

FROM BRAZIL: A TRIBUTE TO CLAUDINE SHERRILL

DO BRASIL: UMA HOMENAGEM À CLAUDINE SHERRILL

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Abstract

It was learned only last week in Brazil that the “Mother of Adapted Physical Activity (APA),” Claudine Sherrill, died on May 8, 2020. As her colleague and friend, I wrote a tribute to Claudine. I wanted to familiarize my young Brazilian colleagues with her contributions to the field of APA in Brazil. I also wanted to touch upon her personality and how it left fond memories in the minds of many Brazilian colleagues. And I wanted to remind all of us -- who knew her personally and who knew of her -- about the woman that she was: kind, generous, creative, passionate, fearless, and fun.

Keywords: Claudine Sherrill. Adapted Physical Activity. Brazil.

Resumo

Soubemos apenas na semana passada no Brasil que a “Mãe da Atividade Física Adaptada (AFA)”, Claudine Sherrill, morreu em 8 de maio de 2020. Como colega e amiga, escrevo aqui uma homenagem à Claudine. Meu objetivo é familiarizar meus jovens colegas brasileiros sobre suas contribuições para o campo da AFA no Brasil. Eu também foco na personalidade dela que deixou boas lembranças na mente de muitos colegas brasileiros. Por fim, minha intenção foi lembrar a todos nós -- que a conhecemos pessoalmente -- sobre a mulher que ela foi: gentil, generosa, criativa, apaixonada, destemida e divertida.

Palavras-chave: Claudine Sherrill. Atividade Física Adaptada. Brasil.

When we met Claudine Sherrill

She was called the “Mother of Adapted Physical Activity” by the international community (PALAESTRA, 2021). In Brazil, some of my colleagues sweetly referred to her as “Vovó Donaldá” (an esteemed and beloved character, Grandma Duck, from the Donald Duck Disney cartoon). My colleague Kathya Lopes coined this nickname; she and others explained to me that it was fitting because of her caring, sweet, and receptive personality. I never learned if Claudine Sherrill knew about her distinguished Brazilian nickname.

Claudine’s many friends and colleagues in the Brazilian community of adapted physical activity (APA) learned only last week about her passing, when Palaestra Journal posted a tribute to her (Palaestra, 2021). This was authored by our colleagues Lisa Silliman-French, Greg Reid, Gudrun Doll-Tepper, Karen DePauw, and Dilara Ozer, and the publication was shared on our national APA discussion group platform.

Following the news, so many of my colleagues and their students began to ask about her, as they had heard about her visits to Brazil and how much she influenced Brazilians in our APA endeavors. Then, I decided to write about Claudine, not only to help familiarize young Brazilian colleagues with her and to acknowledge some of her accomplishments and legacy, but to bring to light the moments she had with us, Brazilians. We all want to celebrate her memory and expose the meaningful impact her visits (although brief) made in our lives. Claudine Sherrill was an outstanding scholar and a pioneer leader in the field of APA. She was a reference to us. And she was kind to us all.

I met Claudine Sherrill

I first saw Claudine Sherrill when we rode together in an elevator in the building that housed the International Symposium of Adapted Physical Activity (ISAPA) in Miami, USA, in 1991. It was my first international trip and my first international conference. I was too embarrassed to approach her because my English skills were quite crude. I knew what an important leader she was in the APA area. Prior to then, Sherrill was a reference in our writings and teachings. She was a celebrity. That same day, in 1991, I saw her keynote speaker presentation. With a smile, and gazing around at everyone in the audience, she patiently waited to be introduced. Then, she was given the floor. This small-statured woman, with gentle movements and a sweet, friendly, smiling face, began to speak. I was startled. A vibrant, assertive, soprano-timbered, powerful voice dominated the audience's attention, and we all smiled. In fact, I remember, I was ecstatic. And even though my understanding of the English language was limited, she reached my soul, imprinting this moment in my memory. This I will always treasure. And so, that was my first impression of Claudine Sherrill. Some of my colleagues, noted professors in influential Brazilian universities, shared how Sherrill's enthusiasm and charisma made an outstanding impression on them, as well. Marli Nabeiro commented how accessible and attentive Claudine was to her in 1991, in Miami. Verena Pedrinelli cited author Sherrill frequently in her teachings and research. Verena was, perhaps, the first Brazilian academic professor who personally encountered Claudine, in Berlin during the 1989 ISAPA.

In 1995, during the ISAPA Norway, many Brazilians already knew her. Marli Nabeiro, Kathya Lopes, and Beth Mattos, who attended the conference, shared fond memories. According to them, Claudine made a point to approach and socialize with them, the Brazilians. Amusingly, she even wore a pin of the Brazilian flag on her ID card, pretending to be Brazilian.



