

2021 PRAASA Report – District 19 DCM

This year's PRAASA was my third that I attended in as many years. While I missed the anticipation of traveling to the Host Area/City (I live for road trips), hanging out with old friends, and the prospect of making new ones; this year's event still carried the spirit of Love and Service that the previous ones did. I actually attended more panels than I ever have because I didn't get distracted by the novelty of new people, places and things. On the flip side, I didn't take as many notes because I DID get distracted by doing laundry, making meals, and taking part in the other creature comforts that we have grown accustomed to doing while attending meetings during the "Pandemic Age of AA". It marked a full year for many of the attendees since they last took part in a live meeting, myself included.

The theme for this year was "AA in a Time of Change" (I will come back to this later in my report). Host Area 93 – Central California did an amazing job in organizing and carrying out the very first Virtual PRAASA. From the "Virtual Lobby", a PDF file/schedule with direct links to each Panel to the Webinar style presentation with an ASL Interpreter for the deaf members and the ability to listen in English, Spanish, and Japanese. The whole experience was as seamless as it could be and just as effective in carrying a message of Service to the Alcoholic that has yet to find a solution.

As I did the prior year, I attended the DCM/Alt-DCM Round Tables, mostly on Friday, some on Saturday. The discussion during these meetings centered around a variety of topics; how the pandemic has affected attendance and participation in General Service at the District level, the benefits and disadvantages to switching to a virtual meeting format, keeping GSRs engaged in Area Assemblies, Dark Meeting outreach, and the inevitable transition to meeting in person and what that will look like. There were almost 200 DCMs/Alt-DCMs in the Zoom room at it's peak. Some spoke to having an increase in attendance by GSRs during the pandemic, many in lower population areas, because the need to travel to district meetings became obsolete; some districts had a DCM with no GSRs, some with a few GSRs but no DCM. There were quite a few helpful suggestions in reaching out to meetings not represented by a GSR (Dark Meetings). I admit this is something that I have not excelled at as a DCM, but realize it is never too late to start or employ these suggestions.

There were some great Panelists and it was inspiring to see and hear those whose experiences in General Service have not only helped to keep them sober, but have provided a clearer sense of purpose in their lives. I don't consider myself an overly emotional man, but I was choked up (a little... ;) by the redemption, conviction, and passion in some of their stories and presentations. Much attention was given to some of this year's agenda items of the 71st General Service Conference; some new, some that have been around a while. The focus, of course, being on how our society can adapt in an ever changing world in order to more effectively carry the message of recovery of Alcoholics Anonymous. This has possibly never been more evident than in the past year of our shared experience as a society and as human beings; with the pandemic a catalyst of AA in a Time of Change.

I was moved by one panelist in particular, Kelly X. of Area 05. Born in China and raised in a traditional Chinese family structure and dynamic. She spoke of the barrier to her even becoming aware of what an alcoholic was, if it was even possible for her to be one, and in a country where A.A. isn't as accessible as in other places, much less to a woman in her culture. Her story isn't to dissimilar than many of ours, though the specifics change, and the mountain she had to climb may have been taller and littered with more obstacles, the characteristics of her journey to and through her experience in the Fellowship, resulted in a Spiritual Awakening that rendered her sober, useful, and whole. She also detailed the experience of helping grow the Fellowship within the Chinese community of Los Angeles, ever broadening the reach of the miracle of Alcoholics Anonymous. A fulfillment of purpose and a repayment of the gift that was so freely given to her.

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In closing, and on a personal note, I continue to be confused, relieved, perplexed, surprised, and amazed (to name a few...) at the life that I have been afforded by A.A. I have become a part of a group of sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous that have heeded the call to Service. This year's PRAASA was indelibly not in person as many would have hoped. Nonetheless, the spirit of those in attendance was tangible. I have heard more than one person respond recently to those who voice their displeasure with online meetings, how they long for the days of meeting in person, and are resistant to attending meetings as often or at all. It is brought to our/my attention that the new members, who have gotten sober during the pandemic, not knowing an A.A. meeting in person. Criticism of the online medium is lost upon them, for they have known no other type of A.A. When it boils down to it, I will take this thing however I can get it. I have borne witness to this Fellowship step up, suit up, and show up to carry The Message this past year. How many Alcoholics would have not had the chance to recover had we not?

Adrian O.