

## About Rhonda Denise Johnson

### Byline:

Rhonda Denise Johnson has a Masters Degree in English from California State University, Los Angeles. She is the publisher of an online Spoken Word poetry journal, *Visions with Voices*, and is the author of a newly released book, *Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge*. Email Ms. Johnson at [rdjohnson@speakingforthechild.com](mailto:rdjohnson@speakingforthechild.com)

### Broadcast Bio:

If there's any truth to the saying "That which does not kill me makes me stronger," Rhonda Johnson must be one of the strongest people around. In her book, *Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge*, Ms Johnson shows how strength can come out of weakness. As a child, going through public schools with a slowly progressive hearing and vision loss, she misses many of the social cues that told other children what to do and what not to do and when her hearing loss progresses to severe deafness, she is unable to explain to others what she does not understand herself and her failure to respond to other people's expectations is seen not as a disability but as a behavior problem. One thing kept her sane—the ability to shape the written word. In *Speaking for the Child*, Ms. Johnson uses this ability to show how the human spirit can triumph over the deepest perplexities. In May of 2000, Ms. Johnson received a cochlear implant, which restored her sense of hearing after 12 years of profound deafness. With the help of visual technology, she is able to turn what could have been a tragic life into a victory, not only for herself, but for everyone who reads her book. For more information about cochlear implants visit <http://speakingforthechild.com/cimplant.html>

### Full Bio:

In 1968 a three year old girl looked out from her back porch and imagined that if the houses across the alley had not been in the way there was no reason she should not be able to see to the end of the world. Twenty six years later a doctor suggested that she get a white cane.

Going through public school with a hidden yet progressive dual sensory loss was anything but easy. Because there was so much I could hear I was not aware there were things I was not hearing. When my hearing impairment became noticeable around age twelve it was not taken for what it was, a disability, but as another manifestation of my stupidity and lack of common sense which had always served as an explanation for why I did not pick up on the social cues like other kids did. I learned that if I thought no one understood me or could not understand why people treated me the way they did that would be taken as proof against me. So I had no outlet for my confused thoughts and emotions.

Right when I was finishing my bachelors degree, my hearing plunged into profound deafness. For twelve years, I could not hear anything. For the last six of those years I progressed to legal blindness. Unable to hear or see, but still able to think and feel, I felt like a master swimmer who could not float. At a time when I should be out doing something with my life, giving speeches, feeding children or rising up the corporate ladder, I was instead imploding in on myself, unable to even be aware of anyone's needs but my own.

Then in the year 2000, I underwent surgery that restored my sense of hearing. It was like being born again. And yet it would still take time to conquer decades of bottled rage and pain from continuous rejection and betrayal. But I was used to looking inward for answers and I determined that I would not be an innocent bystander in my own life—somebody's sad case for people to shake their heads at. I knew that as long as I saw the world as a place that had done me wrong I would remain defeated. So I determined that if that which does not kill me makes me stronger I could not give others blame for my pain without also giving them credit for my strength.

After living so long in a silent world, I felt good being aware of other people and their needs. I felt good knowing I was able to contribute to meeting those needs. And that was a lot better than constantly worrying if my own needs would be met. Although I am still legally blind and day to day

things can still be challenging I have screen magnification software that allows me to use the computer and create beautiful websites. People say how in the world does she do that. Tell me and we will both know. I never ask how I will do something. I ask what steps need to be taken and just do it.

This is just a brief sketch of the triumph of human dignity and spirit over surmounting obstacles, thwarted hope and relentless social criticism. You, the reader, may find in my story that you are not alone in your own struggles with life, that someone else understands and that the strength in me is also in you.