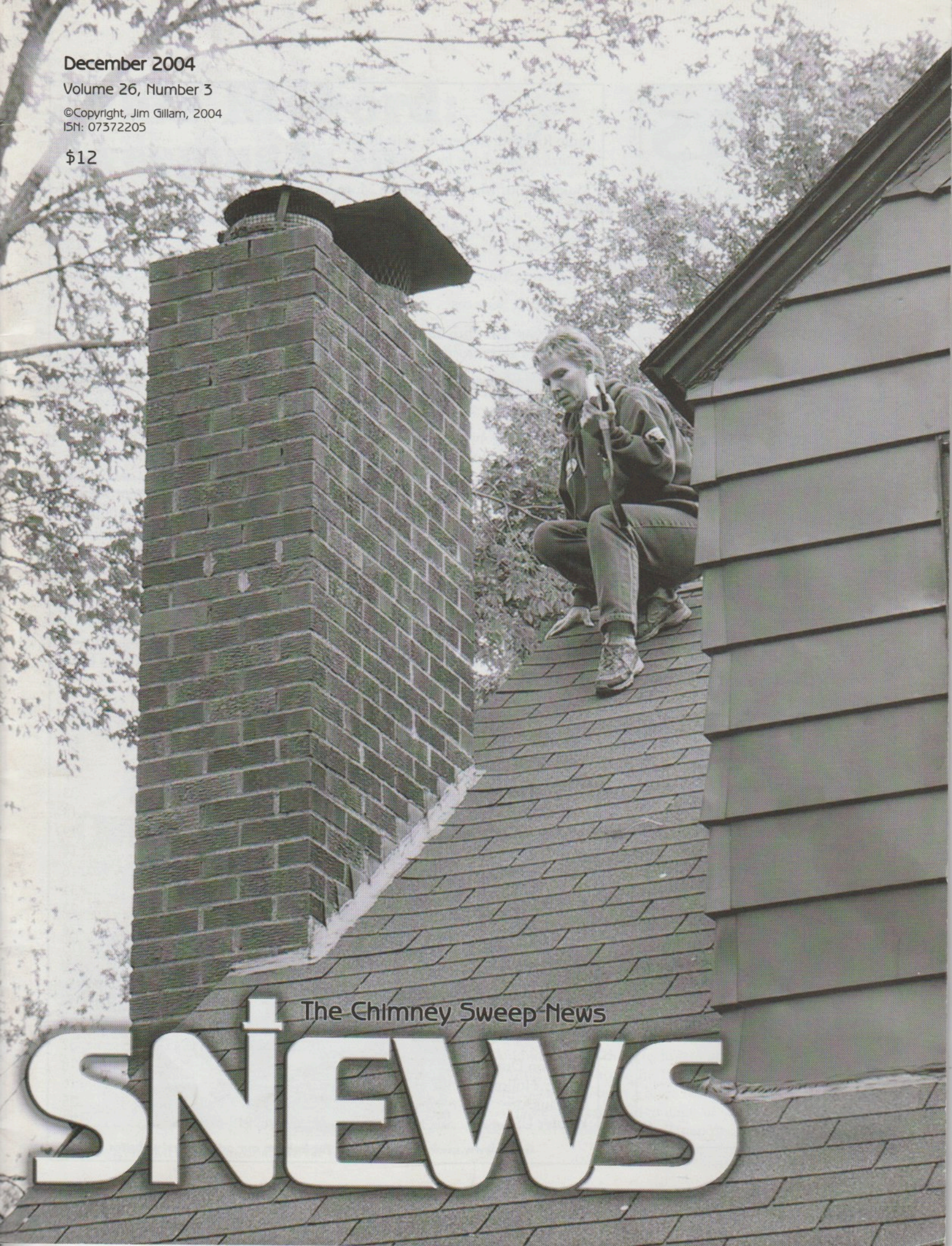


December 2004

Volume 26, Number 3

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ISSN: 07372205

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The Chimney Sweep News

SNEWS

Janie Rickord: Sweeping is in the Family

Article and photos by Jim Gillam

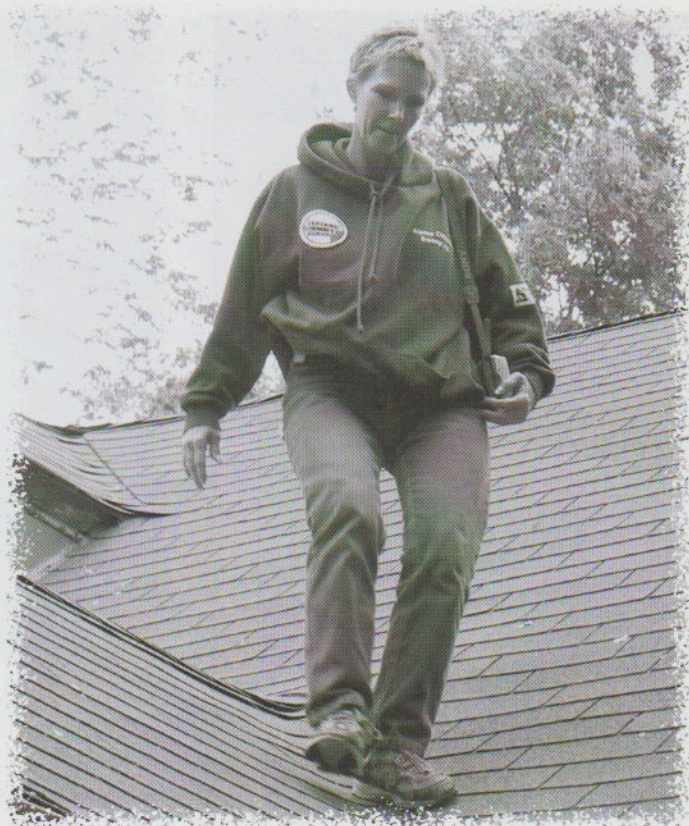
When Janie Rickord, who operates Alpine Chimney Sweep in Des Moines, Iowa, thought about what she could do to make a living after a divorce, chimney sweeping didn't immediately come to mind. But with her father and brother already in the business, each with his own company, examples of sooty self-reliance were close at hand.

"I started cleaning houses for a living," she recalls. Meanwhile, Janie's father, Raymond Fraser, who operates Alpine Chimney Sweep in Omaha, Nebraska (120 miles west) invited her to help him on the weekends.

"I just loved it," she says. "He taught me quite a lot." As she learned the basics of the chimney sweep trade working with her father, "he said I should get certified.

"So I started studying." She says, "For about six months, NFPA 211 was my night time reading. I got certified, and then my dad said, 'Now, you're ready to start your own company.'"

Although she was tired of housecleaning, she was hesitant to start a chimney business because her brother, David,



Janie Rickord of Alpine Chimney Sweep descends the roof after checking a chimney in Des Moines, Iowa.

was already operating Four Seasons Chimney Sweep in the Des Moines area. "He was not happy about this at all!" she exclaims.

In 1995 Janie went ahead and Dave eventually grew to accept Janie's presence in the Des Moines chimney sweep market. "Now we work together quite a bit," Janie says.

