

Media Kit

Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge
by Rhonda Denise Johnson

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Contact Form

Email: rdjohnson@speakingforthechild.com

To Book Rhonda Johnson:

Rhonda Johnson is available for phone interviews, voice chat and other online venues. She is available for in person speaking engagements in the Northeast Texas area. Ms. Johnson can speak on the following topics:

Growing up with a disability

Experience as a late deafened adult

Helping family members adjust to disability and other challenges

Coping with family members who suffer from bi-polar disorder

Coping with religious pressure

Finding the strength within

Writing papers in college

Effectively expressing ideas in writing

Cochlear implants

Finding spiritual peace

Living alone and loving it

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 26, 2012

New book by Rhonda Johnson
Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge

Speaking for the Child was well received at book signings in New York, Washington, DC and Paris, Texas, where Ms. Johnson resides. Ms. Johnson is looking forward to book signings in the Dallas area and Texarkana.

Rhonda Johnson is an award winning poet (Henri Coulette Memorial Award, of the Academy of American Poets) and a published short story writer. She also publishes a unique online quarterly journal of poetry and prose. Visions with Voices (<http://visionswithvoices.com>) allows you to both read and listen to the various writer's works.

Quotes from Speaking for the Child:

"We all live on the same planet, but we don't all live in the same world."
"Insanity is the only sane response to an insane word."

Brief Synopsis:

What makes this book unique is not just what Rhonda Johnson goes through, but what she comes out of. As the world of hearing and vision slowly fades, she struggles in a world that refuses to acknowledge her disabilities but interprets them as a lack of common sense and attentiveness. As a child, she cannot explain to others what she does not understand herself. Filled with confusion, rage and self-doubt, she finds that there is still something inside her that will not give up. In the end, her experiences culminate in the decision to stand alone, to boldly go where few have gone before and none have returned—to a place called Self. She must ignore what others think is common sense and look inside her Self to remain sane in this insane world.

Speaking for the Child is structured around the more than thirty streets where the author has lived. The people in these houses make up the thread that runs through her life, tying each house to the next to form a single tapestry. All this moving meant that she is never in one place long enough to be known for who she is rather than for what is written and said about her by teachers and peers.

In her teen years, her spiritual world is usurped by the Word of Faith movement when she falls under the influence of a well-known televangelist. They teach her that, according to the Bible, prayer and faith will make God heal her, and then blame her when He does not. Her continued vision and hearing loss lead her to ask questions those around her never ask. Their disappointment in her failure to receive God's healing fills her with rage and a slowly increasing cognitive dissonance.

The year 2000 brings unexpected joy. A device called a cochlear implant restores her hearing after twelve years of profound deafness. Rhonda bursts into the 21st century armed with self-knowledge and understanding. In *Speaking for the Child*, she looks back and speaks for the child who, not knowing or understanding what was happening, could not speak for herself.

For more information, please visit the *Speaking for the Child* website.
<http://speakingforthechild.com>

You may also view a complete media kit:
<http://speakingforthechild.com/media>

Fact Sheet

Title: Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge

Author: Rhonda D. Johnson

Publication Date: June 2011

Category: Biography/Autobiography

Formats: Paperback, Kindle, Large Print Paperback

ISBN: 978-1463564629

ISBN -Large Print: 978-1463566012

ISBN-Kindle: 1463564627

Number of Pages: 207

Number of Pages-Large Print: 259

Kindle File Size: 459 KB

Dimensions: 6" by 9"

Dimensions-Large Print: 8.5" by 11"

Price: \$19.99 USD (Paperback), \$9.99 USD (Kindle)

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

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.

Hello, Rhonda Johnson. We have recommendations for you. (Not Rhonda ?)

