

Need a new machine? Get a midwife!

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Having previously suffered nightmarishly whenever I was faced with upgrading or replacing computer equipment, I was filled with trepidations this time around. In fact, I procrastinated for more than a year while my machine slowed to a crawl and I was forced to cancel out of error messages that appeared with increasing frequency and tenacity.

Anxiously awaiting the arrival of my first machine years ago, I eventually christened the late arrival with an apposite name which was then conveyed to each successive incarnation. Thus, as I wandered off to brew a cup of tea while my computer opened a program, or polished silver as the progress bar slowed to the speed of viscous tar, I patiently waited for “Godot.”

Now it was time to give birth to a new baby with the help of a qualified midwife. My friend Charlie graciously and generously volunteered...

Hoping to facilitate data and software transfer, Charlie attacked the old machine by meticulously removing accumulated dust while inventorying the current set-up. He soon closed the box and restarted whereupon two hard drives failed, leaving me with only one in marginal condition. With that, our dream of creating a mirror image of the old computer was destroyed and so began the tedious task of loading individual programs, backing up, and restoring data on a file-by-file basis. We hit a few snags and added these items to Charlie’s all-too long troubleshooting list. Working tirelessly, we were just about to finish ticking everything off the list and re-boot when we suffered catastrophic failure. The drives became inaccessible. The screen went black. Near midnight, Charlie finally went home quietly promising, “We’ll solve it—don’t worry.”

I didn’t. I was content to rely upon Charlie’s unflappable equanimity, unflustered confidence, and calm reassurances. And although I was staring at a tangle of wires and missing drives, anxious about accumulating tax work, I relaxed. Completely! After all, I had no reason to worry—Charlie had said so. And within 24 hours, I learned that he was right.

That was three years ago. Several tax seasons have come and gone. Even Charlie disappeared, to Canada and then South Africa! But Godot, in one of its many subsequent manifestations, is still here, still crunching numbers, gaining weight as internal hard drives (currently seven!) are manhandled into the original casing. Modems have been exchanged, routers added, printers (a total of four now!) have been attached. Software has been installed, updated, removed and replaced.

But none of this is news to anyone who relies on a computer. Each morning, we arrive at work and hope that the back-up programs have run successfully during the night, that e-mails have arrived safely, that the screensaver is running without interruption, and that there are no alarming error messages to greet us when we move the mouse and bring the system to life. Just in case, we have our computer guys on speed-dial: Work number, cell, home phone, pager, instant message, twitter—whatever it takes to reach the guy FAST! But where’s Charlie?

Back in town! No longer gallivanting off to exotic locales. He's here and for the last two months at my beck and call. And when things inevitably failed, Charlie stayed and worked. I pampered him with herbal teas and cookies, generously bestowed computer store gift certificates upon him, and...

...offered to do his tax returns for *free*. He accepted and brought his documents a few weeks ago. It's a complicated return, I told him. I'll have to research a number of items and then I'll have to put him at the back of the line. I'll call when it's ready and he can come pick it up.

(That way, I know, he'll have to stay in town near the phone, at least until April 15th!)