Getting Educated

"I had some fear about being a woman in this business," she acknowledges. "Being a woman, I felt like I had to know what I was talking about. When I first started sweeping, I would look at a bad chimney but I couldn't repair it, because I didn't know how. I started looking at what it would take to do it ALL right. That's when I started with education. I got with the people who have doing it for a long time to insure that."

She credits Copperfield Chimney Supply as being instrumental in her education. "Russ Dimmitt and Brian Reid actually came to Des Moines and did a hands-on chimney liner with me.

"From that point on, I've been pretty loyal to Copperfield because of that," Janie testifies. "They've been wonderful with their technical support, and they've done relining workshops in Fairfield. Tom Urban and the ChimScan have been a huge help in our business, too."

Janie also takes advantage of the courses offered at the CSIA Tech Center near Indianapolis, which is within a day's drive.



Employee Kerry McEnroe unloads a RoVac from the van.

EDITOR'S CORNER

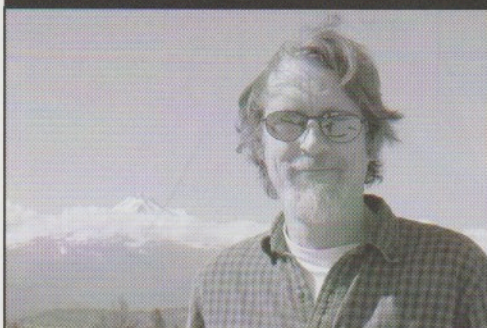


photo by Barbara Gillam

Dear Readers,

In this issue we welcome Dale Howard back to the pages of *SNEWS*. Dale, a sweep who founded Westminster Chimney Supply, wrote frequently for the magazine in the late 80s – early 90s. He then sold the supply business and went on to further adventures including world travel and marketing August West Systems. Dale is now an independent marketing consultant affiliated with Y2 Marketing (a firm co-founded by Richard Harshaw, who will be the keynote speaker at the National Chimney Sweep Guild convention).

