

Northwoods News - December 2023



MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-PRESIDENTS ANDREA AND LINDA

Greetings!

We hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday, spending it in the way that you most enjoy, whether in the midst of family commotion, or quietly with a few close friends. Hopefully, we're all getting mentally and physically prepared for the season to come. Time to get out the skis, parkas, wool hats and those safety grips to strap onto our boots. It's also time to curl up inside and enjoy good books, movies, and sitting by fires, wearing comfy socks.

There is some exciting news to share about our branch! We recently received a certificate from Jan Carey, the president of AAUW Minnesota, congratulating us on increasing our membership by fourteen new members (27%) between February 2022 and February 2023. That growth was due in large part to our special events, like the successful garden party in 2022, for which we owe a huge thank you to our fundraising leader, Kay Vandervort. Another important factor that contributes to our membership increase is the activity of the Public Policy Committee that provides great community visibility.

The Northland Gathering that the Ely branch is hosting for the AAUW branches in Northern Minnesota has been scheduled for **Saturday, October 12, 2024, at the Grand Ely Lodge**. We're very grateful to Kristen Switajewski for her willingness to be a co-chair of the committee, but we need someone to join her as the other co-chair. Kristen is a very

experienced event planner through her work with the Ely Chamber of Commerce. Please let us know if you would like to be involved and if you would be willing to co-chair.

We were happy to hear that the AAUW State Annual Meeting will happen in person again this year. It will take place in Hastings, MN on **April 26 and 27, 2024**. All members are invited and encouraged to attend. The last in-person meeting in St. Cloud was enjoyable, informative and a great way to interact with AAUW members from around the state. We encourage you to give it consideration and hope that Ely will have a strong representation again next year. There will be more details to come in early 2024.

Hopefully, everyone takes the time on occasion to look at the AAUW National website – Home – [AAUW : Empowering Women Since 1881](#). It highlights all the important equity work that this organization stands for and strives to accomplish. The “Explore the Issues” tab provides information about the legislation that is important to advancement of gender equity. The “Take Action” tab provides suggested “Calls to Action” nationally and by state. On that same page, see the “Two-Minute Activist,” click on “Act Now” and there are suggestions for contacting our legislators about specific legislation to support and actions to oppose.

Finally, we hope to see all of you at our **December holiday gathering on Tuesday, December 12, at the GEL at 5:30**. There will be NO ZOOM option for this last meeting of the year, as it will be largely social time, while we bid on our amazing silent auction items, and win prizes in the raffle drawings. Please feel free to bring friends to the meeting and be sure to make a new friend at every meeting. We are the most wonderful group of women!!

Andrea and Linda

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

December 12, 5:30 pm, GEL: Branch meeting
- Holiday celebration with auction and raffle

January 9, 5:30 pm, GEL: Branch meeting
- Lisa Pugh will discuss her nearly 4,000 mile canoe trip from the headwaters of the Missouri River down the Mississippi to the Gulf.

February 13, 5:30 pm, GEL: Branch meeting

- Beth Peterson, Minnesota Senior State Director with Vote Run Lead, will discuss the political power of women as voters, candidates, and leaders to create and sustain an equitable democracy.

March 12, 5:30 pm, GEL: Branch meeting

- Kelly Klun, Klun Law Firm (and AAUW branch member!) will discuss estate planning.

April 9, 5:30 pm, GEL: Branch meeting

- Annual meeting

May 14, 5:30 pm, GEL: Branch meeting

- End of the year banquet and silent auction

If you need a ride to a meeting or event, please be sure to contact Linda Sutton or Linda Bergum!

BOARD MEETINGS are held the fourth Monday of the month.

