



Alex Rodriguez with Steven Boyington (r)

Alex Rodriguez

“After Katrina, we looked at life in a much different way.”



I'M A FRONTWALKER

First Place—Walking Circuit, DCFR Outreach Co-Director, 38, Educational Consultant, Member Since 2006

Although Buenos Aires was my birthplace, I was really raised in the DC-area. My family relocated to the District when I was a month and a half years old and then moved to Potomac. After graduating from Gonzaga High School, I moved to Baltimore where I attended Loyola College and received my Bachelor's in General Psychology with a minor in Spanish. I then received a Master's in Clinical Psychology, specializing in child and adolescent development.

After teaching in elementary and high schools in Baltimore City, I moved to New York City in 1999 to become an educational consultant. As a single gay man in New York, I felt like a kid in a candy store! I really knew no one and loved all that this city has to offer. However, having left behind in DC and Baltimore a large group of friends, I began to feel a bit lonely after a few months.

In June 2000, I went to the Chelsea Piers dance with a small group of friends which was the culmination of Gay Pride NYC. During the dance, a really attractive, hot guy insisted that I talk to him. I blew him off thinking he looked like the typical buff “Chelsea boy” (all muscle and no brains!). We finally talked and he asked for my number. I had no idea at the time how to input my name and number into a cell phone so a friend, who was pretty drunk, took the guy's cell phone and input my

name and phone number. A few days later, this guy—now my partner Steven—actually called! Our first date was a few days later. We met for lunch and our date continued on through dinner and I was instantly smitten with him.

In 2003, with a new mayor and administrators coming in to NYC, I knew my school contract would be terminated. It was during February of 2003 that a new contract was potentially going to be in place in New Orleans, of all places. Steven and I bought a house in the Gentilly neighborhood, about ¾ mile from Lake Ponchartrain. We put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into our home. On August 27, 2005, I was at home while Steve was away on a trip. I knew about Katrina and its path to hit New Orleans. I turned on the Weather Channel and then my VP in Baton Rouge called and told me to leave New Orleans. Steven also called and said, “Leave now.” I secured the house and left for Baton Rouge. Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans two days later.

Three days after Katrina hit, I drove to Houston, dropped off the car and flew to San Francisco to meet Steven. When I looked at aerial photos of New Orleans, I realized our entire neighborhood was underneath eleven feet of water. A month later, the National Guard let us enter our homes to gather our belongings. Almost everything was gone. I was in shock and

just cried. Steve almost started laughing because everything was in shambles—we would find some of our things in the strangest places.

After Katrina, we looked at life in a much different way. We realized that things—material possessions—don't make you happy. The experience forces you to have a new set of priorities and a different perspective.

We moved to Arlington to live with my sister and her two sons. Her husband, who is in the Army, was deployed to Baghdad for one year. She really wanted us to move in and help her out with the kids, etc, and she had enough space for us to live with her in her house. While Steven ran in New York, he had stopped because it was too hot and humid in New Orleans. He took up running again when we moved back to DC. Steven found out about the DC Front Runners through the web and thought it would be fun to run with a group of like-minded people. It's ironic that Front Runners was supposed to be Steven's gig, not mine! A few weeks later, Steven mentioned that the club had a walking group and that it would be nice if we went together.

In September 2006, while Steven was away, I went to my first walk where I met John, Ann, Max, David and Larry. The next day was the club's Anniversary Party at Tony and Kevin's place. While I was a bit hesitant to attend, (I am very outgoing but

really knew no one at that point!) I finally decided to go. Ironically, one of the first people that I met at the party was Orlando, who I met in 2001 through mutual friends in New York!

In January, Steven finished his first marathon at Disney World. He's going to enter again in 2008 and has challenged me to walk the half-marathon! There's a 3½ hour time-limit to finish the half, so I'm going to start an eight week training program this fall.

I like walking because I can hold conversations with others and enjoy the scenery. Some of us walk at a pretty fast clip. Front Runners is really a social group and I've



met some very interesting people. Since Steven is a runner, I've had an opportunity to meet many of the runners. I wish there were more mingling between runners and walkers, but I appreciate the fact that some of the runners like Steve, John Wineberg, Jeff Dutton and others, have walked with us.

By marching in the parade, working the Pride booth and participating in other outreach activities, I've made an effort to get the word out about our walking group. Unlike other sport clubs, we're unique because almost everyone can walk and become a member. This means that there is a tremendous opportunity to grow the Front Walkers, and like the experiences in other cities, I think we'll become a more prominent, visible part of the DC club in the coming years. ▼

Interview by Marcel Acosta

The scene every Saturday morning. Here come the first runners speeding in our direction. Decisions, decisions, decisions. Do we wave, nod, bow? Curtsey? Grunt "g'morning"? High five? Practice what we do at the bars and pretend they don't exist?

But who was the new hot one we haven't seen before? Is he with us? Does he have a boyfriend?

Ask Barry, he will know.

— Andres Doernberg, Walker



A Name is a Name?

by Alex Rodriguez



A few months ago, during our regular Saturday morning run/walk, I met Michael and a friend of his from Orlando, FL. They were in town for a friend's commitment ceremony in DC. Michael is a member of the Orlando Front Runners/Walkers organization. He told me that he found us by googling DC Front Runners and came upon our website, which at this point had been updated. Michael liked the layout and the overall look of our new website! As we walked, I asked him about his group back in Orlando and I was very impressed to hear that they have over 50 walkers every Saturday. I asked what it was that they had done to attract so many walkers. Michael told me they changed the name of their organization to Orlando Front Runners/Walkers. Before this change, there were no more than a handful of members who walked.

Last year when I joined the DC Front Runners, as a walker, I met another walker named Steve. He is originally from the Bay area in California and he told me that his former group also had well over 75 to 100 walkers every Saturday. I was shocked! How did this happen? Again, the answer was in the name of this group. While in New York City with my partner,

Steve, we decided to grab a drink at a Chelsea sports bar called Gym. The Front Runners New York were having a happy hour, sign and all! I immediately went up and met three of their members who were there setting up. We chatted for a bit and they talked about the challenges of increasing the number of members, especially younger ones to get involved and take on some of the responsibilities. I talked about being a walker, not a runner. One of the three told me that their group had very few if any walkers and when I asked why this might be, he said it was probably because of the name of the group.

Since these interactions, I have gone online to the international website of Frontrunners and have found that there are some groups who have "walkers" in their names and my bet is that they have many more walkers who are members as well. I greatly appreciate the new website for the fact that the walking group is prominent and highly visible. It would really make an impact on future members, dues and friends if we could change the name of our group as well.

Just a thought... ▼

