

Ladders and Light Fixtures

By Marilyn Reeves

Several years ago, Jim brought over a standard 5-step, lightweight aluminum ladder, the fifth step being the top, and too dangerous to stand on. The second step is as high as I go.

My kitchen came equipped with two light fixtures, one of which is a large, encased fluorescent. A couple of years ago it began blinking off and on intermittently, so I purchased a set of new bulbs and asked my neighbor if he would be so kind as to do the honors. Being a nice fellow, he said sure. So he got up on my ladder, fought with the wooden frame for a while and finally succeeded in changing the bulbs. The fixture stayed on for about three days before blinking out again.

Next I asked Eydie, knowing that she does odd jobs occasionally, and she did the same. Thank you, Eydie. The light stayed on this time for about four days.

Okay. Time to call my handyman, Larry. Over the years he has installed numerous items for me, including my bathroom sink, my microwave oven and my air conditioning units. Larry charges a little more, but he's the nicest guy in the world and reliably efficient. His diagnosis was that the fixture needed a new ballast, but seemed a bit disinclined to pursue the matter. Perhaps fluorescent lights are not his specialty. He recommended that I replace the entire fixture. After shopping around a bit, I found the cheapest replacement would be roughly \$400 ... not in my budget. So instead, I climbed up on my ladder and placed an old desk lamp on the top of my cupboard with the cord dangling down where I can plug it in next to my coffee pot. It's a crude solution, and if ever the president comes to visit I'll probably invest in a new fluorescent fixture. Until then, this arrangement will have to do.

My other kitchen light is a standard ceiling fixture designed by a demon. It features a shallow glass bowl supporting a decorative three-inch wide band of brass circling its outer perimeter.

When one of the bulbs burns out, I get out my trusty ladder, stand on the second step, brace my hip on the fourth step, and reach up overhead to remove the glass bowl. This requires both hands. My left hand has to hold the bowl while my right hand unscrews the ball-shaped thingy that holds the unit together. The first time I tried this, the outer brass ring separated from the bowl and slid down my left arm, dangling there like a giant shoulder bracelet. I finally solved that problem with the application of a little super glue!

Then it's back down the ladder to shake out the disgusting roasted miller parts, climb back up, replace the bulb and the bowl and, after several fumbling attempts, screw the little ball thingy back in and finally check to make sure it all holds together. Then I'm good to go for another few weeks. Until the other bulb burns out.

Meanwhile, the big fluorescent just sits there humming occasionally and putting out a sort of pale pinkish glow. But every few months it mysteriously comes back on all by itself, dazzling me

with light. I actually like it better when it stays off. I never liked fluorescent lighting much anyway.