

Written by Patricia Turnier

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Kenneth Culver Johnson was born in 1942 in Arkansas (Pine Bluff (Jefferson County)) to Kenneth Culver Johnson Sr. and Helene Maye Brown Johnson. Mr. Johnson is a graduate from *Carnegie Institute of Technology*

. He wears many hats: director, producer, author, teacher and screenwriter. Mr. Johnson's first important work was

An Evening of Edgar Allan Poe

in 1972. Soon after, he wrote, produced, and/or directed one of the most popular TV series of the seventies,

The Six Million Dollar Man

(1973-1978), based on the novel

Cyborg

by Martin Caidin,

The Bionic Woman

(1976-1978) and

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The Incredible Hulk

(1977-1982). Before his aforementioned popular shows of the seventies, Kenneth Johnson was successful in NY and in the East Coast as a director/producer. In 1966, he was part of

The Mike Douglas Show

in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as a producer, and he directed most of the film work for the show. When he was only 24 in 1967, he took Roger Ailes' position as executive producer of the show.

It is important to consider how *The Bionic Woman* was ground-breaking in the seventies. Jaime Sommers, who represented the bionic woman, was strong and feminine; in other words, she was not androgynous. Sommers was also astute, forthright, self-defined and intrepid. She carried herself with class and finesse without being ostentatious. Her beliefs and actions profoundly shook the status quo regarding how women were portrayed on TV. Kenneth Johnson provided to international viewers a broader definition of what a woman could be on television.

Jaime Sommers was the high school sweetheart of Colonel and astronaut Steve Austin, the bionic man. After a skydiving accident and restructuring surgery paid by the American government, she became a top-secret agent for the Office of Scientific investigations (OSI). She could run faster than 60 mph, it is even reported that her speech reached 100 mph. She possessed the ability to bend massive steel bars, jump from really high heights, and hear sounds from a long distance. A bionic dog called Maximillion was also created, and could run at speeds of up to 90 mph. Max cared about saving lives as much as the other bionics, Steve Austin and Jaime Sommers. Emmy Award winner Lindsay Wagner portrayed Jaime Sommers.

Sommers, the most famous female secret agent, undertook many missions where she did such undercover work as a police officer, a chanteuse, a nun, a professional wrestler, and so on to fight spies, aliens, crazy scientists, etc. Sommers was not the only powerful woman in the show; it happened from time to time that she had to fight Fembots, which were female robots who had superpowers similar to the bionics.

The name "Jaime" was mainly a male name (a derivative of "James") before the television series began. It is certainly not a coincidence that in 1976 the name Jaime became one of the 100 most popular names of the year in the U.S. The female name Jamie (a variant spelling) also became highly popular at the time. So, it was a cultural phenomenon.

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Three made-for-TV movies were done between 1987 and 1994, which expanded the "bionic family" and covered a rekindled love between Jaime and Steve. The second film, *Bionic Showdown*, introduced Sandra Bullock as paraplegic Kate Mason, who became a next-generation bionic female. Sommers helped to train the novice cyborg. In August 2002, there was talk of a remake of *The Bionic Woman*, where Jennifer Aniston was considered for the title role, but the film never materialized.



In the eighties, Kenneth Johnson became the creator of the famous series *V* from 1983 until 1985 that was inspired by Sinclair Lewis' anti-fascist novel *It Can't Happen Here*). This show is about power in which aliens were used as a metaphor and allegory. 80 million viewers in America tuned in to watch *V*. 8 Later, Johnson adapted the

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Alien Nation

franchise to TV from 1989 until 1997, and several television movies related to the franchise were made in the nineties.

Alien Nation

– starring Michele Scarabelli, a native of Quebec – concerned prejudice, bigotry, discrimination, and so on. Different ethnic groups related to these topics gave awards to Kenneth Johnson. Thus, he received prizes from Asian-Americans, Latino Americans, Jews, African-Americans, the Gay & Lesbian community, etc.

