

Leisure Worlder

OF THE MONTH

CATHERINE WRIGHT

In the summer of 1927 a young Harvard graduate returned home to Los Angeles and suddenly was stricken with polio. The paralysis of his body even affected the vocal chords. He became a patient of Dr. John C. Wilson, a renowned orthopedist and therapy was prescribed. Dr. Wilson recalled a young lady therapist at the University of Southern California, now a teacher of corrective physical education in the city school system and asked if she would administer to the young man since he lived across the street.

Catherine Wright agreed to do what she could for the polio victim's tragic plight; hot packs, massage, passive exercises, etc. In less than two years the youth was taking long mountain hikes with the Sierra Club. His recovery was complete.

Miss Wright's life story is replete with incidents of her humanitarianism. As a college coed at U.S.C. she volunteered as a therapist for World War I battle victims. Founder-chairman, for more than a decade she was an active participant with the patient service program of the Los Angeles County chapter of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and when she moved to Leisure World it was only natural the Orange County association's chapter called on her for help.

Miss Wright stayed on the Orange County Muscular Dystrophy job for six years. This was in addition to her projection of a library for Leisure World in 1965 and the bringing of that to fulfillment.

Catherine Wright's story of how as a university graduate therapist turned health educator, she became a highly successful librarian in Leisure World without previous training is just another remarkable chapter in her life.

I was the second president of the Panhellenic Club of Leisure World," Miss Wright recalls. "Membership was 16 at the time. I told them we needed a project, something we could do for Leisure World with our time and limited funds. I pointed out the lack of a library for residents and it was agreed to make that our project."

"It was one of the luckiest days of my life when," says Miss Wright, "I made my first visit to Leisure World in 1964. After 14 years I'm just as enthusiastic about our beautiful community as I was that first day."

A native of Brooklyn . . . Iowa, that is, not New York . . . Catherine was a young girl when the Wright family came to California after a 12-year stopover in Minnesota.

It was following her graduation from Hollywood High School and a subsequent enrollment at the University of Southern California that Miss Wright's penchant for helping others first became apparent.

The Army had sent out an appeal for therapists during World War I, setting up a training center at Reed College, Portland, Oregon. A teen-age coed at the time, Miss Wright took a train to Portland and applied at the school.

Catherine eventually wound up in Letterman Hospital, San Francisco, where she served as a physical therapist for more than a year.

With this background, upon her return to U.S.C. she was offered a position as physical therapist for orthopedic doctors.

Her role of coed "Florence Nightingale" did not interfere with other collegiate activities. Kappa Delta sorority pledged her and Catherine later became the chapter's treasurer and then president. She also sang with the U.S.C. Glee Club.

Catherine Wright quickly learned teaching in the Los Angeles School System was more lucrative ("with a full summer vacation as well") than being a therapist at a university.

Miss Wright was asked to serve on the executive committee when the Los Angeles County chapter of the Muscular Dystrophy Association was organized in 1954.

After her retirement following two decades of service without remuneration, the Association expressed its appreciation by dedicating its Annual Report 1964-65 to her "In grateful acknowledgment to a generous and compassionate woman who has served with unparalleled skill and devotion "

As might be expected, when she moved here Catherine Wright became a member of the first group of "Pink Ladies" at the Leisure World medical center and served seven years.

In Leisure World she is a member of Panhellenic Club, Ebell Club, Geneva Presbyterian Church, Delta Kappa Gamma (international honorary society for women in education) and a charter board member of the Leisure World Historical Society.