

## Nothing Bad Ever Happens

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March 2018 issue, Drive Light

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*Nothing bad ever happens to me*

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*Why should I care?*

(Lyrics by Danny Elfman, from the 1983 Oingo Boingo song *Nothing Bad Ever Happens*)

As far as technology goes, I've been pretty lucky. I've had very few things fail in the nearly 40 years I've been playing with computers and other tech devices. Sure, there are a few things here and there that break now and then, but overall, the technology that I've bought over the years has been very reliable. It seems nothing really bad ever happens to my tech.

I took note of this reliability in my tech stuff when I realized recently that I do have a lot of old devices around, many that I still use (or at least can still use). I can't name too many items I've seen fail over the years, and certainly can't think of any that have been catastrophic failures. Sure, I've bought a few items that were DOA (dead on arrival), but I don't count those, as I was able to return them under warranty. If an expensive tech purchase had failed not long after the warranty expired, then that might be a disaster, but I don't recall that ever happening to me. I do remember buying a netbook (remember those small laptops, kind of a precursor to a Chromebook?) in 2009 and found the display had problems from the first time I turned it on. I just sent it right back to Amazon and received another one that worked fine for many years (or at least as well as these underpowered laptops ever did), and probably still works to this day.

I say that the netbook probably still works to this day because I must admit, that although I do still have it, I have not tried to use it in many years. That is often one thing that technology items have going for them in trying to last - we often lose interest in them well before they would have failed. The netbook was running up to 2014, as my hard drive backup records show the last backup for that computer was on 4/21/14, right after the last update that was available for Windows XP. I'm pretty sure I've not used it since then, as I've bought many newer and more capable computers to replace it.

In spite of how well current devices may be made, my good luck with technology probably does not come as inevitable or by chance. I try to take good care of my equipment, as not only does it often constitute a significant financial investment, it also represents an important resource to me, that I don't want to be without due to failures.

I try to use care with all my tech items but am particularly insistent on maintenance and preventative measures on those items I find most critical in my daily life. I take great care in handling my portable electronics, more so than I often see from other users. My laptops and Chromebook are always transported in a padded case; I have my smart

phone completely surrounded by screen protection and a shock-resistant case. I keep the air vents clean and the fans running on my computers. I do a reasonable job of keeping my computer data backed up (I have not so far lost anything of significance). Surge protectors and UPS (uninterruptable power supply) units protect my most critical and expensive tech devices.

I perform my own auto maintenance and repairs, both to save money and make sure it is done right. This does mean I do have to learn how, but this knowledge provides additional benefits when having to diagnose problems on the road. Not everything may be perfect with some of my cars, but they get me where I need to go. I didn't bother fixing the back-up sensors on my wife's car when it got older, as I felt it was not worth the cost and effort. At some point she got a new car, and I inherited the old one, which at 226k miles and 13 years old is still my daily ride.

There are a few minor tech items that I would not count in the failed column as they really never performed up to expectations from the start. I wanted to experiment with network security cameras a few years ago and bought some cheap ones (\$25). These never really worked well for me; they were difficult to set up and to keep connected to my home network. I finally gave them to my son and bought a more reputable and expensive brand, which have worked well.

I fear there are some tech devices that may be designed by the manufacturer to be disposable. Apple products may be designed that way, but are too expensive to be disposed frequently, so I avoid them. I often try to fix our broken home appliances, but my wife's track record with floor cleaning devices is not too good. It seems we need a new small vacuum or steam mop every few years, and these don't seem to be repairable, though at least the ones she picks are not that expensive.

Here is a bit of a run-down of my tech reliability over time by category; see how it compares to your own.

Computers - I don't know how many computing devices I've had since that Timex Sinclair 1000 I bought in 1982; it could be in the 20's. I've had several PC-XT clones, many tower cases running everything from DOS through every version of Windows up to 10 (but I've never had Microsoft Bob) and six laptops. I am actually writing this on my oldest running computer, a tower case with a Pentium 4 processor and Windows XP (and not connected to my home network). It has been running almost continuously since 2005, with no failures that I recall.

When we had kids at home, we had four desktop PCs running in our house. Now the two of us that remain regularly run three desktops, two laptops and a Chromebook. Over all this time I've never had a motherboard fail, don't recall ever having a memory module fail, and only had a couple of hard drive failures. I can't remember when the last hard drive failure happened; it has been so long ago. None of my running drives are that old, however; I've upgraded the drives in our two laptops twice in the last six years (once to larger drives, and again to hybrid drives). I bought a few spare PATA hard

drives as spares when SATA became more prevalent; now that XP computer is my only one that can use them. I don't recall ever having a computer power supply fail; that spare I bought ten or more years ago 'just in case' is now probably obsolete. Surprisingly, I've never had a fan fail.

Computer Accessories - I have bought a bunch of external USB hard drives for backup and data storage over the years and have never had one fail. I did have some regularly-used small encrypted USB hard drives that did fail after many years; the cable connector to the drive wore out and became unreliable. By that time, however, larger sized drives were needed anyway. USB Flash drives are supposed to wear out, as each memory location is rated for a limited number of writes. Even with Flash drives that I tend to use a lot, I've never seen any evidence of failure, as I again tend to keep moving up to larger sized devices anyway. I have had a couple of wireless mice fail, but they are inexpensive. Keyboards seem to be unbreakable.

Network Products - I did have one router failure about ten years ago, but I had a cheap spare on hand to use temporarily until I bought a good replacement. Now it is sitting unpowered, as I'm using the router built into my AT&T U-verse modem. I think I had an Ethernet switch fail many years ago. Most of my switches now are fairly new, as I've been trading them up to 8-port and/or Gigabit. I've had four network hard drives, but their size generally becomes insignificant over time and I then shut them off, rather than see them fail. I did have a 120G network drive fail, and I may have a 500G that had issues recently (I have not yet had time to diagnose it). No data has been lost, however, as I back these up too.

Mobile Phones - I've had my current Samsung Android smart phone for less than a year - so far, so good. My previous phone was a Samsung slide 'feature' phone that could text but not access the internet. When its camera failed, it was probably a blessing, as it got me to finally graduate to a smart phone; it worked otherwise. My phone before that was a dumb flip phone which worked fine, but I abandoned it when I switched to being on my wife's cell plan.

Cameras - I have owned many digital cameras over the years, from a 2 Megapixel Olympus in 2001 to my 18 MP Panasonic today. In almost all cases, I got a new one because image resolution went up and camera prices went down, not because my old one broke. I did have one major fail that was all my fault. I dropped my old Panasonic 16 MP camera at the Long Beach Grand Prix two years ago and cracked the rear display screen. I soldiered on with it, using the viewfinder display, until the flash also failed, and my wife gave me the new one for my birthday last year.

Overall, my tech success has been pretty positive. I've been careful in picking devices to buy, and I've tried to take care of them as best I could. I have been rewarded by years of reliable use with very few failures. I don't look at my positive results as a reason to abandon my practices of care and backups, but rather a justification for them. I hear enough of others having grief with tech failures to know that things can and do break. I've seen others casually handling or flipping their phones (no wonder their

screens have cracks), not shutting down computers correctly and disconnecting devices by yanking on the cables. No wonder it seems (at least relatively speaking) that nothing bad ever happens to me.