

To: Aimee Olsen-Borovitch, Haphazard House

From: MacKenzie Blaylock

Date: November 4, 2024

Re: "The Barter Complex" by Carina Freitas

Thank you for the opportunity to edit this essay. I agree that Carrie Freitas balances between personal narrative and policy implications in a poor manner but do believe there is a salvageable essay within. I found myself caught up in the story she was telling but became confused anytime she mentioned the organization's she's involved with. Those elements weren't very detailed and poorly explained. However, the details of her story in Zimbabwe made me feel like I was right there next to her, showing her strength at writing scenes.

My first preference would also be to scrape out the elements of policy and form that into an informational essay, but I'm afraid there isn't enough substance to do so. Focusing only on policy would require rewrites and asking Freitas to add entire sections. This would require much more than 30 hours and could anger Freitas as it implies her personal life isn't worth telling.

Instead, I suggest sticking to the personal narrative, rounding out the structure, and bringing a more emotional aspect to the piece. While it may not fit with the over-arching structure of the book, it may connect the readers further using pathos and ethos in a way that logos cannot. Additionally, this may require changing the order of the chapters to have this piece finish the book seeing as it would have an empathetic ending that would transition strangely to the next informative piece.

To create this purposeful personal narrative, I believe a chronological order would be beneficial. Joining her through her journey of creating a bartering enterprise can help the reader feel connected. It also leaves room to add instructions on how to do the same as well as adding her elements of policy as she develops them. Policy will no longer be a main point, but instead sprinkled throughout to add to the roundness of the piece.

I agree that 30 hours seems reasonable for this level of developmental editing. Creating this personal narrative won't require asking Freitas to write too much new material and can largely be crafted out of what is already there with some adjustments.

I hope to help make this essay worthy of consideration within the whole of the book. Let me know your thoughts on my suggestions for Freitas's work and thank you once again for this opportunity.

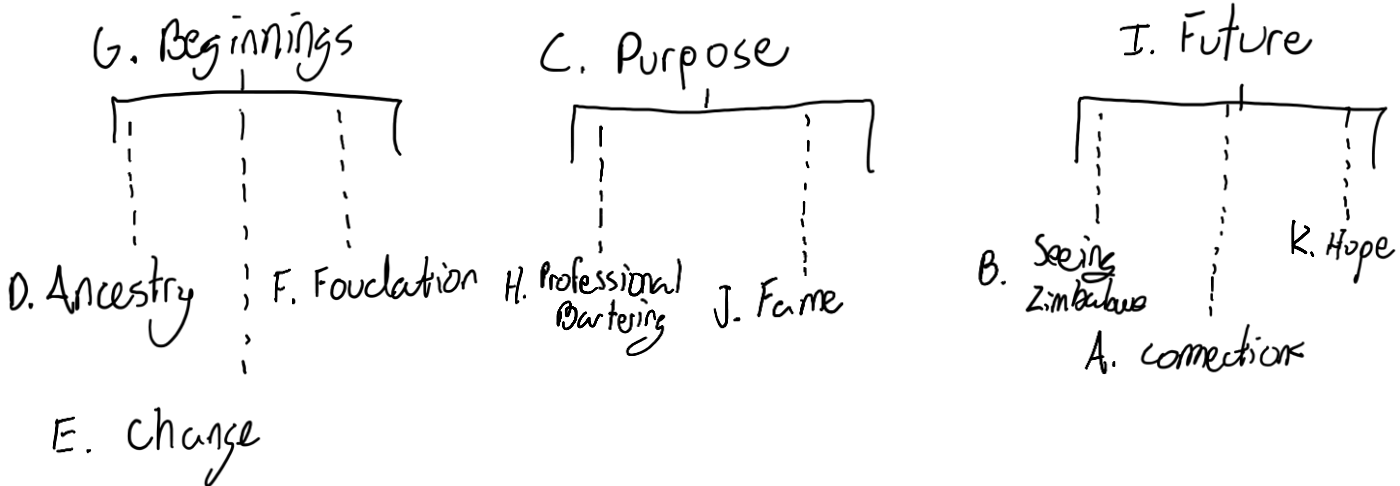
Freitas Personal Narrative Tracking

- Mention of Zimbabwe, 1
- Mention of Portuguese family, 1
- Mention of career, art, and daughter, 1
- Description of jealousy of House of Stone, 1
- Description of those who don't like surprises and those who do, story of her mother, 2
- Bartering at her local co-op, 3
- Barter as a safety net for seniors, 3, 4
- Retirement communes, 4
- Experience with a medical clinic in Zimbabwe, 5
- Visiting a family's house in Zimbabwe, bartering for their art, 6, 7, 8
- Story of her Portuguese family and bartering community, 8, 9
- Growing up, life experiences, 9, 10
- Connecting her local artist friends with businesses with bare walls, 10, 11
- Connection with Zimbabwe, 11
- Oprah of Barter, explanation of show, 11
- Attraction to international barter, 12, 13
- Inspiration for her policies, 13
- How she figured out how to appropriately barter, 14, 15, 16, 17
- How bartering helps women, 17, 18
- Why she chose to still include men, 18, 19
- How she started House of Stone, 19, 20, 21
- Connection to music, 21, 22
- Daughter as inspiration, 22, 23
- Connection of Shona (art) to barter, 23

Original Outline

- Section 1: Why Barter?
 - o Introduction
 - o “Universal access”
 - o Trust
 - o Surprise
- Section 2: Why Zimbabwe?
 - o History of barter
 - o Personal experience
- Section 3: Why Me?
 - o Immigration history
 - o Growing up/life experiences
 - o Becoming “The Barter Lady”
- Section 4: Globalizing Barter
 - o Microcredit
 - o Art
- Section 5: Getting Started Locally
 - o Common mistakes
 - You both gotta want it
 - What’s it worth?
 - Deferred payments
 - Storage addiction
 - Barter versus Gifting
- Section 6: The Global Sisterhood
 - o How barter aids women
 - o Keeping it open for men
- Section 7: The Future of Global Barter
 - o Formation of House of Stone
 - o Programs implemented
- Section 8: The Spirit of Barter
 - o Role of communal support
 - o Shona is barter

Resubmitted Nesting Diagram



Updated Thesis Draft

As Freitas has learned in her own life, barter can be used to build mutually beneficial community with relationships built on trust across the globe, especially for women.

Updated Outline Draft

Sections are heading titles, but the topics nested within sections are merely notes for the topics to be covered, not titles themselves

- Section 1: Ancestral Connections
 - o My Portuguese Family
 - o Gifting vs. Bartering
- Section 2: Rebellion
 - o Moving Out
 - o Losing a Friend
- Section 3: Maturing
 - o Pregnant
 - o The "Ledger Lady"
- Section 4: Growth
 - o Town and Daughter Grow
 - o Bartering as a Profession
- Section 5: Meaningful Bartering
 - o Discovered Shona
 - o House of Stones
 - o *The Barter Lady*
- Section 6: Seeing Zimbabwe
 - o Going to Medical Clinic
 - o Meeting Rufaro and Maiba
 - o Bartering Becomes Personal
- Section 7: After and Next
 - o Congress to Consider Barter

- Bartering with Daughter
- Zimbabwean Music Barter

Master Timeline Diagram

With a few dates mentioned, this is a rough guess at when these events happened and the order they're in.

- Her ancestors experience growing up in a Portuguese farming community
- Her growing up in a subdivision, 60s
- Bartering and gifting with the local farmers
- Bartering with her friends
- Living in a communal farmhouse
- Housemates were artists
- During the 70s, visiting bars, losing a friend
- Pursuing a business degree at the local community college
- Got pregnant, 26
- Moving back in with parents
- Became "Ledger Lady"
- Bartering her ledgering
- Daughter growing up didn't like second-hand items
- Daughter grows to be a teenager
- Local town started blossoming, new shops popping up
- She started connecting her artist friends with the walls of the shops
- Her home becoming filled with art, requiring storage
- Discovered Shona sculptures while scouting for art
- Started House of Stone Enterprises, 2006
- Started with one volunteer collection station
- Learned the process of shipping out Shona sculptures
- The program grew
- Created *The Barter Lady*
- Set up the antiretroviral drug exchange on *The Barter Lady*
- Not restricting men for the safety of women
- Going to a medical clinic in Zimbabwe
- Meeting a girl named Rufaro in line at the medical clinic
- Returning to the family's homestead
- Discovering the mother, Maiba, makes Shona
- Bartering for Maiba's Shona
- Agreeing on a barter between a Shona sculpture and HIV drugs
- Attempt to get Congress to fund modest barter co-ops
- Daughter now loves bartering
- Showing up every Saturday morning at local co-op
- Future plans to trade traditional Zimbabwean music for iPads

To: Aimee Olsen-Borovitch, Haphazard House
From: MacKenzie Blaylock
Date: November 15, 2024
Re: Freitas Developmental Plan Draft

As previously discussed, here is a draft of the current developmental plan for the Freitas essay. The plan will include the vision for the essay, the strengths and issues with its current state, and the plan to improve it. All of the suggestions are left open for Freitas to accept or revise but the plan is made with the intention of using the most appropriate suggestions.

