

# Stopping Kaz: One Skeptic's Experience Using the Internet to Debunk a Religious Con-artist

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## Abstract

Often, a skeptic sees something fraudulent and thinks "What can I do? I'm just one person." This presentation will emphasize how one person can use the Internet and other media to expose frauds, quacks and con-artists.

## Foreword

First, I would like to say that David and Reggie send their regrets for not being able to be here to present this paper. They have asked me to do so in their stead.

For those of you who did not understand that reference: you will by the end of the presentation.

## Introduction: "Something's Very Wrong"

Late One evening in June of 2004, my girlfriend Susan said something odd to me. She said "You need to talk to your mom. She told me about a woman who was a speaker at her church, and...something's very wrong there."

We had no way of knowing it at the time, but that simple statement would lead me into a skeptical investigation which would put me in touch with a wide variety of people in several states and on two continents, and which would still be going more than a year and a half later.

Susan couldn't remember many of the details of the guest speaker's story, but what she did recall was... disturbing.

I talked to my mother the next day.

## A Very Strange Story

A woman going by the name of "Dr. Kaz deMille-Jacobsen" had been a guest speaker at my mother's church, and the congregation had been very impressed with her "inspiring" life story.

## Her Celebrity Claims

Kaz claimed to be the illegitimate grandchild of the famous film director Cecil B. deMille, and the illegitimate child of actress Katherine deMille and actor Peter Lawford. The film studios wanted to avoid a scandal, so she was instead raised by the doctor who had attended her birth, Dr. Max Jacobson, a well-known doctor to stars and politicians.

She claimed that at a young age, she married famous pop star Fabian, and after divorcing him, married Roberto Andretti of the famed car-racing family, who subsequently died in a racing accident in Monaco in 1984. With two business partners, she had formed a production company, and by 2001 they had produced dozens of films and records,

and had won several Academy Awards and Grammy Awards.

Although now supposedly penniless, Kaz said she at one time owned luxurious homes in London, Los Angeles, New York, France, Spain, and elsewhere, and had a net worth of over \$100,000,000. She had founded two charitable organizations which are now world-wide, each with membership numbering in the millions. Her charitable work with young artists got her a seat on presidential advisory committees under three different American Presidents: George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush.

Is your "baloney detector" going off yet? Hold on, it's about to get much louder – and angrier.

## Her 9/11 Claims

She claimed that on September 11, 2001, she and her partners were meeting with clients on the 101st floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. She and her assistant had left the meeting, boarded an elevator and had started down when the plane struck the building. The resulting explosion killed most of the people in the elevator, but despite life-threatening wounds, she was able to lead her horribly-burned assistant, and a young man who had lost a hand, down a ladder on the side of the elevator shaft, back into the tower at the 94th floor, and helped them all the way down to the ground floor, where they ran out of the tower just as it started to collapse.

If your baloney detector hasn't shattered yet, it's about to.

## Her "Heavenly" Claims

In a hospital recovering from wounds she received during her heroic escape from the WTC, she went into a leukemic coma and later died. While dead for 28 minutes, she visited "The Heavenly Realm," where she met many of the apostles, as well as Jesus and God Himself. She was told that it was not her time to die, but that she was to sell all of her worldly possessions and homes, give all her money away, and live the life of an itinerant minister, traveling from town to town, telling her wondrous story to whatever group would listen. She was also told to speak to world and religious leaders, and that she would be given a message for each of them.

When she awoke in the hospital, she found that she was holding a rock in her hand – a rock given to her by Jesus Himself. She gave the rock to a scientist friend who gave it to NASA, which declared that the rock was "not of the Earth nor the moon." NASA refused to return the rock, but instead sent her to meet President Bush, who wanted to hear her wonderful story. He and Mrs. Bush then knelt down in

front of her, and asked her forgiveness for having let 9/11 happen.

Since then, she gave away her fortune, and has spoken to many world leaders, including Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela and many others.

