

Shit Happens

And it was diarrhea.

First it was the dehumidifier. Liz claims the only way to have a basement that doesn't smell like a basement is to run a dehumidifier more or less all the time. She is absolutely right. Our basement has no noticeable smell, yet everyone else's we visit does. So it was a catastrophe when our old machine stopped working. There had been fan issues some years before. Liz was used to tearing it apart and cleaning it and so on. Unfortunately not this time. All her efforts were in vain: there was no resuscitation this time. Eventually it was pronounced dead. It had died of old age we figured. It certainly pre-dated my arrival on the scene 14 years prior. We didn't even do an autopsy. We placed it out with the garbage and it was gone before the garbage truck got there.



Okay, this was a problem that was easy to fix: throw money at it. Problems that are solved with money are the best kind of problems. (Too bad all our problems were not like that. As in the MasterCard ad, some things are priceless: like getting Alex to try anything the least bit scary: no amount of money will get him in a boat or chairlift or rollercoaster, or ...) So we went to Canadian Tire and now we are the proud owners of a new dehumidifier.

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Then it was the washing machine. For some time this spring I had noticed some water beneath the machine at times. It wasn't very much and I thought that it might easily be a bit of run off which happens when you take the clothes out. (You see it's a fancy front loader.) It wasn't that every load produced water. Sometimes it was there sometimes not. A quick wipe up with a rag and the water was gone. Pas de problem.

Eventually though we had enough and started looking. I got the bottom off the washer and while it was running looked underneath. It was really cool. The drum spun sideways, suspended on two pistons. One was clean as a whistle, brand new looking. The other was dirty, and by golly

there was a drop or two coming off it. Shit. As I watched and became more familiar with what I was looking at I discovered that drops were also coming from a series of bolts that held the thing together. The washer consists of an inner steel drum, with lots of perforations: this clearly doesn't hold water. Outside of this must be a water tight liner. On the very outside are two big plastic half spheres, clamshells if you will, bolted together. What I'm not sure is if these are the only water barrier or not. I suspect they are. Anyway the water was leaking from the joint: not much, just a drop or two and only during one of the rinse/spin cycles.



Dirty piston and water marks



Clean Piston



What to do? Will it is a Kenmore from Sears. We bought it because of Sears: we always had good luck with them and their quality and service. So we phoned and booked a service call. It would cost \$75 as the machine was 4 years old. Okay, send the guy out. What else could we do?

The guy showed up. I don't think that he had ever seen a washing machine before. I'm sure he thought the problem was that the machine was on its side and wanted to turn it rightside up! No question he was an idiot.

"What's the problem?"

"It leaks."

"I don't see any leak."

"You idiot: its not running, there is no water in it." I wanted to say that, instead I said, "Look down here, you can see where water has run done this piston. You can see where water has lifted the tiles under the machine. It only leaks a certain times in the cycle."

"Lets see."

Okay, so we start the washer.

"There's no leak."

"Yes, we told you it only comes during some cycles and not every time."

"There's no leak."

So we cranked it around to a rinse cycle. Nothing.

"I can't stay here all day, I have other calls to make."

"Just hang on a second, we can make it leak."

15 minutes later Liz coaxed two drops from the silly machine.

"Oh well it needs a whole new drum."

"Is it covered in by the warranty?"

"Not sure."

I read the warranty. The steel liner was covered forever from rusting out. Well shit it was stainless steel, of course it wouldn't rusted out. Everything else was covered with a great one year warranty. Three years had elapsed on that.

He left. What an idiot.

Later he called it was some part that needed replacing but it was covered. Later he called to say it wasn't covered. To replace it, parts and labour was \$450.

Well this was a problem you could throw money at but holy cripes there is some economics to be considered. A new top loader was \$500 to \$600. And this was a super duper fancy front loader: the Cadillac of washers: it should last for 25 years with no problems. We had replaced a top loader with this one after 25 years of faithful service. It was a tank. This was supposed to be better. Four years and it was dead?

