

Barn-raising

If you've done your brainstorming with a group, like Jeannette did, you're in luck. It's going to turn into a barn-raising spontaneously.

In all the years I've been working with creativity in groups, I have never once seen a brainstorming team come up with a bright strategic idea, like Jeannette's Appalachian plan, and then get up, put on their coats, and say, "OK, kid, good luck. You're on your own." That never happens. What does happen is what happened to Jeannette:

One of her friends said, "You know, a guy in my office has an old van he wants to get rid of. I'll bet he'd sell it to you for less than \$200! It's in terrible shape, of course. But anyway, here's his phone number." And then somebody else said, "My best friend's brother is an auto mechanic! Maybe he'd fix the van for free if you did advertising photography for him, or portraits of his family. Let me call my friend and have her ask him." And then somebody else said, "Why don't you try to get a job in a photo store, so you can get stuff at discount? I think they even let you have the outdated film and photographic paper for free." Another friend knew a journalist who had gotten several grants, and offered to put Jeannette in touch with him for help writing up a grant proposal. The whole group agreed to ask everyone they knew to dig in their closets for old Brownies and Instamatics, and they decided to put together a list of addresses of people along Jeannette's proposed route who would be glad to let her stay overnight with them for free. Between them, Jeannette and five friends worked out a plan by which she could go ahead and set her dream in motion without waiting for a grant—

for less than a thousand dollars! And then they planned to throw a flea market to raise the money.

If you think this sounds incredible, try it. When your brainstorming team starts coming up with concrete suggestions, contacts, and offers of help, you'll find yourself scribbling as fast as you can to get down all the names and phone numbers—and within five minutes you'll have so many real and promising first steps that it takes your breath away.

When you've gotten your plan worked down to *specific needs*, that's the last moment when anyone wants to give up, go home, and forget all about it. On the contrary, that's when everybody leans forward and starts getting really involved. It suddenly looks like this fabulous thing might just happen. And it's not so much that people want a piece of the action. It's that they want to *give* you a piece of your action! Each member of your brainstorming team is realizing that she or he has something real to contribute: an idea, a contact, a skill. And each one loves the idea of being able to say, "See that house? See the third brick from the left in the third row from the bottom? I gave her that. I made it with my own hands."

In Chapter 6, we talked about the importance of identifying *emotional problems*—the hands-off kind that can only be helped by a sympathetic ear. But now we're dealing with *strategic problems*, the kind that call for helping hands. These are the problems that can be fixed—and we seem to take an uncanny delight in fixing them. You know what I'm talking about if you've ever given someone a lead that led to a job, or an apartment, or a part in a play, or a life-changing experience, or a love affair. Most of us remember and treasure every part we've ever played in someone else's survival, satisfaction, or success. And that's not because we're a bunch of altruistic saints. It's because helping each other is creative and it makes us feel good.

We're just beginning to realize that sharing skills and resources is a deep human pleasure and need, one that's wired into our survival just as much as hunger or sex. If our distant ancestors hadn't evolved an actual instinct for cooperation, they would have been eaten by saber-toothed tigers the first morning they crawled out of their caves. And the things that keep us alive always feel good. That's how nature makes sure we will do them.

Pioneer families and small farmers had to pool their labor to get their barns built, their crops plowed and harvested, their corn husked. In the process,

they reaffirmed the bonds of community—and had a whale of a good time. Working together toward vital common goals strengthened their relationships as it lightened their labor. There was no split in their lives between love and work, self-interest and mutual aid. In our complex and technically advanced society, we no longer need each other's direct and personal help to survive. We're still dependent on other people, but the cooperation that keeps us alive has become abstract and impersonal. We can buy houses built by strangers. We can stand in line at the supermarket to buy our food. We can open the Yellow Pages and hire a doctor or a plumber. We exchange most goods and services for money instead of love. We've gained the freedom to pursue our individual goals—and that's a precious freedom—but we've paid a high price: the *community of purpose* that once fused work and relationship into a meaningful whole. Our most practical and satisfying way of getting things done is still *together*. And the proof is that so much of our potential stays stubbornly locked inside us as long as we try to tap it alone.

Our instinct for cooperation is still very much alive. It's looking for a job. Why not put it to work in the service of our individual goals? Sharing dreams and resources could be a wonderful way to surround ourselves with a "family" of winners—a community with a new common purpose: no longer the survival of all its members, but the fullest unfolding of each one's unique potential.

We don't have to go all the way back to pioneer days for a working model of that kind of "cooperative individualism." We have one right in front of our eyes. Our myths of "every man for himself" and "looking out for Number One" have just kept us from seeing it, because it's in the last place where we'd ever think of looking: *in the lives of successful men*. As a matter of fact, *it's the reason why they're successful!* Most of them take it so completely for granted that it doesn't occur to them to give credit where credit is due. Ask them and many will say, "Of *course* I made it on my own." But I can think of at least one high flyer from modest beginnings who's given the public lie to that Horatio Alger myth.

The popular notion is that this man single-handedly built up his family's little farm into a million-dollar business. The way he tells it, when he came home from the Armed Forces to take charge of the farm, a group of men got together with him, rolled up their sleeves, and said something like this:

“OK, son, the first thing you’re going to need is a certain amount of money. Here’s a loan. We figure it’ll take about four years till you’re in a position to pay it back. Harry here has a company that’ll front you the starter seeds and fertilizer. I’m not growing anything on my lower forty, and I’ll let you use it so you can get started. You can use my farm machinery too, here’s the key to the shed. We’ve got marketing contacts in every town in the state, and old Sam has the trucks. Now if there’s anything else you need, you just call on us, hear? We’ll be droppin’ by from time to time to see how you’re doing.”

And that’s how Jimmy Carter, self-made man, got his start.

This system of cronies and contacts is called *the old-boy network*. It’s an informal institution that many young men on the rise can call on to help themselves get established in their work. It operates both within professions—often in the form of the “mentor” relationship, where an older man takes a younger one under his wing—and between professions. It got its name from groups of men who had been classmates in school, and who kept in touch and helped each other out. The editor published the professor’s book, the accountant finessed the executive’s taxes, the lawyer saw the producer through his divorce, the banker got the entrepreneur a loan, the congressman threw the new Interstate to the contractor—and each man shared his ever-broadening contacts with the others.

That’s how things really get done in our “individualistic” society—right at the top! Never mind the myths. *There’s a network of helping hands behind any genuine success.* And do you know how Jimmy Carter ended his speech on the old-boy network?

