

AAUW TIMES

**Elgin Area Branch
1920-2020**



*Working for 100 years to promote equity for women and girls,
life-long education and positive social change*

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AAUW's Mission Statement
AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education and research.

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We dedicate our May newsletter to two of our long-time members who are no longer with us.



IN MEMORY OF WILMA JEAN BOOTH

By Jelayne Ewers

Wilma Jean (Davis) Booth was born on September 1, 1938, in Buncombe, Illinois, located in the southern part of the state. She graduated from Vienna, IL High School and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in home economics and a Master's Degree in childhood education from NIU in DeKalb, IL. She taught for 25 years in district U46 at Ellis Middle School in Elgin and Canton Middle School in Streamwood. She was an accompanist for the school choirs in addition to her teaching. She retired in 1994. She was a member of the Elgin Area Retired Teachers Association, the Illinois Retired Teachers Association and the National Education Association.

She met Jack Booth while going to elementary school. They attended different schools, but they played softball on opposing teams. They later attended the same church, and when Jack got his driver's license, began dating. She married Jack on May 13, 1956. They both attended Southern Illinois University for a short time and then moved north where Wilma attended NIU and then graduated, while Jack worked so that she could finish college. He then went to school while she worked and put him through. Together they had two girls, Jannea Booth and Melana (Alan) Beyer and two granddaughters, Lauren Beyer and Clarissa Murphy. She went to be with her Lord on April 10, 2020 after suffering from a seizure and discovering she had a form of leukemia. She died after contracting Covid-19.

Wilma was a very special lady with lots of talent and wisdom. She had a quiet demeanor, but when she spoke everyone listened carefully, as they knew she was very sincere and knowledgeable about many things. She was an exceptional pianist, teacher, leader, wife, mother and grandmother. Wilma had fantastic leadership and organizational talents. She was a very detailed person, making notes on many things, including what she wore to a particular meeting so that she would not wear it twice. She was inspired to keep a notebook on her activities after reading an article called, "Who Cares", written by Nate Adams, a director of the Illinois Baptist Association. She was also a very compassionate person and a great inspiration to many people. Wilma was a delicious cook and whenever she brought food for an occasion, you knew it would be something special, as well as delicious.

She was very active in her church. She led her life as a Christian, and it was apparent in everything she said and did. She began playing piano for church services as a child. She taught Sunday School for many years. She led the Music Ministry at Larkin Avenue Baptist Church and Calvary Baptist Church for more than 50 years, and for 17 years she directed the hand bell choir - Fox Valley Baptist Association Ringers. She was the Children's Choir Director at her church for over fifty years, and although she disciplined them in her gentle manner, they loved her. In addition, she led a youth and a college career choir. She was also with a group called The Illinois Baptist Singing Illinoisans. In addition, she helped start a group called the Illinois Allstate Youth Choir. She taught enrichment music classes at the Southern Baptist Conference's camp in the summers. Her favorite song was, "I Would Be True". She was the head of the Mission's Committee, and she also led several Bible Studies at Calvary Baptist Church. She served on the board and as an officer of the Fox Valley Baptist Association, was secretary for the Illinois Baptist State Association and was on the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. At one time she served as the secretary.

She also served as Chair of the Elgin Area Women's Connection, as well as Prayer Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, Assistant Program Coordinator in charge of Music, and Assistant Hospitality Coordinator for that organization. In addition, she also did substitute teaching in some of the Bible Studies they held. She loved playing the piano for the monthly luncheons, and the ladies thoroughly enjoyed hearing her play.

She was a board member with the Friends of Judson University in Elgin for 20 years and was president for three terms, for a total of six years. She was also historian and third vice president in charge of fundraising and active on many other committees while on the board. She was in charge of programs for board meetings, as well as being garage sale chairman. She had great knowledge of Robert's Rules of Order and could reliably provide advice when questions arose. Wilma and Jack held garage sales at their home for the Friends of Judson and were always willing to bring tables to hold display items on if needed. She was also a willing volunteer to help at the sales, either pricing, selling or donating food items for the workers.

She was an active member in Elgin Area Branch AAUW and was Co-President of the organization from 2013-2015. She would have received recognition for 50 years in the organization this year. She also held the position of first vice-president in charge of programs, recording secretary, social committee co-chair, nominating committee chair, Sheridan School volunteer chair, and Study Topic Chair of "A Dollar's Worth" during her time with the organization. She received the Susan B. Anthony award and was a Named Grant recipient. She was still very active in the branch before the long illness that contributed to her death.

