

Tribute to Everjoice Jeketa Win

Ennie Chipembere

Dear EJ,

It's been some time since you left us, and your absence is deeply felt. Finding the words to express this grief has not been easy, but I hope this first public letter honours your legacy without dwelling in sorrow. What endures is your profound impact, your influence, your memories, and the stories that celebrate the phenomenal feminist, friend, sister, mother, and mentor you were. You gifted us with stories: stories about you, stories shared with you, and stories learned from you. My hope is that many of us will honour your memory by sharing these stories as I am doing now.

I, like many others, was profoundly impacted by your words. As an economic historian, your research and co-authorship of the 1992 book *To Live a Better Life – An Oral History of Women in the City of Harare, 1920-70* offered critical insights into the systemic injustices women have faced since the colonial era. Through this work, you introduced us to the women who shaped the city in often unrecognised ways, yet whose influence was pivotal to policy and urban life. This publication marked a defining moment in your emergence as the social justice and women's rights activist we came to admire.

Thank you for your writing and for the depth of your analysis. You helped us understand the necessity of our ongoing struggle by illuminating the structural causes of poverty, injustice, women's oppression, exclusion, and entrenched power dynamics. Your work continues to inspire us to challenge and transform these recurrent patterns.

You remain one of the most gifted storytellers and feminist oral historians I have known. We learned so much from you; your stories built bridges, passed on wisdom, and fostered solidarity. Many first encountered your work early in your career through *Speak Out* Magazine, which became an essential resource for both rural and urban women across Zimbabwe. Through

Speak Out and your skilful storytelling at the Women's Action Group, you provided women with the tools to challenge gender-based violence and resist harmful cultural practices that denied them land and economic resources. Your writing gave Zimbabwean women a powerful voice to name and share their experiences, forging connections and strengthening collective organising for women's rights.

You often recounted hours spent under a tree sharing stories of discrimination and identifying opportunities for solidarity, thereby transforming shared pain into collective agency. I witnessed you employ this approach throughout our travels, using storytelling as a strategy to understand women's struggles and champion the work of women's rights activists. You connected deeply with women everywhere, always centring their voices and experiences in the fight for social justice and women's rights.

Thank you for being a grand connector and an intergenerational feminist weaver. Your approach to solidarity and movement building was embodied by people in action across borders and generations. Across the 45 countries of the ActionAid federation and beyond, you exemplified a brand of feminist solidarity and movement building that extended well beyond formal work. You were intentional, attentive, and deeply caring.

I witnessed your thoughtfulness in countless ways, such as remembering birthdays, and single-handedly orchestrating an extensive global gifting network of clothes, scarves, accessories, and teas. Today, many of us wear the clothes you shared with pride, treasuring them as symbols of being seen, remembered, and connected, not just to the gifts, but to you and the messenger. You shared many helpful books, but one that has stayed with me – especially since I really needed it – is Lois Frankel's *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office: Unconscious Mistakes Women Make That Sabotage Their Careers*. While I was struggling to transition into a leadership position, you gave me this book, sat me down, and said, "My dear, shine where you are, be political, strategic, and apply your unique feminism embedded in the strengths you have with coaching, people, and organisation development." Later, with confidence, I delivered this book as a gift from you to ten sisters in countries as distant as Nepal. These tokens serve as reminders of your commitment to feminist care,

connection, and the ongoing work of nurturing our movements across generations.

Your work as connector, EJ, often took the form of, “Miss Ennie, when you travel to Zimbabwe, Kenya, Senegal, India, Nepal, Guatemala, the US, Denmark, Liberia, or elsewhere, go and meet XYZ; she has experience with this and can help with that. Reach out and connect over a meal or cocktails.” I often wondered why it was necessary to message or meet unknown sisters, but your intergenerational feminist spirit understood that, even today, conversation, relationships, shared experiences, and in-person contact remain the foundation of a sustainable movement. You recognised that these connections are essential for bridging borders and navigating the intersectional differences that too often divide us.

