Matchmakers

How helped Alaska's Clarence and Chad break the ice

February 1, 2004 By Tom Beer

POZ is many things to many people—nurse, support group, town gossip—but for one reader we shocked even ourselves: by playing cupid. Last July, Chad Rugroden, 41, picked up an issue in a Desert AIDS Project waiting room in Palm Springs, California, after driving a friend to his doctor's appointment. Chad, a sculptor who's had HIV for 17 years and lost a lover to AIDS in 1990, thought he was just killing time. Instead, he met the love of his life.

Chad spotted Mr. Right in our Partner section, where we interviewed Clarence Smelcer, 42, an Athabascan who organizes fellow HIV positive native Alaskans in Anchorage ("Northern Exposure," July/August 2003). "Clarence was just brutally honest," Chad says of the activist, who told *POZ* his former homelessness helps him identify with people in the community. "I needed to let him know his work reached a great distance. His picture didn't hurt, either."

Chad Googled Clarence, found an e-mail address and sent a respectful mash note. Clarence recalls, "My friends said, 'Oh my god, he's a stalker!'" But Chad's tone—and yes, his JPEG photo—proved irresistible. E-mails led to long phone calls, and the pair, both single, soon realized they had lots in common. "I fell in love before I even met him," says Clarence, a recovering alcoholic who says boyfriends are often "resentful" of his sobriety and his daily AA meetings. Chad doesn't drink and felt alienated from the party-and-play Palm Springs lifestyle. Both were ready for romance.

POZ reader, what would you do? Chad hopped the next plane to meet this magazine pinup boy. "The flight into Anchorage was breathtaking," Chad says. "I thought, 'If nothing else, I could live here.'" The pair spent a blissful two weeks together in August that felt like a honeymoon—"There was near perfect weather," Clarence says with a sigh. In October, Chad packed his belongings and, with his 120-pound Great Pyrenees, Bella, in tow, moved on up and in with Clarence—and his approving lesbian roommate.

Didn't the lovebirds fear they were flying too fast? "We had nothing to lose," says Chad, the bold one. Clarence is more reflective. "I trust very easily," he says. "It's just in my nature. I had some concerns—that's natural. But I'm a lot calmer now that Chad's in my life. I'm a lot more content." Mazel tov.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Matchmakers-211-6291