

Sally Kalin Interview – June 9, 2014

1. Why did you join AAUW?

- I moved to State College to work for Penn State in 1978 and I was looking for ways to get involved with the community. I probably aware of the State College Branch of AAUW through the Used Book Sale, which is likely true of many women in town. I remember going to a couple of AAUW meetings and thinking that they were really interesting. Then AAUW had a coffee at someone's home to try to entice women to join. Each guest was paired with someone from AAUW, and it turns out the woman with whom I was paired had been my 8th grade typing teacher from the Churchill Area School District in Pittsburgh. We didn't make the connection right away, but when we did, everything clicked and I had such a good time that I thought, "this group is worth joining." I joined AAUW, started going to meetings, and was invited to join the Board as Recording Secretary not long afterwards. I soon realized what a talented group of women were in AAUW. They were not self-promoters, but many were early feminists. They were all so smart. They came from so many different backgrounds and fields of study. I realized that AAUW was a group that I could be comfortable with. Also, I was one of its youngest members, if not the youngest member, at the time so they were kind of thrilled to have me. I have never regretted my decision to become an active member of AAUW.

2. Why have you remained committed to the organization for so many decades?

- It is just as I said. The women are interesting. Their backgrounds are interesting. They are community leaders in so many different ways and not just through AAUW. What I have always found telling is that you can select just about any woman who is active in AAUW, only to find out that she is active in ten other things as well. There is this wide and deep network that grows out of AAUW membership that I have found really invaluable. And frankly, the women are just nice to know.

3. What would you tell potential members about the organization?

- When you join AAUW, you become part of a group of women who contributes locally in many different ways. AAUW has an excellent reputation: nationally it is very well known among governmental and other influential circles. AAUW had some rough years about ten years ago when there was some mismanagement at the national level and its membership dropped. In the last couple of years, its membership has increased by about 40,000. So it is on a very good trajectory. It is becoming more diverse. It is involving younger women to the best of its ability. So I think AAUW will have longevity.

4. What would you tell current members?

- I would advise them to stick with AAUW because, especially in the last five to ten years, the national officers and executive staff in AAUW have done some very good things. One of the issues AAUW has been facing, and I am sure you've heard this from other people, is retention. The younger generations, particularly the millennial generation, based on what I have read and on what I have observed, are not as civic minded as some other generations. Many groups, and I am not just referring to volunteer groups, I am even talking about religious organizations, are having trouble bringing new members into their organizations. Identifying leaders is even more of a problem. AAUW is facing a constant need to involve new people but also to retain long-term those members who appear to be committed.

5. What were the biggest challenges you faced as branch president and/or Used Book Sale chair? How did you resolve or address those challenges?

- One thing that AAUW constantly has to battle, and this is true of every organization, is that some people never want to change. And the world surrounding AAUW has changed a great deal. Organizations, including those as successful as AAUW, can't always rest on its laurels. We have to keep looking forward. I found that some of the things that I had to do as Branch president meant that I had to push a bit.

I wouldn't be comfortable describing myself as a dynamic president. My term of office was 1991-1993. The major challenge that I faced was that I was a co-president, and at the beginning of my second year in office, my co-president passed away. I had to finish the term of office by myself, and that was really hard because I really liked and respected Vonna Jansma, who was my co-president. I still recall getting a phone call at work from her daughter-in-law, who informed me that Vonna had died of cancer. I was stunned. We had a

program planned that evening, so I had to decide whether or not the program should go forward. Vonna always had an optimistic, forward looking philosophy, so the program did go on as planned. However, at the beginning of the program I informed everyone of Vonna's death—I still recall hearing the gasps—and had a minute of silence in her memory.

Vonna had completed college as an adult student, and was always a strong supporter of older students. Her family directed memorial contributions to AAUW, so the Branch took those funds, added to them, and created the Simmons-Jansma Scholarship for adult students. Today it continues to help fund the education of adult women, many of them mothers, and serves as a lasting memorial to Vonna that demonstrates how women can and do support each other.