In a way it's like Dale never left, because we've re-run a couple of his old articles recently, including, on the recommendation of Jim Collar (London Aire Services, Forest Lake, MN), "Boost Your Standard of Living with Smart Pricing" in the October issue.

His introduction to marketing begins on page 12, and we look forward to more of Dale's marketing insights in future issues.

As you sum up your accounts at the end of the year, it is a good opportunity to evaluate your company's performance. Michael Stone of Construction Programs and Results walks you through such an evaluation, beginning on page 21.

Year end also provides an opportunity to set your goals for the next year. John Wisniewski (Let There Be Light Chimney Sweep, West Chester, PA) tells how setting his sights high has helped him accomplish extraordinary things.

Thanks Dale, Michael and John!

We're honored to bring you these articles, and hope they help you to realize your goals in business!

Thank you, readers, advertisers, the folks at Graphic Press, Jen who designs the magazine and makes it attractive to read, the Postal Service people who deliver it to you, and especially my partner Harriet, for making it all possible.

May you thrive in 2005!

Chimney Jim



Janie scanning the flue with a Chim-Scan.

"I want to take Kerry and me both to a F.I.R.E. investigating class and a D & D [CSIA's Diagnosis and Documentation course]," Janie says. "One of those will be our next venture.

"By going to all this stuff it keeps your level of consciousness up," she reasons, "and your ethics. That's so important. So that's what I try to instill in these guys, too. You can't skip a smoke shelf!"

Installation

Alpine began installing stoves two years ago. "That was another little hurdle!" she exclaims. "We've been putting in a lot of stoves – we

are the top seller of Regency woodstoves in Iowa!"

She is selling woodstoves exclusively. "We've really stayed away from gas because everybody is doing it. I've still got so much to learn about the wood," she acknowledges. "I'll just hang in there with the wood."

Alpine has a reciprocal arrangement with a several local fireplace shops. "They will recommend us for wood and we recommend them for gas," she says, "so it works really well."

It Runs in the Family

Janie's son, Jake, is also a chimney sweep, in partnership with Matt



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Wright as Alpine Chimney Sweep in Taos, New Mexico. And two of Janie's nieces are in the chimney business in Denver, Colorado.

"Jake worked with me since he was 15," Janie says. "He's one of those kids who can look at something and know how to fix it. He must get that from his dad, who was an inventor.

"I used to call Jake when I was first starting out," she continues, "if I couldn't figure out how a damper or something went back together. He'd come over and just know it, right now! He just had it.

"He didn't really want to chimney sweep, though. But one of his friends, Matt Wright, did. He got certified with me and then went to live with my son in the mountains in New Mexico."

Jake was working there as a cook while building a straw-bale house on a small piece of property he had purchased. He was struggling. Janie says, "I did the same thing with him that my dad did with me. I said, 'you know how to chimney sweep!' So that's what he's doing."

Alpine 1, 2, 3

"We call it Alpine 1, 2, and 3," Janie laughs. "That's fun. My son will call me on the Nextel phone and say, 'This is Alpine 3 calling Alpine 2. Are you over at Alpine 1?'" Janie and her brother, Dave, both frequently go to Omaha to help with their parents' business.

"My dad is 80," Janie says. "He still can get on roofs. He still gets out there every day."

Janie's parents started their chimney sweep business in 1986 after he was terminated from his insurance position just prior to his retirement date.

"When they first started their business," she continues, "my mom did telemarketing – cold calling. They still have most of those customers today. She still gets on that phone every day from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. They have a certified retired fire captain who does most of their sweeps. She'll get him six jobs a day, every day."

Animals

On a job with her dad recently, Janie says, "You could smell a dead

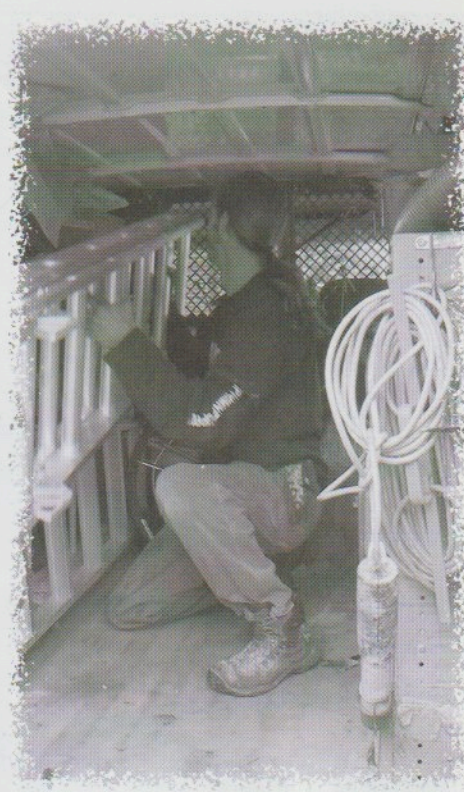
animal in there. This is where the girl in me comes out! I took the damper off and said, 'OK, Dad, get over here!' He has no problem reaching in there to grab a dead maggot infested squirrel. I can do it. I just don't prefer to if somebody else is in the room," she laughs.

