



## Member Profile

Barbara Palmer, “almost a charter member”

When AAUW Morgan Hill celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2016, Carol O’Hare and Carol Holzgrafe interviewed all eight charter members who were still part of the branch. We spent hours with them, learning their stories, each one different, and what AAUW had meant to them. These interviews were published in our newsletter, *The Wildflower*, and are posted on the branch website under Branch History.

Now, it was time to check in with those women who were not quite charter members, having joined a year or two later. The first of these interviews was with Barbara Palmer, who became an AAUW member in 1984. We wanted to discover how AAUW has been part of her life and what positions she has held.



*First Communion, 1956*

An early influence in Barbara’s life was her Aunt Marcella. “She was a single, career woman before her time - not a traditional woman at all. She often took us to Milwaukee on the train to see plays, Christmas decorations, etc. She was very social, and I’m sure I got my enjoyment of a social life from her. On the other hand, I got the traditional house stuff from my mother.”

Barbara moved through Catholic schools, from elementary to earning a degree in English and Kindergarten-Primary Education from Cardinal Stritch University, an all-female college near Milwaukee. Along the way, she made several close friends, many of whom she still sees regularly.



*Spring Luncheon, 2004*

### Background and Education

Barbara was born and raised in Racine, Wisconsin. “I had an idyllic, Father Knows Best kind of childhood,” she said. “We lived in a lovely, safe, middle-class neighborhood.”



*75th birthday celebration in Florida with college friends, 2023*

## Teaching Career

After graduation, Barbara stayed in Milwaukee and began working life by teaching 32 second graders at St. Eugene's Catholic School – and earned \$4,800 a year.

“The priest paid men teachers more than women teachers since they had families to support,” she said. Barbara also noticed that female teachers with families did not earn more.

Teaching second grade appeared to be Barbara's future until one of her students had a stroke. When he returned after several months, he was unable to read.

“I didn't know how to help him,” Barbara said. So, she returned to Cardinal Stritch for her M.A. in Special Ed/Learning Disabilities, and then spent the rest of her career teaching special education.

## Barbara and Allen Meet

On a summer break from teaching, she and a friend were working at a modeling agency and scored jobs as “Cigarette Girls,” handing out samples of Alpine cigarettes on street corners. One corner was near an office where Allen Palmer was working. (He was with IBM.) He noticed the attractive, young women, accepted their free matches but not cigarettes. He later returned to invite them for drinks and dinner. Since there were two of them, they thought it would be safe, so accepted and enjoyed the evening at a restaurant in their local neighborhood.

However, Barbara did not easily give out her phone number, but Allen, was persistent. The next day he drove his Cadillac to visit every business in that neighborhood in his attempt to learn where to find her, which he did.

“When he asked me out, I said no. I was very busy having a good life, tennis lessons, baby-sitting etc.” Barbara said. But eventually they dated. “A mere week after the first date he asked me to go to Ja-

maica. I went – but without my parents' blessing.” This was in June; Allen proposed in a few months later, and, after he asked many times, she finally said “yes.” They were married in May 1975 and will soon celebrate their 49th anniversary.



*Barbara and Allen's wedding, 1975*

## Move to Morgan Hill

In 1977 Allen was offered a great job at IBM in San Jose on Cottle Road. Although Barbara was sad to leave family and friends, she looked forward to a new adventure and thought California would be an awesome place to live. So, they house hunted and bought their current home in Morgan Hill.

Barbara's first job in the area was at the Children's Center in San Martin, a residential treatment center for special needs boys, not an easy place to work. Then she went to the San Jose school district where she was resource specialist for the program where students with special needs were pulled out from regular classes. She stayed at Randol School for about 30 years, teaching 450 students over the years. She retired in 2002; Allen had retired from IBM ten years previously.

## Joining AAUW in 1984

After a few summers off from teaching and not meeting other women, Barbara looked around for something to connect her with the Morgan Hill community. “I heard about AAUW from a neighbor.” And there, in March 1984, “I found my

happy place. I had met my people; there was an instant click.” One of these was Patti Trantow, a branch charter member, and they have been close friends ever since.



