



Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter



The Gifts of Community

August 2012, Issue 52

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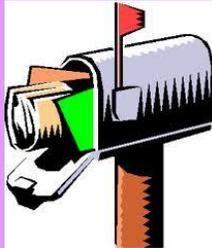
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Letters . . .

We Get Letters . . .



"All my life I have been a person that was well connected and well supported; but after a series of transitions and a move to a new area, **I found myself for the first time in my life without a network of friends and family. I felt terrified of the feeling of being 'alone in the world.'**

In my new neighborhood I did the first thing I knew to do; I slowly started volunteering at my children's school, but I didn't know anyone and it seemed as if all the parents from the school had years of history with one another.

For a person who has always believed in 'community' I felt like a total failure. **How could I have reached middle age and be without a network?**



One day Gena - one of the moms that I had gotten to know - brought me lunch at work

The Relationship Between Gifts & Community

Judging from the emails we receive, our readers are telling us they increasingly yearn for community. We don't want to live in a commodity world, where everything we have exists for the primary goal of profit. **We want things created for love and beauty, things that connect us more deeply to the people around us. We desire to be interdependent, not independent.** The gift circle, referenced in [Charles Einstein's](#) article below, along with many other forms of gift economy that are emerging on the Internet, are ways of reclaiming human relationships. A Personal Safety Net (PSN) helps us look at the various ways in which people and organizations lend what they have to give to support us in our lives. Conversely, a PSN helps us identify ways in which we support others. Our human need to connect through gifts within community needs nurturing. *Read on:*



"Wherever I go and ask people what is missing from their lives, the most common answer (if they are not impoverished or seriously ill) is "community."



What happened to community, and why don't we have it any more?



For some community is nearly impossible because **community is woven from gifts**, (not purchased with dollars). The layout of suburbia, the disappearance of

public space, the automobile and the television, the high mobility of people and jobs all contribute to the isolation people feel across economic levels. **It is a dependence on purchasing things and services which is ultimately why poor people often have stronger communities than rich people.** If you are financially independent, then you really don't depend on your neighbors - or indeed on any specific person - for anything. You can just pay someone to do it, or pay someone else to do it. I need someone to do their jobs, but not the unique individual people. *They are replaceable and, by the same token, so am I.*

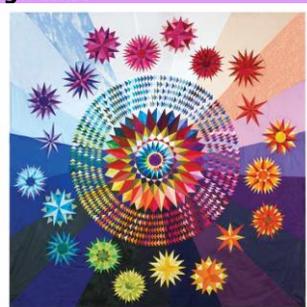
because she said she was worried about my apparent depression. She offered to come once a week to visit me and bring a picnic lunch and just visit. She was my first glimmer of hope. While we were visiting she told me **"You have all the tools you need to rebuild your life, now you just need a safety net."** I had *no idea* what she was talking about . . . 'what on earth is a safety net' I wondered. I felt she didn't truly comprehend my plight.



In an effort to explain, she sent me a link to the Personal Safety Nets [Newsletter](#), and it was the missing puzzle piece to my dilemma.

The Personal Safety Net philosophy was everything I already instinctively knew and believed in, but had forgotten due to fatigue and loss.

I started by reading the entire newsletter and then phoned the PSN office to ask if they had any local workshops scheduled that I could attend. The workshops and support of the PSN team re-ignited my belief that a 'net' is simply part of a 'network' - but **it was my job to sew it together.**



Safety nets are a reciprocal creation; they are the meshing of needs and assets; giving and getting. Once you start crafting your net, it grows exponentially.

I assigned two people to be my kids' emergency backups and offered to do the same for other people's kids. I traded house keys with 2 neighbors, I

That is one reason for the universally recognized superficiality of most social gatherings. How authentic can it be, when the unconscious knowledge, "I don't need you," lurks under the surface? When we get together to consume - food, drink, or entertainment - do we really draw on the gifts of anyone present? Anyone can consume. **Intimacy comes from co-creation**, not co-consumption, as anyone in a band can tell you, and it is different from liking or disliking someone.



To forge community then, we must do more than simply get people together. While that is a start, soon we get

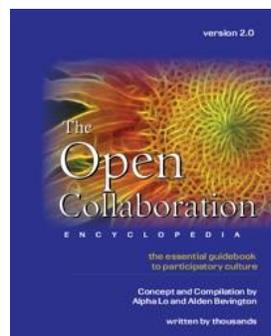


tired of just talking, and we want to do something, to create something. Community is woven from gifts. People in gift culture pass on their surplus rather than accumulating it, your good fortune is my good fortune: more for you is more for me. Wealth circulates, gravitating toward the greatest need. **In a gift community, people know that their gifts will eventually come back to them, albeit often in a new form. Such a**

community might be called a "circle of the gift."

