



Lone Wolf Theatre Company

Resources

More resources section will be added over time. Our archives will include links, PDF articles, photos, and more samples of Mr. Thorson's writing.

Lone Wolf Howl: SEEKING SHELTER FROM THE STORM

(Originally published in [Cochrane Times](#): March 9, 2005)

Cochrane Times — On the last Tuesday of February, I witnessed something that I'd never seen before and may never see again: I watched an Inuit man build an igloo. In Iqaluit for a week, I was presenting a seminar on arts integration for the first ever Nunavut teachers' conference, and signed up on my free day for the traditional igloo-building workshop.

It was a gorgeous -20° C with no wind and clear skies... a godsend in the February arctic (or rather a Sednasend, for those who know their Inuit mythology).

Speaking in Inuktitut, Joshua (our workshop leader) walked us through the process as he carved out the first block of snow (always the hardest one) that would serve as the 'cornerstone' for this corner-less, stone-less building.

An igloo is built from the inside out, cutting your blocks from the floor as you go, lifting the heavy snow stones above your head until the sky is blocked out entirely.

It took Joshua half the day to complete it, stopping regularly to explain, answer questions, and to give all of us numerous opportunities to try our hand. I asked the translator how long it would take him if he were on his own. 'A couple of hours' he said. 'Three men could do it in half an hour.'

He made it look simple. This is part of the artist's illusion: the greater the work, the easier it looks. But don't be fooled: igloo building is hard work.

It demands skill, strength, patience, and an innate sense of tradition. In short, it's an art form. The end result may be beautiful, but the motivation for building it is – traditionally speaking – one of survival.

A family shelter can be constructed in half an hour with the sole simplicity of a single tool. I made that observation to one of my fellow workshop participants, to which she responded 'yeah, but you also need snow.'

The snow goes without saying, I explained. If you weren't subjected to the harsh abundance of it, you'd have no need to build an igloo out of it.

Writing is that way. Words are like snowflakes... innocuous on their own, sometimes pretty, but gather enough of them together with a furious wind and you've got something that is simultaneously breathtaking and dangerously harmful.

The writer's job in all of this is simple: build something out of these words on behalf of the tribe.

Whether it's a two thousand-page novel or a two hundred-word letter to the editor, the end result may or may not be beautiful, but the motivation should be the same: tribal survival.

Reading the blizzard of writing lately in the newspapers about the same sex marriage debate is amounting to a whiteout. Worse, it's a black and whiteout.

The members of our tribe – be they elected MPs or '20-year-old college students' – are all taking a stab at the traditional art of igloo building. There's no shortage of snow, but there's a dearth of know-how, and we're ending up with a village of one-sided igloos.

A one-sided igloo – however well built – is the work of an idiot and a waste of snow. It's not only asinine, but laughable. No self-respecting Inuk hunter would be caught dead in it. However foolish they may appear, one-sided igloos (and here's where the analogy melts rapidly away) will never result in the promotion of hatred and intolerance nor aid in the denial of rights and privileges to the fellow members of our tribe. The dullest pencil is still a very sharp knife.

The conditions we are living in today are breathtakingly beautiful to some and threateningly harsh to others, but we are living in them together.

If you want to participate in creating our shelters, please choose your snow carefully, build from the inside out, and set the blocks just so. Keep in mind that it's not as easy as it looks and when you're done we will all have to live in whatever gets put up.

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HIGHLIGHTS

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