

**within our lifetime**

Take action to end racism.

## Remembering Mama Lila



**With Love from her friends at  
Within Our Lifetime Network**

Established in 2012, Within Our Lifetime (WOL) Network brought together 125 organizations, racial healing practitioners and racial equity advocates committed to ending the impact of racism in our lifetimes. Network members represented major national organizations, universities, statewide and local organizations, school districts, faith-based institutions, and movement networks. The Network served as a vehicle for connecting, building learning and leadership capacity, and mobilizing its members to actualize its vision.

WOL had been clear that the work of healing from the insidious multi-generational impact of structural racism, would be complex and emergent. WOL had also been clear that creating a sense of momentum and possibility is critical for survival in the long fight for racial justice. Hence, the vision of WOL Network was to advance a proactive and cross-sector movement that eliminates or significantly transforms race and racism in our lifetime. WOL played this critical role in the racial justice movement for many racial healing and equity organizations.

Mama Lila was a founding member of WOL's Leadership Council and remained an active member through 2018. She was key in the development of our Campaign to Combat the Impact of Implicit Bias and our Rapid Response system to mobilize material, human, and financial resources to support and increase the effectiveness of on-the-ground racial justice efforts.

Mama Lila represented WOL in our meetings, conferences and retreats in Dallas, Atlanta, St. Louis/Ferguson, New York, Washington DC, Oakland, and Detroit.

Mama Lila was so many things...an activist, water warrior, mentor, guide, truth teller, and most importantly she was our friend. She shared her many gifts, loved hard with each relationship, acted always with integrity, wrote the book on accountability, and had cutting analysis with the best delivery. And when she walked in a room you would be touched by her smile and the sparkle in her eye.

Mama Lila was WOL - she worked to build this network from the ground up, and infused everything we did with love. While we will miss her dearly, we vow to continue her good work.

To the Cabbil family, we offer our heartfelt condolences and thanks for sharing Mama Lila with us. May she rest in power.

## **Tributes to Mama Lila from her Within Our Lifetime Family**

Thank you for the way you loved on us, with kind words and hugs and cake and cards in that perfect handwriting. But also, with truth-telling and call ins and “read this” and a clarity about justice and all the ways racism shows up. I’ll miss your warmth and wisdom though I know you’ll continue to share it as an ancestor.

We continue to fight. You rest in power,  
Mama Lila.

*Trish Tchume - Washington DC*



Mama Lila with Chris Messinger, Dr. Ruby Cain,  
Tony Watkins, and Trish Tchume New  
York, 1/17

Dear Cabbil Family, My thoughts are with you, as you celebrate Lila. Please take care as you grieve – her arms and heart will always be wrapped around you.

Lila, I will miss you, my friend, my comrade, my favorite co-conspirator. You are my shero. You generously shared your gifts, wisdom and love. Please know your legacy will live on through the many hearts and minds you touched through your truth telling, your teaching, your fearless organizing for racial justice.

You energized Within Our Lifetime Network being so clear, and claiming we can end racism within our lifetimes and then doing everything possible to make it so...and doing with humility, grace and compassion.



Mama Lila with Maggie Potapchuk Dallas,  
12/15

Always, you were ready to fight the good fight, practicing accountability and being willing to take the necessary risks and the consequences that came with them. You

by  
it

gave of yourself so completely with your full heart. I remember your laughs, our strategizing talks, and especially you smile and that twinkle in your eye. Thank you, my friend. I will miss you so. Rest in Power, Lila.

