



(From left) Chris, Linda, Bonita, Jack, Molly and Jackie Wrather in a photo taken at the Disneyland Hotel around 1959.

Embracing Fun and Philanthropy In Equal Measure

The Wrather family vows to continue the fight against cancer.

WRITTEN BY LAUREL DIGANGI

When Chris Wrather and Linda Wrather Finocchiaro pass on family stories to their children and grandchildren, philanthropy will be mentioned along with joyful stories about TV stars, theme parks and life in Los Angeles in the mid-20th century.

The Wrather family's tradition of philanthropic support for the John Wayne Cancer Institute began decades ago with entrepreneur Jack Wrather and his wife, actress Bonita Granville—who passed away, respectively, in 1984 and 1988. Today

this tradition continues through the Wrather Family Foundation and the generosity of their children, Chris and Linda.

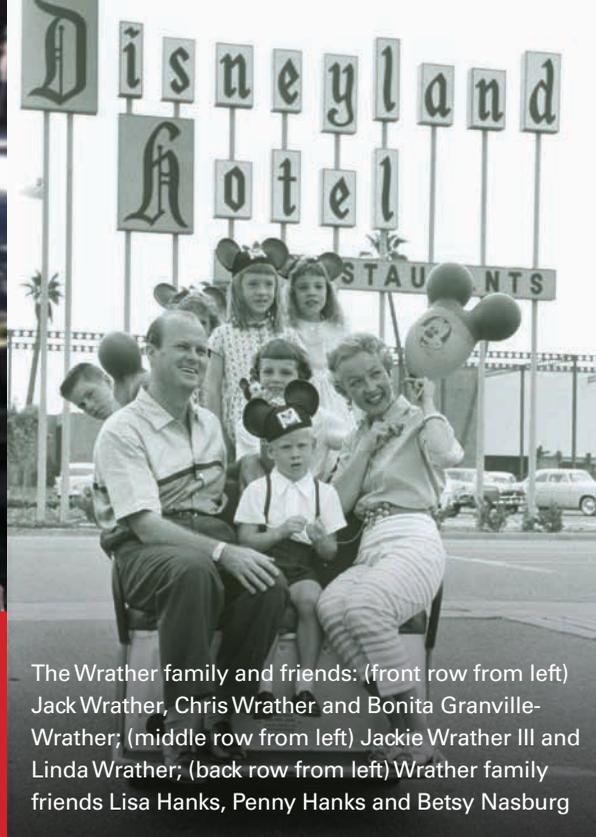
“I believe that multi-generational charitable giving is important because it helps a family understand its story,” says Chris, a data scientist with an MBA and PhD in statistics and operations research from the University of Texas. “These stories become a part of them and something they can pass on to future generations.”

Chris and Linda have colorful

Linda
Finocchiario
and Chris
Wrather



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The Wrather family and friends: (front row from left) Jack Wrather, Chris Wrather and Bonita Granville-Wrather; (middle row from left) Jackie Wrather III and Linda Wrather; (back row from left) Wrather family friends Lisa Hanks, Penny Hanks and Betsy Nasburg

stories of their vivacious parents. When television was still a novelty, Jack and Bonita became producers of the long-running, iconic TV shows *Lassie* and *The Lone Ranger*. Jack's other successful business ventures included the Disneyland Hotel and transforming the Queen Mary and Spruce Goose into tourist attractions. Bonita was best known as the child star who played Nancy Drew in the 1930s movies and for her Academy Award-nominated role as Mary in the 1936 film *These Three*.

Not as well-known, however, but equally extraordinary, were stories of Jack and Bonita's philanthropy. "My father had real empathy for people who didn't have the resources he had," says Chris. "My mother would tell me that he would write a check for \$500 for anyone who asked. This is when \$500 meant a lot."

His mother, who was on Loyola Marymount University's board of trustees, also directly influenced Chris by suggesting he volunteer for the school's board of directors.

"She told me that it was time for other people to become more involved and then said, 'Why don't you do it?'" he recalls. He not only took her suggestion but also eventually became a trustee himself.

Because Jack and Bonita both died from cancer in their 60s, Chris, Linda and their half-sister, Molly Dolle—who recently passed away—have all enthusiastically supported the Institute's cancer research. Chris, in particular, has a special interest in its Surgical Oncology Fellowship Program, which trains the next generation of leaders and innovators.

"The program resonated with me because, coming from an academic background, I know how important it is to have mentors," he says, "and how important it is for these young doctors to enhance their knowledge and abilities. It's an investment in the future."

Chris and Linda also have a sentimental attachment to Saint John's. They both were born there, as were Chris' two sons and two of Linda's three children. And

when they lived in the Southern California area, it was their first choice for their own medical care. In fact, when Linda first began radiation treatment for breast cancer following a lumpectomy at Saint John's in 1993, she didn't understand the serendipitous contribution that her parents would have on her recovery.

"A technician told me, 'This must be so heartwarming for you,'" Linda recalls. "I was truly perplexed." But when the technician explained that the half-million dollar radiation machine had been donated by her parents before they died, Linda was truly touched. "It was almost like a paranormal, spiritual phenomenon," she says.

The Wrathers recall their exciting parents as larger-than-life. Growing up in the Wrather household was a child's fantasy. Jack Wrather built the Disneyland Hotel at the request of his friend, Walt Disney, who needed an investor to come in and launch the hotel project.

"We were treated like royalty at the Disneyland Hotel and even had special meetings with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck," Linda says.

Both Linda and Chris hope to pass the "torch" of caring and generosity on to their own children. Linda, who lives in Portland with her husband, Anthony, has long donated her time to charitable organizations. Chris, who lives in Los Alamos, New Mexico, with his wife, Charlotte, and 10 dogs, says his oldest son, Matt, recently approached with a request: "Dad, can we have a discussion about the younger generation playing a larger role in the family foundation?"

Chris says he's delighted with his son's interest and also hopes to spread the word about the John Wayne Cancer Institute to a larger audience. "We've seen government funds decreasing, and it's still important for individuals to find a disease they have a special interest in and help the development of the treatment for that disease." ■