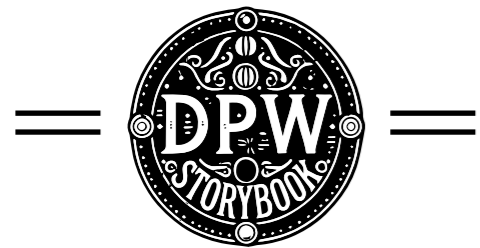


# MISS ROACH AND SAILOR

Miss Roach and Sailor, dedicated managers of the Black Rock Saloon in Gerlach, play an essential role in the off-Playa social life of the Department of Public Works (DPW) during the pre-build and Resto periods. Alcohol at the Saloon is sourced through donations from the annual Collexodus. With years of experience in both the DPW and Gate departments, they have transformed the Saloon into more than just a bar; it has become a communal living room—a place for camaraderie, support, and unwinding after long days, where everyone feels safe and valued. It's a place where community belonging is shown. Within the main bar room, specific shelves adorned with photos commemorate members who have passed on. The wooden bar counter, where members proudly etch their names, marks each person's unique contribution to this close-knit community.

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



**SAILOR** It has been my DPW 4th or 5th year. It is my 17th burn - more than half my life. I was a participant and then gate and then DPW. Gate - probably 8 years with Gate. 8 or 9. GayPW we call it. I still do Gate.

**MISS ROACH** Miss Roach: DPW 5 years. I did Commissary in 2007. Gate 15th year. I have been working for Gate for about 13 years and so we do both.

**FLO** Is that where you met, actually?  
**Miss Roach:** We met at a BBQ for Newbies in Golden Gate Park. They don't do that event anymore, but it was a way that a bunch of teams could go out and recruit new people and enculturate them and all sorts of stuff. That's how Sailor and I met and somehow - he joined Gate that year.

**SAILOR** That was a lovely day.

**MISS ROACH** I was already working for Gate, so I was running - I had a pink pop up and I was running the event for Gate being a presence there (at the BBQ) visit and learn about the department and how to volunteer and that is where I met Sailor.

**SAILOR** She thought I was a bimbo.

**MISS ROACH** I thought he was a bimbo — because he likes to play one on TV.

**FLO** So, you shifted from Gate to DPW and then the Saloon?

**MISS ROACH** The Saloon is a funny story. We crashed Golden spike—not by accident, but we weren't planning on actually doing it—in 2012. We were in Reno, and we spent a day volunteering at the Temple that year. The Temple build was in Reno. The guy was like,

“Hey, ya wanna go crash Golden spike?” And we were like yeeaaaaah—sure. So, after the Golden Spike we intentionally kind of kicked everyone out from behind the bar and were like, “We're bartending for you!” and made [it] very slightly theatrical. Like, we're Gate, and we're going to bartend and take care of you guys. By the end of the night both Logan and Playground were like, “Here's how to turn off the lights, here's how to lock the doors,” and peaced out. That was 2012. Yeah, so after Final Supper that year we did the same thing. We had this harrowing drive throughout this white-out that was just completely bonkers. We got here and basically did the same thing [as] 2012, where we kicked out the bartenders and like, “We're gonna take care of you!” It was kind of like an interdepartmental appreciation gesture. [laughs]

**SAILOR** It has done a lot for interdepartmental relations because Gate and DPW used to have beef. They didn't like each other. And now you know, we kind of do a lot for both departments and so people are a lot nicer to each other.

**MISS ROACH** Which is awesome. [laughs]  
It was intentional on our parts too: to try and bridge that gap. There's always been people that have worked for both departments, but for whatever reason there was almost theatrical disliking of one another. Unfortunately, when you do tell a story and it gets retold, and retold, and retold, things get lost in translation. What started out as a theatrical beef between two departments became the actual beef. There was no reason for people not to like each other. Both departments are cut from a very similar cloth.



Flyer of Miss Roach and Sailor joke “campaign” during DPW Resto 2016.

SAILOR Yeah, well we're all just Burning Man nerds, but it got so bad that whole containers disappeared, and a car got rolled, ya know, and—it got weird and that's why we don't do capture the flag anymore.

MISS ROACH [We became managers] in 2014, I think we were just the bar managers running the bar together. Last year is the year we became the manager and assistant manager.

FLO So you guys are actually managers of the Saloon which means the bar, the computer room, the kitchen, the TV room, the pool and the laundry? Miss Roach: Don't forget the laundry.

