

<https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-024-01598-y>

# A final story that celebrates a woman's ideas and achievements

Check for updates

**Obituaries of scientists are much more often about men than women. At *Communications Earth & Environment*, we are initiating a series of articles highlighting the lives and work of women scientists, aiming to inspire the next generation with their stories and career paths.**

Women have made and continue to make significant advances in Earth and environmental science. Some discoveries were acknowledged<sup>1</sup>, but many are still invisible to the general public and the scientific community, mainly due to systemic gender bias and academic inequality<sup>2</sup>. While some improvements have been made over the past decade, women scientists are still perceived differently from their male peers in ways that often make it more difficult for them to believe in themselves and pursue a career in science<sup>3,4</sup>.

In response to continuous bias, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization released a call to action to close the gender gap in science. The report urges private and public organizations to break gender stereotypes in science, and one of the suggested actions is to increase the presence of women scientists and their interesting career paths in the media<sup>5</sup>. Reading and learning about women who succeeded in the past despite having to persist and fight can lend encouragement to an early career researcher in doubt of herself. Every woman scientist has an extraordinary story regardless of age, ethnicity, nationality, or affiliation. In our obituary series on remarkable women in the Earth & environmental sciences, we want to bring some of these stories out into the open.

One is laid out in an obituary of Evelyn Fox Keller<sup>6</sup>, one of only 14 of the past 100 obituaries published in *Nature* that honored notable women in science over the last five years. Evelyn Fox Keller was a physicist, a mathematical biologist, and a feminist philosopher who focused on gender in science. Her scientific training in



Credit: Woman © annaspoka/stock.adobe.com

different fields allowed her to cross boundaries between scientific disciplines and break the barriers to women's scientific achievements. Like many women today, she experienced discrimination during her early studies and later in her faculty career. She did not leave academia. Instead, she continuously analyzed her experiences, leading to her landmark book "Reflections on Gender and Science". Her idea of putting women's perspectives and experiences at the center of scientific analysis disrupted science as usual and broadened its scope. Kellers's work reflects her experiences in the United States, and little do we know about women's academic achievements, perceptions of gender bias, and coping strategies in different countries and cultures.

However, Keller's story and research on gender in science remind us that the fight for more confident and remarkable women in science must continue regardless of geography and culture. Increasing the visibility of women's extraordinary work is one venue to increase women's interest in science. Hence, we call for your suggestions of an exceptional colleague, mentor, and teacher whose scientific work has impacted the

community and whose story can impact the lives of others.

Our first obituary spotlights Cheryl Ann Palm, an ecologist with a unique ability to bring experts from different disciplines and countries together to find ways to reduce deforestation and increase food security. Through her work in Africa, she built the bridge for African and the US scientists to learn from each other and work together. The majority of them were women. Like Evelyn Fox Keller, she knew that women at all stages of their careers needed support; she helped acquire funding, authorship, and collaboration, facilitating a path toward faculty positions. Her work reminds us, again, that women's networks and connections matter. We hope the life stories of Cheryl Ann Palm and Evelyn Fox Keller and those we will publish in weeks to come will help you and your colleagues think about Earth and environmental science as a long, fulfilling career worth pursuing.

Published online: 20 August 2024

---

## References

1. Kölbl-Ebert, M. & Turner, S. *Towards a History of Women in the Geosciences*. (Geological Society of London, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.c.3283388.v2>.
2. Zernike, K. *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins, MIT, and the Fight for Women in Science*. ISBN 978-1-9821-3184-8 (Scribner, New York, NY, 2023).
3. Dutt, K. et al. Gender differences in recommendation letters for postdoctoral fellowships in geoscience. *Nat. Geosci.* **9**, 805–808 (2016).
4. Popp, A. L., Lutz, S. R., Khatami, S., van Emmerik, T. & Knoben, W. J. M. A global survey on the perceptions and impacts of gender inequality in the Earth and space sciences. *Earth Space Sci.* **6**, 1460–1468 (2019).
5. UNESCO. *Call to action. Closing the Gender Gap in Science*. SC-PBS-STIP/2024/FWIS/1 (UNESCO, Paris, 2024).
6. Vicedo, M. Evelyn Fox Keller (1936–2023) philosopher who questioned gender roles in science. *Nature* **624**, 31 (2023).

**Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, which permits any non-commercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this licence to share adapted material derived from this article or parts of it. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

© Springer Nature Limited 2024