He said, “I have never known a woman who had that.”

He was only half right.

It’s true that most women have been incredibly isolated in terms of our talents, dreams, and goals. Not *alone*: we’d go down to the river and beat sheets on the rocks together, or we’d meet at the laundromat, which amounts to the same thing. But until very recently, there were precious few women in a position to offer their sisters a handhold in the worlds of power, money, achievement, and adventure, and those few didn’t initiate an “old-girl network”—a fact that was cited as proof of the old belief that women are competitive rivals, and that the good-buddy spirit of mutual aid is just one

more piece of male equipment we were born without. Consciousness-raising groups gave the lie to the notion that women couldn't support each other, but that support rarely went beyond the emotional. We exchanged comfort and complaint, not contacts. And that gave ammunition to the belief that only the exceptional woman is built for action—and that she's not a nice person.

It's all myths. It's nonsense. Of course women will compete with each other—if two of them happen to be after the same job or in love with the same man! Men do that too, and it's as natural as when you've got two hungry people and only one cookie. Otherwise, women have always given each other, not only understanding and compassion, but enormous amounts of practical help. The fact is that *there has always been a women's network*. In the domestic and human sphere, where we felt competent and comfortable, women have shared recipes, remedies, outgrown baby clothes, tools, and techniques since time began. The traditional way to make friends in a new neighborhood was to go next door and borrow a cup of sugar!

Cooperation isn't our problem. It never has been. Women are able to share resources and skills quite efficiently, with a warmth and openness many men envy. Our only problem has been taking ourselves seriously—as full, fascinating people with dreams and gifts and goals. You've done that now. You've shaped a clearly defined goal out of the stuff your dreams are made of, and you've taken it seriously enough to work out a detailed plan for getting it. You're about to find out that that's all it takes to bring the “old-girl network” out of the kitchen and into the world—and to convince the old boys to go coed.

If you've been brainstorming by yourself, and your flow chart has some holes in it, you can call a group of people together to provide you with the missing pieces in your plan. You can throw a *resource party*—the modern equivalent of a pioneer barn-raising. And that will become the natural takeoff point for an ongoing *resource network*: an informal community of mutual aid, combining the clout and goal-orientation of the old-boy network with the versatility and comfort of the cup of sugar connection. In the last chapter, you learned how to build a bridge of actions from a distant goal to your doorstep. Now you're going to discover that you can build a bridge of helping hands to virtually any person, skill, or thing you need on Planet Earth.

HOW TO THROW A BARN-RAISING

To give a resource party, the first thing you need to do is sit down and ask yourself a simple question:

Who do you know?

That's another one of those tricky little questions like "Who do you think you are?" When we ask, "Who do you know?" most of the time what we're really saying is, "Are you well-connected? Do you have rich, powerful friends?" If you don't—and let's face it, most of us don't—you will probably answer, "I don't know anybody," meaning, "I don't know anybody who counts." And that's grounds for inaction. I'd like you to forget that right now and take the question in its original, innocent sense. Who do you know? Who are your friends and relatives and acquaintances? Whose names and phone numbers are in your address book? *You've got the makings of a full-fledged, effective resource network right there.*

How many of those people should you invite to a barn-raising? In a pinch, you can just have lunch with your best friend, or even talk to her on the phone. Two heads, and two people's resources, are more than twice as good as one. But the more people you pull in, the more help and ideas you'll get, because everyone will be inspired by hearing what everyone else has to offer. Four or five is a good working number. Fifteen is about the most you can comfortably fit into your living room. (Anything over fifteen also calls for a slightly more formal procedure, so we'll talk about how to throw a large-scale barn-raising after I describe how the basic version works.) As with brainstorming, it's helpful, though not mandatory, to get people of a variety of ages, backgrounds, and occupations: someone from Montreal, someone in her sixties, someone in movies, a carpenter, a stockbroker, an encyclopedia salesman, a shrink. You can ask a few of your friends to bring along their most interesting friends—or their husbands or grandmothers. It's not necessary for everyone to know everyone else. Success Teams barn-raising start with a roomful of total strangers.

A barn-raising not only gives fresh purpose to old friendships; it can be a great way of making new ones. I meet a lot of people who say, "I don't make friends easily. I just don't seem to attract people." I'll tell you the kind of people who do. *They're the ones who are on their own trip, who have a fabulous idea and are running with it.* They don't call people up and say,

“Uh . . . whatcha doin’ tonight, Marty?” They say, “I’ve got such and such to do, and I could use some help. Want to come over?” Everyone loves to be around them because they generate so much energy. We were taught that it was selfish to be on our own trips, much less to ask for help with them. That’s nonsense. The truth is that *the most generous thing you can do for the people around you is generate energy*. So don’t be shy but inviting people over to help you out. There will be plenty in it for them. You’re not only going to give them the chance to share in your goal, you’re going to give them inspiration and help with theirs. If there’s anything *they* want or need in their lives right now—a piano teacher, a tenants-rights lawyer, a set of kitchen cabinets, a ride to Vancouver—a barn-raising is the place to ask for it.

Your get-together can begin and end with socializing, but in the middle it’s got to be a business meeting, with everyone’s attention focused on the problem at hand. You start things off by telling everyone, first, all about your goal, and second, everything you’ve figured out you need in order to get it. For instance: “My dream is to start a horse ranch and riding stable. I’ve already got my first horse, and she didn’t cost me a fraction of what I expected. What costs is the tack! I need leads to second-hand saddles, bridles, and blankets that I can buy cheap or trade for riding lessons. I also need customers—people who would like to take private riding instruction for ten dollars an hour.” Or: “I’m going to move out to Colorado and start a small publishing house called Mountainbooks. I’ve got to find a partner or investor with enough money to back the enterprise for two years. This is a shot in the dark, but does anybody know anybody who might have a personal contact to John Denver or Robert Redford? I also need personal contacts to small-press publishers and to writers who specialize in the outdoors and nature field.” Be ready with pencil and paper, because the ideas will really start flowing.

There are two rules you’ve got to follow if you want your barn-raising to be effective. The first is: *Be as specific as possible about what you need*. (Unless you’ve gotten stuck for ideas and you want some group brainstorming, working with your flow chart should have helped you reach this point.) Asking for “help” doesn’t work. It may get you sympathy, or some well-meaning suggestions that miss the mark, but eventually you’ll just get a helpless shrug. But if you ask for a second-hand piano, a contact in the music business, or lessons in auto mechanics, it’s like dropping a beckoning

worm into a pond full of hungry bass: every mind in the room will rise to the bait.