SAILOR Overall, we're hospitality. My focus is largely the bar, but we just try and provide a space for people where they could relax and get their stuff done. Miss Roach: Yup. For us it's really important to create this place [that] is our clubhouse and our communal living room. We really need to create a space where people can just exhale at the end of a really long hard day. So, it's like little, tiny details that people wouldn't necessarily think about: the floors are clean and vacuumed, the cleanliness, and picking up after people. It wouldn't necessarily make a difference for one day but, like, over time it would build up. It would make people not feel as comfortable here, and underappreciated, and we want to make sure that we create that arena that people feel good coming here.

They feel relaxed and comfortable. They can zone out, and watch TV, and play games with their friends. They can cook a meal for a bunch of their friends, and all that kind of

stuff. The bar is an arena in which wild things can happen in a safe space. In my mind, and in both of our minds, this can be a safe space where people can act out bizarre things sometimes, because it's funny and it's fun, and people like to have that opportunity. Yeah, it's those late nights that we have here, especially during Resto season, which is where the weird magic moments happen. You don't know what it is until you see it. As it is happening, you're like oh my god it's happening, and you're kinda like, "This is why we do it." Sometimes that means working a lot standing on your feet, and you're still having fun even if you're not having fun. Sometimes you're like, "Holy shit I could sleep 4 more hours or 12 more hours," but we do it because we can.

MISS ROACH We love it. We love being able to support this space, and make people feel really good; make people feel that sense of wonder and possibility and, "What's going to happen next?" We're having so much fun right now.

SAILOR Our incident reports have certainly dropped since that first year. I think people are starting to take us a little more seriously, if not out of respect, then because they know that I am the person who serves them alcohol. They want to get alcohol and if they screw up, I won't give it to them. But, you know, a lot of folks, especially around Resto time, are working out a lot of issues. This is, for me, a time of year where I sort of distill all of the rest: it's this moment of reckoning. We're on the precipice of going back to the place where we have no work, we have no place to live, we're homeless and jobless and, you know, not exactly rich.



## “The bar is an arena in which wild things can happen in a safe space.”

So, a lot of folks, in that moment, melt down. I often will see it. Sometimes they are just drunk, and I give them a ride home. Sometimes people are having the need for additional conversation, and they need someone to talk to. Roach and I sort of tag in and out of that. It's different year by year and there's a lot of interpersonal stuff that we sort of have to help people with. Sometimes that's really annoying. Other times it's really fulfilling.

I am there to help you now. I can, and I am going to. Other times you're just like this person is... you can't get through to them right now. They are too loaded, and you need to take those people home. And if they're, you know, way out of bounds, and if they're being awful, it ends up becoming a ranger issue. God bless the Rangers: they help us so much.

FLO And did the interactions between DPW and the Ranger's get better over the years throughout your management?

MISS ROACH We have been trying really hard to make sure that at least our relationship with the Rangers were better cause the first year we came in there just wasn't a lot of communication and Crow and I have always gotten along, and I work for him for this company in the off-season

MISS ROACH And so we just kind of started spit balling the conversation for a couple of years and we really codified it to where we have a really good relationship. While Sailor and I are technically part of a safety team here we do take a collaborative safety approach to this and that is why we want to have managers who are here and know who the Ranger is and know who our medic is for the evening because we all want to be able to communicate with folks and work together to keep our kids safe. If people are having a hard time or people are too intoxicated or any of that kind of stuff, we all can make sure to monitor and keep an eye out for someone and avoid them from melting down and over the last couple of years I absolutely think our relationship with the Rangers has been great.

FLO And can you tell me which specific improvements that description of improvement that actually made that relationship better?

MISS ROACH Oh yeah, there's no rules it's basically a cultural change. When people start - when the ball starts rolling and you start treating people like your coworkers and their nice people and they're on our team. Five years ago, we would not have cheered for a Ranger giving a speech at Golden Stake. There's such a weird antagonistic

“Fuck Off Ranger” mentality DPW used to be a much different

SAILOR They treat them like hall monitors these guys aren't prudes they like to party as much as we do - but they can't while we are because they are looking after us.

MISS ROACH They're keeping their stuff tight so they can give us the opportunity to be crazy and silly and work our shit out. Yeah, but the cultural change has been really awesome I remember being really surprised last year we had one of the new Ranger's and one of the crew was like, hey it's really nice to meet you and being like 'Oh god, where is this going?' No, he was actually just being a nice person to him - someone I would have never expected to be nice to a Ranger previously. So, I think there might also just be a collective sense of maturity a little bit more.

