

Mary Ellen Scribner -- AAUW Austin Branch 2008-2018

I have been a member of AAUW Austin for forty of its ninety-five years, but this morning I am going to take a chance and focus mostly on the last ten—at least hit some of the highlights. I say “take a chance” because we read or hear every day that it’s the short term memory that goes first, plus many of you have been with the branch the past ten years also and may remember things differently! There are two reasons that 2008 seems like a good place for me to start. First, that was when I more or less returned to active duty with the branch after spending eleven years working overseas in international schools during the academic calendar months. Secondly, that was the year that the AAUW National Education Fund approved the creation of the Ann Richards American Fellowship Fund, and along with other Texas branches we began raising money to fund the new fellowship. The completion of that fellowship was announced at the 48th Biennial state convention in April. Eleven of our members earned the yellow rose pin in a final Sisters of Ann push to complete that fund this year. Proud to be one of them!

In 2012 the Branch hosted the 45th Biennial AAUW Texas Convention. Elizabeth Newell served as local arrangements chair, and Dr. Rosemary Morrow and Pat Rehm were co-chairs of that convention. YOU have the opportunity to make some history in 2020 when Austin will host a very special convention celebrating the centennial of women getting the vote. Pam Wolfe is on the state board, and Dr. Linda Welsh has agreed to be the local arrangements chair. When they call, please consider joining the effort! Or call them and volunteer!

AAUW is a nonpartisan organization that promotes equity for women and girls, and we have a long history of creating social change through public policy efforts. For much of the last decade Dr. Sylvia Garcia has been our public policy chair. She has led us in an aggressive voter registration effort, many of us becoming deputy voter registrars and working to expand access to marginalized voters. We have also lobbied at the TX Capitol a number of times for equal pay and to support Planned Parenthood with its focus on women’s health. And we’ve lobbied at the State Board of Education for more inclusive textbooks and curriculum for social studies and for science books that present science accurately. On Women’s Equality Day in 2013, along with the Georgetown branch, we hosted a “When Women Succeed, America Succeeds” event with Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi. Linda Young secured the use of the auditorium at Austin Community College’s Northridge Campus, and about two hundred enthusiastic branch and community members filled it. Police say that up to fifty thousand attended the Women’s March in Austin on January 21, 2017. Twelve to fifteen were AAUW Austin members dressed in their purple shirts walking along together. On February 23, 2018, the Austin Branch and Global

Austin cosponsored a program by Pakistani-Canadian journalist, activist, and author Raheel Raza, for an open to the public meeting at Austin's North Village Branch Library.

More and more support of STEM (or STEAM now that art has been added to the mix of science, technology, engineering and math) has been on our agenda here in the 21st century. EYH morphed into Girlstart, an amazing non-profit with a mission "to increase girls' interest and engagement in STEM through innovative, nationally-recognized informal STEM education programs." AAUW Austin is proud to have Girlstart's executive director Tamara Hudgins as a member. About fifteen years ago, Latinitas, another non-profit focused on "empowering all girls to innovate using media and technology" came on the Austin scene. Lilac Bauer became the branch liaison to both Girlstart and Latinitas in 2012 and began coordinating the many ways we have provided support to these two great organizations, helping with their conferences by preparing goody bags for and then handling conference registration and distribution of t-shirts and goody bags to conference participants, serving as presenters at conferences and other events, doing data entry of surveys, etc. It soon became apparent that Lilac's title should be STEM coordinator, and in 2017 the need for her to have a committee was recognized. Her team now includes Jackie Hardee, Janani Janakiraman, Carol Midboe, Judy Reinhart, Katherine Staples, and Ginny Tannebring.

Janani, who is a full-time IBM employee, has done so much for the branch over the past decade. She volunteers as a core team member of IBM's Women in Technology Community Service Organization: part of her service is maintaining the AAUW Austin website. In 2015, 2016, and again in 2017 her volunteer service was recognized with community grants of \$1000 to \$2000 annually with the Branch as the designated recipient. The first grants were used to purchase tablet computers for Latinitas and Mainspring Schools, to support Latinitas' Code Chica conference, and to support technical education at Girlstart, Latinitas, and Mainspring Schools. For the latest and largest grant, we looked beyond those three most frequent beneficiaries and purchased hand-held microscopes and field guides for Girls Outside, STEM books for Bookspring, a couple of laptops for GenAustin, and a projector for GirlForward. Latinitas had asked for a drone and drone kits, and there was enough money to do that also.

