

God, Life, and Everything "Walk Across America"

If you are a patron of Cranberry's at Tilly Hall, you may remember a young man who used to work there named Alex Plass.

Alex is 22 now and back in his Cranberry's days wore long hair, thick glasses and gages in his ears. But you could't ask for a more ready smile or friendly service.

Alex left Cranberry's to pursue his dream of becoming a documentary film producer. He studied film in New York City and finally graduated, finding work as ... a delivery driver for a Manhattan restaurant. It is a hard profession to find a toe hold, and this diversion from his dreams wore on him.

And then he met a bartender named Victor Revilla who liked personal challenges. He told Alex that he had already walked the Appalachian Trail (by the way, my wife and I just saw that Robert Redford movie, "A Walk in the Woods," about hiking the AT. We laughed a lot!), and now he was looking for a new goal.

As they talked, Victor, who goes by the nickname Slick, revealed that he wanted to walk across America and wanted to take good pictures to remember it by. He asked Alex to recommend good photographic equipment. Which he did.

But then Alex thought, why just have good photographs? Why not have a movie? A documentary! He asked Slick if he could join the walk, and soon a partnership was born. Six months from Delaware to California.

They started a FundMe campaign to raise the needed cash not only for food and gear but also video, computer, phone equipment. It takes a lot to document such a monumental undertaking.

They began their trek on June 27 and immediately found it would not be easy. They hadn't raised as much money as they had hoped and realized they would constantly be short on food and money. Within the first week, one of the backpacks had broken, and they were kept in place while awaiting a new one.

Along the way, however, they have met some wonderful and hospitable people. Many are curious about their project and want to talk about their plans and dreams. I asked Alex what his favorite moment has been so far.

He said, "One of my favorite moments would be getting invited to eat dinner with the mayor of Aviston, Illinois. Slick and I were taking a break after just getting to town, sitting in a closed gas station parking lot. A truck pulled into the parking lot, and out stepped a man who said he had seen us walking earlier. After telling him about our trip, he invited us to get some dinner with him at the only restaurant in town." He said the mayor knew everyone there on a nickname basis and told them all about their trip. They were, said Alex, "Literally, the talk of the town."

When I asked him what the worst part has been so far, he said "I wouldn't really consider any instances to be a bad or the worst moment. Just experiences to learn from. Like getting lost and running out of water in West Virginia. Or having to walk 3 more miles after already doing 31 during the day, to find somewhere to sleep. Slick has taught me to take things one step at a time."

When I learned he intended to walk through East St. Louis, Illinois, one of the most dangerous cities in America, I begged him to skip around it. By the time that message got through (they have sporadic internet access), however, they had already done it. He told me they had very few problems. "Was very scary though." They left the video equipment in the backpacks for fear it would be stolen.

At this point in the venture, Alex and Slick are somewhere in Missouri, well on track for a December arrival in California. Even if they were to quit today, however, they would have stories to tell their grandchildren for a lifetime.

I can't wait to see the film Alex produces from this young man's adventure. Of course, if you saw "A Walk in the Woods," maybe you'd agree that it is simply anyone's adventure as long as you truly have the desire and the will to see it through.

The "why" of such a trip varies from person to person. To seek the next grand adventure, to get out of a rut, to see what your brothers and sisters across this great land are up to. You never know.

But as we approach yet another commemoration of the September 11 attacks, and our attention focusses on the southern tip of Manhattan (and Washington DC and Pennsylvania), let us spare a thought for a couple of young men schlepping their backpacks toward the other end of the country.

There is, after all, so much to what makes us United States.

If you would like to follow Alex and Slick on their Walk Across America, they have a FaceBook page: [Walking Across America](#). You can also donate to their project - information on their page. And look for their movie sometime in 2017.