



## **Iris Carl Equity and Leadership Award 2008**

This is a copy of the talk presented at the Annual Meeting of NCTM/TODOS in Salt Lake City, Utah April 2008.

Buenas Tardes, I am Carey Bolster and was privileged to serve as Chair of the Iris Carl Leadership and Equity Award for 2008. We had an outstanding committee, and I would like to recognize each person who served on the committee: Naomi Lopez, Rochelle Gutierrez, Madeleine Long, Guillermo Mendieta, Cathy Seeley, Ed Silver, and Rick Silverman.

Naomi, Rochelle and Shirley Frye did a lot of the behind the scenes work to keep me straight ...they had limited success.

Thanks to all the members of the Selection Committee for their valuable contributions.

The TODOS Iris Carl Leadership and Equity Award was established to recognize an individual who has made significant contributions to the quality of mathematics education provided to underserved students, in particular to Latino/Hispanic students. The honoree is a mathematics educator who exhibits commitment to improving the mathematics education for all students and has made, or is making, unique contributions that have impacted equity and access for underserved students. The individual's work in improving mathematics has influenced the school, community, leaders and practitioners and its impact has been sustained.

The first winner was Guillermo Mendieta in 2006 and last year's winner was Ed Silver for 2007.

In the next 4 hours I will briefly outline the accomplishments of this year's winner. The winner is a secret that even the committee doesn't know. I will give you a list of clues, and as soon as you know the recipient of the Iris Carl Leadership and Equity Award for 2008, shout out the name!

OK, Clue 1 only has a few words. "She helped found TODOS and served as its first president."

*The audience shouted, "Miriam".*

I said, *"I guess the rest of the clues aren't important."*

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Now about Miriam. Note she has gained so much fame that she is known by one name like Madonna.

Dr. Miriam Leiva is president and founder of TODOS: Mathematics for ALL, an international organization. The mission of TODOS is to advocate equitable and high-quality mathematics education for all students, in particular Latino/Hispanic students, by advancing the professional growth and equity awareness of educators. Under her leadership TODOS has bloomed in membership, influence, and has become a force for improved instruction for each and every kid.

Dr. Leiva's professional experience of over 40 years as a teacher of mathematics at all levels, K through the university level. Her career in education began in North Carolina classrooms, and includes 35 years in the Mathematics Department at the University of North Carolina Charlotte where she is the Bonnie E. Cone Distinguished Professor for Teaching Emeritus.

She has used her education, wisdom, and energy in so many circles as she enhanced educational experiences for kids and educators. She was Chair of the North Carolina Mathematics Curriculum project, and director of MATHink and Project Excel MATH, professional development programs at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte that link classroom teachers in various schools.

On the national level she was Director of Teacher Preparation in Science and Mathematics at the National Science Foundation, a member of the US National Commission on Mathematics Instruction, a researcher, an author of papers, books for teachers, K - 12 textbooks for students, as well as a plethora of professional activities that resulted in improved instruction. Dr. Leiva recently presented testimony before the National Mathematics Advisory Panel, making recommendations based on her research and upon the work of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. The list goes on and on.

Dr. Leiva has been an advocate for children, especially English Language Learners, throughout her career. She is a role model for ELL students having come to the US at age 13 from Cuba. When she came to the US she was tall compared to the others her same age. So they placed her in High School. She took English, Home Ec., Phys. Ed. and math. Upon entering math class, she saw a language that was familiar to her and exclaimed, "Oh, I like math it is in Spanish". This unique personal experience led her to the study on the importance of language in mathematics.

She is a beacon lighting the way and beckoning others to follow! According to MAA records she is the first Espanic-American woman to earn a doctorate in mathematics and mathematics education in the US.

Due to Dr. Leiva's expertise, talent, dedication, and ability to attract others to the cause, TODOS, Mathematics for All, has grown faster and been able to offer more service than any organization I know. Under her leadership, TODOS, Mathematics

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for All, has risen to prominence in mathematics education throughout the country and internationally. The organization sponsors schools, awards grants, provides mathematics teacher in-service programs, and contributes to important positive change events including NCTM regional and annual meetings.

Dr. Leiva and TODOS President Elect. Nora Ramirez, recently represented the organization at the NCTM sponsored Equity Summit in Washington D.C., contributing to ever-widening efforts toward excellent mathematics education for every child. All this was accomplished in a short 5 year period.

One person's nomination mentioned that Miriam should receive the Iris Carl Award as, ..." we should honor her life-long contributions to the improvement of teaching and learning of mathematics, her passionate advocacy work on behalf of minority students, and the far reaching vision that resulted in the creation of TODOS."

Another nomination stated:

"Miriam Leiva has provided insightful leadership at the cutting-edge of mathematics education for many years and continues to make exemplary contributions in the pursuit of high quality mathematics of all students, and as President of TODOS has focused on Latino/Hispanic students."

My own personal life is enriched by knowing Miriam. She has changed my use of the English language. "I can't do it Miriam" is no longer part of my vocabulary. She flashes that winning smile, her eyes get that special sparkle and she just glows and exudes boundless energy and you say, "OK, but this one time" ...until the next time and she does it to you again. A mathematical Pied Piper, a spokesperson for kids and teachers, a beautiful blend of common sense, knowledge, humor and caring. A beautiful person through and through. A teacher.

An outstanding leader, a passion for equity in education, a family person, a teacher, the mother who gave life to TODOS ...along with others who labored with her.

Kay Guiland was right when she wrote "If you need understanding, if you need advice, if you need help, call Miriam. She is always there for you, seeking answers to your problem, taking time to make a difference for you."

To sum it up, Miriam makes a difference.

I need help in presenting the Iris Carl Leadership and Equity Award for 2008, so I am asking a friend I met for only 2 hours, 12 years ago...

Miriam Katie Lieva, another one of Miriam's crowning achievements!"

*Note that Katie Lieva, a member of TODOS is Miriam's daughter, and surprised her mom as she co-presented the award. For the first time in the 5 year history of TODOS, Miriam was speechless. Here are Katie's comments.*

Hi Mom,

Dad and Fernando know I'm here (Fernando is my brother) and they are happy that I could represent them here today. If I may be so bold, I'd like to think that I am also representing "las niñas" (Anyone who knows Mom has heard about the three strong women in her life: her mother, Abuela Eusebia, and her two sisters, Nina and Pucha) who raised her and taught her that she could do anything she wanted. Speaking for all of us, you have made us proud.

Since this is a leadership award, I must stay on topic and say that like the best kind of teacher, you have led us by example: guiding us to ask the right questions and sharing our joy when getting to an answer (not GETTING the right answer, but in GETTING THERE). You educators sometimes call this the "Aha" moment but as mom and her two grandbabies will tell you, it sounds like this, "AH!"

Mom, like you always told us to do; you have done your best. And since we don't live in a vacuum, your 'doing your best' has had an amazing ripple effect of inspirations, aspirations and accomplishments (some of which are a work in progress). WE are that work in progress: your friends, your colleagues, your students, your groupies, your family... nosotros TODOS. We thank you.

Thank you Katie. And thank you Miriam as you spearheaded the creation of a national and international math educational movement to ensure each kid receives the best mathematics possible. TODOS, Mathematics for All. It says it all.

Miriam, we love and appreciate all you have done to help kids and lead us in realizing that each of us makes a difference.