Janani has communicated her passion for AAUW to twin daughters Kavya and Priya Ramamoorthy who are student members of the branch and have started a student chapter at the University of Texas which they both attend. When the twins were in middle school, they heard about a girls' swim team required to practice in an old pool while the boys' team got to use the high school's new pool and equipment, just the sort of discrimination that the United States' enactment of Title IX in 1972 was meant to prohibit. Their Title IX research work led

them to seek help from the branch. Veronica Johnson arranged for a meeting at her home with other AAUW members, and Nita Hornbeck, Pat Rehm, and Barbara Waite volunteered to mentor them in web development. The girls were also able to interview Lisa Maatz, the AAUW top policy member in Washington, D.C., and went on to win the Gold Medal in the 2012 National History Day Competition for their website "Title IX: Empowerment Through Education," and they received AAUW's Title IX Champions award. Then, in November of 2014 Nickelodeon's NICK NEWS producer and crew filmed an episode in Austin on Title IX, featuring our Title IX champions. Yes, our champions—we have become very proprietary of the twins. Anita Knight can even identify which one is which!

An endowment started in 1927 and completed in 1992 yields interest that is used for annual fellowships to women in the last year of their doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin. Since 1985 from two to five of these fellowships have been awarded annually. We typically receive twenty to twenty-five applications. For the past several years I have loved serving on the selection committee—it is a window into what women from all over the world in every field that can be studied at UT are delving into these days. I always wish we could help all of them but as higher education grows more and more expensive, the selection committee has opted to give fewer but larger grants each year so that they will have a real impact for the recipients. My fellow selection committee members are Jean Bessent, Joyce Pulich, Janet Widoff, and Ruth Rubio. Love working with you ladies!

Now, a momentary flashback to 1978. I moved to Austin and joined the Branch—I think the first meeting I attended was at Green Pastures! That was also the year Janie Patterson got around to joining AAUW even though she had earned her degree from UT in 1946! Janie was a special gift to AAUW and the Branch from the day she joined until her death on March 20, 2012. She was involved in many activities in addition to her active participation in the Branch where she quickly joined the contemporary literature book group and indulged her love of cooking in the culture and cuisine group. A journalism major, she began editing the newsletter soon after joining the branch and continued to until the summer of 2009 when it was becoming too big a job for her to compile it and get it printed and then mailed. I said I would do it if I could send it electronically by email; the board agreed that it was time to advance our use of technology. Members were happy to receive their newsletter in this way, and it soon became a primary communication tool. By the summer of 2015, I was needing to focus more time elsewhere, and Anita Knight became the editor of the newsletter and broadened its reach even more. Now, as Anita is spending more and more of her time on travel and global friendship efforts, she would appreciate someone else taking over the editorship of the newsletter. Is it your turn?

As the current decade began, the Branch was well on its way to complete twenty-first century technical functionality in its communications and management. In the fall of 2011, when AAUW National launched a Site Resources group to offer website solutions and provide a degree of standardization for AAUW Branch websites, Anita Knight went into action. Existing content from the old website was moved, and she received technical problem solving assistance. Our beautiful new website was launched early in 2012; Anita and Janani continue to expand its features. Are you on Facebook? A Facebook page was created for the Branch in August 2014. It currently has 197 likes!

Are you aware that there is a virtual branch, the AAUW TX Lone Star Loop on Facebook? It has 253 members at this time. AAUW National also has a Facebook group; currently it has over six thousand members. If you aren't part of some or all these groups, you are missing out on lots of information, advocacy and inspiration.

Every time I receive an evite to a branch meeting, I remember the telephone trees we used for this purpose in the past. I can't remember how many years Norma Julian called me monthly to ask if I wanted a lunch reservation! Anyone here today who remembers Norma Julian? Like Janie Patterson she was a longtime branch member who lived a long, full life, dying in 2011 at the age of ninety-nine. There must be some link between longevity and AAUW membership! Using evite saves time, avoids a lot of confusion, and gives accurate counts and meal preferences for branch events. Linda first used it for the summer social that Hurricane Harvey canceled. New program vice president Jean Bessent continues to put it to great use for programs and lunches. Look for an evite mid-month to the winter social being hosted by the past presidents on December 2.