

LESSON IN LIVING

ARE WE LISTENING?

Elma Allen Milano

My home lies two blocks south of a busy thoroughfare and two blocks north of a very busy street; however, within my subdivision it is quite peaceful. The other morning, I awakened at 4 a.m. and noted some of the sounds I heard. The most memorable one came from my mantle clock which was a gift from one of my daughters. It chimes every 15 minutes. My cuckoo clock (which was also a gift from another daughter) puts on a little show every half-hour; it gives out one “cuckoo” on each half-hour and then on the hour it cuckoo’s as many times as the hour indicates. I was also given a “bird clock” which makes a different bird sound on each hour of the day. Thus, if I have a sleepless night, I can always know what time it is. To me, these are friendly sounds; they keep me company.

Having taught music for sixty years, and my hearing still being keen, I decided to write this lesson on sounds. Each of us would profit from periodically “stopping the world and getting off.” This is what I did and then began by noting my own body sounds; stomach rumbles, breathing and coughing. Other “homemade” sounds were the hum of the refrigerator, computer, washer and dryer motors. Living where I do, there is the continuous drone of airplanes flying in and out of Sky Harbor Airport located in Phoenix. And then there are always the “attention-getters” such as the sirens, alarm clocks, doorbells, telephones and crying babies.

My favorite outside sound comes from the birds that begin singing at dawn and continue until dusk. My next-to-favorite sounds are of my great-grandchildren playing, talking and laughing. I also enjoy the music generated by the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the ever-popular Harmonicats. My dad was a gifted harmonica player and he either whistled or blew his harmonica almost all day long. I grew to love this happy, “reedy” sound. Because the accordion is also a reed instrument, it was very enjoyable to me when I became a professional accordionist while still attending Eagle Rock High School in Los Angeles.

Speaking of sounds, what contributions do we make to the noise of this busy world? Does our mode of living emit loud quarrels? Does our music practicing get on our neighbor’s nerves? Are we aware of our acquaintances sleep patterns so we do not pierce their rest hours? Is our voice soothing, or is it screechy and shrill? It pays to periodically use a tape recorder and find out how we sound. Do we have a cooing quality when we speak? Do we sound cheerful and pleasant? Is our language intelligent? Do we use too much slang; and how about swear words? Do we keep a dictionary handy to avoid mispronouncing words?

It is very appealing to hear a cultured, intelligent person speak who has fine diction. A cute English accent is especially appealing to me. As long as we control the pitch, volume and enunciate clearly, we each could become a more pleasing conversationalist.

This was written in 2007 when Elma was 87-years-old. The complete series may be found on lintonmilano.com.