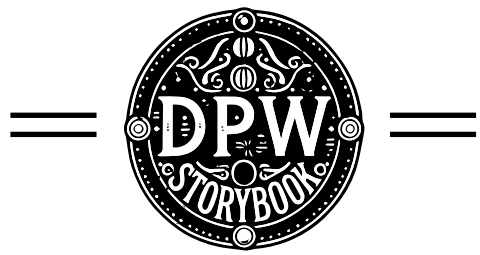


JUICY JAKE

Juicy Jake attended his first burn at the San Diego Regional Decompression in 2009. His first Burning Man was in 2010, and he joined the DPW in 2011. Since 2013, he has been an integral part of the Ghetto crew, the camp where most DPW members stay on the playa. He became the manager in 2016, known for his hands-on approach and strong interpersonal skills. Juicy Jake has played a crucial role in organizing and managing the logistics of the Ghetto, ensuring a comfortable and safe space for all members.

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



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Photo credit: Flore Muguet, 2016.

I started and got into Burning Man when I moved to the West Coast from Massachusetts and started hanging out with some Burners. They were like, “Hey, do you wanna help us throw this party in the desert?” This was down in San Diego, and so I helped them with this party. Next thing I know, it’s the San Diego Regional. I had no idea I was doing the Decompression, and so I just ended up falling into place. My buddy was the guy who was doing the infrastructure department, so I ended up being his assistant. That was 2009.

Then by 2010 I had become lead of the infrastructure department for San Diego Regional and also organized a 30-person theme camp for the Burn. So, 2010 was my first year at Burning Man, actually. I was there for 14 days. I ended up driving the box truck and finding the box truck, renting it, all that stuff. Packing the camp, bringing the whole camp out. Me and my friend were the first ones there and the last ones to leave for our camp. There was so much of the city left, I didn’t want to leave but I had to. And so, the following year, 2011, I came back and I came out for two months and joined DPW and worked in the Ghetto. I didn’t know who I was gonna work for. I got emails from Logan saying I was in. So, I came here, filled out paperwork in the office, and then he pretty much just threw me in with the Ghetto crew and was like “we’re going to try this out.” I had no idea. The whole drive up here, no idea who I was gonna work for. They were putting together a new crew [that] year. The manager was a first-time manager: the whole crew was all first-year crew so I just kind of fell in with that as being a construction guy.

I killed it. I loved it. I stayed all the way through Resto, and then took

2012 off. I came back in 2013 and pretty much just started working on becoming the assistant manager into the manager. By 2013, at the end of that season, I knew I wanted to run the Ghetto. I just loved it. I loved hosting the party. You know, like facilitating the space. The logistics of putting all those people into that space comfortably for a month... I don't know. I like it.

I mean, this year I'm still a manager in training. But primarily, the job of the Ghetto manager is to map out the entire block for the whole property, for the whole Ghetto. Being in communication with everybody and anybody at once who wants to camp in the Ghetto. I've actually made up a system to help me with this by making and offering the different little pods, the little shade pods: those are now for different departments.

So, I help myself by de-compartmentalizing all of the shade pods. Now it's up to the people who run that department or run that shade pod to make their own layout for me, and then submit it to me so that I don't have to come up with that on my own. That helps me with placement. That's part of the logistics of the placement.

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Well, on the DPW list, on the email list, I put out—starting July 5th—I put out emails for people who wanna camp in the Ghetto to email me. They tell me what they're camping in, all this other stuff. That gives me a heads up on what's going to be coming in, so I know how I'm going to place people in there. As far as the people who don't really know what department they're gonna be with.

I only have two or three of those shade pods which are open for them, which is something I'm trying to change, and get more shade for the people who don't have departments like that. It's a little bit of a battle to try to facilitate that. I mean when I first started, we had, I think, 175 in the Ghetto? And this year we had 275.

I know about 75% of my job is interpersonal stuff. Dealing with so many people, you know, like, “Oh, well I used to date that guy and now I don't want to camp near him.” Or, “Oh, well, they're dating this one now, I'm now camped next to my ex-boyfriend's new girlfriend.” [chuckles] With the bar aspect, we have people come in and we serve the staff, but we also serve the public. But before the public's there, we're serving staff.

