



Say Again?!

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I freely admit it—I'm going deaf.

When I was a teenager, I could hear a gnat coming from a mile away. These days, I usually have to read someone's lips to understand what he is saying. This is not a good thing, especially for an E-2C NFO whose life revolves around the radio. I first noticed this hearing loss a couple of years ago when I had to frequently ask other crewmembers what someone said on the radio. At first, I thought maybe my helmet or earphones were defective. After about \$200 of modifications to my helmet by the PRs, I started to realize that maybe it wasn't the helmet. I also started to notice how often I asked, "What?"

I'm not quite sure what exactly caused my hearing loss. It may have been the roar of jet engines. It may have been the heavy machinery I've been exposed to during my 11 years in the Navy. There were many times when I went to FOD walkdowns without wearing hearing protection. I had figured that I was just going to be in the noisy environment for just a few minutes—what harm could that have done? There were also times when I was in shipboard engineering spaces without hearing protection. Sometimes I was in an office aboard ship where I couldn't even hear a person yelling to me. It really doesn't matter what started it. There are many things

I could have done to prevent at least some of the hearing loss.

Again, I never really thought about putting earplugs in my ears. It just didn't seem to be a priority at the time. The bad habits didn't stop at work. I was damaging my hearing at home, too. I would listen to music with the volume way up, or mow the lawn without earplugs. The list went on and on.

What have my years of experience taught me? They have taught me one should listen to one's elders because they may actually know something. Some lessons are best learned through the experiences of others rather than your own. My hearing will never come back. I can't start over and say, "This time, I'm going to do the smart thing." So what do I do about it now?

For starters, I now take better care of the hearing I still do have. I wear hearing protection whenever I'm in a noisy environment. I try to not have my music on too loud. I definitely have earplugs available every second while I'm aboard ship.

I hope these precautions will extend my hearing a couple more years so I don't ever have to use the sign language I've been learning in my spare time. ☺