Reports and Proposals

Janie writes proposals for her parents' company as well as her own. "I bought the F.I.R.E. program last year," she says. "It's much easier than writing everything out by hand, and there was always the fear of leaving something out, like disclaimers."

Attending to Business

Janie acknowledges that it is difficult to juggle going out on her own jobs, working with her father in Omaha, and attending to business in the office. "The business part of my business is the hardest part for me," she says. "I would rather be knee-deep in creosote than sit in the office. It just drives me crazy!



Kerry loading the ladder back into the van.

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Employee Chad Kent removing leaves from a gutter.



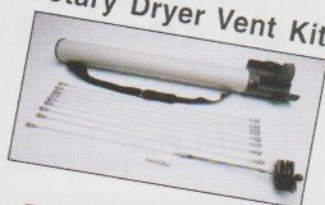
Kerry sweeping a fireplace.

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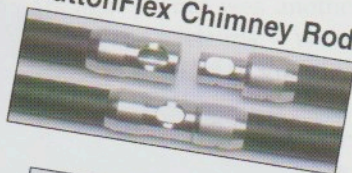
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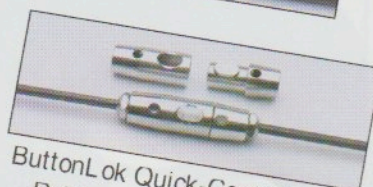
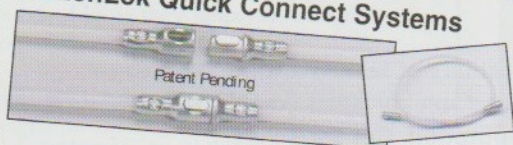


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"I have a hard time letting go," she acknowledges. "My employees can verify that. I want to make sure that it is swept behind the damper. Then I get home at night and say, 'Oh, I've still got a lot to do!'"

Employees

Janie currently has one steady employee, Kerry McEnroe, and one occasional employee, Chad Kent. Kerry, 21, has been working with Janie for about three years. "I've been certified for two years," he says. "Within the last year, since we took the Ahrens Masonry course in South Dakota, I've started doing rebuilds and bricklaying."

Kerry has attended two NCSG conventions with Janie. He enjoys meeting his colleagues from around the country. "They get together, drink beer and talk chimneys," Janie observes. "I can see in him, after we go to a convention, how his enthusiasm picks up from being with other sweeps his age. They keep in contact with their Nextel phones."

"I can beep them up any time," Kerry smiles.

Chad, 22, has worked with Janie off and on for about five years, between stints in the Army and college.

"These guys are friends of my son," Janie says. "These young kids work really hard. I pay them well. I think that's important. If you pay them well, you can expect good work."

"They play hard so you have to be conscious of that," she adds. "The problem with hiring young guys is that Friday night still means something to them. Even if you plan to have them work on Saturday, they might be present but they are not really there. It's not worth it! So on Saturdays I work alone."

At the Customers' House

Following up on a referral from her brother, Janie and the Alpine crew arrive for a scan. They find a chimney with terra cotta liner sections present



Janie points out problems with the interior of the flue to her customers as she scans.

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at the top and bottom, but none in between. Janie's brother, David, had reported finding a pile of liner shards on the smoke shelf when he swept the chimney a couple of weeks earlier.

"Give us some options as to where we go from here," demands the customer husband.

"You have quite a few options," Janie replies. "Obviously, I recommend that you do not use the fireplace as it is. You can stick with wood or you can go with gas."

"My husband would like to do that," the wife says. "But I just love the wood fire. I'd hate to give that up."

"And," the husband adds, "I have a whole barn full of wood!"

"I can say with certainty that this chimney should be relined," Janie declares. "I don't know what caused those tiles to be missing. You said you heard popping."