As you sweep the broken shards of your baloney detector off the floor, you may be asking yourself: people *believed* this? The answer is: Yes. Lots of them.

Not only did my mother fully believe the story, but so did her minister and the congregation of her church. And my mother was aware of several other congregations where Kaz had spoken, and of others where she was scheduled to speak in the future.

### **Why Did They Believe Her?**

I am frequently asked this question, and have asked it of ex-supporters of Kaz. Here are some of the answers I've received:

#### **“Her message is so positive”**

She wraps all of her nonsense in a Christian-sounding message, which makes some people more receptive to it.

#### **“My minister supported her”**

Many church-goers assume if someone has been invited to speak at their church, that the person's story has been checked out by their pastor. Sadly, this is not always the case.

#### **“She had spoken at other churches”**

Kaz is often recommended as a speaker for one church after someone hears her speak at another church. It is all-too-easy for a pastor to assume that Kaz's story was checked out by the pastor of that other church.

#### **“I didn't think anyone would lie about such things”**

Some people find it inconceivable that a person would make up such a convoluted story, and then tell it in front of a congregation.

#### **“I just ignored the parts I doubted.”**

I found this very interesting. Some people told me that when they had doubts about a part of Kaz's story (such as the “Rock From Jesus”), they chose to simply push that part aside, and focus on the parts they *did* believe.

#### **“I thought I could tell when someone was lying”**

My mother fell into this group. After hearing only some of this story from my mother, I asked her if she really believed it. She told me that she could tell when someone was lying to her, and she knew that Kaz was not lying.

#### **“She didn't charge any money”**

When I asked my mother if she had given this woman any money, she told me that no, Kaz didn't charge any money for her talk at the church. She was convinced that this was further evidence of Kaz's believability. When I asked if Kaz had accepted donations, my mother said “Well of course, we took up a ‘love donation’ for her.”

Of course.

### **The Investigation Begins**

I decided not to press the issue with my mother at the moment, and in fact, I might have even let the whole matter drop at that point, if it weren't for two things:

1. Kaz had been invited to speak at my mother's church again in a few weeks, and

2. If I was right, Kaz was earning money and admiration by lying about one of this nation's greatest tragedies.

Of all the frauds, quacks, hoaxers and con-artists we skeptics talk about, the worst of the lot, the ones which make my skin crawl, are those which prey upon the grief, pain, suffering and deaths of others. Snake-oil salesmen. Psychic mediums. Faith healers.

If I was right about this Kaz, then she fell squarely into this category. She was profiting from the suffering of those who really were in the Twin Towers and the Pentagon that day; profiting from the deaths of those who did not survive; profiting from the grief and sense of helplessness felt by the rest of us who watched it all happen on our televisions.

If I was right about Kaz, she needed to be exposed for what she was. She needed to be stopped.

### **Searching the Web**

The first thing I did was look for any information about this woman on the Internet. If she was even a fraction of the things she claimed to be, there would be dozens if not hundreds of references to her on the web, right?

There were only three.

There was no mention of her on any of the lists of Oscar winners, Grammy winners, 9/11 survivors, or presidential advisors, and I couldn't even *find* a list of recipients of rocks from Jesus.

Possibly more telling was her total absence from the many lists of people who legitimately make a living as Church guest speakers.

Although I found this lack of information to be telling, I knew it wouldn't convince my mother. I had to dig deeper, but was running out of leads to follow.

### **A Little Help From My Friends**

At this point, I turned for help to a group of people I knew would have some ideas - the denizens of the JREF Forum for help.

I had been a member of the forum for a few years at that point, and knew that the regulars there would be supportive of my research into this woman and her claims.

On July 12th 2004, the topic “Dr. Kaz deMille Jacobsen – Fraud?” appeared on the JREF message board. In it, I laid out the situation, and asked Forum members for suggestions. Many offered suggestions and advice, but Forum member Marian struck gold. Marian – may she forever be touched by His Noodly Appendage - had found the email address of a member of the deMille family.

