

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 246: IT WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT...

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On the 4th of July, I was sitting in my living room with wife Nancy (KC9FZK), watching TV. Suddenly, a flash of light caught my eye – it was a huge lightning bolt in the southeastern sky. Crash! Nancy heard something go “pop” upstairs. The lights flickered and went out momentarily, then came back on. We both ran up to our second story office. Three computers (always on) were up there. They were my main machine (a desktop that I had built about 10 years ago), and two laptops, one of which was Nancy’s main machine. Of course, the laptops were still on since laptops run off batteries kept charged by a “brick” charger plugged into the house current. A momentary loss of power would not cause them to go down. The desktop, however, was off, and would not automatically come back on since that was an intentional setting I made during its setup. But, even when I turned its power on, it would not start. I carried the wounded soldier down to the basement workshop.

Two more computers live down in the basement. One, a laptop, is the brain of a Winlink station that runs 24/7. The other is a desktop machine used mainly during rebuilding of computers, to snag software from the internet and load the software on CD’s or thumb drives for porting to machines being worked on. The Winlink laptop was still on. The desktop was off but fired up just fine when I turned it back on.

I checked the wounded soldier - my main machine – the desktop from my second-floor office. The power supply had popped an internal fuse, which I replaced, but the supply still would not operate. The supply was clearly toast. I plugged a spare power supply, known to be good (I have a tester that loads all the outlets), into the motherboard. It would not fire up the motherboard, even when all peripherals were unplugged. Ergo, the motherboard was also toast. My wounded soldier was a dead soldier!

You might ask, why didn’t you have your computers on a surge protector? I did; a surge-protecting power outlet for each. Moreover, I have a very large surge protector that was electrician-installed on my main breaker box to protect all circuits in the house. Its three status lights indicated it was A-OK and not blown after the incident. Whatever zapped my main machine must not have come in on the power lines. Likely it had come in on a network cable. If not that, it could only have been a humungous coincidence – simply time for my desktop to die when the lightning struck. I don’t think it was the latter. It must have been a network cable acting like an antenna, bringing in a big surge.

Well, all of that was just background. What I really want to advertise is my backup and networking scheme that saved me from a lot of grief. The scheme might well work for you. I have mentioned it before, but now it is tried and true.

All 5 of my computers have been partitioned so that they have a C drive, a D drive, and an E drive. C is for Windows itself. D is for programs I have installed such as CCleaner, an image viewer, Microsoft Office, games, ZIP utilities, PDF utilities, TeamViewer and the like. E alone is the exclusive site for saving my creations: letters that I write (in MyDocs), pictures that I take (in Graphics), schematics I devise, and so on. Additionally, there is a special subdirectory (folder) on my E drive named Nancy’s Stuff. It contains the entire contents of Nancy’s E drive, including

all her creations. Similarly, on Nancy's machine, the E drive has a special folder called Stan's Stuff – a complete copy of my E drive.

With a few keystrokes, I can tell my backup software to do its thing. It looks at my E drive and compares it with Nancy's, and changes Stan's Stuff on Nancy's end to be exactly like mine. It also looks at Nancy's machine, E drive, and make sure the folder Nancy's Stuff on my E drive is the same as hers. Then it goes out to all three other computers on the network and makes sure their E drive is a duplicate of mine. All that takes about 4-5 minutes, fully automated, while I watch. I had just done all that a day before the main machine died.

So, it was a simple recovery. I physically moved the laptop to the main position, and continued working, just as if the main computer had not died. I did not loose a single file because I had not changed anything between the last backup and the death of the main machine. The backup scheme worked, and it saved me from grief. Even if I had not backed up for a couple of days, things would not have been too bad.

Even if you do not adopt part or all of my scheme, you should back your stuff up. You will find that your creations do not take a whole lot of space, and you can at least back up by copying files to a CD or DVD. That is an insurance policy that just cannot be beat!

Happy Computing!