I'll give you an example of how this works. Could you put me in personal contact with someone who speaks and writes fluent Chinese and could translate into English? It doesn't have to be someone you know personally; it could be a friend of a friend, or a waiter in your favorite Chinese restaurant, or a professor at a university where a friend of yours teaches. But I want a name, an address, a phone number, and the name of the go-between, so that I can go in and say, "So and so sent me."

I'll bet that the farthest thing from your mind just now was the people in your personal universe who know Chinese. But if you give it a few minutes' thought, I'll bet you'll realize that you can solve my problem. If, on the other hand, I had said, "I'd like to have a pen pal in Peking; can you help me?" the chances are that—unless I was making a clear request for brainstorming—you would have shrugged your shoulders and felt helpless.

Before you can get what you need, you've got to take responsibility for *knowing what you need*. Being clear and specific about your needs is one of the most important ways of treating yourself like a winner. It's also the signal to everyone else that you're serious about your goal. So if what you need is Hard Times—and an ill-defined problem often conceals fear or pain—ask for Hard Times. If you need ideas, ask for brainstorming. And if you need a tractor or violin, ask for a tractor or violin. The chances are excellent that you'll get it.

The second rule for getting the most out of a barn-raising is: *always ask for the most specific information you can get*—names, addresses, phone numbers, book titles, etc. Remember that what you are aiming for is to get your flow chart down to *first steps*—things you can do today or tomorrow. If you want to make the move from executive secretary to executive, and Anne says, "Hey, I know somebody who *did* it," don't say, "Wow, great!" Get that woman's phone number and write it down. If you need a write-up in the local paper and Bill's best friend's wife works there as a copy editor, get her number so you can call and ask if she knows a reporter. If Joe knows three magazines you should run classified ads in for your book-find service, write down their names and ask Joe if he has copies you can borrow tonight.

Do you feel like saying, “Hey, wait a minute! Not so fast!”? Right. That’s because we’re getting out of the nice, comfortable realm of fantasy and into the frightening realm of real action. You’re going to *follow up* on the leads you get from barn-raising—tomorrow and the next day and the next. That’s what makes your goal really happen. It can also make you very nervous. That’s why the next section of this book is all about how to set up a support system that will keep you going when you feel like crawling into bed and pulling the covers over your head. But one of the best things about throwing a barn-raising is that you’ve already got some of the raw materials for your support system right there with you in the room.

I’ve mentioned the importance of accountability—of having someone else, like a teacher or a boss, who knows what you’re planning to do and cares whether you do it or not. Just knowing that someone else’s eyes have seen your plans helps to keep them from sliding back into the never-never land of dreams. Once you’ve told your friends that you’re planning to write a novel or start a dairy farm, they’ll be interested and excited—and hopeful, because if you can do what you love, maybe they can too. So they’ll be rooting for you. And all of a sudden, if you don’t do it, you’ll not only be letting yourself down—you’ve done that before—but you’ll be disappointing them, too.

Believe me, you will find this infinitely more effective than ‘self-discipline.’ And it works right down to the step-by-step level. Because if Anne should happen to call you next week and say, “Did you talk to that lady executive I told you about? What did she say?” you’re going to feel pretty sheepish if you didn’t call her. That may not be enough to get you to pick up the phone when the midweek willies strike (more first aid for them in the next section), but it helps. So whenever the person you get a lead from is a friend, it’s a good idea to work on the “report back” principle. Say, “I’m going to call you next Sunday and tell you what happened.” That’s a firm date. Write it down.

When your barn-raising group has given you all the suggestions they can, it’s the next person’s turn to take the floor and tell what s/he wants to do and what s/he needs. As you go around the room, you’ll be astonished at the variety of resource a small handful of people can offer each other for achieving goals of all kinds. Here are some of the kinds of things people I know have asked for—and gotten—in barn-raising.

INFORMATION

I'm a great believer in libraries—and in librarians, bless them. You can go to the library in any moderate-sized town, college, or university and find out almost anything you need to know, from the regulations of the American Kennel Club to the Gross National Product of Paraguay. You can also accomplish wonders by browsing through a bookstore, if yours allows browsing. But before you spend precious hours searching for the facts and addresses you need, try a shortcut. Ask your friends.

Stacy had a bottom drawer full of poems she had always secretly thought were pretty good. She got up her courage and showed some of them to her friends, and they urged her to make it her first target to get at least one poem into print. Stacy was a school nutritionist in a small Midwestern city, not a literary person at all. She had no idea who would publish the work of an unknown poet. One of her friends had taken a course in women's writing at a nearby community college and was able to give Stacy the names of the best women's literary magazines. She promised to check copies out of the college library so that Stacy could see the kind of work they printed and get their addresses.

Carol, a cartoonist, had signed up with a top agent and gotten some encouraging responses from TV people, but she needed a special kind of assistant: a gifted cartoonist who would be willing to work with someone else's concepts. She had no idea how to find such a person, or why that person would want to work with her. She brought up the problem at her barn-raising. One friend knew a professional illustrator who had done animated commercials. She called the illustrator and got the names of two trade magazines that deal exclusively with cartoonists. Another remembered seeing a recent magazine article by a free-lance cartoonist that mentioned trade associations, and offered to track the article down. By following up on this information, Carol was able to place classified ads that led to interviews with three eager potential apprentices.

All of us have more odd bits of information floating around in our heads than we know we've got. We're constantly reading and overhearing things—TV features about women stockbrokers, newsletters on voluntarism, reports on new solar collectors or supersonic cockroach zappers—and filing them away, forgetting we even have them until someone else's need suddenly

yanks them into the limelight. We can be eyes and ears and memory banks for each other. It's a lot less lonely than the library stacks, and it works just as well, if not better.

THINGS AND STUFF

“Pathological individualism” is the single factor that has done the most to give money its awesome power over our lives. Why be “self-reliant” and pay the going market price for all kinds of things we can help each other get for less—or for free?

Starting with that classic cup of sugar, *borrowing* is the world's most time honored and legitimate way of getting something for nothing. Friends will very often be willing to make you the short-term or long-term loan of something they're not using. I know a penniless playwright whose first off-Broadway hit got written on an old mechanical Royal portable that had been gathering dust in a friend's closet. And a Siamese cattery that survived its first lean year because its owners could borrow a car to make trips to a wholesale pet-food warehouse.