*Maggie Potapchuk – Baltimore, MD*

For Mama Lila

Lila  
you be like Lilac  
limitless with time  
I saw you  
witnessed you with my own eyes  
  
I saw grace and boldness within you  
with every word you wrote in calligraphy  
laid down  
woven intricately  
like every piece of kente cloth you  
adorned  
we adore you  
as the Queen mother you are  
that you always were  
And with that aura  
it's why we called you Mama



Mama Lila with Allen Kwabena Frimpong –Dallas, 12/15

Lila  
you be like  
Lilac  
illimitable,  
Lila  
infinite,  
Lila

Lila  
you be like  
Lilac  
never  
lacking  
with your  
love  
because  
it's  
lingering  
in its sweet  
bonafide



Mama Lila with Allen Kwabena Frimpong and Dr. Cheryl Grills– Washington DC

fragrance  
you'll  
continue  
  
to fill us with your graciousness  
nevertheless  
everyone should know that her voice  
has and shall rejoice and unite discord with  
harmony  
Her voice will forever declare to bless  
every human life to finesse  
their path to freedom  
with favor  
in doing their best

Because all she knew  
was her best self  
refreshing like the water  
Lilac blooming  
Lila



immeasurable with your passing  
in your transition  
we will yearn for all you embody  
in all of our bodies  
that scent that we inhale called  
Liberation

So saddened to hear the news  
Mama Lila Cabbil passed over.  
She was a water warrior for Flint,  
a long-time organizer in Detroit,  
and a national leader for racial  
equity, inclusion and justice. I'm  
so grateful to have spent time  
with her at the Facing Race  
Conference last fall celebrating  
the accomplishments of the  
National Within Our Lifetime  
Network where she mentored,  
and served as a role model, for  
so many of us.

*Val Ramos – Hartford, CT*

*Allen Kwabena Frimpong - Los Angeles, CA*



Mama Lila with Kevin John Fong, Trish Tchume, Chris Messinger,  
and Val Ramos – Detroit, 11/18

Mama Lila taught me so much, just from her  
way of Being.

She never stopped. She never gave in. She  
always lived in the space of vision and belief of  
what we could be as a human race. Two days  
after a surgery she was out organizing to get  
clean water for her beloved Detroit. When I  
asked why she wasn't resting, she said,  
"circulation is key to healing." Amen to that.

You are missed, yet I know that you are still  
with us, calling us forward, as you always  
have.

*Jeanné Isler – Washington DC*



Mama Lila with Dushaw Hockett, Maggie  
Potapchuck, Robin Toma, and Jeanné  
Isler – Dallas, 12/15

Lila was in my thoughts the other day when watching Mike Moore's latest that includes the issue of racial inequities of access to clean water, and privatizing clean water, which Lila pointed out when we used bottled water at our events! I will remember her fondly.

*Robin Toma – Los Angeles, CA*

The movement for racial justice lost a shining light this weekend. And so did I. Mama Lila Cabbil was a fierce and brilliant community organizer with an amazing commitment to care for those around her, and an ever-expanding capacity to grow her circle of life. To say that she worked with Rosa Parks for 40 years is entirely too limiting of the scope of her life. Just ask the Detroit Water board and the Water Warriors. And dozens of other organizations and people.

But writing in the past tense and about you is too removed and inauthentic and painful.

Mama Lila, you were a gift in my life. My memories of our time together bring a smile to my face. Whether it was sneaking cinnamon buns out of the hotel lobby in New York or you teaching me how to use Uber (but also modeling how to talk to drivers like human beings), I was learning. You gave me an

impromptu tour of historic Detroit full of your own stories. Your laugh filled the room, always.

You were realistic about the size of the challenge we face, but you were perennially fighting. I watched you carve out space for other people's leadership, speak truth to power, help us keep our eyes on the prize, and care for so many, many people around you.

When our Within Our Lifetime network sunsetted, you popped up with a cake in the shape of a sunset (!) and made sure our closing celebration was held at the local restaurant with staff who were formerly incarcerated. You lived your values, and inspired me to live mine. We worked on that racial justice report for 2 years, and Trish and I kept editing, editing, editing, and finally you said to us "It's time. Get out of the way and get it into the world. Nothing's perfect." Thank you for that reminder.



Mama Lila with Chris Messinger –  
Detroit, 11/18

I'm not even scratching the surface. You packed a lot into an amazing life, and still, we're left wishing for more. But also, I'm wishing you peace. Thank you. Rest in power.

