

The Way I Hear It

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The Space Between Your Lips and My Ears



I haven't yet watched Code of Silence, in which a deaf worker with exceptional speechreading abilities uses her skills to aid criminal investigations. I want to avoid the usual cringing at the myths of hearing loss and deafness perpetuated in popular media. But I have been assured that Code of Silence avoids these myths, some of them anyway, so I'll give it a go.

But until then...

There's a space between a hearing person and me,

Between their words and my ears.

A space that changes shape and size as it

Fills with the sounds of spoken language

That I don't always *get*.

To "hearing people", this space is not only invisible,

It doesn't exist,

As they converse easily with (most) people, crisply, speaking and listening,

Back and forth, *blah-de-blah-blah-ing*.

But the people with hearing loss, we can feel this space

Between your voices and our ears.

It's *challenging*, sometimes *painful*,

Because in this clear, tasteless, and odorless expanse,

Sound and meaning are often splintered,

With blurry edges and hollow middles

Or even *nothingness*—as if the sound never happened.

We work hard to understand.

We look across this space to the lips of speakers, taking in their full face and eyes and facial expressions and body language

Which help fill in the words' meaning when our hearing aids don't detect crucial bits of speech.

(But what we *see* is *never* enough to expertly speechread criminal conversations from a distance!)

We get things wrong and ask for the sounds to be recreated and spoken again

We might even have to ask *what are we talking about now*, if the discussion has spun out of our control.

If we have the topic wrong, *nothing* we see or hear will make sense.

(And we wouldn't want to send someone to jail on something we *thought* we saw them say, right?)

This distance and time between the spoken words and the receptive ear,

Between your lips and my ears,

Is, for some of us, the space between hearing and loss.

Some of us will say, "*I never had good hearing, so how can I have lost it?*"

And some of us say, "*Hearing has slowly dripped away*" or

"It left so fast I didn't have time to say goodbye."

But we can smooth the space between there and here.

Let's use technology, develop skill at reading faces, and learn how to ask and pull

Better communication from the people on the other side.

Communication is the glue that connects us.

Without it, we really would be islands, separate from each other.

And I don't want that kind of space between a hearing person,

Or *any* person, and me.