

# ALEC MAPA

## THE BABY DADDY

**A**lejandro 'Alec' Mapa was born in San Francisco in 1965. His conservative Catholic parents had arrived in the US from the Philippines several years earlier, making him a first generation Asian-American. His early upbringing was strictly religious. His family lived directly opposite their local Catholic church, which, together with his sister Monica, Alec attended daily.

Growing up gay in 1980s' San Francisco, the son of émigré Filipinos of firm Catholic faith, presented Alec with a unique set of challenges. Eventually, he would channel those experiences into his defining one-man show, *I Remember Mapa*, serving both to kick-start his career and exorcise some personal demons.

The first 15 years were hard for Alec. In 1983, he moved to New York, where he enrolled at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He won his first break in the late 1980s as understudy to BD Wong in the Tony-award winning Broadway debut of *M Butterfly* but, limited

Since the early 1990s, actor and comedian Alec Mapa has appeared in many top television shows from *Friends* to *Seinfeld*, *The Cosby Show*, *Law & Order* to *NYPD Blue*. More recently, he's been cast in *Desperate Housewives* and *Ugly Betty*, two standout shows of the last ten years, as well as comedy films *Marley & Me* and *Don't Mess With The Zohan*, all whilst crafting his own comedy stand-up shows. However, Alec's greatest achievement came in 2010 when he adopted five year old Zion with husband Jamie Hebert. His journey to family life and parenthood was, at times, difficult and testament to his determination and drive to succeed.

stand-up successes aside, work was slow and uninspiring. When the national tour of *M Butterfly* concluded Alec found himself unemployed and so he turned to stand-up comedy.

However, in 1992 disaster struck. His beloved mother passed away, his personal relationship broke down and just 12 months later his best friend, Dawn, died of complications relating to AIDS. Alec was devastated, reflecting in an interview last year that "... the universe just handed me all my life lessons on a single platter." Of this time Alec admits that had it not been for Monica, whom he credits as his role model, he might not have survived this difficult time.

### THE COMIC

After a prolonged period of reflection and recovery Alec channelled his experiences into his comedy show *I Remember Mapa*, which he would take on the road for the next five years. The show was met with favourable reviews and TV guest appearances followed from *Friends* to *Dharma & Greg*, as well as a second one-man show, *Pointless*, which regaled audiences with the travails of a gay Hollywood B-lister in search of love.

In 2001, Alec landed a lead role as Vern Limiso in the ill-fated CBS sitcom *Some of My Best Friends* alongside Jason Bateman (*Arrested Development*, *Juno*). It made him the first gay Asian lead in TV history. Sadly, as a result of poor promotion and scheduling difficulties, declining ratings meant the show was pulled after just eight episodes. Nevertheless, Alec maintains that *Some Of My* »







Alec married producer Jamie Hebert in 2008 and in 2010 the couple adopted Zion, via California's foster care system.



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» *Best Friends* provided a turning point in his career, telling the *Gay and Lesbian Times* in 2010 that through the show he met "... everyone on television and I haven't stopped working since."

The following year, whilst Alec was performing *Pointless* at a Los Angeles theatre, he was approached by an intern who asked him on a date. That man was Jamie Hebert and he and Alec have been together ever since.

Just as Alec's personal life stabilised, so too did his professional life. In 2005, following a three year recurring role in sitcom *Half and Half*, Alec was cast as Vern, personal assistant to Eva Longoria's character Gabrielle, in the eight season multi-award winning drama *Desperate Housewives*. From there Alec returned repeatedly as Suzuki St Pierre in the cult ABC comedy drama *Ugly Betty*, as well as roles in comedy films *Marley and Me* and *Don't Mess With The Zohan*.

**THE ACTIVIST**

In 2008, Alec and Jamie married. This was before the introduction of Proposition 8, legislation that prohibited same-sex marriage in California. Alec was a vocal opponent of the law and an impassioned advocate for LGBT rights. The San Francisco of Alec's youth was that of Castro Camera, The Alice Club and the Briggs Initiative; the beating heart of the gay-rights movement. He was 13 when in 1978 former City Supervisor Dan White entered San Francisco City Hall and shot and killed Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man elected to office in the United States. Alec came out to his family the following year.

In New York in the 1980s, he was confronted by the ravages of AIDS, as colleagues and friends succumbed to the virus at a terrifying rate. In previous interviews Alec recounted how during production for *M Butterfly*, it was commonplace to attend a funeral or memorial once a month. Back home in San Francisco, a similar picture prevailed. As a young gay man coming of age in the 1980s, Alec felt it was hard not to become politicised.

These days, Alec is a dedicated fundraiser for AIDS charities and LGBT rights organisations such as the Matthew Shepherd Foundation. In 2005, he received the prestigious Davidson Valenti GLAAD award for advancing the cause of LGBT equal rights and has recently helped out with the Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team (APAIT), which makes AIDS education materials available for US speakers of Mandarin, Vietnamese and Tagalog.

**THE BABY DADDY**

In 2010, Alec took on a new and enduring role, as he and Jamie adopted five year-old Zion from California's foster care system. The idea to start a family took hold when Jamie accompanied Alec as he was performing on one of Rosie O'Donnell's R Family Cruises for same-sex parent families. Alec told *Edge Magazine* in 2012 "All of a sudden, we saw what was possible. We saw real life happy kids and exhausted parents. We saw families. I looked at my husband and it felt like that was the next step for us."

Like Alec and Jamie, growing numbers of same-sex couples are starting their own families. Today, there are various options available to gay mums and dads to be, including adoption, fostering, co-parenting, donor conception and surrogacy. Each option is subject to specific legal requirements, making it advisable to obtain expert legal advice before undergoing any treatment or entering into any parenting arrangement. The law is not always 'joined up' and it can be a legal minefield for prospective parents that can create a legacy of legal problems, worry and uncertainty if it is not tackled proactively from the start.


Adoption law and practice in the UK can be complex and lengthy. There are around 4,000 children in the UK each year that need to be adopted. Many of these children are at school and have siblings who need to be placed together. Some of these children have complex or special needs which require sensitive handling and





infinite amounts of patience by adoptive parents. For those considering adopting a child from overseas they will need to comply with the vigorous inter-country adoption process and ensure they obtain the right immigration law clearance for their child to enter and reside in the UK.

Alec and Jamie's experience and journey to parenthood was no picnic. As he explained in an interview earlier this year "We became parents instantly so we didn't know that kids have meltdowns, we didn't know that they can't stay up all night". They also discovered that foster children are sensitive to change, which brought additional challenges. The transition from red carpet show man to PTA attendee, for a man who admits to having lived life with a reckless abandon, was never going to be easy but, for Alec at least, the time had come. Nevertheless, the responsibility that accompanies such an addition to the family did bring some abrupt changes and unanticipated experiences for the Mapa-Hebert household, which Alec drew on for his most recent comedy stage offering *Alec Mapa: Baby Daddy*.

In 2012, Alec raised sufficient funding to take *Baby Daddy* to DVD. As he explained in an interview with *Edge* magazine last year, he hopes that by taking the show to a wider audience, he will be able to expedite the growing acceptance of society towards LGBT families. A recent study by the Pew Research Centre found that although between 2007 and 2011, the proportion of people who view gay parents as bad for society reduced from 50% to 35%, there is still much work to be done. 

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