

Trudy Levine Interview – June 14, 2014

1. Why did you join AAUW?

- We arrived in State College in 1968. My husband accepted a job at the University and here we came with three youngsters. The youngest was four years old. And I didn't know much about State College. I lived in Pittsburgh and went to the University of Pittsburgh and all I knew was Penn State University was here. I was very surprised when we came here, but very delighted. It was an unusual situation for us because we had been in a large city. We had been in California, the Los Angeles area, and we thought it would be great for the kids and it was. Once here, I saw an article about AAUW having a meeting. I really didn't know anything about AAUW at that point. I went to the meeting and I was hooked! The people were wonderful, the speaker was great! I thought this is something that will keep me busy and interested. I joined immediately. I found out about the Used Book Sale and what they did and I thought "what a wonderful thing." So I tried to get involved in that almost immediately.
- It wasn't long before I was asked to be the recording secretary when Marge Dunaway was president. I had been in the AAUW maybe a year and didn't really feel like I knew enough to do the job, but Marge was a phenomenal mentor. She would review my draft of the minutes of the meetings and I would type them up and distribute them. I was serving as Membership Vice President in 1973, when Carol Herrmann, a member of the nominating committee, came to me and asked if I would be president. I was overwhelmed and hesitated, but she inspired me, convinced me and sold me on the idea of taking it on and I have never regretted it. We had a phenomenal board. All experienced, capable, dedicated women and they were so helpful. The job was easy and I loved it! And I was hooked for life. So that's why I joined and why I've never left.

2. I assume that is why you have remained committed to the organization for so many decades?

- Absolutely. They have done so much. Being there on board and seeing these accomplishments, how can you not want to be a member? As an officer, I had the good fortune and opportunity to work with, and learn from, women who were leaders in their fields. Many of these women served, and continue to serve, as officers, board members and volunteers in many community organizations. I have witnessed the commitment of AAUW to the various projects they have undertaken and the results of their efforts have had a major

impact on the community. The State College Branch continues to take on issues which affect women and their families.

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

- If you have the time for only one organization, choose AAUW. There are many ways to be involved throughout the year. For example, volunteers work on collecting, sorting and pricing books throughout the year, in addition to working at the actual Annual Used Book Sale. They volunteer for Festival of the Arts Information Booth, attend meetings and learn more about ongoing projects while meeting a great group of women who are making a difference. There are projects ongoing in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math education), community service projects, social and economic issues, etc. Perhaps you could serve in a board position. Check it out. You can make a difference and enjoy it.

4. What would you tell current members?

- Get involved. I know you are busy. Start out with one little thing and you will find out that you want to do more. There are so many options -- enjoy your membership! Go to the meetings and continue to support AAUW because it's there for you, it's there for other women, it's there for families, it's there for everyone. You can see the great strides that have been accomplished because of the efforts of AAUW members.

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?

- During my term as Branch President, our branch was involved in numerous projects, study action groups and various activities. My biggest challenge was ensuring that all of these diverse projects, groups and activities were successful. For example, we were involved in a travel group, had a monthly radio program on WMAJ, legislative and international relations groups, book talk lunches with Schlow Library where we met and heard from local authors, in addition to our monthly meetings. These monthly meetings were held October through May at the Woman's Club on S. Allen St., and were open to the public. I was very fortunate to work with a phenomenal board! I learned so much from them and they were most supportive.
- As Book Sale Co-Chair, we strove to continue the annual growth of books sold and proceeds raised from the previous year's sale. At that time, we collected the books, which had to be taken to several members' homes where volunteers sorted and priced them. The books were stored in these homes until

they could be taken to the site of the sale. My home was one of the collection sites and I recall with fondness many of us working together at each other's homes – they came to my home on Monday and so I baked goodies for us on Sunday! The support of the business community has always been invaluable in the success of our sales. Of course, our biggest asset, has always been our college town community which donates and purchases our thousands of boxes of books at our annual sales.