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Customer Reviews

Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge

2 Reviews

Average Customer Review

(2 customer reviews)

- 5 star : (2)
- 4 star : (0)
- 3 star : (0)
- 2 star : (0)
- 1 star : (0)

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful:

An Inspiration , September 30, 2011

By *****La***** - See all my reviews

This review is from: **Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge (Paperback)**

The fact that I don't have a disability didn't keep me from relating to Rhonda's experience with slowly progressive visual and hearing impairments. Like she says this isn't the story of an unbroken series of triumphant gestures, nor does she present herself as life's innocent victim. I see a real person in this book. I see the strength and the weakness in her that makes her accessible to an ordinary person like me.

Johnson takes me inside her mind where I watch sound and vision slowly fade away. Then I feel the pain and anger of having the people around her judge her behavior as if she had no disability but was just stupid and hardheaded. Johnson captures the pain and the anger of living in a world where she cannot explain to others what's going on because she doesn't really understand herself. What's more, people tell her that if she thinks no one understands her, that is proof she's everything they accuse her of being. When she does come to understand her disabilities, she still has to sort out decades of unresolved emotions. At the end of the day, she was able to speak for the child who could not speak for herself, and now we have this book.

I really got into this book. Although there are some painful moments, Johnson doesn't tell a sob sad story. In fact, I found myself laughing at some things, crying at others and sometimes just wanting to jump in there and slap somebody. As I read, I wondered how anybody could survive what she did without going bonkers. I didn't think I could have, but she did and I began to think if she could go through all that then I could deal with my life.

I was greatly inspired by Speaking for the Child. It took some courage for Johnson to share so much of herself. Her honesty is the strength of her writing. I recommend this book to anyone who loves great writing, but especially to those who struggle in this life.

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1 of 1 people found the following review helpful:

Multiple disabilities but she's not disabled , October 8, 2011

By **Harold Rush** - See all my reviews

This review is from: **Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a Challenge (Paperback)**

"Speaking for the Child" by Rhonda Johnson is a compelling read, whether one has a disability or not. Almost everyone knows someone who is unsighted or deaf or has some form of physical challenge. Sometimes that person would be able to be more independent if we listened to them, so we would know how to best assist them. Too many times, we decide for the person what kind of help they need and how to meet that need.

Worse than that, with children, we may not understand that the child has a physical impairment and we misjudge their behavior totally. This is what happened with Ms Johnson. She was going deaf and didnt realize it, (she was a child), and the adults around her decided she had behavior problems, thus causing her a hellish childhood.

Later, she begins to lose her sight, compounding her life's challenges more than most of us could ever imagine.

The beauty of this book however, is not the terrible things that happen to Ms Johnson, but how beautifully she rises to these challenges and overcomes them, to the extent that she not only goes to college but manages to get a Master's degree. And she doesn't stop there. She's still reaching for new heights but you'll have to buy and read the book to enjoy her humorous take on people and her life. I definitely recommend this book to anyone who loves great writing and loves being inspired!

Transcript of Blog Talk Radio Interview

Program: Rush Hour

Show: A Conversation with Rhonda Denise Johnson

HAROLD: Hello and welcome to this special edition of Rush Hour. I'm your host, Harold Lee Rush, and we have a very very special guest with a very very special subject we're going to have a conversation with and about today. My guest is a young lady by the name of Rhonda Denise Johnson, and I guarantee that if you give her a couple of minutes she's going to share with you some information that you probably had no idea about that will definitely help you to see and maybe help someone close to you in ways you never thought about. How are you doing today, Ms. Johnson?

RHONDA: Oh, I'm doing just fine, Harold. I'm doing just fine.

HAROLD: All right, well here's the first thing I want to be able to ask you, and that is just who are you. Tell me a little about yourself.

RHONDA: Well, I am the oldest child of an oldest child. I grew up in Washington, D.C., but I've actually lived in six different states. I grew up with a hearing impairment. It advanced so slowly that for many years I was not even aware there were things I could not hear because there was so much that I could hear. And I was about twenty-three years old when I, you know, progressed into what I perceived as profound deafness. That's when, you know, I was no longer able to use the phone. Then for the next first twelve years of my adult life, I could not hear any thing at all. During that time, I earned my Master's degree using a service that used a court reporting machine...