One of the positive things that I initiated for AAUW was meeting agendas. It sounds so simple, but I was attending board meetings that would go on for two and a half hours! Frankly, I didn't have time for two and a half hours of a semi-productive meeting. I realized that for some members, Board meetings were their social outlet. As a result, board meetings were filled with discussions about whose husband was having surgery and who was selling their home and moving. When someone tried to get an issue on the table, it would bounce all over the place and through all these mini-discussions that were occurring among the Board members.

As the Branch president, and a working woman with a busy schedule, I had a tough time with such long, convoluted meetings, so I decided to initiate having a meeting agenda. I even experimented with giving each item a time limit. Wow, I got into hot water over this. Many Board members did not like the agendas, and resented even more that I was informing them that we would only spend two minutes on this item and five minutes on that item. I persevered, and we got our Board meetings down to a little over an hour. I started serving refreshments to add a social angle, and those members who wanted to mingle afterwards or have coffee could do so.

I am pleased to report that to this day we still have agendas at every meeting. The agendas keep us on track, allowing us to systematically address our complex operations, programs, and so many issues. And no one complains! The implementation of agendas was probably my biggest success as president. Rather embarrassing.

6. I know that one of the things that you have been a strong supporter of and that you have chaired is Strategic Planning?

- I have led strategic planning several times. It was always a very good exercise. As I mentioned, change doesn't come easy to any organization, and AAUW is no different. Strategic planning allowed the Branch to have a lot of open and honest discussions. One morning I reserved all of the meeting rooms in the State College Borough building. We had general brainstorming sessions and then broke into smaller groups for more focused discussions. I think those attending enjoyed the give and take, and some very good things came out of the sessions including a workable strategic plan. My current position is Vice President for Finance. About a year and a half ago, I chaired a financial task force that was charged to look at how the Branch operates financially, which also included an examination of our financial infrastructure. The State College Branch has a very successful Used Book Sale, which is our economic engine. We are stewards of the funds raised and must expend them responsibly and in accordance with AAUW's mission. The task force came forward with a number of recommendations, nearly all of which were approved. Since then, additional recommendations have been accepted and tweaks continue to be made to our financial operations. The Branch is slowly changing how we manage our money, which includes how we make decisions about our money. On the whole, this is good. I believe that my strength is in administration. I am not great at pricing books, which some people are. I am also not a good special events planner--I can do it, but I don't really like it. But I like sinking my teeth into administrative issues, which is probably why I wanted agendas at meetings and agreed to do things such as lead strategic planning. Everyone brings different strengths to AAUW, and AAUW can use them all. This is something that I like about the organization.

7. What impact has AAUW made nationally and locally on women's issues? Or how has AAUW contributed to the status of women in State College and at Penn State University?

- Well I am sure probably every woman with whom you have talked has mentioned what AAUW has done nationally. It is one of the strongest lobbyists in Washington for women's rights. It has done amazing things that people don't always acknowledge, but its national presence is one of the major reasons that I stay involved. Its scholarships have helped to educate many women, including prominent ones such as Rachel Carson and Judith Resnick.
- Another important thing that AAUW does is sponsor and publish research, especially in education. Its major reports are read and respected nationally. Perhaps about fifteen years ago, AAUW produced a research report called

How Schools Shortchange Girls, which documented how classrooms revolve around the male students, therefore pushing girls aside. For example, girls will often not speak up or out in a group—they prefer to raise their hands. Teachers wouldn't acknowledge this, or call on the girls to participate, thereby giving male students the floor and marginalizing the girls. This one research report helped to revolutionize the management and teaching in American classrooms. Since then there have been other equally influential research reports. I think research is a very, very important thing that AAUW supports, and I am especially pleased that our Branch sends monies to national to continue this.

My husband has a cousin who is a professor at the University of Wisconsin. She is a major figure in the field of child development with a particular focus on mothers and children in the developing world. She is also very involved with women's rights in Wisconsin, particularly faculty women's rights. We recently had an opportunity to chat, and she started quoting to me from AAUW research reports--- and she's not even a member! But that shows you the influence of what AAUW has done and I am very proud of that.

