



# My Detachable Ear

by Larry Leifer

Be glad your ears are attached. When I lose a hearing aid, not only do I lose my hearing all over again, but I also lose time, days even, replacing my ears. It's usually my fault. When you lend your ear to someone, and you don't snatch it back—well, expect to lose an ear.

You wouldn't think that you could lose track of such a vital sensory organ. I've been using hearing aids for roughly 30 years; but still, I frequently have these startling moments when I realize that my hearing's lost again.

It was not until the next appointment that I reached reflexively to my hearing aid....No ear. The person last seen with it was heading for the airport. Damn!

Part of the reason my ear replacements get lost is that they're so darn small. I've never cared for these hearing aids that hide, or look 'natural,' but that's the technology of the day. You stuff the plug in your external ear canal and hang the dongle behind your ear; then you're ready to make sense out of what people are mouthing. Not that anyone's fooled; these cosmetically neutral blobs that are supposed to look natural look to me more like tumors on the back of one's ear. And as the years pass, designers may have improved these devices acoustically, but they've also increased the means and modalities for their getting lost.

Somewhere into the fourth or fifth replacement (owing to diminished sensitivity, not forgetfulness) I began to notice that what others call music is pretty much noise, save maybe the beat that I really mostly felt rather than heard. Symphonies became cacophonies.

There are some up sides to this lost ear thing. I have come to rely on, and treasure, one-on-one conversations in isolated environments. The result is that elusive thing some call "quality time." One advisee once confessed that I seemed to hear her better than anyone else—even though I can't hear worth a damn.

The other interesting, maybe even cool, thing is that my latest hearing aid is a hand-held wireless microphone. In order to hear and distinguish one voice among many, or with high background noise, I must either hold the microphone up to the speaker or ask that she wear the microphone as a pendant. Both actions require that I invade strangers' personal space. When I decide I want to hear someone, there's no choice but to get close and personal in a new and engaging way.

The only problem with this ear-passing ritual is when someone accidentally runs off with my ear. Fortunately, this time, the guy who had it noticed that he was wearing my ear as he was getting into a cab. He stopped short—probably in horror that he had stolen one of my important body parts—and rushed back to find me.

Thus my ear is reclaimed, my head connected to sound again...but not for long. In some ways, losing my ear—and my hearing—has become part of me. It's sure to live on long after this particular hearing aid is gone. 🖐️