

Maria del Socorro “Choco” Leandro, Educator. Advocate. Fronteriza.

Maria del Socorro “Choco” Leandro Dresser, transitioned in the early hours of April 1, 2025 accompanied by family including her only son, Ricardo Botello, her husband, Bob and longtime friends who surrounded her with *cariño* and care.

Born in Piedras Negras, MX, Choco was one of 5 children born to Guadalupe Silva Leandro (San Luis Potosi, MX) and Julia González Guerrero (Sabinal, TX). After spending her childhood in Piedras, her family moved to Eagle Pass. There, she graduated from *Eagle Pass High School* and began working at *Newberry's* while attending *Uvalde Junior College*, (now *Southwest Texas College*). It was then she met, Robert Dresser, a *VISTA* volunteer. They dated briefly but parted ways, pursuing separate life paths. Soon after, Choco transferred to *UT-Austin*.

At *UT-Austin*, Choco found her groove as an educational justice *guerrera*. Whether in the financial aid office helping working class Chicano students receive the resources entitled to them or as president of *MAYO (Mexican American Youth Organization)* involved in the Chicano movement and in the *Raza Unida Party*, Choco dedicated her time and energy to making lasting change for those in her community.

After completing her *Sociology* degree at *UT*, Choco joined the 9th Cycle of *Teacher Corps* (1974-1976), a federally-funded Master's program that integrated academic study at *UT*, an internship in the *Austin Public Schools* and community work. There, she began her career as an educator at *Sánchez Elementary* earning an M.A. in Education and teaching certificates in Elementary and Bilingual Education.

Choco's work as an administrator began at *Guerra Elementary* in the *Edgewood District* in San Antonio, TX; while completing mid-management and administration courses at *Our Lady of the Lake University*. As principal of *Burleson Elementary* in *Edgewood*, Choco led pioneering efforts in the field of Bilingual Education developing Dual Language programs in Early Childhood and Elementary Education alongside an exceptional team of teachers that she recruited.

Principal Leandro, known as “*La Leona*”, empowered mothers involving them in school programs and teaching them to actively advocate for their children's education. As *Burleson* developed into a model

Dual Language School, Choco hosted visitors from local, national and international



schools. A team from Greece visited and teachers from various Latin American countries became part of the *Burleson School familia*.

Throughout her career, Choco served as an expert consultant on countless projects, including with the *Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)* in San Antonio, a nationally recognized educational think tank. After working at *IDRA*, Choco joined *Unidos US*, formerly the *National Council of La Raza (NCLR)*, as the *Director of Education for Texas and the Southwest Region* where she initiated a family engagement program, *Padres Comprometidos*, that continues to be used. In 2013, she retired from *NCLR*.

More than 50 years after meeting in Eagle Pass, Choco and Bob reunited and married in 2014. They enjoyed a decade of travel and adventure in places like Barbados, Japan, Mexico and more. Whether driving between their home in Sacramento, CA and San Antonio to visit *familia*, or traveling, they were surrounded by loving family and friends enjoying great meals, bottles of wine and the best pláticas.

A dedicated educator of dual language pedagogy, early childhood education and parent empowerment in the schools, Choco was a trailblazer and visionary. She will be remembered for her quick bilingual wit, fierce insights, and deep faith and generosity. A voracious reader and lover of the cultural arts who was a boardmember of the *Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center* and supporter of the *Esperanza*, Choco was a tireless dancer. She adored spending time with her grandchildren, Alyssa, Camile, Londyn, and Léon, especially if they went to *Leatherby's*. Her infectious enjoyment of life was a blessing to all.

Choco was preceded in death by her parents, her brothers; Guadalupe (Lupin) and Sergio (Beto) and her sister, Maria Julia Elizondo (Meni) who passed on April 6, 2025—days after Choco. We toast to Choco's well lived life and to the reunion of *las hermanitas*. May their memory be a comfort to all. ¡Choco Leandro, presente!



Meni (right) is now reunited with Choco after passing on April 6, 2025, just days after Choco.