

The Miriam Dell Award

In 2013, the Association for Women in the Sciences (AWIS) launched the Miriam Dell Award for Excellence in Science Mentoring, a biennial prize awarded to someone who demonstrates outstanding mentoring efforts to retain females in science, mathematics or technology.

The recipient of the Miriam Dell Award may be related to any part of the science system, for example teachers at primary or secondary schools, lecturers or supervisors in tertiary education, or in the science workplace. Mentees may also be at any stage in the science system – from school age to the science workforce.

The recipient of the Award will receive a glass trophy and an all-expenses paid trip to receive their award from AWIS.

Any queries about making a nomination or the award should be emailed to awis.auckland@gmail.com

The inaugural award was made in 2014 to Dr Judith O'Brien of the University of Auckland (see page 60). Nominations for the 2015 award will be open in March 2015.

The award is named for Dame Miriam Dell, Patron of AWIS, botanist, secondary school teacher and advocate for women's advancement.



Dame Miriam's career in science (in her own words!)

I graduated in 1944 from Auckland University College (as it was back then) with a BA, majoring in History and Botany. I went on to do honours in Botany mainly because my brother had all the textbooks. I was pipped for a Senior Scholarship by Anne Wylie, a student from Otago. I got first class in my honours papers and was again pipped by Anne Wylie. We have been good friends ever since!

When we moved to Wellington I wanted to finish my thesis so went up to Victoria to start the process. At that time there was some sort of feud between the Botany departments and the Professor would not let me continue with the research I had begun in Auckland. He insisted I take a paper in Statistics and would not approve my thesis subjects. So I became fed up and had a baby instead! So much for a career in Science!*

However, I had trained as a secondary school teacher and taught Science for many years. I taught also at night school to students in the pharmacy courses. Some of those students have had distinguished careers in Botany, much to my satisfaction.

My brother, Professor R.E.F. Matthews of Auckland University, was a brilliant scientist and a Fellow of the Royal Society of London as well as the Royal Society of New Zealand. He also held many other important posts. My husband, Richard Dell, worked for his DSc after we were married in 1946 (there was no PhD then!). He was a leading authority on Cephalopods, among many other things, and Director of the National Museum.

*Editorial note: Science's loss has been women's gain, both nationally and internationally, as Dame Miriam Dell has devoted most of her life to promoting women's advancement and equal rights in society. She has served on a wide variety of community, government, and international organisations. These include the National Council of Women, of which she was National President from 1970 to 1974. Then she was the first New Zealander to become President of the International Council of Women (ICW), holding this office from 1979 to 1986, and was in charge of the ICW's Third World Development Programme until 1991.

She was Chair of the Committee on Women, the forerunner to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, from 1974 to 1981, and Chaired the 1993 Suffrage Centennial Year Trust. She also served on the New Zealand National Commission for Unesco, and has been involved with the Social Security Appeal Authority, International Year of the Child, and the Advisory Committee on Women and Education. She was made Dame of the Order of the British Empire in 1980, and appointed to the Order of New Zealand in 1993.