HAROLD: mmmm

RHONDA: ..connected to a laptop. And I just basically, you know, did what I had to do.

HAROLD: mm hm. Now you had a hearing impairment, but I understand you also had an additional physical challenge?

RHONDA: Yes, I have a visual impairment also, and that also progressed very slowly until I am now what they call legally blind.

HAROLD: Wow. So now in spite of these challenges—dealing with these challenges, I understand you said you've earned a Master's degree. You got a Bachelor's degree, then you turned around and got a Master's degree. In what subjects?

RHONDA: Well, I received my Bachelor's degree in communications with a print media emphasis. And I received that from Biola University in La Mirada, California. And I got that in 1988. And a Master's degree in English with the literature emphasis from California State University in Los Angeles in 1999.

HAROLD: Wow. Now you say you spent twelve years deaf. Why are you able to hear now?

RHONDA: Oh because in the year 2000 I received what they call a cochlear implant. And that restored my hearing.

HAROLD: So now cochlear implant—is that some kind of device that, I take it because it's an implant, is implanted in your ear?

RHONDA: Yes, it's implanted in the ear. It bypasses the damaged nerves of my inner ear and sends electric signals directly to the auditory nerve. It's actually an array of electrodes. When I go to the airport,

I can make the alarms go off at the airport.

LAUGHTER

HAROLD: Wow. So can I call you Rhonda?

RHONDA: Sure, sure.

HAROLD: Okay, Rhonda. Now you've written a book with a very unusual name. It's called *Speaking for the Child*. Now first of all, why did you write the book?

RHONDA: Well, I wrote *Speaking for the Child* mainly because whenever I look back at my life experiences, to remember so much so vividly, not only the events but the thoughts and emotions that accompanied those events and then have the words to express those thoughts and emotions is a gift given by the Creator. It's a summons to help others find the strength within them in the same place—in the same way that I found my strength within me. We all have experiences. We don't all experience the exact same thing in the exact same way, but it's good to know we are not alone; that others have been through that valley we call life on Earth and have survived and not only survived but have thrived. So I have been summoned to share deeply and to share honestly what I have seen. I wrote the book in answer to that summons.

HAROLD: "Wow. That's very well put. Now who do you expect to read your book?"

RHONDA: Well, everyone, I should hope. The reader I had in mind as I wrote is someone who has struggled. Someone who has experienced joy and pain, sadness and happiness. Someone who has experience emotions so deep they cannot be defined by concrete terms like joy and pain.

HAROLD: Wow. That is everybody in a way though. Because we've all had some type of struggle. We've all experienced joy and pain. Sadness and happiness and a lot of us do feel many times when we are going through something that we are the only person in the entire world that feels this this way. So I can understand the idea that—you know, it's like the first time you have your heart broken, for example. No one can convince you that, number one, that you will survive, that you will get over it or that anybody else in the entire history of the world has ever had a heartbreak like yours.

RHONDA: Nobody.

LAUGHTER

HAROLD: So is *Speaking for the Child* a self-help book with answers for getting out of what you call the valley of life on Earth?

RHONDA: No, it's not a self-help book. It's a sharing of ideas, yes, but there is no one right way out of the valley. All of us have within us the kernel of humanity; but from the time we are babies, the world dumps so much junk on us that that kernel becomes buried. We may not know it is there. Especially when we listen to people telling us oh you're trapped. You'll never get out of the valley. You'll never be happy. There's nothing there because you're not worth anything. If we listen to that, then, you know, like the saying goes, perception is reality. If we let other people define our perception of ourselves then that perception becomes our reality. In *Speaking for the Child*, the reader will find that he or she can cast off all that junk, find the kernel within and let it grow.