My writer friend Julia is the most successful “borrower” I know. People just seem to walk up and offer to lend her things, and not just things, but whole houses. She needed a work studio for \$100 a month or less; the third person she asked offered her the free use of an enormous gothic apartment with a view of the Statue of Liberty where she now writes her articles for a total cost of \$25 a month in subway fares. (She stumbled on an exceptional situation—an empty apartment that its country-dwelling owners only used on occasional weekends. But that's just the kind of wonderful surprise that barn-raising can turn up! It's a more common solution to “borrow” temporary living or working space from vacationers in exchange for routine house, plant, or pet care.) Julia has also spent months writing in her parents' beach cottage, borrowing a neighbor's bicycle for trips to the grocery store. Most borrowers are equally enthusiastic lenders, and in return for all this bounty Julia arranged for me to use the same little beach house for free at a time when I was in desperate need of a cheap and solitary vacation. It gave her almost as much pleasure as it gave me.

When Shakespeare's Polonius told his son, “Neither a borrower nor a lender be,” he was telling him to miss out on one of the small joys of life. Of

course, he was talking about money. And money can be tricky. We'll be talking about that a little later. But there is rarely any problem about borrowing tools, books, tape recorders, tennis rackets, musical instruments, or a string of pearls to look classy for an interview—provided that they are not in active use and that you use them with care and respect.

Second-hand: Anything you can't borrow, or would rather have for your own, you can usually buy second-hand from someone you know or someone they know: a truck, a flute, a desk, a film projector. Ellen, who wanted to start a horse ranch, brought up her need for second-hand riding tack at her barn-raising. Within a week she had offers of two used saddles and three bridles, in good condition, cheap. Second-hand shops naturally mark things up. So do people who put ads in papers or throw garage sales for strangers. Friends give each other rock-bottom prices. The mark-up is in the pleasure of knowing that your old couch, camera, or Chevy van is filling a need in your friend's life.

Homemade: Do you need display shelving or a hand-lettered sign for our store, a handsome business card, a special costume for your stand-up comic act? Don't go out and buy them before you've checked out the talents in your network. If you can make a personal contact who knows carpentry or graphics or sewing, you'll get exactly what you want for less—and you'll be giving someone else the chance to do what s/he loves.

I know a free-lance sales rep in textbooks, the creator of her own business, who got a unique and beautiful business card designed by the friend of a friend, a graphics designer. Kate didn't charge Helen anything for the design (she was employed full-time), but she enjoyed it so much that she produced a whole sheaf of stationery designs for another friend who was starting a film production company. Both delighted non-customers passed along so many inquiries—"Hey, who did your letterhead?"—that Kate wound up quitting her job and starting a free-lance custom design business.

Freebies: If you know someone who works in an office, she can sometimes bring you small quantities of pens, pencils, stationery, envelopes, rubber bands, and paper clips for free. Many a poet has broken into print on the strength of photocopied duplicates made on some more gainfully employed friend's office lunch break. My friends who breed Siamese cats got introduced to a restaurant manager who was happy to give them all the chicken gizzards that would ordinarily have wound up in the garbage. Free

samples, out-of-date but still perfectly good merchandise (like dated film or photographic paper), and usable scrap (like mill ends from a lumberyard or empty fruit and egg cartons, the primary school teacher's and shoestring interior decorator's dream) can be carted away by people who work in many businesses. Get in touch with them and they'll give it to you.

Discount and Wholesale: Here is another privilege that employees in anything from retail stores to giant corporations can often share with their friends. The old joke, "I can get it for you wholesale," is no joke if it saves you hundreds of dollars. One woman who was starting a small dance company on a shoestring got a personal contact to the friendly young manager of a hosiery store. He provides all the company's leotards and tights at wholesale prices in exchange for credit on their recital programs. A man I know who works for a large electronics corporation used his employee's discount privilege to buy videotape equipment for a friend who wanted to produce a series of health-information programs for community cable TV.

Shopping Skills: Find that special person who knows where all the bargains are in your town. There's at least one in every network. I know a woman who has made it her business to find every thrift shop in a three-state area. Rae is a book designer with terrific taste, and she can make herself look like she just walked out of Saks Fifth Avenue for about \$7. (I'll bet she loved to play dress-up when she was a kid.) She'll not only let you make the rounds with her—she'll design you from head to foot, just for the fun of it, if you've got a public appearance or an interview coming up.

Which brings me to another valuable kind of help you can get from your friends . . .

SKILLS AND SERVICES, OR MIXING BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE

Lorna, a weaver, ran a barely-surviving craft shop called Fabric Arts, selling weaving, knitting, crocheting, and macramé supplies. To meet her goal of getting the business into the black, she needed her shop remodeled, and she needed expert marketing advice. By announcing her needs at a barn-raising, she found a young interior designer and a marketing consultant who were friends of friends. The interior designer was willing to accept payment in

kind—in hand-woven fabrics. The marketing consultant didn't charge her for his advice. In a couple of hours over coffee, he gave her some fantastic ideas—and invited her out to the movies the next week.

John, a psychiatrist who lives and sees his patients on a sailboat (believe it or not), had a further dream: to make his living by turning people on to nature. He got a bunch of people together for brainstorming, and they came up with a brilliant idea: he should promote himself as an expert on “success stress” (which, as an ex-workaholic himself, he was) and take small groups of executives on fishing and camping weekends as a form of play therapy. But how to do that and earn enough money to keep three children in school—and maintain a sailboat? His friends put him in touch with a professional PR person who was immediately delighted with the idea. Because John came to her through mutual friends, she didn't have to spend a lot of time interviewing or investigating him; there was an immediate feeling of warmth and “let's get to work!” She proceeded to prepare a campaign of press releases, media appearances, and newspaper interviews that would make him known and attract a clientele.

Whoever said that mixing business with pleasure was a bad idea? Since so many of us spend one-third of our lives doing business, it might as well be as pleasant and as personal as possible—and save us money besides. So if your goal calls for the know-how of an electrician, typist, editor, literary agent, publicist, lawyer, accountant, or auto mechanic, check out your network before you open the Yellow Pages. Services delivered on a basis of friendship, even a couple of times removed, are generally higher quality, lower cost, and a lot more fun than exchanges based strictly on money. If a friend or a friend's friend types your manuscript . . . or frames your drawings . . . or keeps the books for your store . . . or takes the pictures for your portfolio, you'll have the assurance of personal care and the added satisfaction of contributing to his or her survival. If you're setting up in business yourself, your friends will be your first and best source of customers and clients. Exchanging professional services with people you know does more than anything else to recreate the community of mutual aid that is such a natural form of human relating. And it often cuts costs even further by developing into a spontaneous system of barter—swapping services and skills instead of paying for them. (More on that a little later, when I talk about how to keep a considerate balance between giving and getting help.)

