

Sitting Here, Deaf

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I know that you, the hearing care professionals, laugh at us, the consumers with hearing loss.

Don't deny it. In a talk he was giving to a consumer audience, an audiologist told us that a standard joke among the professionals is the definition of a hard of hearing person – someone who puts off getting a hearing aid for 10 years, yet who now can't go without them for even 10 minutes when it's being repaired.

Or something like that.

Well, I don't think it's a very funny joke. Recently, I spent three interminable hours while my hearing aids were "being looked at." They came out beautifully, expertly repaired. But while I was waiting, I wrote down my thoughts:

Sitting Here, Deaf

I'm sitting here, quietly and deaf
Waiting for my hearing aids to come back.
They are being examined, possibly repaired
By technicians who may not know
They have my life in their hands.
This may be the twentieth set
They've worked on today
Under their magnifiers and lights,
Looking for what's wrong and
What might be fixed.
But really, do they know
They're poking at my insides,
Dissecting organs of communication
That connect me to the world?
I'm waiting here, nervous and deaf
In a temporary vacuum, void of sound
I clear my throat, but cannot hear it.
I'm worried –
Is there something seriously wrong?
And if it can be fixed,
Things will sound so different and loud
That I'll startle at car horns
And cringe at the cat's howl.
I'm pacing, anxious and deaf

Half cursing my dependency
On these two bits of digital technology.
I feel as if I'm separated from my children
Unable to focus on anything but them,
Worrying and wondering how the technicians are doing...
Perhaps joking with colleagues?
But hopefully focused and intent, because
Surely they've been trained and sensitized
To know that what they're working with
Goes beyond a fusion of wires and plastic and chips -
These are creations of human genius
An eloquent expression of our ability to make
Something from nothing – to create communication out of silence.

Do they know that?
I hope so but I won't know so
Until she comes back with my ear-babies and says,
“Here, try them now.”
I'll put them in and start the ritual
That tells me how they're working.
I clear my throat – once for sound, twice for assurance –
My voice will rise and fall, whisper and boom –
As I test myself with a fragment of nursery rhyme.
Mary had a little lamb,
Lamb, lamb, LITTLE LAMB!
Mary, mary, MARY, mary...

Then I'll know that I can hear, and maybe hear well...
But whatever happens, whatever the verdict,
I hope she brings them back soon
To where I'm sitting and waiting –
Deaf, quiet and anxious.

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