

Marge Dunaway Interview – June 14, 2014

1. Why did you join AAUW?

- I was newly married and I was living in an apartment. One of my neighbors felt that I was lonely, which I was, and she invited me to an AAUW meeting. I can't remember the subject of the meeting, but I can remember being very impressed by the women who were there. Mary Alice O'Brien was president, and I recall Evelyn Hensel, Dorothy Veon, and Dr. Pearl Weston being present. I was very favorably impressed by them and I told my husband that I thought I would join AAUW. At the same time his mother was trying to get me to join the State College Woman's Club, which I did eventually. I think I attended one more meeting before I joined AAUW. I didn't become active for sometime because about a year later I had my first child. It was after my second child that Adelaide Kendig, who was president at the time, called me and said that the recording secretary had resigned. She said that she really needed me and she knew I could do the job. So, of course, I said yes. I was recording secretary, publicity chairman, vice president for membership, and finally Branch president. So that is how it all started.

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

- I think for two reasons. First, I still think it is an extremely worthwhile group of women who belong. They come from many different backgrounds, which make them very interesting. They have a variety of interests, and they are well educated. It is a group like no other. It is an extremely worthwhile group for what they do and what they stand for.

In the early days AAUW was primarily concerned with education for women. They still are, but the focus has widened and now equity for women is important. Both of these issues lead to AAUW's primary goal – the advancement of women.

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

- I would say pretty much the same thing. That it is a group of very interesting, well-educated women who have many different backgrounds and come from many different places. Through the years, they have stressed women's education and women's equity as the most important parts of the AAUW program. Our primary focus is the advancement of women.
I know there's one question about what the challenges were. I didn't have any major problems. There were one or two people who didn't think I was suited for the job, which maybe there always are. And there were some, some of my "social" friends who said why are you in this group? What does this mean to you? Why don't you do something like go work at the hospital? I did work at the hospital. There was one occurrence that I would like to tell you about and it didn't even happen in this Branch.

There is a branch in northeastern Pennsylvania, which is quite a strong Catholic area of the state. Their president called me and said, "Marge, we have a terrible problem. Some of our members have discovered that AAUW stands for women's choice on the abortion issue. They are outraged. They have gone to the priest and he has urged them to resign. Already five or six have resigned, and we are afraid that it will spread through the branch. What will we do?" Of course I was terribly concerned. I called our current legislative chairman, Harriet McGeehan, a highly intelligent woman who was on the governor's committee to revise the Pennsylvania constitution. Choice was of special interest to her, and she spoke beautifully about the topic. So I said to the branch president, "if we can find a date when Harriet and I can both come, could you arrange a meeting of the full branch?" She said she could, and she did find a suitable time and place.

I went to Harriet's (she lived in Hazleton) the night before and we talked through the whole thing. We determined what she was going to talk about and what I was going to talk about. She was going to talk about the issue and I was going to talk about what you do if you want to try to change something. Those are the things we decided on. The next day we drove up to the site of the meeting. When we walked into that room, you could have cut it with a knife, right down the middle. On one side were the people who were angry with us. And they were really angry. On the other side were the people who went along with us. They thought AAUW's position was correct. I couldn't understand why the other group had just discovered AAUW's position. Harriet talked about the issue and I talked about what to do according to the AAUW by-laws if you wanted to try to change something. So we talked for a while and finally when we finished, Harriet and I went back to get in the elevator. One woman followed us back and said, "We're going to get you for this." I mean, we were actually threatened which was a little scary.

There was one other Branch and I cannot for the life of me remember which one it was, who we thought was going to follow suit. And we managed to get that stopped. Then we were very concerned about what might happen during Convention. Whether they would get up on the floor and try to start something, but they didn't. The ones who came to Convention were very quiet, very subdued. Nothing more happened except they did continue to lose members for some time. The Branch survived, but it took years to get the membership back up. And there was always a lot of feeling about this. I just thought that was such an important thing, even though it didn't happen in this Branch that I would like to talk about it. That's why I am mentioning it.

J.E.—it is appropriate because one of the questions that we have is about issues. What are some of the issues? What are some of the pushbacks? That is absolutely fine.