I must admit, I've never considered bartering before as a way of getting the resources I need. Despite this, I found that I can learn from this essay on how barter can be used not only in your day-to-day lives, but internationally as well. I mostly related to the passage where Freitas explained her experiences with people moving into her childhood neighborhood and saw the generosity shown as gifts, not as an exchange. This opened my eyes as I realized many of my neighbors growing up would give gifts, but eventually the amicable relationship we had with them would die off. I can only now wonder if those weren't gifts at all, but a hopeful start to a small bartering community that my family unknowingly shut down.

Content Summary

Freitas's manuscript not only highlights the United States's poor view of bartering as a serious form of trade but goes deeper into the transaction. Through Freitas's lens of perspective, we are shown how bartering can not only support a community on a local level, but enhance relationships internationally as an agreement can be formed to help each other. While diving into Freitas's life and how she has helped people through barter, she also gives advice on how to start bartering yourself and how organizations could use barter to help themselves and others. She ends the piece with a hopeful message on what the future of barter can look like.

Problem Summary

Though her intentions are clear, Freitas's meaning is lost as she jumps between specific policies and personal narrative. These changes are jarring and can cause the reader to doubt the author's authority on the subject as she doesn't spend enough time on either topic. Additionally, the author focused too much on answering the questions asked of her and not enough time on arranging the manuscript to tell a structured story. The result is a piece with sections put together and no clear transition between them. The author also tends to lose her unique and emotional voice when explaining aspects of policy, making the subject bland and largely uninteresting.

Vision Statement

Even though the rest of the book this essay is nestled into focuses on policy, it is the narrative of Freitas's life that makes her story of barter so captivating. Through her ancestry, growing up and becoming pregnant, and her rise to fame through her bartering programs, a story of international barter and the power it gives women is there to tell. With quite a bit of rearrangement and more time spent on the emotion that drove Freitas to dedicate her life to barter, Freitas could create an essay that not only captures the audience's attention but motivates them to help others.

Readership Profile

As for the overall book, the most likely readers are women, likely middle-aged, looking to understand the history of what it means to be a woman, especially internationally. The rest of the book also draws on readers of the individual authors of each essay. Freitas brings in her own set of readers, including the viewers from her popular TV show and anyone involved with or interested in the House of Stone Enterprise. Anyone interested in bartering, trade, or some other type of exchange that doesn't rely on an economic system is likely to be interested as well, especially as people are becoming more careful with where they spend their money as prices rise.

Working Thesis

There are a few arguments to pull out of the original draft, though the intent is to either focus on a how-to guide for bartering or Freitas's personal life.

1. Barter is a tool that can be utilized in addition to other economic systems to aid international relations and impoverished communities.
2. As Freitas has learned in her own life, barter can be used to build mutually beneficial community with relationships built on trust across the globe, especially for women.
3. Economic challenges can give rise to opportunities for barter, as shown in Zimbabwe's economic climate and used by women across households.

My preference would be to choose Option 2 as the thesis for the manuscript. Option 1 fits the theme of the book but would require much more content to be written and would likely lose the author's unique voice. Option 3 is more personal but could be a challenge for the author to separate her experiences from the situations at-hand. Option 2 leans heavily into Freitas's story but provides opportunities to show vivid examples of how barter can be used and why it is effective.

Revised Contents

The thesis is up to the author's consideration or revision but continuing on from this point I will be using Option 2 to structure the updated manuscript. Using Option 2 requires heavy rearranging of the manuscript's content, reflected in the updated table of contents (TOC). I have chosen to structure the updated manuscript in a chronological

order so the reader can follow Freitas's journey in using barter first in her childhood and then growing and using it internationally. Through this structure, the inspirational narrative of Freitas's life can grow steadily, eventually ending in a call to action for the readers. Correct me if I misjudged, but I placed the author's trip to Zimbabwe after her establishment of House of Stone and *The Barter Lady*. Not only does this match her timeline but leaves the strongest part of Freitas's writing nearly until the end, setting in stone her reasoning for believing in the success of barter.

- Section 1: Ancestral Connections
 - o My Portuguese Family
 - o Gifting vs. Bartering
- Section 2: Rebellion
 - o Moving Out
 - o Losing a Friend
- Section 3: Maturing
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 - o Zimbabwean Music Barter

Structural Issues

The unrevised draft does contain elements that don't completely fit in with the new outline. They are as follows:

- Old section 1 will be broken down completely, revising the introductory paragraph to match the updated structure (page 1), slimming the paragraphs on universal access and surprise and moving them to new section 7 (pages 1, 2, and 3), moving the paragraph on trust to new section 4 (page 2). The rest of old section 1 on retirement communes no longer has a place in the manuscript but I will attempt to fit it in section 7. If it doesn't fit, I recommend cutting it.
- Old section 3 will be split into different stages of life, each becoming their own sections.

- The end of old section 5 (pages 13 and 14) on Freitas losing a friend will be put in new section 2 since it was an event that changed her world view.
- Old section 5 will be cut and each bit of advice will be placed casually into their chronological appearance; new sections 5, 4, 3, and 1 respectively.
- Old sections 2 and 6 will combine to make new section 6.
- In old section 7, the description of House of Stone (pages 19, 20, and 21) will be moved to new section 5.
- In old section 8, Freitas's experience as a new mother (pages 22 and 23) will be moved to new section 3 and the rest stays at the end in new section 7.

Stylistic Issues

While the author's writing is charming, there are a few stylistic issues to take note of.

Overbearing Familiarity: There are quite a few times the author crosses the invisible boundary of seeming too personal with the reader. Some of these instances hurt the reliability of the author: "Barter gets a bad rap" (ms. p. 1), or "I'm hella proud of what we've achieved" (ms. p. 11). Others take away from the seriousness of the topic: "I'm the only person on television who bawls more than John Boehner" (ms. p. 11), or "squeeze their massive biceps admiringly" (ms. p. 17). I will flag these instances and ask for them to be cut or reworked.

Vague Details: There are several areas, specifically policy-related, that don't explain their topics well enough to the reader: "Now that 'real money' is involved, they're all ears" (ms. p. 1-2), or "Overnight, billionaires were turned into homeless people" (ms. p. 4). Once again, I will flag these and ask for elaboration.

Revision Logistics

Once the plan is approved, it shouldn't take long to give a rough revision of the manuscript. I will begin with structuring the piece to put everything in order and have it transition easily. If that is okay, then I will go over it again, this time looking at paragraphs themselves and seeing what details need hashed out and what words need changed. Lastly, I will do small line edits to make sure the piece looks clean. All of this should take no more than twenty hours. Each step will be taken with the author's approval.

In Sum

This entire plan is not only able to be altered but expected to. My goal is to carve something incredible out of what is already here. Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on making this piece the best that it can be, and I look forward to hearing from you.

The Barter Complex:
Empowering Women without Money

By Carina Freitas

Why Barter? Ancestral Connections

~~Barter gets a bad rap. Hell if I know why. Barter, the process of trading goods or services without the use of money, runs the world, yet no one gives it the credit it's due.~~
It's been around for millennia, and it's seen whole societies through times of famine, war, and economic depression. Usually, while the men were fighting about money, the women were quietly bartering to keep food on the table. Right now, barter is ~~what's~~ keeping the nation of Zimbabwe alive ~~(if barely)~~ through decades of struggling under a dictatorship. It helped ~~ed~~ generations of immigrants find their footing in America, including my Portuguese great grandparents, ~~who worked to become successful; they were the wetbacks of their day, but through hard work and trading services they managed to become real estate moguls in the hills east of San Francisco with property worth many millions.~~ And barter, ~~let me tell you,~~ has saved my own life countless times ~~skin, too many times to mention.~~ Without barter, I wouldn't ~~allowing me to~~ have my career, my art, ~~and~~ my precious daughter.

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~~Barter, even in small forms, has always been a part of my family.~~ I grew up in the hills east of the San Francisco Bay Area, in the fourth generation of a family of Portuguese farmers. When my great-great-grandparents came over from the old country, a “port-chu-gee” (as we pronounce it) community had already been established on the eastern side of the Diablo Range, probably because the climate allowed us to raise crops we already knew how to grow—olives, grapes, lemons, artichokes—along with some new ones like avocados. During the depression, the federal government dug a tunnel through the mountain, and the commuters from the city soon began to turn our region into a bedroom community.