HAROLD: What I'm going to do is a little something different here. We have a caller. I'm going to pull the caller up and talk to them for just a second. Hello his, you're on the air. This is Rush Hour. Who is this?

CALLER: Hi. (Indistinct)

HAROLD: I'm sorry?

CALLER: I just wanted to say thank you.

HAROLD: Oh, okay. All right. Well continue to listen and we appreciate you.

RHONDA: Yes, we appreciate you.

HAROLD: All right now—Rhonda Johnson, *Speaking for the Child*. What if I don't see myself in a valley, if I'm happy with my life and think it's all wonderful, why should I read *Speaking for the Child*?

RHONDA: Because it's a good read. It spans four decades offering a unique perspective on many of the newsworthy events that occurred between the late sixties and the early 21st century. The reader will recall many things and say *hmm I never thought of it like that*.

HAROLD: Right. Right. Okay now, let's deal with some specifics in terms of the book. What is your book about?

RHONDA: Well, *Speaking for the Child* is an autobiography so it is shamelessly about me. I don't say that to be arrogant. It's an autobiography. Specifically it's about the impact my disabilities had on me and those around me. How my emotional, spiritual and intellectual faculties were affected by my experience of visual and hearing impairment. For instance, when my family and I got caught up in the Word of Faith movement, being disabled gave me a different perspective than I might otherwise have had. It made me ask questions that other people were not asking. Especially, you know, when they were telling me that if you have enough faith God will heal you. Then after a while, they started blaming me when I remained deaf and they were waiting for a great miracle.

HAROLD: So they were blaming you and said you didn't have enough faith. Right?

RHONDA: Right.

HAROLD: mm. Wow. How did that make you feel?

RHONDA: It made me feel many things. It made me feel like I just could not find, you know, could not find reality, could not deal with, you know, people were just—sometimes they were overwhelming me. You know like one time a man who was a prophet came to our church and told me that since the Bible says faith comes by hearing and since I can't hear, that means faith can't come to me.

HAROLD: Ooooh! Really.

RHONDA: He actually said that to me. Then the next day he got up and told everybody that without faith it is, the Bible says it is impossible to please God.

HAROLD: Oh, wow. So you suffered at times, what really was abuse from people, in terms of people abusing you sometimes knowing and sometimes not knowing—just out of their ignorance. So all of that was weighing on you as well.

RHONDA: Yes, and like I said, it made me ask questions that other people were not asking. It made Church, you know since the time I was a small child, going to Church has been one painful experience after the other. And I felt myself having a slowly increasing sense of cognitive dissonance where there was just this wide gap between what I was taught to believe and what was

actually happening.

HAROLD: mm. Talking with Rhonda Denise Johnson who's written a book, *Speaking for the Child*. You know, as I was reading the book, one of the things that really struck me was the amount of detail that you expressed from the time that you were almost born. Did you really remember all those things from your childhood?

RHONDA: Yes, I did. I structured the book around the streets where I lived. Like I said I've lived in six different states and there are thirty one chapters. Each chapter represents a different street so that's thirty one streets. Structuring the book that way helped me to remember a lot of things that happened on those streets or in those houses. I noted in the book any events I was told about.

There are two things, particularly, that are very pivotal for me but for which I seem to have a mental block for remembering them. One of them was when I was four and my father tells me—you know, at the time I did not know he was my father. There was just this man who would come and visit me, talk to me and play with me and stuff. And he tells me when I was about four years old, I came to him and asked him, you know, "Are you my father?" And he said he went to my mother and apparently my mother must have jumped on me because when I came back and I was very mad at him, you know "Why did you tell my mother?" And I have no memory of that. What I do remember is crawling up under the couch—we had a claw footed couch—and I just crawled up under the couch and said every curse word, anything I could think to say that I knew I was not supposed to say, I said it.

