

AZBurner Newbie Orientation - Presented by Walmark - '04 Post Playa Depression

Post Playa Depression Everyone here was a virgin to the playa one time or another. At one time Larry Harvey was a virgin to the playa.

Every veteran here went to their first burn for reasons different than why they return for their second, fifth or eleventh burn.

One of the most important threads that you should leave here today with is the fact that Burning Man has a different meaning to each of us here today.

The greatness that is Black Rock City is its diversity that you find within the core culture that is Burning Man; its non-judgmental environment and the aura of acceptance for what each individual, group or collective bring to the city. There is goodness in all you see.

I first read about Burning Man in a magazine article that I read in October of 1993. I cannot remember the name of the publication, but it could have been Omni; however, I can tell you that it had a great impact on me. I knew that one day I would attend; I knew that it would be an experience I would always cherish.

Before I can discuss my PPD I need to provide you some background about me. Prior to doing what I do now, I spent 20 years in the Army. After I retired in the spring of 1996 I did not miss a beat, did not take a day off, I immediately went to work. In my office I am have been dubbed triple A. I am in constant motion, and for the big guy that I am, I do not move slowly. I have never meandered anywhere in my life until I entered BRC.

Black Rock City gave me peace, serenity and calm. It provided me a sense of grounding that I have not had felt in many years. The last time I had that feeling was in college, but that's another story. So, on a cold day in December 2002 this neo-conservative, a card carrying member of the vast right-wing conspiracy (that is a lot of words to say compassionate republican) rolled over in bed and asked his neo-pagan, Wiccan partner of 24 and a half years if she would be interested in attending an art festival in the Nevada desert called the Burning Man Project.

After much discussion and puzzled looks she said sure, why not. So on New Years Day 2003 I joined the AZBurners group on Yahoo (Walmark03). After much lurking I discovered who the mentors of the list were and I hung on to their every word. They prepared us well. So well that we were accused of being veterans in disguise. That was a tribute to Gary, Grover, Astrid, Naked Mike Scotto, Desert Rat, and Queen Mel of SoLoCo.

So, what is the point that I am getting at?

After attending Burning Man for the first time, many develop the 'playa blues'. It can range in severity from very mild and transient, to severe and lingering. Post Playa Depression (PPD) is most common after the first burn; however, some suffer their whole life, even if they never return. PPD comes on within the first few days after returning from BRC. For most first timers, it passes quickly; for others, professional help is needed.

- The range of symptoms experienced depends on the severity of the depression, and may include:
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things.
- Feeling that life outside of BRC is meaningless
- Negative thoughts of non-burners
- Feelings of guilt
- Feeling unable to cope in a cash society
- Wanting to hug everyone you meet
- Difficulty sleeping or changes in sleeping patterns
- High Sex Drive / Low Sex Drive / Playa Sex Drive / No Sex Drive
- Anxiety, panic attacks or heart palpitations about living in the default world
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of meaning, purpose and existence

Now you understand the reason for the Decompression© parties that are held about 30 days after the burn. Now would be a good time to plug the AZ DeComp which will be the weekend of 8 October at Gateway Ranch outside of Flagstaff. Since returning from my first burn I have found myself longing for the playa daily.

I see car commercials with the new models driving out on the playa and I point at the TV screen and say to my partner "HOME". There is no 12 step program to help you to cope, but last time I checked the AZ Burners group on Yahoo there is 262 members that will be glad to assist in ridding you of your post playa blues. What a great support group they are. It does not matter what the need is, someone is there to help. Whether your trailer rolls over on the way to the burn or your RV breaks down on the way back. Whether your computer crashes and burns, or you just need a ride to the monthly dinner. Someone in the group will help you with a smile and expect nothing in return, but hugs are nice.

The AZ Burners have several get-togethers over the course of the Burning Year starting with DeComp in October; HoliDaze in December; New Years Eve in Bisbee; Toast in the Spring; 100 Daze in May; and the Rebar Bender in August. Not to mention the monthly dinners in the Phoenix and Tucson areas.

So the point is if this is going to be your first visit to El Playa LoCo, there is a good chance it shall not be your last. There is also a very good chance that you will feel some sort of depression after you return. The best way to combat it is to become active in your regional

burner community. That's my story and I'm sticking to it