



Newsletter – June 2020



Looking Back, Looking Ahead

We hope that you are all doing well and finding strength and solace during this pandemic. Looking back, we realize how fortunate we were to have so many opportunities to see one another at branch programs. Looking ahead, until we are able to get together physically, rest assured that our branch leadership team continues to find new ways for us to stay connected.

We typically close down for the summer and say goodbye until the fall. This year, however, you will continue to receive newsletters all summer long. Also, you'll have opportunities to take part in virtual events on Zoom.

We had excellent programs planned for the spring, but as you know, our best laid plans have gone awry. The two programs that were scheduled for the spring will be part of our fall lineup.

This edition of the Bennington Branch newsletter features a potpourri of stories and resources:

- celebration of Wendy Lyons (p. 2)
- discussion of interview and workshop recordings on the AAUW website (p. 3)
- a report on the virtual Vermont Suffrage Symposium (p. 4)
- a report on ongoing virtual programs and programs planned for this fall (p. 5)
- member resources, including timely Racial Justice information (p. 6)
- a book recommendation (p. 6)
- pandemic journal entries by the Scribble Sisters, one of our branch special interest groups (p. 7-8)
- a travelogue by a member whose trip was interrupted by the lock-down (p. 9-10)

Gudrun Hutchins and Dawn Rodrigues,
Newsletter Editors

Wendy Lyons Completes Associate Degree



Wendy Lyons (front left) and Judy Murphy (front right) have been sheltering from COVID-19 together at Judy's home. Jennifer Kern (back left) and Gudrun Hutchins (back right) are social distancing during our get-together.

Scholarship Recipient and Branch Member Wendy Lyons has completed the requirements for her Associate Degree from Community College of Vermont. The Bennington Branch was planning to celebrate her graduation at the June picnic which was cancelled.

The scholarship committee celebrated Wendy's accomplishment last Thursday, highlighting her academic work as well as her passion to contribute to our community and help others in need. Wendy has already started summer courses at MCLA in North Adams to work toward her Bachelor's Degree.

2020 Legal Advocacy and Public Policy Fund Donations Exceed Previous Years' Donations

There have been many extraordinary experiences during this spring's coronavirus pandemic isolation. The contributions of branch members to the 2020 collection for the National AAUW Legal Advocacy and Public Policy Funds is one of these experiences. Kudos!

Our 2020 collection raised \$ 765.00, our highest total yet! Further, National AAUW board members are matching any contributions received by May 31st dollar for dollar up to \$ 23,000.00. A deadline we were easily able to meet.

Our total contribution of \$ 843.00 includes \$ 78.00 for LAF collected during our last public, 2019 spring program. Thank you to Treasurer Norma McShane for issuing a check to the Legal Advocacy Fund in the amount of \$ 460.50 and a check to the Public Policy Fund for \$ 360.50.

Diane Rehm Interview on the National AAUW Website

By Catherine McClure

Late last year national AAUW began virtual convenings. The April 14, 2020 event featured an interview by AAUW CEO Kim Churches with Diane Rehm former NPR radio host and current host of “Diane Rehm: On My Mind,” a weekly podcast. Kim Churches framed the conversation within the current Coronavirus Pandemic to highlight Diane Rehm’s latest book published this spring, *When My Time Comes*. Those of you who are familiar with Rehm’s recent focus know that she is an advocate of exercising the “right to die.” During the interview with Churches, Diane Rehm emphasized that it is even more critical than ever during this pandemic to have the difficult conversations about your own end of life wishes with your loved ones. Watch for her new documentary in the spring of 2021 on PBS.

Editor’s Note:

You can listen to the interview (audio only) on the national AAUW website. To find it, go to www.aauw.org and click the search icon (it looks like a magnifying glass and is on the left of the Donate box). Type in “Rehm” to connect to the audio of the interview and read additional information about Rehm and her new book.

