

# DPW Dedication by Joe the Builder



Photo by John Curley

The year was 1998. I was living in a San Francisco warehouse filled with a mundane lifestyle, working and dating a 20 something Norwegian girl who had a very different outlook on our relationship. I met a man named Brian Wallace, an entertainer in local restaurants and coffee shops. That summer I would see Brian at very random locations about every two weeks - just by happenstance - and I found that very peculiar, as did he. I got a call from Brian late one night saying that he was going to an event called "Burning Man" out in the Nevada desert. In 30 minutes. He asked if I wanted to go. My girlfriend had just cheated on me, work was slow, and I was feeling particularly down. Not knowing anything about the event or what lay ahead, and taking into account my current state of mind, I said ok. He told me we'd be gone for 5 days, so I grabbed 2 bags of bagels, 2 gallons of water and a blanket. This is one case where the phrase "ignorance is bliss" really stood out. After a half hour Brian showed up and the adventure began.

I had no ticket and no knowledge of what was ahead of me and I was ok with that. At the Empire store, and I bought a ticket for \$100 from a guy who was leaving the event. It was all the money I had brought, but Brian said do it, so I did. Then Brian drove us to the middle of this forsaken desert looking for the entrance. We found it, got through the gate, found a spot to park, and crashed for a while...

I remember Brian saying, "remember where we are and I'll see you later", and he vanished. I wandered around in a state of awe, seeing things I hadn't even dreamed of. I danced my ass off, walked by people fucking in the street, was introduced to some amazing art and danced some more. Time flew. I soon realized it had been about a day and a half since I had left Brian. I found my way back to the van; he was there and said, "well, whatcha think"?

After a few days I realized that I was getting a bit hungry. The bagels had run out and there was not a food vendor in sight. I asked around and was pointed to a camp that was giving away pancakes. I rolled up and they asked for a song in return, hung my head and I said I had no singing voice they would be interested in. The woman took pity on me I guess. She told me to come back after I ate, grab a plastic bag and pick up some trash. I agreed. I soon realized I was in an unfamiliar situation; For the first time in my life I was picking up trash for a meal, and somehow it was very gratifying and strangely rewarding.

That same night there was the big fire that everybody got excited for. I got wrapped up in the raw tribal energy that was being manifested and projected throughout the entire city. That night I did things that I don't really want to share here. Eventually I found my way back to the van, and that night Brian and I headed back to San Francisco. All I remember about that return trip was laying my head against the van door and then waking up in front of my warehouse with a lot of gratitude to Brian for taking on this amazing adventure.

I saw Brian only once after that. Somehow I felt he had played his part in the story my life. At one point our adventure had landed us onto a happy little camp with a few nice souls one of whom introduced himself as Lord Huckleberry. I had no idea at the time that he and I would eventually form a great and lasting friendship.

Over the rest of the year I bonded with Lord Huckleberry, and he invited me to join his camp next year, which I did, along with a truck full of stuff. Then the following year with a truck and a trailer full of stuff. All the subsequent years I kept bringing more stuff with the primary goal of just helping people out on the playa. A couple of years in, a lady named Marcia ran into Lord Huckleberry and asked if he had a pick, he responded, "no, we have something better, we have a guy named Joe who is a builder, I call him Joe the Builder". I helped Marcia out for a couple of hours and the rest is history. I still remember the feeling I got evolving around that simple, humbling pancake breakfast.

I really love and care about the DPW that I've grown to know and the life changing experience known as Burning Man. Please do me and yourself a favor, take care of each other and be safe out there.

My best to you,

Joe The Builder  
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