Softwareitaville

Across the nation, students of all ages are begrudgingly penning summer vacation essays for English teachers. If your son or daughter is struggling, maybe they can borrow mine. I visited my son who spent his summer as a medical officer at a scout camp on Catalina Island.

Catalina veterans, who have traveled the entire island, know this is not your typical planes, trains, and automobiles excursion. It's more a planes, wait, taxis, wait, ferries, wait, safari buses, wait, golf-carts-and-hiking-boots type of escapade. Due to the island's small airport, rental car dearth, and plethora of Conservancy (read island mafia) restrictions, travel throughout the island relies on indigenous services and ... locals.

Island coterie restrictions are ecological, economical, and, at times, sadistic. Coming from the Mountain West, I'm accustomed to independent travel, coming and going as I please. After numerous calls to island proprietors, it was clear that independent travel – beyond walking – was out. Rather than buck the system, the engineer in me decided homework, planning, and execution would result in smooth travel. What I did not count on was island time.

Island time is an attitude, a state of mind that puts time on the bottom rung of the priority ladder. On island time, a restaurant advertising breakfast at 8:00 a.m. may open any time between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. On island time, the 12:00 a.m. noise ordinance may be enforced around 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. On island time, the Safari Bus requiring passengers to be in line 30 minutes in advance may depart 30 to 40 minutes after a 10-minute delay because ticket holders outnumber bus seats. After 15 minutes on a dusty, bumpy road through the heart of the isle, the bus driver, under the influence of island time, stops to check if the back door of the storage compartment containing your luggage is closed.

On island time, there are two days of the week: today and tomorrow. Yesterday is a memory, anything beyond tomorrow is unfathomable, and anything that does not get done today can wait for tomorrow.

Don't get me wrong – island time can be relaxing and revitalizing. However, if you need to travel the length of the island, pick up your son, take him back the length of the island for a hot shower, steak dinner, and soft bed and then return the length of the isle, it can be frustrating. A kind of frustration one can suffer on software projects.

Island time is not much different than a project's inaugural time. Inaugural time occurs at the beginning of a project when requirements are few, resources abundant, and budgets profuse. On inaugural time, the system is perfect (in your mind), the customer is your friend (in your mind), and modules not completed today can wait until tomorrow (also in your mind).

Unlike island time, extended inaugural time is lethal. Left uncurbed, a refreshing project expedition turns into a tedious death march. Before you know it, the blame game commences and you are singing the blues. Fortunately, you can sing the following song at the company's project cancellation party at your local karaoke bar.

(Sung to the tune of Jimmy Buffet's *Margaritaville* ... my apologies, Jimmy):

Feelin' my wrist ache
Watchin' my drive bake
Management purists, pushing snake oil
Strummin' eighty-eight keys,
Trusting they won't freeze
Top brass wimps, they're beginnin' to roil

Wasted away again in Softwaritaville
Searchin' for my lost taker, of fault
Some people claim that there's a manager to blame
But I know it's nobody's fault

I don't know the reason
For customer treason
Nothing to show but this whip through code glue
But it's a real beauty
A pension plan booty, how it got here
I haven't a clue

Wasted away again in Softwaritaville
Searchin' for my lost taker, of fault
Some people claim that there's a client to blame
Now I think, it could be my fault

I blew out a flip flop
Stepped up an amp drop
Cut a deal; online buy from Saigon
But there's ruse in the vender
and soon I will tender
A lax obligation that helps us plough on

Wasted away again in Softwaritaville
Searchin' for my lost taker, of fault
Some people claim that there's a vendor to blame
But I know, it's my own darn fault

Some people claim that there's a hacker to blame
And I know it's my own darn fault

Promptly add the following to your process asset library: "All members of a failed project, as their last act, are to sing the failed-project anthem – Softwaritaville – at the project cancellation party." Enjoy.

— **Gary A. Petersen**
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