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Microwave miseries

Last week my microwave oven gave the mournful electronic equivalent of the call of the loon and promptly died.

It was two years and one month old, with a two-year warranty which I'd firmly refused to extend because our fridge, freezer, washer and dryer have been costing us hundreds of dollars a year in warranty fees and have consistently and churlishly failed to go wrong.

I called the repair department and they promised to send someone out on Friday, the one day I knew I'd be home, since I'd invited nine people for lunch. By the time the repair man, nowadays known as a technician, arrived, the gathering was in full swing and I'd completely forgotten he was coming.

"Did you know there's a strange man in your kitchen?" inquired one of my startled guests as she returned with her dessert. Meanwhile the irritatingly jocular repair man, making unhelpful remarks like, "you ought to have taken out the extended warranty, you know," was busy dismantling my ailing machine and muttering that he couldn't understand it at all.

He finally put it back together, told me with a cheerful grin that he didn't think it would last long but I'd be covered for three months anyway, and asked if I'd like to extend the warranty for another year. I calculated that by the time I'd shelled out \$62 for his visit and another \$42 for the extension, it would be simpler either to buy a new one or go back to nature.

As it turned out, I didn't have to wait long for his fearless prediction to come true. My resuscitated oven lasted barely forty-eight hours before turning itself on unaided and going into its death throes with an alarming and prolonged beep as I nervously approached it to whip out the plug.

After that I'd liked to have called it quits, but unfortunately I've developed a chronic case of microwave dependency. The children are complaining they don't like toast with holes in it (I've long since lost the knack of taking the butter out of the fridge in advance) and no one is happy about having to wait an extra hour for dinner because I'd forgotten how long baked potatoes take in a conventional oven.

I'm reminded embarrassingly of my smugness when a business friend of mine had a problem with her microwave before this family went high-tech.

We were in a meeting, when one of her daughters called and asked how to cook hot dogs now that the microwave was incapacitated. "Just boil some water and put the wieners in it for a few minutes," began my friend. The incredulous reply could be heard as far north as Sunderland.

"Don't be ridiculous mother, you don't boil hot dogs," said the young lady, witheringly. It took a lot of convincing, and several more instructional phone calls, before the disbelieving teenager was persuaded that not only could you cook hot dogs in this manner, but that in the old days it was a traditional method of rendering them marginally edible.

My cavalier attitude to what I now recognize as a crisis has returned to haunt me as I wait anxiously by the phone to find out what, if anything, can be done to bring those insistent beeps permanently back into my life.

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