



**FRIENDS
AND
ENEMIES
OF THE
NIGER
DELTA**

By **EGBE IFIE**

**(A compilation of collected views of
COMRADE JOSEPH EVAH
on the Niger-Delta Problem)**

BRIEF ABOUT

COMRADE JOSEPH EVAH

Comrade Joseph Angodeme Evah, Coordinator, Ijaw Monitoring Group, and Publicity Secretary, Ijaw National Congress (INC), was born on the 24th of December, 1965, into the family Of Chief John Brebahay and Madam Tuku Evah at Ekogbene Town In Delta State. His father, Chief Brebayah was one of the many children of the late pa Abiri of Peretorugbene, Bayelsa State

Comrade Joseph Evah had his primary school education at Ekogbene, precisely, the Ekumu Primary School, for a while before he left for Lagos to be raised by his uncle , primary education at the African school, Ajegule Apapa, and his secondary education at Satelite Secondary School Lagos. After his secondary school education, he took the Nigerian Defense Academy form to enter the Nigerian Army and another set of forms to go to St. Peter and Paul Seminary, Iperu remo, Ogun State, to become a Catholic priest. The army and the church rejected him; perhaps, his destiny elsewhere. With his resilient nature, he turned his attention to university education and headed to the University of Lagos where he read Mass Communication In 1992 and later, diploma in law from the Lagos State University.

He was Press Secretary To the first Ijaw woman to be elected local government chairman in the history of Ijaw nation- Chief (Mrs.) Felicia Orunagha of Burutu Local Government Area. He also briefly worked with the vanguard Newspapers and left the paper in the heat of June 12, 1993 annulment crisis to join the Committee for Defense of Human Rights, A pro-democracy group, to fight the Babaginda Government. It was the annulment of the June 12 elections that changed everything in his life. He went into full activism. In one of his television interviews Comrade Evah said: "The annulment of the June 12 election in Nigeria opened the third eye of some of us. If some forces in Nigeria can humiliate and cheaply suppress a big and sophisticated tribe like Yoruba, then we that are regarded as minority in this Nigeria project are in perpetual slavery and bondage. Therefore, we must take our destiny into our hands and resist the condition we find our selves in and that was the struggle. "since then, the Niger-Delta struggle was his life. His strategies are the use of the media to place the Niger-Delta question on the conscience of Nigerians and the international community as well as mobilize the people at every level for an effective struggle.

The mission is the total emancipation of the Niger-Delta from education, social, economic, political and cultural bondage. He pioneered the creation of the television and radio program called the Niger-Delta Hour on various Stations to enable the public listen to his messages on

the region. Today, he is a popular face on television in Nigeria and the world. He is even more popular with print media (newspaper and magazines). Hardly a week passes by without him bringing an important issue affecting the Niger-Delta to the public focus through interviews, press releases, statements, advertorials, photographs etc. he is contemptuous of injustice and would erupt with rage and action against it. Government has detained him several times on account of his crusade for justice in the Niger-Delta.

In his Niger-Delta struggle journey, Evah had to contend with appellation of enemy in 1989. His first detention during Abacha days was when he challenged shell and an oil servicing company, NISSCO, belonging to the government, for demolishing the block of houses built for workers while leaving Ogulagha community after completing a tank farm contract job.

The Abacha government felt the press release captioned “Ijaw declare war on oil firm” was a serious threat and ordered security agents to detain him for over a month

Evah's whole life revolves around the Niger-Delta question- visitation to campuses, provision for scholarship for indigent students, establishing and funding youth groups to train future leaders, reorganizing cultural groups to revive dying culture of the Niger-Delta tribes, and provision of educational materials for educational institution across the region,

especially through the Tuku Educational Foundation which he established in memory of his Late Mother, to assist the less privileged the society

Evah broke new grounds when he established the first Niger-Delta Hall of Fame where over 200 photographs of personalities from the South-South geopolitical zones who have contributed to the success of the Nigerian state, are displayed and the commissioning ceremony took place on the 10th of November, 2004 to mark the 9th anniversary of Ken Saro Wiwa. It was a historic occasion. However, the most remarkable action taken by Evah that brought him to limelight was his ability to mobilize the whole Niger-Delta to stop the dredging of the river Niger from Warri to Baro in Niger State, to attract artificial sea port near Abuja during the military regime. He did not only go to the court of law to challenge the dredging, but also sensitized the international community against the action of the government

Comrade Joseph is one of the Ijaw leading names in human rights crusade in Nigeria. He draws a distinction between making noise for settlement and services for humanity. His contribution to human and environmental rights advocacy in the media and public forum makes him a reference point on fundamental issues. There hardly any societal

problem he does not dwell on or place before the court of public opinion. In fact, some of his fans refer to him as the living encyclopedia of Niger-Delta.