NORTHWOODS YOUNG WRITERS CAMP

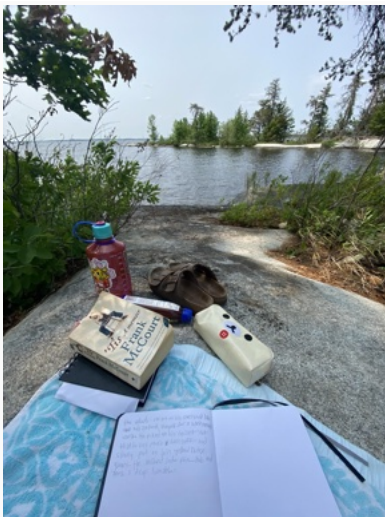
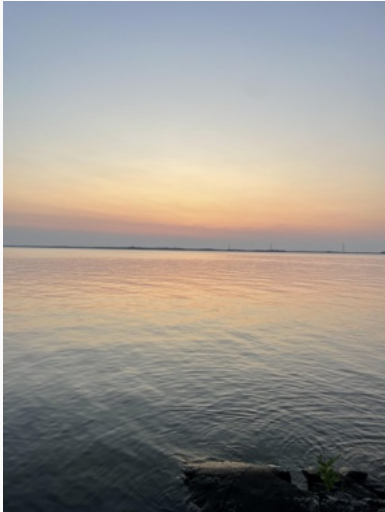
By Lauren Rehbein

Atsokan Island is paradise. Swimming, exploring, reading, watching sunsets, gathering around the fireplace, making new friends, paddleboarding, and of course writing, made my experience unforgettable at the Northwoods Young Writers Camp. This summer was my third time participating in the camp. I keep coming back because I can relax and have fun while also getting incredible advice from authors Margi Preus, Mary Casanova, and Erin Soderberg Downing.

Each morning, campers wake from their slumber by the ring of a large brass bell and head to breakfast in the dining hall (which is a beautiful screened in porch) with scrumptious food made by the chaperones and authors. From there, campers sign up for a one-on-one session with one of the authors to get feedback on their writings. Besides mealtimes and meeting with the authors, there is a lot of free time for campers to work on writing while also being able to take breaks to swim and get to know other people. What I love most

about the island is the multitudes of different areas to write alone, or to gather with others and share projects. My favorite place to write was on a sand bar, where I would plop down on my beach towel and write while also getting some vitamin D!

So much of what I have learned about writing has come from the authors on the island. Because of this camp, I was given constructive criticism and tips that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. It has allowed me to excel in my English classes. I would like to thank the AAUW for the generous grant given to me which helped cover the cost of this wonderful, life-changing experience.



LET'S TALK ABOUT: DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS AROUND THE HOLIDAYS

By Anna Heil

'Tis the season for families to come together and partake in holiday traditions of all sorts... Cooking together, sharing gratitude, giving gifts, drinking wine, catching up on each other's lives, and—oh no! Talking about politics! Global events! Upcoming elections! Media coverage! There can be a lot of difficult terrain to tread, so here's a guide to navigating tough conversations with people you love.

1. Prepare yourself with facts.

Whether it's abortion access, voting rights, or climate change, there is a lot of misinformation out there. You'll feel more confident in navigating a difficult conversation if you can shut down overused and uninformed talking points with facts. It's especially important to know about how the issues you care about vary from state-to-state. Resist the urge to parrot emotionally charged clips you may have seen online or on the news, and get the nitty gritty data before you head into a conversation unprepared. Check out this [fact sheet from Planned Parenthood](#) for an example of a good place to start.

2. Don't be afraid to make the conversation personal.

Facts alone are never going to be 100% effective in changing someone's mind. We are not logical creatures—we're emotional and social ones. Sharing your own narrative is far more likely to build empathy and resonate with the people across the table from you. Take this [2016 study](#) of door-to door canvassers who were advocating for gender rights. Canvassers reflected on their very personal experiences with transphobia and how it had impacted their lives with voters in South Florida. Those conversations then substantially reduced the voters' transphobia for the next three months (as measured by follow-up surveys in the research.) We each have a story, regardless of political party. Help destigmatize polarizing topics by sharing the personal experiences you have had. Hearing from someone they love, in-person, may have a profound effect on a friend or family member who is used to getting their news from one-sided sources (or someone who is used to only engaging with opposing viewpoints angrily and online!).

