



• SPOTLIGHT

## Estella's Brilliant Bus

By Staff Writer

***Ironically, Estella didn't even learn the computer until she was 70, and at 71 this daughter of migrant workers who grew up harvesting crops made it her life's mission to bring technology to underprivileged children. Estella's poignant story brought Winfrey, Purdy and Estella herself to tears. Winfrey was so impressed that she matched the \$25,000 donation that Toyota had awarded, sending Estella home with \$50,000 for her non-profit operation.***

This wasn't going to be a typical Saturday. No shopping, no errands, no preparing for Sunday dinner. It was the day that Estella Pyfrom was going to be honored by Oprah Winfrey, the world's most powerful woman; and any time your day includes an encounter with Oprah, it's going to be an extraordinary day!

This was unbelievable to Estella, but perhaps it shouldn't have come as a surprise that Lady O would recognize this trailblazing woman. After all,

she's already been recognized at the White House for her innovative creation, Estella's Brilliant Bus, a computer lab on wheels that she takes to impoverished neighborhoods, teaching poor kids computers. She was also hailed a Top 10 CNN Hero in a telecast last year, hosted by CNN's Anderson Cooper and viewed by a worldwide audience. But it was still a huge surprise to humble Estella that she had caught Oprah's attention.

"Who wouldn't be excited about Oprah?" Estella asked just days after Oprah's crews had spent several days filming her throughout Palm Beach County. Harpo's crews captured her on board the bus at Village Academy, a unique model school in Delray Beach, Florida, where four year olds excitedly hopped on the big bus, running their little fingers across a keyboard at each of the bus' high tech computers, excited to be on a bus instead of in the classroom. The tots worked on a pre-kindergarten program under the tutelage of Miss Estella, as she's affectionately known. The crew also filmed Estella, a noted philanthropist, at a food bank that she runs.

With filming wrapped, October 25 arrived, and Estella was up at 5:30 a.m., checking her email just in case there were any changes. There were none, so she made breakfast for her husband of 56 years, Willie, and herself, and reminded herself to remain calm. By 10:00 a.m., she got dressed, looking picture perfect. Oprah was sending a car at 11:00 a.m. to chauffeur her from her West Palm Beach home to the American Airlines Arena in Miami, where tens of thousands of Oprah fans would already be in place, enjoying the second and final day of "Oprah's The Life You Want Weekend" tour. Along the tour, Toyota gives a "Standing O-Vation" to an extraordinary citizen who is making a difference in their community by changing the lives of others. Estella was the Florida honoree.

Upon arrival, they were escorted to VIP seats; the atmosphere was electrifying. Shortly thereafter, the big moment arrived! Oprah Winfrey called out Estella's name and she was escorted onstage, where Winfrey stood with Amy Purdy, *Dancing with the Stars* finalist and Paralympian, who lost both legs at age 19. Purdy serves as a Team Toyota Ambassador and presents the Standing O-Vation award in each city of the tour.

A video presentation of Estella's story began showing on the big screen, and the three ladies watched in awe, captivated by the details of her life. Oprah's narration told how Estella, an educator for 50 years, was so determined to bridge the digital divide that she took her own and her husband's retirement and investment funds, to the tune of \$1 million, and bought the tour bus, which she then outfitted with 18 high-tech computers, Internet, Wi-Fi and adjustable swivel chairs, preparing the bus for the sole purpose of bringing computers and technology directly to the poor. She has taken the bus to schools, community centers, daycare centers, stadiums and any place she's asked. She has helped more than 60,000 students, from age three to senior citizens, teaching them not only computer lessons but also GED and college prep, math, English, science and social studies, all free of charge.

Ironically, Estella didn't even learn the computer until she was 70, and at 71 this daughter of migrant workers who grew up harvesting crops made it her life's mission to bring technology to underprivileged children. Estella's poignant story brought Winfrey, Purdy and Estella herself to tears. Winfrey was so impressed that she matched the \$25,000 donation that Toyota had awarded, sending Estella home with \$50,000 for her non-profit operation. "Look at what ONE WOMAN could do! One woman!" Oprah exclaimed, raising Estella's hand in victory, while the crowd applauded wildly. "Thank you for using your life as a force for good. And at 77!" Oprah said in disbelief, congratulating her again. The two embraced and Estella literally wept on Oprah's shoulder.

"I was so emotional when Oprah was telling my story because Oprah was emotional and in tears. She made me feel like she was relating to me and she could feel my happiness. My tears were tears of joy and my assurance of knowing that I could continue to serve more children. For a moment, I was in disbelief that what was happening at the moment was a dream and was not really happening at all. Oprah was so passionate about the giving and was holding me like you would not believe," Estella explained, still emotional. "I love that lady!"

*Learn more about Estella Pyfrom and Estella's Brilliant Bus at [estellasbrilliantbus.org](http://estellasbrilliantbus.org).*

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