Today, the term pack rat may be used generically to refer to any compulsive hoarder—human or otherwise—who collects a miscellany of items, but may have trouble managing them. However, a more specific kind of pack rat—the wood rat or trade rat—has long been of interest to ethnobiologists. I recently accompanied two Seri Indian women into the Sonoran Desert in order to see how their people historically robbed caches of food gathered by one pack rat (Neotoma albigula) on the Sonoran Desert coast of the Gulf of California.

As we came up to a mesquite tree situated along a desert wash, Angelia Torres and Maria Dolores Torres spotted a large mound of sticks and cholla cactus joints gathered by pack rats. The sisters assessed which sides of the two foot mound might have the most accessible entry ways, and then used hoes to lift portions of the midden up in order to expose chambers built below. When Angelita exposed one of the chambers, she discovered a skeleton of a coachwhip snake, which instantly reminded her of the many reptiles (in addition to pack rats themselves) which the Seri harvest from these middens to eat (Nabhan 2003). But the main harvest from these middens was not the meat of reptiles or mammals, but the edible pods and seeds of legumes and the dried fruit of columnar cacti. These, Angelita explained, could be harvested from the middens long after they were otherwise unavailable from the natural vegetation of the area, so that they offered food to the Seri well into the winter and spring (Felger and Moser 1985).

Each chamber in the middens that they opened had a different assortment of plant foods in it, or served as a hibernaculum for a different set of animals. It was like taking cross-sections of structures in a wholesale granary operation in the Great Plains, where one silo might hold flour corn, another, the grains of wheat, and still another, a heap of Great Northern beans. As I stood watching bit after bit of natural history data reveal itself as the midden chambers were day-lighted, I thought about another kind of silo—the ones which give academia its reputation as a bunch of unconnected and disjointed ivory towers (Clery 2006).

Over the last three decades, many academic disciplines are “silied” off in a way that keeps their insights from informing or being informed by other disciplines, or for that matter, from informing and being informed by humankind in all it diverse manifestations. But ethnobiology has never been stuck in a single silo. It has always served as a bridge between disciplines just as it has reminded us of the larger bridges or richer interactions between humans and other species, and those between cultures. As ethnobiologists, we might claim interdiscipli-