Wilma was a true leader in so many ways. She was always willing to help in any way that she could in every organization in which she was a member. Wilma was eager to serve in any way it was needed. She remained active in all her groups before she became ill. She will be sadly missed by so many people. Wilma, you will remain in our hearts forever. She was truly a remarkable person, and a great friend.



IN MEMORY OF MEDINA GROSS

By Gareth Sitz

Where do I begin to eulogize my friend of 40+ years?

A Poetic Memoir

For Medina, with love

We were
an unlikely pair

I was flamboyant and mercurial
prone to dark moods
flights of ecstasy
and unbounded energy
a people magnet
seeking attention
from the universe

My tall friend
the steady one
humble and soft spoken

Washing dishes at parties
plucking weeds from
community gardens
clearing cobwebs from
the minds of
needy people

I wore makeup
vain about my looks
donning vibrant colors
and dangly earrings
dressing with care
to create an image

You faced the world
barefaced and braless

dressing with no
pretense
your clothes
comfortable and practical

I talked more than listened
No idle chatter passed your lip

Raised by single mothers
struggling to greet the world
housework
our low priority
messy cluttered
cluttered homes
a secret bond

We became each other's
extended family
enjoying each other's children
sharing celebrations

August found me
in your backyard
consuming Chinese food
connecting with your loved ones
taking photos because
visual memories matter

Countless times
at my house
cooked vegetables
your standard contribution

You were lavish
complimenting
my cooking
always wanting
to do my dishes

We sponsored our daughters'
bridal showers
and rejoiced
at their weddings

My sweet scientist
you thrived in my artistic world

A faithful cheerleader
praising my plays and poems
attending each performance
organizing theatre parties

and pot luck dinners
to boost attendance

Embracing the role of
stage manager
more than once
coping patiently
with my shenanigans
working quietly
in the background
doing what needed to be done

You never missed
a poetry reading at the library
or telling me it touched
You your heart

gave me romance novels
by the dozen
(Your secret pleasure)
“You could write one of these,”
you said smiling

My two half-finished ones
may one day be dedicated
to your memory

Towards the end
knowing
I’d soon lose you
visiting oh so painful
pulling back was
my refuge

Helpless to cure you
I made soup
hoping my offered sustenance
might wash away
recent negligence

You said my soup was
Divine
rewarding me
with your words

You died as you lived
marching to your
different drum

How lucky I was
to sing
in your band

I am not going to use this space to talk of Medina's many contributions to AAUW and to the Elgin community. I wrote a tribute to her several years back when she was given a Named Grant by our branch. (That tribute follows the remembrance.) Rather, I will use this space as a place to share what Medina meant to me personally.

We met when I was a young teacher. Medina took me on with no reservations. I was a bit of a challenge in those days, suffering from recurrent bouts of severe depression. When I hit rock bottom over and over, Medina would encourage me to listen to my body and do physical activity. In good weather, we spent many hours walking around Lord's Park and talking. She always tried to draw me out, rarely sharing much about herself. She liked to be with me precisely because our gifts and personalities presented such sharp contrasts. It was innate for her to perform acts of service, and on one level I was her project.

When Medina was in massage therapy school, she asked me if I would mind being her guinea pig so she could practice her various techniques. I jumped at the chance. For at least a year, I was privy to free massages, and it was during that time that we truly bonded. Medina's identity was her role as a healer. Being a massage therapist was a late in life career for her, and oh how she loved it! She saw no more than 2 or 3 clients in one day, seeking precious individualized time with each person. She never watched the clock, often taking almost two hours with me. With New Age music in the background and her soothing presence, Medina transported me to a state of total relaxation. My body melted under her touch, aches and pains dissipating and my spirit calming down. Sometimes we talked, and sometimes we were quiet. I knew this act of healing made her complete.

After she finished school and got her license, I continued to see her as a client on a regular basis at a discounted rate. When she knew my finances were tight, she would find some kind of excuse to gift me with her time. When I was stressed during tech week of a show, she would reach out to me and offer a session to help me get focused and stay fully functional.

Medina was as feisty as she was gentle, a woman of strong opinions about everything. In spite of her calm demeanor, Medina was a spitfire. When Medina was given her cancer prognosis and told she had a 30% chance of survival unless she had chemotherapy, she opted to go the holistic route. I had gone with her several times to Chicago to visit her Chinese herbalist, and I had also taken Qi Gong and yoga classes she felt would heal my mind and body. As I found my own pathway with swimming and aquatic exercise, she applauded my choice and stopped trying to convince me that her choices would be right for me as well. When she saw me feeling stressed and anxious, she would ask me, "Have you been swimming?"

