

This is the first in a series of interviews with Morgan Hill's charter members. The Branch will celebrate its 35th year in December 2016.

Barbara Cate, Co-Founder of AAUW Morgan Hill Branch

Barbara Cate founded the Morgan Hill Branch of AAUW in 1981 with Irene Blaine and was its first president. Carol O'Hare, Marilyn Gadway and Carol Holzgrafe visited Barbara at her Pajaro Dunes vacation home in August 2015.

"It was a fun time and gave me a raison d'être," states Barbara Cate about starting the Morgan Hill Branch. "It was a labor of love. I have only good memories."



Barbara Cate August 2015

Background and Early Career

Barbara Cate was born and raised in Fresno, California, to strict German parents. She had intended to attend UC Berkeley, but her parents insisted that she stay closer to home. So she ended up going to Fresno State where she received a degree in Social Welfare in 1964. ("I was programmed to be a nurse, but that fell apart for reasons too boring to talk about," she said.)

After a year of working for the Fresno County welfare department, she "beat-footed [sic] it out of there" and moved to Santa Cruz where she enjoyed a single life "well-spent." After all, it was the 60s and there were a lot of young people there. She met her husband Charles when he hired her to work for Santa Cruz County Welfare Department as a social worker, although they didn't start dating right away. She and Charles were married in 1969 and moved to Ventura, where Charles was assistant city manager and Barbara worked in adoption. Throughout her career she often did the work of a graduate social worker but without the MSW degree (or the MSW pay).

"After a stint as a small business owner (purified water), I ended my career as a special education teacher for the visually impaired."

Joining AAUW

Her AAUW life started in 1970 when she joined the Ventura branch. “There I was in a new town. I took the initiative to find a branch. I knew about AAUW from my sister and had also heard about it in college.”

Barbara and Charles moved to Morgan Hill in 1978 when Charles was hired as city manager. The first thing Barbara did was join the Gilroy AAUW Branch. “I had a 4½ year old son and wasn’t working, so I knew that AAUW was a way to meet people. They were so happy to have me, as I was young.” She remembers being in charge of membership and culture and whatever else she was asked to do.

Starting the AAUW Morgan Hill Branch



The idea to start a Morgan Hill branch came from Irene Blaine, another Gilroy member who lived in Morgan Hill. “Irene came to me and said, ‘I have a proposal for you. I think we should have our own branch; if you’ll be president, I will be the program chair.’ Irene was very much into issues, such as water quality.

Environmental issues were her main focus. She wanted to get the branch out of being just a social club as she perceived the Gilroy branch to be. (AAUW was generally into very serious issues then. I remember studying colored toilet paper back in Ventura and the impact the dyes had on water treatment.)

“So I agreed, not knowing what I was getting myself into. I spent 1980 and 1981 going to every local, state, and regional AAUW convention and meeting. I did all the leg-work to learn what was involved in starting a branch. It was fun to get away from home and meet these dedicated, stimulating women around the state.

“All those state officers started sending me literature on every single position. Our guest room contained stacks of papers and file boxes. The state knew how to do things. It was wonderfully organized. Someone from AAUW CA even came from LA and spent a week with me. She was a dynamo!”

In September 1981 Barbara and Irene were ready to hold their first public meeting to promote the new branch to the Morgan Hill community. A newspaper article appeared in the *Morgan Hill Times*: “Women college graduates interested in community problems, international relations, challenges for education or advancement of women are invited to join a local group in forming a branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW).” Seventeen women attended that meeting at the library, including Marilyn Gadway, who was new to Morgan Hill. She immediately became involved and offered to help. Marilyn and Barbara

began to meet weekly to organize and plan. Irene continued to preside over monthly general and board meetings as the branch took form.

At the October organizational meeting, bylaws were approved, along with annual dues of \$25 (\$9.25 for the branch). Twenty-seven women attended the November meeting, and the group voted to endorse the American Cancer Society Great American Smokeout.

On December 3, 1981, a charter celebration event was held at Marilyn Gadway's house, with 35-40 women present. Officers were elected: Barbara Cate, president; Irene Blaine, programs vice president; Carol Anderson, membership vice president; Maxine MacDonald, secretary; and Claudine Stirn, treasurer.