I phoned customer service and spoke to a manager and complained and asked for some sort of discount. She agreed that this was a terrible situation and promised to write a very strong email to someone else. I still don't know what that was supposed to do (Sears is run by idiots: its contagious within the company apparently.) Anyway we did the only sensible thing we could: we put a towel under the machine to catch the drips and waited for things to get worse. ☺

While I was on the road to Nova Scotia, Liz came to her senses and thought: if its leaking from a bolt, maybe its loose? She tightened the three or four bolts she could reach from below. Marg and Barry came over that Sunday and Liz asked Barry if he knew how to take the top off. In no time they had every bolt humming tight.

That was about 40 loads of laundry ago. Not a drop since ☺ Stupid repairman. They wanted to charge us a fortune to tighten a bolt or two. Maybe he wasn't so stupid....

After we had the problem fixed and after I came home from Newfoundland, Sears called. The email had finally reached the right person and they phoned to say that they would give us a great discount on the \$450. wait for it..... and entire 10%. Wow.

“Well that's a great deal”, I told her. “We'll get back to you.” ☺

Oh yes, remember that the service call itself was to cost \$75? They've never billed us! ☺

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We used to own our own furnace and rent a hot water tank. But both got old and when they offered a good deal on a rental furnace we jumped at the chance. So now we pay every month for the furnace. It's a great furnace. Since its not ours, it works great. About the same time the rental water heater was getting old and we decided to BUY a new one. They were not super expensive so we bought one. It's worked wonderfully for many years now, until about 5 days ago. It died. Moral of the story: rent, never buy!

How does a natural gas hot water tank die? It stops making hot water. We discovered this about 11pm. Liz couldn't get any hot water to water her face. Well it was due to the showers and dishwasher and so on I suggested. “No way”, Liz said. It always gave us all the hot water we could use. We NEVER ran out of hot, not after 10 loads of laundry and 4 showers. Never.

Fortunately there is only one thing that can go wrong on a natural gas hot water heater: the pilot light had to be out. So near midnight we go and inspect the beast. Yup. No pilot.

I smelt a faint wiff of gas as I got my nose down close. I was using a flash light, there were lights on in the house and we continued to turn on and off light switches. The fact that we were still alive kinda argued against a serious gas leak. In any case I dialed the 1-800 number on the side of the heater and was reassured that when the pilot goes out, the gas automatically shuts off. Thank heavens.

Where was the manual? We had always kept it beside the heater in case of just such an emergency. But now it was no where to be found. Fortunately there were lots of instructions pasted to the heater itself so we knew who to call and how to relight the pilot light.

But more to the issue, the pilot had never gone out in all the time we had it. Why would it go out now? There must be a reason.

Anyway Liz, my hero was the brave one, the one to do the dangerous work of re-lighting the pilot. I'm far too terrified of blowing up the house to touch anything that has anything to do with natural gas. As I read the instructions, for the fourth time, Liz carried them out and after about 5 minutes, on her first attempt the pilot light was on just like it had never been out. She turned up the thermostat and the burned roared to life.

Okay, so why had the pilot light gone out? As we stood around and listened to the roar I heard an occasional hiss. Liz heard it too. It sounded EXACTLY as if drops of water were hitting the burner. Holy cripes: the tank was leaking! Liz got on the phone and started to book a service call. I stood and listened. If the tank was leaking, where was the water? Was it all consumed by the flames? There was dirt and dust under the heater, no sign of water at all. If it was a leak it sure was small. With nothing better to do I began to read more labels on the side of the water heater. Eventually I read the big red warning: basically it said: "When first starting the heater, don't be alarmed by some water leaking: it is not a malfunction, but condensation on the side of the tank. It's only leaking when you can see water underneath, after 24 to 48 hours." I yelled to Liz and she stopped the service booking. Now as we listened the hissing had already stopped.

That was a week ago and we still have hot water. So far that was 2 near misses and one hit.

The good upshot of this incident was to force us to organize our receipts. We have them all over the house but the bulk are simply tossed into one of two big boxes. This weekend we went out and bought 100 plastic sleeves and labels and threw out 70% of the receipts for things long since dead and buried. The rest are now logically organized and readily accessible in one of five big



binders. Well... those that we have that is. Don't ask what things we are missing receipts for: its too embarrassing. Oh by the way, I found the heater manual about one foot from the heater, tucked into a corner. It is now pasted to the side of the heater. Should it be in a binder?

