

# PLAYGROUND



photo by Mike Garlington

**I FIRST CAME TO BURNING MAN IN 1995** when my friend Tim said, “There’s a party in the desert. Do you want to go?” Sure. Why not...

I didn't know Tim all that well, but we had been to a couple of Crash Worship shows together so I figured he wouldn't steer me wrong on this. So I get into this rental van with Tim and 4 or 5 guys I don't really know and we head out to the middle of nowhere.

We drove from San Francisco and it seemed to take forever. We were convinced we were lost; it was midnight and we were in the middle of nowhere, and, seriously, how the hell could anybody throw a party out here. So we found a turnout, backtracked a little thinking we would find "it" and, when we didn't, found another turnout and we all slept in the van. I slept on the floor under the bench seats and the guys slept on the seats.

We woke up, got our bearings and hit 12 mile. We drove onto the playa and there was sign that said "Burning Man" and maybe 2 or 3 people standing around it. They asked if we had our tickets but then didn't take them or rip them. They said only, "You head east about three miles and then head north 5 miles and then you should start seeing everyone. You all have a compass? Yeah? Okay, bye."

After driving as directed, we arrived - no fence, no cohesiveness really at all - just a group of people kinda camped in the a general area. I got out of the van and the first thing I saw was a man on a bicycle in a pink tutu. All I thought was, Holy shit where am I? It was the kind of "what the fuck" that implied to me that anything was possible. Rave camp was a mile out because people in Burning Man proper didn't want to hear it. A year later it was two miles out because clearly one mile wasn't enough. There was a drive-by shooting range. You could go the hot springs.

I started working DPW in 1999. I was introduced to DPW via Coyote. I knew him in San Francisco - he worked for Burning Man and invited me out. I lived at the ranch for a month before we even hit the playa. The survey team surveyed the city that year with an old railroad transit. It was first time we used the transit, and Coyote put me in charge of working it while he and the rest of the team used the range finders and put in the flags; every year since then he's run the transit, but that first year he had me do it. It was The Year We Surveyed the City Three Times. By the third survey, we knew what we were doing.

As everybody knows, after survey comes fence. I'm sure there were many people helping because there's no way Carl and I could pound in all those T-stakes by ourselves but it felt like it was basically just the two of us. It took daaaaaays. We would drive Carl's pickup to the depot and load up with t-stakes and then go out to where we needed to drop the next set. I'd drive and he'd drop - I was supposed to drive very slowly because he'd be walking behind me, grabbing t-stakes out of the back of the truck. He tells the story that I'd be listening to my head banging music and my foot would become leaden on the gas pedal and pretty soon he'd be huffing it to keep up with the truck, this old man running behind me. I don't quite remember it like that (though it's not far off), but that's how he tells it. It was awesome stringing the twine and tying more square knots than I ever want to tie ever again in my life, just me and Carl. Which, I've got to tell you is the best way process any major shit you've got in your life - looking at nothing but mountains and tying knots. There are no phone calls to girlfriends, no TV, no pints of ice cream for distraction. You process, you deal, you get over it.

I became a full-time employee in 2003, doing data entry and being DPW's Volunteer Coordinator. The DPW Council was formed in 2004. We have been doing it wrong ever since, and there's no way we could do any of this without the people that make up the DPW.