This eventually led me to Mrs. Cecilia deMille-Presley. Mrs. deMille-Presley is trustee of the Cecil B. deMille foundation, the head of the deMille estate, and is on the Film Boards of several universities, including UCLA and Chapman. In short, she is the real deal.

The first contact I got from Mrs. deMille-Presley was very clear: She didn't know whether Kaz was a liar or was delusional, but she knew for a fact that Kaz was in no way related to the deMilles. She said Kaz was possibly

dangerous, and that I should warn my mother and her church.

I read this last during my lunch hour at work. Not wanting to wait another minute, I went straight to my mother's house, armed with printouts of all that I had found.

When I arrived at my mother's house, she was assembling pamphlets for Kaz's upcoming appearance at her church the following Sunday.

My heart sank. This was not going to be easy.

At the same time, my outrage over what I believed this "Kaz" woman was doing grew. Not only was she accepting donations under what appeared to be false pretenses, but she was being helped to do so by who-knew how many kind-hearted, well-meaning people like my mother?

We sat down in my mother's living room, and step by step, as gently and matter-of-factly as I could, I walked her through all I had found (and not found), ending with the warning from Mrs. deMille-Presley.

After a pause, my mother asked to see the printouts again, and went over them one by one.

Finally, she said that she wasn't fully convinced that Kaz was a fraud, but felt that there was definite cause for concern. Would I come with her and speak to some other people in her congregation?

I did.

Later that evening, Kaz's upcoming appearance at my mother's church was cancelled.

## The Web Site

One of the members of my mother's congregation said something which really floored me.

He said that he had felt some doubts about Kaz, and had gone to the web to find some evidence to support her story. But, finding nothing, he had decided to simply give up and *accept her story*.

After hearing that, I knew that I had to create a web site about this woman. The next time someone did a web search for "Kaz deMille Jacobsen", they would find something to read.

I started gathering as much information as I could – the members of my mother's church were forthcoming with flyers, photos and, most importantly, names of other churches where Kaz had spoken.

I had also corresponded with the deMilles several more times, and had found out more of what they knew of Kaz.

Back in the 1990s, the deMilles had first heard about Kaz from Charlton Heston. Mr. Heston had been at a film opening when he was told that CB deMille's granddaughter wanted to speak with him. Having been a long-time friend of the family, he was surprised and confused when Kaz introduced herself. Highly suspicious, he later called the deMilles to give them a "heads-up" about it.

As it turned out, Kaz had been using the deMille name to get her foot in the door to see industry people in both New York and Los Angeles, in part to get donations for "Tinseltown International," one of the charitable foundations she had supposedly founded. Her behavior had been strange enough that she had been banned from offices in at least two studios.

The deMilles had hired private investigators to find out what they could about Kaz, but they hadn't found much.

They shared several documents with me in order to help convince people that Kaz was, at the very least, lying about being a deMille.

All of this information from the deMilles and from members of my mother's congregation led me to yet more people, with more information.

I felt that I had enough material at this point to make a first pass at a web site. I just needed to decide on a format. The site's target audience was Kaz's potential victims: Christians. I decided I needed to try hard to keep the site from being perceived as "anti-Christian," when in reality it was merely "anti-Kaz." And although it would have been easy to put together a site where I let this woman have it with both barrels, I decided that the tone of the site needed to be straightforward, calm and matter-of-fact. I also wanted the site to be accessible to everyone, and so decided to make the structure and content of the site as simple as possible.

The pages of the site include:

- The "splash page" people see when first entering the site.
- A Home page where the site's purpose is explained.
- A Who page where Kaz is introduced.
- A Claims page where her claims are listed and examined.
- A Questions page, with questions for Kaz.
- A Sources page, where sources of information are displayed and discussed.
- A FAQ page, where frequent questions to the site are answered.
- A Contact page, where visitors are encouraged to share information with me via email or postal mail.

On September 9, 2004, [www.StopKaz.com](http://www.StopKaz.com) was open for business.

