

FOCUS on Cornell alumni

TV's 'Digging for the Truth' is Josh Bernstein's passion

BY LINDA GRACE-KOBAS

He braves crocs in the Amazon to find the real Temple of Doom. He dives Alexandria Harbor seeking Cleopatra's palace. Using Homer as a guide, he sails the Aegean Sea in Odysseus' wake. He treks across glaciers in Patagonia and journeys into the volatile deserts of Yemen. He rappels down a rock face in the Jordan rift valley to find a salt pillar – or Lot's wife?

Josh Bernstein '93, host of The History Channel's hit series "Digging for the Truth," is a latter-day Indiana Jones. He's also an ardent environmentalist who drives a 1982 Australian-made Toyota Land Cruiser that runs on vegetable oil. And, as a profile in the premiere issue of Men's Vogue reveals, he's a great-looking guy who just may have "the best job in the world."

As the second season of "Digging" opened Jan. 23, even The New York Times gushed that Bernstein "could be the best thing for archaeology since Harrison Ford cocked his hat."

The show, which airs Mondays at 9 p.m., is The History Channel's highest-rated series and is bringing it an infusion of young viewers. The Times reports that "Digging" had 1.4 million viewers last year, with hefty increases in the 18 to 49 and 25 to 34 age groups in its time slot.

To further increase viewing among youngsters, The History Channel is engaging in a comic book promotion of the show, with

images of Bernstein in his trademark brown fedora on buses and billboards in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia and Washington. The channel also sends weekly educational updates to 125,000 teachers around the country, with guidelines on how the show can help teach history and geography.

In addition to hosting the show, Bernstein is also president and CEO of BOSS, the Boulder Outdoor Survival School. He is a member of the Explorers Club and a professional photographer.

Engaging and down-to-earth, Bernstein, 34, grew up in New York City and double-majored in anthropology and psychology at Cornell. He then spent a year in Jerusalem studying mysticism and ancient texts, among other things.

As an undergraduate, "I really liked the Near Eastern studies and Native American courses I took," Bernstein said in an e-mail interview. "I guess I always liked studying global cultures." His advisers were Professors James Maas in psychology, John Henderson in anthropology and Gary Rendsburg in Near Eastern studies. He added, "I really enjoyed my talks with [the late] Mohawk chief Ron LaFrance, who was head of the American Indian Program. Seventeen years later, I can still remember sitting in his office and discussing my dreams."

Despite his swashbuckling TV image,



BILL GARDNER/JWM PRODUCTIONS

In the episode "Digging for the Truth: Who Built Egypt's Pyramids?" Josh Bernstein is shown riding Habibi the camel across the Giza Plateau on his way to the Great Pyramids of Giza.

Bernstein says at Cornell he "wasn't a jock" and didn't play team sports. "But I am athletic and enjoy physical challenges," he added. "I love rappelling, diving, horseracing, swimming, hiking, et cetera. I love to bring a little adrenaline and excitement to each show."

He preps before filming the arduous series. "I'd work out once or twice a day, mixing cardio and weight training, and I've always eaten very well – organic foods, no candy, soda, et cetera. These days, because of the rigorous production schedule, I don't have as much time for my health and fitness, but I still try to work out and eat well whenever I can."

Bernstein's TV success rests on his passion for exploration and fact-finding. "I really just love to travel and explore, to learn from other cultures and bring great stories back for our viewers," he said. "Every adventure has been worthwhile." Pressed, he said: "I have a long, long list of favorites. Favorite archaeology: Egypt. Favorite site: Petra in Jordan. Favorite market: the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. It goes on and on."

Bernstein auditioned for the hosting role of "Digging" and got the job. His advice for students worried about careers is: "Follow your passion."

"Find something that you would normally pay someone to do, then focus on it and do it well enough that you get paid for it," he advised. "Honestly, I love what I do at both BOSS and The History Channel. The fact that I can now support myself from it is a blessing. It may take you a few years to make it all work – it took me almost 15 – but if you have the patience, determination and entrepreneurial spirit, it's the most satisfying work lifestyle you can create."

Bernstein hasn't let his TV stardom and comic book hero status go to his head.

"I don't focus on the 'star' thing too much,"

he said. "I'm just grateful to do the show and happy that so many people are supportive of what we've all worked so hard to create."

"As for the comic book, I'll admit that seeing myself turned into a comic book hero was a weird experience. I never expected that to happen – nor

did I expect it to be so much like a real comic book! I just hope that I avoid all the bad guys and get the girl in the end. ... We'll see."

Stay tuned, Monday nights at 9 on The History Channel.

Linda Grace-Kobas is the director of the Office of Humanities Communications.



THE HISTORY CHANNEL/PROVIDED

Follow Josh Bernstein's (Class of '93) adventures as he digs for the truth Monday nights at 9 p.m. on The History Channel: "The City of the Gods (Teotihuacan)," March 9; "The Real Queen of Sheba," March 13; "Troy: Of Gods and Warriors," March 20; "The Da Vinci Code: Bloodlines," March 27; "The Giants of Patagonia," April 3; "Lost Cities of the Amazon," April 17; "The Real Sin City: Sodom and Gomorrah," April 24.



JOSHUA KESSLER

"Digging for the Truth" host Josh Bernstein '93.

Toronto Raptors and Texas Rangers choose Cornellians to lead them

Two Cornell alumni were picked to manage prominent sports teams recently.

Bryan Colangelo '87 was chosen as president and general manager of the Toronto Raptors this March. The team, currently fourth in the Atlantic division of the National Basketball Association, has reportedly signed him to a multiyear contract with a seven-figure salary.

And last October Jon Daniels '99 was promoted to general manager of the Texas Rangers at age 28, becoming the youngest person ever to hold such a position in Major League Baseball history.

Both were undergraduates in applied economics and management in Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Colangelo was a three-year member of the Big Red men's basketball team, helping it post a 45-33 record during those seasons. A reserve guard, he was a letter winner in 1986-87.

Colangelo most recently was president and general manager of the Phoenix Suns, which he joined 11 years ago. Following the 2004-05 season in which the team won 62 games, considered the third biggest turnaround in league history, he was named NBA's executive of the year in The Sporting News.

In an Associated Press story that followed, Colangelo's father, Jerry, who was the Suns' first general manager and a former NBA executive of the year, said: "[Bryan] showed he could handle anything thrown his way. ... I'm

very proud of what he's accomplished."

Daniels joined the Texas Rangers in 2002 as a baseball operations assistant. He was the team's director of baseball operations before moving up to his new position.

"His youth is an asset to us. He is truly an exceptional talent," said team owner Tom Hicks, in a story about Daniels' promotion on the Rangers Web site. Added former coach John Hart, whom Daniels replaced: "Jon is young, but he has the qualities that you look for in a leader."

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