In one of his usual television interviews, he said that when Alexander the Great conquered Asia. He did it with relative ease, he therefore, submitted that conquest was possible because the people of Asia had become slaves lacking courage and no longer knew how to say "No". Evah insisted that the Niger-Delta people are crawling in their land of Black Gold and wealth but strangers not only come and walk around the crawling Niger-Deltans, but also fly about in glory. So he said the answer to the Niger-Delta question is to change the mindset of tomorrow's leaders. He said our problem is in us for our people deserve the type of leaders they get, adding that the generation of Ahmadu Bello and Awolowo prepared and groomed leaders to take over from them but in our case, we only produce emergency leaders so any opportunity to serve is used to service the pocket and administration of the stomach. So leadership is the bane of Niger-Delta problem.

Comrade Evah once said about his childhood day: I was a very stubborn child. My step father after the death of my biological father, once detained me at the headquarters of the Nigeria Army Military Police Guardroom, Apapa, Lagos, for two months when I was in primary four because I forcefully shaved the head of a boy younger than me because

of a minor disagreement. My uncle, Sergeant Walter Evah was a disciplinarian and he made me experience prison life as a child in 1974. I knew poverty in the real sense of the world because my uncle who was a Sergeant in the Army, had three wives and 18 children and that became a problem to him. The family hardly ate three square meals a day. We were so poor that each of the wives adapted her own strategy to survive. Some enter any available forest round Lagos to farm, gather firewood while others get local canoes, paddle around any available canal stream, river, or lagoon to fish and for us the children, we hawked anything around bus stops like Mile 2, Agboju, Maza-Maza, Suru-Alaba, etc for survival especially after school hours. We hawked what is known today as sachet water. In those days, we measured a cup from a cool bucket of water for 2 Kobo.

There was a particular point in our life as a family when we had no roof over our head and we used to occupy uncompleted buildings in Festac Town in the late 1970's. At a point the situation became so unbearable that my mother had to depart to the creeks of Lagos. First, she moved to Amuwo Odofin village behind Dubar Hotels and constructed fishing traps. The native head popularly called Baale, asked her to pay tenement rate to him before actual fishing activities commenced but she refused insisting that any part of the world you see water, such areas was discovered by the Ijaw people. My mother once challenged the

Yoruba Oba that if actually the canal, streams, and rivers belonged to the Yoruba's, why are they afraid of fishing? Why can't they swim across the river? She was arrested by the Police on the order of the Baale and later remanded at the Kirikiri Prisons for three months where she later became woman leader in prison. Despite the fact that she was an illiterate, my mother at various time challenged the authorities of traditional rulers who tried to force her to pay tenement rates for fishing rights in Lagos and environs. Her stubbornness landed her in various police cells and prisons even in Ogun State.

Throughout her 30 years in commercial fishing activities around Lagos and Ogun State, she never paid any of the local chiefs tenement rate for fishing rights. She preferred to educate them on why she understood the river more than them or she challenged them to legal war. So I understand the language of poverty and that is why I take extra time to handle the problems of the poor masses. I know what they are passing through. I have passed through the same road before. So I want to live my life raising the standard of life of the poor, that is my joy," he once told Nigerians in a television programme.

In appreciation of his selfless service to the cause of the Niger-Delta region. Comrade Evah is a recipient of several awards from organizations, groups, institutions and communities. He is married to

Mrs. Preye from the Magada family of Ojobo and blessed with children. His first marriage to the late Mrs. Pesilade Torulolo who died during childbirth in 1994, was like fire on the mountain. The marriage lasted ten years and all children born by the first wife all died before the age of one. She died while giving birth to a set of twins and the twins also died in the process. The late wife had previously experienced the loss of three children after childbirth. After the calamity in 1994, the activist started life afresh with his present wife and they are blessed with children (Boys and Girls).

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PREFACE

Some eight years ago, an idea was conceived, an idea that was to bring to birth ‘Friends and Enemies of the Niger – Delta a man who conceived this idea, thought of a book that would highlight the friends and the enemies of the Niger Delta. Ebge life thought of a book which each volume was to centre on people who have identified themselves with the problems and struggles in the Niger – Delta from either side: positive or negative. Prof. Ifie set out on this mission by collating interviews and articles from various newspapers and magazines with write-ups that centred on the Niger-Delta with issues varying from resource control to the internal wars in the Niger Delta. Prof. Ifie worked on his idea seeing it grow into conviction and then put commitment into it the last eight years. As he began to collect and collate such interviews and articles, a particular name was prominent. A man who, through his interview, identify himself positively with the struggles, problems and oppression of the people in the Niger-Delta. This man is Comrade Joseph Evah, former Publicity Secretary and Co-ordinator of Ijaw Monitoring Group. His doggedness and commitment to the struggle could not go unnoticed by Prof. Egbe Ifie, who himself had been in the vanguard of the creation of Delta State and the struggle of the people. He then decided to devote this first volume to the man Comrade Joseph Evah, his struggle and fights against the oppressions of the people of the Niger Delta.

