

# Decode, Decorate and Communicate

**Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 – 9:30am**  
**Elsie May Goodwin Gallery - 1902 Pacific Ave.**

The April AAUW branch meeting will be at the Elsie May Goodwin Gallery on Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, where we will enjoy interactive activities. First, we'll attempt to decode eight contemporary visual symbols that represent causes we at AAUW care about; Discuss possible meanings with those at your table; Then, the original intent will be revealed. (You may think that your ideas are even better!)

Next, we will decorate postcards. Finally, we will communicate encouraging messages to the girls in our mentor program on the postcards. AAUW members will each be given the name of a mentor girl, along with some basic information about her so that the postcard messages can be personalized. Each girl will receive at least two cards, which will be mailed to them. I'm sure that they will be pleasantly surprised to receive the postcards!

Would you like to donate refreshments for our meeting? Muffins, scones, cookies, or ? (Meeting fee waived for hospitality!) Contact Amy Lovett Cooper by 4/8 for details (209) 373-8606 [repooc3@sbcglobal.net](mailto:repooc3@sbcglobal.net)

**When:** Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 9:30am

**Where:** Elsie May Goodwin Gallery  
1902 Pacific Ave., Stockton

**Cost:** \$10

**Reservation Deadline:** Wednesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>

Call or Text Reservation Chair Betty Parsons  
@ (408) 309-8958 to Make a Reservation  
[bjpars\\_95120@yahoo.com](mailto:bjpars_95120@yahoo.com)

**A RESERVATION MADE IS A RESERVATION PAID**

# President's Message



As I have watched the news coming out of Washington, D.C., since January 20<sup>th</sup>, I have been bemused by the apparent descent into chaos. Who's being fired? Which agencies are being shut down? Exactly who is in charge? It seems we have lost our senses.

I fear we have lost our compassion, too. Take, for example, what has happened with USAID. Founded by John F. Kennedy in 1961, this agency of the Federal government has been responsible for bringing medical, educational, and humanitarian assistance to people around the world for decades. A top USAID official was placed on leave because he wrote a scathing letter about the Trump administration and DOGE's actions to stop the funding of many of the agencies supported by the organization, suggesting that the actions taken by the administration have threatened lives.

The suspension of foreign aid might delay lifesaving assistance if there is a surge in diseases such as malaria, Ebola, avian flu, or polio. This could eventually impact us in the U.S., also, because infectious diseases can be easily spread here, too. Remember COVID?

Also, maternal and childcare programs have been suspended, which could cause millions of pregnant women, newborns, and children to lose access to care. A suspension of nutrition services could result in children's not receiving care to offset severe malnutrition. Educational programs for these children have been impacted, also, which threatens their future.

Elon Musk branded USAID as a "criminal organization" and placed thousands of employees on leave. In response, employees were directed to shred or burn hundreds of classified and personnel documents for protection from improper access to private information.

Recently, Janti Soeripto, president and CEO of USAID member organization Save the Children, was interviewed on NPR. She indicated that the cuts to services are "cruel and chaotic because there is food and other items sitting in warehouses and going to waste." Getting answers from the administration has been impossible, and children are suffering, and some will die.

Is this really what we want from government reorganization?  
I hope not.

Sandra Mazzuola  
President

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# Mentor Program

Spring always signals the winding down of the academic year for our girls. The seniors have chosen where they will start their college education next year, the eighth graders are eager for high school, and the others are just trying to stay on track.



On March 15<sup>th</sup>, the mentor group was welcomed by One Body Fitness and Nutrition in Linden for an afternoon focused on health and nutrition education. Our hostess, Melissa Cheney, is a Certified Personal Trainer through the American Council on Exercise, a Level 2 CrossFit Coach, and a Certified Wellness Coach through Wellcoaches. She has spent the past 13 years coaching CrossFit, personally training clients, and providing one-on-one nutrition coaching. Before launching her fitness career, she managed corporate wellness programs for Sutter Health. Melissa graduated from UC Davis with a major in Health Communications and a minor in Nutrition. Her passion for health and fitness was ignited in childhood, influenced by both her Grandma Rose and her mom. She is eager to share this passion

with her community, promoting healthier living and helping others become the best versions of themselves.



Our afternoon began with a challenging light workout, followed by a cooldown featuring several relaxing yoga poses. We then moved outside for light snacks. Afterward, we returned indoors to discuss the importance of balanced nutrition for developing female bodies. We also talked about the significance of adequate sleep for both physical and mental well-being, and we learned about the adverse effects of following social influencers who negatively affect our body image.



April will find us on this year's college tour to California State University, Sonoma. One of our former girls, Rosa Martinez, who is a graduate of Sonoma State, will accompany us to offer insights about her alma mater that might not be included in the tour. More about this in next month's Steamer!



