

# A Big Boy Finds Big Problems In SF Queer Community

By Blue Buddha

Quite a few people believe, like I once did, that what binds so many of us together is being part of the LGBTIQ community. Well, sometimes that is not enough. There are many incidents in my life that have taught me this and I would like to share three recent San Francisco memories with you.

We are in my favorite part of town, SOMA, so let's go to Planet Big. I'm a big boy and know it. I also love love love to dance and there is nothing like getting my groove on to some tasty beats. I came to Planet Big because, hey, this place is for the "big boys" of my community so why not go and check it out, and I can dance as well, a win-win situation for me. So I'm on the dance floor and starting to get warmed up when I get pushed aside a couple of times. Small space for so many big men, so I take it in stride, but it keeps happening and I get somewhat frustrated. I know when I'm on the floor I try to be aware of others around me and not everyone does that, but this is starting to get ridiculous. Finally I find a spot where I can do my thang and dance, when a couple of guys get behind me and the whole thing starts all over again. I try to ignore them and keep dancing when I hear, "I'm tired of these guys coming in here thinking they are big." Push push a bit more. Well you got what you wanted: you pushed the "too big for mainstream gay folk but not big enough for the chub scene and one of the only three people of color here" out the door.

Let's go to Hairrison Street Fair 2004. The day is warm, the sun is shining, and I feel good. I arrive at the fair to see so many people just having the time of their lives. I wait in line and pay my entrance fee. I notice all of these smiling faces who keep me smiling and make my way to the front of the line. Putting on the wrist bands is this very tall and big dude whom I've seen around. He is smiling at all the folks, saying "hi" and just generally being friendly. I reach his post and the smile disappears. I say "hi" and don't get any answer back; as a matter of fact this guy doesn't even look at me once. He just puts on my wristband so tight that I feel my circulation being cut off almost immediately. I try to get the guy's attention to ask if there is a way he

can loosen the wristband or give me another one, but he chooses to ignore me and keeps looking anywhere but in my direction. OK, fine, I will just have to work this thing loose, no big deal. Street fairs to me are usually the same old thing, so my main interest is who is on stage. Being that I am a musician myself I like to see who else is out there in the scene. The stage is rockin' with the Bobbleheads and next out is Pepperspray. I am enjoying myself 'cause I like live music, fresh air and sun. Unfortunately, while I was standing in my spot I get stepped on 3 or 4 times. Like I said, I am a big guy, apparently not that big, but big enough that a person can not just walk right by or through me. One guy taking pictures of some other fairgoers steps on the front of my military-style boots without noticing. I say, "Excuse you" and move over slightly. Again he is so obsessed with what he is doing that he steps on me again to take another picture. Again I say, "Excuse you!" and move over slightly. Not once does he look in my direction after I speak or acknowledge the fact that his foot is not on level ground and that part of his foot is at least 2-3 inches off the ground. Amazing, I think to myself. For 30 minutes I stand basically in one spot as two other people not only step on my boots but even stand on my boots and can't hear me say a word to let them know that I am standing there. One guy is so intent on taking pictures of other men that he literally walks backwards into me, pushes me a good foot, thanks his subjects and walks away. Again being one of not very many people of color and being one of only a very small number of African-Americans I walk out never to return.

Fast-forward to 2005 Bernal Heights. Nice and warm for a San Francisco summer night. We walk into Wild Side West. The "we" being my two roommates, one of Euro descent and the other of Mexican descent, along with another Mexican man. We go to the bar to order drinks. One of my roomies orders for his friend and the other roomie and I wait to order. I fold my arms across his back and look over his shoulders to see what kinds of spirits I would like to partake. They get their drinks and go to the back porch. I wait patiently for the

bartender to serve me. She serves at least one other person and then starts to clean the bar. I keep my eyes on her to get her attention if she looks in my direction. She never looks in my direction. For almost 10 minutes I stand at the bar and the bartender never looks at me. Whenever she needs to look from one side of the room to the other, she either looks behind herself where the cash register is or looks to the ground and never once makes eye contact with me. I have worked in a bar and have been a patron of quite a few, so I have a good sense of when bar staff is trying to ignore me. I walk to the back and let me friends know what is going on and then I am leaving. One of my friends tries to get me to stay but I'm not having it. I let him know that I have to put up with this kind of ignorance many times in many places and will not spend money some place where I am not wanted. Again I walk out, never to return.

The tie that binds is that we are all humans. Humans who come from many different places with all kinds of baggage. Sexual orientation is not enough to make a person forget from whence he came. If that were true there would be more happy well-adjusted people in this city and fewer folks crying, hurting and trying to numb themselves to the disillusion of a queer community.

Blue Buddha is a singer and a 40-year-old African-American queer man. He has taught elementary school children and teachers. He has also worked with many kinds of people with physical health problems, developmental disabilities, and mental health and substance abuse issues. He currently works in the research section of the AIDS Office and volunteers as an HIV Counselor with Magnet. He produced the African-American Soul of Pride Stage and Village in 2003 and 2004, and is co-producing the Soul of Pride Stage in 2006. He is a member of the SFGMCI steering committee and works with SF Brothas, the African-American component of SFGMCI. He also was appointed to the LGBT Advisory Committee for the Human Rights Commission on March 1, 2006.