The other event was when I was about nine years old and my mother and my father they finally decided to tell me "Well yes, this man is your father." You know and for a long time I just did not accept that. I did not remember them taking me to a restaurant and telling me that. All I can remember is when I just rejected the idea and I told myself no my father is a great war hero. He died in a war in Viet Nam. We had just finished the Viet Nam war. You know, I remember my reaction to these events but the events themselves, I don't remember. Not like the other things that happened in my life I have snapshots of them.

HAROLD: Well you do a phenomenal job of expressing or recreating so many different things in your life. That's one of the things that makes the book a fascinating read. But now one of the things I am curious about is why did you entitle the book *Speaking for the Child*? And also it has a subtitle, which is what?

RHONDA: The subtitle is *An Autobiography and a Challenge*.

HAROLD: And a Challenge. That's deep. Now why did you name it that?

RHONDA: Well, I wrote it *Speaking for the Child* because, you know, when we are children, we suffer a lot of things—misunderstandings, betrayals, confusion, rejection, disapproval. We have strong feelings about these things, but we may not have the words to express our inchoate thoughts. When we grow up we look back with better understanding and a bigger vocabulary that allows us to say for the child that is still within us the things that child could not say at the time when we were children.

HAROLD: A lot of times we don't seem to, I don't know, it's sort of like we don't seem to recognize in children that we deal with—our own children we don't seem to remember that we were children once and we had experiences we couldn't express and we don't give our children the benefit of that. You know one of the things about the book that makes it a must read for some particular people—anyone who has children, a child or children who first of all have disabilities. They don't have to be the same as yours but the fact that they have disabilities or physical challenges. Because one of the profound things about your book is that there were so many things that happened to you because the adults around you did not realize that what you were

experiencing were physical challenges and they got labeled as mental or psychological issues. And I thought about it as I was reading how terrible that must be to be a child. For example, you talk about your hearing loss. It was a gradual hearing loss. What made it so—in some ways I felt the pain when adults would make judgments about you based on what they perceived as not paying attention or different psychological issues.

RHONDA: Not having common sense.

HAROLD: Yes. When in reality all the time it was that you did not hear them because you could here a certain amount of things. But now here's the crazy part that, especially as a child, you did not know what you did not hear. And people assuming that you heard then they just assumed that either you didn't have common sense or that something was wrong with you psychologically because you did not respond to things that they felt you should have heard when it was really that you didn't hear it. And I think about how many children are out there like that. How many children and how many parents are trying to figure out, you know, something must be wrong but they don't have a clue that it might be a physical issue such as a hearing issue. Sometimes it might be a seeing issue—a sight issue. You know, and so hopefully in reading the book, there may be some parents—some adults who might say, you know maybe I need to have my child tested for hearing—an in depth test for hearing or an in depth test for, you know, an eye test. And not just go along with—sometimes these experts who want to declare the child mentally imbalance or deficient and want to put them on drugs or whatever. So if your book helps even one parent or one child or one person to find out that what's going on with them is physical and not mental and save them from years...

RHONDA: One child.

HAROLD: Yes, that will be powerful, you know. Now in terms of yourself. You are now older, and of course wiser. You've had some years of being able to hear. What would you say to those who are out there who are wondering if their child is having some issues that are not psychological? What would you say to them?

RHONDA: What would I say to them?

HAROLD: mm hm.

RHONDA: I would say be patient. Pay attention to what's going on. Ask yourself questions. You know, one of the questions my parents—my mother never seemed to ask was why is there a difference between the child I see at home and the child the teachers are writing about? Why is there this difference between the way my child gets along with the children she meets in the summer and the children she meets at school?

HAROLD: Wow!

RHONDA: There's a difference, then we need to find out why there's that difference and speak to the child. You know, don't say "What's wrong with you?" You know, questions like that just overwhelm a child. And also another thing that made an impact on me was my family moved around a lot, you know 31 different streets. And because of that—because we moved so much, I was never able to—I never stayed in one place long enough to be know for myself who I was rather than what was written about me.

