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The Cambridge English Dictionary defines a heroine as a woman who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great. When I think of a black heroine of Bermuda's legal system, Dame Lois Browne-Evans, DBE JP MP, is the first person that comes to mind. It gives me great honor to pay homage to Dame Lois Browne-Evans. A black woman whose contributions to Bermuda's legal system are immeasurable and a true heroine, in every sense of the word.

While the focus of my essay is on Dame Lois Browne Evans' significant contributions to the legal system in Bermuda, one cannot turn a blind eye to her notable contributions to local politics, which spanned over a forty year time period. As a matter of fact, Dame Lois' daughter, Mrs. Tina Evans said this about her mother, "The law was her introduction into the world of politics and the foundation on which her political activity was built." Imagine breaking racial and gender barriers in fields that were predominantly held by white males, even more so during Dame Lois' time.

Dame Lois Browne-Evans was Bermuda's first female lawyer. She was called to the Bermuda bar in 1953. It was more than ten years later before Dame Lois would be joined by other female lawyers. It was clearly evident that our legal system lacked female representation at this time, with less than 10% of those called to the Bermuda bar being women. Thanks to the feminist movement, we later saw an increase in the number of women called to the bar locally. It all began with Dame Lois.

Despite the emergence of women as lawyers, the challenge of women holding senior roles within the legal system existed both locally and globally. There were very few women who rose to the ranks of Directors or Partners. It is argued that this had a lot to do with the notion that women, as mothers, were meant to be the primary caregivers in the family. However, Dame Lois, a wife and mother to three children, established her own Law Firm and was later joined by Mr. Frederick Wade, who later became her political running mate in Devonshire North and Opposition leader.

Dame Lois was the legal mind behind many high profile criminal cases. One of her most high profile cases was that of Larry Tacklyn, who was hung in 1977 for the shopping center murders, after being exonerated for the assassination of Governor Sir Richard Sharples.

As the first black female Parliamentarian in 1963, Dame Lois fought tirelessly for human rights, minority rights and the rights of workers. She was a matriarch of social justice and a champion of fairness and equality.

Dame Lois' reach extended far beyond Bermuda's shores, when she became the first female Opposition Leader in the British Commonwealth in 1968. She was also the first female Attorney General in 1999, and became a Dame of the Order of the British Empire that same year.

Dame Lois was a member of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, and had the opportunity to debate at the London and Bermuda Constitutional Conferences. She also served as delegate to numerous international conferences around the world.

Dame Lois was an icon who worked extremely hard and garnered many accolades as a result of her works. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that she was named Bermuda's first National Hero, and celebrated on National Heroes Day, a holiday that was observed for the first time in 2008. In 2011, the Dame Lois Browne-Evans Building, which houses the courts, the Police Station and several government offices, was opened at 58 Court Street in Hamilton. I believe that these were both well-deserved ways in which to honor Dame Lois' achievements and service to Bermuda and her people.

In closing, I, like so many others, salute Dame Lois Browne-Evans for all that she was and for all that she did. A trailblazer, a pioneer, a fierce leader who led by example, and a role model, who has inspired and empowered generations of blacks and generations of women. We owe a debt of gratitude to Dame Lois. It is my hope that her legacy will continue to be honored in a way that is befitting of the life she lived and the contributions she made to the Bermuda we live in today.

As a young black woman who has dreams of forging my own path in the legal and political arena, I am encouraged by Dame Lois' story. Because she did, I believe that I can.