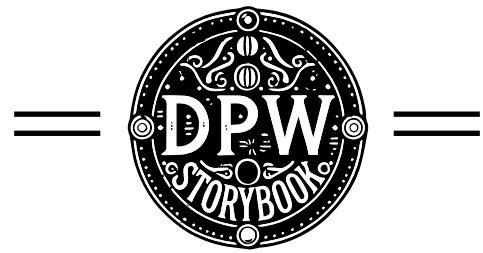


FOREST

Forest is a long-time participant of Burning Man, attending the event since 2000 and joining the Department of Public Works (DPW) in 2008. Originally from Ohio, Forest's journey with Burning Man began as a solo trip but quickly grew into deep connections, first with the regional Burner Con and later with the DPW. As of 2016, he works with the TSA team, focusing on sorting and recycling trash and resources.

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



“Like I lot of people, I came to do DPW when I was kind of at the end of my rope...”



Forest on top of the TSA Station, Photo credit: Flore Muguet, 2016.

I found out about Burning Man for the first time in 1997 and instantly knew it was something I wanted to do and had to go. It took me three years to get here, so 2000 was my first burn. 2001 was my second. So, I guess I was 28 my first burn. My first burn I was just in a tent by myself on the outskirts of the city. My second year I connected with some people in Ohio, which is where I'm from, who did this thing called “Burning Corn” which was a regional back then.

They had done it the year before in 2000, then 2001 was the second one, and I helped build the effigy for that. That ended up being just two years for that one and then that was it. That was a pretty epic experience. [The effigy] was a big ear of corn because it was Burning Corn. You know, Ohio. Corn fields.

It was a really powerful experience and those people were, you know, kind of underground types, and

creators, and artists. So, I rode with them out to Burning Man in 2001, camped with the Cataclysmic-Mega-Sheer Ranch, which was a group of people that had been doing Burning Man since '93 or '94. Most of them had been in DPW, which at that point was only, what, like four years old? DPW had been existing for four years by that point. Most of the camp had been in it, or were currently in it, and were coming by a lot. So, I got exposed to the old DPW my second

burn which was, yeah, out of this world. It was really wild.

I remember coming back from the burn, after the Man burn, and sitting down next to one of the guys in the camp who had a megaphone and was saying all kinds of stuff to the people passing by. There were some plastic chairs and some wooden chairs, and all of a sudden, I was pretty exhausted. I could see this vehicle driving along the Esplanade, out of

the Esplanade: out a ways. It had, this big, long, maybe like a Lincoln or something, you know? And it had people on top of it, and I could see a pile of flame go, and it ended up being a flamethrower. So, what happened is they did this sharp, right turn and started heading directly at us. [chuckles]

So, I'm sitting there and I just flip them the bird. And Ed is the guy who had the megaphone and he's just like,

“blah blah blah,” and he leans back, and he puts his foot up, and they get about 8 feet away, and I see they have not slowed down at all. So I jump the hell out of the way because I’m like, “what the hell?” and they knock him off and over and onto the ground. I come over and I’m like “Dude, are you alright?”

He goes, “Yeah, it’s so and so. We’ve known each other for years, we do this shit all the time.” I’m like “Ok.” They jump down off of the vehicle. There was probably about four or five of them riding up there. Yeah. I mean there could have been other people who aren’t DPW, but I’m sure that’s who it was because, you know, it’s kind of a no brainer. I mean, they came by and helped with building the ranch way in the front and the fence that we had, and digging post holes and all that. They were coming by constantly. Actually, the DPW parade that year came right in front.

You’d have to ask Will or Coyote about that. [chuckle] But, so then what happened is that I asked Ed if he’s all right, then these people jump down and they grab this burn barrel that’s not lit. They kicked the plastic chairs out of the way to grab the wooden chairs, shove them on in, and they take a big, huge, two gallon can of gas, and they douse that thing. Then they step back out of the way, and they fire off that flame thrower, and they blow it up and burn it. That’s the kind of shenanigans that used to go on.

The chairs were wooden, so they were fair game: they got burned. [laughs. Then, there was like four other vehicles that had flame throwers, and they were blasting those things off so that we had about. It was four or five different vehicles right in front of the Ranch way, on the Esplanade, with flame throwers, just going off like crazy after they had set our shit



It looks like a selfie. Photo credit: Forest, 2016.

on fire. It was fucking nuts; it was great. I was standing there watching the whole thing go on and I felt very peaceful. I felt this beautiful, warm feeling that goes with chaos that I’ve experienced. But, no, it’s very much the opposite reaction to what other people would have.

So, that was kind of my first exposure to DPW, and then I pretty much always wanted to be a part of DPW then after that. I had a friend who

was part of DPW for a number of years. I knew him, I think I met him in 2007. Yeah, that sounds right. Different events in Colorado. He would come and stay at the place I was living out there in North Denver. So, he ended up being a manager. He was a manager for the oculus group that builds the café.

So, in 2008 he was like, “Forest, when are you gonna come out here and do

DPW?” I said, “I don’t know. I always wanted to. I guess it will happen when it’s supposed to.” At that point in time everything kind of fell apart in my life. Like I lot of people, I came to do DPW when I was kind of at the end of my rope. [chuckles]

So, I called him up and said, “Well, here’s what’s going on.” And he says, “Well, things are full before the event. But, if you get yourself a ticket to the event, I’ll have you on crew

afterwards.” It was all kind of a last minute thing. Within a day and a half, I had a ticket, a camp, and I was gonna help with the Conclave again, and I knew I was on DPW. I was on crew for all of strike, and I ended up staying on for restoration.

I’ve been away for a couple of years and was just coming back. I remember the ghetto in 2011 being like maybe a 4th or a 5th the size of what it was this year? But the

“Early Man is one of my favorite things.”

event has increased in population somewhere in 20,000+ in that time. I’m not on social media, so it’s like completely off the radar, and for some folks to remember me from five to six years ago, That’s pretty sweet.

Education about recycling is definitely something that was absent with some people because everybody is coming from all over the country and other parts of the world, so not everybody has recycling where they’re from.

Early Man is one of my favorite things. I got to help with the effigy and burning that. It was like some stairs and then it was an effigy of Lexington starting on top of the stairs. He’s the guy who started TSA I guess. I got to do a flame effects thing that Dave X helped me with, and that was pretty awesome. It’s fun because that’s like old school Burning Man. There’s no burn perimeter, so it’s pretty crazy. [chuckle] Fireworks flying by your head.

I finally got to go and fly in a plane this year. We took off and we went flying around the city and then we went flying over by Trego Mountain. Incredible.