Equity Network Events On the National AAUW Website

By Gudrun Hutchins

National AAUW has also posted a number of interviews and workshops with sound and video on the national website. Some of these are instructional videos on how to be a better speaker or writer to support AAUW issues. Others are AAUW staff interviews of various people involved with interesting aspects of the pandemic.

The easiest way to get there is to go to the same search tool that looks like a magnifying glass. Type in “webinars” and choose the second item “Equity Network Events.” Scroll down to the specific workshops that you want to view. (Make sure you keep scrolling down past the sign-up form for Equity Express!)

For the Webinar on May 18, 2020 titled [STEM Leadership in Online Resources During COVID-19](#), an AAUW staff member interviewed squid scientist Dr. Sarah McAnulty. She explained that she became interested in squids as a child because they have been on earth more than 500 million years. More recently, Sarah has become a “Science Communicator” and created a non-profit program for students called “Skype a Scientist.” During the pandemic she has signed up more than 5000 scientists and 10,000 classrooms to work together virtually. She explained that laboratory scientists are becoming bored while sheltering at home and the classroom teachers need them urgently to inspire their students. Even if you don’t know anything about science, her enthusiasm is infectious.

During another interesting webinar on May 12, 2020 titled [State Legislator Roundtable Discussion](#), four state legislators discussed pandemic issues in their states. The legislators were chosen to be of a different party than the state’s governor and were encouraged to be critical of what was happening in their state. The program was organized and moderated by AAUW public policy chair Kate Nielson.

These webinars can be watched live when they take place if you register. At the end of live webinars listeners may ask questions. For me it is easiest to watch them on my laptop whenever I need a little inspiration and have time.

A Symposium: One Event, Many Perspectives: The Centennial of Women's Suffrage

<http://www.ethanallenhomestead.org/suffragesymposium>

A few of us had originally planned a field trip to Burlington on May 16 to take part in a suffrage symposium that focused on Native American and black women's experiences. Although the event (co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters and the Vermont Commission on Women) was canceled, the speakers agreed to create videos of their presentations. As a result, we can all take a virtual field trip, sit back with a cup of iced tea, and get some perspectives on suffrage that contrast with the programs we've offered to the community this past year. Below are short reviews of the presentations.

"Navigating Freedom in Two Worlds" by Melody Walker

Melody Walker, of the Elnu Abenaki Band of Ndakinna, speaks about her tribe's belief that women's voices must be integrated into all aspects of the world around them. With her newborn baby in her arms, Walker explains what it is like to live in a connected community where women are treated as equals. Women participate in all tribal decisions (the equivalent of voting in the outside world). Everybody speaks and everyone creates; as a result, women's voice is integrated into all things. (Note: Walker focused on the positive aspects of her life and her community and did not point out that the eugenics movement in Vermont attempted to strip the Abenaki of their culture.)

"On the Shoulders of Our Ancestors and Mother Earth" by Beverly Little Thunder

A member of the Standing Rock Lakota Band from North Dakota, Beverly Little Thunder now lives in Vermont. She is admittedly angry and sad about the misogyny in the white world that has permeated native communities. Although the Snyder Act in 1924 permitted Native Americans to have full voting rights, the Constitution left it up to the states to decide; as a result, it wasn't until 1962 that all Native Americans had the right to vote. Survival of native identity has been a struggle; however, according to Ms. Little Thunder, youths are stepping up and speaking out, especially about the destruction of the planet.

"The Courage of their Convictions: African American Women in the Fight for Women's Suffrage" by Kathryn Dungy

Kathryn Dungy is a professor of Social and Cultural History at St. Michael's College. Her talk focuses on the impact of Delta Sigma Theta, a black sorority founded at Howard University just weeks before the famous 1913 Women's Suffrage Parade. Ms. Dungy states matter-of-factly that "there is no nostalgia for the suffrage movement." Passing the 19th did not guarantee voting rights for African American, Asian American, and Native American women.

