

E-Tu Zen Sun - Interviewed June 14, 2014

1. Why did you join AAUW?

- Well, my first encounter with the initials AAUW was when I was a graduate student at Radcliff. I needed to find some funding for fellowships, so I looked up the papers. You can apply if you're a foreign student from your home country. Which I was not. I was not an American citizen then, so I was in the U.S. Then if you are an American citizen you can apply from here, but I wasn't a citizen. So I thought, oh well, that sounds like a worthwhile organization but I don't quite fit it in right now and that's my first recollection about AAUW. When I finished graduate school and toured a couple of years and came to join my husband at Penn State, I already had made some acquaintances here, women, friends here, who were wives of History faculty...by the way, my discipline is History...and they were both AAUW members then in 1952. And they said, oh why don't you join AAUW? And I said, oh well, I remember the initials AAUW. I didn't have very good luck with them, but they are nice people here and so I joined.

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

- Because I'm interested in the work, the purpose, the mission of AAUW. And so I thought that I would put some effort in it.

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

- I would wonder do we include men these days? I think we've started admitting men, but I haven't seen many men. I think it's the name American Association of University Women. If it was AAUW-M they might join. Well, anyway, I would say that it keeps you up to date with what is happening. Not only in terms of professional women's world, but also the wider world. And also there is the International Federation of University Women. I'm afraid I haven't done terribly much there, but I think that it answers a need. Now I think that there is a place for special women's organizations because our work isn't quite done yet. On the other hand, I have been wishing that there would be more blending. Having no daughters, 2 sons, and they are very good sons, I don't have any problems including men in activities.

4. What would you tell current members?

- Well I think that we are plotting a very good course. There is enough of a local presence so that people are getting to know more of what AAUW does in the community. And on the other hand, we also are having our work reach out into other countries, other university women's groups and so forth, and so I think we are having a good track record.

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?

- By the time I was Branch president? Oh, I think it was the time that people didn't know very much about us. It was 1958-1961. I think in the '50's, you still wouldn't hear people go -- AAUW. People would tell me, "I have known some nice AAUW members, but there are some AAUW members who seem to look down their noses on other women." You know, I think that's unfortunate if they feel that way. I am sure AAUW members don't really tend to think that way. People might say, all they talk about is the AAUW does this and AAUW does that. And so because they are doing things for AAUW, they want to talk about it. Other people who are not members of the organization might have resented it a bit.

6. What impact has AAUW made nationally and locally on women's issues?

- You know, I don't really know very much about it. I know that we have done good work in the scholarship programs in both the undergraduate and graduate student groups. Every time I attended the awards dinner, there would be someone of the award recipients would say, wow I really would like to, in later years, be women like you. And that made me so happy.

7. How has AAUW contributed to the status of women in State College and at Penn State University?

- I think women have come a long, long, long way since I came to State College in the 1950's. When I first came to live here, one of the banks, I won't mention which, one of the banks downtown. I was teaching part-time being paid out of the small change box, I don't know. But I thought I would open an account. And the gentleman in the bank said, well, we know that your husband's account is here and I think that you should merge your money with your husband's. He didn't want me to open my own personal account. I was so upset because I had all of my degrees from women's colleges in this country and I thought I was just as good as the next person on the street. So I said, thank you very much and I walked out. And then my husband, later on, walked in and said that apparently the man told him, well your wife was here and wanted to open an account. And he said, she can open an account if she wants to. But I never, for a long time, I didn't have anything to do with that particular bank.

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

- Well, I think it depends a lot on where the male colleagues come from. There are some from very dedicated religious backgrounds. Back in the early 1950's, the History Department was in pretty close quarters. We had a number of offices in Sparks Building. There were always four desks in the same office.

And I being, at that time, a part-time person had to share the desk with one or two other colleagues. So you are never alone, by yourself, and when the students comes to talk to you everyone else hears it if they are there. But one day, one of the colleagues at that time, he, himself has changed a lot. He's retired now, many years ago and we became good friends over the years. He was sitting at the other end of the room and I was sitting at my desk doing work and it was as though I wasn't there. He says well...one day I thought this was very memorable because it's hard to forget this... he said, well I wish that we would get more women graduate students. And I thought, good man! He said, so they come here to get their graduate degree and then they go home and take care of babies and we don't have competition in the profession. Straight out like that. I thought uh-oh, not such a good man. But then in the succeeding years, his wife earned a graduate degree. A schoolteacher in State College but she got a graduate degree from Penn State and his attitude changed. So it takes a woman to change.