SAILOR It's not something that you can't take back - I don't know, I think that the crew we have as Rangers has been very good. And trying to bring them into the fold and not make them feel alienated and part of what we do we call it pre-Rangering ya know, when I deal with something before the Rangers have to cause sometimes it's way easier to get through to somebody - cause ya know they're wearing Khaki, they have a uniform on and the uniform sometimes people feel like they're in trouble so if I'm just like listen dude get in the car I'm taking you home, they feel less in trouble.

FLO So, I understand that your job goes way beyond serving people drinks and making sure that there's soap at the laundromat ... because

you have a caring role and you're also here everyday for us. You're this stability that people can have here. How does this caring role that you endorse without necessarily having it in your job description, how does this impact the job itself? Like if there is a high demand of taking care of a lot of people? how do you dispatch between all of this? Is that a challenge sometimes?

SAILOR It can be difficult. The thing is it is very emotive job, and we're not really allowed to have bad days. I can't look like I'm pissed off. Or sad. I have to dig deep when I am back here otherwise, I depress everybody. It takes a lot of energy sometimes. You have to dig deep. I had a pretty intense loss last year and I went to work, and you know it was I couldn't - work seemed like the only thing that would actually help me because it seemed like a distraction. Even then, dig deep dig deep and actually helping people makes you feel better and other times you feel like goddamnit I just want to lie down and so yeah - it's pretty exhausting.

MISS ROACH On a different team, you can pull your hoodie over your head, and you can do your job but if we're having a sad day, we're not allowed to have any feelings really except for like hospitable ones. So that is definitely an emotional challenge for us. And Sailor and I will often go into our office and be like, I'm going to download about this person. We'll actually ask each other will this require the man's touch or the women's touch like sometimes you need the right tool for the job and which one of us is that. And sometimes it'll be ok, like this is definitely a Roachie situation or ok

this is definitely a Sailor situation, so we do try to make sure that we're all in the loop about how we're caring for people and the best way to approach it.

FLO I have a question about the emotional attachment some people have to this place. It's also a memorial at some point and having their names on the bar table means a lot to them. I was talking to some people that were not DPW telling me: "I work close with DPW and there is one thing I would like to do and one day I would like to be DPW and mark my name on the bar". So, it's something that can mean a lot for people. It's not only a name on the bar, it's something that means way more than that.

SAILOR This bar - A lot of things have happened in this bar. In fact, it's has been said that after we painted over this ceiling Howard Hughs' name was - Howard Hughs used to actually hang out here it was described - you know, the crazy billionaire who broke all the speed records, The Aviator, with Leonardo DiCaprio - his name was scratched into the ceiling, and we didn't even know.

And Trixie, had her first drink here when she married and 17. Trixie works in the Office - right here, across the street and she was married, at 17, or 19 - it was a different time, and she had her first legal drink at that part of the bar right there.

FLO Before it was actually the [DPW/ Burning Man] Black Rock Saloon?

SAILOR Oh yeah - we're talking like 50-60 years ago. A lot of things have happened here. A lot of it we don't even know about. This bar itself, it's

“To be able to scratch your name into it [the bar], means you did something cool. You know, it means we built the 3rd largest city in this state with a hangover in a matter of weeks and then we shut it down and cleaned it all up. And we created an arena in which people's lives changed..”

an ongoing epitaph for some, it's a piece of history for the rest of us and a point of pride. To be able to scratch your name into it, means you did something cool. You know, it means we built the 3rd largest city in this state with a hangover in a matter of weeks and then we shut it down and cleaned it all up. And we created an arena in which people's lives changed. And it's all silly and wasteful arguably stupid but it's still special and I'm proud of it. And this bar kinda marks a lot of that.

MISS ROACH I think that because it's the center of our clubhouse and it's our central meeting spot that it makes a lot of sense that this is where we do some sort of commemoration of people and ourselves. The one thing that I know that we want to do over the next however many years we're able to keep doing this I would like to make the art in here reflect the current staff rather than just having random burning man signs because we're at burning man. They're like, "well, just take this and hang it on the wall," but really have stuff that is made by us hanging here or new pictures of us hanging here, stuff that we've created so we really have a sense of feeling that ownership and this place is reflecting this team. I think that DPW is really special, and I think all the teams out at Burning Man probably feel similarly and I feel there is a tight knit bond and so when we have lost people that it's felt very deeply.

SAILOR When you're putting up that new shelf this year - it's like - oh. We needed more room. And I mean, we're all getting older and eventually everyone dies - but even so - we've had some that are just too soon. And each time a shelf goes up. It's pretty rough.

FLO Did you actually write your names on the bar?

