

Individual New Program: International, Women Making a Difference – My Sister’s Keeper

This event moved the AAUW mission forward by bringing awareness and understanding of the plight and barriers to equity and education facing young girls and women around the world .Each year 120 million children are denied an education, many due to their inability to afford school supplies or fees. In poverty stricken villages from Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to Nambak , Laos TO Dharamsala, and Suja in northern India our presenter saw how a pencil can rewrite a child’s future. Our speaker, Susan Barron Trenk, founded The Pencil Promise after witnessing young children in Phnom Penh spending their days searching through a mountain of garbage to find anything that their families could sell or eat. She learned that a free school called PIO (Peoples Improvement Org) had been built for these kids by a volunteer, Phymean Noun, who has been named a CNN hero. At first parents did not send their children to school because they needed them to work the garbage dump for the families to survive. Phymean then started the rice program, giving rice to the families in exchange for them sending their children to school. That worked, however there was no money left for school supplies. That’s when the pencil promise was born. They delivered school supplies for hundreds of children in need. Susan gave a dramatic audio visual presentation and gave the attendees at the meeting a way to immediately take action to break down the barriers to education and financial independence for these women and children by purchasing school supplies or gift certificates. Philanthropy is another part of the AAUW mission. In the past year Susan has expanded The Pencil Promise and has personally delivered school supplies to over 1000 children in need in Dharamsala, India where the Dali Lama is living in exile. Thousands of refugees continue to leave Tibet to join him bringing only the clothes on their backs. On March 19th Susan will return to Cambodia and go on to Laos delivering school supplies for another 1000 children. In Phnom Penh Susan is partnering with the Somaly Mam Foundation (SMF) that rescues women from the sex trade. These women have had no education, and are often kidnapped from their villages at 7 or 8, or sold by their desperate parents who believe they are being taken to work as domestics for nice families. The SMF rescues these girls and then rehabilitates them allowing them to move on. Jobs skills training is an important part of the program. Susan has partnered with SMF and with JWOC in Siem Reap by sponsoring seamstress instructors to teach women an important work skill, sewing. She then offers the students employment sewing The Pencil Promise backpacks. Her Empowering Women program increases self esteem, offers the most marginalized women an opportunity for financial independence, eases poverty in the community, and creates beautiful backpacks for children in need. She is also sourcing the school supplies locally that go into each backpack locally, thus helping the local economy. Susan is a woman making a difference and through her efforts has become “my sister’s keeper”.

Through our program and the generous contributions of AAUW members in Westchester and in Poughkeepsie, AAUW has helped to support the following partnerships that Susan has made during the last year. Susan is an AAUW member and is eager to share information about The Pencil Promise with other branch’s.

Partners: JWOC in Siem Reap; the People Improvement Organization (PIO) school founded by Phymean Noun, a CNN hero; the Somaly Mam Foundation founded by Somaly Mam, a sex slave survivor, a CNN Hero in 2006 and one of Time Magazines 100 most influential people in 2009.

Schools: the Nambak Orphanage school in Nambak, Laos, PIO School in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the Tong Len Tent School in Dharamsala, The Tong Len Hostel School, Dharamsala, the Tibetan Childrens Village, Suja, India.

Our branch's goal was to bring visibility and aid to women in other countries who are so poor they cannot feed themselves or their children, cannot educate themselves or their children, cannot hope for a better future without help and support.

We began taking action steps for planning our programs for the year in June 2010. A budget for hospitality and other meeting expenses had been presented in March. In June our program co-chairs invited anyone with suggestions to come to a planning meeting. Nine members attended and other members sent written descriptions of their proposals. The theme for the year was "Women Who Make a Difference" Each proposal was discussed and then we voted and made a preference list. We also discussed the best date and time for each program. Each of the committee members took responsibility for calling a prospective speaker and emailing the speaker's availability to the program co-chairs. The deadline for replies was July 15th so that there would be time to include all the programs and presenters in the branch yearbook which is printed in August. Susan's presentation was chosen as the committee thought her presentation would move the AAUW mission forward.