In 1997, Johnson was in charge of *Steel* starring Shaquille O'Neal. In 1998, he directed the sequel of *Short Circuit*. Among other TV shows, he produced a 1993 pilot for a Sherlock Holmes series entitled

Sherlock Holmes Returns

. Many of his series could be enjoyed by an entire family and were

Emmy Award

Winning programs. Kenneth Johnson has a strong visual sense that is conspicuous in his body of work. Many elements in his mini-series were ahead of its time. For instance, in the bionic shows on a regular basis viewers were exposed to computers and other new technologies which were not used at the time by people on a regular basis. Johnson is among the most creative filmmakers in America. He also has interests in music. In the past, he learned piano and was later credited as a composer for the

Alien Nation

's theme music and for other TV shows.

In addition to producing and directing, Kenneth Johnson teaches filmmaking seminars at major film schools in America and Europe. More specifically, he gave courses at *UCLA, USC, NY Film Academy*

,
Columbia University

,
Universal Studios

in L.A.,
English National Film School
I in London,
State University of Moscow

, and the list goes on. Johnson is the winner of the reputable
Viewers for Quality Television Award

. He received
Saturn Awards

,
The Sci-Fi Universe Life Achievement Award

, etc. In addition, he gained nominations for both the

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Writers Guild
and the
Edgar Awards

. His shows have been translated into several languages: Korean, French, Spanish, German, etc. Noteworthy, Kenneth Johnson wrote these novels V:

The Original Miniseries
and

V: The Second Generation

. It would be fascinating if Kenneth Johnson could write companion books related to his most successful TV shows (such as the ones of the seventies) like Spike Lee did for his movies. I am convinced that, in these books, future readers would discover new behind-the-scene stories, just like in the following interview.

On a more personal level, Kenneth Johnson married Bonnie Hollaway on February 2, 1963, and they divorced in 1975. They had three children together. On June 19, 1977, he wedded Susan (Susie) Appling, and had one child with her. Kenneth Johnson has five grandchildren. One of Johnson's daughters, Katie Johnson, is an aspiring novelist while Juliet Johnson, an authoress. The latter has published a volume of essays (<http://somebodysalwaysungry.com>). Kenneth Johnson's oldest son, David Johnson works in theater in Oregon. The producer's younger son Michael Johnson lives in Maryland and works in retail.

Overall, Kenneth Johnson is a veteran who has been active in the entertainment industry since 1968. He is the Spielberg of television. Kenneth Johnson masters the art of developing introspective characters for his series and is the only producer/creator with three series on "TV Guide's 25 Greatest Sci-Fi Legends": *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *The Bionic Woman*, and *V*. Hence, he is most known for his cult television series in science fiction: the V science fiction franchise,

The Incredible Hulk

,

The Six Million Dollar Man

,

The Bionic Woman

and the television adaptation of
Alien Nation

were dubbed in several languages. Mr. Johnson is one of the most creative and inventive executive producers/directors/screenwriters in America. On a continual basis, Johnson's series are being remade, and this is a testament that his body of work is perceived as a classic one. For instance, the original novel of Caidin – as well as the TV series – will have a new adaptation of

Cyborg, The Bionic Man

, published by Dynamite Comics in 2011-2012, based on an unproduced screenplay by Kevin Smith. Before, there was a TV movie called *Bionic Ever After?* in 1994. In March 2012,

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Dynamite Entertainment had put
The Bionic Woman
comic book title into the market. This was based upon the revised continuity established in
The Bionic Man
comic (a reimagining of
The Six Million Dollar Man
) , written by Kevin Smith, in which the character of Jaime Sommers was reintroduced. A
crossover mini-series,
The Bionic Man vs. The Bionic Woman
, was on TV in January 2013. An eclectic approach was utilized in the bionic series with some
humor, drama, and action.

Kenneth Johnson's shows added sunshine in my life during my childhood and to many other kids around the world. In fact, his shows provided something special to people, no matter what their age was. For instance, as mentioned, the bionic woman was instrumental in giving a broader perspective of what a female could be, and I am certain that it cast a great influence for women to enroll in non-traditional jobs in the seventies such as agents, cops, detectives, and so on.

Mr. Johnson answered our questions with passion and humor. In fact, it was funny to notice that he is a person of dry humor. Talking to him made me realise that comedy is really a natural thing for him. I discovered that Kenneth Johnson is an unassuming man who does not take himself too seriously. We could reach out to him easily sans an entourage. He showed generosity with his time. It was a real pleasure to speak with him. Our readers will surely learn new things about his shows and his future project. We spoke to him from Quebec last September. This is his first interview from this province.



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www.kennethhanson.us

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