

# Dr. Claudine Sherrill (1934-2020)

## Our Mother of Adapted Physical Activity



It is with great sadness that we report Dr. Claudine Sherrill, also known by many as the “Mother of Adapted Physical Activity,” unexpectedly passed away on May 8, 2020. Claudine was born on July 28, 1934, in Indiana.

### Formal Educational History: Her Beginning

In 1952, Claudine graduated from Logansport High School, Indiana. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in 1955 from Texas Woman’s University (TWU)

with a major in health, physical education, and recreation. As an undergraduate student, Claudine played field hockey, took Girl Scouts camping, and taught swimming lessons to children with disabilities.

Claudine earned her master of arts degree in physical education and her Doctor of Education in physical education and educational administration at Columbia University in New York (1957; 1961, respectively). Further, she completed a post-doctorate at San Francisco State College (semantics) and from TWU (special education). In 1977, she earned the highest level of the National Therapeutic Recreation Society Certification. Upon retirement, Claudine was awarded the status of professor emerita because of her exceptional contribution in adapted physical activity, academic leadership, dedication to the profession, and overall achievements.

### Teaching: Her Passion

Initially, Claudine was a full-time lecturer in the Physical Education Department at the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras (1955-1957), where she learned about cultural and linguistic diversity. During this time, she was a lifeguard for a year-round Girl Scout camp on the weekends, which helped her develop a lifetime love for individuals of a Spanish descent and their diverse cultures.<sup>1</sup> In 1957, Claudine made her way back to New York City and taught physical education in Brooklyn for a year. After that, she taught physical education in Harlem part-time, an evening course at the City College of New York, and two courses at Barnard College (1958-1959). From 1959 to 1961, Claudine attended

San Francisco State College and taught method courses in elementary physical education, elementary school dance, and sports. In 1961, she began her lifetime commitment to TWU when she joined the faculty in the Kinesiology Department and taught biomechanics, adapted physical education methods, and elementary school physical education teaching methods. In addition, she taught the methods of research for 30 years. Claudine was most proud of starting the adapted physical education specialization at TWU in 1972.<sup>1</sup> She was the first faculty to receive one of the few federal grants in adapted physical education (a continued tradition at TWU). In fact, she had three personal preparation grants at the same time (i.e., MS in Adapted Physical Education, PhD in Adapted Physical Education, and Therapeutic Recreation).

Claudine loved teaching and would challenge her students to their highest potential.<sup>1</sup> She was highly praised by former students for her teaching style, her dedication to excellent performance, and her ability to bring out the best in each student.<sup>4</sup> Claudine directed over 150 thesis and dissertations, and through her students she touched and influenced the lives of thousands of people who have benefited from her knowledge, from her creative approach to personal differences, and from her fervor for equity and opportunities for all.<sup>2,3</sup>

### Scholarship: Her Dedication

Claudine devoted her personal life to the field of adapted physical activity, creating a cross-disciplinary profession by serving individuals with disabilities. She was able to blend her personality and professional career, a combination that allowed her to become an internationally recognized pioneer in the field. She authored multiple books, including the 6th edition of our adapted physical activity “bible,” *Adapted Physical Activity, Recreation, and Sport: Crossdisciplinary and Lifespan*, which has been translated into several languages. Claudine published and co-published over 160 articles in refereed journals and has presented in over 30 countries.<sup>4</sup> Much of her research focused on prejudice, social injustice, inclusion, and changing attitudes and behaviors through sport, dance, and aquatics.<sup>1</sup> She was one of the few professors who was able to write a manuscript that would be ready for publication with minimal edits.

Claudine was also known for her editing skills. Wanting to ensure her students’ papers were up to standards as well, she spent countless hours working with her students and their manuscripts. Her editing style was to cut up, tape,

and write all over the pages, and then expect the drafts to be corrected and resubmitted. Needless to say, it was always a surprise when receiving papers back from Claudine. In addition, she would make sure that each of her students could recite the APA format of writing and state the page number for each rule!