The following steps were taken for community visibility. The month before the presentation the program co-chair wrote an article for our newsletter giving information and visibility to the program. The Greenburgh Public Library received the information and designed and printed a flier as a co-sponsor. We had an easel with the program information in a prominent place near the entrance to the library. The program was included on the library calendar and on the calendar of the Westchester Office for Women. The newsletter editor and our website manager published the information. Our hospitality chair is reminded of the date and time and the expected attendance numbers so that guests and members will enjoy a social get together with coffee and refreshments before the meeting starts. Our membership co-chairs set up a membership table with our membership pamphlets and name tags. Three weeks before the presentation we informed the library that we needed a display table for the school supplies Susan would bring and that she would be using audio-visual equipment in her presentation. Susan did a run through of the audio-visual equipment at the library three days before the presentation. Susan came with her 17 year old son who operated the tech equipment and gave a short, emotional speech about his experience as a volunteer in Dharamsala this past summer. He has also spoken at his school about how shocking it is to find that students in other countries don't have the opportunity to go to school and that schools that do exist don't have **any** school supplies. An email reminding all members about the program went out the Friday before the meeting.

The measured impact was immediate, very enthusiastic and supportive. Approximately 50% of the attendees bought gift certificates or school supplies. Several members sent in checks after the meeting and we received a letter from a member who was very touched by the meeting and wanted to share her experience with her granddaughter. A shorter version of the letter was included in our newsletter which also brought more visibility to the program. All of the funds raised that night were used to purchase school supplies for 1000 children that Susan, her son, other volunteers and a film crew will deliver on her trip in March.

Lessons learned for future programs. Programs that touch the heart as this one did, bring out the philanthropist inside us all. Even the best plans, need a plan B. Despite the run through of the equipment, there was a technical failure and Susan finished her presentation without the use of all the audio-visual program that she had prepared.

OUR NOVEMBER MEETING -by Seleana Barron



Our November meeting highlights our AAUW Westchester theme of women making a difference. It also provides insight into how our branch members can take action in the NY State AAUW's theme "My Sister's Keeper" discussed in the fall issue of the Focus Newsletter. Their article discussed the hope that the program, "My Sister's Keeper", would provide knowledge and understanding of daunting problems facing women on both a national and international level and would also offer a path of action. Our meeting does it all.

Could you locate Siem Reap, Cambodia and Dharmasala, India on a map of the world? Do you have any idea what problems the children and their parents in these two villages share? Do you know what caused their problems?

Please come and bring guests to our meeting on November 3rd at the Greenburgh Library at 6:00pm. Find out about The Pencil Promise and the two journeys that have changed the lives of my daughter, Susan Barron Trenk, who is the founder and CEO of The Pencil Promise, her family, and her travel companions. A visual presentation will make it possible for you to see for yourself what life in these two villages is like, what daily hardships they face and how a simple premise can bring help and hope for their future.



Susan is making a difference by her own efforts and by providing opportunities for the women she is helping to become women making a difference. For every school item she sells, she provides and personally delivers specifically needed school supplies for children who have none.

If you want to personally take action, visit her website store, thepencilpromise.com, to purchase school supplies or a gift certificate or come to her presentation prepared to purchase supplies or a gift certificate. This is a meaningful way to look forward to our holidays by giving help up to others.

TOYS FOR CHILDREN OF MOTHERS AT BEDFORD HILLS CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

- by Carol Almasi

Thinking of the joy this brings to the children of women incarcerated at the Bedford hills Correctional Facility, our community service project for the holidays is again collecting toys, books, and other gifts.

Suggestions for gifts include dolls, including ethnic dolls, arts and crafts kits and supplies, board games for all ages. Also, clothes and toys for newborns and toddlers, and gifts for teenagers, such as bath and body gift sets, makeup kits, scarves, chess sets, footballs and basketballs.

Please leave all gifts unwrapped. Monetary donations are also welcome. I will be glad to shop.

I will be at the November branch meeting and December luncheon to receive any gifts that you can provide. Thank you in advance.



