2.6 Vs. 3.0 Vs. 5.0: Seize the Fish!

Whil Hentzen

I don't know how to start this column. It's not morbid or anything; I just feel like I want to set off about five processes at the same time. So if you feel like you're being thrown from one plot line to another like a Tom Clancy novel on steroids, you'll be in good company. Some of the things floating around inside my head these days: What does "carpe diem" really mean? Should one be developing in FoxPro 2.6/DOS in 1997? Is Delphi 3.0 the future or just the next punch line for Conan O'Brien? A life event tells me I'm turning into my parents; and I've found another reason why Steve Martin may be the greatest actor of all time. ## Whil — the previous sentence is confusing; did I fix it or would it make more sense to state those two points as questions? Example: Am I turning into my parents? Is Steve Martin the greatest actor of all time? ## better to state it as two questions <g>(???) Finally, what's the deal between Visual FoxPro 3.0 and 5.0?

I was reminded of a recent exchange regarding the phrase "carpe diem." I don't remember how it started, but Doug Hennig and I started trading various reinterpretations of the phrase awhile back. If your Latin is rusty, it translates literally to "Seize the Day!" but the one I liked the most, living close enough to Lake Michigan that I can hear the waves on a quiet evening, was "carp diem," which of course translates to "Seize the Fish." ## Whil — actually it translates to "Fish Day," but you knew that, right?! (## of course I do - that's the whole point) Now it's not uncommon for someone in the office to mention that they're going to wait until later to do something, and have two or three others remind that potential procrastinator to "Seize the Fish!"

It's hard to believe, because it seems that Microsoft doesn't believe it anymore, but a lot of people are still using DOS (the operating system—not just the version of FoxPro). We've just turned the switch on a new application with 50,000 weekly online accesses from around the country, but given the environment of the customer—a number of machines with 4M of RAM and a mission critical library that can't run under Windows—we were required to use FoxPro 2.6 for DOS. We'll be installing a number of additional subsystems on this foundation over the next six months; the company providing the libraries has missed two deadlines on their port to Windows and we likely won't see anything in production until early 1997. We won't be deleting FoxPro 2.6/DOS from our machines for a while.

Remember when you used to tease your folks about their growing fascination with the obituary column? A fellow I ran with a dozen or so years ago recently died of cancer, and it struck me that it's no longer just my parents' friends who are appearing in the obit column. Along with having your first child and watching your little girl get married, I think this event is one of those turning points in life—turning to your spouse and saying, "Look who died the other day…". It was strikingly odd that I heard about Larry on the same day that Les Pinter's column for this issue showed up in my e-mail in box.

After having spent a week in Anaheim looking at Delphi, seeing a number of new tools that Borland is releasing, and since then investigating a couple of other development tools, the only feeling I have is that of a kid in a candy store— I want to use them all! But so little time!

The heroine in Sgt. Bilko, when asked why she preferred uncertain and risky prospects with Bilko (Steve Martin) instead of a steady and secure life with Bilko's archrival, responded: "With Ernie, every day is an 'anything can happen' day."

But the toughest part is making the decision between versions 3.0 and 5.0. I remember the agony we suffered when telling customers that they wouldn't be able to reasonably run FoxPro 2.6/Windows on a 4M machine (oh, it would run, but they couldn't load an application at the same time), or that expecting other Windows applications to run simultaneously with other Windows applications on an 8M machine was, well, crazy. Now we're telling our customers that expecting to run Visual FoxPro 3.0 on a Windows 3.11 machine is an uncomfortable and risky proposition. Oh, to be sure, some people are doing it. "Some people" also jump off cliffs with ropes attached to their ankles. We've just found it to be expensive and to too little advantage for our tastes. Microsoft is obviously not interested in enhancing the kludge used to run a 32-bit application on a 16-bit operating system, so the long-term prospects are less than enviable for applications built along these lines.

Nonetheless, we've got a nice tool with robust libraries that we've built up over the years for customers who require their applications to run on an operating system that's getting long in the tooth, and an awesome tool that we've been using for a couple of years for use with the 32-bit operating systems we're moving to now.

The events I've just outlined have ganged up on me. It's easy to get tired or depressed, looking at all the different things going on. We can wring our hands and complain about problems we're having, or we can take advantage of every day. But it's an exciting time if we look at our situation with the right outlook.

I've decided that we're going to have a rockin' good time with version 2.6 until it absolutely keels over and dies, and that we're going to knock people's socks off with version 5.0 when the environment is right. No tentative steps, no second guessing. I'm so excited about all the cool stuff going on that I hate going to bed each night, and I want to set my alarm earlier than the day before, because I can't wait to get back in front of the tube.

Seize the fish!