

ALLISON

Allison is an experienced commercial construction worker from Maryland and self described “nerd.” In 2016, she attended Burning Man for the first time and worked with DPW during the restoration season. Passionate about the environment and maps, she was drawn to the event’s cleanup and restoration process, which she had read about in an article on geographic information system software.

This interview was conducted in 2016 by “Flo”, Flore Muguet a French anthropologist. Most of Flo’s questions have been omitted to improve reading flow.



“I just started making plans to go... I’m just telling people I’m going to Burning Man even though I don’t have a ticket.”



Photo credit: Belle Benedetti, 2016.



Photo credit: Dan Dillilo, 2016.

FLO Can you tell me where you’re from?

ALLISON Maryland.[...] This is my first time to have come to Burning Man. Also my first year to be involved in DPW. I wanted to come to Burning Man for a long time, and then last year I made a small effort to come. And then since last year I’ve been trying to come all year. So, I started telling people I was coming to Burning Man, and I tried to buy a ticket online through the lottery system. Yeah... so, I tried to buy a ticket online and it didn’t work, so I was waiting for the second lotteries and the low-income program. But,

I was pretty confident that I could get a ticket even at the last minute, because last year I was on all the Facebook groups and I saw how many people were selling tickets at the last minute when their plans changed.

So, I just started making plans to go. I blocked my calendar. I just started making plans to go: like, I’m not gonna get a job, I’m not gonna visit anyone, I’m just telling everyone I’m going to Burning Man even though I don’t have a ticket. So, I have a friend who comes to Burning Man, and he’s been coming for a couple of years. He’s really involved in a lot of art and

volunteer projects. He’s worked with DPW for one year, and so he gave me a contact so I could volunteer with Burning Man office for the general leadership conference in April, because I had applied online and Burning Man had never contacted me. I’d gone through several times using the online forms for anything. Just anything. But, I never got any information back.

This friend of mine has the direct email of someone he’s worked with, so he told me to email that person. Or, he emailed them with my email and said that I wanted to volunteer. So, I volunteered for the GLC conference

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in lots of different areas, so that was really cool. I got to go into a bunch of the warehouses, I got to ride in the trucks, I unloaded, loaded stuff, set up conference rooms. I was a monitor for the conference: bringing people pens and water, things like that. I helped clean-up, and I helped with tickets at the door of the party they had, and then cleanup the next day, and load stuff back into the warehouse. It was fun to meet a lot of different people and see the production side of the event.

I had read about the cleanup and restoration process years ago in a magazine about geographic



Photo credit: Allison Arnold, 2016.

information system software. And you know, they like to advertise all the cool things their software can do. So, they had an article about the Burning Man cleanup process and how they were using their software process for mapping moop. And you know me, I'm super nerdy about the environment and maps. I like maps. I already wanted to go to Burning Man, but I didn't realize I wanted to go to Burning Man or wasn't going to allow myself—like, "I need to stay in school, I need to have a job, I can't go to Burning Man, it's too much fun!" So I read this really nerdy article about the mapping process, and I thought it sounded amazing to stay in the desert for a month and pick up cigarette butts, and then put them in a map. So, I had the idea, "I'd love to stay for the restoration process" but I wasn't allowing myself. I was like, 'oh, that's a long time to not be getting paid and not contributing to my career. Oh, I'd have to save a lot of money to take a month off from my life.'

It just seemed really impossible, but then when I had already booked the time to come here, and people were asking me when I was coming back, I realized I had enough money to pay my September bills and I didn't have a job to come back to. So, I could do whatever I wanted. So, I started asking how I could stay for resto. My same friend, who had stayed one year for resto, said, "oh, just show up at the morning meeting. That's all you have to do." So, that's what I did. After the meeting I went up to Logan and I said, "I'm new." And he said, "what's your intention?" I say, "oh, what do you mean?" He says, "how long do you wanna be here, what do you wanna do?" I say, "oh, yeah, I



Photo credit: LadiesandGentleman, 2016.

wanna help and stay through Resto." He says, "you have to apply for that." I say that's fine. He's like "ok. So, today, go with Starchild." That was it. They didn't really ask too many questions.

[...] I was carrying my east coast, commercial construction work [into BM with me]. Like, my boss, he's always yelling at everyone to work harder and faster and more efficiently, and to work alone. Because that's what makes him money. And

at one point, Starchild was saying something like "we need to slow down, we need to work together." He even gave a speech at one point! He said... "it may seem that you feel like you're not doing anything or there's too many people, but we need every one of you here. This is the system." He said something that I had kind of already worked out in my head five minutes before, but I'd been working through all morning. ... He's really good at explaining what's going to happen so that the people doing the

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task don't have to understand all the mechanics of lifting this beam down. They don't have to already have that body knowledge. They can just follow his instructions like "move to the left, move up, down" and it all flows really smoothly. I thought that was really impressive.

On lingerie day I wore a full body fishnet stocking with underpants and my little fanny pack, and we mooped like normal! And I was rather conservatively dressed

“I felt so special.”

compared to others, I think. So, it was really interesting for me. When I got dressed in the morning I felt quite scandalous. But once I got onto the playa and saw how everyone else dressed, I felt like a prude. So, that was interesting. It was just super fun! The more I thought about it, I remember another friend had said something to me once like "oh, that's really slutty. Like, not playa slutty, but slutty." And so that face kept coming into my mind... the context for the outfits and just "playa slutty" as a whole new level. It's an opportunity that I don't have in normal life.

And on the Lingerie day, I felt like people were really open and caring, and communicating more. Everyone was just so happy. It felt very happy to me. And yeah, it felt great to be in that outfit... if anything, I feel like people were holding back from saying how much they love people. And so when people would say, "oh, you look great" Like I just don't know how I'm perceived by other people and I've gone through a lot of body issues myself... I felt so special.