By supplementing your own skills, the skills in your network can save you time and energy as well as money. They'll set you free to concentrate on what you do best, instead of having to struggle with all the little side tasks that clutter up every goal. For instance, there are published books—good ones—that tell you how to write an effective resume or grant proposal. I've listed the best ones I know in the Resources appendix at the back of this book. But if you know someone who's a whiz at resumes, you can get one written up in a pleasant evening over coffee, instead of wrestling with it for a week by yourself! If your network can put you in touch with someone who's applied for grants and gotten them, you'll get personal advice and feedback you can't get from any book. If you're applying to school and you draw a blank on one of the awful essay questions—"In 1,000 words or less, what are your reasons for wishing to enter the medical profession?"—you can get a friend with the gift of blarney to write it for you! In short, *you don't have to do everything by yourself*. Save your energy for what you love—and delegate as much of the rest as you can. You deserve help—and you don't have to worry about "using people" as long as you observe the "Safeguards for Barn-Raising" on p. 164.

If there are skills your goal requires that you really want to learn for yourself, like bookkeeping for your small business or auto maintenance for your delivery van, ask your barn-raising group to get you an introduction to someone who can teach them to you. For instance, if your goal is to open a bookstore because you love books, but you have no idea how to *keep books*, tap your network for an experienced small business owner who's willing to show you how to take inventory and use a ledger. (Again, I've provided a list of good books on starting your own business in the Resources appendix. But the best book is no substitute for the personal advice of a seasoned veteran.) If you're interested in photography but have never touched anything more complicated than a Brownie, get a photographer to give you a short lesson on f-stops and light meters so you can go out and start taking pictures tomorrow. A mini-apprenticeship is the quickest and most direct way to get your hands on any skill, and barn-raising is the ideal way to set one up. Most people are as glad to share the secrets of their trade with a personal acquaintance as they are reluctant to teach them to a stranger or a customer.

Another valuable resource we can offer each other is something called *a day in the field*. This is especially important if you have one or more tentative goals that you think you might love, but don't really know much about. Suppose you're attracted to the life and work of a newspaper reporter, but

you suspect that you got your idea of what it's like from the movies. It sure looks gritty and glamorous and exciting when Bette Davis or Robert Redford does it, but what's the reality?

The way you find out is, you ask your network to find you someone who works at a newspaper. And then you arrange to spend a day or two or a week hanging out with that person—soaking up the atmosphere of the newsroom, going along on assignments, carrying notebooks or cameras, toting coffee and copy. You won't be in the way. Most people love to talk about their work and enjoy the novelty of having an audience. It makes them feel like *they're* Robert Redford or Bette Davis! And that goes for doctors, stockbrokers, teachers, and craftsmen. Like volunteering, a day in the field is a great way to find out whether a particular goal is for you—and if so, to make contacts that will help you get your start towards it.

MONEY

Jeannette's Appalachian photography trip is a good example of how the exchange of ideas, goods, and services through barn-raising can reduce the cost of any plan to the absolute minimum. When you've reached that rock-bottom amount you've still got to have, your network will help you get it.

Friends can help you dream up and carry out fund-raising schemes, like Jeannette's did. They can find you a contact who's had personal experience with Small Business Administration loans. I know a couple who are close friends with the vice-president of a bank, an unpretentious sweetheart of a man; they have helped friends of theirs get bank loans by acting as references and go-betweens. If you have a promising scheme and a steady income, a friend will sometimes be willing to co-sign a loan with you or put up collateral—or even lend you the money directly. A woman I know put up her savings passbook for a doctor friend who had helped her through a difficult hospital stay and was now starting his own practice. And a young sculptor and his wife were able to buy a brownstone in Manhattan by arranging to borrow money at interest from a friend. If you know someone who has a few thousand dollars lying idle, there can be a special mutual advantage in this arrangement: you pay your friend less interest than you'd pay a bank, but more than he or she gets from a savings account. (Important note: a loan to or from a friend is a business arrangement. It should always be undertaken on the basis of financial reliability, not emotional trust, and

the terms should always be drawn up on paper. That's not crass or cynical. It's the way to protect both your money and your friendship.)

If you're looking for a business partner, investor, or "angel," your network of personal contacts can find you one. There are an amazing number of mildly-to-massively wealthy people in this world who are looking for something interesting to do with \$3,000 or \$25,000—as a tax deductible contribution, a hedge against inflation, or just a sporting gamble. Where are they? They're hiding—for very good reasons. But they have friends and cousins and grandchildren. And the odds are that someone you know knows one of them. It may take four or five or six links in the chain, but you can find that little old lady who loves murder mysteries and will back your little bookstore if you'll put up her name on a brass plaque.

I know people who've done it. Like the chess master—brilliant but broke—who opened his own chess shop with two partners: a former pupil and a fourth-generation multimillionaire who'd been in several business ventures with the pupil. And the theatrical director who financed a Shakespeare festival with a \$14,000 gift from the grandfather of an actress in her company. Before you can look for a backer, of course, you've got to demonstrate your seriousness by getting your plan precisely defined on paper—and that means *figures*. And projections. It's the projections—where you expect to be in six months, one year, two years—that really turn on a creative entrepreneur. If you don't know how to do them, your friends will help you.* They'll dig up someone who's run a boutique, or managed a restaurant, or packaged a movie, and who can sit down and give you a short course on capital outlay, overhead, percentage points, projections, and whatever you need for a financially sound proposal.

CONTACTS, CONNECTIONS, CLOUT: "JOE SENT ME"

It should be getting very clear by now that the most important resource people can offer each other is other people. And it's never more important than when your goal is to get in through the door of a closed professional world. Not all goals require clout. But if yours does, your network will help you get it.

* See the Resources appendix for books that give you sample business plans.

I'm sure you've heard those conversations about how hard it is to get a good job in business—or to get into medical school, or get a movie part, or get published, or get reviewed—that end with an angry sigh: “It isn't how good you are. *It's who you know.*” Damn right it is! Some seeds have wings to travel on the wind; some have stickers for hitching a ride on animal fur or human clothing. The seeds of human genius happen to travel by a system of personal contacts. Why sit around bemoaning that fact when you can put it to work for you?