3. Listen to viewpoints that are different from yours.

Why might someone hold the viewpoint they do? It's easy to make assumptions if you approach conversations without curiosity. We can each be guilty of living in our own little echo chambers. Try and take some time during these conversations to step outside of that bubble without judgment. If you allow someone with a different viewpoint to be heard, they are more likely to be open to introspection. This is also an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the issues you care about. How and why can you refute talking points you don't agree with? Embrace deeper understanding by listening and being open. Check out [this article from Time](#) about having uncomfortable conversations, or listen to an episode of Open to Debate for engaging back-and-forths about hot topic issues (I recommend their

recent re-run of “Is Anti-Zionism the New Anti-Semitism” in light of the current atrocities in Palestine).

4. Practice.

Get comfortable talking about the topics you have been mulling over before you sit down and start carving up a turkey. It may be easier to start with someone who is like-minded but willing to roleplay than the sister-in-law who you suspect will disagree with you right off the bat. See if you can remember some of those facts you researched, share your story, and be curious. Recognize that these conversations will likely involve some discomfort, but the more you practice having them the easier it will become.

5. Give grace.

The holidays are a stressful time. It's ok to enjoy the time without changing anyone's minds about the key issues you care about. In fact, it's likely that people's minds and hearts will not change immediately! Someone you sit with this season may not fully understand why you are so passionate about the issues facing women, our country, and the world. The more comfortable you get having these types of conversations and sharing your point of view, the more likely those conversations will be compassionate and productive. This of course does not mean you don't have a responsibility to use your privilege to speak up on behalf of those suffering—try and step out of your comfort zone and engage if these conversations come up, but keep things civil. Don't automatically write someone off because they voted differently than you. Instead of approaching a difficult conversation with hostility, try open-ended questions to understand the “why” behind someone's beliefs. Find common ground and go from there. If you are not in a space where it's safe for you to openly disagree, don't feel the need to force a conversation at that moment. Consider bringing it up at a different time, or in a less public setting. Be detached from the outcome, set and hold boundaries, and know when to take a break.

Now get out there and try having a difficult conversation!

PUBLIC POLICY

AAUW Ely, Public Policy Committee

by Mary Setterholm

We NEED You-Get Involved in Public Policy work!

The Public Policy Committee spent the last two meetings crafting the Public Policy input to the Ely branch 5-year strategic plan. Through this work, we looked at AAUW National Public Policy priorities and crafted our plans around those priorities albeit with a local focus.

One of the areas of focus continues to be legislative advocacy at the state and national levels. A major focus, both nationally and at the state level is **passage of the ERA**.

Why We Need the ERA

The progress our country has made on gender equality through the courts and patchwork legislation can be reversed. Sex discrimination does not have the same legal protection as other constitutional classes, such as race, religion, or nationality. This constitutional double standard means that hard won legislative and court victories against sex discrimination are not permanent—and can be rolled back or difficult to enforce.

The lack of constitutional equality reaches every aspect of women's lives. The ERA would clarify, once and for all, that sex discrimination in employment and wages, reproductive rights, insurance, Social Security, education, and more is a violation of constitutional rights. Importantly, the ERA would also provide new opportunities to seek legal recourse when an individual faces sex discrimination and would place the burden of proof on those who discriminate instead of those fighting for equality.

At The National Level:

The public policy team engages in many efforts on this key issue, including but not limited to:

- Working in coalition with other gender equity and civil rights organizations, including the ERA Coalition.
- Mobilizing AAUW advocates and members through targeted calls to action on important legislation, like J. Res. 17/S.J. Res. 1 which would remove the deadline for ratification of the ERA.
- Joining timely amicus briefs to assist the courts in coming to informed decisions about the ERA.
- Engaging directly with elected leaders and the public through calls, letters to political offices, and comments and testimony in hearings.
- Providing voter education resources on key equity issues to consider during elections and offering information on how elected officials have voted in the past (more about this and Get Out the Vote guides at the AAUW Action Fund).

All members are encouraged to lobby for AAUW Public Policy priorities by using the Two-Minute Activist – sign up here – and by writing to our representatives. Members of

AAUW's Action Network receive urgent e-mail notices and text messages when their advocacy is needed most. With the online Two-Minute Activist tool, it takes just minutes and an internet connection to make your voice heard on issues impacting women and girls!

