

May 28, 2008

Sparrow

Jane Arden (Hillman) Stoneback  
1935-2008

Sparrow—Jane Arden Stoneback—singer-songwriter of international reputation, paragon of grit and grace, wit and will, during her long fight with lung cancer and all her life, passed away May 25th at Cumberland County Hospital in Kentucky. Born in Carter County, in the eastern Kentucky hill-country, daughter of Alice and Richard Hillman, she made her home in the Hudson Valley for the past four decades. Before moving to Highland in 1969, she lived in Alabama, Florida, Hawaii, Kentucky, New Orleans, South Jersey, and Tennessee. She also lived and traveled extensively abroad, especially in France and China.

She studied at Vanderbilt University, the University of Paris, and Peking University. She taught and tutored English language students and lectured on folksong in France and China. Other work experience included a year in Hawaii as Executive Assistant to the President of one of the largest Pacific Rim firms, three years in Nashville as national troubleshooter for General Electric, and many years in the emergency room admissions department of Benedictine Hospital in Kingston. She was also a writer who published essays, poems, and songs.

During a forty-five year singing career as the better half of the duo "Stoney & Sparrow," she achieved national and international renown as a singer through her powerful and nuanced performances of folk, country, and gospel songs as well as her own compositions.

She made concert tours and television and radio appearances throughout Asia, Europe, and North America under the auspices of the British Council, the Fulbright Program, USIA (the US State Department), and many other cultural organizations and institutions. She performed in Austria, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Thailand and other countries as well as in most of the fifty states and throughout the Caribbean.

In 1984 she sang all over China and several albums featuring her singing were major hit recordings there—said to be the first million-selling records by an American in China. In 2006 a 2-CD album, "Stoney & Sparrow: Songs of Place 1962-2006," was released (recorded live in New Paltz). In 2007 another album—"Overcoming: Live in Alabama, China, and the Hudson Valley"—was released, featuring earlier concert performances and dedicated to the Hope Lodge in Nashville, where cancer patients at the Vanderbilt Medical Center reside during treatment.

Closer to home, Sparrow was well known for her performances in the Hudson Valley, especially at SUNY-New Paltz where she performed annually for many years. The world that she made in her singing was inseparable from her role as gracious host and

adoptive mother to the extended family of generations of SUNY-New Paltz students that she welcomed to her home, their home. This community, this communion of students and teachers, poets and writers, salutes her as muse:

"Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."

(Proverbs 31:28)

She is survived by her husband of forty-six years, H. R. ("Stoney"—Distinguished Professor of English at SUNY-New Paltz), her son Rick (CEO of the Cumberland County Hospital in Kentucky) and his wife Robin, her son Gregg (Professor of English at Westfield State College in Massachusetts) and his wife Nancy, and her four grandchildren, Adam and Lee (Westfield, MA) and Rachel and Richard (Marrowbone, KY).

Listen to Stoney and Sparrow at this link. Keeping alive songs that Grandma used to sing.  
Click on the small arrow to the right of the small photo on the right.

<http://www.myspace.com/stoneyandsparrow>