HAROLD: Oooh that is very very profound, Rhonda. And I hope that people who are listening to this can get to the depth of what you just said because that is so vitally important. We don't know how many children are growing up today are being essentially abused because they don't have any understanding and the adults around don't have any understanding and that child is in a world, in a sense, all by themselves. And that's what I really kind of felt as I came away from reading a particular chapter, my heart just went out to you because it really did seem like you were

in a world all by yourself. Did it feel that way sometimes?

RHONDA: Yes, it often seemed that way. It often seemed like I was in a play or a movie and I was the star of the play—the star of the movie but everybody had read the script except for me.

HAROLD: Wow. Well I appreciate you taking the time to share with us today from your experiences

RHONDA: Thanks for inviting me.

HAROLD: Again, it's Rhonda Denise Johnson. The name of the book is Speaking for the Child: An Autobiography and a challenge. If you would like to get more information I would recommend that you go to her website which is speakingforthechild.com. There you see to remember the name of the book is the name of the website, www.speakingforthechild.com. You know I have to mention that you also publish an online Spoken Word poetry journal. It's Spoken Word poetry and narrative from many different writers. It's a really exciting website. It's called Visions with Voices and I It's quarterly. It's really nice because you can not only hear the Spoken Word poetry but you can also read it, because you publish the narrative of the work and that's something that is definitely different for the world. And you also have a web design business, too. So I want to throw that in there, too. What is it lovelydayrainbow.com?

RHONDA: That's right.

HAROLD: Okay. And again, that's Rhonda Johnson Speaking for the Child. That's speakingforthechild.com, has been our guest today at Rush Hour. We are definitely looking forward to talking to you again, as well as being able to read your book and share with you the success you are bound to have.

News and Story Ideas

Parents dealing with a child's disability

Signs your child may be hearing impaired

When God doesn't heal

Help your child adjust to a disability

Changing your religious beliefs

Children with disabilities in the mainstream

Teachers using shame as a form of behavior modification

Possible Interview Questions

Q. Could you have written this book at an earlier time in your life?

A. No. Certainly not the same book. Actually, I first attempted to write an autobiography when I was 33. It didn't work. I had not yet come to terms with my feelings about the events in my life so by chapter two, all that unresolved emotion overwhelmed the art. What I am able to write now is much more valuable. I was kind of happy with the first chapter, which was published in the Creative Writing Club journal at Cal State Los Angeles in 1998 or somewhere thereabouts. I was able to revise that chapter and include it in the book that we see now. But chapter two, I threw out.

Q. Why did you write this book?

A. I wrote *Speaking for the Child* mainly because whenever I look back at my life experiences, to remember so much so vividly, not only the events but the thoughts and emotions that accompanied those events and then to have the words to express those thoughts and emotions is a gift given by the Creator. It's a summons to help others find the strength within them in the same place—in the same way that I found my strength within me. We all have experiences. We don't all experience the exact same thing in the exact same way, but it's good to know we are not alone; that others have been through that valley we call life on Earth and have survived and thrived. So I have been summoned to share deeply and honestly what I have seen. I wrote the book in answer to that summons.

Q. What advice would you give to aspiring autobiography writers?

A. Keep a journal. Find the things in your life that stir your memories: photographs, music, places. Sometimes one memory will spark another. Talk to your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles about where they came from and things that happened when you were small. But don't try to publish your autobiography until you conquered your demons or at least have some perspective on them.

Q. So have you conquered your demons?

A. I think so. Though, as my father likes to say, the devil is in the details. I still have emotions but they no longer have me. I mean, I'm no longer trapped in that ball of confusion, pain and anger. I have Self-knowledge now.

Q. Who will read your book?

A. Well, everyone, I should hope. The reader I had in mind as I wrote is someone who has struggled. Someone who has experienced joy and pain, sadness and happiness. Someone who has experienced emotions so deep they cannot be defined by concrete terms like joy and pain.