4. What would you tell current members?

- I think they should consider more action issues. The way we used to have and I will speak a little bit more about that later. More things that the Branch actually starts. Projects that they start that are action projects. And there are a number of those. I miss, and I don't know if anyone else does or not, some of the cultural things. You know we used to have an area of interest, which was cultural. And we did, probably not important things, but I remember we took a trip out to Falling Water one year. And everybody loved it! It was sort of a contrast from all the heavy work that we were doing. And that was back in the 1960's. And in the 1960's, if you remember, that was when the assassinations took place, Washington was burned, and AAUW was terribly concerned. I was in Washington at the time and they took me up to the top of the building and I could see parts of Washington burning. It was very scary. AAUW adopted this focus -- *Action for a Unified Society*. They urged branches to do action projects, educational projects and projects that would help women. In other words, they really wanted to DO things. And that's when the State College Branch did a number of things.

We started the Volunteer Corps and the Family Planning Council. And that took a lot of background work because we were anticipating quite a bit of opposition. We didn't know when we brought it up to the Branch whether they would approve it or not. So I remember going to a number of meetings of a committee that we had to work on the background ...and we included a businessman and a doctor, and a nurse and a variety of people so that it would be well balanced. And of course when we did bring it up to the branch, they approved it which was a big relief. And then there were some other things. There was something that we called the Visual Survey of State College. Have you heard of that?

Well, all I can remember is that a number of us went downtown and we were assigned a certain street or a part of a street or alley. And we sort of walked back and forth and looked to see what we thought could be corrected there to improve the environment. And it was a little embarrassing because some of the merchants were not happy to see us doing this. And some of our suggestions such as, your trashcans are over flowing, didn't go too far. We just did this project for a short time.

J.E.—So a predecessor to the Downtown Improvement Organization.

- Yes, it was part of what we would call environmental issues, nowadays. But as you know, we have always supported scholarships and grants of various kinds,

libraries and educational institutions. There is such a long list of people that we give funds to now. It's just amazing.

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?

- Not really many. As I said, there were two or three people that made it quite obvious that they were not happy with me, but that's always going to happen I am sure. There were a number of people who simply did not approve of this feminist organization and would ask me questions, like why are you involved with this? What is it that you do, actually? And so forth. I can't say that was a big challenge, it was just people were not well informed at that time.

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

- I think quite a big impact. We have been influential in passing legislation. There is a bill, I can't begin to remember the number, it's part of a bill that helps protect women against assault and provides the funds for something like the Women's Resource Center. We have been influential in supporting that kind of legislation and probably getting it passed in the first place. And I think the fact that AAUW and its objectives are becoming better known to people. It is due in a large part to us. And then, of course, I shouldn't say the book sale has influenced women's issues, but in a way it has. Because it attracts people who work in the book sale and then they become involved in the part of the organization that works on women's issues. I think that has helped.

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

- Of course the University is an institutional member of AAUW. In fact, I remember going up and asking Eric Walker when he was President if Penn State would join AAUW. And I felt kind of silly doing it. He sat there very straight faced and said well tell me about AAUW, I don't know what it is. Of course, his wife belonged and he still didn't know what it was. So I know that Penn State is an institutional member and of course now we have a college group that is affiliated with AAUW. I don't know how many Penn State women are in that group. You probably do know.

I suspect ten or twelve or something along that line, but I really don't know. And as far as State College goes, I think it's the same general thing that the publicity that we have is very good now and people are more aware of what AAUW does. There is more awareness that women need to be helped, that they need to be helped to advance. They need to be helped in the workplace. I don't know how active the Legal Advocacy Group is now, but when I was involved in Washington, that used to be a big thing because we provided funds for women who were

discriminated against in business and institutions helped them obtain legal help and so forth. I think there are just many ways we have helped women.

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

- I think people just didn't understand. They had the old image of women marching in parades and so on which is not very pleasing to them. I think, in general, they have come to accept this. But in the early days, it was not accepted very much. As I said, I used to get a lot of remarks about what are you doing in this organization anyway? What good is it? What is it doing? People would often say why don't you work in a hospital instead? I did. I said I do work in a hospital too.

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

- Frankly, I don't know what the next steps would be because I am not currently up on things enough. But I think we will continue to push equity. I think it is the big focus for women and for girls and I think there will be more projects, like the one Mary Dupuis is involved in STEM. The next steps, I think, we will just continue to work away and to try to get into the schools more, the way we have in Bellefonte and State College and to try to tell them more about women's equity. I think the younger women, correct me if I am wrong, I think they are all for it. In the old days, we had some who really didn't know whether equity was going to be good for them or not. Or maybe their husbands had told them it wasn't the thing to do.

