Bowie Seniors Computer Club Minutes for Sept. 3, 2009

Carl Bulger presided.

Presentation:

Charlotte Melichar accidentally spilled a cup of water on her Dell laptop keyboard. She immediately turned it upside down so most of the water ran off. She turned the computer off, let it dry, and tried to turn it back on. It would not turn back on.

She had no warranty. Dell said the repair would cost about $358. She negotiated for a discount. The Dell technician said that he would have to talk to his manager. They went back and forth several times. Charlotte felt like she was haggling over the purchase of a car. They finally agreed on a $100 discount. Dell sent a special box for her to ship the computer to their service facility.

She sent out an email to some of the members inquiring about the best way to get her personal data off of the hard drive before sending it in. Dan Lee mentioned the possibility of buying an enclosure that would house the hard drive after she removed it from the laptop and that would provide connectors and cables so she could copy its contents to another computer. Bob Blum suggested that she try using a USB Drive Adapter that he had. It has a USB connector on one cable and IDE and SATA hard drive connectors on the other end. Her drive is a SATA. For some reason, Bob's adapter did not work. He accom-

panied her to Chesapeake Computer in Crofton where she bought an enclosure for $50 and he bought a new USB Drive Adapter for $39. After several hours trying to interpret the instructions for the enclosure, Charlotte was finally successful in copying its contents using Windows Explorer. After wiping the hard drive clean, she reinstalled it in the slot on the side of the laptop, and shipped the laptop to Dell. Nineteen days and $400 later, she had the computer back and working.

Loss of her computer was an emotional shock. That seems to be an universal reaction. Even Bob Blum admitted that he gets quite emotional when his computer stops working. Because he likes to tweak his computer and experiment with new software, he probably experiences more computer failures than the average user.

Since we all panic when our computer stops working properly, we appreciate presentations on backing up our hard drives; protection from viruses and other malware; maintenance tips, protection against power surges and lightning strikes, and how to recover from a failure.

Computer Problems:

After a power outage lasting approximately 12 hours, I turned on a desktop computer. It hung up on one of the boot pages with the error message: "Checksum Error

– Defaults Loaded. F1-Continue or Del – Enter BIOS." I chose to continue. But I could not connect to the internet through my broadband FiOS connection, although it seemed to be connected via DSL. The Antivirus program wouldn't open properly. Several other processes that load on boot were also affected. Was it a hardware or a software problem, or both? If it was software, was it caused by malware?

The evening after the meeting, worse problems appeared: brief "Blue Screens of Death" followed by shutdowns and restarts. I went into the BIOS and reset certain settings. After that I got an error message that the processor fan was running too slow. I turned the power off, opened up the case, and blew out what little dust I could find. After I closed it up, it still did not work OK. Finally, I noticed that the time in the lower right corner was wrong. When I clicked on it, the date read January 1, 2002! After I reset that, everything worked normally.

But later I noticed in the log book that the symptoms were similar to those that appeared two years ago when the lithium CMOS battery on the motherboard had needed to be replaced. I replaced it, again, just in case the date was lost because the CMOS battery voltage was so low that it allowed the date to be lost during the power outage.

Ed Godstrey reported that there were two lightning strikes on

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Maycheck Lane in the same storm that caused my power to go out. This prompted a discussion of Uninterruptible Power Sources (UPS) and Surge Protectors.

Surge protectors for electronics should have an Underwriter Labs Rating #1449, which specifies that they keep the voltage from exceeding 330VAC +/- 10%. You can buy a UPS with a built-in surge protector or you can buy a separate surge protector and plug the UPS into it.

UPS's allow you time to save data before powering down your computer after a power failure. They also provide a cleaner power waveform to your computer which may lengthen the life of its components. The storage battery in UPS's must be replaced every three to five years.