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

- It is difficult to pinpoint all of them, but AAUW has helped women in every respect. Women are now recognized as a powerful force. I have a personal story. My older sister Ann was anxious to pursue a career in physics. She applied to Carnegie Tech (in Pittsburgh) in the early 1940s, where our brothers went, but they were not accepting women in that program. She went, instead, to the University of Pittsburgh and received her BS in physics. She then applied again to Carnegie Tech for graduate school, was accepted, and was the first woman to receive a doctorate in physics from that school. My granddaughter did not have to worry about her gender limiting her ability to study physics – it is exciting to realize what changes have been brought about. Today, there are more women in sciences, law schools and medical schools. This year, there were 13 graduates from the Hershey Medical School and nine of them were women.
- Nationally, AAUW has also supported women with the Legal Advocacy Fund (LAF). This fund has supported women in higher education if they have been denied the kind of promotion or position that they have earned. Locally, AAUW was fortunate that the Centre Daily Times was extremely generous in coverage of our various activities. We also had the Pennsylvania Mirror. Between the two newspapers, we had publicity that you could not buy today.

7. How did that manifest itself locally in State College?

- Locally, we have encouraged women to run for public office and to be active legislatively to effect change. Our members have been involved in most volunteer organizations in support of women and women's issues and have been recipients of numerous awards for their outstanding service.

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

- I did not perceive AAUW as a “feminist organization” but rather as an organization of women helping other women and the community, while

developing their own leadership skills in a social environment with other women graduates.

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

- I did not detect opposition from the community which seemed, instead, supportive of our efforts. Our efforts to improve educational opportunities for women were appreciated in a University community which values education. We always had speakers for our programs, and donations of books, facilities and trucks for our fundraising Annual Used Book Sale. I am pleased to say that I was not aware of anything that I felt was remiss because we were a women's organization.

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

- Wouldn't it be great if some day we wouldn't have to concern ourselves and worry that women are being shortchanged? I remember years ago, AAUW had an article, a real study that they did, on shortchanging girls. They were doing this in the schools whereby the boys were getting the attention because they didn't feel the girls should have it. I think that the time should come when we don't differentiate because it's a girl or a boy or a woman or a man, whether on the job, in a school, in a career or in a business, etc. People should be treated equitably and that includes pay equity. AAUW has been advocating for pay equity for some while and, although it is improving, it still has a way to go.

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

- Below is a partial list of AAUW supported programs from past years:
- Phone Friend – Years ago when there weren't many social services available, there were children coming home after school with a key because no parent was at home. They were called "Latch Key Children." Phone Friend was an AAUW program to help these children. The children could phone volunteers and they would get a friendly, helpful person to listen and talk to them.

High School Achievement – certificates awarded to the top 10% at each school in the county at the end of their Junior Year.

Voluntary Action Committee – started as a Volunteer Corp Bulletin and was so successful that in 1975 a Community Volunteer Center was established matching volunteers with community needs.

Staffing the Arts Festival Information Booth – at the corner of College Avenue and Allen Street for the entirety of the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts. Scholarships and Grants – which started as a loan to women students and has now expanded to four \$5,000 scholarships for women returning to college. Additional programs – We have done other things, too, essentially supplying funding for many of the community organizations. As a result of our very successful book sales, we have been able to give support to women's issues, to the libraries, and support to many things that come to our attention. And some of these things we find ourselves. We don't have to be told to support them. We realize there is a need for it and we try to be available to help.

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

- Locally, the population has become aware of the problems facing women and have worked as a community to help solve them, knowing that AAUW members will be available as needs arise. Our local AAUW had a representative who served as a liaison between the University and the Branch. Many members are also employees of Penn State, serving in positions at all levels in many departments. Many AAUW members have had leadership roles in State College, among them Ingrid Holtzman and Felicia Lewis, who served on State College Borough Council, Ann Cook who was the recipient of the Benjamin Rush Award, Marjorie Dunaway, a former Branch president, also served as the Pennsylvania State AAUW president and a national officer of AAUW. The Centre County Council for Human Services Annual Volunteer Dinner, which honors outstanding volunteers from each of the many organizations in the community is named after Dr. Rose Cologne, a long-serving AAUW member.