We are poised at a critical moment of opportunity to reclaim gift culture, and therefore to build true community. The reclamation is part of a larger shift of human consciousness, a larger reunion with nature, earth, each other, and lost parts of ourselves. **We are not actually independent or "financially secure" - we are just as dependent as before, only on strangers and impersonal institutions**, and, as we are likely to soon discover, these institutions are quite fragile.

Alpha Lo, co-author of [The Open Collaboration Encyclopedia](#), recommends *building community through something called the Gift Circle.*



- The ideal number of participants in a gift circle is 10-20. Everyone sits in a circle, and takes turns saying one or two needs they have: "a ride to the airport next week," "someone to help remove a fence," "used lumber to build a garden," "a ladder to clean my gutter," "a bike," and "office furniture for a community center."

- As each person shares, others in the circle can break in to offer to meet the stated need, or with suggestions of how to meet it.
- When everyone has had their turn, they go around the circle again, each person stating something he or she would like to give.
- Finally, the circle can do a third round in which people express gratitude for the things they received since the last meeting.
- This round is extremely important because in community, the witnessing of others' generosity inspires generosity in those who witness it. It confirms that this group is giving to

gathered phone #'s from neighbors and taped them up in the kitchen so that the kids felt protected. Next I stepped up my involvement with local non-profits with whatever talents and gifts I could share and I met truly high caliber giving people there who have become my friends.



The whole process snowballed and within a couple of years I can finally say I am no longer alone in my new town. I thank Personal Safety Nets for nudging me back into the community. **My fear and isolation have been replaced by more than I dreamt of having again in my life.** I never want to be a burden or a challenge for other people."



Diane went on to say . . .

"The challenge with the PSN concept for me now is accepting help. On the receiving end of an interaction, I feel guilt, shame, embarrassment, and worthlessness. Though I don't fall into common mindsets like resentment, or obligation and I never do things begrudgingly for others, and actually feel joyful doing for others, I have had trouble turning this around for myself.



What I've learned, in part through Personal Safety Nets, is to better apply this to myself. **We all have gifts and needs, and the ability to match people up to fill those would be my full time job if I could.**

each other, that gifts are recognized, and that my own gifts will be recognized, appreciated, and reciprocated as well.



Gift Circles: 1) reduce our dependence on the traditional market. If people give us things we need, then we needn't buy them; 2) reduces our production of waste; 3) hastens the demise of the present economic system in that any bit of nature or human relationship that we preserve is reclaimed from the commodity world."

This article was originally published in [Shareable](#) -- an online magazine that tells the story of sharing that covers people, places, and projects bringing a shareable world to life. [Charles Eisenstein](#) is a teacher, speaker, and writer focusing on themes of civilization, consciousness, money, and human cultural evolution. We've edited it for space and content. [Click](#) to read Eisenstein's entire piece.



PSN Note: A few ideas related to circles aimed at reclaiming human relations and community that we're aware of include: [Timebanking](#), [Resiliency Circles](#), [Common Security Clubs](#), and a variety of ideas featured in [YES! Magazine](#).

Moving Forward Into New Home & Strength

We're moving forward. Through the generosity of our friends at [Childhaven](#), we've found new office space within their beautiful center at 316 Broadway (we're in suites 303 & 304, Seattle, WA 98122), in the Capitol Hill district of Seattle.



After holding multiple workshops and seminars for Childhaven's management and staff, it was apparent that the co-location was an excellent fit all around. [The Childhaven model](#) in the treatment and prevention of child abuse and neglect is respected nation-wide and we're delighted to have been welcomed into their safe and caring place for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. (And, we'd add, for families)

At the same time, **we are progressing in a transition into non-profit status** that will be a better fit with our mission of replacing fear and isolation with security and connection through community. Stay tuned!



In the meantime, our work with organizations, communities, families, and individuals continues as before. We welcome your invitation to learn more through a class, a seminar, or talk. Please contact us ...

Our Workbook:

"That is the fun of networking to me!"

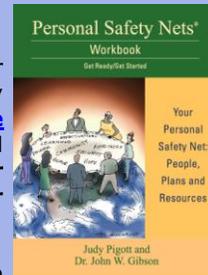
- Diane Venti

Thanks Diane, we couldn't have said it better ourselves!

Get Ready/Get Started - FREE!

We've made it easy for you to simply download our entire workbook by clicking on the Personal Safety Nets Workbook PDF on our home page or [click here](#) - and you'll have all the pages, table of contents and the entire appendix. **You can choose to save or print off the pages and have them all for yourself - FREE.**

Tell your friends and family. Direct them to www.personalsafetynets.com. Now's the perfect time to get started - **filling out this workbook will get you started on the road to a complete and very useful personal safety net.**



We'd Like to See Your Story



We're seeking your Personal Safety Net story - how YOU have dealt with a situation by building a network, or gathering with others to solve problems; putting plans, people and resources together to make a task or journey easier.

Please tell us your story using your smartphone and upload them to

info@personalsafetynets.com.