

# BETWEEN US!

Hi. This month I'd like to talk to you about something very serious and very important—something very close to my heart.

I don't usually talk much about the contributions to charities that I make, but there's one organization that I'm associated with that I'd like to call your attention to.

This year for the second year in a row I had the honor of being named the National Youth Chairman of the Special Olympics for Retarded Children. It's a program I'd really like to tell you about.

The Special Olympics were established in 1968 by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation. I don't know if you know it, but the Kennedy family includes a retarded daughter and it was because of her that the family became actively involved in setting up programs to aid the retarded. One of these is the Special Olympics.

It's a lot like the regular Olympics, except all of the athletes are retarded children—and you'd be surprised the amount of talent they display. The kids really get out there and compete with all their might. It's quite a sight to see.

Last year over 250,000 mentally retarded kids took part in local and regional games all over the United States. Then 40,000 of those advanced to their state Games. This year's California Special Olympics State Games included some 3,000 kids. The games were held this past July at

the University of California at Los Angeles.

One of the nice things about it was that there were dozens of major sports figures and show business stars there, yet the real stars of the day were the kids competing. Why, they've got one kid who's almost as good a swimmer as Mark Spitz!



His name is Brian Loeb and he's 18 years old but because of some problems when he was born, he only has the mentality of an 8 year old. But he's also one of the fastest swimmers around—and he's had lessons from some of the regular Olympic athletes who've seen him swim and are very impressed.

I personally think the Special Olympics is one of the greatest programs I've ever heard about and I'm extremely proud to be a part of it. I'd like to pay my own special tribute to the two people running the whole thing—Mrs. Eunice Kennedy Shriver, President of the Special Olympics,

Inc., and Mrs. Tom Sarnoff, California State President. They are both really great people.

I have taped some radio and television appeals as part of the fund raising efforts for the Special Olympics—I hope you'll heed them.

I can't tell you enough about this whole thing. When I first heard about it, I knew immediately that this was something I wanted to get involved in. I kind of feel that as an entertainer I have some obligation to use my position to try and help others. I don't have any desire to use my popularity to get involved in politics or run for an office, but I think—I hope—maybe I can use it to help some people who are less fortunate than I.

Mental retardation is a serious illness—but it's no longer something that can't be cured or something to hide. There's a lot that can be done—and is being done, including encouraging the retarded to excell in sports.

This is something that's very important to me, something I feel very honored to be a part of. I hope that you'll get a chance to see some of the special TV programs that are being made about the Special Olympics—and that, like me, you'll find it in your heart to care.

*Love! David*

## BY DAVID GASSIDY