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

- I think we have become more involved in both local and national issues. I have also seen AAUW members become more involved in the greater community. For example, our members have served on the boards of other non-profit organizations. The women volunteering reads like a "who's who" in the community when you see the awards and honors which AAUW members have received. They are women who feel that what they can do for the community is good, not only for them, but for their families. Having served on the AAUW Scholarship and Grants Committee, I can see the benefits that AAUW has provided these women. Some of the recipients are single mothers, yet they have the unique desire to continue their education even though funding is not available. When we are able to give them financial

support and see them aspiring to set a good example for their children, and aspiring to get a better job so they can provide a better situation for their families, we realize what a difference we are able to make. We started out with one scholarship and now have increased it to four.

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

- Since I have been in AAUW, women have become CEO's of Fortune 500 companies. We see women doing things we never imagined – such as being president of General Motors! Women have become very visible in every aspect of government and law. We have women on the Supreme Court. There is no limit on what women can do. There should be no limits on accepting women in these wonderful positions. I hope soon the day will come when we will be able to see the first woman President of the United States. Isn't it about time that the capable people are doing the jobs and we don't have to go and pinpoint and separate the women from the men?

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

- Our major focus has been the Annual Used Book Sale. This is an on-going, year-round effort and you really have to give these women credit. Our Used Book Sale is the grand finale, but preparing for it is a major, major task. And the funds that have been derived from that have been utilized, not only for scholarships, but utilized for memberships in the different community organizations. The money has been used for educational purposes. The money has been used to support the PA State AAUW and the National AAUW projects, including Fellowships. Currently, people are downloading e-books and some book stores are closing. It would be worthwhile to look into possible other future fundraisers. Some years ago, we did publish a cookbook – *the Educated Palate* – as a fundraiser. It consisted of recipes submitted by our members. I think I still have mine.

16. I would like to give you the opportunity to talk about the problems you see with the Branch and AAUW in general?

- At one time we did have many more meetings and many more study action groups, but over the years, more and more women have entered the work force. And why not? They are educated women. They are women who can contribute to society in many ways and as a result they don't have the time for as many volunteer endeavors. There are also many single parent households, many of which are headed by women. Therefore, unlike in the past when fewer women had employment responsibilities outside of the home, today

women have to limit the amount of volunteer activities in which they can be involved. This universal phenomena also impacts AAUW.

17. What are the most significant accomplishments of the past and where should the Branch head in the future?

- Please see question 11 above for some of them. I think we are a respected group here in State College. We have made a name for ourselves because of the good things that we innovated and support and because of our visibility in the community. Anyone who hears AAUW realizes that it is an outstanding group.

In the future, I see STEM (Science, Technology Engineering and Math education) being implemented for girls at the elementary school level. I would like to see it go even to preschool. I would love to see us, if we have the finances and fortitude, to develop a head start type of program whereby you catch these girls at a very early age, and let them see that they can do anything. They have Title IX – they can now be in sports. Let them realize that they can do the same things that the little boys do and that they can excel in anything that they are interested in. We can get them interested in STEM subjects by exposing them to it. I think it is phenomenal what Mary Dupuis and the group of STEM volunteers have been doing these last few years. They started at the higher levels of schools, and now it is being adapted to the lower grades.

18. What other women's issues do you think that the Branch should address?

- Pay equity for women is a major issue that is currently being addressed. Currently, single women receive only 77% and married women 66% of men's salaries. Another issue is the Family Medical Leave Act, which currently permits *unpaid* time off for maternity or other family situations, and guarantees their jobs while they are out. However, these are *not paid* leaves, and therefore, many women who would like to take advantage, and really have the need to take that time off, cannot afford to do so because they can't afford it financially. It would be nice to see that they could take this time off and have the possibility of being paid. I understand that there are very few countries in the world that do not offer to pay women during the time they have family medical needs. I think there are three countries: Sierra Leone, Swaziland, and Papua New Guinea, who, like the US, do not provide pay. It is an issue that AAUW is working on and it would be wonderful to see it accomplished soon.

19. What are your last words that you would like people to know about your involvement in AAUW and the State College Branch?

- AAUW has enriched my life and I can't imagine not having been a part of it. Even as I have aged and become less active in many of the community activities in which I used to volunteer, I still cling to it. I try to work at the Used Book Sale, serve on the Scholarship and Grants Committee, and work my shift at the Arts Festival Information Booth. But regardless, I will always feel that I am an AAUW member because it has really been phenomenal for me and it's something that I cherish. I think it has helped me in many ways and I hope I have helped in some way.