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My father and mother were part of the last generation to grow up on farms, and I can just barely remember from my childhood how important barter was in that world. At my grandmother’s house, neighbors would drop off baskets of fresh produce (in summer) or jars of pickled delicacies (in winter), and she would do the same. If she needed something, instead of rushing out to the local Woolworth’s to buy one, she would call her friends to see what she could borrow.

~~Barter versus Gifting. I have learned the hard way to keep separate my gift and barter relationships. I don’t barter with family, and I don’t give gifts to members of my local co-op: mixing the two can cause hurt feelings, or even legal threats, on both sides.~~

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~~When I was growing up, the farmers didn’t have a problem mixing barter with gifting.~~ This continued as I grew up, the farmers mixing bartering with gifting. If you left a bushel of cherries on your neighbors’ porch at harvest time, you knew that you’d soon find a bush of their peaches on your own stoop. If you helped a friend pump out a flooded basement, you knew you could call on him to help raise a new roof over your new

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garage. If you had people over for dinner, you expected to be invited to their home in return. Nobody was keeping a formal barter ledger, but folks knew the rules, and people who didn't "return favors" would find themselves quickly left out of the loop.

Sad to say, during my lifetime the spirit of giving in my old neighborhood has vanished. That local "gift economy" only succeeded for as long as it did because the community was small and stable, with families that had known each other for generations and had long memories. When the nouveau riche types arrived, they were drawn to the romance of the small-town culture, but they didn't understand that everything we did for them was *quid pro quo*: they just thought, "Aren't these simple country folk so generous and nice!" This made clear to me the difference between bartering and gifting: you didn't barter with your family and you didn't bring gifts to your local co-op.

Rebellion

But Quickly, the old agricultural ways were lost, making us ~~we were~~ children of the sixties, growing up and we grew up in one of the early subdivisions, ~~where the old agricultural ways were quickly lost~~. My parents sold the farm to a developer who parceled it out into lots, and we moved into the model home of Olivas Estates, where we three kids promptly began our obligatory investigations into sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. When I thinking back, we just adapted the old Portuguese barter philosophy to our new interests, trading a tab of acid, say, for several doobies. Despite ~~Besides~~ all the partying, those days were inspiring because we believed we were the first generation to evolve beyond the core problems of society: capitalism, greed, war, racism, sexism,

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homophobia. ~~We saw each other as equals, simply living on the same Earth.~~ It's like we were bartering with spiritual goods: you give me respect and I'll repay you with kindness.

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Before long I was living in a communal farmhouse, managing the garden and pursuing my business degree at the local community college. ~~(Thirty years later, my daughter lives in a dilapidated Victorian in West Oakland that has the same grungy, fun-loving, hipster vibe.)~~ Most of my housemates considered themselves artists, even though all of them went on to be stockbrokers or dentists or something equally bourgeois. I felt drawn to art, too, but I never had the confidence to put myself forward as an artist—instead, I opted to become their supporter, their patron. Some might say their enabler. My favorite times were Saturday nights, when we'd ~~get~~ pile into a car and speed through the Caldecott to downtown San Francisco to go club-hopping all night.

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~~These nights weren't without their pain, though, as the AIDS epidemic took many of my young friends from me far too early. like others of my generation, I lost many young friends to the epidemic.~~ All through the seventies, the bars I frequented were full of sexy gay men dancing with their shirts off and welcoming us with open arms. Of course, it helped that we showed up in high heels and outrageous costumes: to them my girlfriend and I were just two more drag queens. I remember Andrew, a gentle soul who looked like the Marlboro Man; whenever we made our entry at the EndUp, he always walked up to Melanie and me with our first drinks, prepared just the way we liked them. When he got sick, he rarely left his apartment on Dolores Street; I visited and saw how much losing his looks had shaken and shamed him. Eventually, he stopped letting me in, so I left care packages outside the door. No one ever informed me of his death: I still wonder if he had any sort of memorial service.

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Maturing

Eventually, I ended up pregnant. All of a sudden, it was time to grow up. Raising a child as a single mother in rural California was no easy way, as the blues song says, but my little Sophie made all the sacrifices worthwhile. I moved back in with my parents and became the Ledger Lady. I traveled, traveling around in my beat-up VW bug to do the monthly payables and receivables for all of the little businesses whose owners knew me as Cat and Rafe's little girl: the hair dresser, the caterer, the lumber yard, the family doctor, the grocer, the bar and grille, the fancy restaurant. Before long I was trading my book-keeping services for hair cuts, a cast for my daughter's broken arm, a buffet for her birthday party. Somehow, I was no longer just working, I was bartering.

Some of my friends complain that I'm *too* barter centric. I have no ambitions as a matchmaker—I never try to set up my single friends with each other on blind dates—but I do send my friends to each other all the time as customers. Over the years, this has created a cat's cradle of relationships that mostly brings me great satisfaction and joy but occasionally gets tangled up. Where barter really began to pay off was when I reconnected with my hippie artist roots.

After much trial and error, I've learned a few things about successful bartering. *What's It Worth?* For example, when you're first getting started, barter products or services that you already know well. It's better to start small and become known as a reliable source of a single type of commodity. In my neighborhood,

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everybody trusted me to do their books but nobody was going to hire me to sing at their wedding. And if you're thinking about branching out into something you don't have deep experience with, make sure you involve someone who does. If you're setting up a food co-op, enlist the help of a sympathetic farmer or grocer. ~~We find that mid-level managers at local supermarkets can be great assets: they have the expertise you need to establish reliable value rates, but they don't make enough money that you have to worry about them "siding with the competition."~~

~~Deferred Payments.~~ One of the biggest challenges I've encountered in setting up a barter business is dealing with deferred payments. At first, you'll be inclined to allow deals to be made on a handshake. This is only natural; part of the appeal of barter is that it builds a sense of community and trust among the participants. But it just takes one welcher to sabotage your fledgling co-op's reputation. So start off on the right foot: create an exchange ledger that records the names and contact information of both parties, notes the date of the deal, and specifies a date by which services will be rendered. Of course, folks will soon start planning exchanges with each other that they don't run by you: but if those deals go sour, they won't reflect poorly on your co-op; in fact, they will only underscore the value of your role as a middleman.

I said at the outset that I wouldn't have my beautiful daughter, Sophie, if it weren't for barter. That might be an overstatement: now that I have her, I cannot imagine that I would ever have ~~an~~ given her up regardless of any hardships I might have faced. But that's easy to say now, in hindsight. As a scared single ~~mother26-year-old-who-just-found-out-she-was-pregnant-by-a-man-who-was-definitely-not-husband-material, in the era of Roe v. Wade,~~ I had a choice to make, and it was the support of the local co-op and those who

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encouraged my Ledger Lady business that gave me the strength and confidence to take on ~~that new challenge~~[single motherhood](#). Today, I see it as my role to provide that sense of communal support to others.

Growth

While I watched Sophie blossom from toddler into teenager, our local region was growing up, too. Whole new towns sprouted up out of nowhere—and because of the tunnel, the people in these towns were wealthy, with ties to the sophisticated city. With each new faux hamlet came a shopping center posing as a town square camouflaged in oaks and eucalyptus. Each of these hidden malls had a nouvelle cuisine restaurant, a high-end salon, and an art gallery. As the Ledger Lady, I started hooking up my artist friends with the bare walls of these fancy joints. Now you see this trend everywhere: if you go out for brunch, you can pretty much count on piercing the yolk of your poached egg under a painting, photograph, or bas-relief wearing a price tag the way Minnie Pearl wore them on her hats. But back then the concept was cutting edge, and I became the go-to gal for temporary art exhibits in East Bay retail establishments. ~~Soon I became~~[was](#) part of the bridge-and-tunnel crowd, curating the walls of board rooms in the Financial District and bistros South of Market.

~~Storage Addiction. It wasn't long until I realized that if~~ you're going to barter, you need a place to store the goods you intend to trade and receive. This might seem obvious, but the point was totally lost on me until I found myself unable to move around in my two-bedroom apartment in Oakland. Every inch of my wall space was covered in framed

paintings and drawings; I've got smaller sculptures lining the baseboards of every room, and larger ones parked among the furniture. I loved living among my art like this, but the time came when I needed to expand into a storage rental unit. I started out with one 10 x 15 unit and now have three filled to capacity. ~~And these are personal items only — my business has graduated to acres of warehouse space in Richmond.~~

Another of the joys of barter is the element of trust. In the days before currency, both parties in an exchange would have approached each other with their goods in hand and swapped them on the spot. But barter in the twenty-first century is mostly about providing services, and those exchanges cannot take place simultaneously in real time. Think about it: if a gardener and a barber have an arrangement to swap services, the gardener can't mow the barber's lawn while he's getting his hair-cut. Postmodern barter has developed a number of conventions for getting around this problem. These rules of the game create a kind of community, and once you've joined it you find yourself trusting strangers. In today's society, where parents don't allow their children out of their sight and most people have moved away from their hometowns, the experience of trusting a stranger is exciting, scary, and deeply liberating.