You made feminism accessible and relatable in contemporary society. While addressing the most challenging social justice and women’s rights issues, you consistently reminded us of the importance of self-care and collective care, demonstrating what it means to embrace femininity while fiercely advocating for our rights. You encouraged us to develop our own distinctive style, emphasising the importance of well applied makeup, a bold lip, and the right bra size – lessons that still bring a smile to my face. We all looked forward to your photos, featuring beautiful hats, perfectly done nails, and a cocktail in hand.

You championed the necessity of rest, often sending gentle reminders to take time to regroup. I remember how, whenever we organised global women’s rights gatherings, you would insist: “Girls, we need to start after a good breakfast, and let’s finish early to give people time to connect, rest, and go shopping.” Your nuanced understanding of women’s lives across geographies and class divides made you a remarkable feminist leader, as well as a deeply human one with flaws and joys just like the rest of us.

As a passionate advocate, you nurtured a generation of feminists, many of whom went on to work within INGOs and other mainstream organisations – spaces that are often unwelcoming to feminist voices. You showed us how to claim our identities and practise feminism even in environments that are not always open to us. My first experience at the African Feminist Forum in Uganda with a large group of ActionAid colleagues introduced us to a powerful

network of solidarity, literature, and organising – resources we continue to draw upon two decades later. Your legacy endures in the countless feminists you empowered to claim their place and voice, wherever they may be.

We drew inspiration and tangible examples of change for women from your work across Africa and around the world. Through your stories about your time with Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), you demonstrated how you collaborated with others to build a network comprising over 30 organisations, which successfully influence policy and legislation in Zimbabwe and Africa. Your collective efforts drove significant changes in laws regarding inheritance, marriage, anti-violence, and land rights.

Your leadership extended to the global stage where you led networks at key UN conferences: Beijing (1995), Cairo (1994), Dakar (1994), Vienna (1993), demonstrating that both local and global advocacy are essential for advancing women's rights. Your role as a Commonwealth Technical Advisor to the Commission on Gender Equality in South Africa further exemplified the depth of your experience and your influential voice in shaping feminist agendas.

You taught us how to bridge the gap between mainstream development work and feminist struggles, empowering us to bring feminist principles and organising into spaces that had previously excluded them. Your legacy is a testament to the power of feminist leadership and collective action.

In the last two decades of your career, your impact and transformative leadership were most powerfully felt in ActionAid International, Oxfam, and the Shine Campaign. Through your roles as Head of Women's Rights and Global Director of Programmes at ActionAid, you shaped the organisation's reputation for pioneering women's human rights programmes, advancing regional and global policy engagement, and leading influential campaigns.

Notably, your leadership in co-creating campaigns with the women's movement across 45 countries – such as *#WomenWon'tWait*, which linked HIV and AIDS with violence against women, and *#HungerFreeWomen*, which advocated for women's land rights for smallholder women farmers – was particularly significant. These campaigns not only advanced critical policy changes but also shaped the current global dialogue on women's rights in agriculture, feminist alternatives in climate justice, and humanitarian work.

Your legacy endures in these movements and the countless lives they continue to touch.

Dignity and choice defined the last decade of your life. As with everything you did, you embodied strength, humanity, and an unwavering fighting spirit. You chose to confront your physical experience in ways that preserved your agency and honoured your dignity. You navigated both the visible and invisible pain on your own terms. Though your illness was incurable, you bravely refused to accept the inevitable. Instead, you continued to offer your expertise, shaping feminist discourse and new funding frameworks, while remaining accessible to everyone who sought your support for professional or personal challenges.

EJ, you gave so much of yourself to us, to women's rights, and to your family. Family was deeply important to you, and no tribute to your life would be complete without honouring that dedication. You demonstrated that it is possible to fight for justice while nurturing and cherishing those closest to you. Your love and commitment to your family and friends were as profound as your dedication to the movement, reminding us that care, connection, and solidarity begin at home.

You stayed true to the gift you were – to your family, friends, the feminist movement, and the ongoing struggle for social justice and women's rights. A phenomenal feminist economic historian, writer, storyteller, connector, and movement builder, you were a strategic and steadfast ally who stood with the cause and your colleagues until the very end.

Rest in Power, EJ!