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

- I don't believe that there was any effective opposition. I can't remember it since I was a member and during the two years I was President, I didn't encounter any unpleasant experiences. Except that in the 1950's if you didn't know very much before the book sales. The book sale was a very good thing. I overheard one day, in the early 1950's I think, and they said, that AAUW, well, all of the members they say, the AAUW did this and the AAUW did that, as though they were somebody. I don't know where that came from and I think it's unfortunate that some people would think like that. But I think that maybe there were members who were so proud of their work in AAUW or that in membership in AAUW that they were talking not in a very diplomatic way. I don't know. But I really think the book sale has changed people's conception of AAUW a great deal.

10. What are the next important steps for AAUW nationally toward equity for women and girls?

- Well we are already engaged in certain aspects of legislation. I don't think that we...it's okay to concentrate on gender issues for a while, but I hope that after a while we would not need to do this gender thing anymore. It should make no difference. So that we can move on to wider social issues, ethnic attitudes, for instance. I, myself, have not experienced any unpleasantness but I think that others...there were some Chinese friends once asked me, E-Tu, how do you deal with American friends. I said, excuse me? They said, well is there a difference between Chinese and American friends? I said, no, they are just people. They are just friends. When I talked with a friend, I didn't think about the person belonging to this or that ethnic group. So that I think it may still be

pervasive. Not that the majority of the culture is, but maybe some could reach out a little more. But I don't know how to change the ethnic groups' attitude. They need to change as well. Because I truly don't see the difference between American white, black or yellow friend. But they have to have kind of feeling when they look at a Caucasian person, immediately you get uptight and think, how do I speak English? And stuff like that. But that is very difficult because these people have lived here many years. These women I've talked with, either faculty or most likely, the wives of faculty at Penn State, they should have integrated culturally into the society more thoroughly.

11. What are the next important steps for AAUW locally toward equity for women and girls?

- Maybe I don't know everything that is going on, but I think that women and girls have been doing pretty well in this town locally. There is even going to be a girl drum major for the football team. I saw that. Certainly on campus, I don't think that there are any...well I have retired 20 some years ago so I don't know...but I know that the History Department used to be very male orientated, has had a couple of women chairmen. So I think that we are on the right track. Just keep going.

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

- Oh the scholarship program definitely. As I said, the book sale, when I was sitting at the sales desk, so many people, especially men, would come by and say, this is wonderful work you are doing and we really want to support it. Some men even refused to accept the change. They would say, no, no this is my donation to you. And that was really wonderful for people to know that AAUW is a part of the social interactions. It is not some group that is off to one side, sitting on a hilltop.

13. 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/particularly important to the community)

- Well, the Youth Center, I think is extremely important. Through my participation in the UNA/USA, the local chapter, I got to know one or two people who are officers there. I didn't really give it too much attention before I met these people because you just don't see the problem, you know. But then I realized that they were really doing wonderful work and the United Nations Association, I think, they have an annual dinner and you introduce these foreign students. And I don't know how deeply that goes into the people at the dinner. Foreign students are invited by the chapter and the others go because of their interest. But, I don't know how much understanding of the importance

of international interactions and understanding other people's cultures really is wide spread among the general population here.

14. What impact did AAUW have on the State College area, on Penn State University?

- That is a difficult question. I really don't know. I think that we have done all of the outreach and the fellowships and scholarships. These are well known activities. We can't be everything to everybody. I don't think we should try to. We have to maintain our individuality and there are so many organizations in this town. But I think we should just keep on going. Coming back to the book sale again, I think that always makes a big impact, not only on State College, but also on surrounding communities. People come from, as you know, miles around.

15. What impact did AAUW have on women's leadership opportunities?

- You know, I suspect that there are probably a lot of people who are active... well you don't become fully engaged in something like AAUW without having already the mindset from back in your school days and college days and so forth. But I am sure, that there are a lot of people, potential, probably still in the community that we have not touched. Although, I know that every year we get a lot of new members I think mostly from the Penn State student body. Well, that is very good. Maybe having more activities on campus. I am not in close contact with undergraduates anymore so I don't know whether they prefer to go to an AAUW event one evening or go do something else. But we could maybe try once a year or something like that.

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

- Oh boy. A lot of changes. In the 1950's, we weren't thinking about women as a candidate for President of the U.S. Now, it's nothing special. Well, I remember Geraldine Ferraro when she was running for Vice President. I am very proud of the fact, my younger son was at Swarthmore, and he particularly came home that week to vote for Geraldine. Now I think that what we have to be really sure is that all the candidates for public office who are women to make sure they...we are still at a stage of when we have to be more prepared than anybody else. We have to be solid. And don't just let your thought inspire you and shoot your mouth open without thinking. I think that people learn.