*Chris Messinger – Boston, MA*

I called you yesterday because it was my birthday and I just wanted to hear your voice. Little did I know that you were preparing for your own entrance into the next life.

Although we knew each other for years through Grace, we grew close in the past few years through Within Our Lifetime. We bonded over good food and long conversations filled with laughter. Every time I visited you in Detroit, we'd barely make it ten feet before someone would stop you and say hello. No matter what kind of day you were having, you were always there for others with a kind smile, a sparkle in your eye, and a flyer in your hand.

I will miss you dearly - your infectious laugh, your fierce knowledge about environmental justice, your stories about Dr. Parks, your button collection, and your deep wisdom that emanated through every word you said.

All that, and the fact that, until you, there was no one else I knew who loved ice cream as much as I do. I'll never forget that time, after a long day of travel and conferencing, I asked you if there was anything else you needed before we headed home, and you said, "How about some ice cream?" So, I took you to Fenton's where, inside of 15 minutes, we polished off four scoops of ice cream!

A couple of years ago, you wrote me this note -

*"Kevin, there is none like you. Through your facilitation and attention to our whole being, you have poured into us connections that bonds us together in a way that serves as a shield from some of the fiery darts that come our way when we are not together..."*



Mama Lila with Kevin John Fong – Detroit, 6/17



Mama Lila at Fentons Oakland, 4/17

*I love you. I am in gratitude for the gifts you gave me at this time, the beginning of the New Year. I believe that is a sign that God is Blessing us with what we need to bring this change, undoing racism in our lifetime."*

Lila, you have given me this blessing and this responsibility. I know what I need to do, and promise that I will continue your good work. Thank you for your love, care and guidance. May you Rest in Power, my dear friend.

*Kevin Kahakula'akea John Fong – San Francisco, CA*

As a daughter of Detroit, I watched you with admiration and was delighted that you "saw me" in the many crowded rooms in which we would find ourselves over the decades. Your belief in what is possible inspired so many to not wait on others to take action, including me. I learned from you to fight like we could win at any moment. Rest in POWER Beloved Mama Lila. May your light shine forever.

*Angela Waters Austin – Detroit, MI*

Mama Lila where do I begin... the reality of losing you in the physical is yet not real. Your spirit will always be with us-- its lightness, it's joy, its demand of justice will never leave me or the places to which you brought love and light. I will never look at a heart shape and not think of you-- I will always remember our many long talks over meals, your advice on how to live in light, freedom, truth and justice and how to mend a broken heart. You carried with you a wisdom and concern for others that will never be unmatched. I hope to leave one



Mama Lila with Simran Noor and Kevin John Fong– Detroit, 11/18

tenth of the legacy you leave behind... and I know I will visit with you often in times of desperation and in times of joy, I will seek you, knowing just the memory of you will bring comfort. Love you forever.

*Simran Noor – New York, NY*



Hard to believe, yet her spirit lives on. Sister Lila set the bar extremely high and would not rest or settle for anything less. Her tireless work for equity and justice inspired and propelled me to reach for the stars. RIH

*Dr. Ruby Cain – Muncie, IN*

Mama Lila with Tony Watkins, Trish Tchume, Allen Kwabena Frimpong, Chris Messinger and Dr. Ruby Cain – New York, 1/17



Dear Mama Lila,

I wish I could be there with you for your homegoing. I'm there, as has long been true, in Spirit. I'm there with you today because your spirit, your love, your capacity for goodness was so very strong. Thank you for pulling me in and drawing me close.

Thank you for caring about me, about your community, about all those in need of your caring, and your love.

You would often tell me—plead with me really, to take care of myself. I will remember and be grateful that you loved me.

