

# Barn Raising

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*Neighbours help build shelters against dire circumstances ...*

Remember the old barn raising happenings where the whole community sprung into action if a family was faced with an emergency? There was the gathering of supplies, the organizing of volunteers, the food brigade and the first aid tent.

Annie Lamott, in her book "Traveling Mercies", remembered this activity when she witnessed a tragedy that befell a family in the neighbourhood.

Their neighbour's daughter, Olivia, always had fragile health. Each cold or respiratory condition landed her in the hospital for a couple of weeks.

It wasn't until she was seven that the doctor diagnosed cystic fibrosis. Regularly, with this condition, the patient's lungs fill with a thick sludge that harbours infections. Twice a day these individuals have to be pounded between the shoulder blades for forty-five minutes to dislodge the mucus.

The routine of the affected household is turned up-side-down. With the added burden of the financial drain, parents can easily burn-out.

This is where the barn-raising imagery takes over. Others can help with the shopping, the cleansing, walking the dog, and the fund raising. Some are good at helping each of the parents find a time-out, though all try to hold back to insure they don't intrude on family privacy. And they help each other find ways to be with the family without trying to instill messages of false hope.

The network of barn builders grows: some offer to help with the physical gifts of caring. Others have the spiritual gifts that may encourage tears and the need to talk.

Just as the neighbours of old helped build barns to insure shelter against the harsh conditions, Lamott writes "We, their friends, all know the rains and the winds will come, and they will be cold... But we will be building this barn all along, and so there will always be shelter."

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*Printed in CRCN/CiRCLe M Newsletter Sept 2011*