10. Where would you like to see AAUW in the future?

- I would like to continue with the present emphasis on equity and on education for women and advancement of women. But I would also like to see more action projects. We used to have great study groups in several areas. I know there was a very active one on international relations and there was a cultural affairs one, a community one and there were four. I don't remember the other one. I don't think those need to interfere with the overall objectives of equity and education. They are just something added for people who might like to actually get together and study and talk about a certain area, especially international relations. I think that has become awfully important with what's going on in the world now. I am reading right now, *I am Mulalah*. It's a fascinating book, really fascinating. The position, status and role of girls in Pakistan are just awful, terrible.

11. You mentioned that you would like to see more action groups. What kinds of actions activities do you see the Branch doing?

- That's a little hard to say because I think it sort of depends on what comes up in the future.

J.E.—Let's talk about the ones that the Branch as handled in the past.

- Well, of course, there was the Family Planning Council, and the Volunteer Corps, and the Survey of Downtown, but then there was also Phone Friend that was very worthwhile, while it was needed. There has always been fellowships and project grants. And we are very proud now that we give these local scholarships. When I was busy in Washington, local scholarships were an absolute no-no. They didn't want any money to go anywhere except to come to Washington. That was hard to overcome because they really fought it. But now, I think, most branches have something along that line. They have some kind of scholarship, maybe for high school girls or, as we do, for women returning to college. And I think that's most worthwhile. I think it's wonderful that we have four scholarships along that line.

12. What impact did AAUW have in State College?

- I don't know if I can answer that. I am thinking of the women who belonged to Council, Borough Council, who now belong to AAUW. I think it's influenced a lot of important woman to become involved.

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

- It helped women to find those opportunities for leadership and a lot of them had been anxious for it and all of a sudden it is there and they become leaders. When I just look over the membership list, which is so different then when I was involved, it reflects that there are a lot of people who were leaders in State College who now belong to AAUW. And I think that's wonderful because I remember trying to get some of these people. They just weren't interested.

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

- Well I think one of them is the fundraising and where it goes. As I mentioned previously, AAUW used to feel that it should all come to Washington and be used for fellowships, research, projects and so forth. And now of course that has changed completely. And the branches have their scholarships and their project grants and so does the state. That's one big change.

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

- A great deal! I had one of those husbands who didn't want me to work because he thought it reflected on him, that he was not able to support me. That really is the reason that I got into a lot of volunteer work. But that's no longer true and women are working both because they want to and because they need to. And that I think has been a massive change. It's been hard on organizations because after all, women only have so much time. I know some organizations have lost a lot of members. I don't think the State College branch has lost a large amount. I think we've kept our numbers pretty steady. I know we have lost some branches, but I think that is one massive change – women working outside the home.

16. What are the most important issues, like pay equity for women or Title IX that AAUW should focus on for the next 100 years?

- I think pay equity is still one of the very important things because here we are and its seventy cents to men making one dollar. This is really not fair. There are so many women who have to support their families. There are so many single women that have to do that. That's one of the important issues that I think they should try to focus on. And I think always this business of assaulting women, sexual assault, whatever kind of assault it is and it doesn't seem to be going away. We read more about it all of the time. I am just shocked by some of the things I read. And I think that's another thing that we should focus on is that business. Another thing might be education K-12. I don't know how much work AAUW has done in that, but I think that is something important that is almost immediate. Actually, all aspects of education AAUW should be interested in. That is a particularly important one, to give children the right start in their education.

17. What issues specific to State College would you like to see the branch focus on?

- State College is such a really good place it's hard to say. But there are a lot of things certainly that can be improved. Perhaps more attention to environmental issues. There are a lot of them floating around. I hated to see Jackie Melander work so hard to get a historical district here and have them turn it down. I don't think the realtors will ever approve it. But the Historical Society is one thing that is important and AAUW can support them and they do support them with money, I know, they could be a little more interested in what happens to the physical part of State College, the downtown area. Because it is growing so fast and spreading so fast that the core is kind of being neglected. If it's not a historical district then I am afraid it's not going to preserve very well. It's just going to go down hill. That is one thing. I think more projects in the schools, or larger ones. The thing that Mary Dupuis is working on and what they are working on in Bellefonte to enlarge those.

