



Eve Ensler embraces a woman in the crowd during a global rally "One Billion Rising", which is part of a V-Day event calling for an end to gender-based violence, in Bukavu February 14, 2013. V-Day is a global activist movement to end violence against women and girls, said organizers.

REUTERS/JANA ASENBRERNOVA

Eve Ensler will be a part of the Voices Lectures this fall at the First Congregational Church, 1126 SW Park Ave., in Portland. Ensler will 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct 2. More information is available at voicesinc.com.

cold medical process: It was this journey we were going to go on together. I think that makes all the difference.

**R.R.:** *At one point in the book, you mention you were a group leader in a homeless shelter. What do you recall of some of the trauma the women experienced?*

**E.E.:** I worked in a homeless shelter for around eight years, and it was a profound time of my life. For me, many things stand out. One is how many women I met who had been violated or suffered insane violence, which was a huge reason that their trajectory had gone downward. But there was also the incredible unwillingness of people who were outside the homeless community, to understand that (homeless people) were on a continuum of poverty and exile through an economic system that is progressively making more and more people poor. It was fascinating to me how people distanced themselves from homeless people, because some (people who aren't homeless) know it's a slippery slope, because there is no real system of economic justice or containment, so any of us can fall off at any moment. So people don't want to be near homeless people because they feel they'll "catch it." That was what I was struck with over and over and over: how homeless people become contaminated and isolated and "a thing," rather than just someone who lost their home and don't have money, for whatever reason. Whether it be economic investment or losing work or a tragedy. It taught me a lot about this whole capitalist structure and how easy it is for people to lose their way.

**R.R.:** *How is City of Joy doing?*

**E.E.:** Wonderfully. I was just there for the month of February, and it is glorious. The bougainvillea is thick, and the roses are higher than me, and the women are unbelievable. They're just miracles. They

come, and they're destroyed; they have nightmares and diseases. They have dread, they have despair. They become the most beautiful, empowered, inspired, joyous beings who are off to lift up the communities. I don't know. I don't think I've ever been as proud or inspired by anything.

**R.R.:** *How's your health now?*

**E.E.:** Today I have three years clean (of cancer), and I'm alive. And every day that I'm alive is a gift. A huge gift. It's absurd that I'm alive, and I get it, and I get that I have the privilege of having health insurance, which afforded me treatments and medical care that 99 percent of the planet aren't afforded. So I try to do as much as I can every day in service as my debt of gratitude.

*Rosette Royale is the assistant editor of Real Change News. Reprinted from Real Change News, Seattle, Wash.*

**R.R.:** *Here's where questions get difficult. How did you see that violence manifest in and on the women there?*

**E.E.:** Because we've now built this amazing place with them called City of Joy, I've heard many, many stories of women who have been violated in the most atrocious ways I've ever heard, during this 13-year-old war over minerals of the Congo. Over minerals (and mineral ores) like coltan — which go into our cellphones and our PlayStations and computers — and copper and gold, which get pillaged by the West, China and the world. Those minerals are taken (when) militias go into the villages where the mines are, and they rape the women and have fathers rape their daughters and sons rape their mothers, and everyone be raped, in general. They destroy the families, they're fractured. And the families flee, and the militias move in, and they take over the mines with the multinational corporations.

So we're seeing the coming together of the worst forces of the world — this capitalist greed and sexism and racism and colonialism — which is destroying the indigenous Congolese. I think that's the landscape: You see this beautiful world and country and earth, and then you see that the majority of the people can't even live in the bush anymore, the forest, because the forest has become the most dangerous. So Bukavu: It used to have 50,000 people, and now there's a million people. There are no jobs and no work, no structures or streets or police, and no law, no water and no electricity. Everyone's there just because they're terrified to live in the bush where all the raping and murders occur.

What I'm interested in is how many of us — and I think it's men and women — leave our bodies, based upon trauma and pain. For me, I've tried so many ways to get back in: whether it was, at a young age, drugs or promiscuous sex, then eating disorders and performance art. And then, eventually, "The Vagina Monologues," talking to as many women as I could about their bodies and discovering why this worldwide epidemic of violence is at the root of why so many people have left their bodies. The Congo was the further extension and the most extreme manifestation of that violence. And then getting cancer, which was the thing that, oddly and ironically, landed me smack in my body. I just became body.

So that's really what I'm interested in now: how we get back into our bodies, which is the connective pathway to our connection to the earth, to each other, to everything

that matters. I think this global disassociation, this global bifurcation, is what is at the root of allowing so much to continue, whether it's insane poverty or economic injustice, or racial injustice or climate change. We're not feeling what's going on. And I think the question is: How do we get back into our bodies so we feel it?

**R.R.:** *Could you talk about how you discovered that you had cancer and the journey that that took you on?*

**E.E.:** Well, what I talk about in the book, in the chapter called "Somnolence," is that there were signs about my cancer long before I ever did anything about it. I've talked to so many people who have had cancer or sicknesses. They see things are wrong, and they don't do anything. In the same way we understand that climate change is happening, and we're not doing anything. And the same way we see that people are starving all around us, and we're not doing anything. I think the signs got [to be] too much: There was blood coming from my body, and it was like I had to deal with it. And by then it was late, really late. I had a huge tumor about the size of a mango inside me. So I think it was profoundly shocking and yet that feeling when you know something's wrong, so it's not completely shocking. It's like when someone just rips off the veil of denial.

**R.R.:** *You write and talk so honestly about it. How difficult was it to tell your truth about your illness?*

**E.E.:** Well, I think when you get cancer, it's a process of coming to terms with what's happening. I think your brain just can't believe it. The minute someone says to you, "You have cancer," it's like someone has just said, "You're dead." And then you have to begin to gather the forces. I had just never read a book where anyone had told me really what it was like to have cancer, and I wanted that book. I wanted someone telling me what it was like to have (ileostomy) bags and what it was like to lose control or what it was like to have an infection where you became the Gulf of Mexico. That was the book I needed, so I guess that was the book I wrote.

So much of what happened to me was coming into my body, into the body of the world. So when I had (an) infection, it was happening simultaneously with the Gulf (oil) spill, and literally there were days where I felt like I had oil in me and pelicans dying in me. It was both horrifying and amazing to

just begin to see the metaphor and see the connective tissue that runs through one's body into the world.

**R.R.:** *Is there a way for other people to connect deeper into the body of the world without having an illness?*

**E.E.:** I hope so, and that's what the book is saying — right? — where we don't need to get to a point where we destroy the earth before we appreciate it or have our bodies die before we honor them. I think there are many pathways into your body and many pathways into connection. A lot of it has to do with being awake here and being willing to come out of the somnolence. Hopefully the death of my somnolence will help other people to wake up. That would be the idea.

**R.R.:** *There's a person in this book: Dr. Handsome. You mentioned that it only takes one sentence from a doctor to give patients dignity. Could you expound upon that?*

**E.E.:** In the course of my treatment, I had really good care and not good care. And really good care has to do with the doctor or the nurses or whoever is actually seeing you as a human being. So often people just get into kind of doing their job, doing it effectively, and looking at your body as if it were an objective thing. For me, that moment with that doctor was such a profound moment, because I was in a state of utter humiliation, utter terror, utter nausea, lying on this table, not knowing where the cancer was, knowing I had this tumor inside my body, inside my colon: inside me. I was just utterly crushed. And in walks this gorgeous doctor, and I think, OK, this could be the end of the world. His walking around that table and acknowledging me and acknowledging my work and my being: Everything changed for me. It all felt like I could handle it, and I could go through it because he had made a connection with my heart. He had connected me with his heart. It wasn't this

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