"People were still signing up to the last minute. I think that they thought that being a [charter] member had status." There were a total of 41 charter members, including 8 who also belonged to Gilroy. Women were joining "to find a connection. Morgan Hill didn't have a lot of working women at the time. Many women had school age children, and they needed something to do and women to connect with."

The official AAUW charter granting recognition to the Morgan Hill Branch is dated December 7, 1981.

Barbara recalls the challenges of those early days, such as "training people who had no training. I just assumed everyone knew how to do their job" and was surprised when not everyone one did. She was also surprised by the amount of paper AAUW generated. "I had stacks a foot tall for every single committee. We filled out lots of paperwork for the charter. It was time consuming, but there were no glitches."

Morgan Hill Branch Continues



Barbara served as branch president 1981-1983, program vice president and historian 1983-84, and Educational Foundation (now AAUW Fund) chair 1984-1985. (It is thanks to Barbara that we have a complete collection of newspaper clippings and photos from the early 80s.) She didn't drop her membership in the Gilroy immediately, but her heart was with Morgan Hill. "We were a group of much younger women than they."

In April 1986 Barbara left Morgan Hill when her husband took a job in Fairfax (Marin County). Later they moved to Calabasas in southern California and then, when Charles retired, returned to Fairfax where they still live.

When asked why she has continued to be a member of the Morgan Hill branch all these years, her answer, “Why not? I’m very sentimental. I had a lot of history there. I joined southern Marin branch for awhile but am not a member there now.” However, she is thinking about rejoining that branch as long as they don’t ask her to do anything!

Even though Barbara left Morgan Hill many years ago, her name may be familiar to branch members because of the AAUW endowment established in her and Irene Blaine’s names. Marilyn Gadway remembers, “We had been raising money from the Wildflower Run. As we started to make more money, I said: we are viable branch; we should have our own endowment.” In 1991 the Irene Blaine/Barbara Cate/Morgan Hill American Fellowship Endowment was established to celebrate the branch’s 10th anniversary. In 2002 at the AAUW CA Convention, ten branch members, including Barbara Cate and Bob Blaine (widower of Irene Blaine), celebrated the endowment’s completion (\$100,000).



Barbara with Bob Blaine April 2002

Barbara’s fondest memories of AAUW: “Making new friends; going to conventions with my friends.” She thinks she went to every convention until she moved. (In 1983 the national convention was in San Francisco.) Barbara still has many friends in Morgan Hill and occasionally visits. She attended the branch’s 20th anniversary lunch in December 2001.

Importance of AAUW

“I have always had a more global approach for raising money for higher education. When I had a son, I paid more attention to scholarship sources. Boys, it seemed, always had more opportunities for funding education. AAUW fit my idea of how to focus on education, and I always thought girls needed that boost and the boost comes in the form of money. I like the emphasis on graduate studies.”

Barbara’s parents always stressed the importance of education. “My mother must have been my role model. ‘Make yourself better, aspire to be better,’ she told us. “My sister and I were never given a choice to attend or not attend college; it was expected. My father said we needed a degree in case the man we married left us!”

Although AAUW’s emphasis on education for women is paramount, Barbara found other reasons to appreciate the organization. “For me AAUW demonstrates how women can inspire other women and not necessarily do what is ‘expected’ of them. Patti Trantow was the first woman I met who kept her maiden name, and this was in the 1980s. Michael Sue Brown-Korbel had a double last name. And jewelers came in the female gender—I still have a lovely bracelet made for me by Marianne Thornton.”

Current Activities

So how does Barbara spend her time now?

“I’m in a very active book club; we read everything, fiction and non-fiction. 11 months, 11 books, 11 women. I travel a lot. (We’re going to Scotland next week and spent five weeks in Italy in the spring.) I like travel, books, museum crawls. I am part of an active group who seek out art exhibits and experiences in the Bay Area. I exercise a lot. I go to the JCC three or four days a week, doing deep-water aerobics. Health and friends are important.”

AAUW Morgan Hill: Thirty-Five Years

Would the Morgan Hill branch exist without Barbara Cate's hard work? Probably. Would it have happened 35 years ago and become such a vibrant part of the community? Maybe. But because it did, we say, thank you, Barbara!

Carol O’Hare and Carol Holzgrafe