

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 222: How Not To Fix A Computer

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Gabe called me the other day to ask if I would fix a computer he had gotten from me well over a year ago. It was an older Dell desktop, but still good, if he could only get it to show on its attached monitor. All he was getting was a black screen.

"Sure, bring it over or drop it by and we'll take a look at it", I said. "Nancy and I may not be here over the 4th of July weekend, so you can bring it then and leave it by my door, or wait to the 5th". He came on the 5th with it wrapped in plastic in the event I was not home, but I was home and invited him in. We moved to the top of the basement stairs. "Can you manage it, Gabe?" I asked. "Not sure" said Gabe, so I took it from him and together we wrangled off the plastic covering. Then, as I was tucking the computer under my arm at the top of the stairs, it slipped out of my hands!

Crash, crash, crash, BIG CRASH. It went down, tumbling over and over, skipping over some of the 12 stairs but crashing into others. Finally, it hit the concrete floor of my basement (BIG CRASH), shed its side panel completely and plastic bezel from the front panel, and stopped up against the food shelves. Gabe and I looked at each other in horror!

"Well, I will fix it or replace it", I said. We took it and the loose parts over to the computer bench and I began an examination. It actually looked OK except for a couple of dents in the frame, so I hooked it up and turned it on. It worked! Messages were scrolling on the screen! The BIOS complained its battery was dead and it did not know the date or time, so I turned it off and replaced the coin cell. Back on, and I checked all the BIOS settings and entered the correct date and time. Everything looked good except the installed floppy drive (A:) did not show up in the BIOS. I turned it off again, examined the cables, and found the power cable for the floppy had come partially out. Back in it went and we powered up again. This time, the operating system started, and XP dutifully came up on the screen.

So I fixed Gabe's computer by throwing it down the stairs! He got home later and called me to say it was working perfectly. Maybe the physical crashes reseated the video card so that its gold fingers made proper contact in the socket, reversing a year's worth of oxidation. We'll never know. But it worked, and one does not go on to fix that which is not broke! Please note, however, that I don't recommend that you try this fix yourself!

. Happy Computing!