Locally, the State College Branch has done a lot of things. Your questions mention organizations such as the Voluntary Action Center and programs such as Phone Friend for latch-key children (do people still know what that means?), which was replicated throughout the nation. AAUW helped to get the first woman on the Board of Trustees and to have Penn State hire its first woman faculty member. Many newer members aren't well informed about the role that AAUW had in empowering women at Penn State and within the community. Today the Branch awards scholarships to adult women and provides community grants to organizations with projects that promote equity for women. We have an active program in local school districts that encourages girls to explore STEM fields. All of these are very important. They might seem small when the whole concept of equity for women is so huge, but it's critical to keep chipping away at injustices and inequities. AAUW, possibly more than any other women's organization in State College, has contributed to making life better for women locally and nationally.

8. What were some of the challenges of being members of an early feminist organization?

- I don't go back as far as some of the other women in the Branch, so I probably can't answer this question well. I don't believe that AAUW makes much use of the word "feminism." Instead it likes to stick with phrases such as "equity for women and girls". But let's be real---this is feminism. Feminism is all about equal rights for women, equal pay for women, equal educational opportunities, and having laws and protections in place to help women

achieve. Challenges continue to exist for AAUW and for all other women's organizations.

J.E.—interestingly most of the early women that we've talked to didn't acknowledge that it was a feminist organization. They didn't see it that way.

- That's not too surprising. I view AAUW as a feminist organization because I view feminism in a very positive way. I recognize for women who are older than me, and also younger than me, that feminism is not a good word but in reality that's what AAUW represents but in way that is very palatable. Perhaps that's a strength of AAUW.

9. What opposition did the local branch face over the years as a women's organization? From whom?

- I think the biggest AAUW brouhaha that occurred during my membership took place about twenty years ago over abortion rights. When the national organization came out with a statement that supported the right of women to choose, it was meant to support giving women the freedom to make up their own minds about this difficult issue. Unfortunately, it was interpreted as AAUW being pro-abortion. AAUW lost members over it. There were problems in State College, including a call to boycott the Used Book Sale and negative letters to the editor in the newspaper. It was ugly locally. It was ugly nationally. I still wonder if AAUW did the right thing by coming out with that statement because it served to confuse the issue. If you really talk to the women in AAUW, their opinions and beliefs are all over the place. There was and is a lot of gray areas when it comes to a volatile issue such as abortion. It took years for AAUW to recover from this issue because it lost many formerly committed members.

10. What are the next important steps for AAUW nationally and locally toward equity for women and girls? Or where would you like to see AAUW go in the future?

- There are some challenges going on with AAUW right now in terms of fundraising and how those funds are expended. AAUW is concerned that branches are not always spending the money that they raise in the right way, which is to put the money towards activities that support AAUW's mission. For branches that are 501c(3)s, which State College is, the IRS and the states provide permission for branches to fundraise for mission-related projects, or for those related to increasing equity for women. AAUW wants more money to go to national initiatives such as lobbying and research. AAUW was very

active, for instance, in the passage of the Lilly Ledbetter Act to give women pay equity. AAUW needs more money and more commitment from the branches to keep these national efforts going. My personal feeling is that what happens nationally to help and empower women also has an impact locally. I don't know if members of our branch always agree with this message, but I do. I think it's very, very important.

AAUW also is engaged in preventing the abuse of women, which is a critical national issue because if women are abused and subjugated, how can they ever achieve equity? Encouraging girls to enter STEM fields is also a major focus, although I believe that we need good women in every field.

For years, AAUW has appropriately advocated for educational equity for women. Right now there is a growing national concern about the diminishing of educational equity for men. Men are not going to college at the same levels they once did. They are dropping out of college. They are dropping out of high schools. They constitute smaller and smaller proportions of students in professional schools. There are serious social and economic impacts from these changes. *You can have true equity only if both men and women have it.* I believe that AAUW needs to take a look at this but that is a personal opinion.

11. What programs/needs/causes has the local branch supported over the years?

- I think we have already discussed some of those. I am glad that Mary Dupuis spoke to you about the STEM initiative that she leads, and which engages the school districts and is also a Penn State program. It is an incredible program with a strong commitment from the Branch, and I have to tell you how very impressed I am with what the members of AAUW have done with STEM. I am not involved with that program, but the commitment of the women who are behind it and the way that they have brought together university students and high school students is really impressive. I hope they get more recognition for what they are doing. STEM opens up the doors for young women to consider fields other than what was available when I went to college. In those days, so many women became librarians, teachers and nurses but now the world of opportunities is open to them. This is a wonderful, wonderful program.