## Initial Feedback

It took several weeks for the site to hit all the search engines, for interested parties to start finding it, and for feedback to start trickling in.

One early email was from a Christian gentleman who had been given a CD recording of Kaz speaking in front of a congregation in Littleton, Colorado. He had thought there was something fishy about her story, and searched the web, finding the StopKaz site. This was exactly what I had created the site for! After following up on the information I provided on the site, he had decided that she was indeed a fraud. Would I be interested in a copy of the CD? I would.

Another item I obtained was a streaming audio version of an episode of "The Jesse Lee Peterson Show," an L.A.-based internet radio talk show, on which Kaz had been a guest. I spoke with the Reverend Peterson at his office. He was shocked and concerned by what I had to say, and said he would ask her to come back on the show to answer my charges. I was later told that she had declined that invitation.

I received another email, from a gentleman who attended a church in Lomita, California, where Kaz had recently spoken, and she had mentioned both me and my web site!

Would I be interested in a cassette tape of her presentation? Yes, please!

At several points in the recording, she addresses me directly, as if I were there in the congregation. I found out much later that she had insisted to the pastor of the church that I was there. Whether this was done for dramatic effect, or because she actually believed it, I do not know.

Listening to the tape was... surreal. But her mentioning me was definitely a sign that I was getting to her.

These and other audio and video recordings of her that I eventually obtained helped in further documenting her claims, as well as the inconsistencies in her story.

It should be noted that much of the evidence I have received in all of this has been from Christians. This despite the fact that I clearly state on the site's FAQ page that I am an agnostic. I find that fact heartening.

### Celebrity Feedback

I attempted to contact all of the various celebrities in her stories, but aside from the deMilles, most of them did not respond to my emails and phone calls. Some notable exceptions:

- Her claim to have been married to a "Roberto Andretti of the famed car-racing family" was refuted by none other than Mr. Mario Andretti. In an email sent by his publicist, Mr. Andretti stated that his was the only Andretti family in racing, and that there had never been a Roberto in the family. As to her claim that this "Roberto" had been killed at the Monaco Grand Prix in 1989, Mr. Andretti stated categorically that there had been no racing fatalities in Monaco in that year, nor indeed for the past thirty years.

- Her claim to have been married to singer/actor Fabian Forte was refuted by his current wife. He has been married three times, none of them to Kaz.

- Her claim to be the illegitimate daughter of Peter Lawford was disputed by Lawford's biographer, James Spada. Mr. Spada said that in hundreds of interviews he conducted in researching the book, neither Kaz's name nor an illegitimate daughter were ever mentioned.

### Ex-supporters of "Kaz"

As Kaz went from church to church, she usually stayed at the homes of church members, frequently overstaying her welcome. I have corresponded with several of these people. Some I have spoken with over the phone, and have even met a few of them in person.

On one memorable occasion, I sat at a kitchen table with two such women. After they were sure I wasn't simply on some anti-Christian crusade, they told me many interesting stories of Kaz, and gave me some documents which she had inadvertently left on one of these women's computers. After getting my permission to do so, these women briefly prayed over me, asking that I be protected from "Kaz's demonic influence." I took it as a compliment.

Among the many documents obtained from Kaz's ex-supporters were these three gems:

- Her birth certificate, indicating that she was born "Carol Ann Priest" in Christchurch New Zealand in 1947, and that

her parents were Doris Eileen Priest, a housewife, and Colin Aubrey Priest, a "fibrous plasterer."

- Her Australian passport, issued in 1997, under the name "Karolanne Victoria Jane Seaborne-Lavell."

- Her New Zealand passport, issued in 2004, under the name "Kazshari deMille-Jacobsen."

### Media Attention

Not long after the web site went live, I received an email from Mark Madler, a reporter with the *Burbank Leader* newspaper. He had found the StopKaz site when following up on a puff-piece article the *Leader* had done on Kaz in 2002.