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Number four was the TV. On Thursday both Liz and I were out and Alex and Scott were home alone. As I drove up and Alex and Scott came running saying the power was out. It was a nice sunny day: Why would the power be out I thought. As I walked in the house I heard the hum of the frig.

"The power's not out.", I said. "What makes you think the power's out?"

"The TV just shut off in the middle of our game."

Sure enough the TV was dead. Neither the remote or the main power button, nor a new circuit could coax any life from it. The TV was 12 years old and except for some problems in the early years, while under warranty it had been a fine working machine. BUT it was 12 years old. TV technology has changed a lot since the early 90's. And the prices: we paid \$750 for it and thought we had a great deal then. Today much better 27" models are available for about \$250.

Anyway I lugged it out to the car and drove it over to the TV repair guy. I told him there was no rush on this. It was great to get the boys off the stupid game consoles! No TV meant no games. Guess they'd have to play outside. What a shame. ☺

Anyway by late Friday the autopsy revealed that it needed a new power supply: \$160 installed.

"Thanks very much. The TV's yours." I said. "What do I owe for the diagnosis?"

"\$20."

So that was it. Our 27" RCA TV is now garbage because of one minor little part and electronic progress.

But that's not the "shit happens" part of it. Wait for it....

Okay, so now we needed a new TV. I knew there were tons of TV's for nothing. Walmart had them. Loblaws had them. Everyone had fantastic deals on. So I went to Loblaws. There was only one small TV left. Ditto at Walmart.

Holy Cow, no one had them any more. Three months ago you couldn't move for all the TV's. Now that we wanted one, there were none. Costco wasn't any help either.

I recalled the latest Future Shop and Best Buy flyers. There were cheap TV's in those. But I had cut them up (for a school assignment) and threw them out. But with a bit of looking I retrieved them from the recycling bin. Yes there was a great 27" Toshiba TV for only \$280. Okay it isn't a flat screen and it isn't High Definition and it isn't a plasma or anything else. But it replaces what we had for about 1/3 the price, and only a bit more than the repair cost of the old one. It just didn't make sense to put money into a 12 year old TV. So off to Future Shop it was.

Now before I get into the main story here I need to digress a little and talk about sale people. They are so used to selling stuff to people who don't want it, that they have no idea how to sell something to someone who want's it! Let me give you some examples.

Over the years we've been called hundreds of times, always at supper time, by sales people trying to sell us windows and doors. Never want any. Then this summer we dropped off a wedding present at this home in Thornhill. They had a Phantom Screendoor. Coolest thing we had ever seen. It is a screen door that slides sideways and hooks with a magnet. When you open it it rolls back like a normal window blind (except sideways) to disappear into a very small vertical frame: hidden, out of the way, a phantom. We had always wanted a screen door for our front door, but hated the idea that you'd have to beat your way through TWO doors everytime you came into the house. But no screen door means we can never leave the door open for a breeze without the bugs as well. This was the answer. 99% of the time It's hidden away and for the 1% of the time you need it, it's there: materialized out of thin air. I'd pay lots for this door.

So at home I googled "Phantom ScreenDoor" and the very first hit was a local company selling them. I phoned and asked how much, expecting thousands, but heard "\$400". ☺

"Installed?"

"Yes."

"I want one. Please come over and install it. By the way, we'll be away for about 10 days end of the month."

You know what? We've NEVER seen them. Here they had a "live one", someone who wasn't arguing about the price, someone who was really keen and they totally dropped the ball. I didn't call them back because I'm not sure any more if I want such a foolish company doing any work for me and besides it's too late in the season.

Getting back to the TV story. It was 8:30pm. Reid's dairy closed at 9pm. Liz dropped me off at Future Shop, I went in to buy the TV while she took the boys for ice cream. I went in and instantly a salesman was on me. I love Future Shop for that: pushy salemen. Great I WANTED to buy. I said. "I'll take that one over there and I'll get a second one to replace the one in our bedroom."

The salesman said, "Okay sir, I'll be right back in a minute."

Bastard went running for cover! In the 20 minutes I stood there, he never came back. I never saw him, nor did I see him with any one else. No other salesmen approached me. Apparently he told everyone else not to go near that one because he WANTED to buy a TV. They are so programmed to sell to those who can't make up their minds that they had no idea how to handle me. So I left. That's two (the lost flyers were one: you need to count, this is funny).