Figure 1 - ISAPA Norway in 1995. Left to the right: Beth Mattos, Karen DePauw, Eliane Mauerberg-deCastro, Kathya Lopes, Claudine Sherrill, Marli Nabeiro (Reprint with permission, E. Mauerberg-deCastro, 2011). Photo: M. Nabeiro

During the ISAPA Norway, I accepted the position of South American Representative for the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA), which became an opportunity for me to develop a closer fellowship with Claudine. We shared numerous ideas for increasing the visibility of IFAPA and for disseminating the APA philosophy throughout our Region. Claudine supported many of my colleagues and encouraged them to be active members in the international arena, such as the IFAPA. Throughout the years, she supported and nominated Verena Padrinelli, Beth Mattos, Marli Nabeiro, and me to be IFAPA Regional Representatives. Her efforts were integral to increasing visibility to the international community of an emerging APA field in Brazil.

The 1990s were my early years as an APA scholar. Indeed, in Brazil, adapted physical activity was in its “auroral” moment. Claudine Sherrill became prolifically referenced in Brazilian academic and professional circles. Her publications, specifically her textbook, “Adapted Physical Activity, Recreation and Sport. Crossdisciplinary and Lifespan,” made us familiar with APA’s history and structure of knowledge, and she gave us exciting recommendations for APA programs for all ages and abilities (SHERRILL, 2004). Claudine’s textbook was the main reference in my APA classes, and for years, my students used her book chapters to present seminars in front of their peers. She was a familiar name that they carefully and correctly pronounced (“according to

Sherrill...”), and they dissected the information from those pages and turned it into knowledge. Later, in 2005, when I wrote my own textbook, she became my most cited reference (MAUERBERG-deCASTRO, 2005). Most importantly, her work helped me to dismantle the medical model paradigm that was typical of textbooks in those days.

Claudine was committed to promoting inclusion and accessibility not only in the contexts of APA/sports for people with disability, but also among cultures and the APA leaders around the world. Beginning in 1995, she tried to tempt me to organize an ISAPA in Brazil. It took nearly 12 years for this project to materialize. On August 9, 2004, in Thessaloniki, Greece, the IFAPA Board, presided over by Claire Boursier, unanimously accepted our bid to hold the 2007 ISAPA in Brazil. This date marked the long process of preparation for ISAPA Brazil, which Claudine and I shared. It was the beginning of a long road for me.

In 2005, during the ISAPA Italy, we officially announced the ISAPA Brazil. Claudine was then elected the IFAPA president (2003-2007). She was an active mentor to our ISAPA Brazil organization. She sent me numerous memos insisting that our ISAPA program should include a balance in gender, race, geographical and disability representation, and, importantly, a balance between female and male speakers. So, we made sure of this.

First visit to Brazil

In 2005, Claudine came to Brazil as a guest speaker for our National Congress of Adapted Motor Activity. As the president of the organization behind the Congress, the Brazilian Society of Adapted Motor Activity (SOBAMA), I presided over the organization at my university. Claudine arrived at the airport at the same time as did my dear friend Anne-Mette Bredahl, from Norway. Both were our guest speakers. Both came to my home for dinner. Claudine left me with a treasure, the latest edition of her textbook with her personal inscription.



Figure 2 - Claudine Sherrill and Joslei Viana de Souza at Eliane Mauerberg-deCastro's home (left photo). Claudine gifts Eliane with a copy of her latest textbook (right photo).

(Reprinted with permission, CBAMA, 2005) Photos: D.F. Campbell

During the 2005 congress, Claudine was always available to all participants, whether during other colleagues' presentations or in informal settings. She spent time and gave the same attention to students as she did to academic authorities. She was approachable and curious, was energetic, and showed a genuine interest in the status of APA in our country. My colleagues Marli Nabeiro, Verena Pedrinelli, Gabriela Toloï, Joslei Viana, Edison Duarte, and so many more, were taken by Claudine's devotion to the field of APA as well as her tireless engagement with, it seems, every individual who wanted to share time with her.



Figure 3 - Claudine attending a workshop by Anne-Mette Bredahl about sports for the blind (left photo). Claudine enjoying the poster session (right photo).

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Figure 4 - Social gathering (left photo) with colleagues, from the left: Dale Ulrich, Anne-Mette Bredahl, Claudine Sherrill, Eliane Mauerberg-deCastro, and Dean of São Paulo State University, Amilton Ferreira. Claudine with students (right photo) during the 2005 Sobama Congress opening session.