DARLING SOPHIA,

YOU ARE PROBABLY WONDERING WHY YOUR NAME IS ON THIS CERTIFICATE. WELL, I RECENTLY WENT TO MEETING OF MY LOCAL AAUW (AMER. ASSOC. OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN) AND HERE IS WHAT HAPPENED.

SUSAN, A YOUNG WOMAN SHOWED US A FILM AND TOLD US A STORY THAT WAS INSPIRATIONAL TO ME AS A MOTHER/GRANDMOTHER AND AS AN EDUCATOR. IT HELPED ME REALIZE THAT IN A DIFFERENT WORLD, VERY FEW OFF US WOULD BE BLESSED WITH SAFETY, AFFLUENCE, OPPORTUNITIES AND EDUCATION. WHILE I NEVER HAD TO SCAVENGE THROUGH GARBAGE, ONLY IN THE US COULD MY FAMILY AFFORD TO SEND ME EVEN TO A FREE COLLEGE TO MAKE A BETTER LIFE FOR MY FAMILY AND ME. AND THE US PROVIDED MUCH FOR YOUR GRANDFATHER'S IMMIGRANT FAMILY. ASK YOUR DAD IF HE REMEMBERS THE POOR LITTLE TOWN IN ITALY THAT GRANDPA'S FAMILY LEFT TO COME HERE. STILL EVEN THAT WAS FAR BETTER THAN SO MUCH OF THE REST OF THE WORLD.

TO HELP YOU SEE WHY I WAS SO MOVED I HOPE YOU WOULD CHECK OUT [HTTP://WWW.THEPENCILPROMISE.COM/OUR_STORY](http://www.thepencilpromise.com/our_story). THEN YOU TOO MIGHT UNDERSTAND HOW WONDERFUL THIS TASK IS THAT SUSAN HAS UNDERTAKEN WITH THE PENCIL PROMISE.

IMAGINE NOT HAVING A PENCIL, OR PAPER AND YOUR PARENTS NOT HAVING THE BAREST ESSENTIALS TO ALLOW YOU FREEDOM FOR AN EDUCATION. INSTEAD, YOU WOULD HAVE TO SPEND YOUR DAYS PICKING TRASH OUT OF GARBAGE PILES. I KNOW THIS SOUNDS OUTRAGEOUS BUT IF YOU CHECK OUT THE FILM YOU COULD SEE WHAT SUSAN SAW AND FELT WHEN ON A VACATION. IT CHANGED HER LIFE.

NOT ONLY DOES THIS ORGANIZATION SUPPLY PENCILS, BOOKS, AND BOOK BAGS, IT ALSO PROVIDES SALARIES FOR THE MOTHERS WHO MAKE THOSE BOOK BAGS. THIS SIMPLE SOLUTION FREES TIME FOR THE CHILDREN TO GO TO SCHOOL AND NOT TO SPEND DAYS SCAVENGING GARBAGE. IN ADDITION, ALL MONEY DONATED GOES DIRECTLY TO THIS PROJECT.

WHAT A GIFT FOR EACH CHILD, FAMILY AND, PERHAPS FOR THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE. AS YOU MIGHT HAVE LEARNED IF YOU READ THREE CUPS OF TEA, GREG MORTENSEN CERTAINLY MAKES US REALIZE THAT, IN MUCH OF THE WORLD, EDUCATION SEEMS AN IMPOSSIBLE GOAL, ESPECIALLY FOR GIRLS.

SO, I MADE A DONATION IN YOUR NAME AS I WANTED TO SHARE THIS WONDERFUL TALE WITH YOU. I SEND MY LOVE TO YOU AND, IN YOUR NAME, TO THESE CHILDREN.

WOW, THIS IS A LONG LETTER, BUT THE STORY IS WORTH IT, I THINK. I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU AT CHRISTMAS. YOUR PICTURES, WHILE BEAUTIFUL, ARE NOT THE SAME AS HUGGING YOU IN PERSON.

LOVE,