MISS ROACH They're both - behind the bar.

SAILOR We're right next to each other.

FLO Are there any rules? When can someone write their name on the bar?

SAILOR There are no actual rules

MISS ROACH There're some guidelines, suggestions.

SAILOR Pretty much the guideline, the operating - the idea is you should do a full season. Some people say it's three seasons some people just showed up and wrote their name in the bar and they shouldn't have. Some of them are actually scratched out but I never saw it happen. Yeah - it's pretty serious faux pas.

MISS ROACH Well, yeah, this symbol right here is so important. People can't wait to put their name in the bar and feel like they've accomplished something and be with this weird pantheon of names somehow. It's so important to people they can't wait to do it. And that means that some people maybe they shouldn't have carved their name, it's a little bit too early or there's people who have flame out. They were around for a couple of weeks and never come back. And I think, my personal opinion is that your name goes on the bar when you know that this is your community that you're willing to keep investing in. I'm here for the long haul. Some people are just lifers, whether or not that means they're going to work for DPW for the rest of their life - probably not but they're still involved in the community and

they ya know keep in touch and talk with people and plan trips and do things and involve themselves in the community. That should be, I think, what the ideal - I don't know - rule, guideline, measuring stick.

FLO And about the rules in all the other rooms, are there rules?

MISS ROACH Yes, some of them are pretty simple like don't smoke in the other rooms and you can only smoke in the two rooms and the bathroom. Don't smoke in the other room and ya know there are a lot of unspoken things like just be a reasonable human being. Clean up after yourself. Don't climb on the roof and throw a shopping cart onto a fleet truck...

But we're actually working on a document like a little one or two sheet to go up next year maybe to just update in the DPW manual just like, "How to use the Saloon." There's also the photo policy that we're discussing and that's going to be an ongoing conversation. About what people what they feel they want to create our community standard around what should the photo policy be in the bar.

SAILOR Personally, I won't serve anybody if they have their cell phone on the bar. This is not the place for that. Well, the problem with it that you don't know if somebody's texting or actually filming something.

MISS ROACH Sailor favors immediacy and doesn't use social media. Well, I mean, I think we're getting to the place that conversation that I'm going to back up and not want to assume but I think we're getting to the point "Ask First" and I think that's really simple, ask

“On a different team, you can pull your hoodie over your head, and you can do your job but if we're having a sad day, we're not allowed to have any feelings really except for like hospitable ones.”



# “The biggest con we’ve ever pulled is convincing DPW to drink vodka.”

first or if you photograph something in the moment, you can say “hey, I took this picture of you is it ok if I keep it for myself and may I use it” - it’s a two part system. “Hey, is it ok that I have this picture, and this is what I intend to do with it. Can I put this on Facebook, can I put this on twitter or tumblr or whatever insta- like all of it, any of it.

FLO What does this bar mean personally for you two guys, what does that mean to you?

SAILOR This is my favorite bar in the world. The moment I get here, before I start work, I run my hand down the whole thing. Yes! This is my bar. I love this place - so much. I feel back here, I feel more at home, then, well, anywhere. Yeah.

FLO I have a question now about all of the activities and rituals that this place is allowing, it is not only a place that we use the computer it is not only a place that we drink, it is not only a place that we have food, it is a place that has the annual ladies night, or the annual Golden T Stake, when that happens here from what I understand.

MISS ROACH 2 out of the last 4 years it has been inside this bar. We have had a lot of weather events and been like - let’s just go to the saloon.

MISS ROACH And the Punk Show night!

FLO I am guessing the pool tournament also.

MISS ROACH We used to do a Poker Night. The person who used to lead that up is no longer doing DPW. So certain things rise and fall and we try to

consider it and try to create a space where we can support these things to happen but with just his and my energy alone sometimes things don’t really gain purchase. It really needs other people to really believe in a party or a thing so

FLO Would you like to tell me about a specific activity or - that happens in the bar that is your favorite one that you participate in, and you feel very honored to allow here.

MISS ROACH We did like a Folsom Street Fair on Sunday, we just kind of did like a weird, fetishy night, where people could dress up and look pretty and we played a bunch of amazing like goth industrial metal and darkwave 80s it just everyone was dancing and having fun. It was just really fun.

FLO So can you tell me, just in terms of the time frame here. When is the Saloon opening and when is the Saloon closing?

MISS ROACH We got here July 11th. We take a couple of days - basically that general week taking a few days to vacuum all the spider webs and set the bar back up and I’ll do a rocket run to grab some fresh ingredients just to start us off and yeah, I think we were open the 16th. So we go from July 15th or 16th to August 11th or 12th.

