

DOWN HOME: Getting an earful from the doctor

January 23, 2009

Dr. Ray, my dermatologist, gave me a thorough examination the other day. He literally looked me over from the top of my head to the soles of my feet.

As he started fingering his way through my scalp, he called out the medical names for all kinds of dohickeys that spot my body like some sort of anatomical connect-the-dots game.

I can't tell you all the words he used. Not because this is a family newspaper. But because I didn't understand them, can't pronounce most of them and probably couldn't spell them to save the tops of my ears and the tip of my nose.

Dr. Ray got really busy when he came to my chest and belly. He started telling the nurse all sorts of things. I looked out the corner of my eye, and she was over there, writing them all down. She must know the abbreviations for every kind of mole and skin speckle, because she never would've kept up otherwise.

Every now and then, he pulled out this cool little magnifying glass with blue lights on one side. He'd hold it about a half-inch from the spot under inspection. "I think that's just a whumptywidget," he'd say, pausing to squint carefully. (Of course, I'm paraphrasing. I don't think "whumptywidget" is a dermatological term.) "Yep, that's it," he'd add, and the nurse would write it down.

Interesting thing about a visit to the doctor. Day by day, I don't think much about my body. It works, which is what I care about. And it's nothing special. On the one hand, nobody ever suggested I enter the Mr. Universe

pageant. But then again, I'll probably never be a contestant on "The Biggest Loser," either.

But when a doctor gives you the once-over, you think about things that don't occur to you in a normal day.

So, after Dr. Ray finished my exam, he studied my chart one more time. Then he studied my left ear again and answered the question I'd nervously asked a few moments before.

He's a fine Christian doctor. Church of Christ. Spends his vacations on mission trips. He's compassionate, and it shows. He exhibited his kindest post-exam manner when he spoke.

"For you, it may be too late," he said gently.

"You see, laser hair removal ... only works on hair with pigment. It looks like the hair on your ears already has turned gray, and you don't have enough pigment. I'm sorry; I think it's too late."

He really knows how to hurt a guy. Getting older is bad enough. First, I started losing hair where I wanted it, like on the top of my head. But then I started growing it where I didn't, like on my ears.

Vainly (that's probably the key word in this column) I hoped medical science could "cure" me. Turns out, I'm already too old. And too gray.

So, I'll have to just live with the body—and the ears—the good Lord gave me.

As for you, see your dermatologist every year.