

Area 58 Delegate -- PRAASA Report March 2011 – Honolulu, HI

Last year I shared with you that attending PRAASA as a Delegate was radically different than attending in previous years, although it was difficult for me to find the words to explain why. What I realized for the first time last year was the tremendous responsibility I felt to A.A. in Oregon Area but also to A.A. as a whole. This year I felt the same, but the Honolulu host committee made me feel downright pampered as well. As you can see by my dress, I am still in the Hawaiian spirit. The lei I'm wearing was hand made for the Delegates and is comprised of two kinds of shells that have a special significance to the Hawaiian people (I wish I could remember exactly what they told me about it!). It was this special touch and many more than made me feel so welcome and pampered.

This was my ninth PRAASA, and although it will be my last as an officer of Oregon Area, it will by no means be the last I will attend. Next year, PRAASA will be hosted by our neighbor to the north, Western Washington Area 72, and it will be in Bellevue, just outside Seattle. Because it's so close, it is reachable for virtually all of us in Oregon. If 4 of you share the drive and a room, the cost would be negligible. Most of your home groups and Districts should be able to fund you to attend, so start working on them now. I wish I could have gotten a PRAASA 2012 button for each one of you, but all I could manage was one per District. Take them home as a reminder to start saving now for next year.

As you may have heard at the Friday night PRAASA sharing session, there is something for everyone at this particular service event. The panel discussions are informative and pertinent to what is happening in A.A. at the moment, and the roundtables cover sharing on just about every imaginable position. If you are a group secretary, treasurer, GSR, DCM, or if you are involved in Corrections, CPC, PI, Treatment, Access or Intergroups ... just to name a few there is a meeting for you. If you want to hear about something controversial or thought provoking, there are late night sharing sessions. If you think we are a glum lot, hang out with some of us who have been going to PRAASA for awhile, and I think you'll be amazed at how much fun we can and do have in service. If your home group or District doesn't understand the benefit it will bring to them by funding someone to attend PRAASA, take them a program so they can see what goes on. Written copies of many of the panel discussions are also available for download from the PRAASA website, www.praasa.org. Here are just a few of the topics that can be downloaded and may be of interest to you or your group: a) Leading by Example Not Promotion, b) Practicing our Traditions in a Digital Age, c) The Hand of AA: Inclusive Never Exclusive, d) Tradition Five, Our Primary Purpose, e) Special Needs: What Are They? How to Reach Out? What is the Role of Our Committees, f) Service Sponsorship.

As with last year, there were three times during the weekend when the Pacific Region Delegates gathered to share about the upcoming Conference. This year, however, I was one of the 'experts' rather than the newcomer. Last year, by the end of those sharing sessions, my questions had been answered by the Panel 59 Delegates and my fears alleviated. The Panel 60 Delegates did the same for the Panel 61 Delegates this year. We talked about every possible scenario that might be confusing or overwhelming, and we assured them that if they 'hit the wall' at some point in the Conference, we would be there to pick them up, dust them off and send them back into the room.

When I wasn't in the Delegate meetings, I was listening intently to the presentations. As a second year Delegate, I was not asked to present on a topic. This allowed me to be fully focused on each panel, and particularly to the presentations dealing with Conference agenda items. As Delegates, we are advised to "listen as if we have no opinion, speak our truth, then vote our conscience." I was very careful not to draw any conclusions based on what I heard, but rather to take that information and add it to the comments I received from all of you. By the time I arrived at the Conference, I felt about as informed as I could be about the various agenda items.

And speaking of presentations, I would like to recognize and thank Fred D. and Keary D. from District 4 who were both presenters. Fred's topic was an agenda item from the PI committee: *Understanding anonymity: What do I tell family members about A.A. members they may meet?* Keary's topic was *Service Sponsorship*. Both Keary and Fred hit it out of the park with their presentations. They researched their topics, their delivery was nothing short of professional, and I think they actually enjoyed doing it. Next year, who knows? Maybe you will volunteer?

The Sunday morning talks by past Trustees will always be my favorite part of PRAASA. This year it was a bit different. Rather than sharing their experience, strength and hope on their favorite topic, each Trustee was asked to speak on a Concept. We heard about Concepts 1, 3, 5, 9 and 12 from five members who were all past Pacific Region Trustees, and two of them were also past Managers of the General Service Office. What a treat. The very last item on the agenda is always the Ask-It-Basket, or lovingly referred to as "Stump the Delegates." Just like it is here at our Assembly, the questions are sometimes serious, sometimes not, but all in good fun.

A great benefit for many of us from Oregon Area who attended this year's PRAASA was getting to see and visit with one of our friends, former Area Secretary and Finance Committee Member Eric V., who is now a Hawaii resident. Gus managed to drag him out of his house and bring him to the Hard Rock cafe where some of us who stayed a few extra days had gone for dinner. Although the visit was short, it was great to know that he is alive and well, and he still has that great sense of humor and big, warm smile.

