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People weekly

Broadway's glowing goodbye to Liz Taylor

The how-to book on making love to a man

Arthur Ashe's ordeal

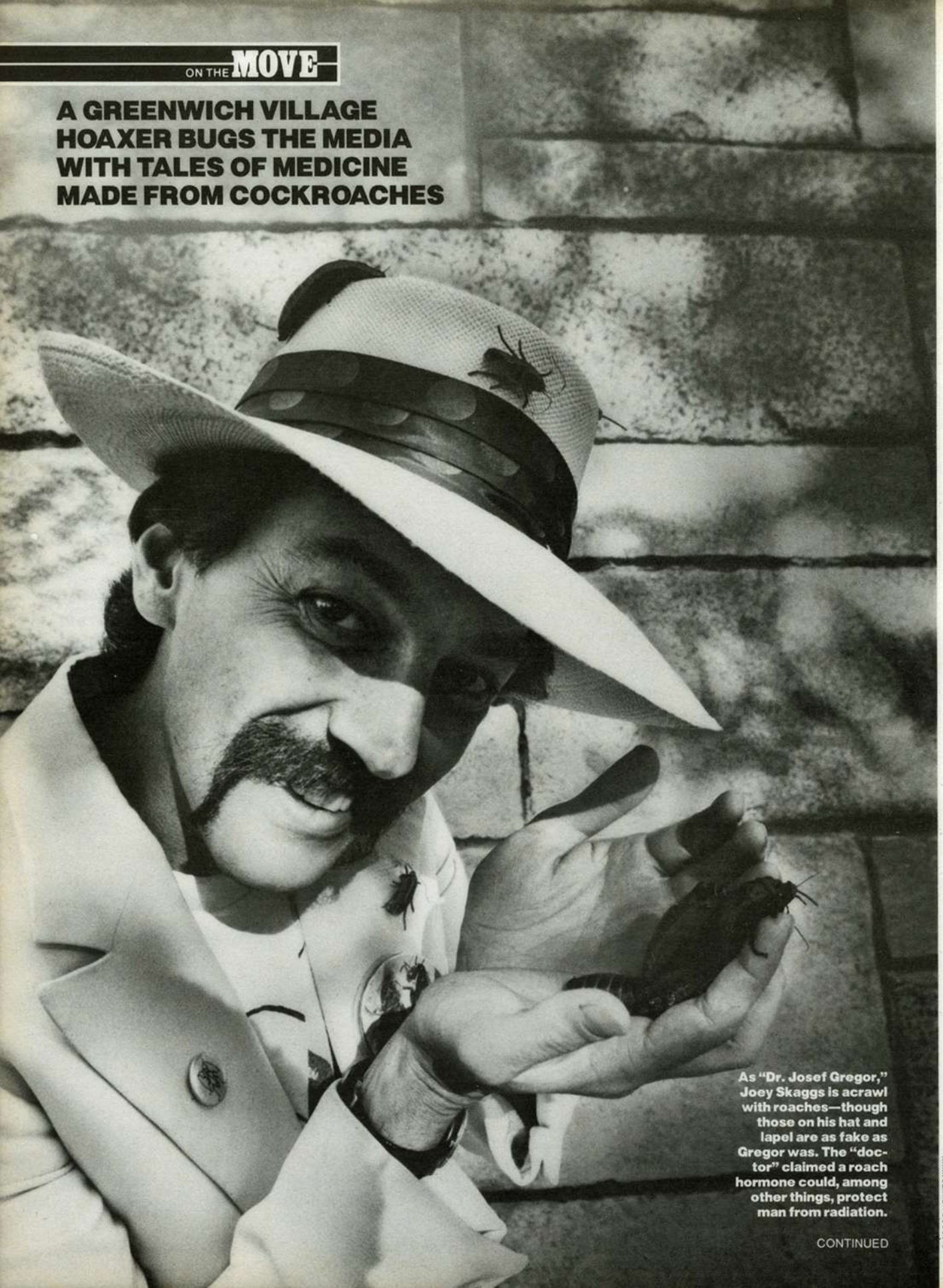
THE 29 BEST (AND WORST) DRESSED PEOPLE IN THE WORLD



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ON THE **MOVE**

A GREENWICH VILLAGE HOAXER BUGS THE MEDIA WITH TALES OF MEDICINE MADE FROM COCKROACHES



As "Dr. Josef Gregor," Joey Skaggs is acrawl with roaches—though those on his hat and lapel are as fake as Gregor was. The "doctor" claimed a roach hormone could, among other things, protect man from radiation.

