



Rick **HOHN**

From a segregated education in schools for students with disabilities, Rick Hohn went on to become an ordained minister, motivational speaker and accomplished artist. In his youth, Rick conveyed thoughts primarily by typing or pointing to a simple alphabet board with a head stylus, hoping that others would patiently listen. As a young adult, he learned to apply the same principle to art when his mother taped a paintbrush to his stylus. Though Rick spent much of his youth in silence, he is not shy about sharing his talent.

When Rick speaks, listeners may imagine themselves at the nexus of art, words and inspiration. So adept is he at composing, tweaking and timing the delivery of messages he creates on the DynaVox speech-generating device that serves as his voice that they seem a natural extension of his heart and soul. Since he began using advanced augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) nearly 15 years ago, Rick has adapted and mastered the logistics of the succession of devices he has used, accessing vocabulary via a head pointer—reflecting the same method by which he learned to type and paint in an era before computer technology changed society. While he often wonders how his life would have turned out if he had an AAC device back then, he contemplates the possibilities technology holds for future generations of people with disabilities.

For today, the DynaVox allows him to prepare and give sermons to his congregation, share the stories behind his paintings and handle practical matters such as helping others understand his unique situation—whether at a doctor appointment or while making travel arrangements. He has mastered the etiquette of grabbing the attention of his listeners. For private conversations, he turns off the “Speak When Inserting Words” behavior that would normally speak messages as he composes them and asks his communication partners to read the text on the display screen. At meetings, he uses “Robert’s Rules of Order” and similar vocabulary on the device to keep things moving forward.

Rick takes great pride and joy in his leadership experience, whether describing what disability means to a child or dealing with the public. Celebrating his tenth year as a consumer representative for DynaVox Technologies, Rick has coached consumers at the United Cerebral Palsy affiliate in his hometown in the fundamentals of AAC. He has also taught painting to others with disabilities.

Since Rick has been using AAC technology, friends now catch his sense of humor. “They didn’t know that side of me before,” he says. “Now they love when I tickle their funny bone.” And with the DynaVox and a speakerphone, Rick makes unassisted personal phone calls. “A simple dial tone before a conversation is music to my ears,” he says.

Rick has fulfilled a personal dream and honored a family tradition by pursuing his ministry, following in the footsteps of his grandfather and four uncles, all of them pastors. “I am doing what I thought was impossible by delivering sermons at churches. For 20 years or more, I used to condemn myself for entertaining the idea that I could preach, sometimes better than my pastor could. Why, the audacity to think such a thing when few people could understand what I was saying! But after discovering the power of speech through my device, sharing all of the sermons that had been bubbling inside me for years became a very real possibility.”

Before he had the DynaVox, it was unimaginable for Rick that he could be gainfully and meaningfully employed. Now he has three jobs—pastor, artist and his work for DynaVox. It is a good feeling, he says, not to be completely dependent on government resources and to give back to society as a tax-paying citizen.

Writing has always come naturally for Rick and using the DynaVox in combination with AccessIT, its computer access component, simplifies the process. Composing a letter is now a two-hour task, compared with two days using a typewriter. The convenience expands to his preparation of sermons and business presentations.

A third aspect of Rick’s career complemented by his use of technology is counseling and teaching. A good listener, Rick uses his device to keep one-to-one communication a two-way street, whether mentoring individuals who use AAC or ministering to members of his congregation.

“Before my DynaVox, people had to laboriously read my low-tech word board, but now they can listen to what I say from my device, allowing them to stay focused on their situations.”

Name:	Rick Hohn
Age:	60
Occupation:	Ordained Minister, Consumer Representative, Artist
Location:	Vista, California
AT Device:	DynaVox 3100®, DynaVox DV4® and AccessIT® from DynaVox Technologies

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