At The Local Level:

ERAMN is planning for its #Day1forERA on February 12, 2024, the first day of the Minnesota legislative session. They are hoping to have a record breaking turnout. Veronica Johnson from AAUW's Minneapolis branch is planning on having an AAUW table at the event. It would be great to show AAUW Ely branch support by having a good turnout from our membership. With enough interest, we can work to arrange carpooling and perhaps other interesting outings while in St. Paul for this event. Please contact Mary Setterholm if interested in participating in #Day1forERA (mary.setterholm@gmail.com).

Kelsey Waits, MN State Public Policy Chair, is offering 2 ZOOM sessions to discuss the state of the ERA in MN, whether it will be on the ballot in 2024 or 2026, and what our work will be to get it passed when it is on the ballot.

- Sunday, Jan 7 from 2-3 pm: The State of the ERA in MN. Register here:

<https://umn.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJMpdugtqjsoGtwHxu2tsgY9ZtXZOkZvEP>

- Tuesday, Jan 16 from 7-8 pm: The State of the ERA in MN. Register here:

<https://umn.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAvdOmhpjMiHNEVelaYgYFDx1vIINLrKY5>

NEXT Public Policy Meeting: January 16, 4:30 at the Boathouse



FUNDRAISING

By Kay Vandervort

Piggy Banks

Do you have an AAUW ceramic piggy bank? Have you decorated it? Are you filling it with all that random loose change you find at the bottom of your purse and littering your dresser?

More banks have been ordered and will be available at the December meeting. Then plan to bring your filled, decorated bank to the annual meeting in April for the emptying and pig parade. But because this is an ongoing fundraiser, we'll send you back home with your empty bank so it can be refilled over the summer.

Christmas Auction and fun

Once again we will have a bucket raffle and sell two-part tickets at 2 for \$5, 5 for \$10, and 14 for \$20. Keep half and put the other half into the buckets (actually bowls) corresponding to the items you'd like to take home. Chances are good you'll win something. There will be a door prize drawing and a silent auction with items that range from wine and chocolate to a Tiffany platter in the original blue box.

Use of a credit card will be possible, however, you'll need cash for the bucket raffle. Please invite your friends to attend with you whether they are interested in joining or not.

Pie and Mimosa Pop Up

In January, we will schedule a pie and mimosa pop up breakfast at Sarah Paro's house. Watch your e-mail for details. (Pie breakfast is to make up for having just come through the holidays when we were too stuffed to enjoy the dessert. This time we'll start the day with pie.)

AAUW MEMBERS HELP SOLVE A MYSTERY...

In November, several AAUW members attended the Ely Library's Roaring '20s Mystery Event, where participants were given identities and clues to solve a murder. We didn't win, but we sure had fun!



MEMBER UPDATES

We're excited to welcome a number of new members this fall! Please welcome:

Kathleen Antilla Kathy.antilla@gmail.com (dual member with Duluth branch)

Nan Snyder whitshell@aol.com

Gerard Snyder whitshell@aol.com (welcome our first male member!)

Meet Anna Heil!

Most people in Ely who get to know me are surprised to learn that I was born in San Diego, California, and have no family connections here in Minnesota... So you may be wondering a) how did I end up here and b) why did I stick around after the first winter of 40 below zero weather, instead of lounging on a "sunny and 60s" beach in southern California??

I first traveled to Ely when I was 15 years old for a dog sledding trip in the Boundary Waters with the Voyageur Outward Bound School and the Girl Scouts of America. I

traveled on scholarship to Minnesota (and flew in a plane by myself for the first time!) to meet up with five other teenage girls and experience what winter camping over New Year's Eve was like. I fell in love with the Northwoods on that trip and the Outward Bound ethos of challenging yourself and pushing your comfort zones.

I continued pursuing outdoor education while in school at Colgate University in upstate New York (where in between environmental geography and film and media studies classes I was ice climbing frozen waterfalls and backpacking the High Peaks) and when it came time to graduate, I decided to try and make a go of it in the outdoor industry. I returned to Ely, where I became a summer intern for the same Outward Bound School that had first gotten me invested in experiential learning! I've stuck around Ely pretty much ever since, also working as a guide for Women's Wilderness Discovery and now as a Program Director for the YMCA Camp Northern Lights. With a love for adventure, the outdoors, and hands-on learning, Ely is a pretty wonderful place to be!