However, on December 16, 2004 Prof. Jeremiah Egbe Ifie passed unto glory, leaving behind his idea, vision and collation of hundreds of newspapers and magazines over the years. His friends, colleagues and family members with Joseph Evah met and came to a decision that his vision should not die.

This book which comes out as the 1st volume (edited copy) and centres on Comrade Joseph Evah came forth as a result of people who believe in the vision of Prof. Ifie, a man who believe and fought for the emancipation of his people. This book is an expression of his ideas, vision and the years of his commitment being brought to birth.

Long Life the Niger-Delta!!!

FOREWORD

This book centres on Comrade Joseph Evah. I had not met him before but his name rang a bell all through the eve of the funeral of Late Prof. Egbemo Ifie.

On arrival back to Ibadan after the funeral at Bolou-Apelebiri, I consulted the family of the late Professor to enquire who Comrade Joseph Evah is. He was introduced to me as a notable Izon activist, a Ulysses who had trod smooth and rugged paths desiring to put the Izon Kingdom into its proper place in the map of the world. It became known to me, also, that the late elder statesman had planned a book in honour of this gem. It then became obvious to me that Evah has a close affinity with the Classic Niger - Delta of ideas. I had no option than to stand in the gap to complete Professor Ifie's work on Evah.

Comrade Joseph Evah loves people. He relates well with people and like working with them. He believed that success in life depends on co-operation. He likes people "networking" as he calls it, and this, he claims

to have noticed among the Yoruba people. He said such team spirit is the brain behind their success. Evah equally likes meeting people. A lot of people get along with him easily. He has become used to people of different states; such that anywhere he goes to, people come to him. Like the biblical Joseph, he naturally finds himself assuming a leadership role. In villages, the young men and women go to him to questions. In the cities, he makes himself easily available to students and different categories of persons. He appreciates the need and importance of education. He, therefore, makes contact with people especially from the Niger-Delta region. He believes that Ijaw people are not poor. He says the resources of the country comes from Izon land and so must be made available to benefit the owners. He lamented that the Izon people had long been balkanized and neglected in the scheme of things by successive governments. As a matter of fact, it is disturbing to note that promises made by colonial masters were merely politicized. Revenue accruing from its oil is solely used to develop other places. Succeeding generations of Niger-Deltans have cried out to no avail. The Kaiama Declaration which communiqué appears to have brought about the resolution of government to establish the NDDC, is simply politicized beginning from its elastic definition and the numerous regions it purports to cover. Thus, due attention is not given to the bird which lays the golden egg. Evah solicits for co-operation to work together as a group. The monitoring team which he directs, campaigns against injustice. He uses the media to its limit. As a student of Mass Communication and on time secretary of the INC, he believes in the efficiency of the media for information dissemination.

The book is essential on the activities of Comrade Joseph Evah, a young man, a telemachus, rugged, bold and whose interest it to speak the truth without fear or favour. The book is a portrait of Evah's socio-political life and the Niger-Delta Question, a metaphor describing the good and the

ugly, typifying the place of the Izon man and his need of full freedom in the Niger State. This philosophy, Evah prides and arms himself with, using the Izon truth and the sledgehammer. Like Nehemiah, he holds the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other. Evah and the media are one. He has featured in more newspaper and television interviews than anyone of his age.

The book serves as volume one to other volumes to be published on personalities concerned with the Niger – Delta and the Niger-Delta Question. The books structured into seven phases beginning with a history of the Niger-Delta, followed by Evah’s background and interviews. The fifth phase has essays relating to the Niger-Delta while the last phase is a panorama of photographs on Comrade Evah’s life and activities. It will interest all to know of this noble activist, who he is, what he does and what his entire life philosophy is. Youths and adults of every nation would be glad to read from the blasting tongue of a warrior reminiscent of Adaka-Boro and other Ulysses of our time.

Some eight years ago, an idea was conceived, an idea that was to bring to birth “friends and enemies of the Niger-Delta” a book that would come forth in volumes. Prof Egbe Ifie, the man who conceived this idea, thought of a book that would centre on people who have identified themselves with the problems and struggles in the Niger-Delta, from either side: positive or negative.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Almighty God and to all those who lost their lives and those who are ready to lay down their lives to achieve the Niger-Delta of our dream.