



Remember the Saturn ad scandal and the woman who exposed the fraud?

WHERE ARE THEY NOW: TRUDY SUGGS

In 1996, Trudy Suggs noticed a woman signing in a Saturn commercial... but was the woman really deaf? Suggs' subsequent investigative piece rocked the deaf and hard of hearing community and catapulted her into a place she never dreamed of. SIGNews tracked down Suggs to find out what she is doing today.

How Trudy Suggs exposed a major scandal

In late 1996, Suggs and her then-boyfriend, Randy Shank, were watching a taped show when they came across a commercial for the Saturn car company's *Real People, Real Cars* ad campaign. Watching the ad, Suggs and Shank immediately knew something was fishy, and were not comfortable with the invented sign for "Saturn" in the ad. The following day, Suggs phoned Saturn to find out whether the woman, Holly Daniel, was a hearing actor or a 'real' deaf person, since this particular ad campaign featured actual Saturn owners who were not actors. "The representative I spoke with insisted Holly was indeed deaf," Suggs said. "My focus then turned to how she 'invented' a sign - which is something that should never

happen without community approval."

Suggs sent e-mail to friends, including the managing editor of DeafNation, encouraging them to write to Saturn about the ad. The editor mistakenly assumed this was a letter to the editor, and published it in the newspaper. "This turned out to be a wonderful mistake, because I got e-mail from people in Louisiana who told me that Holly was not deaf. Rather, she was an uncertified interpreter who pretended for as long as two years prior to the commercial that she was deaf."

And the motive was not the money from the Saturn ad. "It was something beyond that," Suggs remembers. "It definitely had something to do with being accepted by the Deaf community."

"What was bizarre was that

Holly told me that she had a hearing twin sister who was the interpreter everyone knew. She sent me birth certificates, which were eventually proven to be fraudulent, among many other twists to this story," said Suggs. She wrote a three-article series about the scandal, which appeared in *DeafNation* (March, April and May 1997) and brought attention from national publications.

"When I wrote the series, it was an amazing experience. I learned so much about the world of illusions and shattered dreams. I also learned how far someone would go in deception in order to stay in the community. If it wasn't for the people I knew and the Deaf community, this story would have never been told." Saturn pulled the televised and print ad as a result of this expose.

10 years later: What Suggs is doing now

Suggs works full-time operating T.S. Writing Services,

which has over 300 individual and corporate clients. She married Shank in late 2005 and they live in a log house in Faribault, Minn.

Suggs is currently working on a book about the Saturn ad fiasco, exploring the power of the close-knit nature of the Deaf community and how "we

can really congregate to help each other." The 10-year anniversary of the Saturn scandal is approaching and Suggs hopes to complete it by then because "this is a story that must not be forgotten, given its incredible impact upon the interpreting and Deaf communities."



Trudy Suggs

Ten years ago, Trudy Suggs helped expose a fraud who had appeared in a commercial as a deaf Saturn car owner. Today Suggs lives in Minnesota with her husband and dogs, where she operates a writing service.

Deaf chefs pursue career and adventure

James Johnson

SIGNews Staff Writer

Don Gaul, Kurt Ramborger, Praxy Orduno-Arcia, and Ian Goldstein are deaf chefs and have worked at four- and five-star restaurants in the United States. They defy the theory that a chef has to communicate well in his kitchen. They take great pride in their careers filled with accomplishments and, of course, frustrations. Nevertheless, they show deaf people can be chefs if they enter that profession.

Profiles of deaf chefs

Gaul and Ramborger are self-taught chefs. Gaul spent many hours at home perfecting his pastry recipes, read many books, and was mentored by chefs at 95 Cordova Restaurant at the Casa Monica hotel in St. Augustine, Florida, Walt Disney World Dolphin and Swan Resorts, and the Peabody Orlando in Orlando. Don's journey into the pastry world took a long way - nearly 20 years - since he, as a Gallaudet student, met Isaac Abenchuchan at his Mexican restaurant in Frederick, Maryland. After several career changes, he decided to go into the restaurant industry. Although he no longer works in the industry, he continues to enjoy making pastries for different groups and lives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.



Beginning as a self-taught pastry chef, Don Gaul (third from left) was mentored by chefs at many fine restaurants in Florida, including the Casa Monica Hotel, the Peabody Orlando and the Dolphin and Swan resorts at Walt Disney World.

Ramborger became a sous chef only after a series of promotions from a dishwasher to prep cook and line cook. Under his belt are over 13 years of experience and nine different restaurants. He studied under three different chefs, and now specializes in several cuisines, especially Italian cuisine. Kurt previously worked for the deaf-owned *Abbondanza* restaurant in Seattle. He now caters in the area of Fremont, Calif., and volunteers for the California School for the Deaf-Fremont's Food Education and Service Training (FEAST) sharing his culinary experience with deaf and hard of hearing high school students.

Praxy Orduno-Arcia and Ian Goldstein graduated from the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. Praxy

was the first deaf person to apply to the California Culinary Academy, and was finally admitted after nearly one year of legal struggles. Praxy has always cooked all her life, and all her past work experience is related to food. As part of the culinary training, she did an internship at the Boulevard Restaurant, one of the finest restaurants in San Francisco, and worked there nearly one year after the completion of her training. She then was the executive sous chef at *Upstairs Downtown Restaurant* in Fresno, CA - she helped two artists open the restaurant. Until 2004, she operated her own catering company, Praxy's Catering. Praxy now manages a Starbucks store in San Leandro, CA where she recently started a popular

monthly Deaf Chat, and continues to cater.

Ian completed his internship at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in San Francisco and continued to work there before transferring to the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Washington, DC. After five years with Ritz Carlton, he worked under a chef at the Gallaudet University Kellogg Conference Center. He now works for Bon Appetit Management Company managing the Marketplace and Rathskellar at Gallaudet University. As a teenager, Ian began to spice up his mother's plain and simple meals, and he has not looked back.

Pursuing their dreams

Communication in a commercial kitchen is a common obstacle, not for only deaf chefs, but all cooks. This is es-



Praxy Orduno-Arcia (in white jacket) and her crew at a Deaf Community Center fund-raising event which she catered. Orduno-Arcia was the first deaf person admitted to the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco.

pecially true in kitchens with foreign-speaking staff. It is a common misconception for hearing people who question deaf people aspiring to be a chef because it is them who have difficulties understanding foreign people, even their gestures and body language. Deaf chefs have overcome the communication barrier with note writing, gestures, body language, homemade signs, and, in some cases, lipreading. They taught others how to communicate, and have successfully worked together. Ian felt this has broadened his understanding of the "food language" and that it has nothing to do with deafness. It comes from your soul and heart in the cooking world.

Praxy advises to have a lot of patience with hearing people in a kitchen. Take time to teach them how to communicate with deaf chefs. She also wants aspiring deaf people to understand that being a chef can be exhaustive and demanding - working evenings, weekends and holidays - which contradicts some romantic view of being a chef. She has seen some people becoming chefs for the wrong reasons.

Resources for aspiring deaf chefs

Culinary schools are available for deaf people aspiring to be a chef. For California School

Deaf Chefs, continued on page 20