I love reading, mountain biking or cross country skiing (depending on the weather), watching movies with a big bowl of buttery, salted popcorn, and low-quality arts and crafts. My family has always supported my adventurous heart and we've often joked about the backwards gender roles we each occupy (stay-at-home dad, breadwinner mom, ballet-dancing older brother...) I also love my Ely community, which definitely includes the ladies of AAUW. Don't be intimidated by the ever changing hair color... Now that you know me, come say hi!



Say hello to Pam Ransom!

I was born and grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. It was a good place to live and I had great fun with a close group of ten girl friends. I went to DePauw University and earned my Bachelors Degree in 1974. Later I went to graduate school and earned a Masters Degree in Social Work in 1979. And then in 1991, I earned a Juris Doctorate degree at the Kent College of Law in Chicago.

In the 1970s, I began working, and I retired from full time employment in 2017. Throughout these years I've loved the challenges, the people I've met, and friendships.

My first jobs included working with juvenile offenders at the DuPage County Youth Home (IL), and at Lutheran Child and Family Services I counseled pregnant women who were considering placing their children for adoption.

Then in the 1980s, I worked at the Chicago Hearing Society as Executive Director, where we provided services to people who were deaf and hard of hearing (e.g. audiology services, sign language interpreters). And then I worked at the Chicago Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities. We advocated for accessible employment, housing, transportation and emergency services, and worked on the passage of state legislation to make telecommunications accessible to people who were deaf / hard-of-hearing.

In 1992 (my favorite job... smile), I moved to Washington D.C. and was hired by a consulting firm, to bring together national Disability Leaders and the Seven Regional Bell Telephone Companies to negotiate the passage of Section 255 of the "Telecommunications Act of 1996" which would make telecommunications more accessible to people with disabilities.

The Legislation passed, and in 1997 I moved back to Oak Park, Illinois and started my own consulting firm... Working with telecommunications companies, assisting them in making their products / services in compliance with the new legislation.

And then in 2008, I changed direction and began teaching at North Park University in Chicago until I moved to Ely Minnesota in 2017.

So, why Ely, Minnesota?? In the 1950s, my parents, soon after they were married, drove from Chicago to Ely and canoed / camped in the Boundary Waters.... Then in the late 1970s and '80s (when I was married), we came up once / sometimes twice a year...to canoe and camp in the Boundary Waters and Quetico. Then more recently, starting in about 2009, I started coming up to Ely to enjoy summer vacations at the Northernaire Resort. And I knew that I wanted to live in Ely .

In July 2017, I moved to Ely, on Mitchell Lake, right next to the resort where I'd stayed for years. I've met interesting people and made new friends. I volunteer with the Ely Area Food Shelf as Treasurer and I love volunteering on "food shelf" days. I'm also a member of AAUW, Empower, and I appreciate the artists and arts organizations in Ely. I plan to get out snow-shoeing and cross-country skiing this winter. And I'm looking forward to the warmer weather to be able to go out kayaking.

As I finish writing this article... I'm looking out my window at the trees, the lake ...thinking about dear friends, and that I wouldn't want to live anywhere else....



MEMBERSHIP

Have a friend who might be interested in joining? Either of the presidents or Kay are happy to follow up with that person.

Membership forms are available at all meetings, or you can schedule a coffee time and invite a member or two to join you and your friend to talk about what we do and why we love AAUW.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Ely Branch of AAUW respectfully acknowledges that we are on the homelands of the Lake Superior Bands of Ojibwe people and within the ceded lands of the Treaty of 1854, where they retained rights to hunt, fish, and gather.

We also recognize other Indigenous peoples who lived here before the Ojibwe people. These include Dakota, Cree, and other tribes that have occupied and utilized this land.

We recognize the perseverance and survival of our Indigenous neighbors who continue to live throughout this region. We're deeply grateful for the multitude of ways that the Anishinaabeg have and continue to contribute to collective well-being through sharing of knowledge and time.