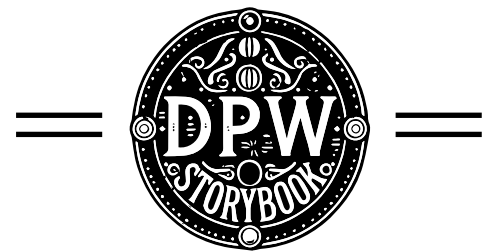


LODOG

LoDog is a self-taught carpenter who has been part of the DPW since 2001. As one of the managers on the Shade Crew, he has played a key role in developing and refining the survey and construction techniques used to build shade structures in the harsh desert environment. LoDog seamlessly combines his technical expertise with practical, hands-on skills to guide the team effectively. Thanks to these improvements, the Shade Crew has evolved into one of the most efficient DPW teams at Burning Man.

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



“I wondered why nobody had done the Pythagorean Theorem...”



LoDog (left) enjoys a PBR with Special in front of the Fluffer truck. Photo credit: unknown. Year: unknown.

2001 was my first year. Then in 2002 I had knee surgery for a little thing I did. I’ve had knee surgery before. I’ve had many knee surgeries. I wasn’t able to do 2002. I came back to do 2003. I worked for the shade crew again. I found out that my friend and former boss, Shooter Shaber Caleb—Shaber. His name is Shaber—had become shade manager in ’02. He was the shade manager in ’03. It’s hard to say this without it... the reason he became manager was because he talked to all the bosses—to Will Rogers, etc.—as the rest of the Chupacabra policia team were building. But the Chupacabra policia building team, I was the head. I was the one who knew what we were doing.

Well, in 2001, the Chupacabra policia team came from Seattle and rescued shade. So, I came down to build a huge thing, which nowadays is not that huge. But we built a 16 by 16 ft. cube. We walked on the 16 ft. cube, so your eyesight was actually 25 feet in the air, or 23 ft. Whatever 16 ft. is plus your body height. So, back in 2001 that was pretty tall. It was pretty flimsy too, but it was structurally sound. It moved a lot. It was at 8:30. There was a Chupacabra policia ziggurat in the middle of some people. The name of the whole place was called “Someplace.” With some people. Part of the some people was the Chupacabra policia who were engaged to build the ziggurat. The 16 by 16 ft. cube? There were no floors in between. So, we had ladders to go up and a hard time trying to make it structurally sound so it wouldn’t blow over. What it basically did was form a huge shade structure underneath for the hot days.

So that was a great little thing. But what it was, was my first time in the shade department. We rescued them because nobody actually had any idea. Part of the problem with

people coming to early Burning Man building was that they'd bring their skills from the real world. But this is a different kind of real world. So sometimes their skills don't apply, or they need to change what they do in the real world so it works out here.

That's what we did basically: get rid of the crap that didn't work. There's a way of trying to locate on the ground where you're gonna put a hole without having to interfere to much with that hole. That works everywhere really good when you have good ground to dig. But here on the playa, it's all dust. We tried to dig a hole, and it would just fall in that year. Something else had to happen, right? You had to be able to get these post holes on a really accurate 12 ft. grid.

I wondered why nobody had done the Pythagorean theorem: just 3, 4, 5, and lay it out. They didn't see it as being any great, big mental exercise. This is something you learn when you're 15, in a math class. But it turns out even the brain you have when you're 15 in your math class gets ruined out in the desert. Brain fried, right? You start to get dried out and the next thing you know, you're dehydrated. [...] Hydration and Fluffer Nipps—when she started that thing—saved everybody's ass, so we were all able to survive. But in particular what that helped me do was be able to go out and do these 3,4,5, stuff, and put flags in the ground, and have assistance.

It wasn't until special showed up that I had an assistant that was a permanent assistant. Usually my assistant was the first person to get hurt on shade crew, because they couldn't work. When you're doing this thing out in the desert, it doesn't take too much inaccuracy to turn into the wrong dimension, because you're doing little-bity, little-

bitty, little-bitty, and in all it's one construct. So by being terribly yelly and angry—well, I wasn't angry, I was yelling because of the wind blowing and things—making sure they did exactly what needed to be done. We started off making shade the way it is now.

