



Deafness in comics

Deaf persons in comics

Professor Calculus



The main characters in comics are usually flawless. One exception is professor Calculus. He is hard of hearing. The professor refuses to use hearing aid even though he misunderstands frequently. In "Destination Moon" he claims that hearing aid is used only by the deaf, and he is not deaf - he is just a little hard of hearing on one ear. Still, he *does* use a hearing trumpet! This suggests that the professor has grown more and more hard of hearing and does not know just how much he does not hear.

This may lack of understanding may have been caused by the fact that the other characters fail to tell him when his answers are a bit off. Like when Tintin says that he is not feeling too well in "The Seven Chrystal Balls". When professor Calculus thinks Tintin claims that Hippolytos is in the garden, Tintin does not tell him he misunderstood. And the professor appears to be stupid when he walks into the garden.

It looks like Calculus eventually understands the problem. When they are going to the moon ("Destination Moon") Haddock makes a comment about Calculus not being deaf any more. The professor says that he has constructed hearing aid because he has to listen to the radio while piloting the rocket to the moon.

Gaston Lagaffe

[Gaston Lagaffe](#) wants to do as much of the things he supposed not to do in working hours instead of doing his job. The result is a medium size mountain of incoming mail. That is not so bad, The bills from the plumbers, electricians and various people fixing the buildings after Gastons experiments end in explosions are worse. Gaston does his best to reduce the strain on his fellow workers by exposing them for practical jokes.

Like putting firecracker inside the telephone. When the poor victim (Pruimpit) answers the phone, the firecracker goes off leaving his glasses in the other end of the room. The joke is funny to Gaston, but Pruimpit feels otherwise. The response is trying to put Gaston into orbit. Pruimpit does not hear his co-workers' warning that the launcher is too short because he has turned deaf and does not hear a thing. We do not know whether the damage is permanent or where Gaston lands.



Donald Duck



The few handicapped we meet in Duckburg are usually villains. If you read Norwegian you can have a look at "Sykdomspanoramaet i Andeby" (Tidsskrift for den Norske Lægeforening nr. 30, 1994 / Donaldisten 26) og "Der kjeltringene er funksjonshemmet" (Handikapnytt nr. 2 -1995 / Donaldisten 26). Sometimes we do however meet "normal" deaf persons. In "Donald's Raucous Role" ([WDC 178-02](#)) even Donald ends up deaf. Donald and the boys moves away from all the noise - they settle down in Old Lace Manor where "no dogs, cats, or **babies** are allowed." Now, one should expect that all is well when the Ducks have moved away from cats fighting and passing trains....., but Donald starts trying to hear the little noises their neighbours make. After removing skirting, he succeeds in hearing squeaky slippers and declares war on the noisy neighbour. Hours later the neighbour upstairs ends the war between his downstairs neighbours by blowing an alpenhorn directly into Donalds ear (you can hear the alpenhorn "thirty miles upwind on a cloudy day"). A week later Donald regains consciousness and Huey, Dewey and Louie visit him. The last panel shows Donald adjusting his hearing aid saying: "I can't make out a **word** you're saying! There's so doggoned much **static** in this **hearing aid!**"

In "Silent Night" ([CS WDC 64](#)). Donald decides it is too bad nobody sing christmas carols anymore and starts singing "Silent Night" for his neighbour [Jones](#). Jones does not like his singing and uses an electrified baton to force Donald to sing to Jones' stone deaf friend against the wind across a canyon. You can read the story at [Kit's Silver Age Comics](#)). It is even worse in "A Day in a Duck's Day" ([W DD 138-01 /H 98085](#)). Donald's new muscle car causes Donald and his neighbours to loose their hearing, but it *does* toast wiennies from ten feet away!

Mr Jinglepurse in "Special Delivery" ([W WDC 203-01](#)) may just be difficult to wake up, but he is probably hard of hearing. This may be good when you have a roaring lion as a pet. When Donald tries to deliver food for the lion (Imported zebra chops) the lion (Angelboy) breaks through the door, assails Donald and makes a lot of noise, but the owner sleeps well until Huey, Dewey and Louie shake him awake. All he says is "Eh?... Goodness! I must have fallen asleep!" This proves that it is important to use hearing protection when being in a noisy environment.

Which is what Donald tries to do in "The Gab-Muffer" ([W OS 1047-02](#)). [Gyro Gearloose](#) makes him a gab muffer because he is tired of the noise the boys make when playing. Donald turns the device on, the space around the boys falls silent and his nephews think they have "been yelling so loud we broke our ear drums!" and gone deaf. Later, when the device is damaged, a fire almost ends in disaster because the fire department cannot hear what Donald is trying to say on the phone. [Gyro's helper](#) saves them all by extinguishing the fire and making the gab muffer short circuit. The silence does not cause any problem for the silent little man.



A different kind of gab muffer is made in "Teken-lopers" ([H 94191](#)). In this story [Magica de Spell](#) makes [junior woodchucks](#) on a bottle. The bottle works as a one-way gab muffer: Huey, Dewey and Louie can hear children asking whether they were born inside the bottle, but people outside cannot hear a word of what the poor junior woodchucks shout.

