



by Kandice Bridges

I am all about the details. My entire career has been spent drafting and editing tax memos, reviewing documents and deciphering the Internal Revenue Code. I have to catch typos, identify incorrect analysis and discern the distinction between

earned and accrued. The other day, I considered my anal retentive nature. Was I born this way or was it a result of my chosen career path?

I always did well in school, but I don't remember being overly nit-picky. Maybe it started the fall semester of my senior year of college, during which I had to write thirty-two papers. However, if I'm being honest, I was more interested in which fraternity party I was going to attend than making sure I adhered to proper grammar. In law school, I read thousands of pages of cases, statutes and regulations and, at the end of each semester, took one three-hour written exam per class to prove I'd learned everything. Sometimes my grade was based on written memos and research papers. Spelling and grammar counted. Perhaps my penchant for details took root in a healthy fear of failing out, or worse, becoming a source of eternal disappointment and embarrassment for my parents.

As a newly minted associate in a large national law firm, the partners bled red ink all over the work I gave them for review. One particularly excruciating time, a document I drafted came back with a horrifying number of revisions. There were bright yellow sheets from a legal pad etched with glaring red words, front and back, inserted in between the pages onto which I'd poured my heart and soul. Fueled by a desire never to have that happen again, and wanting to minimize the wrath of a partner otherwise known as Satan, I became even more focused on the written word.

A few years later, when I found myself circling misspelled words in statutes, cringing at poorly drafted documents and mentally revising programs distributed at awards presentations and weddings, I congratulated myself on being observant, detail oriented and well-trained. It never occurred to me that most people don't feel compelled to edit everything they read.

About four years ago, I told my husband as we drove through a Dallas neighborhood that I was tempted to call the city to complain. "About what?" he asked. "Look." I said, pointing, "There, the street sign says Burgundy with a 'u' and a block away it is spelled B-u-r-g-a-n-d-y." He rolled his eyes. My husband also shook his head when I ordered an e-book and followed up with a polite email to the author pointing out a typo. I thought I was merely being helpful. When I told him I had discovered the Holy Grail: a typo in a traditionally published novel, he might have used the word 'psycho'.

A couple of months ago, I realized it was possible I had a problem that crossed the line from professional fastidiousness to obsession. I went to the opera for the first time. There was nothing that bothered me in the program, the text on the tickets or the menu at the bar. It was the subtitles. Almost every sentence ended with an exclamation point! Even if there was no excitement! Or strong feelings! What drove me over the edge, though, was the extra space between the word and the exclamation point. Every single time. I was even more perplexed because when a period was used at the end of a phrase, no extra space was placed before it. I was taunted by the punctuation and

inconsistent spacing. I tried not looking, instead focusing my attention on the stage. I couldn't. Let it. Go. I left before the show was over. In my defense, I determined I'm not an opera person. I'm pretty sure it wasn't just the subtitles. Pretty sure.

My 38th birthday arrived not long after the opera experience, and I had some friends over to celebrate. I decided to make a CD of my favorite upbeat songs to give as a party favor. It took quite a while to cull through all of my music and select the seventeen songs that captured my musical tastes from high school through current day. It wasn't until after my party, when I was listening to the CD in my car on the way to work, that a college memory made its way to the front of my mind. I was nineteen, driving around Dallas in my red Mitsubishi Eclipse, volume turned up as high as it would go, windows rolled down, singing song number three at the top of my lungs. The song was "I Love You, Period" by Dan Baird. It's a song about a boy who has a crush on his teacher and writes her a love letter. My favorite part of the song was the chorus because I could totally feel the teacher's pain as she offers a critique of his punctuation. The lyrics?

I love you period
Do you love me question mark
Please please exclamation point
I wanna hold you in parentheses

At that moment, I knew. The next time someone accused me of overzealous editing, I'd respond as any reasonable, rational person, having thoroughly analyzed the genesis of their idiosyncrasies should. I'd blame my parents.