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Meaningful Bartering

One day, I was at a trade show, scouring the booths for art that would go well in a new Ethiopian restaurant, when I came across my first Shona sculptures. I was immediately obsessed~~They bowled me over~~. I picked up the laminated sheet explaining the origins of the pieces and read that the first European traders in the Kingdom of

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Zimbabwe were the Portuguese, who along with the Arabs had established the gold routes that eventually left the empire in a state of near collapse. I instantly felt a deep connection to this place I had never been. This was only the start of what would become a life-long love.

Eventually, I started House of Stone Enterprises in 2006. ~~Last year, we bartered an estimated \$1.4 billion in HIV medications and original Zimbabwe artwork. The question I ask myself every morning is, What's next? How else might we use barter to help the people of Africa find health, peace, and economic prosperity?~~ We originally started House of Stone with one volunteer collection station for the medications. It was a vacant storefront in the Castro that the landlord allowed me to rent at a reduced rate until his deal with a major clothing chain came through. For drugs representing a month's worth of treatment, we offered a hand-sized Shona sculpture; for "donations" supplying a year's worth of treatment, the client could receive either twelve small sculptures or a single large one. Initially, we could not guarantee specific animal shapes or human configurations, but our Barter Circle members embraced the element of surprise and set up a bulletin board for photos at the station that allowed them to trade a giraffe, say, for a woman nursing.

When we had enough drugs to fill an air freight container, I traveled with the shipment to Harare, where I had already cultivated connections with various sources of local art. I recruited the help of a respected woman elder, Akudzwe Mwoyo, to gather the items on a schoolyard of red dirt on the outskirts of the city. Pickup trucks as rusted and clap-trap as any you'll see in the Central Valley pulled up with loose bales of Msasa leaves: these would serve as our bubble wrap. We spent an afternoon carefully packing

the pieces, with the largest at the bottom and the smaller pieces on top. The airlines had given me a strict weight limit, so I allowed the women (and a few men) to fill the container only part way. As we entered each sculpture into the inventory, I wrote down the name of the artist and the person the medicine was intended for.

From this first “airlift,” the program grew. We opened up collection stations in Los Angeles and San Diego, then around the United States. Akudzwe expanded her network of stone smiths and started an apprenticeship program for young Zimbabweans. I spent three months in Harare with her niece, Tsitsi Twangerai, setting up a local co-op on the model of the one in my Oakland neighborhood: this was a critical development, because we could not get workers to devote themselves to making art full-time if our only currency was HIV drugs. To meet their needs for other treatments, we started a drug exchange with other humanitarian aid agencies. To meet their need for food, we helped women farmers—who struggle to survive in societies in which virtually all landowners are men—by beginning a campaign for donors to buy hectares and sign them over to women’s farming cooperatives.

~~Of course, there are lots of Americans doing good work in Africa: the Gateses, Oprah, Bono, Alicia Keys, John Legend, the Clintons. And how they get that work done is none of my business. My aim is to sidestep politics and work directly with the African people. At a time when well-meaning humanitarian aid efforts can be co-opted by local governments or private enterprise because of the large sums of money involved, barter is an approach that keeps everyone honest: you only trade for goods or services if you intend to use them yourself, otherwise they’re worthless to you.~~

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I'm also ~~incredibly~~ ~~hella~~ proud of what we've achieved with our show *The Barter Lady* on the Lifetime network, bringing to millions of Americans an awareness of the heroism of people in struggling economies around the world. ~~For the dozen of you who haven't seen it,~~ The show's format is equal parts QVC, *Antiques Roadshow*, and *60 Minutes*. First, we have fun guessing the value of the items offered for barter by (mostly small) American businesses and individuals. Next, we celebrate and appraise the folk art of a culturally rich but economically impoverished ethnic group, most of whom are harassed minorities in their country of residence. ~~When the trade is made at the end of the hour, there is a Niagara of weeping on both sides of the exchange—including me, of course. I'm the only person on television who bawls more than John Boehner.~~

Selling the idea of the show wasn't as simple as I hoped it would be. When I was raising funds for the show's pilot, I often got asked, "Why not focus on local barter stories in the U.S.? Why do you insist on going global?" Now, let me be clear: I am as much an enthusiast of the local co-op as anyone . . . and that's saying something in the Bay Area. I get most of my food that way, and for years I also clothed myself and a growing daughter in vintage bartered items. People struggle economically in the U.S., too, and barter can be a valuable way to supplement a modest income. At our co-op, we've set up a recycling center mainly so that families with nothing else to barter can collect bottles and aluminum cans and swap them for essentials.

But the international angle attracted me for two reasons. First, I found that microcredit and barter could work together beautifully. ~~The first was microcredit.~~ Back in 1983, Muhammad Yunus created a bank in Bangladesh that gave very small loans at reasonable interest rates to the poor to allow them to start businesses. ~~The idea was to~~

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providing an alternative to the loan sharks that dominate cash-strapped communities all over the world. The majority of microloan recipients ended up being women, and their rate of default was consistently extremely low. I was blown away by the concept when I first heard about it, knowing barter was the perfect fit. When Yunus won the Nobel Prize in 2006, I heard about this concept for the first time and was blown away by it. Surely, I thought, barter and microloans could work together beautifully. —

My other attraction to an international theme was the variety of art. If we'd kept the show focused on American communities, we would have found plenty of local artists to barter with—I already trafficked in local art all the time in the East Bay. But each time we discover a new form of folk art overseas, we bring to our viewers not just a unique artistic vision but awareness of a completely new, often neglected culture. Instead of helping an individual artist to launch her career, we help infuse whole regional economies with much-needed cash. And now that we've expanded the show's reach beyond art to include health care, sustainable agriculture, schools, and other critical needs of those societies, we're able to make a contribution much more directly—and with much less red tape—than anything we could have achieved in the U.S.

Despite its other achievements, the most important work we've done on *Barter Lady*, in my opinion, was setting up the antiretroviral drug exchange. Every year, as my viewers know (because I've said so ad nauseum), the United States was wasting millions of dollars' worth of perfectly good HIV drugs every year because advances were constantly being made in treatment and our AIDS patients—unlike Africans at the poverty level—usually had health insurance that allowed them to demand the newest standard of care. Back then, after decades of inactivity, the major pharmaceutical

companies had finally started making HIV drugs available to Africa for free or at very low cost, and this effort had resulted in lowering the infection rate in Zimbabwe and several other African nations. But the drugs that Big Pharma was donating were usually several generations behind those currently in use in the U.S. and Europe, with the result that Africans suffered from the pronounced—and sometimes deadly—side effects of the out-of-date regimens. Seventeen years later they're calling me the Oprah of Barter, which

I take as a compliment.

You Both Gotta Want It. Even The Barter Lady encountered struggles through our journey of helping people. When the show's Barter Lady's art-for-drugs program started

to become successful, a Big Pharma company that shall remain nameless wanted to participate by swapping a large shipment of HIV drugs for a monumental Shona sculpture for display in their corporate lobby—for which there would be a well-publicized ribbon-cutting ceremony, of course. I visited the headquarters, photographed the space where they wanted the piece to go, and showed one of their executives some options from a portfolio. After we settled on a piece, he told me the names and amounts of the drugs he had available. He was promising truckloads of the stuff, but they were all outmoded regimens that we'd already stopped accepting from individual barterers. When I told him which current treatments I wanted, the quantity he was willing to let go of became much smaller. Eventually, we worked out a deal that was much closer to the original quantity. This taught me to always learn what both sides want out of a barter and

to come to an agreement that satisfies both.

Simply, What globalizing barter does is allows us to bring our own stories and passions to the problems facing the world. If we all live in a global village, then we

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should be able to build a co-op for it, why shouldn't this village have its own co-op?

Microcredit has shown me and inspired me to. As the success of microcredit has shown, empowering the poor, and especially women, so that we can reverse downward economic trends and build stable, healthy communities.

The beauty of barter is what the politicians would call “universal access.” That is, they would call it that if any of them would back it. Lord knows for many years I tried to get some of our more likely members of Congress to fund modest barter co-ops in their states, with nothing to show for the effort, until I hit pay dirt with the House of Stone™ project. Now they all want in, liberals from my own neck of the woods, libertarians from the Midwest, even conservative Latinos in Florida. After years of twisting so many arms that I should have earned a UFC title, I finally have their attention—but for the wrong reason. Some would call what I’ve been doing “lobbying,” only with kilos of peanuts instead of money. Now that “real money” is involved, they’re all ears.