Kaz heard about this new story (the reporter having interviewed some of her supporters), and left the country not long before the article appeared. A coincidence?

The story, titled "Survival Story Now in Doubt", ran in late December of 2004. Stopkaz.com was mentioned, causing a spike in the number of visits to the site.

The following week the *Leader* ran a political cartoon. It showed a bookshelf labeled "Fairy Tales," on which five books could be seen: Peter Rabbit, Mother Goose, Paul Bunyan, Alice in Wonderland, and "Kaz DeMille Jacobsen."

The *Leader* article caught the attention of Amanda Spratt, a reporter with the *New Zealand Herald*. Spratt emailed me, and not long after, they ran a full-page color story on Kaz and her nonsense. Titled "Living in a Fantasy," the article included quotes from Mrs. deMille-Presley, Jesse Lee Peterson, and me.

The following week, the *Herald* ran a one-paragraph article under the heading "Tour cancelled," saying that Kaz had cancelled her speaking engagements in New Zealand. The article ended with "The *Herald on Sunday* revealed her lies last week."

### The Manhattan Picture

One interesting bit of debunking involved a photograph of Manhattan which Kaz shows during her presentations, claiming that she snapped the photo from the 101st level of the North Tower of the World Trade Center, mere minutes before a plane crashed into the building.

The copy I have of the picture is a grainy black and white photocopy of the image, from the flyer handed out at my mother's church.

Claus Larsen, a former resident of New York and a member of the JREF message forum, saw that image on the StopKaz site and contacted me, stating in no uncertain terms that the image could not have been taken from where Kaz claimed.

Using photographs supplied by Mr. Larsen as well as other photos found on the Internet, it was possible to show that, among other problems, the photograph was not taken from the 101st floor of the North Tower, but from the roof – the 110th floor – of the *South* Tower.

### The Elevator Story

A key element of Kaz's 9/11 melodrama is her supposed escape from an elevator in the World Trade Center.

She says that she and seven other people were trapped in an elevator at around the 98th floor when the plane struck the building. Five of the people used the escape hatch in the elevator roof to climb atop the elevator, so that they could climb down the ladders on the walls of the elevator shaft, but were all killed in an explosion of jet fuel.

Kaz and the other two remaining occupants of the elevator then escaped through a hole the explosion had torn in the side of the elevator, walked across a steel beam to a ladder on the elevator shaft wall, which they then descended until they were able to open a serviceman's door which led back into the tower proper at the 94th floor, at which point they walked down the stairs to safety.

To me, the most glaring error in that story was their getting back into the building at the 94th floor. It is a well-established fact that all of the stairs between the 91st and 92nd floors of the North Tower were destroyed or blocked with rubble when the plane struck the building. Nobody who was above the 91st floor of the North Tower when the plane hit survived. Nobody. And yet Kaz and her two companions somehow managed to walk down from the 94th floor.

There were other problems with the story, which were brought to my attention by an elevator engineer and an elevator mechanic who had found the web site. I confirmed their opinions by contacting dozens of members of the IUEC (International Union of Elevator Constructors), Local # 1 (New York & New Jersey).

Among the problems they had with Kaz's elevator story:

- The roof escape hatch in the elevators of the WTC were locked and designed to be opened only from the *outside*. This was New York Building Code, and policy of the Port Authority, which owned and ran the WTC.
- There are almost *never* ladders running the length of the walls of elevator shafts in public buildings, and according to IUEC members who had actually worked in the elevator shafts of the WTC, there were definitely no such ladders in the WTC Towers. One IUEC member went as far as to say that in his whole career, the only time he had ever seen such a ladder in an elevator shaft was in the movies.

## A Long-Awaited Break

In February of 2005, I got the break I had been hoping for since the site had gone live. I found out where Kaz really had been on 9/11.

She hadn't been in New York. She had been thousands of miles away in Santee California, watching the Twin Towers fall on a television set in a mobile home.

