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Chimney sweep offers Zen-like system

By Lisa Gervais

Many Haliburton County homeowners know Ian Myers. The owner of Myers Chimney has been in countless houses for more than two decades, inspecting and maintaining chimneys and solid-fuel systems. What many may not know is that Myers is a former Buddhist monk who has just written a book titled *Zen and the Art of Chimney Sweeping: the Discipline of Inquiry*.

In an interview with *The Highlander*, Myers is asked about the 1974 book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and said what he has penned is very different. Robert M. Pirsig's tome is a fictionalized autobiography of a 17-day journey on a Honda CB77 motorcycle from Minnesota to Northern California in 1968 punctuated by numerous philosophical discussions.

Myers said it was only after penning his 96-page book that he gave it the Zen-related title; realizing it contained Zen principles but, "I didn't even consciously do that."

In his 30s, he was ordained a Buddhist monk in a Korean temple. But, for a variety of reasons, he did not find it fulfilling. He moved to the County of Haliburton to begin a business he said he has a natural inclination for.

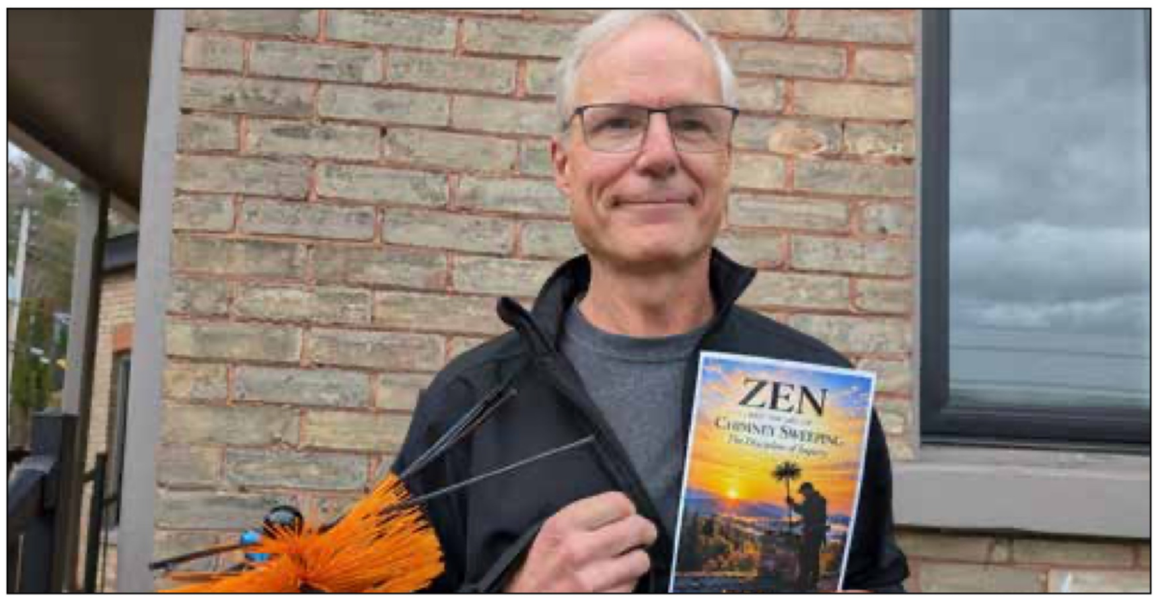
In the book, Myers explains that despite its title, it's not a book about how to sweep a chimney, either, but about a system that could apply to any profession.

"The system can be summed up, as an ever, self-improving system of documenting and communication with all relevant stakeholders (in this case, homeowners, insurers, municipal authorities etc.,) writing your report (in this case a sweep report) as though others will genuinely benefit and find guidance from what you are offering. If that is the intention of a person creating a document, then, over time, the notations improve exponentially and professionalism naturally grows within the practitioner, going on record naturally cultivates trustworthiness.

"Chimney sweeping is simply where the questions found me," he said, adding the queries "belong to anyone whose work asks them to observe carefully, exercise judgment, accept responsibility, preserve knowledge, and leave their profession a little wiser than they found it."

Myers said during his 20-plus year career, "another kind of education was taking place. The work itself was teaching me." He further observed that "some individuals accumulated years. Others accumulated understanding" and the difference fascinated him. The book's style is "as though we're walking together and we're having a conversation."

He hopes to share the book with stakeholders, such as the insurance industry. The National Chimney Sweep Guild (NCSG) will be publishing it in their International 'Sweeping' magazine (The Journal of Chimney and Venting Technology), one chapter per month, in digital and print formats circulated to its many American certified chimney sweeps. The NCSG also has a sharing agreement with WETT (Wood Energy Technology Transfer) Inc. in Canada to distribute their magazine to all Canadian WETT certified members.



Ian Myers with a copy of *Zen and the Art of Chimney Sweeping: the Discipline of Inquiry. Photo by Lisa Gervais.*

"I really think it could teach people how to reflect, focus, and the importance of being in the moment, organizing your thoughts and paying attention to the little things and identifying patterns…"

Reflecting on his time as a monk, Myers said he is bringing his learnings back to improve his industry.

"My Zen master used to always say 'cultivate unknowing mind' and… when the chatter is gone, you interact with things differently, you see things differently, you're not just looking, but you're seeing. What follows is relationships. You start to recognize the patterns in relationships… whether it's mechanical, social patterns, you just get the benefit of that. You don't have to attack it by 'oh, I'm going to practice Zen.' You just have to think, 'I need to clear my mind. I need to sort this out. I've got to figure this out.' I literally wrote it to explain the philosophical underpinnings of my system, which was based upon 20 years of doing the work. And then I wrote this thing and I thought 'this is Zen'."