And now for some observations from my 3 fellow officers who you also fund to PRAASA. We chose to present one combined oral report rather than 4 separate reports, in order to avoid duplication and hopefully save some time. As you can see, I got the short stick and am the one delivering the combined report. I've assured my pals that this WILL be the last time I am 'stuck,' although this really isn't all that big of a chore. It's more fun to complain to them about it than actually carrying out the task. Besides, it gave me the opportunity to wear my Hawaiian dress, which I will probably not wear again, unless and until someone invites me to a luau! By the way, all of us will submit separate written reports to the Secretary for the minutes, so you can read them at your leisure and find out much more than the snippets I am including in this brief report.

As it turned out, Gus and Chase ended up on the same flight out of Portland and quite unknowingly, in seats next to each other. They apologized right up front to the other passengers, knowing that chaos frequently ensues when they travel together. Skip arrived a day earlier, so he very kindly offered to pick them up at the Honolulu airport. From Chase's description, the rental car looked like a stolen gateway car from a Sopranos episode. I'm not sure what that means ... there must be a back story there somewhere. And, much to Skip's chagrin, his two passengers arrived in need of naps and protein, having consumed way too much sugar as is their modus operandi. I can only imagine the conversation that took place on the ride to the hotel. Once there, however, it was down to business.

Chase wants me to be sure and let you know that he didn't hang out at the beach all day instead of attending PRAASA. I'm not sure WHY he wants me to point that out. Again, there must be a back story. Skip was also quick to point out that he didn't go there to play but rather to serve, and yet what a blessing to serve the Area in a 'paradise-like' setting. Gus made no mention of his motives in this regard, so it follows that they must be suspect. Fortunately, we have all been well trained over the years, and we know that we will become totally immersed in the weekend events and have little time for much else except perhaps ice cream at the end of the sessions. The various events run to about 10 p.m. on Friday and near midnight on Saturday, so even ice cream is sometimes out of the question. The roundtables are generally everyone's favorite, and usually the most informative because the discussions are relevant to each person's service position. Chase was particularly interested in how GSR Schools are handled in each of the different Areas, which is a topic that came

up during his Alternate Delegate roundtable. He was also excited to talk about our emerging use of multimedia here in Oregon. Several folks caught the excitement bug, so he passed on to them some PowerPoint files they can perhaps tailor to suit their needs.

Area Chairs and Alternate Chairs have a combined roundtable, and both Skip and Gus attest to the fact that the topics covered this year were interesting and informative. Gus observed that being in their second year of rotation seemed to place them in a position to both give more and receive more in the roundtables. They touched on several topics: how the different Areas operate, Area concerns, Area standing committees and how to keep them motivated to serve, integrating our Spanish-speaking communities into the Area and Area translation needs, involving remote communities and dark Districts in the Area, handling Area business, using home stays to help keep Assembly costs down, Area practices on travel reimbursement. Gus's exact quote was: "It's really hard to explain how valuable it is to get some sense of the similarities and differences within the Pacific Region Areas. We worked as a harmonious group, sharing our experience, strength and hope with each other – one chairperson to another. It was great stuff. Our open and frank discussions about sensitive issues were extremely enlightening and informative. Well worth the price of admission."

We were all of the opinion that this year's panel presentations were top notch. I've already mentioned those given by our very own Fred and Keary. One presentation that Gus particularly liked was entitled, "AA Members and Other Drugs Pamphlet – Why is the Revision taking so long?" Here's what Gus said about it. "The presenter lovingly took us through the somewhat tortured history of the 1984 pamphlet and it's revision which began in 2007. After describing the original pamphlet and letting us know she, like all of us, hadn't seen the current draft, she told us the saga of Randall, one of the stories in the original pamphlet that became somewhat contentious. She also answered the question as to why it was taking so long -- 4 years so far -- to revise this pamphlet. She noted that some things "just take time," and "in AA years, which are the exact opposite of dog years, 4 years is not a very long time at all". I laughed out loud."

At this juncture, I should point out that Gus claims to have taken 34 pages of notes during the course of PRAASA weekend. I am suspicious that he is just trying to make the rest of us look bad, so I think you should ask him for the proof. As for me, I will leave you with a few gems I heard throughout the weekend.

"We obey the Traditions because we want them for ourselves." "Once personality overrides principles, any possibility of true leadership disappears." "I skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been." "Listening with an open heart is as important as leading by example." "Is a surplus of virtue more dangerous than a surplus of vice?" "If you are not free to not believe, then you're not free to believe." "Knowledge of the path is no substitute for walking it." "None of us is as smart as all of us." "AA in action calls for the sacrifice of much time and a little money." And my all time favorite: ALOHA means **A Lot Of Happy Alcoholics**.

Thank you from all of us for your loving gift of funding us to attend PRAASA.

Yours in loving A.A. service,

Anne M., Delegate
Chase B., Alternate Delegate

Gus P., Area Chairperson
Skip A., Alternate Chairperson