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Another of the joys of barter is the element of *trust*. In the days before currency, both parties in an exchange would have approached each other with their goods in hand and swapped them on the spot. But barter in the twenty-first century is mostly about providing services, and those exchanges cannot take place simultaneously in real time. Think about it: if a gardener and a barber have an arrangement to swap services, the gardener can't mow the barber's lawn while he's getting his hair cut. Postmodern barter has developed a number of conventions for getting around this problem. These rules of the game create a kind of *community*, and once you've joined it you find yourself trusting strangers. In today's society, where parents don't allow their children out of their sight

and most people have moved away from their hometowns, the experience of trusting a stranger is exciting, scary, and deeply liberating.

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A third reason to barter is the element of *surprise*. Now, not everybody likes surprises: my mother is one of those who shakes her Christmas gifts demanding to know what's inside; when we threw her a surprise seventieth birthday party, she swore like a sailor and left the room. But for many of us, life doesn't have enough surprises: we get up in the morning, go to work, come home, pop dinner in the microwave, go to sleep, and haul ourselves out of bed again. Our paychecks are automatically deposited into our bank accounts—we pull the same amount of money out of the ATM every Monday morning and keep walking the treadmill of our routines.

Barter throws some excitement into the mix. I show up every Saturday morning at my local co-op and never know what I'll discover. Recently, the tomatoes and corn have been especially good, but there was also some of the blue, fungus-covered corn that Mexicans turn into their salty delicacy called *huitlacoche* (which sounds tastier than the English name for it, "corn smut"). Not something you find at Whole Foods. Although the co-op mainly deals in produce and provisions, I've gotten lots of other goods there: antique cutlery, romance novels, clothing, a bicycle. All week long I look forward to Saturday, when I tell my daughter I'm going on my "dumpster dive." As a little girl, she wasn't jazzed about having so many second-hand items: "Can't we just buy one at the mall?" she would say, like a broken record. But now that she's shape-shifted into this hipster artist type that I barely recognize, she's become quite the barter queen herself.

But barter—to me, and to others in the community—is more than just a way to spice up our lives. In a world that can no longer support the cushy retirement plans of the

baby boom generation (*my* generation), barter can serve as a safety net for seniors. We barter advocates see ourselves building relationships that will be sustainable into our doddering old age. Barter helps us to redefine our wants and needs, to identify resources, and to maintain our own productivity while adapting to the changes in our aging bodies and minds.

In today's society, most retirement age persons are already corralled into "assisted living" complexes. I have no beef with these places—I can't wait to get my mother into one (joking, Mom!)—and I totally recognize that they will continue to be necessary because they provide the medical services critical to an aging population. But lots of other services that these institutions provide—housekeeping, laundry, meals, social events, drug regimen adherence, etc.—could be delivered via barter at much lower cost. With social security in jeopardy and the largest generation that has ever lived heading toward old age, America has reached a critical moment: it is time for us to start thinking about setting up "barter complexes."

In fact, there's a movement afoot among my fellow ex-hippies to build retirement *communes*. In these small communities of 20 to 40 households, with names like ElderSpirit and ElderGrace, residents collaborate on decisions about landscaping, meal planning, and social event planning; they help each other shovel snow, install air conditioners, and mow lawns. Even better, some communities—inspired by "cohousing" efforts pioneered in Denmark in the 1970s—are intergenerational, with small children growing up right next to their grandparents, and adult children able to keep an eye on their aging parents. As this movement grows, the techniques of barter—if used properly—can help keep communal "sharing" fair and honest.

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Why Zimbabwe? Seeing Zimbabwe

~~Now I'm not saying that barter should replace the monetary system. You only have to look at Zimbabwe to see that barter alone is not enough. After thirty years under Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwe economy collapsed in 2008 when inflation increased by 500 billion percent. I'm a numbers lady, and I cannot *imagine* what 500 billion percent looks like. Overnight, billionaires were turned into homeless people, and the working poor—well, how much farther down could they go? Remember, this was a country where a quarter of the population was infected with the AIDS virus.~~

People started trading possessions for essential services. A farmer's wife would get sick, so he'd trade an ox for medical treatment, but without that ox to pull the plow his land would yield less food for his family. In 2009, the country adopted the U.S. dollar as its currency, and this has helped tremendously—now men can travel to the diamond fields or other places with employment opportunities and send back money via wire transfers to their family's cell phones. Barter is no substitute for money, but in struggling economies it's a critical supplement.

~~At some point, I~~The first time I went to a medical clinic in Zimbabwe for the first time. ~~While I was there,~~ I saw a line of two hundred people waiting patiently in the sun. Some were dangling live chickens by their feet, others had scrawny goats on short leashes, but most arrived balancing huge sacks of peanuts on their heads. Anything they could trade to receive healthcare.~~The clinics are especially happy to get peanuts because they add protein to their patients' meals of porridge and vegetables. If I had to walk ten~~

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~~miles with a sack like that on my head in order to get my high blood pressure medicine, game over.~~

In that line I met a young girl of nine named Rufaro. She was carrying her ~~younger~~ baby brother, Betserai, on one hip and had hauled a bucket of maize several miles in the other hand. Her lips were parched and cracked, and the way she ignored the baby's whimpering told me she was ~~totally~~ used to it. She told me—in English, which she'd learned at parochial school before her father's checks stopped coming through from the Marange diamond fields—that she was in line to retrieve more HIV medication for her mother, who was at home, too weak to make the journey. I thought of myself back home in the waiting room of my local Kaiser pharmacy, in a cushioned chair and air-conditioning, and how upset I got if my number came up too slowly on the big digital display. Suddenly, the world seemed to expand around me.

I waited three more hours with Rufaro and Betserai until she got the prescription filled, then drove her home in my rented jeep. The landscape was just like you'd picture: dusty road, expanses of dry grassland, the random baobab tree appearing on the horizon like a tree out of *Harry Potter*. We saw cows and goats at muddy watering holes, a few jacaranda trees in bloom, and stands of the Msasa tree, which looks more like a shrub and I've since learned is very important to the lives of the Zimbabwe people. There were outcroppings of the rocks that give Zimbabwe (translated "house of stone") its name: they're natural formations, but they look like human hands stacked them. The children were drinking from my canteen, and with their faces in the breeze they smiled.

In half an hour we reached the family's homestead. It was a pitiful round hut with a dirt floor, walls of thin Msasa trunks, and a thatched roof. In back was a small stand of

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maize, and there were two anorexic goats tethered to keep them from eating the corn stalks. Rufaro led me by the hand through the hut's entrance—no door—and presented me to her mother, who was wasting away on a straw pallet. When she saw me, she made as if to get up, presumably to offer me some form of refreshment. I motioned for her to be still, and with me asking questions and Rufaro translating I was able to get some details of the family's history.

The mother, Maiba, had married Zuka when they were sixteen and eighteen. ~~They were both members of the Ndebele tribe, which had been the reigning ethnic group in the old Zimbabwe Kingdom and during the colonial era, when the country was known as Rhodesia. As a small girl, Maiba barely remembered Bob Marley singing at the Independence Day celebrations in 1980, with Prince Charles bobbing his head herky-jerky to the reggae beat. A few years later, when Mugabe started his “pacification” against the Ndebele, which the people called Gukurahundi or “the strong wind,” Maiba lost her father and two uncles. Even so,~~ Maiba considered her life with Zuka to be filled with blessings: they had plenty of children (Rufaro was the seventh), and they were able to feed themselves thanks to Zuka's job working for a local white farmer.

Then, in 1997, came the Great General Strike, which paralyzed the country. The white farmers, who owned 70 percent of the country's arable land, were forced to emigrate, the government seized the land, and food production halted, creating a crippling shortage. Zuka had no choice but to find work in the diamond fields. He came home maybe once a year, and on one visit brought the HIV virus with him. Now he was back in Marange, along with tens of thousands of other illegal prospectors digging in the

fields and risking injury or even death at the hands of the government's security details.

Maiba hadn't heard from him in eight months.

On a rough plank along one side of the poorly lit hut, I could barely make out a collection of small stone carvings, displayed as if in a store window. They were miniature versions of the sculptures I was there to export. These days, Zimbabwe is known the world over for its sculptures. Although carving is a tradition of the Shona, the largest ethnic group in the country, Maiba had learned the art as a Ndebele—her tribe is really kind of a splinter group off the Shona anyway, and has only existed since the mid-1800s.