Branch Programs

We hope the pandemic will allow us some opportunities to see one another face-to-face, but are working on alternate plans, too. Here is the tentative schedule for branch programs:

Ongoing

Isolation Book Group

A temporary replacement for the Branch Book Group, the Isolation Book Group has already held two virtual meetings: In April, we discussed *Year of Wonders: A Journal of the Plague Year*, by Geraldine Brooks; in May, we discussed *Greek to Me*, by Mary Norris. For Thursday, June 18 at 1:00 pm, our book selection is *Circe*, by Madeline Miller. At that meeting, we'll select another book for July. Let Kathy Wagenknecht (aauwbennvt@gmail.com) know if you're interested in joining the group for *Circe* or for a future discussion. You will receive a link to the ZOOM discussion by email.

Scribble Sisters

Weekly Zoom meetings. Check with Kathy Wagenknecht (aauwbennvt@gmail.com) for Zoom invitation. (Read a few of the Scribble Sister's Pandemic Journal entries on pages 6 and 7).

August

Program Committee member Mary Brady is planning an innovative event—a virtual suffrage fashion show, with AAUW members modeling vintage dresses from Linda's Antique Clothing Loft in Adams, MA. The show will be filmed at Park McCullough House, featured on our branch website, and broadcast on CAT-TV. See the July newsletter for more information.

September

Fall potluck or virtual party on Zoom.

October

Discussion and screening of "Suppressed: The Fight to Vote." This short film lays out compelling evidence of voter suppression, focusing on the 2018 gubernatorial election in Georgia. It stresses the need for constant vigilance to assure that all citizens are able to vote.

Candidate Forum (tentative)

Program Committee member Margaret Howland is exploring possibilities for AAUW to again host a non-partisan political forum for local candidates running for state office. If we decide to move forward with this event, it will be filmed at the Bennington Fire House, either with or without a live audience. In either case, the event will be available for viewing on CAT-TV and via our branch website.

November

"A Woman, Ain't I?"

This re-enactment of Sojourner Truth's life is performed by Kathryn Woods and supported by the Vermont Humanities Council. Originally scheduled for April 21, it will be re-scheduled for November and either broadcast virtually (via Zoom) or held at the Bennington Performing Arts Center – Home of Oldcastle Theatre. See July newsletter for updated information.

Member Resources

<https://bennington-vt.aauw.net/resources/>

Thanks to those of you who have contributed resource suggestions to previous newsletters. We welcome additional suggestions—not only for reading, but for listening and viewing, too. This month, we have added a new resource category: **Take Action**. This section will include suggestions for issue-oriented resources, including legislative and policy recommendations.

To submit resources for the next newsletter, send an email to Dawn Rodrigues (dawn.rodrigues@gmail.com) or Gudrun Hutchins (vtgudrun@comcast.net)

Take Action Resources

--Racial Justice Resources **(timely)**

You can sign a petition and or donate to demand justice for George Floyd colorofchange.org (or text FLOYD to 55156)

You can donate to any or all of the following:

[Reclaim the Block](https://www.northstarhealthcollective.org), a Minneapolis organization
North Star Health Collective

<https://www.northstarhealthcollective.org>

Louisville Bail Fund

<https://actionnetwork.org/fundraising/louisville-community-bail-fund/>

Brooklyn Bail Fund

<https://brooklynbailfund.org/>

--Submitted by Jane Burkhardt (via her niece)

See additional Racial Justice Resources under **News>Member Resources>Take Action on the Branch website:** <https://bennington-vt.aauw.net/take-action-resources/>

Book Recommendation:

At the Existentialist Café: Of Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails by Sarah Bakewell

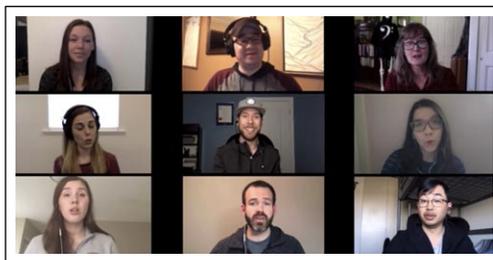
So many members of our local AAUW branch belong to book clubs, including our own AAUW group. I recently recommended this book to one of the book clubs to which I belong. I first read this book in November of 2016 just after the election of our current President. It was astonishing to me the poignancy of this book to our own “age of anxiety.”