MARK SENNET/DOUGGIE

CONTINUED



MADDY MILLER

'I use the media as a painter would use canvas,' says Skaggs

Last May, Dr. Josef Gregor invited the press to his Manhattan office to announce an astounding medical breakthrough: Cockroach hormones had been found to cure a variety of common human ailments, including the flu and menstrual cramps. The sign on his office door read "Metamorphosis," a reference to the organization sponsoring Gregor's research, and while Gregor read his statement, 70 Metamorphosis followers studied his exhibits—including a fiberglass cockroach bigger than a cocker spaniel.

Among the reporters present was UPI's Ed Lion, 24, and the story he wrote on Gregor ran in more than 175 of the wire service's client papers. After the press conference, Gregor appeared on *Live at Five*, an early-evening WNBC-TV newscast in New York. Radio interviews followed.

What almost nobody in the media seemed to remember was Franz Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis*, about a man named Gregor Samsa who turns into an insect. Within two months the "Dr. Gregor" phenomenon was revealed as a hoax perpetrated by a Greenwich Village artist and college instructor, Joey Skaggs, 35. The Metamorphosis followers at the press conference were actor friends. "None of it was true," Skaggs says. "I use the media as a medium, as a painter would use canvas. Everything I do is a social political commentary. Dr. Gregor was a satire on people who look to cults for a panacea. My purpose is to make reporters more responsible."

UPI's Lion found little redeeming social value in the hoax. "I wrote it up as a cult group because they were acting like Moonies," he says. "I guess I got suckered in." *Live at Five* co-anchor Sue Simmons admits: "It's a classic example of how easily we can be duped. We realized before air time it was probably a hoax, but we put Gregor on anyway—more for entertainment than anything else." *Live at Five* co-producer Fred Farrar decided not to interview Skaggs again because "we didn't want to do more to promote his put-on." UPI did run a follow-up story in which managing editor Don Reed conceded, "We were hoodwinked."

Skaggs says he spent more than $3,000 of his own money on his roach spoof, but he financed two 1979 "media performances" with a $3,500 grant funded by New York State. In one he played a tuxedoed bootblack who charged $5 a shine—as a comment on "conspicuous consumer consumption." In the other he staged a protest march against loud portable radios.

Skaggs first gained notoriety in 1966 when he was fined $1 for violating New York park regulations by carrying a 10-foot crucifix, with an American Indian skull and a metal penis attached, in the city's Easter parade. The point, he says, was to "protest man's inhumanity to man." In 1969, to deride breast fixations, Skaggs hung a 50-foot bra on Wall Street. In 1976 he advertised a "cathouse for dogs" with "Hot Bitches —from pedigree (Fifi the French Poodle) to mutts (Lady the Tramp)." New York's WABC-TV bit, citing him in a series on dog abuse. The next year Skaggs posed as Giuseppe Scaggoli, founder of the Celebrity Sperm Bank, specializing in rock-star semen. It was written up in *Ms.*

Between scams, Skaggs ponders one of his abstract "imaginary landscapes." Two are at Manhattan's Hal Bromm Gallery.

Son of an auto repairman in New York, Skaggs studied at Manhattan's High School of Art and Design. He now teaches media communications at the School of Visual Arts, using students in his "performances." The school's president, David Rhodes, approves. "They take his course to learn how the media operate," he says.

Skaggs won't discuss his next hoax but says recent publicity won't blow his cover. "People will forget Dr. Gregor tomorrow," Skaggs contends. Meanwhile he paints, writes scripts and copes with his reputation. "People always expect me to lie," he laments. "I also have this recurring nightmare that two guys dressed in Raid cans are going to come with straitjackets and carry me away." REBECCA BRICKER