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We affirm and promote the inherent  
worth and dignity of every person and  
are a welcoming congregation.





The Trump Administration has used an Anti-Transgender Agenda to galvanize the support of their MAGA base. Little attention has been given to the consequences and harm it has caused to transgender youth who we find in our schools. Most of us don't know how to support these young people, but I have found some advice that has been given in the book "Trans Anthology Project: Reflections of Self-Discovery and Acceptance" by real trans kids.

This is the advice they would give to school administrators about supporting trans and non-binary students in their schools. The words may not be eloquent but they are real.

- Lead and others will follow. Create an accepting and welcoming environment and let students know that there is nothing wrong with being genderqueer.
- A school environment where all kids can be themselves benefits everyone.
- Make sure teachers are educated about supporting trans students.
- Listen to the LGBTQ+ students about what they want.
- Be open to new perspectives and understand how "life and death" it can be to support trans kids.
- Many trans kids do not have supportive or understanding families; school is a place where we can feel free and be ourselves with our friends.
- Having gender-neutral bathrooms available is a lifesaver.
- Have anti-bullying policies and actually enforce them. Empty words mean nothing, there needs to be follow-through.
- Please be kind and have empathy for what we are going through.

To learn more about the real-life struggles and triumphs of trans people, you might want to order a copy of this book written by Chrissy Boylan and Heather H. Kirby, LCSW.



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**Lobby Days are coming!** AAUW-CA is watching a few of the current bills that support our Public Policy Priority Pillars. Briefly, AB 579 is highest priority, which AAUW-CA **opposes** in support of Pillar for Social & Racial Justice for all Members of Society. This bill would clarify that certain actions, including using a child's legal name, referring to a child by a pronoun consistent with their sex as recorded at birth, or refusing to consent to, or provide, gender-affirming health care (including mental health care), are not child abuse or neglect, nor constitute physical pain, mental suffering, or health endangerment.

Follow bills by going to [Public Policy - AAUW California](#). Let your legislators know YOUR opinions on these bills.

We are seeing/hearing a constant stream of news. You may be feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, fearful, or anxious. Monitoring news on these changes is important, but can be detrimental to your mental health. With federal policy pronouncements and changes continuing to take place at a head spinning pace, it is clear that changes are underway to make Project 2025 become reality (track its implementation HERE: [Project 2025 Tracker](#)).

Take action by choosing one self-focused, one other-focused, and one political-focused

item from the list below. This month the topic area is...

### **Take Action: Sexual Assault Violence Prevention**

**Self-Focused: Education.** Learn more about the organizations country-wide that are on the front lines of dealing with sexual assault violence. Read through the resources provided by the Domestic Violence Awareness Project and the CDC.

**Other-Focused: Education & Connection.** Whatever you take away from your homework in self-education--be sure to tell one friend about what you learned. You can do this over lunch. Work with others to organize an event to raise awareness and dispel myths around gender-based and sexual assault violence in your community.

### **Politically-Focused: Outreach to Legislators**

Use 5-calls to reach out to federal legislators to oppose the abolition of the Department of Education, which will impact enforcement of existing sexual and gender-based violence protections under Title IX. Text *SIGN PNNWWO* to 50409 to contact legislators, urging them to back efforts to get money flowing to relevant organizations and programs to raise awareness about and prevent sexual assault violence (e.g. Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women).



## **Membership Renewal Time**

We are rapidly approaching the end of the AAUW calendar year. With June right around the corner, it is time for membership renewal. The majority of the branch members will need to renew before June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025. (Although some members have renewal dates in months other than June.) Members will have several options as to what renewal process will work best for them.

Of course, it would be great to get this membership renewal underway now, we are in a holding pattern awaiting the results of the upcoming vote on increasing state dues. That vote will close on Friday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025. After the state vote results are announced, you will receive an email for you to start your membership renewal.

You will have three options for renewing your membership:

### **Option 1:**

Print out and complete the attached membership form attached in the email and sent in your dues with a check. Checks should be payable to AAUW-Stockton. Mail checks and form to Claudia Mennuti. You will also be able to support the important work of our branch by include donations to the programs. Please write separate checks for each donation. This will facilitate easier bookkeeping for the 501c3.

### **Option 2:**

Membership can also be completed on the AAUW Stockton Branch website using the interactive membership form. This option features an electronic payment method. There will be a 3% convenience fee for using the electronic payment. Members will also be able to donate to branch activities using this method.

### **Option 3:**

Membership can also be renewed at the June branch meeting so bring your checkbook or use PayPal. Membership forms will be available to complete on the spot, or to take home and return before June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

Any member who does not have email will receive membership renewal materials via USPS. They can complete the renewal forms and return them to Claudia Mennuti, co-Membership Treasurer.