12. Identify notable branch projects and/or community projects supported by the branch such as Phone Friend, the scholarship endowment, Women's Resource Center, Schlow Centre Region Library, Family Health Center. (Directions branch is headed in)

- We have already gone over some of these projects. Two of our presidents reviewed the Branch archives and found that our Branch has donated over a million dollars to local community projects that empower women as well as sponsoring a myriad of projects on its own.
- Literacy, for instance, is huge. Schlow Library has historically been our number one funded entity, but AAUW has also funded the Mid State Literacy Council and the English Speaking Union. Women need to have command of the English language to achieve equity, and not just women from other countries, but women from this country. This is a very important effort. We have to give women a solid foundation on which to build if they are ever to achieve equity and literacy is a great example. The Branch even supported The Second Mile, not because we were fans of Jerry Sandusky (the Sandusky we thought we knew...), but because it broadened its scope to include troubled girls who needed help. I think we put \$32,000 into that effort. We've often funded scholarships for local women to participate in Leadership Centre County.
- I recall that we've underwritten two scholarships every year and as a result, Leadership Centre County actually identifies the women as AAUW scholars. But what's impressive about Leadership Centre County is that they track these women to determine all of the groups they later join in the community. There are scores of organizations that now engage women who attended Leadership Centre County with our scholarships. Remember that I talked about how involved AAUW members are in the local community; the same is true of Leadership Centre County graduates. Our local effort actually complements a national AAUW program and conference for outstanding women students. Both programs help to identify and develop future women leaders. A very worthwhile effort.

13. What impact did AAUW have on the State College area, on Penn State University, and on women's leadership opportunities locally?

- I think we have discussed some of those already. AAUW is very good at coming up with new projects. A current project of the Branch, which we do in partnership with the community Diversity Committee, is called Cultural Empowerment for Women. It is an effort to engage women of color and women from other countries, enabling them to network socially and to learn together through programming. Global Connections, which helps international students and their families to integrate with the community, is a program that has been supported by our Branch. So diversity, like literacy, seems to be a theme that the Branch has traditionally supported.

14. What are the most notable or most meaningful changes you've seen during your involvement in AAUW?

- AAUW has always done good things and of course we didn't even touch on the book sale, but people like Suzanne Kerlin can talk much more intelligently about that than I can. I think the Branch has become more sophisticated in its approach to things. It is multi-tasking: it doesn't have just have one project, it has multiple projects. We have shown sensitivity to local and national issues, with STEM being one. I spoke about the importance of diversity and cultural empowerment and literacy. Our support of the Women's Resource Center is very specifically for programs to wipe out sexual harassment and sexual abuse. The programs are designed for teenagers because that is where the problems start. AAUW has its fingers on the trends that nationally and locally impact on women. AAUW is not just all about educational equity. We are about equity, period, because equity issues are so prevalent and pervasive.

15. During your membership in AAUW, how has women's role in society evolved?

- I have been a member of AAUW since I was in my thirties. I have seen women move up through the ranks and make marked achievements in professional fields such as law, medicine, business, and education. We are not yet where we want to be, but the differences are amazing. When I was in college, there were no women in architecture because the faculty thought women made poor architects. A woman I knew got accepted into the program but only lasted about six months due to the negativity and discrimination. Laws such as Title IX changed so much, and you know that AAUW had a role in lobbying for this legislation. However, we still have a ways to go, particularly at the governmental level. I find it appalling how few women we have in Congress and at the state governmental level. , When we look at women's participation in government, as a nation we can't begin to compare to still developing countries such as Rwanda, which only twenty years suffered through devastating genocide, and of course, the Scandinavian countries are in a class by themselves. At one time the presidency and entire cabinet of Norway consisted of women. For a country that is based on the concept that all men and women are created equal, the United States has a long ways to go. AAUW will continue to play a critical role in helping women to achieve equity for a long, long time.

