

Hearing - something I have always taken for granted
-Brent Skinner

Hearing is something that I have always taken for granted. Some sounds I find very pleasant... sounds such as a distant freight train, the wind whispering in mountain pines, early morning birds chirping, children playing in the street or a John Denver CD on a long car trip. My hearing has never been very acute. I would be a poor choice to guard the wagon train on a black prairie night. I would be an even worse pick to adjudicate a choral festival or to take minutes at a meeting of Whisperers International. To make matters worse, I think that I am beginning to go deaf.

Now my impending deafness is not a total surprise. My mother is hard of hearing as were both my grandmothers. A few years back, my mother reluctantly got a hearing aid and found that her hearing had improved so remarkably that on her first week of wearing it she cut three people out of her will, which is now written in HB pencil for quick edits.

Unlike, for example, loss of vision, deafness usually comes on slowly. In my case, it is a consistent and profound failure to hear what my wife is saying. Audrey is uncertain if I really suffer from deafness as opposed to a loss of listening. She observes that I have no problem understanding the radio commentary on an Olympic hockey game. However, one hockey game does not a pattern make. I am finding it more and more difficult to understand my wife's comments when shopping at Safeway, or hearing the counter clerk when placing a coffee order at Starbucks (I have a growing fear that I will end up drinking an exotic double chocolate mint mocha when all I really intended to order was a coffee grande). My inability to hear is most evident in such noisy places as the High Level Diner (my favourite restaurant) or the Edmonton International

Airport. Worst of all, my wife is finding it increasingly frustrating when giving me directions, and is not happy when I return from a trip to the basement refrigerator with a bag of frozen carrots instead of the intended cauliflower. I am giving some serious thought to wearing a “Hard of Hearing and may not understand spoken instructions” placard around my neck so as to reduce spousal expectations and to generate some measure of sympathy.

On the other hand, deafness is not really all that bad. It has made me somewhat immune to verbal criticism (what I cannot hear cannot hurt) and has reduced the negative impact of a lot of otherwise irritating noises. For example, our daughter’s dog generates a high pitched whine whenever we open the kitchen pantry door, to which annoying sound I am now completely oblivious. I can barely hear elevator “muzac” and am only vaguely aware of the sound of the high speed drill or my muffled screams when visiting my dentist. Horn blowing in heavy freeway traffic or the heavy metal music from the next car at the traffic light barely registers. I blithely assume that indecipherable public address announcements are about a special sales event in ladies wear as opposed to a bomb evacuation alert.

Audrey and I are having more frequent conversations about the possibility of hearing testing or pension vesting or robins nesting or something like that.

I am reasonably confident that my marriage is strong enough to overcome an occasional problem with communications. After all, a wise man once described a perfect marriage as being the union of a deaf man with a blind woman.

I could also be wrong. So, if you see me sitting on a pile of suitcases and National Geographic magazines on my front curb, give me an understanding wave but don’t bother tooting your horn, as I probably won’t hear it.

