

DONNA WILLIAMS

Author, artist, autism advocate,
Screenwriter, singer-songwriter
Australia (1963 – 2017)

Donna Williams was born in the inner city in Melbourne. In 1965, in a time when autism was deemed 'infantile psychosis'. At 2 years old Donna was thought to be deaf; she stared through people, had self-injurious behaviors and had significant health issues. She was diagnosed as 'psychotic'.



Though she was diagnosed with language processing disorder and heard autism discussed around her in late childhood, she grew up introduced by her father as 'feral' and by her mother as 'psychotic' and later 'disturbed' with severe language processing disorder, she came to understand sentences by age 9-11 and by age 13 could speak in litanies. Donna failed early secondary education, leaving at age 15 after 4 high schools as 'not assessable'. It was not until her mid twenties that she began to understand her own autism. She became homeless, was exploited by strangers, kept trying to work and had 30 jobs in 3 years. Largely illiterate and innumerate, a psychiatrist encouraged her to return to education at the age of 18. Defying all (low) expectations she passed college and chose to go on to university, achieved an Honors Degree in Sociology, a degree in Linguistics and a postgraduate Diploma in Ed.

She wrote the autobiography, *Nobody Nowhere*, her first of 9 published books in 1991 and at that time became the first book by a person with autism to ever become an international bestseller. It spent 10 weeks at number one on the New York Times Bestseller List, was published in over 20 languages and was followed with her second international bestseller, *Somebody Somewhere* in 1994.

Donna was an amazing spirit. Donna Williams passed away from a battle with cancer April 2017.