



A Lead Graduate Speaks

My Story: A New Chapter

by Crisanta Sampang

"I am a graduate of LEAD."

i SAY THESE WORDS WITH PRIDE, whenever I find a chance to say them. I said them when I went for a job interview in a non-profit organization and I say them whenever I meet immigrant women whom I think are ready for LEAD.

"What is LEAD?" they invariably ask in return. And I tell them. I describe the things I have learned from my Leadership, Extension, and Development (LEAD) course. I share with them the stories of other immigrant women, including myself, who came and learned, and went away with a new and improved perception of themselves and the rest of the world.

LEAD is a life-changing experience. This course helped me to know myself better — it taught me that I could be a leader; that I have abilities that I could improve and use to make my corner of the world a better place.

LEAD gave me a whole new bunch of friends from every part of the world, and it made me realize that though we may speak different languages, we have many things in common. Racism has no place in LEAD.

LEAD is one of the programs being run by Pacific Immigrant Resources Society. PIRS staff and volunteers want to see immigrant women participating fully in Canadian life. It was LEAD that led me to PIRS. Being an immigrant, my

survival instincts lead me to places where I feel accepted and appreciated. The LEAD facilitators and resource people make me feel that way. They are caring, supportive, and appreciative.

As a LEAD graduate, I attend LEAD reunions. When I listen to the other graduates speak of their experiences with PIRS, I rejoice, for their stories are similar to mine and they validate my faith in my organization...

My organization. Of course. When Marg Dolan, a PIRS volunteer board member and Chair of the Nominating Committee, asked me if I wanted to volunteer time and talents to PIRS by joining the board, I accepted immediately. I like PIRS; I like their mission; I have seen the results of their endeavour. Later, when they asked me to become Chair of the Public Relations (PR) Committee, I had no second thoughts. They didn't have to ask me to promote PIRS, I would have done it on my own!

Now I can say I am a graduate of LEAD and a PIRS board member! I'm enjoying this new experience: I'm finding it very interesting to learn the inside workings of the organization. I'm learning how ideas come into being and how plans are carried out. I'm learning where the money comes from, how it is spent, and how I can help earn it! I'm learning about the volunteer services and I'm learning how the organization responds to changes in the community; in fact, I'm learning about every aspect of the organization. Once again, I'm gaining new and improved perceptions!

It was the fall of 1992 when I took my place on the PIRS board as Chair of the PR Committee. I felt pleased and excited but also a little nervous and unsure of myself. To

prepare myself for the first board meeting, I read the PIRS board manual. During my first months on the PIRS board I didn't say much. I did a lot of listening and observing, I read and re-read the manual, the meeting minutes, and the committee reports. I learned a lot about how a non-profit society operates and about the rules that govern its' movements.

My experience, skills, and interests lie in the field of media and public relations, so I feel good in my role as the Board Public Relations Committee Chair. So far, I've produced a media contact list and I've worked with the Executive Director of PIRS, Jean Maloney, and committee members Inge Bailey and Deborah Johnston, to develop policies and procedures for the PR committee. I feel more at ease working at the committee level. We listen to each other, learn from each other, and combine our skills, knowledge and ideas to accomplish our tasks. My active participation in this small group is helping me feel more confident and comfortable about speaking up in the board meetings.

Each month I spend one evening at the board meeting, another two hours at a committee meeting, and a few more hours talking on the telephone, reading reports and meeting minutes etc. The way a board works is becoming clearer to me now and I am starting to participate in a small way in the discussions at board meetings. I realize I still have lots to learn but at the same time I feel that the board members are ready to support me, guide me, and answer all my questions. When we are together they give me a chance to speak up, they listen, and they encourage me. I really enjoy working with the PIRS

board and I welcome this chance to continue the learning and growing process I started in LEAD.

...Versatile Crisanta came to Canada from the Philippines almost five years ago. And such interesting years! She has devoted boundless energy and enthusiasm to a variety of paid and volunteer activities in the community: to the children in her care; to freelance writing for a Filipino community paper, the Philippine Chronicle; to lobbying and media work for the West Coast Domestic Workers Association; to her church; to procuring a licence to teach driving; and to learning the complexities of desktop publishing. She spends two weekends a month editing the Philippine Chronicle, relaxes by conversing on her CB radio, and sometimes volunteers for the multicultural radio station (her voice may be heard giving bilingual announcements and commentary on Tinig Filipino (Filipino voice) Fridays from 7:30 to 8:30 PM at 1470 (CJVB) on the AM radio dial).

On June 1st, Crisanta started a full-time job as Program Coordinator for the West Coast Domestic Workers Association. She thinks her volunteer work with the PIRS board is helping her in her new job, enabling her to approach her work in a more knowledgeable, analytical, and mature way.