SAILOR I worked 26 days in a row.

MISS ROACH And then we re-open, the night of - the day after Trash Man and then we are open until T stake day, the day before inspection.

Well - during the event Week, we’re absolutely closed but during the build

portion we keep hours to make sure that people get a chance to come in a do their laundry, take a really good shower and take care of their business. So, yeah, I drove out every night to relieve Beartrap and then I would stay here till midnight sometimes or till 11 giving people an opportunity to get their laundry done especially kids who have been out here for a month at that point it’s really crucial to be able to have clean clothes.

FLO So now it’s a very practical question, it is a very unique bar that runs on no money, that’s relying on donation, and Collexodus.

SAILOR Well, you know we all work together, a little secret, part of the job here, a large part of the job is convincing DPW to drink vodka. They all want whiskey, and they all want gin. Look, I make those cocktails, I dress them up the way that I do so we can basically stretch out our resources.

MISS ROACH The biggest con we’ve ever pulled is convincing DPW to drink vodka.

SAILOR And by the way, we didn’t run out of whiskey or gin this entire season. Not once.

MISS ROACH I also did two rocket runs to buy more whiskey.

FLO So, you deal with the Collexodus?

MISS ROACH We are around during Collexodus load in and both of us have been up helping out at Collexodus. Nipps and her team make sure that they do the allocation essentially. Like, this goes to the Saloon, this goes to the Fluffers, so everybody gets all their needs met.

FLO So very practical question, so next season you will run on this Collexodus, you always run on the resources from the previous year.

MISS ROACH Yeah. And while Collexodus—they do an amazing job; they get so much great stuff from that process there is no guarantee about anything that comes through there. Maybe next year everyone is going to be on a gin kick, and we’ll get a ton of gin at Collexodus. You can’t know the purchasing and buying habits of the 70,000 people and whatever they have left over after they didn’t consume it.

FLO So, this is a very unique bar that has no money exchanges, that is made for a very specific community, and it’s the middle of Nevada, in a desert town. So, my question is about the interaction between this very unique thing and the world that is outside this thing and especially Gerlach and the locals and also the fact you have this huge front porch that DPW members hang out and are visible to others, not a closed place..So I was wondering how do you see that, how do you see that interaction between the world outside and this very specific and unique place which is the Black Rock Saloon, is that a challenges with locals?

MISS ROACH So, our policy for locals is that they need to have a sponsor to be here. It is a private club and so if you’re down at Joe’s or down at Bruno’s and you meet someone and you’re like “hey come with me to have a drink at the Saloon”. That is how a sponsorship works, not like folks just showing up and being like “hey can you sponsor me”. “I am here because I am specifically going to have a conversation with someone” and

if you go your sponsee goes. They don’t come here because they want to hang out because we are a closed private facility, and we do that for - that’s just the rules for a number of reasons. So, with that policy, there’s a couple of people that work enough with the Organization that they’re kinda like ok well we consider that staff and they’re allowed to come in. And for the most part people really don’t try to come in that often. Like last year we had a bunch of guys from the local working ranches come down. They ended up behaving themselves. It’s not just people in town there’s all sorts of people from ranches and ya know and it’s a bar full of scantily clad girls. Of course they want to come in. But I think the town relations is - we’ve done a really good job of being good to people in town and respecting noise and making sure that we don’t just unleash hundreds of drunken dpw into town at the wrong time so sometimes we’ll stay open later then we intend because maybe we should keep the crowd inside right now. And as DPW has grown there are a lot of people that have really great relationships with people in town they have friends here I have friends here, it’s a small town. You go down and have a burger with someone at Bruno’s or you sit at Joe’s, and you talk with folks, so it is a weird thing for us I think is the nuance of the sponsorship policy and wanting to be welcoming to folks without losing the autonomy that we have here.

SAILOR Yeah, we don’t want to alienate people, but we do need rules otherwise problems occur. And there are finite resources that is meant for this crew, and I think that is a fair way to frame it.

FLO Awesome. Would you like to tell me to conclude this is there any specific situation that you experienced over the four years that were very life changing or very intense for you and made you realize how much this bar meant to you?

MISS ROACH I mean, even just our first time behind this bar.

SAILOR Yeah, just the first time, and we’re lying down on the pool table, and we were like what just happened.

MISS ROACH we knew that something about the first time we were even in the Saloon, I might not have been in this side of the saloon and you just - you know that it’s special from the first moment. And somehow—

SAILOR And here we are.

MISS ROACH Here we are.