18. What are you most proud of that the Branch has accomplished since you have been a member?

- Oh so many things. I think, probably the change over so that now we can award scholarships and grants without running into opposition from Washington. I think that is something to be very proud of. I am very proud that they give so much money to different non-profit organizations, but I must say I shudder a little bit when I see an add in the paper that says if you want to apply for AAUW funds, please do. Somehow that strikes an off cord with me. But I think most of the ones that they do give funds to are very worthwhile. They aren't all strictly educational, but they are, in a way, like the historical society and the symphony and, of course, all of the libraries. The list is so big. It's wonderful that they are doing that because they raise so much money in the book sale. If they can do that and support their own projects and still support these non-profits is a big accomplishment. I hope they can continue to attract wonderful diversity of membership the way they have been recently. We have some very interesting members from all parts of the world. They're contributing so much and that is great. We didn't used to have that variety.

19. You were a Branch President and you were involved at the state and national levels. What was it like for you to advance from the local level, to the state level and to the national level?

- The first job that I took with the state was to be Fellowships Chairman. That was the only thing I hadn't done with the Branch. And of course that was involved mostly with raising money. But I enjoyed it when I got started because I did a slide show. My brother-in-law at that time was in multi-media at Penn State and he helped me do a slide show about fellowships and the research and projects. And at that time we had something called the Centennial Fund that was to raise one million dollars by the time we had our centennial. It was for fellowships and research and projects and we did raise that money which was special. Then I was on the road again. I went around to most of the branches and took my slide show. I showed them my slide show and talked about the various aspects of the programs. I had some wonderful experiences and some very funny ones. A number of times the equipment they provided just didn't work. The worst one was in State College. They asked me to give my slide show here and the projector didn't work. But it was very interesting because I met so many different people.

I was surprised at the variety of the people that I met, the different ages, different interests and I thoroughly enjoyed that. Did a lot of driving here and there and everywhere. I think the most challenging experience was that one about choice issue. That was a real worry. I was afraid that we would lose the branch or most of it. But most of the experiences were good. The conventions were very different then, very different. They were much larger. They were structured and formal. We

followed Robert's Rules. And the legislative program was always a big focus and took up a lot of time. There was a lot of arguing about different parts of it. And the same thing with resolutions, very controversial. The first convention that I was going to have to preside over, I worried about this aspect of it because I wasn't sure I was as up on Robert's Rules as I should be. I had met a lady in Pittsburgh, Crosier was her name, who was an expert on Robert's Rules, and she provided help to a lot of different organizations. So, before this first convention, I called her and said if I come to Pittsburgh would you have lunch with me and spend the afternoon with me? I have to preside at my first convention and I want to do a good job. I am a little uneasy about some things. So we spent the afternoon together and I went through everything that I thought would come up so that I felt very confident. None of it came up at all! Nothing controversial came up. In fact, our Vice President said to me afterwards, this was too smooth. It wasn't interesting.

Yes, the conventions were very different. The last one that I attended here was up at the Penn Stater. It was quite small. I was inadvertently put in a very embarrassing position because the by-laws state that the past president is entitled to vote on anything. I mean she doesn't have to have credentials from her branch or anything because she is past president she can vote. But apparently the presiding people didn't know that and something came up that we were voting on and I voted. And all of a sudden from up on the stage someone said you back there, whom are you representing? So it got to be a little embarrassing and I had to dig out my by-laws and actually find the section in the by-laws that said I could vote. So, the conventions have changed a great deal. They were more fun back then, I thought. A lot more fun.

20. What was it like at the national level?

- Very, very interesting. Of course we had a beautiful building then that we no longer have. But it was confusing because they had so many committees. I was on so many committees that my head was spinning. I went on to the national board as Fellowships Chairman; I took someone's place that had become ill. My last AAUW position was Association Educational Foundation Programs Chairman, 1979-1982. Foundation structure was complicated. I presided at Educational Foundation Program meetings and Centennial Fund meetings, was a member of the Development Committee and was a non-voting member of the three Awards Committees. I was a member of the Educational Foundation and Association board member and an Educational Foundation board member and a trustee of the Fellowship Endowment Fund. This structure was so unwieldy that a new set of by-laws was adopted in the mid 1980's. It was really very confusing. It was most interesting to me to sit in on these awards committees and see how they worked. How they did select the people who received the awards. Of course, they had had people working on different aspects of it before hand. They had piles of

applications that people had gone through and had discarded some. The way they narrowed it down and the way they finally decided, it was fascinating to watch. And all I did was sit and watch, so that was really fun.

