

A Story About Miss Mary

Eileen Segal, Florida PTA President 2012-2014

During President Karen Brown's term at Convention, Miss Mary was donated by an unknown person to Julie Palm, who was then in charge of raising funds for scholarships. At that time during our Scholarship dinner we would bid on items to raise funds.

I remember Miss Mary being carried around the room by Julie asking for starting bids. People were *laughing* because she wasn't that pretty, and they were asking what would they do with her?

She wasn't a beautiful crocheted blanket or bottles of wine, or tickets to the movies, she was just a *large*, Dolphin's Team colored turquoise, ugly cat! Past President Marge Okasako was sitting at our table and told me the story of the ugly mirror, where County Councils would bid on the mirror each year and bring it back and bid on it again the following year, also to raise funds for scholarship. Note: the mirror was eventually retired, framed and now is part of history and is hanging in the state office.

Back to Miss Mary...still no bids, but I then had an "**a-ha**" moment! Let's start bidding on the cat for Karen to keep in Miami-Dade's county office. We then went to Duval County and told them our idea; they could bid on the cat for Past President Lenelle Cruse. Right then and there, Miss Mary became part of Florida PTA's History.

Of course, Miami-Dade County outbid Duval County and Miss Mary made her way home in a van with Miami-Dade County Council Members! The following years, Miss Mary made her way to Convention and Leadership Trainings to raise funds for scholarship. Miss Mary was even put on stage during Past President Jean Hovey's installation (yes Jean was a President before she became Executive Director) and Jean tried to push her off! That's the beginning of the love/hate relationship with our turquoise cat!

Along comes our first male President Charles Derexson and he is at a loss thinking, "What am I going to do with this ugly cat?" I volunteered to keep her in Miami-Dade (because I secretly loved her - ugly or not she needed love) and bring her back for convention. Miss Mary attended the convention that year and she officially had her own name badge and ribbons and she raised a whole lot of money for scholarships!!!

At the end of the convention, Pinellas County Council had other plans for Miss Mary. They decided to “Cat Nap” her and take pictures of Miss Mary from various parts of the state asking for ransom money to get her back!!! Since I was next in line for Presidency and I loved her, we asked Miami-Dade members to cough up money and Miss Mary was saved and sent to Miami-Dade.

During my term, Joe Gebara, President of Miami-Dade County Council, picked up Miss Mary from the office and escorted her to my first Convention. He wore glasses like the secret service and carried her into the first General Meeting and she remained on stage during the entire Convention - - name tag, ribbons and all! Throughout my term, Miss Mary continued raising funds for Scholarships, and when not raising funds she remained in the President’s office. When my term concluded, I was going to take Miss Mary home to retire and enjoy herself in my home office. Executive Director Jean Hovey asked if I would like to leave Miss Mary in the state office as a piece of history. It hurt my heart leaving her behind but I knew this was where she belonged!

Fast forward ... our current President Jen Martinez has a love for cats! Who knew? Out of retirement comes Miss Mary (of course cats have nine lives) and Miss Mary is back at what she does best: raising funds for scholarships for the children of Florida!

So those of you who say, #smashthecat!

Please think twice about our beloved Miss Mary and come over and join Jen’s team
#savethecat!