I'm not saying that how good you are isn't important. *It is.* It just isn't *enough.* Talent or merit alone will rarely get you past the smiling receptionist, the protective secretary, the wary agent, the routine hiring or admissions screening. A personal introduction to someone on the inside will. And that's not because magazine editors, movie producers, and personnel directors are “corrupt.” It's because they're human. Like you, they tend to be a little suspicious of total strangers, but happy to meet anyone bearing the seal of approval of a respected colleague or a trusted friend. Personal introductions are the strength of the old-boy network. And by drawing on your own network, you should never have to walk into a job interview, publisher's office, or record company cold. At the very least, you'll go in with the name of a common acquaintance; at best, you can have an introductory phone call precede you.

Incidentally, this is one place where the generations can really be of help to each other. Your kid may be in school with the daughter of a film director; your friend's father may be a doctor who'd be willing to recommend you for medical school. You'll never know until you ask. And don't ever think this is “cheating.” It's not a substitute for a strong sense of what you have to offer, or a willingness to be judged on your merits. It's simply the smart way to get your merits the recognition and opportunity they deserve.

If you're ambitious, there are two especially valuable kinds of inside contacts to ask for in any field. One is an equally ambitious young man or woman whose career needs complement your own. Ask your network to help you find and meet the bright young agent or editor in town, on the lookout for new best-selling writer; a gifted young director looking for scripts; a young record producer eager to turn an unknown talent into a smash hit; a young fashion designer looking for marketing help. And hitch your wagon to that rising star. When you're just starting out in your own career, this can be easier than getting the attention of someone already

established, and the two of you together will have more than twice the chance of breaking into the big time.

Remember Andrea, the photographer who wanted to be famous for her portraits of celebrities? Since she was timid about marching straight up to big stars and major magazines, I suggested that she pick out a promising new rock star, follow his or her career, and offer her pictures to the editor of a young women's magazine that was just getting started. The singer would be grateful for the publicity, the magazine would be grateful for the scoop—and all three of them could get famous together.

The other kind of person you want to be put in touch with is the man or woman right at the top. If at all possible, get your novel manuscript to the editor-in-chief, your film script to the famous movie star, your marketing proposal to the vice-president in charge of sales. It may make you nervous (Chapters 9 and 10 will help you prepare), but it will save you time and uncertainty. Assistants and trainees may be friendly and sympathetic, but they hardly ever have the power to make decisions, especially positive ones.

This is where you will really need a personal introduction. People at the top, like people with money, are well protected against extra demands on their attention and time. They have to be. That's why letters of inquiry and phone calls to secretaries won't get you anywhere. But your network of friendships will.

Do you doubt that a modest gathering of friends in your living room could put you in touch with the likes of Robert Redford or an executive of IBM? Well, it can. It's already been mathematically proven that if you get any fifteen or twenty people together in a room and start asking them who they know, in five or six steps you can build a bridge of personal contacts to anyone—*anyone*—in the United States. Geography is no barrier. You can take a phone book from any town in the country—say, Bozeman, Montana—pick a name at random, and say, “All right, who knows somebody in Montana—or somebody who *knows* somebody in Montana?” And within five days you can have a message delivered personally to that sheep rancher or liquor-store owner in Bozeman. That's been done!*

* It's called the “small world experiment,” and was done by psychologist Stanley Milgram.

I don't know if anyone has ever tried the same deliberate experiment across the tougher barriers of celebrity and power—getting together fifteen people in a room and asking for a personal contact with Marlon Brando or Jimmy Carter. But two friends of mine have done it in pursuit of their goals, and they're no more “well-connected” than most people. One, a man whose agent had failed to sell his exciting adventure novel to the movies, got copies of the book personally delivered into the hands of Telly Savalas and Robert DeNiro. The other, a woman journalist, arranged a rare telephone interview with the then ailing and reclusive Anaïs Nin through a network of trusted friends. If they could do it, so can you!

Given modern mobility and communications, every one of us has “connections.” We just don't know they're there because they've never been plugged into the juice—the determination to reach a goal. Let's just suppose I had written a screenplay, and I had a strong, irrational hunch that if Marlon Brando could see it, he'd do it. I wouldn't try to find out who Brando's agent was and mail it to him, because I'm no dummy. I know that that would be the surest way of getting my screenplay shipped back to me unopened and unread, with the unspoken message, “Who do you think *you* are—William Goldman?” What I'd do is, I'd take it to a barn-raising. And instead of asking my friends who they knew in Montana, I'd ask them who they knew in the movies. Once I'd gotten one or more contacts inside the movie biz, I'd say, “All right, now please find me someone who knows someone who knows someone . . . who's buddies with Marlon Brando.” And just by following that chain of acquaintanceship, sooner or later I'd get my screenplay placed directly into Marlon Brando's hands. I wouldn't try to do it in five days, of course. I'd give myself, oh, maybe six weeks, just in case Brando was on his island in the South Pacific.

I have a strong suspicion that there's no one in this world a chain of helping hands can't reach—however high, however far. If you still doubt that your own personal network will reach far enough fast enough, you can try expanding your barn-raising beyond the circle of your friends. But first, I want to deal with some of the problems you may anticipate arising when you start sharing resources with your friends.

SAFEGUARDS FOR BARN-RAISING

Most of the resources you can get from your friends in a barn-raising will make a minimal demand on their time and energy. But what if you're asking for a favor that will really cut into a friend's life space—like help writing a grant proposal or term paper, or painting a coffeehouse, or getting a loan? Or what if *you're* blessed or cursed with skills many of your friends need, like editing or typing or carpentry or therapy? How do you keep from taking advantage—and being taken advantage of? Isn't there a danger that this barn-raising business could get out of hand and afflict our friendships with imposition, resentment, and guilt?

Getting and giving help is an art. It takes tact and sensitivity—and blunt honesty. Fortunately, here are two simple rules for restoring an optimum amount of community—enough to provide everyone with support and help without asking the impossible of anyone.

Rule 1: The Principle of Mutuality

“You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours” is the old secret of effective cooperation. And there's nothing crass or calculated about it. You don't help out a friend with the deliberate intention of putting him or her in your debt so you can demand something in return. You help because you care, and giving practical help is one of the most satisfying ways of saying so. But like all expressions of affection, this one has to be roughly equal and mutual, or a feeling of imbalance creeps into the relationship that makes both parties uncomfortable.