We hope this can make your renewal process simple and easy to complete. All members receive a membership directory with the names of the current members which is published during the summer. Of course, we want all members included, so please help us to go to press on time by renewing your membership before it expires June 30<sup>th</sup>.





## Students Discover RIF Book Treasures!

AAUW members' \$ donations to RIF have been transformed into books that are treasured by local students. Lottie Grunsky Elementary's 266 K-6 youngsters became "treasure hunters" at AAUW's March 14<sup>th</sup> RIF Book Distribution in the school's multi-use room.



***AAUW/RIF Liaison for Grunsky Pam Mallett-Jones reflects a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader's joy at finding the perfect book from the dozens of titles on various subjects and reading levels which she had ordered for this book distribution.***



***With guidance available from AAUW/RIF Volunteer Joan Erreca, 6<sup>th</sup> graders each selected a new free book which they happily show here and will take home to read and share with family members.***

## The 2025 Inspirational Woman Writing Contest: *Looking Back, Looking Forward*

Each March, our branch is inspired by stories from the past shared by our Inspirational Woman Writing Contest winners. However, we are also inspired by the winners themselves. With their academic and athletic excellence and community volunteerism, these young people provide hope for our future.

This year, over 50 students submitted essays to our contest. Ultimately, judges Joan Erreca, Sandra Mazzuola and Diane Oren decided upon three winners from Karen Meredith's junior AP Language and Composition classes at Lincoln High.

With coaching on public-speaking from Pam Mallett-Jones, these students presented their essays at the general meeting with poise and confidence. Many audience members commented on the students' exceptional writing and presentation skills.

For members who could not attend the March meeting, the winning essays for 2025 are included below.

Many thanks to everyone who supports the Inspirational Woman Writing Contest. Since this contest's inception over 30 years ago, we all continue to benefit from learning the history of diverse women and honoring those who have previously gone unrecognized!

## **Beyond the Classroom--Jordan Ellis (1<sup>st</sup> Place)**

From a young age I was inspired by how my mother lived her life. Her story may seem ordinary to anyone that doesn't know her, but I find myself captivated by the impacts she has made on not just my life, but the hundreds of kids she's taught over the course of her 28 year career. Every day, I wake up feeling fortunate to be known as Mrs. Ellis' daughter.

As a young girl I was always excited to attend school with my mom as she taught at the elementary school I attended. However, it wasn't until right before I left for high school that I finally understood the influence she had on others. I watched as her students stared at her in awe as she educated them on exciting new topics. After school, I would stay with her while she attended countless meetings for various committees she was involved in; each one improving the school experience. She poured her heart into all of the work she did, yet when she would come home from work, she would go from being a loving teacher to an even more loving mother. She spent countless hours driving me to sporting practices, staying up with me to do school projects, and checking in on me to make sure I was okay. She has taught me what it means to give everything you have for the people you care about.

One day, while discussing her teaching career, she shared with me a powerful story that has stuck with me. Years ago, she had a student who was known for being a troublemaker. However, my mother quickly realized that underneath his acting out was a warm-hearted boy who simply needed guidance. She made it her goal to be a person he could trust, offering him the support and care he needed to thrive. Throughout their school year together, they built a strong connection, and she became one of the few people he felt comfortable turning to in times of need. Years later, long after he had been a student in her class, she received a heartfelt letter from him, thanking her for never giving up on him and always offering support even on his most difficult days. He told her that she was the most important and influential teacher he ever had. This story was a testament to my mother's unwavering dedication to her students and the lasting impact she has had on not only their education, but their personal lives.

In the end, my mother has been a source of inspiration to not only me, but the numerous

students who have had the privilege of being her student. Her kindness, dedication, and ability to make each individual feel valued and cared for is a quality I hope to emulate in my own life. My mother was my first teacher, and every day, I continue to grow through the lessons she teaches me and the examples she sets on how to be a compassionate person.

## **Mom—Kinsey Moccia (2nd Place)**

"What's wrong babe?" Julian urged.

"I'm pregnant"

Before the 18 year-old Phylli Edens got a chance to dream of what her life would look like in the future, those dreams vanished.

"What am I going to do? What are people going to think about me? Where will I stay? How am I going to pay for this? How am I going to tell my parents? Now what?" These are all questions I imagine were going through her mind.

Phylli started gymnastics at five years old and continued as a competitive gymnast until she was 13. Through that she learned perseverance and hard work. At 18 when she had her daughter, she attempted to go to college, but learned it was too difficult to balance work, school, and family life. She dropped out of college and decided to go to a vocational school to become a medical assistant. When she started her internship, she realized it was not for her and decided to work as a full time gymnastics coach. In order to save money to buy a house, she and her husband decided to stay with her parents.

"Are you serious? You're drinking again?" Phylli shouted.

"Jeez, it isn't that big of a deal" her mother barked back.

