

Backyard igloo provides positive shelter in Carnarvon

by SUE TIFFIN
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

To anyone looking into Kim Switzer's backyard last week, they might have seen what looked to be Switzer playing with her son, Memphis.

But despite the singing, the dancing, the laughter, and the pure joy on their faces, the pair were actually working; tromping around in snowshoes in a very particular way to create a 12-foot-wide flat circle in the snow that would serve as the starting point for a backyard igloo.

The joy was much needed for Switzer, who thrives when she is outside but has found it difficult to do so this winter in the way she needs for optimum mental health.

"For me, it's pure joy," she said. "I love nature, it's rejuvenating for me. It's uplifting."

Being a single mom of three, homeschooling her kids, experiencing the death of a parent and the loss of a business, all while living through the pandemic and experiencing a lack of winter camping left Switzer feeling discouraged.

"My whole winter has been [hard], I haven't been out, I haven't been out anywhere," she said.

Then, the kindness of a stranger and the connection made available through social media turned Switzer's winter around.

An avid outdoorsperson herself, she follows like-minded people on social media for ideas, inspiration and friendship. When she saw Martin Pine, who is from Huntsville, share about igloos he was making, she quickly sent him a message asking if he might come to her house and build one in her yard.

"The next thing I know, I get a message in my inbox that says, 'you're like the third person who's asked me about building an igloo in their yard, and you're the only one that's actually close enough that could actually make it possible,'" she said.

Switzer was exuberant with excitement, in the manner, she said, of "a little kid in a candy shop."

"And I still am," she said, the week after the igloo was built.

After she and Memphis had created the starting point in the yard for the igloo, Pine visited the backyard and helped to teach Switzer the technique he has perfected using a contraption called, fittingly, an Icebox Igloo Tool.

"He pops open this little itty, bitty, tiny, square box that I would say is definitely less than six inches thick, and maybe a foot wide by 18 inches long," she said. "It folds all up and it's meant to strap on your back so you can take it anywhere."

With the Icebox Igloo Tool, Switzer said Pine can generally build an igloo in about four or five hours but she said it took them more time as she was asking questions and learn-



Kim Switzer of Carnarvon shows the inside of the igloo, which she will use to find peace and a space to write./DARREN LUM Staff

ing the process of packing the snow, following the angle guide and creating an igloo that can hold the weight of a person leaning against it.

"There were plenty of times where he was like, 'you're so concentrated,'" she said. "I was just soaking it all in. I learned so much about snow, and even going around the circle I learned how snow changes state ever so slightly. In the shade, it packs this way, but as you come around and you're in the sun, it becomes a little more wet, and a little bit more sticky ... How different snow packs and moves and blends, it's pretty wild, actually."

When it was finished, Switzer said she was able to get her much-needed outdoor time, sleeping overnight in the igloo, spending time in it with her ukulele, even eating a take-out meal from the Mill Pond restaurant in the shelter.

Pine's unmonetized YouTube channel has almost 10,000 subscribers and his instructional videos of canoe camping,

winter camping, bushcraft, meal preparation and igloo construction have accumulated thousands of views.

"I love backcountry camping and I have always lamented that so few people avail themselves of the opportunities we have here in Ontario for getting out into nature and camping in the backcountry," he told the *Times*. "I determined many years ago that what keeps people from camping in the backcountry – as opposed to say, car camping in a serviced site in a park – is a simple lack of practical knowledge about how to go about [it]."

He shares his knowledge online and was happy to help Switzer learn how to make her own igloo in her backyard – for the price of a cup of coffee or two.

"As a boy, growing up in rural Quebec, I loved making and camping in snow shelters called quinzhees, which is essentially a large pile of shovelled snow which one then hollows out to resemble a crude igloo-like shelter," said Pine.

Pine said he knew that igloos were sturdier shelters that could remain standing longer and would not result in the builder getting soaked in their creation.

"But the Inuit built their igloos out of a type of snow that is not found in this part of the country, namely hard-sintered, wind-packed snow, which can then be shaped during the building process."

Pine purchased the Icebox Igloo Tool, an invention created by an American mountaineer in Colorado, "Igloo Ed," that allows him to make snow bricks regardless of the snow conditions.

While Switzer's igloo has suffered in recent weather conditions, she sees the resulting hole in the top of the igloo as an opportunity – one to provide a chance to look up at the stars, and also, to learn about how to fix the problem in her own backyard igloo as experience for if she builds one at another time in backcountry.

"I've got to learn, and you learn from trial and error, mistakes, whatever it might be," she said. "It's been four or five days of just an abundance of information."

The igloo in the backyard of her Carnarvon home has lifted her spirits tremendously.

"This is the highlight of my winter," said Switzer. "That right there made my entire winter."

For more information, visit Pine's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/PineMartyn>.



Chinook 30

What **Blaze King**
Wood Stove
owners already know ...

The most efficient wood stove in the world! Made in Canada technology perfected since 1977

Burn a third less wood than a new conventional high efficiency wood stove.

Guaranteed overnight burn

Up to 40 hour burn time King model 81% efficiency
No highs or lows, consistent heat - you control the temperature
Less splitting, less stacking, less carrying wood and less ash
Why be a servant to your wood stove?



Ashford

Make Your Cottage a Home
with **Blaze King Comfort**
www.blazeking.ca

Contact your local dealer:
MYERS CHIMNEY
myerschimney@hotmail.com
www.myerschimney.com



Sirocco 30



King Ultra



Follow us

www.facebook.com/MindenTimes