

Etched By Stone :

A Legacy Of Dedication To African-American Culture



We Will Carry Sonja Stone's Legacy Forth

The day after Sonja's funeral, a Baha'i friend called to offer sympathy and condolences. My friend said that in the Baha'i writings, the profit Bahauallah reminds us, when we grieve for the loss of those we love—when our pain is so great that it is difficult to accept a loved one leaving this world/leaving us—we must remember that their spirit is with us, feeling, seeing, and acutely aware of every tear, every mournful gesture, every sad regret. They know our sorrow; they are present in our sorrow. And they feel the weight of the mourners who can not let go of their material existence. Bahauallah says the spirit desires to soar to its unimaginable greatness and purpose, but it feels our sadness, and in sympathy for our pain, we make it more difficult for the spirit to make the easy/smooth transitional flight into the Other World. I suppose it is similar to a mother knowing she must leave her child for a while, but the child, not understanding the purpose of the mother's departure, but understanding that she/he will see the mother again, begins to cry and lament as the mother leaves. The mother, loving the child and seeing the child's pain, finds it is more difficult to freely walk through the door.

By D. Soyini Madison

We want Sonja Stone to ascend to her universal purpose, freely and joyfully, unencumbered by concerns about our inability to make peace with her passing. We know as we speak to her, she hears our every word/prayer; and, we know that in time we will see her again.

With these thoughts and convictions expressed, I ask myself: Why do the tears still come? Why does Sonja's material absence still weigh so heavily on my heart? I try to find answers in understanding my personal sorrow around Sonja's death, and I am faced with truths that are painful. I realize the pain is not the "death"; I know Sonja is fine and walking tall. The pain is for all of us, and how we will live in this world without her physical presence.

Sonja's passing has caused many truths to surface. Truths about friendship, integrity, sisterhood, and what it means to be a teacher, to be a fighter, to be misnamed and misunderstood, to be loved and revered, and to be a strong voice against the wind as so many others whisper. Sonja Stone did not live a small life; her life was simultaneously filled with tides of political controversy and profound love. The sadness sets in when I think about how we are sometimes unaware that there are individuals whose life is a special gift to us. The weight of loss sets in when I think about how we sometimes take each other for granted, not saying what needs to be said, not listening, not forgiving. The sorrow sets in when I think about how we often displace what is truly valuable: gossip and intolerance instead of valuing the time we spent together in appreciation, acceptance, and love. It is in this life that we must take better care of each other; we are each precious gifts to one another. I still weep because I wish I

had taken better care of Sonja—I weep because I wish we all would take better care of each other.

How each of us comes to understand Sonja's passing is framed within our experiences with her and our own religious and/or philosophical orientation. However, the center of my concern is how Sonja Stone's life and passing has and will change us, at least those of us who knew and loved her.

We know that Sonja's highest aspirations did not completely transcend with her. She gave her will and vision to each of us to carry on. Carrying on the legacy of Sonja Stone is to add to the profound significance of her life and to her own. It is no

mystery or hidden secret what Sonja believed, because she was both warrior and thinker. She made her convictions very very clear.

I want to discuss what I perceive to be Sonja's greatest beliefs as they affect us at this university: First. She believed that the history, politics, and expressive traditions of African-American discourse were worthy of the kind of sophisticated and intellectually rigorous study as any other discipline on this campus. Therefore, she felt the curriculum should be moving toward Departmental status. She fought for this against great odds for almost 20 years. Documentation reflects Sonja Stone's long struggle to move the curriculum to a department and recounts each battle. This is a history we must know and, if need be, defend.

Second. She believed that a Black Cultural Center was es-

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