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Pranks a Lot!



Peter Zetepel

Do you know the man in the photograph? You might have seen him on ABC's *Good Morning America* in 1986, using the name Joe Bones. You could have met him in 1987 as Dr. Richard J. Long, marine biologist, or earlier as Jo-Jo, King of the New York Gypsies. He's also been Dr. Josef Gregor, world-famous entomologist with a cure-all pill made from cockroach extract, and Giuseppe Scaggoli, director of a celebrity sperm bank.

David Hartman, former host of *GMA*, and the folks at *Entertainment Tonight* and CNN have still other names for him, none of them printable. That's because they're among the many media people who have been hoodwinked in grand fashion by Joey Skaggs, 43, media prankster and one of the country's premier

hoax artists.

When he appeared on Hartman's morning show, Skaggs was posing as Joe Bones, founder of The Fat Squad—a team of diet commandos who, for a mere \$300 a day, would physically restrain their clients from overeating. It was all a gag. Hartman and co-host Joan Lunden should have known better, says the hoax-master, because Skaggs had appeared on the show a year earlier under his real name to display his aquatic sculptures called "condominiums for fish." In real life Skaggs is a multimedia artist whose works—including the fish condos—are shown in museums and art galleries.

In other scams, Skaggs has posed as Jo-Jo, King of the New York Gypsies, to protest the name of the gypsy moth. ("Call it the Hitler moth," he cried. "We Gypsies have taken enough abuse!") He once made headlines by announcing that he was going to be the first to windsurf from Hawaii to California. And as Dr. Richard J. Long, marine biologist, he was head of the "Save the Geoduck" campaign in Seattle—the geoduck being a giant clam with a long appendage. The geoduck really exists, but "Dr. Long" claimed it was used as an aphrodisiac by the Japanese. (It isn't.)

Why does he do it? Mostly for fun and publicity, but also to keep reporters on their toes. Skaggs thinks media folk are too often lazy about checking stories and that people in general are too gullible. His purpose, he told TV GUIDE, is "to make some people laugh and some people question."

Media people have to get up early if they expect to stay ahead of incurable pranksters. When *Entertainment Tonight* did a story on media hoaxers last year, they invited Skaggs to appear on the show. Ever obliging and terminally mischievous, he agreed. Then, of course, he sent somebody else, posing as Joey Skaggs, to do the interview.

—Myles Callum