"Mom. I'm leaving"

Couch surfing for months on end created a new type of anxiety in Phylli, but ultimately kept her and her family safe. Eventually she was able to get an apartment for her family. Years after that, she was also able to buy a house for her, her husband, her daughter, and her newborn son. For Phylli coaching was a job, a means to an end, but Phylli's job meant more for her students, especially me.

Phylli became my gymnastics coach when I was two years old. I don't remember much but I remember how she made me feel. I remember that growing up I felt safe and loved. I remember



how I was always excited to go to practice and read our quote of the week. I remember the inspiration I felt every time she encouraged me. She didn't just tell us how amazing we were but pushed us to achieve our full potential.

"Punch harder! Keep your arms by your ears! Point your toes!" are common corrections Phylli gave to her students. What most didn't see were the mom-like encouragements: "You are special and worthy. I believe in you. Let's do this together; I love you."

These are the things I remember the most. Not the corrections or the competitions. Not the excruciating pain after a full day of conditioning. But the true, unconditional love and care Phylli has for her students.

Although Phylli believes she has one family and two children whom she has supported, in reality, she has a much larger family. At Gym Stars she has impacted dozens of gymnasts, myself included, by teaching us hard work, perseverance, resilience, and adaptability. So, it's not surprising when I accidentally called out to her "Mom!"

### **The Cherry Blossom Blooms in the Rain—** George Leopoldo Fujii (3<sup>rd</sup> place)

Tetsuko Yoneda looked down at the charred boards of the building she once called home; her father was dead. Over the course of a week, her status, her wealth, and the man who'd protected her from the horrors of the world, had been scattered amongst the cremated city, lost with the wind. A week ago, her father held her in her arms under the Wisteria tree. Now, Tetsuko held the hands of her younger sisters, following her grieving mother out of the ashes of Hiroshima, and into her clouded future.

Eighteen years later, Tetsuko worked as a nurse in the same city in which her father was massacred. From dawn to dusk, Tetsuko worked in the damp, depressing city. As she walked home in charcoal night, Tetsuko was bombarded with recurring memories of her agonizing march out of the city. Again, she was five years old with her sister's hands in hers; again that heavy knot built up in her throat. Tetsuko wanted nothing more than to depart from Hiroshima; and by now, she had gotten the chance, as her mother had arranged a marriage with her and a man— an *American* man!

On the flight to the US, Tetsuko watched cherry blossoms fade into the blue, endless

ocean, which engulfed her racing mind. How could her mother arrange her with an American of all people, the people that had taken so much from the both of them?

Tetsuko jolted awake; the plane had landed. As she stepped off the plane, the asphalt reflected the scorching heat of the sun onto her anxious face as she wobbled onto solid ground for the first time in twenty-five hours; yet the burning desire of hatred was most present on her mind. Her new home for the rest of her life would be the perpetrators of her suffering all those years ago. *How ironic*, she thought.

However, her husband was not a white man but a Nissei man who was imprisoned in a Japanese labor camp. They bonded in their common trauma; and plotted for a brighter future together. Somewhere in the luminescent night sky was a future for their children which wouldn't have this torment. Together they dreamed in the obscurity of the night.

Eleven years later, her husband never got to see these dreams play out; and Tetsuko awoke to a nightmare. He was dead. Again Tetsuko lost, yet again she persevered. Determined to keep the dream she had for her children alive, she made sure all four of her children attended college, all four graduated, and all four received well-paying jobs.

Throughout her life, Tetsuko lost more than she had gained. Her father and two husbands had come and gone, yet despite these setbacks Tetsuko always pushed forward. Her children, and grandchildren, live the life she dreamed of all those years ago. Tetsuko is a cherry blossom in the mud, and despite the rain, she bloomed. Tetsuko is a woman I am proud to call Obachan.



**Winners George Fujii (3<sup>rd</sup> place), Jordan Ellis (1<sup>st</sup> place), and Kinsey Moccia (2<sup>nd</sup> place) with Lincoln High English teacher Karen Meredith.**



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**Vision:** AAUW will be a powerful advocate and visible leader in equity and education through research, philanthropy, and measureable change in critical areas impacting the lives of women and girls.

**Mission:** **AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research.**

**Value Promise:** By joining AAUW, you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women and girls have a fair chance.

## *April Calendar*

Day	Date	Time	Event	Location/Contact
Mon	7	6:00pm	April Board Meeting	Online via Zoom
Wed	9	All Day	Reservation Deadline	Betty Parsons - (408) 309-8958
Thu	10	4:30-6:00pm	DEI Meeting	Online via Zoom
Sat	12	9:30am	April Program: "Decode, Decorate and Communicate"	Elsie May Goodwin Gallery
Thu	24	4:30-6:00pm	DEI Meeting	Online via Zoom