

# Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

## HELEN JACOBS

A special rapport with young people has enriched the life of Helen Jacobs, Leisure Worlder of the month for February. It contributed to the success of the innovative nursery school she ran for 20 years in Culver City. Nowadays it enlivens the talks she gives as a Gray Panther representative, explaining the organization's work and philosophy to college and high school groups in the surrounding area.

"Our goal is to bring the generations together to view the concerns of each age level and create better understanding . . . that's where it all begins," says the diminutive Mrs. Jacobs.

The former Helen Meyer was born in Brooklyn and grew up in Mineola, Long Island. Early exposure to political and social issues left its imprint on the young woman. So did the finishing school she was coerced to attend. "It almost finished me off," she jokes today.

Wed to Arnold Jacobs in 1933 while still a student at Queens College, she completed work on a teaching degree and taught primary grades for several years preceding the birth of the couple's only child, Elaine. In 1945 the young family moved to Southern California, where Helen became active in hemophilia projects and helped establish the Hemophilia Research Guild to raise funds for education and treatment of the hereditary disease.

Later recognizing the need for pre-school education as increasing numbers of mothers joined the work force, she founded the Culver Nursery School. Husband Arnold left his successful book store business to handle business affairs for the school while Helen managed the staff and curriculum. "I developed what I thought was a unique philosophy for children in the formative years from nursery school to first grade, using the philosophy of Piaget and Montessori methods," she explains.

Another innovation was the hiring of teachers forcibly retired from the public school system at age 65. Many of these continued teaching at the Culver School into their 80s, contributing the mature skills which were to win wider recognition in ensuing years. "We did this before it became fashionable," says the school director, who takes pleasure in the commendations she received for her hiring practices.

Mrs. Jacobs returned to college and earned a master's degree in early childhood education from UCLA. Assisting at the school during this period was another dedicated teacher, her daughter. Today a granddaughter continues the trend as the family's third generation educator. Mr. and Mrs. Jacobs eventually sold the school and moved to Leisure World in 1977. Two weeks later Helen was fully enrolled in the community's newly organized Gray Panthers group where she helped develop an ombudsman program dealing with the problems of nursing home care.

Her talks to student groups are part of her job as education and political chair. She also serves on the Gray Panthers state governance board and is legislative chair for the 175-member local group, keeping it informed on all legislation affecting older adults. She is an avid reader of California Commission on Aging publications and attends meetings of the California Senior Legislators advisory group to keep current on such issues as Social Security and Medicare cuts.

Somewhere along the way, Mrs. Jacobs also manages voice coaching lessons to groom the multiple-octave singing voice she discovered a few years ago. She gave her first recital recently for the community's Visually Impaired Group and has another of what she terms "mini-concerts" on tap later this month in Leisure World.

But her first love is pursuit of the Gray Panther goal to achieve better inter-generational living through "age, youth and action." Mrs. Jacobs believes this aim will be accomplished through education, not persuasion. "The results of education lead to knowledge and development," she affirms.