Canadian Audiologist
The Official Publication of the Canadian Academy of Audiology

When They Take Away Your Hearing Aids

Published February 27th, 2021

Gael Hannan

There's a special kind of deaf felt by people who use hearing aids all the time, every minute of their waking day.

It's not the same as when you first open your eyes to connect to the world—deaf, but *knowing* you will shortly be turned on and tuned in.

No. this special deaf is what you become when your devices are removed—to be examined by the technical gods because Something. Is. Wrong.



Nothing jangles our nerves more than problems with our precious electronic mini-miracles. We hardly notice them when they rest comfortably in or on our ears. But the minute they're not there, our head feels disconnected from our body, from the *world.* It's a shock to the system.

A few seconds ago, you understood the audiologist. But now, she's two-dimensional with a moving, silent mouth, and you wonder—how can she possibly think I can understand her when she

has my hearing aids in her hand!?

A few years ago I went to the manufacturer to have my sputtering hearing aids looked at, content to wait for as long as it took to have them fixed. On this particular day, I waited over two hours, with nothing to do except worry—and write about how I was feeling.

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?
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 *babies*
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.

— Gael Hannan 2014

In the end, the hearing aids were repaired to work beautifully, and I have continued along my hearing journey. But every time my audiologist has my device(s) in her hands, I am uncomfortable until they are back where they belong—on my head.