

## 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.