The sculptures themselves are made of serpentine, verdite, or granite. Highly polished human faces, heads, and whole bodies look like they're wrestling free from the weathered surfaces of odd-shaped blocks. Some pieces are abstract, but even those pieces evoke for me the human body dancing, squatting, or resting. When you first see a Shona sculpture, you think immediately of Picasso or Miro, with all of those oval faces and bodies escaping from abstract backgrounds. ~~I'm reminded of that scene in *The Agony and the Ecstasy* when Charlton Heston, as a handsome young pre-NRA Michelangelo, gradually rescues his *David* from a block of Carrera marble with hammer and chisel. But the Shona stone masters have never seen the work of Western artists, and their "modern" style goes back to the eleventh century.~~

If I'm being honest, Maiba's pieces were not of the highest quality—I'm sure they were not her best work, sick as she was. But I offered to buy them all up and she took the dollars with gratitude. I went back to my jeep and pulled out some other supplies that I'd brought with me from California: toiletries, a first aid kit, flip flops. Sometimes barter

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includes a gratuity. Then I said goodbye to the children and drove off toward the clinic blubbering, motivated by a new idea: to barter medicine for art across the Atlantic.

Through my efforts, inspired by my experiences internationally, I am proud to be part of an emerging “global sisterhood” community of successful women who are focusing their philanthropic efforts on women in developing nations. I’m not sure if I would have ended up here if it weren’t for my experience with Maiba. Now, I have nothing against men, as any viewer will tell you who has seen me host professional athletes on my show and squeeze their massive biceps admiringly. But eEmpowering women is critical to any country’s effort to raise its standard of living and .To put it erassly, women are a huge resource that is being wasted when they could be drivers of success for an entire economy.

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The statistics are starting to improve, but they’re still appalling. Almost half the work done globally is in the informal economy, which pays lower (or not at all), requires longer hours, and has no job security. In Africa, the informal sector is 80 percent of the economy, and 90 percent of those jobs are held by women. As if that weren’t enough, women farmers produce about half of Africa’s food yet are held back by by laws and cultural attitudes from buying their own land, attaining their own credit, and adopting new technologies like seeds and fertilizers. All this while performing the housework, raising the children, hauling the water—you get the picture. Women run countries yet receive nothing for it.

After a century of experimentation, international aid organizations have begun to figure out which types of help are effective. Decades ago, we realized that doling out money was doing no good: each handout created a brief frenzy of corruption without

altering the power dynamics in the society. Nowadays most relief organizations target simple, cost-effective measures focused on women and families. They work to reduce maternal mortality and illiteracy and to provide the building blocks of a healthy community—housing, electricity, sanitation, water, and credit. We recognize that, for a society to improve, it has to create its own solutions and take pride in its own achievements.

That's where barter can play a key role. There are lots of worthy foreign aid efforts that fail because their backers come out of the financial markets and are looking for so-called "quick wins." ~~I won't name names, but I've seen Hollywood celebrities hopscotch across the African continent from cause to cause as quickly as they change spouses.~~ Barter networks take time to build, and their core value is in relationships; their "capital" is tied up in tangible inventory, so it's not so likely to be diverted to a new hare-brained scheme overnight. Barter is also less vulnerable to the graft of male-dominated political structures—corrupt officials tend to salivate over high-value commodities like oil and diamonds, not folk-art sculptures.

I'm often asked why I don't just restrict the activities of my tv show and foundation to women. The answer lies in another lesson that foreign aid organizations have learned over the years: excluding men from aid incites backlash against women. These days, there are some philanthropists who want to trumpet their programs as promoting gender equality on moral grounds; I empathize with their point of view, but I think they're making a dangerous mistake. Forcing a man to sign a form that says he "does no harm" to women is not likely to change his mind and habits if he's a wife-beater. I say let's get him to realize that his wife is as precious as the diamonds he mines.

After and Next

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As for House of Stone, we aren’t slowing down. For our next project, we want to trade traditional Zimbabwean music for iPads. The introduction of cell phones on the African continent has already shown how powerful the new digital technologies can be in the hands of the poor. Cell phones allow migrant workers to send money back home; they also allow extended families dispersed by economic hardship and political persecution to pool their resources. Now we want Zimbabwe to follow the lead of developing nations like Thailand and Brazil by bringing education to children on digital devices. So I’m working with the Big Tech companies to trade shipments of cell phones and tablets for live performances by Zimbabwean artists at their industry events. Viewers of *Barter Lady* and customers of House of Stone can help sponsor the new program by downloading the music from our websites.

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~~Sounds simple, doesn't it? But s~~Unfortunately, so far we've encountered a whole lot of complications. Having multiple kinds of devices means that we need sophisticated technical support in school districts that are scattered across the veld. And the Zimbabwe music scene is hard to break into; it's vibrant but turbulent. We have signed up some successful bands from the different musical factions that incorporate traditional instruments into their essentially modern styles: *sungura*, *tuki*, *jiti*, and *Bulawayo*, to name the most popular categories. But these genres are dominated by male pop stars whose followings constantly heckle each other at concerts. Several times now, artists who initially agreed to participate in our program have later refused to appear on the same album together. So we've taken a different approach by finding Zimbabwean women to record the more traditional forms of Shona music without the fusion of hip-hop, dancehall, or modern instruments.

What stands out about this music is the joy it expresses. Despite all of the hardships and oppression in their lives, the Zimbabweans are known for their sunny dispositions and their appreciation of life's simple pleasures. When you listen to this music, you can't help but smile and start tapping your foot—it is playful, cheerful, relentlessly upbeat. When we've had live performances in the *Barter Lady* studio in Culver City, the audience instantly stands and even the grip and boom operators—who usually act bored with everything—have to fight the urge to dance along. There's not a diva among these ladies: what comes across is how the music is a purely collaborative communal experience. That's something we celebrity-obsessed Americans hardly ever see, and I've had members of our studio audience tell me that these performances are a religious experience.

Sometimes I think barter is like the Shona process of making sculptures. The sculptor goes out into a field and returns with an ordinary piece of serpentine (a greenish rock that we also have in California). He or she will sit under an acacia tree and start daydreaming with files, hammers, chisels, and sandpaper nearby. Once the imagined shape starts to show through the rock, the sculptor builds a large fire and places the stone nearby, heating its surface until it is porous and steaming. The sculptor then pours over the piece a layer of melted beeswax, which gets into the stone's pores and brings its natural color to life. After it's cooled, the stone is buffed to a silky finish.

~~In barter, the rocks are the ordinary stuff of our lives — the things we forget to appreciate. The daydreams are the imagination we bring to reinvesting those items with value. And the fire and beeswax baptism are the transaction itself: hard meets soft, opposites meld, and the result is a beauty that fire and wax could not accomplish on their own.~~

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Why Me?

~~I grew up in the hills east of the San Francisco Bay Area, in the fourth generation of a family of Portuguese farmers. When my great-great-grandparents came over from the old country, a “port-chu-gee” (as we pronounce it) community had already been established on the eastern side of the Diablo Range, probably because the climate allowed us to raise~~

crops we already knew how to grow—olives, grapes, lemons, artichokes—along with some new ones like avocados. During the depression, the federal government dug a tunnel through the mountain, and the commuters from the city soon began to turn our region into a bedroom community. My father and mother were part of the last generation to grow up on farms, and I can just barely remember from my childhood how important barter was in that world. At my grandmother's house, neighbors would drop off baskets of fresh produce (in summer) or jars of pickled delicacies (in winter), and she would do the same. If she needed something, instead of rushing out to the local Woolworth's to buy one, she would call her friends to see what she could borrow.

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But we were children of the sixties, and we grew up in one of the early subdivisions, where the old agricultural ways were quickly lost. My parents sold the farm to a developer who parceled it out into lots, and we moved into the model home of Olivas Estates, where we three kids promptly began our obligatory investigations into sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. When I think back, we just adapted the old Portuguese barter philosophy to our new interests, trading a tab of acid, say, for several doobies. Besides all the partying, those days were inspiring because we believed we were the first generation to evolve beyond the core problems of society: capitalism, greed, war, racism, sexism, homophobia. It's like we were bartering with spiritual goods: you give me respect and I'll repay you with kindness.

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Before long I was living in a communal farmhouse, managing the garden and pursuing my business degree at the local community college. (Thirty years later, my daughter lives in a dilapidated Victorian in West Oakland that has the same grungy, fun-loving, hipster vibe.) Most of my housemates considered themselves artists, even though

all of them went on to be stockbrokers or dentists or something equally bourgeois. I felt drawn to art, too, but I never had the confidence to put myself forward as an artist — instead, I opted to become their supporter, their patron. Some might say their enabler. My favorite times were Saturday nights, when we'd get pile into a car and speed through the Caldecott to downtown San Francisco to go club hopping all night.

