

National Punctuation Day It's 'Grander Than the Silliness Involved'

By F.C. Lowe
Life Editor

Needing a way to channel his aggression and save his marriage, Jeff Rubin, 55, of Pinole, Calif., established National Punctuation Day.

Every morning when the veteran writer and editor read the daily newspaper, he became frustrated with all the mechanics errors and marked them with a red pen.

As he circled the mistakes, he also used profanity, much to the dismay of his wife, Norma, who told him she did not like when he spoke that way.

Thus, National Punctuation Day, Aug. 22, was born in 2004, and this day coincides with Rubin's birthday.

"I intentionally made it my birthday," Rubin said, explaining that at his age the short-term memory starts to fade, and the date of his birth was easy to remember.

This year, everyone is asked to stop and celebrate the use of proper punctuation marks on Monday.

To establish the holiday, Rubin said he followed the directions required by *Chase's Calendar of Events* in late 2002, and the date was accepted a couple of months later.

There is no charge for the service, but someone at *Chase's* responded with a letter stating that they hoped there were no punctuation mistakes in the message.

The holiday may have started "silly" as Rubin put it, but there is a definite passion behind it.

It is defined on the Web site as a "celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons and the ever-mysterious ellipsis."

He is extremely concerned about the proper use of punctuation.

The most common mistakes he has found are the incorrect uses of it's and its, punctuation marks placed outside quote marks, and the use of singular possession when plural is needed.

His serious mission has even survived through the teasing he endures from his friends.

"My plans are grander than the silliness involved," said Rubin, a professional speaker, who is working on a program for elementary students.

"Third- and fourth-graders are learning to read and write and formulating ideas," Rubin said. He wants to influence them with a multimedia presentation along with activities, such as a punctuation play and treasure hunt.

While this project is still in the planning stages, he realizes he will need to move the date of National Punctuation Day next year to fit in better with the school term.

Again he has chosen a number with special meaning. The day he has selected is Sept. 24, when schools will be in session, and because 24 was the number worn by Willie Mays, his favorite baseball player.

Rubin encourages everyone to get involved in this holiday but urges the continuation of proper punctuation all yearlong.

His Web site lists rules for proper usage he compiled after researching the subject.

His resources include the *Chicago Manual of Style*, *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, and *The Associated Press Stylebook*, which he calls his bible.

Some variations in style were found among the books, Rubin said, but he decided to go with what he called his “gut feeling” and what he learned in college.

A journalism graduate of the Bradley University in Peoria, Ill., Rubin said proper punctuation was drilled into him and his fellow students. He is surprised how this does not seem to be the case now with the large number of mistakes published daily and the number of signs he finds with mistakes.

Beware he will take photos of the signs and publish them on his Web site.

Everyone can learn to use proper punctuation, according to Rubin.

“It is not a genetic deficiency, and you don’t inherit it,” Rubin said. “People can learn spelling and punctuation, even though some think they can’t.”

As far as using correct punctuation, he encourages everyone to know why the mark should or should not be used.

Buying a style book and keeping it in a purse or knapsack is vital, Rubin said. “Never let it out of your sight and read a page every day.”

He has definite ideas for celebration of the holiday, including writing an error-free letter to a friend by regular mail or e-mail.

“If the holiday actually made people think, then it serves its purpose,” Rubin said. “That is really all you can do.”

Visit www.nationalpunctuationday.com or call 1-877-588-1212.