

Electric Dreams

Could you cope without a mobile phone, the internet, a microwave and satellite TV?



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Programme running: 3 x 60 mins Production: BBC

One modern family are fast forwarded through the decades of the 70s, 80s and 90s to see first hand how technology has transformed our homes and the way we live in them.

The family and their house are taken back to the digital dark ages of 1970, with daily deliveries of new gadgets bringing them closer to the present. How will they cope without Facebook and Sky+? What joys will they find in Teasmades and early computer games? Will they bother with bricklike mobiles? How will the family play, talk and relax with only the technology of the 70s, 80s or 90s to help them?

The 1970s

The Sullivan-Barnes family are stripped of all modern technology for the ultimate nostalgia trip to the 1970s, travelling through time one year for each day. Father Adam can't wait to leave behind computers and mobile phones to revisit his youth. Mother Georgie hopes less technology will mean more time as a family. Yet with no dishwasher, microwave or freezer, Georgie finds herself trapped by constant shopping and cooking.

As the black and white television only broadcasts 1970s programmes for a few hours a day, the children turn to the record player. 13 year old Hamish, more used to downloading MP3 music files, is impressed by the feel of vinyl records.

Later, Hamish explores the freedoms of the 1970s which his parents often reminisce about. Yet without mobile phones, his parents have no way to contact him when he heads into town unannounced on his Chopper bike. Unfortunately for Hamish, his 1970s bedroom proves a much more effective punishment than his 21st century bedroom filled with technology.

The 1980s

The 1980s brings waves of new developments, including a third TV channel, a freezer and a longed

for microwave. 1980s consumers were afraid of microwaves during an era of nuclear paranoia, so the new delivery comes with its own microwave leakage detector, to confirm that the new gadget isn't really cooking them.

Climate change may have put electric cars back on the agenda, but Adam cannot help but laugh at his newest vehicle, the Sinclair C5. One of technology's most infamous flops, the C5 has a top speed of 24kph.

In the war of the videotape formats, the family wait to see whether their next delivery will be VHS or Betamax. But can they find anywhere that still rents videos? The household's first computer, however, proves more popular.

The 1990s

Games giants Nintendo and Sega battle for children's hearts as Sonic and Mario go head to head on the games consoles. The choice immediately causes arguments between the children, but the parents are more concerned by whether the games, which come with no age ratings, are too violent.

Early versions of modern must have gadgets are arriving almost every hour. Georgie receives the first mobile phone; although it is huge, has poor reception and calls are very expensive, this new status symbol provokes jealousy in husband Adam.

As modern life appears on the horizon, the children pester for the internet, but with less than 1% of the number of websites today, the 1990s internet is another disappointment. However, the return of email offers a taste of modern communication. As better technology gives the children more reasons to stay in their rooms, will the family still spend time together as they re-enter the 21st century?

Image: Ron Chapple Studios, Dreamstime

Distributed by Open University Worldwide, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, UK, MK7 6AA
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