### Service: Her Bridge

Claudine was one of the most well-known members of state, national, and international professional organizations. She was respected for her exceptional vision, knowledge, creativity, and outstanding leadership in adapted physical activity. She exemplified service and believed it was important to build a strong bridge with professionals across the globe to help improve the profession. Claudine devoted her life to professional service for the benefit and development of adapted physical education and sports. Some of her 'on-site' field research, sponsored by the United States Cerebral Palsy Sport and by the International Paralympic Committee, resulted in positively impacting people around the world.<sup>2,3</sup>

In 1991, Claudine was the first recipient of the Elly D. Friedmann Award for Outstanding Adapted Physical Activity Contributions, which was established by Dr. Gudrun Doll-Tepper and the Friedmann family to recognize long-standing leadership, and outstanding academic and professional achievements in the field of adapted physical activity. In 1992, the Elly D. Friedmann Young Professional Awards were created by Drs. Claudine Sherrill, Karen DePauw and Gudrun Doll-Tepper to encourage the development of passionate enthusiasm and inspiration in young adapted physical educators and to help produce a long line of professionals.

Claudine continued to earn numerous awards, including an honorary doctorate from the University of Jyväskylä, Finland (2004), the Julian U. Stein Award (2000), the Laurence Rarick Outstanding Researcher Award (1992), and the Hollis Fait Scholar Award (1985). Claudine served numerous roles (e.g., president, vice-president, member of executive board) with the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA) for over 15 years because of her passion for international communication.<sup>1,4</sup> Additionally, Claudine also served as editor and associate editor for *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly* for over 15 years.

When Claudine was 73 years old (and very proud of it), she stayed active on professional editorial boards, was the issues editor for *PALAESTR*A, and remained an officer of many organizations.<sup>1</sup> Claudine was a member of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (now Society of Health and Physical Educators) since



her undergraduate years at TWU, a member of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) since the 1970s, and a member of several disability sport associations. One of her strongest beliefs was that educators should support the organizations that promote their specializations and professional goals, and she went above and beyond to embody this view.<sup>1</sup>

### Retirement: Her New Life of

### Learning

Although Claudine 'retired' in 2014, she began educating herself on the aging population, the frail elderly in assisted living facilities especially. She spent endless hours with her mom, who she was very close to, until her mom's passing. Claudine volunteered three afternoons a week to engage senior citizens, including her mom, in fun-oriented adapted physical activity, and she planned to write a book for caregivers. She was particularly concerned about the discrimination of society toward the aging population.

Dr. Claudine Sherrill will always be remembered for her personality, her dedication to our profession, her contributions to humanity, and her adorable smile. Claudine spent her personal time with her life-long partner going to the operas, participating in book clubs, and traveling to Hawaii.

*Note:* Please keep your condolences within the APA community so we can protect Claudine's privacy. The National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities (NCPEID) website will provide a forum for everyone to write testimonials ([ncpeid.org](http://ncpeid.org)) after June 1. Additionally, an announcement will be made by the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA).

Thank you Lisa Silliman-French, Greg Reid, Gudrun Doll-Tepper, Karen DePauw, and Dilara Özer for putting together this memorable tribute of Claudine Sherrill.

### References

- <sup>1</sup> Mauerberg-deCastro, E., & Campbell, D. F. (2007) International symposium of adapted physical activity conference invited speaker: Claudine Sherrill. 16th International Symposium of Adapted Physical Activity Conference, Rio Claro, Brazil. p. 12. <http://www.rc.unesp.br/ib/efisica/isapa/ProgramISAPA.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> National Consortium for Physical Education and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities (2000). *Advocate*, 28(3). [https://www.ncpeid.org/assets/docs/adv\\_2000sp.pdf](https://www.ncpeid.org/assets/docs/adv_2000sp.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Texas Association for Health Physical Education Recreation and Dance (1999). David K. Brace Awards: Dr. Claudine Sherrill. Used with permission 4/2021.
- <sup>4</sup> Texas Woman's University. (2010). Distinguished alumni past honorees: Dr. Claudine Sherrill. <https://twu.edu/alumni/alumni-and-student-awards/past-honorees/dr-claudine-sherrill/>