I was contacted by the man who owned that home. He stated that Kaz had started telling her lies about being a 9/11 survivor within months of the tragedy. Knowing for a fact that she had been living in his home on the day of the tragedy, he confronted her, asking how she could lie to someone about such a thing. He said that her response was "How would they find out?"

He sent me photos of himself with Kaz, and copies of holiday letters she had created on his computer during Thanksgiving and Christmas of 2001, when she now claims to have been in a coma in a New York hospital. All of these were added to the StopKaz web site.

I received supporting corroboration of this man's story from multiple people, and, as with most of what I've mentioned here this morning, you can read more about it on the web site.

## Recent Developments

In late October 2005, I was interviewed regarding Kaz by the Australian television show *A Current Affair* (ACA). They had already done an on-the-street interview with Kaz in Melbourne. Evidently, Kaz had not come off very well, getting tripped up in contradictions. I also gave them copies of all of the audio and video I had on her.

A few days later, a promo for the story was shown. The title – "Cashing In on 9/11."

Within hours of the promo's airing, Kaz was rushed to the emergency room at Maroondah Hospital outside of Melbourne.

ACA was contacted by a doctor at Maroondah Hospital who told them that airing the story would be "damaging to Kaz, mentally."

I have been told that Kaz was admitted that night for having supposedly attempted suicide. Several people close to her are of the opinion that it was a stunt, calculated to get the story pulled.

Stunt or not, the story was pulled, and has yet to be broadcast.

Kaz was released just before Christmas, and, so I am told, is claiming that ACA had decided not to air the story because, after further investigation, they had determined that she was telling the truth, and that the StopKaz site was a pack of lies.

When I agreed to the interview, ACA asked if I would object to showing them some ID so that they could be certain that I was who I claimed to be. It seemed a bit odd, but not unreasonable. I subsequently showed them my California driver's license, and my US passport.

Later, I learned what might have been behind that request: Kaz had been telling people that there was no such person as Robert Lancaster. This was just a fictitious name being used by two people named David and Reggie. She assured people that David and Reggie were being pursued by the authorities, who would force them to take the StopKaz web site down very soon.

## Stop Kaz?

From time to time, I am asked "Do you think you will ever really stop Kaz?"

Well, I know for a fact that I have slowed her down. I know of several churches which cancelled her appearances after seeing the StopKaz site. And I have received emails from a number of Christians who heard one of her tapes, found my web site, and decided not to copy and pass the tape on to others.

But stop her?

In 1986, James Randi opened a can of skeptical whoop-ass on the career of "faith healer" Peter Popoff on national television, showing him for the fraud that he was. It is the only time I have ever stood up in front of my television set

and cheered. Popoff's ministry folded not long afterwards, but he is, sad to say, back on television today.

So, stop her? Maybe not. As long as she is out there, there will probably always be another congregation willing to buy her nonsense.

But whenever that happens, wherever it happens, the internet will be there, and so will [www.StopKaz.com](http://www.StopKaz.com).

### **In Closing**

There is a moral to this story.

Actually, there are two. The first is:

DON'T MESS WITH MY MOM.

But there is another, which has been pointed out to me by several members of the JREF message forum.

As trite as it may sound, that moral is:

ONE SKEPTIC CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

With the power that the Internet gives us all, every skeptic can make their voice - their skeptical, critical-thinking voice - heard around the world.

And you don't need to be an expert. You don't have to be an astronomer, good or bad, to debunk astrology. You don't have to be an M.D. to keep watch on quacks. You don't even have to be a magician or escape artist to investigate paranormal claims (although having a gray beard does help - I'm not sure why).

The schedule of TAM4 papers lists me as "Robert Lancaster, Skeptical Investigator," and I guess that when it comes to Kaz, that's what I am. But really, all I am is one skeptic who got righteously pissed off about something, and who decided to try and make a difference.

I invite all of you to do the same.

Thank you.

### **Acknowledgments**

Special thanks to the many people whose help has been invaluable in this ongoing investigation, including:

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