*With Patti Trantow, New Year's Eve in Las Vegas, 2006*

The branch was much more social in those days with fewer programs and no special interest groups, but lots of parties.

After working with a few committees, Barbara was finally convinced to take on the branch presidency for 1991 - 1992. Although the branch was much smaller then, it was still a big job, as she was teaching full time and doing other volunteering. But typical Barbara, she was very organized and managed it all.



*Branch fashion show, 1995*

## **Tech Trek at Stanford**

After Barbara retired in 2002, she was ready for a new project: Tech Trek. She and Carol Holzgrafe were dorm moms (adult counselors) at the AAUW California Tech Trek Science and Math Camp for Girls at Stanford University, then 3 years old. By 2005 Carol was camp director and asked Barbara to be the assistant director, a position she served for several years.

“It was all hard work but very enjoyable and rewarding,” Barbara said. “And I had many ‘interesting’ experiences.” One year they had to battle a hornets’ nest in a dorm room, and another time frat boys in the next building invited the girls to a party. They quickly disappeared when we told them the girls were only 13. Barbara’s most delightful story is when one of her dorm group asked when the maid would come to clean her room. Never, was the answer.

There were challenges too, with occasional homesickness and the early years when every girl had a cell phone. Not a good mix.



*Barbara with MH Tech Trekkers and branch members Lila Washington (front left) and Susan (Oldham-Fritts) Hines (back right), 2012*

## **Wildflower Run**

Like other branch members, Barbara was involved in the Wildflower Run from its beginning in 1984. At first, when there were only female runners, she did registration, then for many years she was

in charge of tally (timing with a stop watch and determining runner placement) for the 2K, 5K and 10K races. “There were no chips or electronic timing. It was done with numbered tongue depressors and it was chaos!”

In 2004 she agreed to take over as Wildflower Run director, a job she did for five years.



*Wildflower Run, 2007*

**WFR Director 2004-2008, in her own words:**

“I was actually eager to be Run Director. I had worked on the Run for so long and had become very much aware of what I wanted to change. If we were to continue this fundraiser, we needed to improve things every year to make the Wildflower Run the best it could be. My three goals were:

- Increase the number of runners.
- Increase member volunteers. I wanted to get as many members involved before, during, and after the run as possible. I spoke at many branch monthly meetings and events to encourage participation.
- Increase the amount of money we raised. If we were doing all this work, then we needed to ramp up our advertising to get more runners and form an official sponsor/donor program treated as seriously as the tally and the water stop committees.

“Previous Run directors had been quite casual about meetings, committees, and the overall structure of the Run. I decided that we needed formal committees with responsible chairs who would take this seriously. I also set a calendar of meeting dates.

“To meet my goal of increasing income for AAUW Funds, Tech Trek and local scholarships, I talked to several people who were into fundraising for non-profits to help me understand what we needed to do. Marianne Thornton, Carol O’Hare, and I visited a friend of Marianne’s who had set up the fundraising structure for another organization. We got many ideas from her. One of our members volunteered to put together a “Presentation Packet” that we took to local businesses, asking them for donations. That was the beginning of the sponsor committee that exists today, now in a much-improved format. It was a big step in getting the word out about AAUW and the Run to the community. Even if we did not get money from a business at first, we would make them aware that we were there and doing good things for women and girls.



*Wildflower Run, 2004*

“The most rewarding part of being Run Director was getting to know our members and really seeing what this organization is capable of doing. I spoke to or emailed just about every member every year to be sure that they would be volunteering in some way and to let them know how important it was for each member to be involved.

“I kept a spreadsheet (had to learn how) with members’ contact information with a column listing their Run jobs. It was tough, but it made strides toward the participation we have today. I was amazed at what our small Morgan Hill branch could really do!

“The biggest challenge was following up on those committee members who needed an extra nudge to get motivated to do their job. I continued to be involved with the tally team and also did sponsors and donors for the first two years or so. In a nutshell I just did too much that I should have asked others to do or help with. It was also difficult dealing with MHUSD, the city, the police department, etc. In my final year I asked Stacy Forgy to take on the job of administrative assistant, and she took over all of these aspects.”



