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A newsletter
about podcasts.

Happy Tuesday!

This is the Hot Pod Sabbatical Series, Week 1 of 5, published September 12, 2017.

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Welcome to the Hot Pod Sabbatical Series.

Hey folks!

So, as I've been explaining over the past few issues, I'm spending the next few weeks doing [a short fellowship](#) at the Nieman Foundation thinking about local media and podcasts, which means I'm taking a break from writing the Tuesday Hot Pod newsletters up until October 16. (I'm still doing short news hits for Hot Pod supporters, however, [which you can become by pledging \\$7/mo](#). There's been quite a bit, and it looks like there's a lot more coming down the pike this week.) So,

if you're one of the surprisingly large number of people who subscribed over this past week: welcome! Do check out [the archives](#) for recent podcast news coverage — that's more representative than the stuff I'm sending out over the next few issues.

In the meantime, I'll be publishing pieces from contributors that were picked out from the call-for-submissions I ran a while back. You all sent in a *ton* of pitches (over 200 in all!), and it's enough to convince me that this I might, indeed, turn this into a regular feature where more (paid) contributors will be fielded. Anyway, over the next five weeks, I'll be sending out a mix of stuff, some of which are typical Hot Pod fare (a reported piece, a profile, a survey), and some of which are not. We're going to try some stuff. (A visual issue awaits you somewhere down the line.) This week, we're starting with something from the latter: an essay, by a freelance audio journalist, about finding yourself — or a part of yourself — as material for someone else's construction.

Let's jump in, after the classifieds.

Classifieds.

"[The Sunday Letters](#): a deep-diving newsletter on contemplative thinking."

Have a job posting or something to plug? [Email me](#) for rates and placement.

By Caroline Lester | [Web Version](#)

This summer, I often went for walks through my neighborhood, listening to podcasts and telling myself, now that I'm a freelancer, this was a form of work, too. And I did learn a lot from those walks.

I learned, for example, that the bright green house I live in is called a painted lady, for her garish coat and colorful trims. I learned that late summer nights are an excellent time for possum spotting. And I learned that an acquaintance had used my full name — first and last — for a character in his podcast.

I spent the following days in a fog, listening as much and as often as I could. I heard my name constantly, spoken by voices I didn't recognize. And, at the end of the season, I heard my own murder. Well, my namesake's murder, anyway. By a character with the same name as the acquaintance, who slit my (namesake's) throat.

It's odd, to hear yourself die on tape.

When I reached out to let the acquaintance know I'd "discovered" his secret, I told him I was flattered. (This was a poor choice of words, and I've felt like an idiot ever since.) But I don't think that what he did was malicious. He told me he wasn't good at coming up with names, and as a result opted to take them from the people surrounding him.

I called my brother, laughing, and told him what I had just listened to. He asked if I had called the police.

Maybe I was being delusional. Anyway, it makes a good story.

...

It's a strange position, to find yourself the subject of someone else.

I've been working on a piece about, among other things, infertility. The women I talk to all ask if they can see their quotes before I publish. When I tell them no — ethics, you know how it goes — they're graceful, and still willing to talk. Every time they agree, I'm thankful, but surprised. Here I am, a stranger, asking them to give me a part of themselves. When we talk to reporters, or people who make stories, or

anyone who requests to use our name, we're looking for something. Validation, perhaps, that our story is true. We're asking to be known. It feels so good to be known.

I think, all the time, how brave it is, to trust someone with your name.

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This isn't quite the same, but there's a vaguely similar kind of uncanniness. To find, as a writer, a piece of yourself used as an accessory; to see your name transferred onto a character you don't control. (Usually, you're the one in charge.)

The stakes are different between nonfiction and fiction, of course. I recognize that. When my subjects choose to lend me their words, they're on the line. When someone takes your name for a fiction podcast, it's not *you* that's on the line — not really, anyway. But the outcome, a character with your name that you didn't create, is somewhat the same.

But here's the thing: it feels *good* to be a character in someone else's story, whether it's you or just parts of you. It feels like someone has found you important and moving enough to write about or listen to or even just borrow from. Like you always suspected, some part of you *matters*, and here is proof.

And yet there's the other thing: that version of you *isn't* you, or at the very least isn't the whole you. So what are you left with? A shadow that outgrows you, one that isn't controlled — by which I mean, defined — by you. And in my case, defined by someone who doesn't even really know you, by someone who picked up your name and maybe small parts of yourself (who knows) and warped it into something just recognizable enough.

And so this thing that once felt good feels, instead, horrible.

...

I find myself going back and forth. *Is this bad?* What's the difference between someone borrowing your name for a story and sharing a name with someone famous?

Last month, I interviewed a high school student named Casey Anthony. That's much worse, I imagine.

The violence that happens to my namesake (my shadow) changes things, of course. And the possibility that maybe, just maybe, my acquaintance wasn't fully forthcoming about the name use. That he wrote traits into the character that he thought came from me. Which makes the violence more disturbing.

I wonder what Casey Anthony would have to say about this.

...

Making audio stories is a solitary process. You track alone, you edit alone, you spend your days buried in headphones and audio files and your studio (or in my case, closet). But the things we create are the opposite of solitude. The sound of someone speaking is insulated, immediate, and shared. Piped through earbuds, it becomes both formless and full of knowledge. It's a knowledge that's very hard to challenge, specifically because it lacks a form. You're in someone else's world, now.

I moved recently, which I think that's why I've been listening to podcasts so much. The closeness between you and the story being presented to you isn't of the place you're in. It's a space of your own. When I walk around my neighborhood, headphones in, I sometimes feel as though I'm floating. Moving through, but not within.

When I heard a raspy female voice whisper my name through my headphones, I snapped back to the sidewalk strewn with cigarette butts, to elm trees lining the

street, to the smell of asphalt in the sun and hot, close air. A shrill sound moved towards me. A car drove by, horn stuck.

There's a thrill to hearing your name spoken by a stranger... and an alienation, too. It's like looking in a mirror and being surprised by your own reflection. *Is that what I look like to other people?*

My character was, at the very least, a surprise. Independent, unexpected. Maybe it was just the name, but I *liked* her. I spent the week listening, hanging on to her actions and words. What else had this character taken from me? What could I take from her? That week, my pitch was rejected. I argued with my partner. I couldn't figure out how to hang those damn curtains in my living room. Each time, I turned to my podcast, to the sound of my name and my character.

Then she was murdered, and became what most women in narratives become: a body to be acted upon. (Isn't it strange, how so many stories end the same?)

Oh, I thought. This is not me, after all.

Caroline Lester is a writer and audio producer who has served stints in Alaska and Boston. She now lives in New Haven, and is a contributor to WNPR and WSHU. You can find her on Twitter at [@caro_ohlvia](#).

She was really great to work with! You should hire her, give her work, etc.

Next week, I'll be back a little something on conservative podcasts from a guy who knows a lot about it.

In the meantime, [consider supporting Hot Pod](#), y'know? I'll still be writing news hits for supporters.

Post note. The thing about temporarily moving into an apartment all by yourself after living with a spouse is that I've forgotten how unaccountable you can be. I've been losing minutes, hours, whole afternoons without meaning to, just reading or pacing around or fiddling with the kitchen. Sometimes I don't notice the apartment. I move things around without remembering. There are turns around corners that surprise me. I'm just a blob in space.

I don't quite think I trust this apartment. It's too quiet. Too... clean.

Day 6 in Boston. Things I've acquired: a yoga mat, a magic bullet blender, Soylent.
Day 6 of experimenting being that guy.

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