That's their safe space, that's their home, that's their saloon. So, they feel at home and comfortable there. So, that's what I want them to feel: this is our home on playa, this is our safe space. By doing that, that opens the floodgates as far as emotions go and stuff.

So, there's a lot of times that you'll have some really deep over the bar conversations, and you really help people out by doing that. You're actually doing therapy. You know? That takes a really heavy toll on the crew. We're building stuff all day

long, we go to the meeting just like everybody else in the morning at the depot. You know, we go to that meeting, then we go back and have our own meeting. We have our own crew meeting so that we know what we're all doing for the day, and then we start working.

Then we have to stop and wrap everything up by 4:30 PM. So we have to cut our day short and turn this construction zone into an active bar. Then we're usually open until about 2:00 in the morning. My whole crew is then back at the morning meeting at 7:00 AM. See what I mean? For the most part my crew gets about 5 hours of sleep if they're lucky and they're not partying too hard.

So, we're drained physically, we're drained emotionally, it's taxing, but we all love it. It takes a real certain kind of person to have a real, gun-ho work status where we're just working, working, working. You know, we have lots of breaks and down time, but in the same aspect we have emotional drain as well as physical drain working together. So, it takes a certain type of person to really want to be in this role, want to be in this crew. [laughs tiredly]

We have a radio channel to contact [outside services]. As far as the people that I contact, there's one person that handles the toilets being pumped out; another person that handles the handwashing stations to get filled; another person that handles the grey water pump with the big grey water tank; and then the actual water tank itself too.

So, there's all these different people that we can contact to have that service that are like the DPW contacts to OSS so we don't have to contact them directly. That's one department we have to deal with. I try to take any situation that disrupts the natural flow of the Ghetto and the bar atmosphere: I pretty much

handle it like the Secret Service in that it doesn't disrupt the environment, but the situation is handled.

Pump Night was the Thursday before the gate opened, and that night I didn't get to watch the band for more than five minutes the entire night. I had at least three or four different situations involving Rangers that I handled that nobody even knew about. There were things going on around the bar outside that I ended up having to deal with. Just interpersonal situations.

Actually, a friend of mine from the outside world came in and was not acting right in the bar. He almost got beat up in the bar. I had no idea of the situation. I came up on it and just saw my buddy outside and talked to him, and then he unloads all this information to me. You know? Then I had just weird people that weren't us, weren't DPW, in the bar acting weird.

I probably had to make about six or seven different ranger calls throughout the season—and at least a dozen different actual ranger interactions. But, with that being said, I did not have to have any interactions with actual law enforcement. So, that's really good. In any and all situations I came across, I was able to have it handled with ranger support. They've actually changed their system since last year because we had bad response time. Things didn't work very smoothly last year as far as Rangers/DPW interaction.

Now whenever a call comes over the radio or the ranger dispatch to go to a DPW camp, they specifically send DPW Rangers. So it takes up half of the guessing work for DPW Rangers where a normal ranger would have to take both sides of the story, weigh it all out, and it's like you're

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just wasting your fucking time. The DPW Rangers: they know that if we need to call them then some shit's not right.

It showed me how people that come to Burning Man take it for granted. Building the city; seeing the city go from a bunch of survey flags to 70,000 people; then back down to what we have now, essentially flags and t-stakes. You know, it's like you really see how people take things for granted in their lives. That they don't appreciate what they have or what they experience, or their perception of how they think they appreciate it isn't reality. The people that come out just for the event week, they come out and they don't have the same respect for the city that we do. You know, the city is built-in, they're like “whatever,” they can take a shit on it, they can trash stuff, they don't care. It's not their house.

It's like when you throw a party. It's a difference of you throwing a party and going to somebody else's party. This is our party. So, I think that's the best way I can describe that. It hardens you as far as having respect for the house that you're throwing a party in. Especially the Ghetto. Like, that's my home. That's my baby. Every year I draw out the block on graph paper by hand and pencil. Then a month or two months after I draw it all out, not even like a month after I draw it all out, BOOM! I'm standing on the deck looking at it in person. It's a really awesome feeling.