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He puts firefighting experience to work cleaning chimneys

By CAROLINE PRICE

He wears a swallowtail coat and a high top hat, both in basic black. If you meet him, shake his hand. Invite him to your wedding. Or give him a job. Paul Glass is a chimney sweep.

He is also a Livonia fireman named Paul Biskner. His sweep's name is borrowed from Joseph Glass, who invented special chimney cleaning brushes in the days when sweeps were commonplace.

Biskner is new to a profession as old as fireplaces and almost obsolete. He thinks sweeps will be making a comeback because people are using their fireplaces more often to offset heating costs.

He learned the trade from August Miller, one of the few sweeps in the country. "When I first became interested in being a sweep, I started looking around for information. There's almost nothing in the library but a few quotes from literature."

I dug around a little more and found an old pamphlet that told about the climbing boys in England."

Climbing boys were the young children who were used in the 19th century to clean out chimneys by crawling down inside them.

"It took about 100 years to abolish the practice. They used geese for awhile, lowering them down the chimney on a rope and letting them flap their wings."

"But people said it was inhumane, so they went back to using kids again. I guess orphans weren't worth much."

Chimney sweeps belong to a profession steeped with folklore. As tradition has it, luck will be with you if you shake the hand of a sweep, and your marriage will be blessed if you invite one to your wedding. (Biskner says he has attended a wedding in his sweep's outfit.)

Sweeps have a few superstitions of their own. "One sweep I know says he never goes up on a roof without his top hat," Biskner says.

THE PROCESS of chimney cleaning is much the same as it was 100 years ago. "If I clean it from the inside, I take the grate out of the fireplace and vacuum out the soot. Then I check the damper, remove it, and put the brush up the chimney. My brushes are larger than the flue, so they scrape off all the soot and creosote that accumulates."

If Biskner cleans the chimney from the roof, he clips a 20-pound weight on the brush and forces it down the flue. "It's easier to clean it from the inside," he charges \$40 to clean a fireplace chimney, and \$30 to clean an oil-burning furnace chimney.

A chimney should be cleaned every few years if a fireplace is used frequently. Otherwise, the creosote and soot that accumulates can cause a fire.

Creosote is dangerous stuff. It's very flammable. And there's no way you can get a fire in a chimney out. It plays havoc with mortar and brick."

Biskner says the five years he has



Paul Glass—a new face in an old profession.

worked as a Livonia firefighter have helped in his latest endeavor. "It doesn't hurt to have fire science knowledge."

He thinks chimney sweeping will become a profitable profession. "I think last winter was the first time people were really using their fireplaces. This winter people are going to realize that they will need the chimneys cleaned."

Biskner's wife, Barbara, is all for his new job. "It may be a little dangerous when he gets up on the roof, but I worry more about him being a firefighter," she says.

The couple also has a daughter named Deanna and a pet skunk named Stinky.

As the song goes, "Chim-chim-a-nee, chim-chim-a-nee, chim-chim-a-nee, a sweep is as lucky as lucky can be."

Biskner will agree.

Madar, Collins Equality Day speakers

Coalition of Labor Union Women president Olga Madar and state legislator Barbara Rose Collins are two of the speakers to be featured at the fourth annual Women's Equality Day on the Kern Block, Aug. 26.

In addition to speakers, the all-day celebration with the 1977 theme: "Women on the Move—Equality Now!" will include displays, entertainment, a rally, a parade and booths from which participants will distribute literature and other information of interest to women.

Co-chairwomen for the 1977 Women's Equality Day celebration are Alma Stallworth, deputy director of the Detroit Historical Museum, and Christine E. Burk of the Bank of the Commonwealth.

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