

of traditional medicine. Over the years, she developed a childbirth education course centred on the notion that “every birth is different” (52).

As the women’s health movement rapidly transformed the field of women’s health during this period, more women began seeking out alternative methods of childbirth and, in 1974, Vincent had the opportunity to witness firsthand the work of a “lay” midwife. She found the woman’s skill so impressive that she began contemplating a career in midwifery. In her work as a nursing coordinator at a local birthing centre, Vincent enjoyed a degree of autonomy unheard of in conventional medical settings, but she still faced “physicians who believe that normal childbirth is a retrospective diagnosis” (58). After fifteen years as a nurse, Vincent retrained as a midwife and spent the next fifteen years attending home births. Although most of Vincent’s narrative is inspirational, she sounds some cautionary notes. The number of home births, for example, has been severely curtailed by the ongoing difficulties faced by American lay midwives in acquiring malpractice insurance and medical back up from physicians and hospitals.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of *Baby Catcher* is Vincent’s style. Although she has delivered over more than 2,500 babies, each case she recounts reflects the joy and awe she feels at the moment of birth. Deftly, she interweaves memoir and case studies with an overview of the transformations over the past forty years in childbirth practices in the United States. *Baby Catcher* is a valuable work for health care professionals, scholars of pregnancy and birth, and the general reader interested in issues of women’s health and pregnancy.

### ***Families As We Are: Conversations From Around The World***

Huston, Perdita.  
New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2001.

#### **Kerima Kostka**

Perdita Huston, who has worked for several international organizations as well as specialized agencies of the United Nations, spent more than four years interviewing several generations of families of all socioeconomic backgrounds in eleven countries throughout the world (Japan, China, Bangladesh, Thailand, Mali, Uganda, Egypt, Jordan, El Salvador, Brazil, USA). Her approach is one of “empowerment”: to let those who have little voice speak about themselves.

Her book is a testament to these voices and illustrates—as only personal interviews are able to do—family life in its richness and complexity, as well as its changes and challenges, throughout the twentieth century. While listening to these individuals, one begins to see striking parallels between all countries.

One universal trend is the undermining of traditional, multigenerational family structures by urbanization, economic shifts, and emigration. A second positive trend is an increased regard for individual rights and democratic values. In all interviewed families, elders tell of the profound changes they have witnessed during their lifetimes and of their accompanying fears and hopes.

At the same time, the subsequent generations are aware of what they have lost and gained. One important improvement named by women and men (especially younger men) alike is the increasing equality of women and men within and outside the family. At the same time, more than one fourth of households worldwide are headed by women (in some nations 30 to 40 percent)—due to the emigration of men in search of work, divorce, widowhood, or abandonment.

Other universal problems that will be faced in the future include the loss of natural resources, physical and mental health concerns, especially alcohol and substance abuse, women's reproductive health and sex education, domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS.

While showing that traditional family structures are dissolving, Huston also demonstrates that such a constricted concept of the family is no longer adequate. Instead, she shows that families come in all shapes and sizes and she broadens the concept of family to include non-biological relations (such as street children protecting each other or groups of prostitutes living together and caring for one another's children). In creating new structures of support, these non-traditional families are adapting to the challenges of the modern world.

At the same time, conservative notion of the "traditional" family is still being forced upon individuals in all parts of the world. As Huston emphasizes, this is the wrong approach: if our main concern is children's well-being, we need to support these newly evolving types of families. Children will be protected best by adults who love and care for them, regardless of their marital status, gender, sexual orientation, or biological relationship.

Although I would have liked her to include a European country—Europe is not exempt from the difficulties faced by the rest of the world—Huston's book elucidates the urgent need for reform and her demands are universal.

***Two for the Summit:  
My Daughter, the Mountains, and Me.***

Norman, Geoffrey.  
Toronto: Penguin, 2000.

**Reviewed by Sylvia Moore**

"I had followed my daughter to the top, which was not the way I had expected