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Review of Rosie Stone's Memoir *No Stone Unturned:* *The Carl and Rosie Story*

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Abstract

No Stone Unturned: The Carl and Rosie Story (published by Ian Randle, 2007) is Rosie Stone's memoir of her husband Carl's death from AIDS, and her own experience of having caught the disease and living with it for many years.

I have mixed feelings about the Rosie Stone book. On the one hand, I welcome a memoir from one of our own. There are so few of our own stories out there. It is such a refreshing pleasure to read an authentic, well-written — despite the sometimes stilted dialogue — story about one of “us”, with all the colloquialisms and familiar places and rhythms. I also welcome this necessary contribution to the destigmatization of HIV/AIDS. But there were aspects of the book that made me uncomfortable, namely, what I perceived to be Rosie Stone's using this book to settle scores with the many people who she feels wronged herself and Carl after their diagnoses with HIV/AIDS, his death, and beyond.

Such a memoir is unusual for Jamaica and the English-speaking Caribbean, even more so because Stone gives an autobiographical first person account of “high profile” Jamaicans (her husband and herself) living with (and dying from) HIV/AIDS. To my knowledge, only Jamaica Kincaid’s riveting memoir, *My Brother* (Random House, 1998), that recounts her brother’s suffering and death from AIDS in Antigua, tells a similar story. There is also Patricia Powell’s fictional account *A Small Gathering of Bones* (Beacon Press, 2003) which is set in Jamaica and vividly portrays the homophobia, stigma and rejection associated with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean. Given the sparseness of the genre, I welcome *No Stone Unturned* as a contribution towards the demystification of HIV/AIDS and those who are living with it. It is widely acknowledged that the spread of HIV/AIDS is exacerbated by the ignorance and stigma that bedevil Caribbean societies with regard to matters of sexuality.

According to the publishers, the book sold an unprecedented (for Jamaica) 4,000 copies in the first six months. Clearly, this was a story that people were interested in. To be honest, I must myself admit, if a bit embarrassingly, to a prurient interest in the story of the life and death of Carl Stone himself, one of Jamaica’s most influential and famous — if not *the* most influential and famous — political analysts. His death from AIDS in 1993 continues, even 15 years later, to inspire a hushed, if awed, remark or two if any topic remotely related should come up. And there is a similarly voyeuristic curiosity to know his wife Rosie’s story — her having caught the disease, and living with it for more than 15 years, especially in Jamaica. What a tale there is to tell there. But this prurience comes from the very fact that the condition is so stigmatized, and we know so little about it; a book like this — indeed, this book — should go a far way in helping to erase that stigma that leads to such unhealthy inquisitiveness.

Rosie Stone gives a very detailed account of Carl’s getting sick, the various diagnoses of his illness before the final diagnosis of AIDS, the aftermath of the diagnosis — how she dealt with it, mainly by remaining extremely private about it, and relying on the support of a handful of close confidantes — and then her discovery of her own diagnosis with the disease. She even shares details of the European holiday when she is sure she actually contracted the disease. We get glimpses of Carl himself — his work, his motivations, his headspace as the end was near — which are fascinating and enlightening, given how little we know about Carl Stone, despite the compelling role he played in Jamaican politics. The last part of the book is about Rosie’s own search for medical treatment, with some very close calls, including, at one point, a T-cell count of one. Through it all we also learn about Rosie’s life story, interesting in and of itself, aside from the HIV/AIDS aspects, and even Carl’s story. Rosie’s own very courageous struggle with AIDS is chronicled too. Based on her telling, it is amazing that she is still alive — she has benefited from just-in-time medical advances, and, it seems, sheer luck.

One of the most interesting aspects of Rosie Stone’s story is the various responses of the people around her and Carl — spanning all aspects of the spectrum from loving compassion to scornful rejection and discrimination. But it is this aspect of the book that, while intriguing, left me uncomfortable. As I read, I couldn’t help feeling like I was party

to Rosie Stone getting even with those who she perceived wronged her and her family. Though she doesn't always give full names, and I personally did not know who she was talking about when she spoke, say, about the friend who let her down, or the dermatologist (Dr. Andrea) who let it be known that she knew about the family's travails with AIDS, it would not have been difficult for me to find out, given that she used first names and enough other details that, had I wanted to, I could easily have discovered, given Jamaica's two or less degrees of separation. She did name her own brother, the popular *Observer* columnist Mark Wignall, and former Prime Minister Edward Seaga as having committed grievous wrongs against her and Carl.

Though the writing was, in places, a bit stiff, this minor weakness is easily compensated for by the alacrity with which the story is told. Rosie Stone has told an engrossing story, there is no doubt about that, and the record sales of the book prove it. More importantly, Rosie Stone has opened the curtains on a topic and a disease which all Caribbean people need to understand and come to terms with, as a matter of urgency.