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Claudine's presentation was titled "Attitudes, prejudice, and inclusion: Nothing about us without us." Verena Padrinelli was the session's coordinator. The content was later published as an article in the Brazilian Journal of Sobama under the title, "Principal Theories in the Area of Adapted Motor Activity" (Sherrill, 2005). Her slides are still available at the website of the 2005 Sobama Congress (CBMA, 2005).

After the Congress, Claudine spent some time with friends and our family on the coast in Paraty, Rio de Janeiro. Claudine immersed herself in every activity we proposed. While she had just had knee surgery before she came to Brazil, there she was, climbing hills and swimming around Paraty's islands. There was an endearing "girlfriend" quality in Claudine that seemed to put both the young and the old ones at ease. She shared with all of us, individually or in groups, her jovial tales with the wisdom of one who is well-travelled. She was a lot of fun. She never complained or refused to engage in adventures during our Brazilian weekend.



Figure 5 - After the 2005 Conference: Claudine travels with Brazilians to Paraty, Rio de Janeiro. Hiking (left photo) and swimming (right photo).

(Reprinted with permission, CBAMA, 2005) Photos: D.F. Campbell

The last time in Brazil

When the ISAPA 2007 finally arrived, the five-day conference welcomed participants with brutally cold, rainy weather that surprised even the Nordic visitors. Claudine was one of our guest speakers, but she also was the trained eye that watched to see how Brazil was going to perform as an ISAPA organization. It was the first time the ISAPA event was held in a developing country (ISAPA, 2007a). We knew there were unspoken concerns because of the economic factors of a small town, as well as security issues and the language barrier. In the city of Rio Claro, State of São Paulo, the 2007 ISAPA was an event with ties to the national Sobama organization, but, overall, it was São Paulo State University's responsibility, as I was the house faculty member in charge. ISAPA Brazil was a "creation" shaped with the labor of a few faculty colleagues, several graduate and undergraduate students, my family (including my sister, Raquel and my partner, Debra Campbell), and my friends. Claudine was one among these friends. We were the Organizing Committee. Most of those days I was overwhelmed with details and responsibilities and could not directly engage with the guests, except during some of the social gatherings. ISAPA in Rio Claro provided a venue for 387 Brazilian academics and professionals to connect with 116 international participants from 23 different countries. Claudine was among them, and she reached out to many.



Figure 6 - ISAPA Brazil 2007: Social gathering with guest speakers. (Reprinted with permission, ISAPA, 2007a). Photos: D.F. Campbell

On July 24, 2007, Claudine delivered an inspired speech about “The Passion of Science: Research and Creativity in Adapted Physical Activity.” Indeed, she was “passionate” about her work, and it seems that, for her, the effort derived from her ongoing inquiry about knowledge with a spiritual purpose (ISAPA, 2007b). That afternoon, she also touched explicitly on the politics of poverty and oppression--as she quoted Paulo Freire’s work, and she voiced her concern about the constant human rights violations and double standards for policies around the world. Claudine offered her advice to the audience stating: “Passion has to be grounded in HOPE, a deep-seated belief that we shall overcome the barriers to equality, and in CREATIVITY (imagination, inventiveness, fluency, mental flexibility, originality, resilience). Creative minds help to maintain the passion we need in ourselves and others to empower change.” Her communication was later published in our Brazilian Sobama Journal (SHERRILL, 2007).

She worked for us. She was actively involved in the ISAPA Scientific Committee, and she had a strong vote on the definition of the list of guest speakers, as well as the topics of the ISAPA program (ISAPA, 2007c). She coordinated the round table, “Adapted physical activity and developing countries,” in which I delivered a speech, together with Ignatius Onyewadume, from the University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana, and Shihui Chen, from the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Tai Po, NT, Hong Kong.



Figure 7 - ISAPA Brazil 2007: Claudine Sherrill coordinating the round table, “Adapted physical activity and developing countries.”

(Reprinted with permission, ISAPA, 2007a). Photos: D.F. Campbell

Claudine ended her IFAPA presidency after the ISAPA Brazil closing ceremony. In the closing ceremony, she delivered the IFAPA awards to several recipients (ISAPA, 2007c). And she delivered personal awards to many of us, respectfully calling us one by one to be publicly acknowledged.



Figure 8 - ISAPA Brazil 2007: Claudine Sherrill at the ISAPA award ceremony

(Reprinted with permission, ISAPA, 2007a). Photos: D.F. Campbell

I saw Claudine in person one more time in 2009 during the ISAPA in Sweden. We secretly reminisced about the ISAPA Brazil and all the highlights and challenges, including its inception in 2004, when I first submitted the ISAPA proposal to IFAPA for review.

And now we have learned that she has quietly left us (PALAESTRA, 2021), although she will remain with us always. We all miss you, dear sweet friend, Claudine Sherrill.

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