In "Trail of the Unicorn" ([W OS 263-03](#)). Donald says "Those blasted kids are the biggest nuisance since measles were invented!" The creator of this story, [Carl Barks](#), was hard of hearing as a result of measles. You can see Barks in "Duckmade Disaster" ([H 92001/W JW 14-01](#)). The artist has him throwing eggs at Scrooge's money bin with the junior woodchuck G.U.F.F.S.P.O.U.T.E.R. and other protesters. The cause of the egg throwing is Scrooge's unwillingness to move his bin from where the protesters want to build a monument to honour the founder of Duckburg Cornelius Coot.

Other comics



The prejudices against deaf are demonstrated in the [Lucky Luke](#) story "The Judge". In this story a mute (deaf?) is appointed as Lucky Luke's defence. He does not look very bright and he is told that he will be hanged if he moves a finger.

The guard in Patos River Bank ("La guérison des Dalton", 18) is probably rather deaf. When Averell Dalton accidentally blows up a dynamite storehouse the guard opens the door and wants to know who knocked on the door. The chief of the Yellow-Foot tribe claims not to be "deaf as the mole" in "Le 20eme de cavalerie."

In "The twelve tasks of Asterix" one of the tasks set before the Gauls is to get a permit. One of the many desk clerks they meet is old and very hard of hearing. The hearing difficulty may just be bureaucrat(a)se for take a hike. When Asterix asks for permit A38 the reply is "The port? It's in the other end of town, by the seaside, you can't miss it..." When the clerk's boss later asks him where window two is, the all signs of not hearing what is said is gone.

Sign Language

It is a well known fact that the native Americans developed a kind of Sign Language because they did not understand each other. This probably was a very simple language, maybe something like "international signing."

In "Watch out for the Blue-Foot" the Blue foot tribe lays a siege to the town of Rattlesnake because a crook has told the chief of all the whisky. The inhabitants of Rattlesnake defend their town well, and the Blue feet call the Yellow feet and the Green-Foot for help. The Yellow-Foot chief tells the others what he thinks of the white men's future (see illustration). After some time the joint forces of many-coloured feet seize the town only to find no whisky. When the Blue feet chief regains consciousness after accidentally drinking a bottle of Coca Cola the cavalry has arrived and all the feet has to leave town.



We also see a little of the native American Sign Language in "The Convoy". The Souix chief receives a report from a scout. The Sign Language works fine, except that the chief thinks the scout has learned a new sign when he scratches his nose.

Lip reading

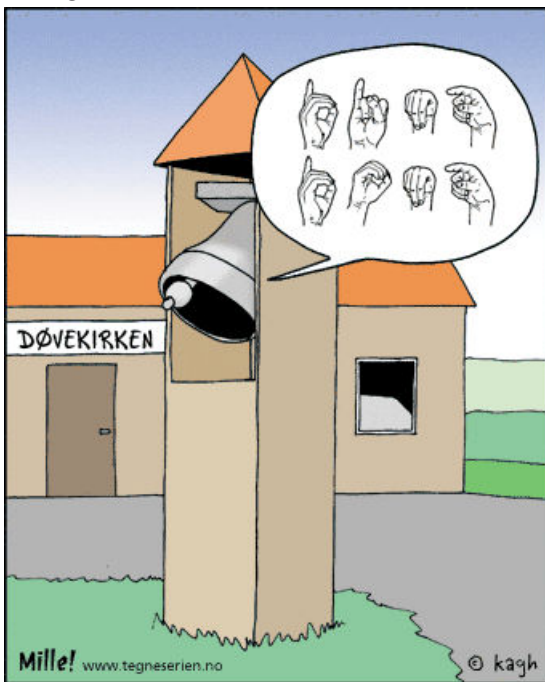


You face many difficulties if you become deaf as an adult, but when Donald becomes deaf in "Donald's Raucous Role" (WDC 178-02) he has one advantage: He is very good at lip reading. We learn this in "Eyes in the Dark" (WDC 60-02). In this story he makes a radar to see things behind trees and walls. He can only see the silhouette, but he is still able to read the lips of Huey, Dewey and Louie. And so he is able to beat them to their tent in the forrest so that when they arrive, he awaits them dressed as a native American. Lip reading does not help when the four of them are getting beating by "Three mad apes."

Courses in lip reading seems to be common in Duckburg. Scrooge in particular must be talented - "The Eaves-Snooper" (JW 27-02) has Scrooge he teaching himself lip reading by reading a book. Huey, Dewey and Louie learns that he plans to use this to outsmart his competitors, and stop him with the help of other junior woodchucks.



Even [the beagle boys](#) learn lip reading. 176-167 learned to read lips in prison and reads Scrooge's lips in "Beagle Boys Ahoy" (D 5694). The beagle boy is satisfied that the **boring** course finally pays off, which means he probably did not take to lip reading as easily as Scrooge did. If he had, he would probably been bright enough to get away with a few of the tycoons millions without getting caught). Anyway, the beagle boys take on to work at Scrooge's boat when he goes treasure hunting. They are not successful at stealing the treasure.



Milles "[The Church for Deaf](#)"

Jamie Berke's page about [Deafness in the Comics](#).