

Ladders – Dangerous, Actually

By Nancy Mann

Standard farmer's and handyman's equipment? Washtubs, brooms, paintbrushes, rakes, nails, bucket, pails and a ladder.

A ladder is handy when wooing Rapunzel, when she has just washed and set her hair (with mousse) and doesn't respond to, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Let down your hair!" Or if you are a seasonal worker when Barnum and Bailey is in town, and your first job is to wash "Martha," Jumbo's many-ton cousin.

It's handy when you audition for a Laurel and Hardy remake (they moved pianos, too, remember?). I looked recently on a small ladder and saw many warnings – the first was "Do not paint over these warnings!"

Some included: "A painted ladder is slippery when wet." "Don't place ladder in bath tubs." "Do not use on quicksand." "Keep your navel between the rails." "Do not use ladders and binoculars at funerals." "Don't 'walk' with a ladder, or confuse it with stilts." "Don't use more than two electric burners on ladder's steps." "Do not use ladder to control animals of any type, such as lions or oxen."

It is illegal to walk under a ladder in Sterling, Colorado.

There is an entire school with courses in ladder safety. Upon graduation, one receives a helmet with a sign "Ladder Safety Trained" which would surely make many mothers proud. I once saw a mime, Marcel Marceau, bring props for a skit – an extra pair of boots, an umbrella, and swim trunks onto the stage. He pantomimed the other needed props – a beach ball, a book, eyeglasses, and scissors. He pantomimed a ladder, stepped on it and climbed up, hand over hand, rung by rung. I watched him in confidence; this ladder was probably much safer.