16. Over time what has the branch done to raise funds? What form has branch philanthropy take over time?

- Really, the Used Book Sale has been our main fundraiser for decades. Because of the hundreds if not thousands and thousands of hours that go into the Used

Book Sale, I often wish we could make more money on it even though what we make is fairly impressive. The Used Book Sale not only raises money, but it is also a community service in that we accept materials that people don't want, we prevent books from filling up landfills, and people have the opportunity to buy books from a huge selection. AAUW provides both a community service and a product for those who want it. With this money, we run the Branch, offer programs, provide scholarships, and give out community grants. It is quite an operation. I anticipate that changes in the publishing industry will mean fewer physical books available in the marketplace, so the Branch will be challenged to find other means of fund-raising in the future.

17. What in your role as Vice President for Finance and with strategic planning, what other forms of philanthropy would you like to see the Branch undertake?

- That is a good question Jackie, and unfortunately I don't have a good answer for that. We have looked at our investments and how we can leverage them to keep generating money. As a librarian, I have some concerns about the future of the Used Book Sale. It is still going very well and is very robust, but I am conversant with the national trends. The number of books, tangible books, being published and sold is decreasing in certain areas. I am an e-book reader myself. The increases in publishing are occurring in areas such as self-publishing, which might not be that palatable in a university community. Some publishers are producing more titles but fewer copies of each one, so there aren't inventories. I have suggested we try sampling the age of some of our donated books to see what trends are occurring in our community. I just saw a post on Facebook from a prominent University administrator who announced that he was taking a bunch of books to the AAUW book sort and that these are books that no one has looked at since 1995. So they are at least twenty years old. Will the local market still be there for twenty-year-old books? I don't know. I don't have the answers. But I can't imagine in twenty years that we are going to have the large numbers of paper books to sell the way that we do now. Soon we'll have to get serious with a discussion about our fund-raising future.

18. Are there other AAUW issues that you would like to discuss or focus on?

- I am very positive about AAUW. I am very positive about the current leadership and the terrific job they have done in attracting new people to the organization. I think AAUW, like all civic organizations, and not just women's organizations, will face continuing challenges with both recruiting and retaining members. I would like to see our Branch become more engaged with the local institutions of higher learning, and not just Penn State. They could be South Hills Business School or Lock Haven University. The future is with the younger people and we need to come up with new ways to engage them. I just read that the generation now in college—is it Generation Z?—is one of our brightest generations. Good news!

19. Are there other women's issues that you would like to discuss or see the Branch focus on?

- We have a lot on our agenda right now. Equity for women is huge especially if you consider there is pay equity, health equity, educational equity—the list goes on. I would like to see us continue to focus on that goal and not become too scatter-gunned, which can dilute our efforts. Earlier I mentioned my personal concerns about men losing out in educational equity battle, which is bad for everyone. This is a serious societal issue that AAUW should recognize at some point.

20. As the Branch looks towards its Centennial, what are the biggest things that they have accomplished and what should they be looking forward to for the next hundred years?

- I believe that State College has been a bell-whether branch that has not been afraid to forge ahead and to take risks. We are leaders. We started organizations such as the Voluntary Action Center, which has a new name now, and Phone Friend, which at one time had something like 1500 organizations around the world emulating it. For years our Branch helped other branches establish their own Used Book Sales. We have always been a leader because we have not been afraid to be innovative. The challenge will be to continue to identify innovative and effective approaches to addressing problems that impact women. I have belonged to a variety of organizations in my life, but I have never worked with a more committed group of women than I have met in AAUW. Sometimes the women are almost self-sacrificing; for example, they have priced and stored books in sub-standard facilities because they didn't want to spend too much on rent, knowing that there would be fewer dollars for the Branch's good works. AAUW women are amazing women who really believe in what they are doing, and you can't discount that.

21. Over the next hundred years, the Branch's focus should be on...

- I wish I had a really good answer for you but I don't have one. One of AAUW's strengths is that it has been responsive to the trends and to the needs of women. This should continue. For example, the Branch's STEM program is going very well. If programs like it are successful nationally, and women become more of a presence in STEM fields, then there will no longer be a need for such programs. Ideally we should work towards putting ourselves out of business, but realistically, equity issues for women will continue and doors will need to be opened through my lifetime and beyond.

22. Any final words about AAUW or women's issues?

- No, I just think that we have to keep chipping away at the issues. We have made tremendous progress, but we are not where we want to be. While we have made tremendous gains, the battle still needs to be won. There is lots for AAUW to work on. I am very proud to be an AAUW member.