"Yes, we heard the popping," the husband confirms. "It was shortly after we lit the fire. I had a bunch of junk – pine – I wanted to get rid of. I lit the fire and it filled the firebox very quickly."

"And then broken tiles were found in the chimney," Janie reiterates. "That indicates that possibly something heated the tiles too fast."

"Heated them too fast?" the husband repeats in query.

"Let me explain," Janie says. "This chimney is on a north-facing wall. Therefore the tile liner is cold. When you ignite a load of pine in there, it gets very hot quickly. It's like putting a freezing cold glass under hot water. POP!"

"I see," says the wife.

"That's not actually what we would call a chimney fire," Janie continues. "This may have been an accidental cracking of the tiles. A chimney fire is really when the creosote residue inside a chimney catches fire. Creosote is a byproduct of wood smoke."

"It's a good thing we didn't keep burning it," the husband congratulates himself.

"That wouldn't have been a good idea," Janie agrees, as she explains the basics of chimney construction to the couple.

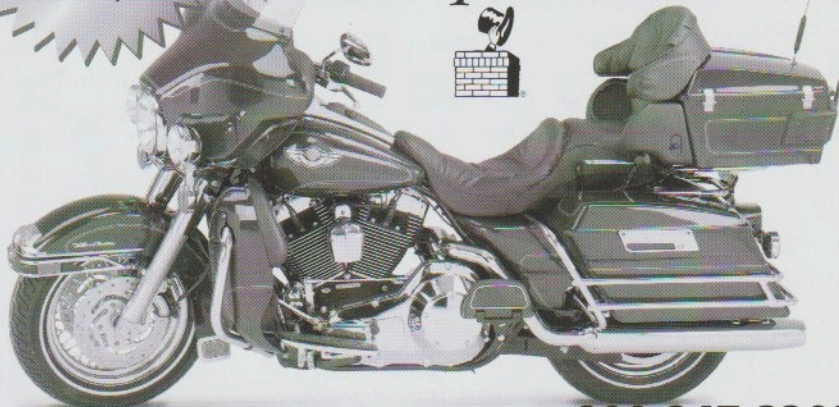
"This house was built in 1915," the wife notes. "We've been here sixteen years and we've used the fireplace a lot!" she exclaims.

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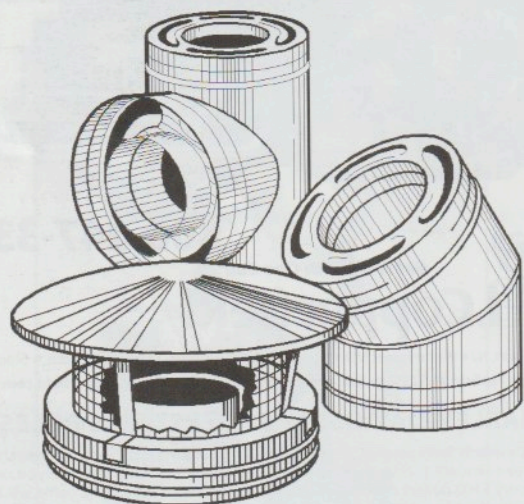
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Janie discusses options with her customer, after confirming that much of the flue liner is missing from his chimney. The customer seems warm to the idea of installing a woodburning fireplace insert with a 6" stainless steel chimney liner.



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Janie promises to send them a report detailing the condition of the chimney. She also discusses the options of relining the chimney with stainless steel for fireplace use or installing a fireplace insert and the appropriate stainless steel liner. The couple seem warm to the idea of a fireplace insert.

Cooperation

Janie says the certified sweeps in the Des Moines area help each other whenever they can. When working in Omaha recently she was contacted by a contractor she frequently works with in Des Moines who wanted an immediate inspection. She asked Dan Hughes and Renee Espeland of Chimney Cricket Family Chimney Sweeps to cover it, which they gladly did. "Yesterday we needed a 36-foot ladder. I called Larry Siegel (ChimChimeree Chimney Sweeps), who loaned me his ladder.

"It's nice having that rapport with the other sweeps," Janie says gratefully.

The Other Half

Janie lives with her husband, Michael. Along with the chimney sweep business they also own a sports marketing company. "I don't do much on that part of it," Janie acknowledges. "He doesn't do much on this.

"Michael publishes several local sports magazines including *The Iowa Sportsman*, *Assembly*, and *The Iowa Sports Connection*."

Janie has six children, ranging in ages from 32 to 10.

Janie is happy to be a chimney sweep. "I never saw myself doing this," she says, "but I love this business. It's a great business for me."



Kerry and Chad get ready to drive to the next job.