

My Years with AAUW

Beth Wyman

I have been asked to recap my extensive experience with AAUW that began in the summer of 1959 when my family moved to Walnut Creek. My children were 18 months and newborn. Getting settled was, as always, full of challenges, but by spring we began to feel established, although I remember thinking that I would never again be “not tired!” It was during this stressful period that I discovered the Walnut Creek Branch of AAUW. It seemed to be such a grown-up endeavor that did not have anything to do with babies! At an introductory meeting I was asked about my interests. At that point, I think it was – well, you name it – whatever! On that occasion I met Bernie Fawley, who was in pretty much in the same sort of situation, so we connected (and became good friends) and decided to sign up for a couple of sessions on Kitchen Tips where I learned, among other things, how to section a grapefruit. It is a useful skill!



Beth around 1980

A couple of other branch members, who had seven children between them, had been experimenting with sourdough recipes and decided to produce a sourdough cookbook. Through their efforts, I became involved in doing what we would now call “outreach.” I scheduled AAUW presentations and did local publicity for their self-published double-sided, 40 page book titled *Ye Olde Time Sourdough*. This was a lot of fun and a great outlet, and we all became experts on sourdough.

This chapter of my life ended when my husband was offered a promotion at the newly opened IBM plant in south San Jose in 1960. We sold our little house (now under Highway 24) and bought a bigger, brand new house on a cul-de-sac built in a former Saratoga orchard. We moved in with Jeff, now three years old, and Barbara, one and a half. As soon as we were settled I joined the Los Gatos-Saratoga Branch of AAUW and was asked about my interests. I casually inquired if there was a childcare group. The response was “No, but you could start one!” So, definitely in my own interests, a childcare co-op group was quickly established. Each month a different member managed the care arrangements. It worked very well for several years and saved all of us young mothers a lot of headaches and money. In addition, we and our children became excellent friends. My husband and I also joined the Gourmet Group, which met at different homes and always with exotic menus. As a result, we all became better cooks and also made lasting friendships. A few years later, my Walnut Creek buddy, Bernie Fawley, moved to Saratoga and joined me in the AAUW group. We remained the best of friends until her death in 2012.

In 1970 our family moved to Morgan Hill where there was no AAUW branch until 1982 when two women, Irene Blaine and Barbara Cate, decided there was a need. I was proud to become a charter member of the Morgan Hill-Gilroy branch, which soon established the now 31-year-old and very successful Wildflower Run. I remember being asked to time the runners for one of those early races and forgetting for a few seconds to click the stopwatch. Hey, those seconds count, but nobody complained. At that time Barbara Cate remarked “It takes an army to do this,” and it still does.

During the years before there was a Morgan Hill branch, I continued to help Saratoga’s Homeless Committee, as my friend Bernie wouldn’t let me get away easily. I was also on the Morgan Hill City Council 1979-1983, but that’s another story.

In 1991 I moved back to Saratoga and re-joined the Los Gatos-Saratoga branch. Because I was working full time, my main AAUW activity there was participation, along with Bernie, with the Homeless Committee. We did a fundraising Spring Tea, and for many years most of us actually home-cooked the cuisine that was served to more than 100 guests. In addition we did the planning, ticket sales, and the set-up and take-down on the big day. We also held a hugely popular silent auction during the Tea and volunteered our time at the Shelter, as well. We were early sponsors of the Georgia Travis Women's Shelter in San Jose. (Georgia was a retired social worker who recognized the need for services for homeless women, She was an energetic member of San Jose AAUW.)

In 2007 I returned to Morgan Hill and, as usual, was asked about my interests. During my years in Saratoga I had attended a South Bay writer's group, and I inquired about that. The response was, "No, we don't have a writer's group but you could start one!" So after a few months of deliberating, that is what happened. Half a dozen women showed up, and we continue today in 2014, with many of the initial members, meeting bi-weekly as Friday Writers. Although we actually do a lot of writing - several of us are published authors - the women are excellent mentors who share their expertise on a wealth of subjects ranging from social problems to finance, and, as a result, we are all better informed. As a group we were pleased to have been acknowledged as the inspiration for the wonderful book celebrating *30 Years of Scholarships for Women and Girls – The Wildflower Run* published in 2013. Happily the branch fulfilled its fundraising goal of \$30,000 on the 30th anniversary of the WFR and all for a good cause – education for girls and women.

I can't imagine spending all of these years without the encouragement, adventure and inspiration I have acquired from AAUW. I am very fortunate. I am a better person. I have met so many interesting women. I have made lifelong friends. I have contributed to a worthy cause. Thank you, AAUW. It has been an exceptional experience!