

A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to tag along with David to North Carolina. He was invited as a past trustee to be the assembly guest at the Area 51 Fall Assembly. I was especially excited because their awesome delegate Rainer L. is on my Conference committee. Plus, Area 51 has fun with their area number and their assemblies feature giant, inflatable green and blue aliens. This was an experience I did not want to miss! One member came up to me on the last day and said he hoped I enjoyed their Southern hospitality (I did) and that I would have nice things to say about them when I got back home. So here we go.

Fresh off of our Area inventory, I was paying attention to all the similarities and differences. I was especially inspired by a funny and informative skit on "How the Assembly Operates," the way they address excess funds in their treasury, and the multiple Pre-Conference events they hold each year. (I also came away with renewed gratitude for the frequency with which we meet in CNCA, and the simultaneous Spanish/English interpretation we are able to provide to all.)

I attended workshops on Safety and the Upside-Down Triangle. I was moved to tears by a GSR who said she had not participated in the two years of virtual assemblies because of an aversion to Zoom. She was not happy with some of the changes made at the 71<sup>st</sup> Conference, but she recognized that her right of participation came with a responsibility that she didn't fulfill. It was a powerful share. We also know that there are members who were left out because the technology was a complete barrier to their participation. Who has been missing and why is an important question, and we won't know all the answers until we hear from them.

Another highlight was seeing the surprise in the eyes of a couple of new GSRs at their first-ever assembly as realized they were eating breakfast with a past trustee and a delegate from California ("Are you lost?"). It took me back to my early days of General Service, when it felt as if a whole new world was opening up. One alcoholic talking to another is magic, especially when biscuits and gravy are involved. By the end of the weekend, we had 260 new friends.

On the last day, a new motion was made to have future assemblies be hybrid. The chair was reminded by a past delegate that she could appoint an ad hoc committee to explore it. It seems we are all in the same boat as we navigate these challenges and opportunities going into 2022.

One thing Rainer talked about in his delegate report that continues to resonate with me is the importance of discussion rather than debate. He noted that debate can be fractious, while discussion is unifying. "I need to share experience, strength and hope, rather than advocating for an agenda or outcome. I need to listen like I have no opinion, like I want my mind to change. And I need the exposure to perspectives I don't share... we cannot afford to allow the polarization of our cultural climate to bleed over into A.A. activity."

It is my belief that we are all on the same side here in CNCA: our common welfare comes first. Let's try not to divide into camps, and trust that we can work together on ways to allow for more access and participation. Let's practice patience, flexibility, love and tolerance... there is always a solution.

—Jennifer B., Panel 71 Delegate