



Letscelebrate! Itsnational punctuationday!

August 22, 2005

I realize that, considering the state of the country — along with the president's own grammar — punctuation might seem the least of our worries right now.

After all, George Bush recently explained his Social Security plan by saying, There's a series of parts of the formula that are being considered. And when you couple that, those different cost drivers, affecting those — changing those with personal accounts, the idea is to get what has been promised more likely to be — or closer delivered to what has been promised.

Who could want a better explanation than that?

Under the circumstances, then, it's hard to get folks to value a well-placed apostrophe.

But today we celebrate National Punctuation Day, and judging from some of the e-mails I've received lately from folks who take exception to both my politics and gender, it hasn't come a moment too soon.

(Your just a dumb, women!!!! wrote one of my correspondents, thereby illustrating a fine command of both the language and debate-club technique.)

National Punctuation Day was declared by a rather obscure group called nation-alpunctuationday.com, which I find rather ironic. If there's anything that's accelerated the erosion of punctuation, capitalization, spelling and the fine tradition of putting a space between words, it's dot-comming.

Even so, the holiday presents an opportunity to revisit the Hudson Valley Chapter of the Apostrophe Protection Society — a group begun in this space last year, dedicated to scouting out egregious punctuation errors and mangled English in an effort to help maintain some modicum of standards.

Our group's feeling is, if we start letting our apostrophes slide, before you know it, we'll all be on the slippery slope toward talking like ... well, you know.

Our minions have now spread far beyond the region's borders. And they have cameras. Several have interrupted their vacations to snap pictures for those of us back in the Hudson Valley.

Along with the photographic evidence presented herein that both Canada and England are also going to hell in a grammar teacher's handbag, I share with you the following submissions of punctuation errors, errant spellings and injurious gibberish:

A free-standing cardboard poster on the counter of the Loch Sheldrake Post Office (printed by the state Board of Elections) informs patrons, You're right to vote. Does that mean you are right if you vote, or does it mean you have a right to vote?

— Lenny Polikoff, Loch Sheldrake

At the state police barracks in Liberty, one of the computer monitors has a scrolling screen saver that says, Dude, your getting a Dell.

– *Anonymous*

(I suppose that's better news than, Dude, your getting a ticket.)

A couple of years ago, a sign over the lingerie counter of a local department store said BRA'S.

Gone now, and sadly missed.

– *Robert Vincent, Newbury, UK*

My address has recently been changed to Woodys Way. I refuse to leave out the apostrophe myself.

– *Anonymous, Town of Poughkeepsie*

A number of spelling errors spotted by Bob Oddo of Summerfield, Fla., during his travels:

- No job to small (As illustrated by the small 'to'?)
- We do not except checks (No check left out? How thoughtful.)
- No skate borders (But skis are welcome to stay over!)

And finally, this bit of gibberish spied by K.J. Walters of Monroe on a syllabus for a college course in medical ethics — a veritable nook-u-ler word explosion resulting from the collision of medical and educational jargon:

Assess the feasibility of the general population going through the process to complete advanced directive forms based on understanding the medical complexities, and uncertainties which include prognostication and anticipating one's reaction to all contingencies of changing physical and mental conditions as well as trusting the medical community in the allocation of medical resources for the author's best interests.