The economy of gratitude between friends is very deep and delicate and fascinating. When you help a friend, you establish a sort of fund of willingness to help you that you know you can count on, if you need it. No one keeps books or writes up mental bills; each friend simply tries to keep the “account” more or less in balance. Most of us do this kind of balancing act instinctively. We know that simple favors are compensated by the pleasure of giving. Even so, we'll often take the giver out to dinner just to say thanks. But if we ask for a major investment of time or skill, we're aware that we're making a big draft on our “account,” and we feel the need to make more substantial compensation. Here's where *barter* can really come to the rescue.

Informal barter is simply a matter of offering something you're able and willing to do in exchange for something you need. "If you'll help me with my resume, I'll babysit for you when you have your interview." "If you'll build my bookshelves, I'll teach you to play the guitar." I know people who've traded professional typing for group therapy, scientific writing for free medical care, and clerical work for karate lessons. Most such "bargains" are spontaneous and approximate, made by feel rather than by a reckoning of hours spent or dollar value. After all, what someone else does for you gets its chief value from the fact that you can't or don't want to do it yourself, and that's a matter of quality, not quantity.

In case you're intrigued by barter as a cost-cutting strategy, I've listed some published accounts of both formal and informal swapping arrangements in the Resources appendix. But the principle of fair exchange isn't just a good way to save money. It's the best way of saving feelings—of getting help without guilt and giving it without resentment. In many close friendships, this kind of exchange takes place without a word being said. But if you're in any doubt, talk about it! Say, "I really appreciate your doing this for me, and I want to know what I can do for you in return." Your friend may not need to take advantage of your offer right now, but s/he will know s/he can, and that's what counts.

A word of warning, however. There are two kinds of people who seem to lack that instinctive sense of balance between giving and taking. I call them "mamas" and "babies." The terms have nothing to do with sex or age; there are male "mamas," and there an 55-year-old "babies." You will probably recognize someone you know in the portraits of them I'm about to draw. You may even recognize yourself.

Mamas are the compulsive fixers. They run through the streets hoisting people on their backs, and then they say, "See? Five hundred people on my back, and who ever carries me?" They are building up a case that they're all alone in the world with these tremendous burdens, but it never occurs to anyone to take care of them for the simple reason that *they never ask*. They don't know how. "Listen, I've got a problem, can you give me a hand?" is not a sentence that's ever in a mama's mouth. If you ask them, "Say, how's it going with such and so?" they get a stiff look on their faces and say, "Fine. Fine. I've got it all under control"—even if they're collapsing. And if you

actually offer them help, they get terribly defensive, because what they hear is that you don't think they've been trying hard enough!

Mamas believe that they're supposed to do everything for themselves after they finish doing everything for everybody else. If they can't accept help, by the same token they can't turn down a request for help. In fact, they will interpret a conversational complaint—like, “Gee, I'm having a rough time with my income tax forms”—as the call of duty, and before you know it, they'll have taken over your life. That might be very convenient, if it didn't have a high price for mamas and their adopted charges alike.

Mamas need to help and help and help because they believe that's the only way to give and get love. (It's no accident that so many women are mamas—and that the majority of mamas are women.) But what happens is, first and worst, the mama's own dreams and talents get lost in the shuffle, because she or he is always giving them last place. And second of all, that kind of “love” really isn't very loving. Consciously or not, mamas regard their self-inflicted broods with resentment and sometimes contempt. That's not friendship. It is noticeably lacking in respect.

“Babies” are mamas' opposite number. They are the people who seem to lack all sense of moderation about asking for favors. The sentence that is always in a baby's mouth is, “I've got a problem. What are you going to do about it?” Babies have usually grown up as somebody's prize poodle. Lurking in the background is a parent who was going to prove what a good parent he or she was by taking such good care of that baby that it would never have to do a thing for itself. Babies believe that the way to love and get loved is to act cute and helpless. They know how to charm almost anyone into doing things for them that they would get much more satisfaction and self-respect from doing for themselves. Of course, it's the mamas who fall for it.

Mamas and babies are each other's natural prey. They're both con artists. They hustle each other. And they both miss out. Mamas are secret orphaned babies who can never relax and find out that life doesn't have to be so lonely and hard. Babies are private, angry adults who've been cheated out of feeling capable and needed. Neither mamas nor babies can marshal the resources to reach their goals, because mamas are always walking around on the cross, and sooner or later babies wind up wailing alone in the playpen.

You've got to be very careful of mamas and babies in barn-raising. If you run into one—or if you are one yourself—you've got to watch out that the mama doesn't take on everyone else's goals as his or her own expense, and that the baby doesn't turn the whole room into an army of private servants. There's a very useful little tool that serves both purposes.

If the magic word in brainstorming is “How?” the magic word in barn-raising is “No.” Learning how to say it is the second safeguard for cooperation.

Rule 2: The Right to Say “No”

Every person in a barn-raising has the God-given right to say no both to offers of help that are unwanted or excessive, and to requests for help that he or she cannot reasonably fulfill.

Suppose, for instance, you're looking for a lawyer, and instead of just giving you a name and a phone number, your friend goes into a whole spiel about why her lawyer, Jane Jones, is the best, and it becomes more and more obvious that your friend is going to feel personally rejected if you detest Jane Jones on sight. You have the right to pick and choose what *you* want—not the obligation to make helpful people feel good. Real help is offered as neutrally as fruit on a tree, for you to take or leave as you wish. If you can use it, fine. If not, it doesn't mean you're rejecting the giver.

By the same token, if someone eagerly offers you a big chunk of help and refuses to accept any compensation at all, you're probably dealing with a mama, and if you accept the offer, you may pay in subtle ways. “No, I will *not* let you type my three-hundred-fifty page manuscript for free even if you've got nothing better to do” is one of the most important kinds of “No” you can say. You can insist on the principle of mutuality even—or especially—when the other person doesn't. It's better for you and better for the mama, who needs to learn to put a higher value on his or her own time and skills.

It's even more important, since so many of us have “mama” tendencies, to say no promptly, firmly, and without guilt when someone asks for a kind of help you don't want to give or don't have time for.

Sometimes, for instance, you will have to refuse professional services to friends, if giving them would jeopardize either your friendship or your profession. If you are in a position to make creative judgments—for instance, if you're the director of a local TV station, a talent agent, or a PR person—you've got to be very careful about acting as a resource for everyone you know. You must reserve the right to turn down material you can't work with, or even to refuse to consider something if you sense that more than an honest opinion is expected of you.

