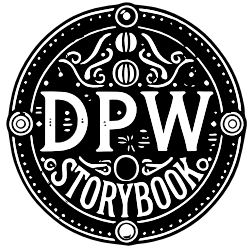


BISHOP

Bishop attended his first Burning Man and joined the Department of Public Works (DPW) in 2017. Originally from Philadelphia, he spent a few years living in the backcountry of Georgia. With a background as a pyro-technician, Bishop also sells body jewelry and indigenous art. His introduction to the DPW team is one of the most unexpected and fun hiring stories: during the DPW Parade, he responded to a “show us your dick” sign by spontaneously dropping his pants, instantly winning over the team with his humor and laid-back attitude.

This interview was conducted by “Flo”, Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2017. Flo’s questions have been omitted to improve reading flow.



“I personally am I bit of a toughy. I’ve lived in Georgia backwater country for a couple of years. I’m from Philadelphia though.”



Photo credit: unknown. Year: 2019.

It’s actually kind of a beautiful experience. I arrived at Burning Man, and the backstory is that I went to Burning Man as a gift. I was participating at another festival and a friend of mine saw that I knew how to work safety. A friend of mine saw and he said, “I can give you the opportunity for a discounted ticket.” He gives me that opportunity—the man next to me. He says, “You’ve never been to Burning Man. You very much seem towards the culture. I’ll pay that for you right now.” And then bam! I got the ticket.

So, it comes about to be Wednesday or Thursday, and there’s the DPW parade. If you’re familiar with the Vampirates—which is a really, really punk awesome band—they are playing on the top, at the front of this awesome art car which is huge. This monster, idyllic truck. They’re rocking it out, and I just appreciate the hell out of it. As they’re playing, I randomly walk up on that one. So, I’m like “I’m following this band for a second!”

I look on the side, I look behind them and I turn, and it’s like this a whole parade, and it’s full of really aggressive women. They got the signs, and they’re like, “Show us your dick!!!” I’m like, oh, this is great! Somebody asked. So, I drop my pants and I follow behind them for a half block. And they’re like, “Oh, he’s real! We like him. Come up! Get up here!” You know, I get a couple of chuckles out of it, but they were dead serious about it.

By the end of the parade, it turns into a good show. The band sets up and starts playing out. People are passing out the beers. You know, lots of joy. A festival. The festivities are exchanged. It’s really cool. While I’m standing there, I meet people who I had met during my festival season. When I came up out, they already had a reputation. I’m sitting there, and I’m told about this gentleman named Logan. He’s like, “Logan’s one of the ideal heads, one of the ghosts, one of the older heads, one of the older individuals. Yo, come down to the trash fence at 7:30 on Tuesday.”

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Now, this was really cool in and of itself, and I was coming out here for an adventure, and I was trying to push myself to my limits. But there was a hell of an uncertainty because on the same day, at 6:30 the family that brought me out here—we travelled from Philadelphia all the way out here to Gerlach or Black Rock City—are leaving at 6:30. So for a whole hour I was just kind of enamored with, “How the hell did I get here? Is this real? Am I putting forth the right effort? Am I just getting trolled? Do I have to worry about getting home the hard way?” But I showed up, and things kind of fell through. I was originally assigned to Shade. During initiation they were telling me that Shade was one of the hard things to do. [...]

Yes, it is rare that there are people of color here. That particular idea or vibe. I can understand that. In a lot

of festivals, unfortunately people of color are not represented for a couple of different reasons. I can theorize. Normally, one, at least coming from the city, people of color aren’t willing to put themselves out in idyllic nature. They’re not willing to leave the comforts of the city. Like, I personally am a bit of a toughy. I’ve lived in Georgia backwater country for a couple of years. I’m from Philadelphia though. So, I can go to Philly and be like, “Hey guys, let’s go to this festival or whatever.” They’ll be like, “You gotta go hiking?? You gotta go out to the woods?? There are snakes out there! I’m gonna be cold? No running water? What the hell is a portapotty?” Those small difficulties and barriers are things that some people are willing to put up in their head, instead of going, “That’s something new. I’d like to engage and experience that.” There is a big defeating factor, but that’s a self-defeating factor.

People of color and various cultures are represented in many different ways here. Some traditional dance. Non-traditional instruments. I’ve actually met a few—a good few—

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people of color. The ones you meet here really end up being the artists themselves, whether it be fire spinners or pyro-technicians. I’m originally with safety as a pyro-technician myself. I’m also a vendor. I sell body jewelry and indigenous art. But I did not vend here at Burning Man. As you’re familiar, unless it’s coffee or ice, you can’t buy it here. Money doesn’t really exist.



Photo credit: unknown. Year: 2020.