

Hearing impaired are MADASHELL

By J B Leftwich

More than 26 million Americans have hearing impairments.

I found this on the internet from one of the 767,754 sites which became available when I typed the key words, "hearing impairment."

Whether 26 million is an accurate number of the hearing impaired is a matter of conjecture. My own guess, based on the people I know or see at church or at chamber of commerce meetings, is the number may be on target.

Furthermore, the number is growing daily as more of us elderly approach or break the 80 barrier. In that age group, according to another bit of datum from the internet, more than 90 per cent of our citizens are enduring hearing loss.

There is another alarming snippet being bandied about. The rate of impairment among the survivors of the 1960s and succeeding decades is rising at an alarming rate. If you fall into this category, you will recognize your impairment when "this part is even" reaches your ears as "the Garden of Eden" and "the runner is out" is received as "the punter has gout."

The Flower Children and others who followed have hastened their entry into this area of the handicapped because, for one thing, they have listened too much to excessively amplified music.

It's a noisy world. There seldom is silence.. Anywhere. Walk into a supermarket and be greeted by a blaring sound system. Some service stations now have highly amplified radios assaulting your eardrums at the gas pumps. Ever drive your automobile just thinking? Chances are the radio is blasting away.

You who are becoming aware that sounds are frequently distorted will also recognize the expressions of people who think your elevator is stuck at the third floor when the question you answer is unrelated to the question asked. Such as: "What do you think about the President's position on Kosovo?" And you reply: "I don't know. Is he playing around with her, too?"

Television is a prime offender. Commercials scream at you. It used to be only the used car dealers who blasted your eardrums. Now, it seems, all commercials turn up the volume. I wonder if advertisers know how often commercials are muted.

Unfortunately for the hearing impaired -- at least in my case -- news reporters and some anchors are shouting the news as if they are trying to reach you during the rage of a wind storm or on the scene at Niagara Falls. As a consequence, especially in the case of female

reporters, this screaming style has positioned voice registers out of the range of many hard of hearing people.

In my case -- and others have voiced similar reactions -- I stick with Channel 4 where Demetria Kaladimos and Bill Hall report in a calm, unhurried style which resonates clearly through my hearing aids. In contrast, the female anchors at Channel 5 seem to be rattling instead of speaking while they go for new speed records for words per minutes. Other friends of the hearing handicapped are Channel 8's Anne Holt, PBS's Gwen Ifill and ABC's Carol Simpson.

On the other hand, I can understand radio newscasts. It's no strain for me to listen to public radio's "All Things Considered." During University of Tennessee sports telecasts, I muted the sound and turned on radio's John Ward.

If I seem a mite angry it's because I'm a mite angry. The hearing impaired are the most ignored of handicapped Americans. You can explain to someone you have a hearing deficiency, and he or she will remember about nine seconds. You see, we just don't look handicapped.

Obviously, we 26 million hearing handicapped need to organize. We need lobbyists to effect a change in the American Disability Act. We need an acronym such as DAMNITDON'TALKSOFAST. Or GETYOURVOICEOUTOFOURTHROAT.

Maybe something not so long. Such as MADASHELL. Can anybody think of a name for our organization to fit this acronym?

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