

The last couple of weeks have been rough. Intensely emotional. A handful of



unexpected deaths shocked our community, bringing us together in grief and mourning. Some of us have friends – or friends of friends – in Texas who lost their homes to fire. The nation issued a collective groan at the latest jobs report, then turned our hearts and minds to the devastating events of 9/11.

And *Lowcountry Weekly* published two typos.

Actually, I'll bet there were more than two. But what I know for an absolute fact is that, in the August 31st issue of this publication, an "m" was left out of ".com" in one website address we printed, and an unnecessary hyphen was added to another. I know this because an anonymous reader made a special effort to email me and alert me to our mistakes.

There was a time, years ago, when an email like this would lay me low for days. I took it so personally! It hurt my pride... shamed me... mortified me to my very core. After all, I was an Editor. A professional stickler. It was my job to catch missing 'm's and extraneous hyphens. To be honest, it was never part of my job I enjoyed – still isn't – but it was part of my job, nonetheless. To be caught being *bad* at my job was practically unbearable. I would take to my bed in disgrace.

Fast forward about a decade. Today, when I receive an email like this, it stings a bit... but only a bit. In fact, when I received this one, I actually laughed out loud. Not that I think typos are a laughing matter; perish the thought! No, I laughed because I saw myself in the letter writer. I, of all people, know the delicious thrill of catching mistakes in someone else's published work... the

sense of superiority... of having spotted something someone else has missed... of being smarter than the so-called “professionals.” Oh, it’s a marvelous rush! I used to dash off letters-to-the-editor on a regular basis, pointing out misspelled words, mistakes in headlines, grammatical errors, bad punctuation... whatever I could find. It almost felt like a moral imperative. I was a linguistic avenger, out to right the world’s rhetorical wrongs!

Of course, this was before my husband and I bought a local newsweekly and learned a few things – like how much *more* goes into running a free, ad-driven publication (with no production staff) than I ever imagined. Heck, considering everything that has to get done around here – writing, editing, photography, ad sales, ad design, page layout, distribution, billing, website maintenance, customer service, phones, email, etc – we’re lucky we don’t have a mountain of typos in every issue. Proofing always happens at the end of a long, *grueling* deadline cycle and often feels like the proverbial “last straw.” Is that an excuse for imperfection? No. It’s just a reality.

So, I don’t dash off those fun “gotcha” letters anymore. I no longer bask in the pride of being smarter than some editor. In fact, most of the time now, when I spot a typo in somebody else’s publication, I think “ouch.” I feel the editor’s pain, as if it were my own. Then I just... let it go. Because here’s the truth: Sometimes, editors really *are* careless. But more often than not, they’re frantic or exhausted or distracted by something at home... or they truly don’t know any better. All of these possibilities – yes, even not knowing any better – are forgivable in the grand scheme of things. And if you don’t know what I mean by the “grand scheme,” reread my first paragraph.

I was very proud of our last issue. It was full of wonderful stories and compelling images, and I know how hard we worked to pull it all together. I refuse to let a few typos utterly destroy my positive feelings about that issue... though, as I’ve said, there was a time when I certainly would have. What I’ve learned is that perfection is rarely (if ever) achievable. Even when something’s “perfect” in one department, chances are it’s less so in another. For example: As an editor, I’ve come across writers who have impeccable punctuation, spelling and grammar... but absolutely no flair. Meanwhile, one of the finest, most soulful writers I’ve ever had the privilege of reading, much less working with (hi, Mark Shaffer!), will never, in a million years, learn the difference between “dessert” and “desert”... or “forest” and “Forrest.” It’s my job to catch these insignificant “imperfections.” Most of the time, I do. Occasionally, I don’t. I’m not happy when I don’t, but I no longer dwell. I shudder to think there was a time when a misspelled word in an otherwise beautiful article made me apoplectic... when I might have written a letter-to the-editor over it. Or taken to my bed in disgrace.

I want to make it clear I'm not advocating editorial slackness... or slackness in general. This is not an attempt to exonerate myself of crimes against the English language. I have committed them; I stand guilty as charged. No, this is an article about perspective. Because this change of heart I've had about typos extends to... well, just about everything. I've decided that too much dwelling on typos – my own or someone else's – is an egregious elevation of style over substance. It's like fretting so much over somebody's tacky shoes that you don't notice her terrific personality... or worrying so much about somebody's lax table manners that you don't appreciate the wonderful meal she's prepared... or being so appalled by someone's bad grammar that you completely miss his natural wit and gentle spirit.

I've been guilty of this kind of petty judgment – against others, and especially against myself – most of my life, and it shames me. But even more than that... *I think it's a shame*. Because I'm the one who missed out. On people. On relationships. On experiences. I don't plan to miss out anymore. Life's too damn short.

As Harper Lee's famous spokesman Atticus Finch once mused, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." This past decade, for me, has been about understanding people... about looking past their metaphorical "typos"... about climbing into their skin. And there's a funny thing that happens when you walk around in other people's skin. You end up more comfortable in your own.

In closing, I would only ask one small favor: If you find a typo in this column... please keep it to yourself. I'm not quite there yet.

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