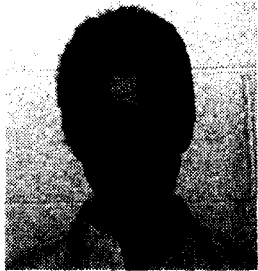


Communicating with the hearing disabled takes patience and awareness

By **RACHEL SHEPHERD**
Capital Times Staff Reporter



The presentation, "Overcoming Barriers Between Deaf and Hearing," hit close to home for me. I struggle with significant hearing loss as I am currently deaf to high pitches (i.e. ringing of phones) and I am expected to be fully deaf in the upcoming years. I am fortunate to attend the Penn State campus where I have faculty, students and coordinators that accommodate my disability (esp. Prof Churchill- thank you by the way).

However, life outside of my academic shell gets complicated. I have said many times I wish I could walk around with a big sandwich sign that reads "I am not stupid, I just can't hear you." I am avoided and made to feel like a fool when I can not hear someone. They think I ignore them or that I am dumb when I don't reply correctly to a question they asked. And rightly so, I suppose, since I have no visible signs of a hearing disability (even my hearing aids are micro). Only those who know me, understand they have to look at me when they talk or repeat themselves when I don't respond. For those that don't, I struggle with a constant ugliness that has no face.

Daily life consists of asking the person accompanying me what the cashier, grocery store clerk, or waitress said. When I am alone, I can get away with a simple nod or smile on about half of the questions asked. I only know I am wrong when someone responds to those gestures with a strange look, in which case I go through my routine, "I'm sorry. Could you repeat yourself?"

Even more embarrassing is when someone else tells you your phone is ringing. Or when they hear a sound and look at me like, "ok why is she ignoring [fill in the sound]."

Internally, my ears ring constantly. I think I hear a phone ring, but can never differentiate that from the ringing in my ears. The ringing is like a sore on your lip - it really only bothers *you*, but it disables you to the point where it affects everything else you do.

Being only 22 and knowing that my hearing is deteriorating is scary. But, I am prepared for the worst. I only wish other people were too. With all the technological advances, foreign languages and other means to communicate with people, could someone please try to communicate with the hard of hearing? Just ask me what you have to do and you'll never have to ask again.

"Being only 22 and knowing that my hearing is deteriorating is scary. But, I am prepared for the worst. I only wish other people were too."

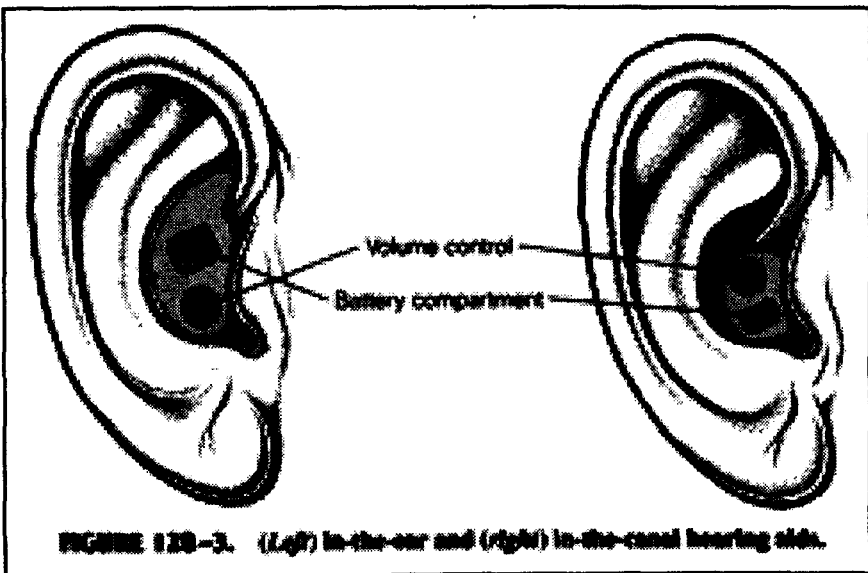


FIGURE 12B-3. (Left) in-the-ear and (right) in-the-canal hearing aids.

Hearing aids are an obvious sign of hearing disability and can help you spot a person with a hearing disability. Subtly checking to see if someone has one can help you to realize why a person might not be responding appropriately.

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