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

- I think it's evolved a great deal. You don't have now-a-days...watching news reports every day, I am so used to seeing women being present in the

important occasions. Representing this, that and the other thing. Representing the country. Sometimes certain countries, I won't mention the names again, but I was annoyed at because sometimes they say, here is the delegation from such and such. I look for women. I always look for women. When I go to a concert I would look in the orchestra to see how many women there are in the orchestra. And delegations from a lot of countries, they are just 100% pure male. And I said, I can't believe out of that whole country, they couldn't have one or two women who are qualified to do that work.

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

- Well, what else are we doing besides the book sale? I can't think of what else. We are not selling candy or cookies. Do we sell anything at Arts Festival?

19. As the Branch looks forward, what should they be focusing on? What changes do they need to make?

- One thing, you know the STEM program is very good. They had to overcome certain prejudices at a certain stage, but I think we have reached the stage. I don't think any school there discriminates against women because they were women and not let them into electrical engineering or something like that. Women have done well in the pure sciences, the hard sciences. Women have done well in math. Women have done well in all of these fields so I think that we will just put it aside. We are not going to go backwards certainly. But I think that women also have to keep up the other end of being a liberal arts concentrator. I think that we have to pay enough attention to language, literature and history, definitely history. We have to know where we came from and why we talk the way we do and so on. So, if you can be a 100%, gold star big engineer for building submarines and that's fine. But I would also like to see that female brain also have a certain amount of culture, literary and historical culture in that head. So you don't just go off like a robot.

20. What are some of the women's issues that you would like to see discussed in the future?

- I think this is one of the issues. Everybody says engineer...I remember way back in the 1960's, on some occasion I met a student from the Netherlands, I believe, a woman. And at the time, engineering was mainly a male field. So I met her and chatted and asked her what is your specialization? And she looked very apologetic and sort of shrugged and said, I am in engineering. I said, well great! You don't have to feel like that. I think I hope we have come over that stage. So when a woman says I am an engineer, nobody will look at her twice. But we do have to also keep a balance of the other part of the human cultural heritage. We mustn't let science and technology overcome the language and culture and history. I think that there should be a balance. I was dismayed to

read somewhere that nowadays, they said, where is it Utah? They said the state education department has decided you don't have to teach grade school children cursive writing after the first or second grade. I think that is awful! And later on, I read an article somewhere that if you don't practice cursive writing, you are making certain neurons in your brain not connect. And they will just fade out. It has to be print. And they can't write anything except print. So they don't write because print is...I could never write a whole page in print.

21. So what are some of the major issues that the State College Branch should focus on that are very local?

- I think maybe there still is room for greater interaction between all of the available international visitors and students and the very local group. Because our student population, Penn State population comes from all kinds of communities in Pennsylvania. I was very impressed once when I was walking down the Old Main Mall with a graduate student in history. A very good person and he was from a very, very tiny town in Pennsylvania somewhere I don't remember now. He said, you know, I really am so happy to be here at Penn State. It is opening up a whole new world to me. All of these different people. All of these foreign visitors. He was a very smart person. He realized what...he was absorbing everything. And that was good to see. So I think that living in State College, we tend to forget that there are many, many people, I don't know whether in the thousands or tens of thousands from other communities who you meet live person who is walking down the street who is from the other side of the world. That is a new experience and they are smart enough to know it is a widening experience. And I think that is very important.

22. So when you think about the AAUW State College Branch what are the things you first think of?

- I know it's difficult to pry students to attend functions. They have their own agendas. But I would try to reach out more to the undergraduates, especially the local Pennsylvania, the U.S. student population. The foreign students are already internationally minded. But I think that is very important to promote among the Pennsylvanians.

23. What are some of your favorite AAUW memories?

- Going off to state meetings with friends from AAUW. It's like time-off for everybody. And meeting the other members from the other branches. I remember when we first started the book sale. I remember the first year when we had it we cleared \$135 or something like that and some cents. And we thought oh boy! That is \$135! And then a delegate from some other branch said, we also had a book sale and we cleared \$3900 something. And I thought, \$3000! I couldn't believe it. So it's a broadening experience for all of us to be more aware of what's being done in AAUW in other parts of Pennsylvania. That woman, I can remember, I can see her now, so proud, \$3000!

24. What final words would you like to say about AAUW as it looks forward to its 100th Anniversary?

- Well, I think that we have been a positive organization in the community. And as I have said, I think maybe we could think of some ways to reach out a little more into the community. I don't know what else. We have been having meetings in the Schlow Library so that's more accessible to people downtown. But everybody is so involved with so many organizations, those who are inclined to do things it is really a competition.