Well, it started when I showed up to do shade. I showed up to help them to build this thing, and then he came and said, "our ticket money was spent on the wood," so we had to go work for DPW just to get our tickets. That's why we worked for shade, was because shade needed people to work there. When the guy who was the manager of shade then saw that all the Chupacabra policia knew how to handle the nails, and the hammering and things, and being on the ladder, they just put us at the forefront of everything, and we put everything up. Following that year, in 2002, they made Shaver the manager from the effort of the shade crew he was leading—and he was leading it politically, but construction-wise, I was leading it.

'03 was a nightmare particularly because we didn't have the system we do now. We had plywood triangles and 2x4s that would act like pockets to accept 4x4 beams up on top. But hammering stuff up high, 10 ft. in the air is really dangerous hard. Right? It's hard for skilled people, but most of all, shade crew is not a bunch of skilled carpenters. They're a bunch of trained volunteers. [...] So you still have to know how to hammer, and many of them didn't.

Well, back in the day we didn't have as many structures, so we could afford to get in there and build it ourselves a little bit. And... we needed everybody at the end sometimes. And then in '04, Peter Mars came in as superintendent, and having reviewed the past three years

went "oh, we need Lodog and Quiet Earp" And we started running shade in 2004 under Peter Mars. And all we were given was materials, and asked what we needed. There wasn't anybody telling us what to, we had to figure out what we did. Quiet Earp was incredibly wonderful in dealing with people, and I did all the engineering. [...] In the first year, 99% of what we do now, I had figured out, because I love my crew [of which there were] 15. We were small.

So in '04, when we got everything thrown on us, we told Peter Mars "give us some trucks. We need trucks, and we need someone who drills holes straight." Somebody I can yell at until there's three. So we got Brickner, who was a farmer who lived next door and did really good holes because he was used to doing fence poles. So when you can hit the flag that I put in the ground, that makes my structure so much easier to put together. It all works together. It's all on a 12 ft. scale, so it can't be off very much or you don't match. You don't meet. So, I was trying to do something incredibly accurate in a field that didn't support that accuracy. So we arrived at being able to do that.

For placement we do the Pythagorean theorem: the 3, 4, 5. The magic number for the right angle formula. One leg is three, one leg is four, and the hypotenuse is five. ... Yeah. Well, it's one of those things that you can stretch out and get really accurate. And if you don't, you're amazed. We misperceive so much out here. Tools are so important for you to get past your misperceptions and get it in the way you're supposed to. Most of the numbers that fall within that are not exactly where they need to be. But, you make a straight line, and now you put in 12 ft. things really accurately, and there's a way of doing

that on which side of the tape that makes that quarter more accurate and allows things to be really well done. Most of our buildings this year were really straight. They've been straight for a few years now. That is a testament to the crew being able to do it.

In '04, it was the first year that we finished ahead of schedule, before opening up. We finished on Thursday. And before that, it was like "we have another one to do, then another one to do." At the end we'd be like "oh, fuck that, they don't get theirs!" So from '04 to right now, we have always met the date. In advance of doing that, we went from the most non-performing crew to the highest performing crew. That was all because of the participation of everybody on the shade crew. I was a good engineer to help that, and Quiet Earp was so good with people. [He left] two years ago.

I'm a self-taught carpenter and mason with a degree from the University of Illinois in architecture. I know a lot about science, and architecture, and engineering. That's one of the reasons I was doing this. I was finishing up a construction management course in Washington when I got hired for this position. I had a background.

So, when we came and we started taking apart everything that we needed to do, we made spreadsheets so we knew how many 2x6, 4x4, how much shade cloth, and what the approximate time was. Part of the spreadsheet thing was something I brought from my schooling. Quiet Earp, who was a very good computer person goes, "oh, it's all spreadsheets!" The next thing we had was a list of things that we did, so we could look out at what we needed. It really helps for ordering stuff, so we've been one of the most efficient departments for ordering stuff and having stuff

out ahead. I'm really proud of that though. Every little facet. Right? The fact that ArtArtArt could be crew lead for a while, and Zeno be crew leads for a while, and come on board without any drop in production? Makes me happy. Ecstatic.

[Shade crew culture] is all on Zeno and ArtArtArt. Quiet Earp and I didn't develop any of that stuff. That's the rest of the crew developing

all that other stuff. The Shaonclave? That could be Art, that could be Zeno, that could be somebody else. It's some other member of shade crew that came up with that. And the shable? The little table in there? OK, everything we have in shade now starts with an SH. You come in with a cooler, but you don't have a cooler—you have a shooler. You know? Do you drink beer? No, you have a sheer.



Photo credit: Nick Heyming, 2021.