

# Martha and A.A.U.W.: A Personal Remembrance

I first met Martha at AAUW meetings. She was small and lithe and I liked the way she could move quickly around the room, sure-footed, making her seem much younger than her years. Active, vital, fun — these adjectives characterized her later years. She enjoyed the beach near her home and swam as often as possible. She ate lots of vegetables and health foods at a time when many could not resist fast food chains and pizza delivery. Her lifestyle contributed to her longevity, as did her attitude. She once told me that writing is the best thing to do when you are old — it makes the time pass quickly.

Martha chaired the Fort Lauderdale AAUW branch's book group, which usually met at her Lauderdale-By-The-Sea duplex. This small unit provided sufficient sitting room for the eight to twelve of us who attended. Her book cases held old, dark-bound, hardback books that she read and reread many times. She also enjoyed listening to classical music from her collection of record albums. A small patio off the kitchen held several varieties of plants, some of which were tied up to give shade. Her small kitchen and dining area was so well-organized that it was more than adequate. From this area she served us tea and cookies.

Once, we heard a lecture analyzing legal issues presented in a currently popular novel, and discussed them at length. Another time a member lectured on F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*.

After about fifteen minutes a member of the audience interrupted the speaker to say she was bored and asked the lecturer to quit. "We have had enough of that guy," the member said. Martha interrupted her and asked if she could speak. Of course, no one dared stop her in her own home.

Martha explained why she considered Fitzgerald one of the greatest American writers of all time and called *Tender is the Night* her favorite book. Martha spoke of favorites on many occasions, probably to call attention to things she thought significant. I was happy to find that she had such a devout passion for literature. After the lecturer finished, we enjoyed tea and cookies served with dainty lace napkins. Long into the late afternoon, after the other women had left, Martha and I continued to discuss Fitzgerald and other writers. I was surprised to learn that she wrote poetry. "Come back," she said as I left, "Come back any time."

Martha and I belonged to both the Fort Lauderdale and Pompano branches of AAUW. For years Martha enjoyed the Pompano scholarship luncheon traditionally held at the Lighthouse Point Yacht Club. In her later years, some of the women seemed concerned that Martha continued to attend. They frequently asked me her age and found it incredible when I explained that she was over ninety. As sometimes happens with elders, people wondered if her mind was still active.

I assured them that it was — "Go ahead, ask her anything."

At one of these luncheons I was standing with a group of women looking out a picture window at large, white yachts tied up to the docks a story or so below. A woman approached our group shouting, "Get her out of there!" At the same time I glimpsed Martha happily pacing up and down the dockage area. I knew that Martha was in no danger of falling, but I ran down to the docking area to calm the others' fears. I didn't have to retrieve Martha; she was leaving the docks as I approached. "I just had to see them," she said, "I was so curious." She was childlike in her intense curiosity, but adult in not taking chances. Even in later years, she traveled widely and visited friends and relatives across the United States.

Dwight Burkam, a retired city planner, shared Martha's interests and often accompanied her to meetings and lectures. I particularly recall visiting and sharing a bag lunch with them at a special meeting of the Sierra Club in a rustic structure deep inside Birch State Park. The meeting concerned the use of waterways for conservation. Martha and Dwight watched intently as the slide presentation mapped out Florida's waterway complex; they were fascinated and still among the audience when at about two I decided to go home. The meeting had begun early, and I was tired then — and incidentally hungry. I bid them a fond adieu.

— Mary McGreevy