a mission, and be loving and faithful husbands and wives. Most important, our Savior believes in us. During our mortal experience, we have been called to administer His church and teach His gospel. Yes, it does matter if someone believes in you.

G. Kevin Jones
Salt Lake City

Holly Welker Responds

G. Kevin Jones asserts in his letter that my review "is misplaced and neglects to acknowledge the time frame within which the movie was made (1969)." The publication date of the movie is stated in the first sentence of my review but ultimately is irrelevant to the attitude toward women in the movie: Sexism is sexism, even when it's old.

Jones also asserts that my review ignores the "simple message of *Johnny Lingo*," which is that "it does make a difference if someone believes in you." I certainly agree with this statement and addressed the idea in my review. I wrote:

There is something magical

and affirming about being loved. We have all experienced—at least, I hope we have—the thrilling, enchanting enhancement of our vision of ourselves when we are reflected in the gaze of someone who loves us and values our finest qualities . . . [but] the movie doesn't acknowledge that very real part of a human being's sense of self. According to Johnny Lingo, Mahana turns into a graceful, self-assured beauty not because someone loves her, or because she loves someone, or because she is treated with respect and kindness, but because she knows she is the most expensive commodity on the island.

Jones should acknowledge the fact that it is not my reading of the film but the film itself that minimizes the importance of being supported by people who believe in you.

Holly Welker
Salt Lake City

Borders on Pornography

I am a long-time subscriber to *Dialogue* and thoroughly enjoy the scholarly articles that it features. I must inform you, however, that I found the fiction section of the Spring 2010 issue disturbing. In my opinion it borders on pornography and is not worthy of LDS publication.

Robert J. McCue
Victoria, British Columbia

Levi Peterson Responds

I continue to endorse the defense of the erotic in literature that I made in the preface to *Greening Wheat: Fifteen Mormon Short Stories*, the collection of Mormon short stories that I edited (Midvale, Utah: Orion Books, 1983; distributed by Signature Books). I say there that “the moral purposes [of literature] are served, not by censorship and exclusion of the problematic or violent or forbidden but rather by the achievement of breadth, balance, and proportion” (ix-x). I believe both my story and that of Lisa Downing achieve those qualities.

Levi Peterson
Issaquah, Washington

Editor's Note:

I regret that Robert J. McCue found the fiction section of the spring issue “disturbing.” However, I find his charge that the stories in that section “border . . . on pornography” incomprehensible. There is nothing in either piece intended to titillate, nothing gratuitous or lewd. Levi Peterson's story is convincingly narrated from the perspective of a teenaged boy baffled and delighted by his emergent sexual consciousness, and Lisa Torcasso Downing's story tries to fathom the effects of childhood abuse of one partner in a marriage with respect and sympathy, even reverence. Both stories approach their subjects with the candor, wit, and grace that are appropriate to an artistic consideration of God's most puzzling gift to humanity.