*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Stranded on the rooftop**

‘Tis the season for holiday lights and while I’m no Clark Griswold, I’ve always enjoyed putting up a few exterior decorations.

The interior holiday decorating I leave to my far more capable and creative better half Sherry, with my primary role being bin hauler to and from the basement. But when it comes to hanging lights outside, Sherry defers. That’s more of a nod to the fact that it’s cold outside and there are usually ladders involved.

This year, there was an unusual development when I decided to expand my lighting ambitions and hang lights on a day when I could actually feel my fingers. The inspiration came when I found a package of roof and gutter light clips that I purchased 10 years ago.

The focus of those good intentions was the roof and gutter of our winery building which has never been decorated before. I used an extension ladder to reach the roof and installed clips and lighting that covered nearly three sides of the building. I installed a timer and congratulated myself for a holiday job done six weeks before Christmas.

Sherry also was surprised but a little alarmed that I did not let her know I was going to be climbing on the roof. There are more than 500,000 falls from ladders annually, of which 97% occur at home or on farms. Most fall victims are older males.

Not only did I fail to be safe but also I made a critical rookie lighting gaffe when I forgot to test all the lights before installing. One string was about a third dark, creating a noticeable gap in my symmetrical line of lights. And the roof clips were no match for a day of gusty winds that loosened several clips, causing another string of lights to sag across the gable.

The next morning, I tackled the issues. I grabbed a new set of lights, leaned the extension ladder against the gutter and climbed onto the roof again.

Just as I was finishing up, a gust of wind came through that was strong enough to shift the aluminum ladder. Before you could say St. Nick, the ladder fell all the way to the ground, leaving me stranded on the roof.

Unless I wanted to jump, I needed a ground assist. I called Sherry, who was initially mystified as to why I rang and none too pleased that I had interrupted her planned pie baking session and failed once again to let her know I was on the roof.

The ladder was too heavy for her to lift. She almost fell backward and the ladder nearly crashed through the pane of glass in the front door. In my best helpful voice, I directed her toward the location of a smaller and lighter ladder. She responded by quoting from Proverbs, which roughly translates to “It’s better to stay outside on the roof of your house than to live inside with an angry wife.”

If she couldn’t find that ladder, the next option was to find the rope and I could help pull the big ladder up. Or I could consider asking her to throw up a blanket and a pillow.

She found the smaller ladder, but knowing my predilection for sharing stories of my mishaps, she first took a couple of photos of the old fool to document my rooftop dilemma.

She’s right, of course, as she usually is. How can I not share?

When I started to write this, an old holiday song kept popping into my mind. So with apologies to Benjamin Hanby — who in 1864 wrote “Up on the Housetop,” one of the oldest secular Christmas songs — here’s my rendition of “Bad Old Chris.”

Up on the rooftop, Chris did go

To fix some lights he had placed just so

Down went the ladder with lots of noise

Leaving him stranded … Christmas joys

Ho, ho, ho!

Why did he go?

Ho, ho ho,

Why did he go?

Stranded on the rooftop,

Hiss, hiss, hiss

Stranded on the rooftop

Bad old Chris

Next came the phone call to Sherry his wife

O dear spouse, I’m in some strife

Give him a rescue, a ladder or rope

Anything to reach the dumb old dope

Ho, ho, ho!

Why did he go?

Ho, ho ho,

Why did he go?

Stranded on the rooftop,

Hiss, hiss, hiss

Stranded on the rooftop

Bad old Chris

Next comes the scowling of his mate

Oh, just see what could be hate

There is the ladder and a few choice words

Also a frown … Stay with the birds

Ho, ho, ho!

Why did he go?

Ho, ho ho,

Why did he go?

Hiss, hiss, hiss

Stranded on the rooftop

Bad old Chris

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at chardie1963@gmail.com.*

***Photo cutlines:***

***Roof lights:*** *The roofline of Chris and Sherry Hardie’s winery was decorated this year.*

***Roof:*** *Chris Hardie was trapped on the roof when the ladder fell down. Sherry Hardie photo.*