Star Bulletin .com

Punctuation’s red-letter day is on the way

BY CHARLES MEMMINGER

Punctuation’s red-letter day is on the way

A woman without her man is nothing. A woman: without her, man is nothing.

A woman? Without her? Man is no thing.

A.) Woman. Without Herman. Is? Nothing!

Aw! O! Man! Without Her? Man! I? Snot!!!!! ... (Hi, Ng!)

And a sentence, without punctuation, isjustacollectionofletters.

The sentence up there about the woman and her man is often used either to show the importance of punctuation or what a bunch of smarty-pants grammarians are. By simply moving commas and questions marks around, the entire meaning of a handful of words can be changed. If you find this less than fascinating, then you'll probably be completely underwhelmed to learn that Monday is National Punctuation Day.

As special days go, National Punctuation Day isn't that well-known. You'll be shocked to learn that Hallmark doesn't put out even ONE greeting card to mark the day. (I think they don't want to use up all their exclamation points before Christmas). But it's not one of those phoney-baloney "national" days like National Kumquat Day, which turns out to be sponsored by the National Kumquat Producers Association (three of the weirdest guys you'll never meet.) National Punctuation Day actually is recognized in "Chase's Calendar of Events," the respected compiler of important dates, which does not even recognize National Kumquat Day (or any day dedicated to obscure fruit or vegetables.)

On Monday there will be massive celebrations of National Punctuation Day across the country, including a Gay Punctuation Parade in San Francisco with gaudily dressed commas, periods and semicolons dancing though the streets. In New York, an enormous flashing exclamation point will be erected above Times Square and in Topeka, Kan., people will march around with question marks stamped on their foreheads. Rhode Island is celebrating the great event by having the entire state bracketed in parentheses made of Nerf material. And Guam — not sure whether it is supposed to celebrate a national day — will beam a laser asterisk at Google Earth cameras in space.

Actually, I made all that up. No big celebrations are planned for National Punctuation Day, mainly because most people don't really use punctuation anymore. Or know how to. I don't and I'm a semiprofessional writer. I suspect I should be using semicolons much more than I do, but I don't really understand what the buggers are supposed to accomplish. I always thought of semicolon as a crutch for a crippled sentence.

I've also never gotten the hang of colons: Like, does one belong here or not? And I hate exclamation points! Unless they are used with a question mark. Don't you think it adds a certain dramatic impact?!

Anywayhappyationalpunctuationday. (((Use as needed: ...!!!???"""***,,,,:::::;;;;;;"""")))