



Former T-H writer founds National Punctuation Day

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August 22, 1005

Jeff Rubin of Pinole has turned his pet peeve into a national holiday.

The 55-year-old writer and business owner said he founded National Punctuation Day (www.nationalpunctuationday.com), observed today, because too many people “think a semicolon is a surgical procedure.” In fact, that’s one of the sentiments appearing on a line of T-shirts Rubin and his wife of seven years, public health educator Norma Martínez-Rubin, produce to commemorate the day.

Other T-shirts say “Jesus and the Twelve Apostrophes;” “A comma is not a state of being,” “An ellipsis is not when the moon moves in front of the sun,” and other clever quotes.

A *Times-Herald* sports writer in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Rubin has run The Newsletter Guy (www.thenewsletterguy.com), a newsletter publishing business, for nearly 25 years. He said he wanted to find a cute, non-offensive way to focus people’s attention on the proper use of the English language.

“It’s sad to say, but writing skills, punctuation skills and communication skills, have just deteriorated over the years,” Rubin said. “You see it in newspapers, magazines and even books – misspelled words, words used incorrectly – it’s extremely frustrating. I wanted to bring this to the forefront of the American consciousness in a fun, silly way.”

Rubin said he used to be more aggressive about correcting people’s grammatical errors, though he can’t help correcting them.

“I frequently correct serial abusers, in a gentle way,” Rubin said. “Usually I do it to good friends who don’t mind putting up with my neurosis. I’ve gotten more gentle about it over the years, but it’s like an itch. I have to do it.”

Joel Gannotti of Pinole said he’s been a friend of Rubin’s for 20 years, and a frequent recipient of his gentle corrections.

“He (peeves me) occasionally, but I sometimes have the opportunity to reciprocate, when he uses a word wrong or doesn’t know what word to use,” Gannotti said.

Gannotti said he appreciates both Rubin and his holiday.

“He’s a great guy, and I think National Punctuation Day is a great idea,” Gannotti said. “I think he’s a leader in the promotion of English as properly spoken and used. And if he can make it more available to the average person, it can only help us in understanding each other.”

A scientist and technical writer, Gannotti plans to observe National Punctuation Day

by working in his National Punctuation Day T-shirt.

“I have the ellipses shirt. A lot of my work is parenthetical. You have to pack as much information as possible into short, pithy sentences,” Gannotti said.

Originally from New York City, Rubin, 55, moved to Pinole more than 20 years ago.

He worked as a sports writer between 1978 and 1981 before starting The Newsletter Guy. And though he sells National Punctuation Day T-shirts on his Web site, it’s not about the money, he said.

“When I went to journalism school, I was trained that you get it right. And that includes punctuation, spelling, facts,” Rubin said. “Now, people accept they’re bad spellers, or bad grammarians, but they can do something about that.”

What he gets out of it, Rubin said, is “the satisfaction of knowing that I’m not alone, that there are other people in the world besides me who are anal about this – who think this is important in business, education and everyday communications.”

Rubin said that although people’s misuse of words, grammar and punctuation has annoyed him for years, it wasn’t until 2003 that he stumbled on a way to address the issue.

“I happened to find out about *Chase’s Calendar of Events* and submitted the idea of National Punctuation Day and they accepted it. And if it’s in *Chase’s*, it’s a holiday,” Rubin said. This is the holiday’s second year.

Rubin selected today for National Punctuation Day because it’s his birthday.

“When you get to be my age, and you establish a national holiday, you ask yourself, ‘How am I going to remember this day?’” Rubin said.

Next year and thereafter, however, National Punctuation Day will be Sept. 24, so the fun workshops Rubin’s developing for school children in commemoration of the day will have a potential audience in public schools that are in session.

Rubin said there’s been an “extraordinary” amount of interest in this national proper English day.

Last year, Rubin said he was interviewed by dozens of radio, television and newspaper reporters. This year, he added, the interest is even greater.

“Last year all the local media covered it, and even some national media. I was on National Public Radio, and NBC even announced it before and after its coverage of the Summer Olympics,” Rubin said. “This year I have already had three live radio spots on the East Coast and two in San Francisco.”

It’s the interest itself that is gratifying, he said.

“To know that for just one day, people are aware,” Rubin said. “If someone writes an e-mail and stops to go over it and wonder if it’s right, I’ll consider it a success.”

For more information on Jeff Rubin and National Punctuation Day, visit

www.thenewsletterguy.com

<http://books.mcgraw-hill.com/landingpage.php?template=chases> and
www.nationalpunctuationday.com or call (877) 588-1212.