

DOUG STONE

by Tamela Meredith Partridge
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It seems like only yesterday that Doug Stone introduced listeners to "The Stone Age" of country music with '90 debut self-titled album and Top Five single, *"I'd Be Better Off (In A Pine Box)"*.

And today, with eight No.1 country singles and a string of platinum and gold albums to his credit, the singer and songwriter is still going strong with the upcoming mid-summer release of his latest album, "In The Name Of Love," and it's tentatively slated first single, "P.O.W. 369."

"We have been working on this album since September of last year," Stone said during a recent phone interview. "I am producing on this album as well. It was recorded in my studio with my 'Stone Age' band members. I have been a lucky guy with my band, because they are so talented. Many of the band members have been with me a long time, they are like family."

Stone and his band members look forward to performing at The Little Nashville Opry on Saturday, March 24 at 6 and 9:30 p.m.

"It is always a pleasure to return to The Little Nashville Opry," Stone said. "It is one of our regular stops. The people are just so nice there, they have fun and really get into what you are doing. And The Little Nashville Opry owners are wonderful people as well. They always treat us like kings and queens."

Stone, whose legal birthname is Douglas Jackson Brooks, is one of six children born in Atlanta, Georgia to parents Jack, a mechanic/business owner and Gail, a singer/business owner. His lifetime affair with country music began at age 5 when his mother taught him to play guitar, took him with her to local gigs, and eventually arranged for him to open a Loretta Lynn show.



"I shook Loretta's hand and said 'Hello' to her," Stone said. "Then I went out to do my thing. I was too scared to sing, but I knew how to play E, A and B real good on the guitar. So, I went out, played those three chords, did a kind of boogie, all the time looking over my shoulder at my mother off stage with an 'Am I through playing yet?' look. When she finally nodded, I just stopped playing and walked off the stage."

His parents divorced when he was 12, causing Stone and his brothers to move with their father into a Newnan, GA hillside trailer that lacked the modern convenience of running water. Even though his father didn't discourage Stone's musical ambitions, he insisted his son take up the mechanic trade in order to keep food on the table.

Stone was on his own by age 16 and living in a 12 x 12 well house which he remodeled to include a small recording studio. He lived in the wellhouse for 7 years, and gradually enlarged it to accommodate the growing needs of his first marriage.

His big break occurred in '87 when Stone met Phyllis Bennett at a VFW hall where his mother had booked the band. Bennett became Stone's first manager and helped him obtain a recording contract. The decision to change his name to Stone was made in an effort to avoid being confused with another country newcomer of the time, Garth Brooks.

The 1993 TNN Music City News "Star of Tomorrow" has topped the charts with fifteen Top Ten hits including, "*In A Different Light*," "*A Jukebox With A Country Song*," "*Too Busy Being In Love*," and "*Why Didn't I Think of That?*"

"I want to go into every show on fire to sing my songs," Stone said. "And that's why it's so important for me to pick the right ones. I want songs that feel fresh, whether I'm singing it for the thousandth time or the first."

His level of career success is amazing considering he survived emergency quadruple bypass surgery at age 35, a subsequent heart attack and mini-stroke, complicated voice problems and a March 7, 2000 plane crash. Giving up a three pack a day smoking habit, adopting a healthier diet, and following a regular exercise regime have all contributed to stabilizing his health issues.

The heart disease survivor served as the 1999-2000 volunteer national spokesperson for The American Heart Association and made a difference by educating the public on heart disease and its warning signs.

"It has been a difficult few years for me," Stone said. "But I am so blessed to be a survivor and feeling healthier than ever. I know it is very important for me to be very open about my personal experience. Taking immediate action at the first warning signs of heart attack and stroke saved my life, not once, but three times. I wanted to help reach other people with that important message."

When he is not on the road touring, the proud father of five can be found residing in Nashville with his third wife Beth and their 2-1/2 year-old daughter, Baili.

For Stone, learning to appreciate his loved ones and life itself has been the greatest gift of all.

"More than ever the things I sometimes took for granted mean everything to me, particularly the people in my life--my family, my friends, and the fans who have been so loyal through the years," he said.