Tuesday, August 31, 2004 c:/wklyltr4.4wc35

**(**2004 NHN&WR letter/story #15)

**Spotlight on the Spiral Staircase**.

This month we are going to change a lightbulb.

There is a spotlight which illuminates a spiral staircase in the Jefferson log cabin. It was installed 13 years ago by Eric St John, a retired Westinghouse electrical engineer. It has since been ensconced in the topmost of three double glass shelves, homemade of course, which display a growing glass insulator collection. The light from the spot passes through shelves and colored insulators resulting in a soft diffused glow down the staircase. We will call it the ‘Spiral Spot’. It is black with recessed bulb, can be turned on/off from the first or second floor and is on circuit #18. When dust accumulation prohibits light reaching the bottom step, operation ‘Insulators to Dishwasher’ is performed.

Visitors to the Jefferson cabin increasingly resemble owners, deck and adirondack chairs; ... all are aging and graying. Now, aging graying people sometimes get up during the night to go to the bathroom. For those sleeping upstairs, the route to the one cabin bathroom is down the spiral staircase and through ‘Jason Land’. ‘Spiral Spot’s’ mission in life is to make this journey as safe as possible by staying on all night. The visitor at present is Charlie Bennett who arrived on a Sunday. Friday A.M. it was found that ‘Spiral Spot’ had expired. Ken tried to take out the old bulb. Unfortunately, his body did not fit the job requirements. Not being tall enough, he had to balance on the second step of ‘Shaky-Stepladder’. Then fingers were too short and stubby to turn the bulb which was recessed and a tight fit in the fixture. Maybe rubber gloves would provide more friction for the twisting pressured needed. Nope, that didn’t work either. Not to worry, ... Norm would be here by evening and in the meantime we’d get a new bulb or two.

Dinner was Charlie, Jason, Ken, Linda, Lucile, Norman and ‘Picked-up Takeout’ Mancini Pizza. Afterwards, Ken innocently opens the conversation.

*"Norm, can you change the "Spiral Spot" Bulb? I’m not tall enough to do it."*

*"Sure".*

Norm bounds up the stairs and reaches up to the bulb with no problem. Stalemate. He could not turn the bulb either. Understand, ... the fingers can not be put around the bulb. Pressure on the face is the only way to twist it out.

*"It won’t turn."*

(Don’t remember who said what from here on, but all contributed. All save Jason who didn’t care if the light worked or not.)

*"Maybe tongs would work."*

Tongs are tossed to Norm. Tongs wouldn’t fit between the bulb and the hood of "Spiral Spot". The situation was akin to having no room to slip a socket wrench over a nut. What would the right tool for the job be? A very small toilet plunger would be ideal. Wet that sucker up and slap it right on that cursed bulb. Just like sucking dents out of a pickup truck. Right, ... but we don’t have one. Norm surveys the scene in front of him. Speaking of socket wrenches, Norm is looking at a selection of glass ones. He starts finding an insulator which fits right into "Spiral Spot’s" hood. Success. He starts to push and rotate.

*"Is this spotlight on? I’m afraid I might bust the bulb."*

*"With a two-way switch how are you supposed to tell, up and down doesn’t indicate on or off.".*

*"I’ll check the circuit."*

*"Circuit breaker is on., but it can be turned off."*

*"Boy, I’m having to use a lot of pressure."*

*"There’s a rubber glove up there. Put the insulator inside the glove."*

*"What?"*

*"Inside the glove. You’ll have rubber to glass instead of glass to glass."*

*"OK, I’ll try it. I think it’s working. Yes, yes, ... it’s out!"*

*"Hooray!"*

*"Which of these bulbs is most like the old one."*

*"This one I think."*

Norm goes back upstairs with the replacement. With fingers around the edge of the bulb he could not seat it in the socket.

*"Now I can’t get the darn thing back in."*

*"Duct tape! Wad up a blob of duct tape and mush it on the face of the bulb."*

*"Duct tape is in the carriage house, how about masking tape?"*

*"Should work."*

*"There done."*

Norm holds the bulb by the tapeball and gently inserts the bulb in "Spiral Spot".

*"OK, it’s in. Guess the switch is off. Turn it on."*

‘Spiral Spot’s’ switch is flipped. ‘Spiral Spot’ still does not respond.

*"Darn, maybe the bulb is no good."*

*"Maybe the old one wasn’t burnt out in the first place."*

The old one is tested. It’s no good. The new one is removed from ‘Spiral Spot’ and tested. It is good.

*"Screw it back in, but tighter."*

*"Yes, ... and use the insulator in the rubber glove to snug it up."*

This time success. Much cheering. A team effort all around, ... Two engineers, Psychology and Liberal Arts majors, an ex-naval officer and the Editor of this publication had changed a lightbulb. Actually, Editor had just observed, thinking,

*"This should be rich, ... I’ll take notes."*

‘Spiral Spot’ had deposited 13 years worth of little dead bugs on the insulator shelves. Operation dishwasher would be necessary and then the bulb replacement would be completed. But wow, ... talk about poor design or as Chas. Lindberg would say, "Punk Engineering".. Should we write a letter to the manufacturer? Admit our ineptitude and ask ‘Home Depot’ how to change a spotlight bulb. Let’s not lose our heads here. Thirteen years from now, we will be like Jason, not caring whether ‘Spiral Spot’ works or not. No, what we’ll do is this: Print a copy of this letter in newspaper column format font 8. Roll it up. Place it inside the insulator closest to ‘Spiral Spot’. From this location it will afford the poor soul re-enacting this scenario, expert advice from the past.

In retrospect, maybe we need an upstairs lavatory. Maybe we’d have more guests? Maybe, Like Fagan, we’d better think this out again.

Lucile & Ken.

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