So we left it until Saturday afternoon to get the TV. I took Liz and we went back into Future Shop. Maybe they'd sell one to her I thought. Nope I was wrong again: they were out of stock. Sold them all yesterday. (NOT TO ME YOU BASTARD, I thought.) Three.

"Okay, so which stores have them?"

"North York has 8 and Markham has 4."

Okay, It was now 5pm. I foolishly thought it would be easy to get the two TV's and be home for supper. We had left the boys saying we'd be home shortly after 5pm with the TV (or two) and make supper. What to do? The North York store was way down Yonge near Sheppard into Toronto proper... Markham was still in the suburbs. Both stores were about 20 minutes from our present location, but Markham was a lot closer to home. So off we set. Liz called the boys from a pay phone telling them we'd be a bit late.

Oh, did I say that we had rented a DVD earlier in the afternoon? We had to return it the next day: we really needed a TV. As we drove we discussed the second TV. It was agreed that the small crappy old TV we had in the bedroom was due to retire. I found it fuzzy and new 20" ones were less than \$200. Maybe if we bought two TV's we'd get a deal (Dream on ☺)

At the Markham Future Shop Liz grabbed the first salesman we saw and asked about the TV.

"Oh, I'm not sure we have them left. Just sold two."

A few minutes later, "Nope we're sold out." Four.

Back home while Liz made dinner I called the Newmarket Future Shop. Nope, they were sold out too. Five.

Best Buy had lots, ☺, but they didn't have any 20" ones ☹. Six.

So with reluctance I called the North York store. Oh yes they had lots, but no parking. You had to park next door at Loblaws and buy something there. Oh well, we could do that I thought, "Please put my name on one."

"No problem. Done."

On the Internet I found that they were just below Finch, not at Sheppard as the guy at the original Future Shop had said. So after supper the entire family piled into the van and off we went to get the TVs.

As promised by the Internet there was the Future Shop, just below Finch. Beside it was a No Frills store, not a Loblaws. Oh well we parked and walked over to Future Shop. It was closed, or rather it had moved further down the street, near Sheppard. Seven.

As we got back into the van Liz commented that this was a class cluster fuck. No matter how hard we tried, we were simply NOT going to get that TV. The fates would not allow it. But by damn I have rented some movies and by golly I was going to watch them, TONIGHT!

We found the correct store, beside a Loblaws and across from Mel Lastman Square. The place was a zoo. The streets were filled with pedestrians and cars. It was hard to move. Of course there was no parking anywhere. Future Shop simply had no parking, Loblaws was real nasty: it cost lots and you had to buy more than \$10 to get a good rate. (Being from the 'burbs where parking is a God given right and free, I drove a ½ mile away on a back side street and we hiked to the store. Eight.

The Store was beautifully new. They had tons of TV's. Yes they had the 27" for \$279.99 and a 20" for \$189.99: both excellent machines by Toshiba. Okay now came the hard sell: you need to buy an extended warranty was the pitch. Nope, was the answer. He disappeared for a time. (My new theory now on Future Shop salesmen is they get paid ONLY for extended warranty sales and nothing else.) He returns and asks me (alone) to follow him in the back shipping area. There up high on a shelf he shows me my TV in its SEALED box. Then he takes me back out to the showroom floor and shows me another box with my 27" in it. But this box was opened. His story was that he had opened it so show another customer. Bullshit, but carry on I thought. It certainly appeared to be okay, and all there. Now look he says, I can sell you the open box one for a discount if you get the extended warranty.

That was a no brainer: yes, we'll take it. Even if it was a lemon, the warranty covered it! So we paid \$279.99 for the 27" which included a 5 year extended warranty, plus the \$189.99 for the 20" and a 3 year extended warranty on that (It was only \$34 and like Liz said, that would guarantee nothing would to it for 3 years.). A heck of a deal. Perhaps it had been worth all that effort ☺

Then I asked the \$64,000 question: how can I get these into the van, ½ mile away? No problem, drive around in front, double park for a few minutes and load them in. So that's what I did. We picked them up without incident and I got to watch my movies!



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The last thing to happen was that Liz broke her fancy magnetic clip on sunglasses. But there is no story to tell. She ordered a new pair and that was it.



What's next?