



Lila Cabbil was born in Durham, North Carolina and raised in Detroit and had the honor of working personally with Rosa Parks. She worked with Mrs. Parks as the program director in the organization founded by Mrs. Parks to honor her husband (an activist), The Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute. Lila has worked in the tradition of Mrs. Parks for over 40 years, and is now President Emeritus of the Institute. She's currently organizing celebrations of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mrs. Parks' birth, Feb. 4<sup>th</sup>, where she'll help unveil a new stamp dedicated to her legacy. Lila has worked on racial justice, environmental justice and food justice for decades in Detroit, and wants to remind us that on that fateful day on the bus so long ago, Rosa Parks always corrected the story to say that she wasn't tired, she was tired of the way she was being treated." Lila co-edited the book *Accountability and White Anti-racist Organizing*, which was published in 2010.

Below learn a bit about the amazing work Lila is doing and how she stays strong through all of it.

### **How did you get introduced to racial justice work?**

I think that my lived experience was an introduction to this work; it was not a formal introduction. As an African American US Citizen, racial justice is part of life. And I wouldn't even have framed it as work until I began to be in circles where that was the language that we referred to resisting racial oppression and responding to racial oppression or even talking about racial oppression. So, that's the reference to it of being work. But for me for a long time it was a part of my lived experience, and definitely wasn't a sidebar at any point in my life.

I had a lived experience in a multicultural neighborhood in Detroit, growing up with people from so many different parts of the world. So on Flag Day children were given flags from wherever country they came from, but for black children we were never given an African flag. We were spectators, and that has stuck with me. We were spectators, living in a neighborhood of immigrants. It was as though we didn't belong and didn't come from anywhere. Every June 15<sup>th</sup> this still comes up for me.

### **Describe one success you have been a part of in this work.**

One of my most recent successes that I'm particularly proud of was working with my group, Uprooting Racism, Planting Justice. One of the things that had really worked with me is that I can connect with others about and stand in solidarity with, and proceed as a "We" instead of a "me." As well, I was interested in bringing more grassroots people in the work that we were doing, and I was coordinating a training with the People's Institute. My process was I identified people who were doing work in the community, not being paid, and not being resourced, but being very committed to community. We then provided them with the scholarships to go through a leadership training around anti-racism. As they apply the training, they receive financial support to help them in their effort to do the work. This has been successful in having people with lived experience be able to build capacity around understanding how racism affects their lives, being able to acquire a power analysis to do the personal change, and then take that into a structural analysis. It is still evolving as a collaboration with three superb activists, Linda Campbell, Charity Hicks and Rhonda Anderson.

**What are you struggling with?**

Currently I'm struggling with the deep damage that has occurred from corporate oppression and the nonprofit industrial complex. I think that the challenge in both cases is the corporate control in terms of fiscal power and the fiscal influence on public policy and the actual corporate lawlessness without regard to people, to the humanity of people. So that loss has been very damaging. We have people hurting and damaged in our relationships to one another and to survival, and it's at a life-threatening level. So that's been a big struggle. Because of the fiscal piece, you have nonprofits acting on behalf of the corporations they are funded by instead of the people they are attempting to serve. So many nonprofits are operating not to accomplish their mission, they are operating to stay in a job. And they really do revolve around money, money and power and the power that money brings. And when you have policy that says that corporations are people, you end up with the Occupy effect. You have the 1% with so much power, but within the 99% you have striations based structural racism that is invisible to the participants even though they have "good intentions" they are not recognizing the inequity tied to skin color and access to power.

**Where do you find support?**

A number of things. In the last few years I put my attention on taking care of myself, kind of like the rule on airplanes is to put your oxygen mask on first so you can be available for others. Not to say that I'm there, but I tend to notice about me, I have a mother hen complex, it's part of being me, so I take situations on in a caregiver mode, in a protective mode, so when I saw that about myself, in doing this work it became more intense about how vulnerable it can be if you don't have some intentionality about the importance of self-care in doing this work.

Last year, after the conference in Albuquerque, I went to three indigenous healing places, and sat with indigenous women to learn about healing and to bring it back to the people I work with. One of the things I've learned to do is to celebrate victories in a collective, so I do make sure to celebrate with others. I have my daughter and church family to pray with. Also I have a dear friend, Bonnie Cushing, she's one of the people I work with in terms of the [accountability book](#), she was the editor, she's a good resource. And then there are my personal friends and even though they're not necessarily doing the work I can share my struggles.

**What is your favorite song?**

My God is Awesome, by Pastor Charles Jenkins

**How do you relax and unwind?**

Summertime it's either cooking or walking, and talking on the phone, I enjoy when you have a friend that you can talk with anytime, I'm not an email queen. I like to talk voice to voice! I do like cooking and eating, so that relaxes me a lot, breaking bread with others. Prayer; my spiritual life is very important, it's foundational to maintaining my sanity, and relaxing and unwinding because sometimes things are quite stressful.

**What's your life motto?**

My basic motto is *love*! I usually wear a heart somewhere, either on my socks, or I have a pin that says, "I love Rosa Parks," that has a heart on it. I wear that a lot because of the social justice work that she represents. I like reminding people of her love for children and community was the foundation of her life work.