Sarah Bakewell’s writing is excellent. Her sense of humor and narrative style brings to life existentialists, Jean Paul Sarte, Simone de Beauvoir and others including Camus, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. As a reviewer in Kirkus wrote (March 2016), Sarah Bakewell puts the work of the existentialists into “a historical context” and explains how an era of dissatisfaction and anxiety gave rise to a definition of life as “choice, action, and self-assertion”. The existentialists’ belief in engagement and action in the face of anxiety and despair has been evident for many of us for some time. This book validates or restores one’s hope. And you just might want to try an Apricot Cocktail!

--Submitted by Catherine McClure

Smile, Listen, and Enjoy:

Longest Time -- Quarantine Edition



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpAKcQufacc&feature=youtu.be>

Sung individually at home by the 26 members of the **Phoenix Chamber Choir**, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

--Submitted by Jennifer Kern

Pandemic Journal Entrees by the Bennington Branch Scribble Sisters

The Scribble Sisters are the writing group of our branch who mentor each other and have published two books of short stories, memoirs, and poetry.

During the past months, some of the Scribble Sisters have written entries for a "Pandemic Journal." The newsletter editors asked for samples and received several from two members.

May 27, 2020 Kathy Wagenknecht's Journal

I have coined (maybe) a new word: COVIDIOTS.

You know who they are. You've seen dozens of photos and live-streamed videos over the Memorial Day Weekend. They were tit-a-tit in a pool at the Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri. They were packed into a church in Mississippi. They went to a stock-car race in Georgia.

But you can also see them storming the State House in Michigan. Holding "Don't Tread on Me" signs in Wisconsin. Making a fuss about wearing a mask into a store in Vermont.

They seem to be either too self-involved, defiant, and bent on relieving their boredom to notice that their scofflaw behavior has potentially dire consequences or they are intentionally confrontational, daring someone to "push them around."

I suppose it would be mean-spirited to hope they all get sick. Mainly because, in their refusal to isolate, they would spread their infection to many innocents. Perhaps a better solution would be to follow China's lead and build quarantine barracks. Anyone found behaving in anti-social ways would be quarantined for 14 days.

Or perhaps looking to the example of our Puritan forebears we should shun them. Make them wear a scarlet letter on their foreheads. "I" for Idiot would do double duty, also standing for their singular interest in self-gratification.

May 5, 2020 Margaret Howland's Journal

Today is PAVE (Project Against Violent Encounters) hotline day. I had only one call, from a woman who, fleeing a violent ex, was looking for shelter. She had ended her trip from Maryland in Middlebury, with little knowledge of where she was. She wondered about assistance in Delaware, or maybe Maine. I referred her to the Middlebury shelter, and she agreed to call them.

How are victims of domestic violence managing these days? I have visions of homes filled with stress: low incomes, or no income, staying calm in the face of needing to help restless children with their school lessons, via Zoom, thinking about shopping but more afraid to go out. Is one of them near the breaking point? Is one of them yelling nonstop at the children, who would love to be elsewhere but are forbidden all but the backyard? How does the victim make a phone call for assistance when the house is filled with people, including an angry frustrated partner?

I am feeling sad about not being able to see my children. We moved here to be near them, three daughters and their families, and we are only about 40 miles from the farthest. We talk a lot on the phone, but have had very short visits, and then only for essentials. Our nearest daughter and her husband twice brought our groceries. That took three hours out of her day, in which she also teaches third grade via Zoom. She was extremely cautious when stopping in, was in the house only minutes, touched nothing, including us. She says she feels lucky to have her parents alive and well, and she plans to keep us that way. Another friend volunteered to shop for us, and did a couple of times. But she too has other responsibilities. So I am using the supermarket's shopping service, and consider it supporting local business.

