



# 34-year veteran still loves what she's doing

## GLORIA MOYER

### Otis Elementary School

By Melani Davis, Editor

In Gloria Moyer's classroom at Otis Elementary where she teaches reading and writing to visually impaired children, it is impossible to be a fly on the wall. Her style of teaching begs participation.

Gloria uses a round table for instruction and she leans in close as she gets to work with each student individually. Students move at their own pace, using materials appropriate to their age and visual impairment and she coaches each one along patiently. There is perpetual dialogue going on at the table and Gloria manages to draw everyone in at once.

"Efrain...rhyming sounds. Car, chicken, star. Which two sound alike?"

"Jasmin, are you done with your B's yet? Flip it over and see how you did...you did awesome!"

"Briana, what's that word? Book. Spell it for us...B-O-O-K. How many cubes will you need this time? Four. Alright, go for it!"

Ms. Moyer gives a brief explanation of a Braille cell, a tool used by younger children before they move on to Braille writers. All of the Braille system is based on six dots, she says.

Whenever possible she calls on a student to answer another student's question, one more way of including everyone in the conversation at the table.

"Briana, how do you make an O? Jasmine, show her how we make an O using 1, 3 & 5.

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Gloria says she has wanted to be a teacher for as long as she can remember. Her first love was history but when she attended Northern Illinois University as an undergraduate student she became drawn to the special education program there.

"When I was five, my mom temporarily lost her sight so when I was checking it out at Northern things just kind of fell together and all made sense. It was an awesome program."

After graduating from Northern in December 1974, Gloria immediately began her teaching career in January at Otis Elementary, where she has remained ever since. Eventually she went on to earn a masters degree at Northern in special education with a specialization in vision impairments.

When she talks about teaching at Otis, her enthusiasm is evident.

"I love it here," she says. "It's just a good school and a good neighborhood. I couldn't be somewhere for 34 years if it wasn't. And people stay — some longer than me!"

"I've been very lucky to work with a good principal. Any teacher here who has an idea, no matter what your grade or subject is, the administration lis-

tens. And people band together to make it work. Substitutes who come to work here say that you can just feel when you walk in the building that this is a good place."

Over the years, things have changed a lot with her program and at Otis. In the beginning, Gloria says, she taught kids with low vision who primarily used large print readers. Then in the mid-80's inclusion in the classroom became more widespread and her student body changed.

"We started to get a lot of Braille readers. About ten years ago we started to offer autism classes in the building and now we serve all ages. Our school has become handicap accessible and we have a preschooler in a wheelchair downstairs. Those kids are included in the classroom however much they can, my kids are included quite a bit — obviously as they get older that's the goal.

"When you are in the same classroom together in kindergarten, in fourth grade, in eighth grade — how can it not make all of these kids better people? It's natural to see kids

walking down the hall with their canes, up on stage with their canes. It's just the way it is, and it's life, and it's awesome. We embrace every difference and celebrate every accomplishment. That is the philosophy at Otis."

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About winning the Golden Apple for Teaching, Gloria says, "How humbling. Sometimes I just stop for a minute and think, 'I can't believe that happened!' It's like a lifetime achievement award at this point in my career. When you love what you do and you do it every day, it's just icing on the cake. Golden Apple is a wonderful organization."

Ms. Moyer believes that her award should really belong to Otis school.





## Ms. Mercado...Part of the Family

*"I have a paraprofessional that is just phenomenal," Ms. Moyer says.*

*"Programs like this have to have someone good or we couldn't do what we do. Mrs. Mercado has been working for us for fifteen years and she's just amazing. When she first started she learned braille on her own. I gave her things and she took them home. She was so motivated.*

*Paraprofessionals don't get the recognition they should."*

*"To me, it's a testament to the whole school. Because you can do your job but unless you have the support and backing around you... So, it's really a school thing the way I look at it."*

At the Golden Apple awards ceremony this past September, Gloria says, for the first time teachers' awards were presented by students.

*"I have a former student who graduated last year from Walter Peyton College Prep. She is totally blind and I taught her since kindergarten. She did the cutest speech — of course she was reading it in Braille — and it was so wonderful. I wanted to have her because people who are watching the event on TV know nothing about what my kids can do. It's one thing to show the little ones, and people say, 'Aren't they cute?' But so many people don't believe that these kids can go on and do great things. She is an example of that. At the end of her speech she said that she planned to go on to college and who knows, maybe take Mrs. Moyer's job. She wants to be a teacher."*

Gloria is looking forward to the semester she will spend studying at Northwestern University this summer as part of her Golden Apple award. She plans to take a British history class, "her first love," a Chicago literature class and a Golden Apple seminar. She says she will enjoy working on the brand new laptop she received, also.

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If Ms. Moyer could offer advice for new teachers coming into the field it would be this: "You have to love what you do and you have to believe in the kids."

And when you choose to be a special ed teacher, she says, you are really educating everyone.

*"That child can do, and should be treated like anybody else. One of my older kids was in trouble for fighting and I said to our assistant principal, 'What would you do to the other kids? Treat him the same way.'"*

*"And general education teachers with special ed kids in their class — know that these kids can do what anyone else is doing, maybe with adaptation, but they are children first. I guess that's the best advice. They are just children first."*

*"We are all different. I don't care if you have special needs or not. Treat everyone as individuals and celebrate those differences. And celebrate every accomplishment."*

*"It's like a lifetime achievement award at this point in my career. When you love what you do and you do it every day, it's just icing on the cake."*