*Wildflower Run, 2008*

What I remember most is the wonderful camaraderie and friendships I developed, and I was amazed at what intelligent and powerful women I knew. I still feel that way today. Not every branch could have pulled this large event together and raise so much money. I truly believe that our branch was, is and will always be special.

Thanks to our Run, the branch is known throughout the state for wonderful members, fundraising ability, and all the things we do in our community.



*Quilt made with Wildflower Run t-shirts, 2008*

### **Wildflower Run Sponsor Chair 2009-2020**

After five years of directing the Run, Barbara next took over the sponsor committee, chairing it for 11 years. “Every year we thought of something better to do and raise more money.”

In 2003, the year before Barbara became Run director, the branch raised a total of \$11,000 from run proceeds, sponsor contributions, and member donations to support all its charitable activities. Five years later, as the Run continued to grow, the figure had doubled. It then more than doubled again during her years as sponsor chair.



*Wildflower Run, 2017*

## Other Branch Activities

In addition to the many years that Barbara devoted to the Wildflower Run and to Tech Trek, she has helped the branch in other important ways. She organized the annual installation ceremony, has been a loyal member of the bylaws committee since 2002, serves as new member mentor, and currently is Membership VP.



*Bylaws committee holiday lunch hosted by Barbara with Carol O'Hare (standing left), Judy Kinker, and Joan Ensign (seated right), 2008*



*With Sandy Clark at her farewell garden party, 2009*

Barbara's commitment to the branch and her community have not gone unnoticed. She was the 2007 Community Foundation Philanthropy AAUW honoree and was branch AAUW Fund honoree in 2005, 2013, and 2021.



*Philanthropy Dinner with Margo Hinnenkamp*

## AAUW Memories

"The most memorable AAUW activity for me was many years ago when about 12 Morgan Hill members journeyed to Long Beach for four days to attend the AAUW California Fall Conference. We stayed on the Queen Mary with lots of other enthusiastic members. State and National conventions were always enjoyable because there were so many bright, bubbly women with different ideas and outlooks, plus workshops on many timely subjects."



*AAUW Morgan Hill gang at AAUW convention in Washington, D.C., 2018*

## Community Involvement and Other Activities

Barbara has always been active with St. Catherine's Catholic Church but gave up work as a liturgical minister last year because of a Parkinson's diagnosis. She and Allen even dressed up as clowns to entertain children at the Shriners Hospital.



*Making children smile at the Shriners Hospital.*

She also spent 20 years as an ESL tutor at the Learning and Loving Center that served immigrant women until it had to close during the pandemic.



*Teaching at the Living and Loving Center, 2006*

More recently she has volunteered at the local animal shelter, walking and playing with dogs. This is where she found her most recent favorite – the friendly miniature poodle, Teddy.



*With her new best dog, Teddy, 2022*

Barbara and Allen frequently traveled overseas: to Thailand, to China with an AAUW Morgan Hill group, many times to Europe and, her favorite, an African safari where she visited a school and talked to the teachers.



*Visiting a school in Africa, 2012*

## Importance of AAUW

“I recently joined the AAUW National Legacy Circle. That is how money set aside in our trust will be eventually left to AAUW. This was a great way for Allen (who also strongly believes in AAUW) and me to be sure that AAUW is able to continue its work toward its mission into the future.



*The Legacy Pin, 2022*

“AAUW has really changed my life. I recognized the gifts I have and the education I have received, and I want to share that with other women. And I don’t think I would have been as outgoing as I am without my Aunt Marcella and AAUW.

“I hope I am remembered for my giving, caring nature, love for people, and the desire to serve where and when I am needed. My Catholic faith has played a huge part in forming my character, the friends I have chosen, the marriage I have, and my overall attitude toward life.”



*Celebrating Christmas Eve 2023 at Fleming's Restaurant with a salted caramel espresso martini – and Allen.*



*Barbara and Carol Holzgrafe (right) at Stanford's main quad in front of Rodin's "Burghers of Calais".*



*With Allen in Africa – hippos in the background, 2012*



*With Allen in Africa – at a Masai house*

**— Carol Holzgrafe and Carol O'Hare**