

# Inspiring Conversations with Shaundale Johnson of S. Rénā + Co. Editorial Boutique

VoyageDallas

Today we'd like to introduce you to Shaundale Rénā (ruh-nay).

**Hi Shaundale, so excited to have you with us today. What can you tell us about your story?**

My love for reading blossomed into a love for words after my business took off. As a child, I simply enjoyed books, without recognizing the deeper connection to language itself.

Fortunately, I was allowed to find my path. I figured out my passion, and I'm grateful for that freedom. My mom played a significant role in this discovery. She nurtured my love for reading. In fact, she said I was the kind of kid who needed only a book in the bag—no snacks, no sippy cup. *Books*. It's no surprise that I eventually became an editor. After writing my first book in 2009, many people asked me to review their stories. I edited many manuscripts for free because I enjoyed it so much. By 2013, my passion led me to start a business, and in 2017, I became a certified technical writer and editor.

This journey has been incredible. I get to read and be compensated for it—a dream come true. And I absolutely love it!

**I'm sure it wasn't obstacle-free, but would you say the journey has been fairly smooth so far?**

Building my business—what some call building a brand—requires hard work and consistency. You see, I never set out to build a brand. I only set out to edit books; everything else fell into place. I had two goals: Read a book a month and get paid for it. In that aspect, it was easy.

Fortunately, I've been able to read up to three books a month and be paid for it. Over time, I learned to scale. When you're "fresh out the gate," you tend to take on too much. Many of us have tried to do all things and be all things to all people. That hardly ever wins. It wasn't until I acknowledged my preference for developmental



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editing that I saw real results. If there was a challenge, it was believing people would pay me for my services once I streamlined. I say this because many don't know there's not only a difference in editing styles (personality), but there are also different kinds of editing (technique). My specialty is developmental editing, which costs the most and comes with a multi-page editorial letter. It is likened to tearing apart the manuscript and critiquing it from every possible angle. Someone else specializes in copyediting, while another is a line editor. Then there's also proofreading. Each stage is necessary; however, few can afford them all. When you find someone who claims to do them all, beware. Many have lost money that way—not to mention valuable time. Clients usually find their way back to another editor to fix what one editor botched. That is the struggle. Watching someone who doesn't know how to navigate the self-publishing process be taken advantage of, whether intentionally or not, is never fun. That's why I say I may not be the cheapest, but I'm also not the most expensive. I go beyond educating my clients and editing their stories. It also helps that I'm part of a wonderful network of Black editors and proofreaders (BEP). We support each other, and the best part is each of

us specializes in something different.

## Appreciate you sharing that. What should we know about S. Rénā + Co. Editorial Boutique?

S. Rénā + Co. Editorial Boutique is a minority-owned small business. As a woman of color, it is important to me that clients and prospective clients know their voice matters. As a developmental editor, it is my job to not wash away or even “whitewash” the stories of Black Americans and how we tell them. I am not politically correct. I am African American Vernacular English (AAVE) correct.

Now, one of the joys I have is getting to work with people from various walks of life. From professional athletes (and former professional athletes) to international influencers and everyone in between, this is where my love of the natural English language comes in. I serve women and men who identify as a number of preferences. I work with Blacks and Whites... Christians, Muslims, and nondenominational... Straight and queer... It's amazing how creatives recognize creatives. And at our core, we are all the same. We all have a story worth sharing, and I get to help people find, develop, or strengthen theirs. That is my reward. At S. Rénā + Co. Editorial Boutique, “We're not just telling stories. We're writing them well.” And what's most interesting is that I've been on Zooms with clients around the globe, some whose first language isn't English, and it helps that I can still do my job to support them in telling their own story, their own way.

## Is there something surprising that you feel even people who know you might not know about?

I think the most surprising of all is I'm a low-key radical. After working with the late civil rights attorney Bobby H. Caldwell on his memoir, “The People's Lawyer,” I call myself an honorary member of the Houston Black Panther Party. That in itself is a story because the party dissolved decades ago. Still, I gained many new uncles and an aunt. For instance, John “Bunchy” Crear and James Avery, founding members of the Black Panther Party in different states, are two souls I love dearly. James took over after Carl Hampton, founder of Houston's People Party II, was assassinated. (Something else folks wouldn't know... I love history!)

I also met DeLloyd Parker, co-founder of the S.H.A.P.E. Center in Houston, and learned about his co-founder Lynn Eusan, the first Black Miss University of Houston, who was murdered. Omowale-Luthuli Allen and the Honorable Gene Locke of the Pan-Africanism movement and members of the U of H 14, who were arrested and charged with the murder of a rookie cop at the University of Houston, their story is priceless. The history and culture of Third Ward in Houston is astounding! I even interviewed with radio hall of famer Ralph Cooper about my time with Attorney Caldwell. Had I been marching with them in the seventies and not learning to walk, you might be experiencing a different me, and this would undoubtedly be a different article.

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