



## A Solitary Battle

*Dr. Stone often fought alone. Her passing should bring about solidarity.*

By Michelle L. Thomas

My eyes would light up and my heart would warm at the mere sight of my beautiful African Queen—Dr. Sonja Stone. From the first time that I met her at the beginning of my sophomore year, I said that I wanted to be just like her. And

I would often laugh at myself when people would ask "What do you want to do when you finish school?" and I would reply "I want to be just like Dr. Stone!". Only once in a lifetime will someone touch your life in such a special way. Before I ever had a class with her, I would find myself going to her office just to say hello or chat. That I wasn't enrolled in one of her

classes didn't matter because I was a student reaching out. Her door was always open to any student who, for whatever reason, wanted to stop in. Her kind words and insightful advice will go with me forevermore.

On January 26, 1991, my Army Reserve unit was called to active duty in support of Operation Desert Shield/Storm. Just the night before I

had received the Martin Luther King, Jr. scholarship award and was surprised to find that Dr. Stone was not at the program. That following Monday morning I stepped into office to share with her my good and bad news. I started by telling her that I had won the scholarship. She responded by literally jumping up and down and grabbing me to give me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. She was just as excited as I. Once the excitement died down, we sat and I told her that my Reserve unit had been called into active duty and that there was a chance that I would have to go the Persian Gulf. We had earlier discussed the threat of this happening, but when it had, she was just as hurt as I. I must say though she had something within that I did not. Her spirituality was so complete that, although concerned she was not worried because she knew God would take care of me. After her usual "Oooh No!" she asked what she could do to assist me in making my transition. She knew how much school means to me and suggested that I continue in her AFAM 60 course, which I was taking at the time and just work with her independently while away. She was truly concerned about my well-being and discussed my dilemma with her close friends and family. When I did meet her family under the unfortunate circumstances of Dr. Stone's hospitalization, they knew and embraced me.

At about 9:00pm on the 7th of August, I came home to find that my mentor had had an aneurysm and was hospitalized in the area. After a few phone calls, my roommate and I rushed to Duke University Medical Center in search of the intensive care unit and someone who could give us information about our beloved Dr. Stone. There we found waiting some of her loving friends and colleagues. This was one of the most difficult experiences of my life. When we went in to see her, I was overwhelmed. There lay in a coma, the most vibrant woman that I have ever been blessed to meet. It was more than I could handle. After returning home, my roommate and I wept for hours. How could it be that our Dr. Stone was fighting for her life? She

had fought so many battles for so many others, why did she have to fight this crucial one? I wasn't finished with her yet. There was so much more guidance that I needed, so many more questions to ask. I still have my thesis to write. Who was going to help me? I had promised her that it would be the longest and the best ever, but I couldn't do it without my mentor. What about the Collegiate Black Caucus and Kawaida? Who would give us contacts and be full of suggestions for community service projects? Am I going to have to go on in this constant struggle without my Warrior? All of these selfish questions and hundreds more filled my heart and mind for several days. On August 10, my beloved friend passed to an eternal resting place, leaving behind a legacy that will forever live within me and all of those whose lives she touched.

Both in and outside of the classroom Dr. Stone was an inspiration. Her intellect in the field of African American Studies and African American leadership styles in particular, was innovative and has compelled me to want to study the same. Each lecture was a treat. She welcomed the ideas and input of everyone who conveyed them. Being a true intellectual, she was open-minded to the views of all, allowing students to be creative and expressive with the material covered. I was fortunate enough to have three classes under her and the bond created as a result is one that even death cannot sever. My heart must go out to those who were not as blessed. Those who have never had her for a class or as an advisor to an organization will never understand the depth of her legacy. But those mentored by her will carry her memory and work forward until victorious in the struggle. Each battle faced can be won by trusting in God and relying on the spirit of our Queen. Although it may often seem that we are fighting our battles alone, we must remember that she did the same and prevailed. It is my prayer though that her passing will unite our community in the struggle and the battle will no longer be a lonely one.