

Burning Man Changed My Life

Life changing – what could possibly be life changing at my age? By 66 you are supposed to have seen it all and have the wisdom of the ages tucked away for immediate advice, even when not called upon.

Why I went to Burning Man in 2003

I went to Burning Man to find something. I did not know what it was I just knew it was missing. I had heard about it several years prior and wanted to go but could not because of work. When I retired, time was now available so in 2003 I went to Burning Man, cold turkey – no camp, no destination in mind, no friends to look up (other than my son, who had gone the year before and had an established camp). I arrived with very little food, a tent, a very meager and flimsy shade structure, and hope. The rest is history.

The question still presents itself – **why did I go in the first place?** I found I needed an identity check. Since I was retired, I was no longer a professional so I had lost that most powerful identifier. My sons were both grown and on their own so I was no longer a father – in the strict sense of the word. Who am I then? I was 57 and could easily live another 25 years – so who was I to be for the rest of my life. I went looking for something that would help me answer the core question.

What I found

I found friendship. I found acceptance. I found love. I found diversity of thought. I was the recipient of many gifts that first year, many of them non-tangible. Before the week was out, I knew I had found home. This is where I wanted to be. It was harsh, it was difficult, it was a lot of work but it was where I belonged.

Why I keep coming back

As my friend Psyche pointed out recently, there is an irresistible force that pulls me to Burning Man. Why would I ever want to pull in the other direction? It is home, it is family. It is a magical week where I can be anybody or anything I want to be. It is a week in which I can savor the art offerings of others. It is a week in which I can share my life with my playa family. I bring away strength, comfort, a renewed zest for life, a warm fuzzy feeling way down deep in my soul, self confidence, and a much clearer picture of what it is that I am as a human being.

How has it changed my life in the default world?

Kind of a loaded question because it has been both subtle and obvious. The largest change is in how I view and treat others. I am much more accepting and non-judgmental. I am also much more willing to “bare my soul” and become vulnerable. Mark Twain once wrote that it is impossible to write an autobiography because to lay it all out there honestly would be simply too embarrassing. We simply cannot live honest lives because that would be uncomfortable, unacceptable, and unwanted by our friends and family. So, we cloak our inner self so that we can appear in control, “with it”, and stronger or even better than we really are. At Burning Man, the cloak is taken away. Nobody is judging you. Nobody is expecting you to behave in a certain way. In fact, you are encouraged to take on the “dark” side. Explore that part of your psyche that you bury deep in your default life.

So, as I am able to experience a self-awareness on the playa each year, I am much more able to cope with the things that the default world puts before me. I am more tolerant, more forgiving, more loving, more open, more vulnerable, more fun, happier, more willing to share with others, more sure of myself; a better version of myself than before I went to Burning Man.

Sir Loin