Our eldest daughter arranged a Zoom video meeting of as many family members as were available. It was great to see them all but still not the same as in-person hugs, big grins, and personal comments.

Pandemic Journal Entrees Continued

(all by Kathy Wagenknecht)

I want to go outside and ask
"If in a mask
Can I just stay
And spend the day?"
I know it might be smart to say,
"I'll go away."
But if I do, I'll wonder who
Can make the rule that I must go?
I think I know,
But I'll not ask
While in a mask.

I lay in bed last night thinking about where our wills are right now. I mean the physical papers. I guess I mean our intentions, too. Fear and anxiety are the shifting substrata of my days.

"Eat, drink, and be merry" sounds good but I think it takes too much energy. Lethargy is my watchword and my new life skill.

I saw on Louise Penny's website "I always said I wanted a clean house but I didn't have time. Now I know that's not it."

Yesterday I ate cookies. Pat and I made chocolate chip coconut oatmeal cookies for the Free Sunday Supper. I baked 25 big cookies and 5 small ones. I wrapped up 2 dozen big cookies to give for the supper, and I ate 1 big one and 3 little ones. I ate them for breakfast and lunch. I didn't feel bad about it. They were nutritious – they had oats and nuts in them. And isn't there something about chocolate being healthy?

I'm pretty sure that COVID causes seizures. I know I've been as seized up as an old gasoline engine. Maybe the cookies can act like the golden grease squeezed from a lube gun, freeing frozen parts. Parts not frozen by snow.

To Color or Not?

I am not a Scribble Sister, but am including this personal vignette.

When I spoke to my sister in March while she was sheltering with her husband in their second home in Aspen, Colorado, she made the statement: "Before this is over, the natural hair color of all women will be revealed." I answered that it would not only be revealed to friends and family, but also to many of the women themselves.

I am one of those women. I no longer had any idea what my hair looked like without being artificially colored. At first I dyed my hair to maintain my professional image as more and more young PhD's and graduate students joined my scientific specialty. Later it became a habit. Now I wanted to find out what the gray looked like and decide whether or not to eliminate the chemical treatments. I was ready to embrace the gray, but only if it looked half way decent.

As it turns out, my natural hair color is nearly white at this point, but it has darker streaks in it that make it look "dirty." I consulted my hair stylist by telephone and she told me that to make very light gray look really good, it would need to be bleached to eliminate darker streaks and conditioned to prevent it from becoming brittle.

That made my decision easier – if a chemical treatment would still be required, I might as well continue with my current color. I also have a deep desire for everything to be "the same" after we survive this nightmare and having the same hair color might help.

Gudrun Hutchins

Pandemic Travelogue: Round-the-World Trip Ends in Vermont

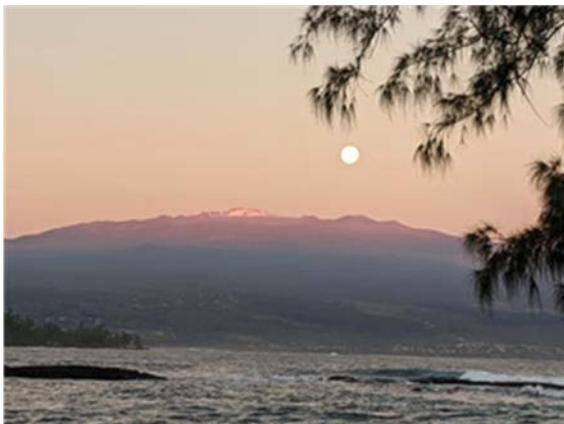
By Julie Mackaman

Editors' note: During our last board meeting, we proposed inviting guest columnists to provide content for our branch newsletter until we can once again safely hold — and use the newsletter to describe — branch meetings. We asked Julie Mackaman to share her experience as a Vermont traveler who was on a trip around the world when COVID-19 turned from an epidemic into a pandemic. This is her report.