Similarly, if you have skills you'd rather not use—if, say, you can type really well, but you would rather die than type another word—don't ever feel obliged to volunteer them just because somebody needs them. You're not the only person on earth who can type, and you'll help just as much by recommending someone else who doesn't hate to type. Your friend will understand. After all, she doesn't want to type the damn thing either!

If a friend approaches you for a loan and you can't spare the money or can't be sure of getting it back, saying “No” is a kindness. In the long run it will only protect your friendship.

Finally, never, ever forget that *your time belongs to you and your goal first*. It's fun and exciting to be involved in other people's projects—but it must not be at the expense of your own. The time you can offer or trade to others should be spare time, after you've done your goal—work and anything else you need or want to do. True giving is from surplus, and the only way to keep your reservoirs full is to take good care of yourself.

The only people who will react to a “No” with real hurt and indignation are babies, and it should relieve your guilty conscience to know that a “No” is usually good for babies. It throws them back on their own resources—especially if you give them ideas and leads they can follow up themselves, instead of agreeing to do it all for them. Otherwise, an honest “No” between friends is an act of mutual respect, offered with regret and accepted with understanding, and often followed up by some joint brainstorming on alternatives.

On the other side of the ledger, you must respect your friends' right to say “No” to you—and don't let the possibility make you afraid to ask. If it's so hard for you to ask that by the time you finally get up your nerve a “No” will kill you, you're doing something wrong—and you're putting an intolerable

burden on the person you're asking. You should ask a *lot*. Just make your requests as *specific* and *direct* as possible, so your friends will know they have the option of saying "Yes" or "No" to the request, not to your whole existence. People love to be asked as long as they know they are free to say "Yes" or "No."

With these two safeguards in mind, you can now discover the magic of turning friendships into resources. It's like a connect-the-dots puzzle: the pattern of community is already there, but you don't see it until you draw in the line of purpose. Most personal networks will reach as far as you need to fill in the gaps in your flow chart and get started toward your goal. But if you'd like to cast the net even wider on the first throw, you can invite your whole office, neighborhood, school, or town to a barn-raising in your conference room, church community hall, or school auditorium. Buy an ad in your neighborhood paper or on the local radio station announcing a resource-sharing gathering; put up invitations on every bulletin board you can find, and tell all your friends to bring *their* friends . . . the more people in a room the bigger the pool of possibilities, talents, and connections—and the higher the energy level. In Success Teams seminars, we start with a roomful of forty or fifty strangers and end up with a crackling resource network.

When you've got a big group of people gathered together, you establish the rules:

1. Be as specific as you can about what you need.
2. *Do not* offer anything you are not truly willing and able to give.
3. If you can provide what someone else needs, or use what someone has to offer, raise your hand and give your name. Write down each other's information and get together after the formal part of the meeting is over.

Then each person gets up in front of the group, introduces him- or herself, and says, "I'm Ellen Johnson. I'm a Gestalt therapist trained at Esalen, and I'm starting my own workshops. I need clients and loft space. Does anyone have any ideas?" "I'm Joe Jones. I'm a sculptor, but I make my living by carpentry. I'll build anything out of wood for a reasonable price. I could use contacts to art galleries that might show my work. Does anyone have any ideas?" "I'm Mary Smith. I want to go to dental school, and I'd like to talk to a woman who's actually done it." "My name is Joy Greenberg. I've written a screenplay, and I'd like to get a production together and at in it

myself! I need lots of advice, may contacts in the movie business, and maybe financial backing.” And so on around the room.

When everyone has had a turn, the formal meeting breaks up and everyone goes looking for the people whose names they’ve written down. Ideas, leads, advice, and phone numbers are exchanged over refreshments. It happens to be a great way to meet people, as well as goals. Many of the participants will stay in touch and develop fruitful professional and/or personal relationships. If you ask everyone who comes to write his or her name on a master list by the door, you can call a “reunion” in three or six months to see what’s actually happened as a result of one evening’s barn-raising.

Once you’ve got a master list of interested people, it’s a very short step to starting a *resource bank*. This is a bit of a project—one that could even become a fascinating goal in its own right for anyone interested in the interconnections that bring community alive. The simplest way to start a resource bank is to ask everyone on the list to fill out an index card with: name and address; goals; specific needs; and resources to offer. This last category should include not only professional skills and services, but hobbies, inner-abilities, experience, anything the person knows and loves: fluency in Spanish, time spent living in Greece or Alaska, knowledge of cooking or ballet or backpacking. It should *not* include any skills he or she does not want to share. Whoever takes responsibility for the resource bank then has a brain-teaser of a job: devising a filing or cross-referencing system.

In Success Teams, we started out by giving each name on the master list a number. Then we could file the cards in numerical order and make a separate, alphabetical classification of skills and resources. After each resource we’d list the numbers of the cards on which that resource was offered—like this:

Animals: 5
Carpentry: 17, 29
Cars: 10, 27
Greece: 19
Public Relations: 15
Spanish: 10, 12, 23, 3
Typing: 8, 43, 61

That way, when a request came in by mail or phone (“I need to meet someone at the Ford Foundation,” “I need to know people who raise Labrador retrievers”), we could just look up the appropriate numbered cards and give the caller names or phone numbers. Whenever someone new called in, we’d say, “Would you like to be part of our resource bank?” and, if the answer was yes, we’d fill out a card for that person.

We’ve got over 2,000 participants now, and we’re working on computerizing the network. Our goal is to make it nationwide, with a geographical cross-referencing system, so that you can call a toll-free 800 number at any time of the day or night and get the name of someone in Chicago with a kennel full of Labradors; or a recording engineer in Seattle; or someone in Houston who has pink canaries and will ship you one by Christmas; or the only woman plumber in Sacramento; or someone who’s taken that new career-counseling course and can tell you “It’s great,” or “Don’t waste your money.” We’re going to have our own network all over the country.

I’ve put our address under Resources, in case you’d like to send in a card and plug into *our* network. I’ve also given the names of books that list some other experiments in community-wide and nationwide resource-sharing: education, information, and employment networks, barter organizations, apprenticeship clearinghouses, etc. You might want to investigate and see whether one of them meets your needs—or you could use any or all of them as models for setting up your own local resource-sharing system.

There are infinite variations on the theme, but the theme itself—lending each other helping hands—is an ancient good idea whose time has come again.