Q. So is *Speaking for the Child* a self-help book with answers for getting out of what you call the valley of life on Earth?

A. No, it's not a self-help book. It's a sharing of ideas, yes, but there is no one right way out of the valley. But no one can come out if they listen to people telling them that they are trapped and will never get out. Within each person is the kernel of humanity; but from the time we are babies, the world dumps so much junk on us that that kernel becomes buried. We may not know it is there when we've been told left and right that it isn't. In *Speaking for the Child*, the reader will find that he or she can cast off all that junk, find the kernel within and let it grow.

Q. So if I don't see myself in a valley, if I'm happy with my life and think it's all wonderful, why should I read *Speaking for the Child*?

A. Because it's a good read. It spans four decades offering a unique perspective on many of the newsworthy events that occurred between the late sixties and the early 21st century. The reader will recall many things and say hmm I never thought of it like that.

Q. What is your book about?

A. Speaking for the Child is an autobiography so it is shamelessly about me. Specifically it's about the impact my disabilities had on me and those around me. How my emotional, spiritual and intellectual faculties were affected by my experience of visual and hearing impairment. For instance, when my family and I got caught up in the Word of Faith movement, being disabled gave me a different perspective than I might otherwise have had. It made me ask questions that other people were not asking. What others thought of as common sense just wasn't working for me and in my efforts to create a lifestyle that does work for me I got out of the box and into my Self with a capital S.

Q. Did you really remember all those things from your childhood?

A. Yes, I did. Structuring the book according to the streets I lived on helped me to remember a lot of things that happened on those streets or in those houses. I noted in the book any events I did not actually remember, but of which I had been told. There are two events that are very pivotal for me but for which I seem to have a mental block. That is the time when I was four and asked the man who came to visit me if he was my father and again when I was nine when this man and my mother finally did admit that he was my father. They told me about these events but unlike the many other events in my life, I cannot get a mental picture of these things happening.

Q. Why the title Speaking for the Child

A. When we are children, we suffer many things—misunderstandings, betrayals, confusion, rejection, disapproval. We have strong feelings about these things, but we may not have the words to express our inchoate thoughts. When we grow up we look back with better understanding and a bigger vocabulary that allows us to say for the child that is still within us the things that child could not say at the time when we were children.

Q. So are you now the spokesperson for people who have disabilities?

A. No, I don't consider myself as such. No one asked me to be their spokesperson so I would not presume to take such a role. I speak for myself—for the child that I was and on some level still am. I am sure there are others who share some aspect of my experiences and can relate to some things. My goal in writing the book is to help people think of their own experiences from a different perspective. I am a teacher so I speak TO others but not necessarily FOR them unless they choose to use what they get from my book in that way. But again, that is their choice and not something I set out to do.

Q. How can parents help their children who have a disability?

A. That's kind of related to the previous question. Again, I have no one size fits all answers. I can only relate what my parents could have done to help me, along with the things they did do once my disabilities became apparent. My experience was unique in some ways so what worked for me may not work in exactly the same way for everyone without some tailoring. Since my hearing loss progressed very slowly, there were some questions that my parents should have asked: My daughter is intelligent so why doesn't she respond to information unless she is addressed directly in close proximity? Why is there a difference between the daughter I see at home and the pupil the teachers see at school? Is the tuning fork the technician put behind her ear really capable of ruling out a hearing loss? Once the impairment became obvious, what my mother did do was helpful for me. She said, "Okay, you have a problem. Now deal with it." To

some that may seem cold, but it gave me permission and confidence. When parents tell a child you're dumb, you're lazy, you're slow, they give the child permission to be dumb, lazy, slow or whatever. My mother gave me permission to be strong and deal with my impediments. Just by telling me to do it, she expressed her confidence that I could do it and that, in turn, gave me confidence.