It was to have been a trip of oceans and seas, of tropical islands and full moons: my husband Rico and I set out at the beginning of February of this year for our most ambitious Mud Season escape since we moved to Vermont in 2002. A bucket list trip taking us westward around the world across four months, it would perhaps be our last hurrah as aging independent travelers, or "backpackers" as they're called to this day.

With few logistics arranged in advance aside from several connecting flights, we crossed the Pacific to Hawaii's Big Island. Here we saw green sea turtles, stood on the southernmost point of the United States, and swam at dawn as February's full moon was setting over Mauna Kea.

We then headed south below the equator to the Antipodes, the direct opposite side of the planet from our home in Pownal. On the east coast of Australia, along the South Pacific, we walked in neighborhoods with parrots on telephone wires, hit jazz clubs, and fiddle music jams, and rented a car to drive inland to the eerie Glass House Mountains. Off Australia's west coast, we bicycled the perimeter of an island in the Indian Ocean, where we spotted quokkas, the adorable but endangered mini-marsupials of the same family as kangaroos and wallabies.



Flying northward toward the equator, we landed in Indonesia where we passed many full and happy days in Bali. One morning we woke up before dawn and hiked on a ridge to watch the sun come up. We donned traditional sarongs to enter water and cave temples, reacquainting ourselves with Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in this Hindu island within a Muslim country. We stayed in a bungalow on the small island of Nusa Penida, where I slipped out every morning in the dark and walked 10 minutes along a jungle path — passing two temples and wandering chickens, cows, pigs and languor monkeys — to get to the beach for my daily sunrise dip in the Java Sea. At night we resumed our 47-year-long backgammon tournament, which we play for a dime a point in the coin of the realm. (I won 9,000 rupiah, about 60¢.)

The coronavirus that had been a whisper in China when we left the U.S. had not yet arrived on our remote shore, and we felt safe in our relative isolation. But as social media reports from home became increasingly urgent, it was impossible to ignore: the virus had arrived in the U.S. Friends advised us against returning, urging us to stay sheltered in paradise. And so, as the days passed, we continued to swim and snorkel, hike, follow the phases of the moon, and drink beer. Having lulled ourselves into a dreamlike state, we tried to ignore news of the struggle for toilet paper in stores back home.

But as our phones lit up with notices of our future flight cancelations, of breaking news of quarantines, and of whole countries closing their borders, we snapped awake: we had to get home before it was too late.

Rico pushed buttons on his tablet until he found a flight two days later that would avoid Europe and bring us back through Australia. Then the worrying began in earnest. What if the sniffles we'd developed were something more menacing than a cold? Would we be allowed to board the plane? Would we be held in quarantine in Brisbane or Los Angeles? Would we ever make it home to Vermont?

It took 65 hours, including brief overnights in airport hotels in Bali and Brisbane, a missed connection in Los Angeles, and a layover in Chicago, but finally we made it back to the Albany airport and then home on March 17, Saint Patrick's Day.

Across the following weeks of self-quarantine followed by stay-at-home isolation, my phone kept popping up with reminders of long-ago canceled flights. It was as if our trip were still continuing somewhere without us on a parallel planet. Maybe on Earth 2, Julie and Rico were gazing at the full moon in Sri Lanka, and Julie was celebrating her birthday in Sicily, and Rico, his birthday in Malta. Maybe they were splashing in the Mediterranean Sea, and Julie was winning backgammon matches in euros instead of rupiahs. And maybe, after crossing their last ocean (the Atlantic), they landed on their last island (Manhattan) with sand still in their hair — four months after their departure. As Hemingway wrote, "Isn't it pretty to think so?"