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Eventually, I ended up pregnant. All of a sudden, it was time to grow up. Raising a child as a single mother in rural California was no easy way, as the blues song says, but my little Sophie made all the sacrifices worthwhile. I moved back in with my parents and became the Ledger Lady, traveling around in my beat up VW bug to do the monthly payables and receivables for all of the little businesses whose owners knew me as Cat and Rafe's little girl: the hair dresser, the caterer, the lumber yard, the family doctor, the grocer, the bar and grille, the fancy restaurant. Before long I was trading my book-keeping services for hair cuts, a cast for my daughter's broken arm, a buffet for her birthday party.

Some of my friends complain that I'm *too* barter-centric. I have no ambitions as a matchmaker — I never try to set up my single friends with each other on blind dates — but I do send my friends to each other all the time as customers. Over the years, this has created a cat's cradle of relationships that mostly brings me great satisfaction and joy but occasionally gets tangled up. Where barter really began to pay off was when I reconnected with my hippie artist roots.

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While I watched Sophie blossom from toddler into teenager, our local region was growing up, too. Whole new towns sprouted up out of nowhere — and because of the tunnel, the people in these towns were wealthy, with ties to the sophisticated city. With

each new faux hamlet came a shopping center posing as a town square camouflaged in oaks and eucalyptus. Each of these hidden malls had a nouvelle cuisine restaurant, a high-end salon, and an art gallery. As the Ledger Lady, I started hooking up my artist friends with the bare walls of these fancy joints. Now you see this trend everywhere: if you go out for brunch, you can pretty much count on piercing the yolk of your poached egg under a painting, photograph, or bas-relief wearing a price tag the way Minnie Pearl wore them on her hats. But back then the concept was cutting edge, and I became the go-to gal for temporary art exhibits in East Bay retail establishments.

Soon I was part of the bridge-and-tunnel crowd, curating the walls of board rooms in the Financial District and bistros South of Market. I was at a trade show, scouring the booths for art that would go well in a new Ethiopian restaurant, when I came across my first Shona sculptures. They bowled me over. I picked up the laminated sheet explaining the origins of the pieces and read that the first European traders in the Kingdom of Zimbabwe were the Portuguese, who along with the Arabs had established the gold routes that eventually left the empire in a state of near collapse. I instantly felt a deep connection to this place I had never been.

Seventeen years later they're calling me the Oprah of Barter, which I take as a compliment. I'm hella proud of what we've achieved with our show *The Barter Lady* on the Lifetime network, bringing to millions of Americans an awareness of the heroism of people in struggling economies around the world. For the dozen of you who haven't seen it, the show's format is equal parts *QVC*, *Antiques Roadshow*, and *60 Minutes*. First, we have fun guessing the value of the items offered for barter by (mostly small) American businesses and individuals. Next, we celebrate and appraise the folk art of a culturally

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rich but economically impoverished ethnic group, most of whom are harassed minorities in their country of residence. When the trade is made at the end of the hour, there is a Niagara of weeping on both sides of the exchange—including me, of course. I'm the only person on television who bawls more than John Boehner.

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Globalizing Barter

When I was raising funds for the show's pilot, I often got asked, "Why not focus on local barter stories in the U.S.? Why do you insist on going global?" Now, let me be clear: I am as much an enthusiast of the local co-op as anyone . . . and that's saying something in the Bay Area. I get most of my food that way, and for years I also clothed myself and a growing daughter in vintage bartered items. People struggle economically in the U.S., too, and barter can be a valuable way to supplement a modest income. At our co-op, we've set up a recycling center mainly so that families with nothing else to barter can collect bottles and aluminum cans and swap them for essentials.

But the international angle attracted me for two reasons. The first was microcredit. Back in 1983, Muhammad Yunus created a bank in Bangladesh that gave very small loans at reasonable interest rates to the poor to allow them to start businesses. The idea was to provide an alternative to the loan sharks that dominate cash-strapped communities all over the world. The majority of microloan recipients were women, and their rate of default was extremely low. When Yunus won the Nobel Prize in 2006, I heard about this concept for the first time and was blown away by it. Surely, I thought, barter and microloans could work together beautifully.

My other attraction to an international theme was the art. If we'd kept the show focused on American communities, we would have found plenty of local artists to barter with—I already trafficked in local art all the time in the East Bay. But each time we discover a new form of folk art overseas, we bring to our viewers not just a unique artistic vision but awareness of a completely new, often neglected culture. Instead of helping an individual artist to launch her career, we help infuse whole regional economies with much needed cash. And now that we've expanded the show's reach beyond art to include health care, sustainable agriculture, schools, and other critical needs of those societies, we're able to make a contribution much more directly—and with much less red tape—than anything we could have achieved in the U.S.

The most important work we've done on *Barter Lady*, in my opinion, was set up the antiretroviral drug exchange. As my viewers know (because I've said so ad nauseum), the United States was wasting millions of dollars' worth of perfectly good HIV drugs every year because advances were constantly being made in treatment and our AIDS patients—unlike Africans at the poverty level—usually had health insurance that allowed them to demand the newest standard of care. Back then, after decades of inactivity, the major pharmaceutical companies had finally started making HIV drugs available to Africa for free or at very low cost, and this effort had resulted in lowering the infection rate in Zimbabwe and several other African nations. But the drugs that Big Pharma was donating were usually several generations behind those currently in use in the U.S. and Europe, with the result that Africans suffered from the pronounced—and sometimes deadly—side effects of the out-of-date regimens.

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This program really speaks to my heart because, like others of my generation, I lost many young friends to the epidemic. All through the seventies, the bars I frequented were full of sexy gay men dancing with their shirts off and welcoming us with open arms. Of course, it helped that we showed up in high heels and outrageous costumes: to them my girlfriend and I were just two more drag queens. I remember Andrew, a gentle soul who looked like the Marlboro Man: whenever we made our entry at the EndUp, he always walked up to Melanie and me with our first drinks, prepared just the way we liked them. When he got sick, he rarely left his apartment on Dolores Street; I visited and saw how much losing his looks had shaken and shamed him. Eventually, he stopped letting me in, so I left care packages outside the door. No one ever informed me of his death: I still wonder if he had any sort of memorial service.

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What globalizing barter does is allow us to bring our own stories and passions to the problems facing the world. If we all live in a global village, why shouldn't this village have its own co-op? As the success of microcredit has shown, empowering the poor, and especially women, can reverse downward economic trends and build stable, healthy communities.

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Getting Started Locally

If you're thinking about starting your own local barter exchange, here are some common mistakes to watch out for.

You Both Gotta Want It. When Barter Lady's art for drugs program started to become successful, a Big Pharma company that shall remain nameless wanted to

participate by swapping a large shipment of HIV drugs for a monumental Shona sculpture for display in their corporate lobby—for which there would be a well-publicized ribbon-cutting ceremony, of course. I visited the headquarters, photographed the space where they wanted the piece to go, and showed one of their executives some options from a portfolio. After we settled on a piece, he told me the names and amounts of the drugs he had available. He was promising truckloads of the stuff, but they were all outmoded regimens that we'd already stopped accepting from individual barterers. When I told him which current treatments I wanted, the quantity he was willing to let go of became much smaller. Eventually, we worked out a deal that was much closer to the original quantity.

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What's It Worth? When you're first getting started, barter products or services that you already know well. It's better to start small and become known as a reliable source of a single type of commodity: in my neighborhood, everybody trusted me to do their books but nobody was going to hire me to sing at their wedding. And if you're thinking about branching out into something you don't have deep experience with, make sure you involve someone who does. If you're setting up a food co-op, enlist the help of a sympathetic farmer or grocer. We find that mid-level managers at local supermarkets can be great assets: they have the expertise you need to establish reliable value rates, but they don't make enough money that you have to worry about them "siding with the competition."

Deferred Payments. One of the biggest challenges in setting up a barter business is dealing with deferred payments. At first, you'll be inclined to allow deals to be made on a handshake. This is only natural; part of the appeal of barter is that it builds a sense of

community and trust among the participants. But it just takes one welcher to sabotage your fledgling co-op's reputation. So start off on the right foot: create an exchange ledger that records the names and contact information of both parties, notes the date of the deal, and specifies a date by which services will be rendered. Of course, folks will soon start planning exchanges with each other that they don't run by you: but if those deals go sour, they won't reflect poorly on your co-op; in fact, they will only underscore the value of your role as a middleman.

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Storage Addiction. If you're going to barter, you need a place to store the goods you intend to trade and receive. This might seem obvious, but the point was totally lost on me until I found myself unable to move around in my two-bedroom apartment in Oakland. Every inch of my wall space was covered in framed paintings and drawings; I've got smaller sculptures lining the baseboards of every room, and larger ones parked among the furniture. I loved living among my art like this, but the time came when I needed to expand into a storage rental unit. I started out with one 10 x 15 unit and now have three filled to capacity. And these are personal items only—my business has graduated to acres of warehouse space in Richmond.