*Lecia Brooks – Montgomery, AL*

*Grief, I've learned,  
is really just love.*

*It's all the love you want to give,  
but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up  
in the corners of your eyes,  
the lump in your throat,  
and in that hollow part of your chest.  
Grief is just love with no place to go.*

~ Jamie Anderson ~

The racial justice community lost an amazing community organizer & civil rights leader. Lila Cabbil was a close friend of Rosa Parks, and president of the Rosa Parks Institute in Detroit. She was a tireless and passionate activist on the front lines of the Michigan water crisis (with the People's Water Board), among many other campaigns for equity and justice. It was an honor to serve with her on the leadership council of Within Our Lifetime, a national network dedicated to ending racism within our lifetime. I learned much from her in a very short time, and she will be greatly missed.

*Michael Rabbitt – Chicago, IL*

Mama Lila with (standing) Kevin John Fong, Simran Noor, Allen Kwabena Frimpong, Michael Rabbitt, Tony Neal, Rebecca Bennett, Al White, and (seated) Carolyn Miller Abdullah, Maggie Potapchuk, and Lecia Brooks St. Louis, 6/16





Mama Lila with Allen Kwabena Frimpong, Trish Tchume, Kevin John Fong, Maggie Potapchuck and Pia Infante – Oakland, 4/17



Mama Lila with Allen Kwabena Frimpong and Kevin John Fong – Ferguson, 6/16

To Mama Lila's family: May your hearts be comforted in your time of distress and sadness on the transition of a loved one who created much laughter on this earth and touched the lives of many. And while we know death brings finality to the body, it can never touch the soul. May Mama Lila travel well and speed rapidly to her reward as she re-emerges back into pure positive energy!

*Carolyn Miller Abdullah – Hartford, CT*



Mama Lila with Carolyn Miller Abdullah and Lecia Brooks – Ferguson, 6/16

May these words bring you comfort -

**Do not stand at my grave and weep**

Do not stand at my grave and weep,  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.



I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush,  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry;  
I am not there. I did not die.

-Author Unknown



Mama Lila shares her wisdom with the Within Our Lifetime Leadership Council – Dallas, 12/15



We love you Mama Lila!

# Mama Lila Cabbil



President Emeritus of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute, Leadership Council member of the Within Our Lifetime national network for racial justice and healing, founding member Detroit People’s Platform, and organizer in the water crisis in Flint and Detroit.

**Within Our Lifetime misses you Mama Lila. Your legacy will live on...we are holding you close to our hearts and will continue to take action to end racism in our lifetimes.**

Just a few of Mama Lila’s quotes:

- “We need to go from dialogue to action, when we do not take our conversations to action it is just idle conversation...”
- “How are our programs and services connected to policy - policy is what brings about change not service.”
- “Evaluation is for the funder, it is not about evaluating from the perspective of the people with the lived experience.”
- “If you are doing your work without people with the lived experience then my question to you how are you accountable and how are you effective of being part of the movement.”

Tributes to Mama Lila:

- “No matter what kind of day you were having, you were always there for others with a kind smile, a sparkle in your eye, and a flyer in your hand. I will miss you dearly - your infectious laugh ,your fierce knowledge about environmental justice, your stories about Dr. Parks, your button collection, and your deep wisdom that emanated through every word you said.”
- “Thank you for the way you loved on us, with kind words and hugs and cake and cards in that perfect handwriting. But also with truth-telling and call ins and “read this” and a clarity about justice and all the ways racism shows up. “
- “Thank you my friend for generously sharing your gifts, wisdom, and love...Know your legacy will live on through the many hearts and minds you touched through your truth telling, your teaching, your fearless organizing for justice...all of it you shared with humility, grace, love and compassion.
- “Mama Lila Cabbil was a fierce and brilliant community organizer with an amazing commitment to care for those around her, and an ever-expanding capacity to grow her circle of life.”
- “She never stopped. She never gave in. She always lived in the space of vision and belief of what we could be as a human race.”
- “I have too much gratitude for your love, mentorship, joy, truth, authenticity, honesty, kindness.”

**w i t h i n   o u r   l i f e t i m e**

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