21. As the State College Branch comes up on it's 100th Anniversary what are the things it should be most proud of?

- Well, I think just a lot of things that I have mentioned. The fact that we are pushing equity and the advancement of women and women's education and apparently doing it with some pretty good effects. The fact that we are getting into math and science quite a bit more than we were. I think we must be proud of that. As always, we have to be proud of the book sale and what it has accomplished and where the money goes. I was a co-chairman, I was never chairman of the book sale, but I was co-chairman with Jody Bland, the third year of the book sale. I had all of the books in my garage all winter and every once in a while, I had a sorting and pricing committee, so I brought the books into the dining room table and we sat around the table and worked on the books. That was the year we were in one of the banks downtown on College Avenue. First National, I think. We had space along the side, but we had to take in all of our bookcases and ways to display the books because they couldn't provide anything. I remember we had to enlist our husbands' help getting the things down there. I think we even had to hire Handy Delivery to take some of the bigger items.

The Used Book Sale we can certainly be very, very proud of. The fact that we are attracting so many very knowledgeable, interesting women from all of these different environments, countries, backgrounds I think is something to be proud of. When I was involved, it was a more homogenous group. We didn't have the variety of people that we do now, that make it so much better. That is one of our goals after all, diversity. These projects that we have accomplished, some of them now aren't as active. I was thinking of Family Health Council now which is Family Health. I don't know how active it is but we did get it started. And some of the other things we got started like Phone Friend, even though it's not in existence anymore, it is something to be proud of because it filled a need at the time, a big need. We certainly have a variety of meetings and interesting speakers. And how is the attendance at the meetings? Is it pretty good?

It is, good. Because we used to sometimes, we were in the women's club most of the time. Sometimes the women's club was absolutely full if it was an interesting or controversial meeting and other times there would be a few rows and it was kind of a disappointment. But I think we are attracting more women all of the time and more women are doing things in AAUW. Which is especially interesting because I know a lot of organizations have suffered losing members because of women doing other things. So I think we can be proud that we have kept a good membership. I'm not sure how AAUW

National is on membership. It's decreased some I know because all of the states have lost branches. Pennsylvania has lost some I know.

22. So as the Branch looks forward to the next 100 years, what should their priorities be?

- They should continue to focus on equity and women's advancement and women's education and all of the off shoots from that. And they should continue to focus on their fundraising and maybe establish more scholarships, more grants and try to help more non-profits, but maybe be a little bit more selective on that. I wouldn't advertise for them. I think we should focus on education at all levels, K-12 through college and graduate work because it is so important. And provide assistance when we can too because the money is going to be hard to come by for a lot of people.

This experience has made me remember things that I was proud of. I think I was very proud when we finally established the family planning council because that had been sort of in the background for a while. And we were a little bit afraid to go ahead because there were some people very much opposed. We had run into that. And I know that one of our members had received some threats. And we did go ahead and we got this thing going and I remember feeling very good when I came home from that meeting and told my husband, okay it passed.

23. Did you have the same push back for the Women's Resource Center?

- I don't think so. I don't think there was opposition for that. I don't recall much about that at all. But it's certainly is important, the Women's Resource Center. The Voluntary Action Center, Myrna Feller was in charge. The Youth Services Bureau, yes we were somewhat active in that. But I don't know how much. I must be one of your oldest members.

J.E.—You are doing marvelously. Your work with AAUW locally and through the state and nationally has been phenomenal and so it's great to have you talk to about it.

- Well, I don't know about phenomenal, but it was very interesting to me. It took up a lot of time. My husband was very understanding. I am sure sometimes he got annoyed when I said I have to go away again. But he was very good about it. I think he realized it filled a gap that since I wasn't working, I needed something like this to do. And so I did it. It was very rewarding. One of the last times I was in Washington, we were there for an anniversary party and I actually took a cab and I had them drive me back to where the old building used to be. It's been razed and some bank is built there. I just was kind of sorry I saw it. It used to be a beautiful building, just beautiful. They had so much space to display beautiful artifacts. I have been at the new building, I think it's a rental, and it's adequate as

far as office space, but these beautiful displays are sort of crowded onto small shelves and it's too bad. The other building, apparently, was going to take so much repair work. When AAUW first decided they needed a building, they assessed every branch a certain amount and that was when we started raising money. And I remember, I think that may have been when Louise Tukey started with the calendars. That was one thing that she did to raise money. And there were a number of other small things, nothing like what we do now. More like, I hate to say bake sale, but the bake sale idea, small sales. And we did finally raise enough money to pay what we owed and they built the building. How our fundraising has changed since then is phenomenal. And that is all Louise Tukey's book sale through and through. I just marvel at her. That is her big interest in life, the book sale.