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Barter versus Gifting. I have learned the hard way to keep separate my gift and barter relationships. I don't barter with family, and I don't give gifts to members of my local co-op: mixing the two can cause hurt feelings, or even legal threats, on both sides.

When I was growing up, the farmers didn't have a problem mixing barter with gifting. If you left a bushel of cherries on your neighbors' porch at harvest time, you knew that you'd soon find a bush of their peaches on your own stoop. If you helped a friend pump out a flooded basement, you knew you could call on him to help raise a new

roof over your new garage. If you had people over for dinner, you expected to be invited to their home in return. Nobody was keeping a formal barter ledger, but folks knew the rules, and people who didn't "return favors" would find themselves quickly left out of the loop.

— Sad to say, during my lifetime the spirit of giving in my old neighborhood has vanished. That local "gift economy" only succeeded for as long as it did because the community was small and stable, with families that had known each other for generations and had long memories. When the nouveau riche types arrived, they were drawn to the romance of the small town culture, but they didn't understand that everything we did for them was *quid pro quo*: they just thought, "Aren't these simple country folk so generous and nice!"

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The Global Sisterhood

I am proud to be part of an emerging "global sisterhood" of successful women who are focusing their philanthropic efforts on women in developing nations. Now, I have nothing against men, as any viewer will tell you who has seen me host professional athletes on my show and squeeze their massive biceps admiringly. But empowering women is critical to any country's effort to raise its standard of living. To put it crassly, women are a huge resource that is being wasted when they could be drivers of success for an entire economy.

— The statistics are starting to improve, but they're still appalling. Almost half the work done globally is in the informal economy, which pays lower (or not at all), requires

longer hours, and has no job security. In Africa, the informal sector is 80 percent of the economy, and 90 percent of those jobs are held by women. As if that weren't enough, women farmers produce about half of Africa's food yet are held back by laws and cultural attitudes from buying their own land, attaining their own credit, and adopting new technologies like seeds and fertilizers. All this while performing the housework, raising the children, hauling the water—you get the picture.

After a century of experimentation, international aid organizations have begun to figure out which types of help are effective. Decades ago, we realized that doling out money was doing no good: each handout created a brief frenzy of corruption without altering the power dynamics in the society. Nowadays most relief organizations target simple, cost-effective measures focused on women and families. They work to reduce maternal mortality and illiteracy and to provide the building blocks of a healthy community—housing, electricity, sanitation, water, and credit. We recognize that, for a society to improve, it has to create its own solutions and take pride in its own achievements.

That's where barter can play a key role. There are lots of worthy foreign aid efforts that fail because their backers come out of the financial markets and are looking for so-called “quick wins.” I won't name names, but I've seen Hollywood celebrities hopscotch across the African continent from cause to cause as quickly as they change spouses. Barter networks take time to build, and their core value is in relationships; their “capital” is tied up in tangible inventory, so it's not so likely to be diverted to a new hare-brained scheme overnight. Barter is also less vulnerable to the graft of male-dominated

political structures—corrupt officials tend to salivate over high-value commodities like oil and diamonds, not folk-art sculptures.

I'm often asked why I don't just restrict the activities of my tv show and foundation to women. The answer lies in another lesson that foreign aid organizations have learned over the years: excluding men from aid incites backlash against women. These days, there are some philanthropists who want to trumpet their programs as promoting gender equality on moral grounds; I empathize with their point of view, but I think they're making a dangerous mistake. Forcing a man to sign a form that says he "does no harm" to women is not likely to change his mind and habits if he's a wife-beater. I say let's get him to realize that his wife is as precious as the diamonds he mines.

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The Future of Global Barter

I started House of Stone Enterprises in 2006. Last year, we bartered an estimated \$1.4 billion in HIV medications and original Zimbabwe artwork. The question I ask myself every morning is, What's next? How else might we use barter to help the people of Africa find health, peace, and economic prosperity?

Of course, there are lots of Americans doing good work in Africa: the Gateses, Oprah, Bono, Alicia Keys, John Legend, the Clintons. And how they get that work done is none of my business. My aim is to sidestep politics and work directly with the African people. At a time when well-meaning humanitarian aid efforts can be co-opted by local governments or private enterprise because of the large sums of money involved, barter is

an approach that keeps everyone honest: you only trade for goods or services if you intend to use them yourself, otherwise they're worthless to you.

We started House of Stone with one volunteer collection station for the medications. It was a vacant storefront in the Castro that the landlord allowed me to rent at a reduced rate until his deal with a major clothing chain came through. For drugs representing a month's worth of treatment, we offered a hand-sized Shona sculpture; for "donations" supplying a year's worth of treatment, the client could receive either twelve small sculptures or a single large one. Initially, we could not guarantee specific animal shapes or human configurations, but our Barter Circle members embraced the element of surprise and set up a bulletin board for photos at the station that allowed them to trade a giraffe, say, for a woman nursing.

When we had enough drugs to fill an air freight container, I traveled with the shipment to Harare, where I had already cultivated connections with various sources of local art. I recruited the help of a respected woman elder, Akudzwe Mwoyo, to gather the items on a schoolyard of red dirt on the outskirts of the city. Pickup trucks as rusted and clap-trap as any you'll see in the Central Valley pulled up with loose bales of Msasa leaves: these would serve as our bubble wrap. We spent an afternoon carefully packing the pieces, with the largest at the bottom and the smaller pieces on top. The airlines had given me a strict weight limit, so I allowed the women (and a few men) to fill the container only partway. As we entered each sculpture into the inventory, I wrote down the name of the artist and the person the medicine was intended for.

From this first "airlift," the program grew. We opened up collection stations in Los Angeles and San Diego, then around the United States. Akudzwe expanded her

network of stone smiths and started an apprenticeship program for young Zimbabweans. I spent three months in Harare with her niece, Tsitsi Twangerai, setting up a local co-op on the model of the one in my Oakland neighborhood: this was a critical development, because we could not get workers to devote themselves to making art full-time if our only currency was HIV drugs. To meet their needs for other treatments, we started a drug exchange with other humanitarian aid agencies. To meet their need for food, we helped women farmers—who struggle to survive in societies in which virtually all landowners are men—by beginning a campaign for donors to buy hectares and sign them over to women’s farming cooperatives.

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For our next project, we want to trade traditional Zimbabwean music for iPads. The introduction of cell phones on the African continent has already shown how powerful the new digital technologies can be in the hands of the poor. Cell phones allow migrant workers to send money back home; they also allow extended families dispersed by economic hardship and political persecution to pool their resources. Now we want Zimbabwe to follow the lead of developing nations like Thailand and Brazil by bringing education to children on digital devices. So I’m working with the Big Tech companies to trade shipments of cell phones and tablets for live performances by Zimbabwean artists at their industry events. Viewers of *Barter Lady* and customers of House of Stone can help sponsor the new program by downloading the music from our websites.

Sounds simple, doesn’t it? But so far we’ve encountered a whole lot of complications. Having multiple kinds of devices means that we need sophisticated technical support in school districts that are scattered across the veld. And the Zimbabwe music scene is hard to break into: it’s vibrant but turbulent. We have signed up some

successful bands from the different musical factions that incorporate traditional instruments into their essentially modern styles: *sungura*, *tuki*, *jit*, and *Bulawayo*, to name the most popular categories. But these genres are dominated by male pop stars whose followings constantly heckle each other at concerts. Several times now, artists who initially agreed to participate in our program have later refused to appear on the same album together. So we've taken a different approach by finding Zimbabwean women to record the more traditional forms of Shona music without the fusion of hip-hop, dancehall, or modern instruments.

What stands out about this music is the joy it expresses. Despite all of the hardships and oppression in their lives, the Zimbabweans are known for their sunny dispositions and their appreciation of life's simple pleasures. When you listen to this music, you can't help but smile and start tapping your foot—it is playful, cheerful, relentlessly upbeat. When we've had live performances in the *Barter Lady* studio in Culver City, the audience instantly stands and even the grip and boom operators—who usually act bored with everything—have to fight the urge to dance along. There's not a diva among these ladies: what comes across is how the music is a purely collaborative communal experience. That's something we celebrity-obsessed Americans hardly ever see, and I've had members of our studio audience tell me that these performances are a religious experience.

The Spirit of Barter

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I said at the outset that I wouldn't have my beautiful daughter, Sophie, if it weren't for barter. That might be overstatement: now that I have her, I cannot imagine that I would ever have given her up regardless of any hardships I might have faced. But that's easy to say now, in hindsight. As a scared single 26-year-old who just found out she was pregnant by a man who was definitely not husband material, in the era of *Roe v. Wade*, I had a choice to make, and it was the support of the local co-op and those who encouraged my Ledger Lady business that gave me the strength and confidence to take on single motherhood. Today, I see it as my role to provide that sense of communal support to others.

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