When she told me of her cancer and of her decision to forego chemo, I responded, "Good for you!" She was surprised, expecting me to try to convince her otherwise. "I didn't expect this reaction from you," she said. We spent some time talking about the quality of life and her belief that love, diet, and the right state of mind would help her survive as long as possible.

Medina was a very private person, preferring to draw others out and be a good listener. Yet, in our memoir group, she felt comfortable sharing her most intimate thoughts and memories, and it was a monthly activity that was very precious to her. All of us benefited from Medina's quirky sense of humor and relished learning so much about our dear friend. I feel fortunate to have spent quality time with her in that context for over 10 years.

I deeply regret her dying when it wasn't safe to be with her, and this concluding poem reflects my feelings at the time.

Pandemic Loss

Feeling herself
slip away
her tired body
no longer
able to fight
closing her eyes with visions
of sweet kisses
and embraces
small hands patting her arm
playing with her white hair

Memories floating
through her mind
a beatific Mona Lisa Smile
gracing her pale face

“I want to see grandma”
the little one cries
not understanding
enforced separation
from his source of
unconditional love

A simple thing
we take for granted
being there
quietly waiting
as salty tears
brush our cheeks

Last moments stolen
Is this how it must end?

NAMED GRANT TRIBUTE

It is my pleasure to pay tribute to Medina Gross as a named grant recipient. She is a woman who has distinguished herself through service to AAUW as well as in the community at large. Her tireless efforts on the part of others have earned her the love and respect of our branch members. Medina is warm, caring, and hard-working, and she has a particular ability to help others to do their best. She is good at encouraging other people, and it is this quality that makes her such a good leader.

Medina has served as AAUW Branch President twice: once in 1981-83 and most recently 2006-2008. She has just been selected as the Membership Vice President for AAUW Illinois.

Medina's long association with AAUW began in 1971. At that time she was new in town and sought to make connections with the community. In AAUW, she found the opportunity to work with women who were vitally involved in many organizations. She speaks of the role models and mentors she found in AAUW, women who were supportive of her as she left work and stayed home with a new baby. Medina credits AAUW as the place where she learned organizational skills and awakened to the political world.

Some of the many roles Medina played in AAUW are as follows: Corresponding Secretary 1974-76, Folk Fair Chairman 1975 and 1977, Learning Exchange Chairman 1975-77, Topic Chairman Families Facing Change 1979-81. She served on several AAUW Committees: Early Childhood Education 1973-82, Media: Issues in Communication 1973-75, First Susan B. Anthony Awards Committee 1974-75, Folk Fair Committee 1974-75 and 1978-79, Nominating Committee 1979, Cultural Interests coordinator 1995-2003. In 2007-08, Medina served on the membership committee. This year Medina serves as newsletter co-chair, the by-laws committee and on the nominating Committee.

Outside the branch, Medina has served in a variety of capacities, making her an active member of the community. The following is just a sampling of Medina's extensive involvement in community activities: Congregation Knesset Israel Sisterhood - Program chair 2009-10; Elgin High PTO Board; Larsen Middle School PTO Board; McKinley School PTO President; Elgin Parent Coop Nursery School - President, board member; Troop 5 Boy Scouts Committee Member, Spaghetti Dinner Chair; Girl Scout Leader; YWCA Board; Holistic Arts and Health Alliance.

Medina graduated in 1960 from the University of Chicago with a concentration in zoology. After school, she did medical editing for eight years, and then she was home with her children for 14 years, during which time she was very involved in community activities. For the past 21 years, she has been doing bodywork, mostly massage and acupressure. She has a general practice and sees people with all different kinds of problems. Her interests are oriental healing arts and alternative health care, especially things you can do for yourself. She has been doing yoga for several years.

Medina and her husband Herb have been married 38 years. They have a son Ben, who is a computer consultant in the San Francisco Bay area, and a daughter Rachel Bloomberg, who is married and lives and works in Schaumburg. Medina and Herb are involved with community theatre in Elgin; they have done some producing and other support work.

Medina Gross has earned this Named Grant on many levels, through her service and dedication to our branch and tireless work in the community. She has served as a role model and mentor to those in her presence, and has given a gift of friendship to me that I treasure deeply. I know I am not alone in admiring Medina Gross and her efforts to lead a life of commitment and service to our branch and to our community at large. In her personal and professional life, Medina has exhibited character traits that exemplify the best that humanity has to offer. I am proud to pay tribute to Medina Gross.