

## From a Sanctuary Client

### How I came to arrive at Sanctuary

I came to Burning Man with three friends. We had all been drinking an hour or more before we entered through the Burning Man checkpoint. We continued drinking for about another hour, until we finally reached the area in which we were to camp. During this time, I paid no real attention to where we were going.

I later got separated from my friends at Main Camp. After a while of looking for them it was starting to get dark and cold, so I tried to find my camp on foot (I also lost track of my bicycle). I stumbled from street to street, only making the situation worse. Now I was completely lost, I didn't even know how to get back to the Main Camp. I was panicked and I needed help.

Eventually, a kind stranger brought me to the Ranger Station, where he spoke to one of the Rangers named "Calamity Jane". As he explained to her my situation, I stood off to the side, feeling like a five-year-old, holding a corndog, who just lost his mommy at an amusement park. Since I didn't know the location of my camp, there was little the Rangers could do, except let me stay the night at a place called Sanctuary.

### How I felt when I arrived

"Calamity Jane", who I found out later to be a wonderful girl named Brandy, led me into a tent full of cots, blankets, pillows, rugs, and people. Just outside the door of the tent was a cardboard sign. On the sign, someone had scrawled the name "Sanctuary" in black permanent marker.

Brandy led me to a cot, handed me a blanket and pillow, then joined a group of others that were gathered around the entrance inside the tent. Five or six other people were lying in cots. Some of the people standing at the entrance were Rangers (like Brandy), others were not, and it appeared that they were performing some type of shift turnover.

I was no longer cold nor panicked, but still worried about where my camp was, and what this "Sanctuary" place was. That feeling quickly went away as I listened to the shift turnover. The people in the cots were victims of overdose and/or bad trips, mostly from psychedelic drugs. The others were volunteers helping them.

I had sobered up and now I felt embarrassed for being at Sanctuary. I was embarrassed for getting lost and not being prepared for the cold. I felt that I was taking up space in a place that offered understanding and compassion

to those who were more deserving than me. I was worried that the volunteers at Sanctuary would feel the same way towards me that I felt towards myself.

After talking with the volunteers a short time, they helped me feel that I was welcome there and I felt better about being there.

### What happened to me at Sanctuary

Within the first hour at Sanctuary, feeling embarrassed and ashamed of myself, I went out into the cold to have a cigarette. While I was smoking, Valerie came out with a blanket, wrapped it around my shoulders, and joined me. We talked for a while. She made me feel that it was okay that I was there. I enjoyed her company so much that I wanted to find out more about the people who volunteered to be at Sanctuary.

Rick talked to me about what the volunteers did for a living. The volunteers consisted of doctors, researchers, and assistants all knowledgeable in psychiatric and/or psychedelic studies.

I watched the volunteers work. It was amazing. They worked unselfishly, doing all they could to help those in need. The largest display of compassion that I witnessed came from a doctor named "Annie." Annie helped a girl who wouldn't speak. The girl just held on to Annie like a small child. Annie ended up holding the girl for about 8 hours, until the girl finally lay down to sleep.

Of all the people that received help at Sanctuary, I feel that I received the most. What was supposed to be a temporary shelter from the dark and cold turned out to be a life-changing awakening. I was amazed at the acts of kindness around me.

Why? Slowly through the years, the older I got, the less hope I had for humankind. It seemed that there was so much selfishness and evil in the world. I've spent most of my life focusing on these bad things, rather than the good. This "Look at the Good Side" wasn't a new concept for me, but pushing that concept to the forefront of my mind and putting it into practice was. It has given me new hope. It's not always easy to see through these new eyes, especially after all those years of seeing through the old pair.

This might not seem like a big life-changing awakening, and in itself, it may not be. It's like a butterfly effect though, in that its cascading effect is taking me along paths that I've never ventured. I want to thank all the volunteers at Sanctuary for this. I wish I could give each of you a gift equal in measure to the one you've given me.

## The good, the bad, and the ugly

Although I am no psychiatrist, the psychological care that was given to those in need was astonishing to me. I kept expecting someone to flip out and scream or get violent, but it never happened. The psychological environment was calm and quiet. The volunteers were kind, sincere, and attentive to the psychological needs of each individual, including me. The volunteers bent over backwards to see that everyone was physically comfortable by ensuring that everyone had blankets, pillows, water, and anything else that was within their ability to give.

I did observe what I felt were problems at Sanctuary. They are listed below:

Temperature: It was extremely cold at night and extremely hot during the day within the tent.

Cleanliness: The bedding is being shared amongst several people with unknown hygiene.

Limited Beds and Bedding: There was concern at one point that there might not be enough blankets.

Entertainment: (Am I being picky or what?) It might be a good idea to have some cards, board games (Chess), and a radio for music. I know when I've had a bad trip; these things helped me to get my mind off of focusing on what was freaking me out. It may also help to get the subject to relax so that they may open up and talk. And if that doesn't work, the volunteers can entertain themselves while everyone is asleep.

## When I left Sanctuary

To help me find my camp, Brandy let me use her bike. She barely knew me but trusted me to return it.

This act of kindness and trust, along with the time I spent with the others at Sanctuary, helped me to realize that there are a lot of great, unselfish people out in the world.

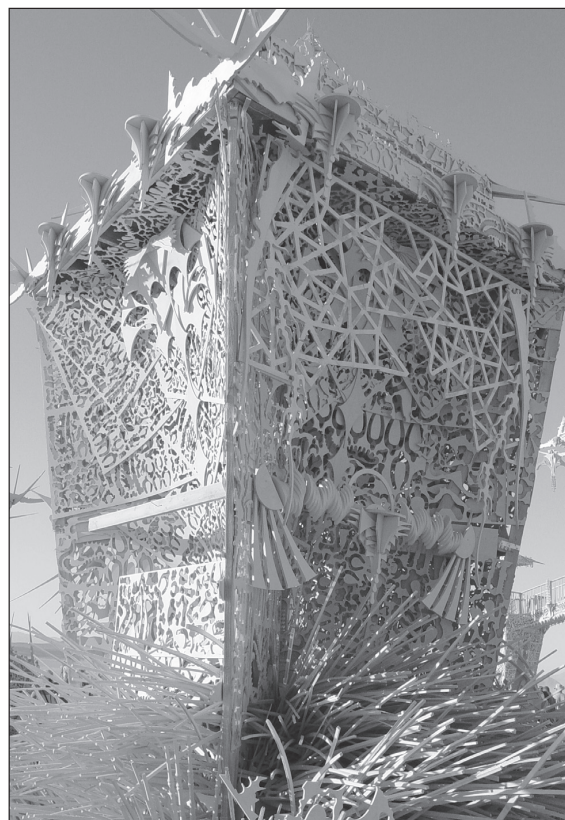
When I got to Burning Man, I thought it was mostly about partying. It wasn't until after I left Sanctuary that I felt that partying is only a small part of what Burning Man is about. Community and helping out one another is the underlying factor that makes Burning Man work as well as it does.

The Rangers and medical facility seem to be funded nicely by Burning Man. Sanctuary to me is just as important as the other two. I've stopped by there a few times to look in and there was always a few people using the facility. Why is it not funded as well as the Ranger Station and Medical Clinic?

It has been two months since I've left Sanctuary. I thought that once I returned to the world in which I normally live, I would lose hope in humankind again. Just the opposite has happened. My hope is stronger and I see more good in people and situations than bad now.

I thank all those who made Sanctuary possible.

Sincerely,  
Ryan Gomez  
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