

Interview: Cindy Caponera on Her New Book 'I Triggered Her Bully'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on May 26, 2014 - 3:33pm

- [Adam McKay](#) [2]
- [Amazon](#) [3]
- [Back of the Yards](#) [4]
- [Chicago](#) [5]
- [Cindy Caponera](#) [6]
- [Exit 57](#) [7]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [8]
- [I Triggered Her Bully](#) [9]
- [International Amphitheater](#) [10]
- [Interview](#) [11]
- [Kindle Single](#) [12]
- [Molly Shannon](#) [13]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [14]
- [Robert Downey Jr.](#) [15]
- [Saturday Night Live](#) [16]
- [Sherri](#) [17]
- [Southside](#) [18]
- [Stephen Colbert](#) [19]
- [The Second City](#) [20]
- [Will Ferrell](#) [21]

CHICAGO – It was a cold Chicago day in May, typical of the endless winter. The coffee shop was warm and inviting, as I waited to interview the comedy icon, Cindy Caponera. She had written a book – “I Triggered Her Bully” – but as she walked in I was more interested in what she was wearing.

Her pullover was resplendent with an inlaid collar design, a thread embroidery that took me back to the court of Marie Antoinette. She paired that with one of the latest and hottest styles, the casual stretch pant, which she pulled off like a young Audrey Hepburn brought back to life for a chocolate ad. Her manicure, which she described as “mediocre,” glowed under the halogen lamps of the shop like Michael Jackson brought back to life as a sequined corpse. She said she had spent 45 minutes to make her eyebrows less purple, and as I looked more closely, I realized her tweezer work was like the words of the Dalai Lama.



Cindy Caponera, Author of 'I Triggered Her Bully'

Photo credit: Cindy Caponera

We sat down, me with my usual black coffee, and her with what passed for breakfast in the joint – a sad piece of egg substance wrapped in a soft taco shell that sat lonely on the plate, like a match girl in the rain. Cindy Caponera was born on the Southside of Chicago, Back of the Yards Neighborhood, smile when you say that. She honed her comedy with two stints at “The Second City” comedy collective in Chicago, and

began her television writing career with the early Comedy Central series, “Exit 57.”

Circumstances and a bit of luck landed her a writing gig on ‘Saturday Night Live’ in 1995. After three seasons there, she has since worked as a freelance TV writer, and added an acting stint on the Lifetime series “Sherri” in 2009. Currently, she is the co-executive producer on the TBS series “Ground Floor.” Her self published essay memoir ‘I Triggered Her Bully’ was released in a print edition on May 10th, after being named a Kindle ‘Top Rated Humor Book.’

The amazingly accessorized Cindy Caponera spoke with HollywoodChicago.com like a brilliantly funny veteran of television comedy writing. The subjects were her book, her career and her expertise in eyebrow humor.

HollywoodChicago.com: In Chicago, there are many stereotypes associated with the Southside. Which stereotypes do you perpetuate in your new book and which ones do you blow to smithereens?

Cindy Caponera: As far as the stereotypes, I have a story called ‘To George Bailey, the Richest Man in the World.’ It’s a story about a time in my life in which I was reading two pieces of self help literature. One was ‘Secrets of the Millionaire Mind’ and the other was ‘How to Let Go of Everything and Be Egoless in Form.’

Part of the instruction of one of the books was to point to my head and say, ‘I have a millionaire mind.’ And the rest of the day was filled with ‘I am not my body, I am not my mind...etcetera.’ So the two books were in conflict. The point of all this is that I’m from the Southside of Chicago, I was raised Catholic and I’m half Irish...and the phrase you never heard in our neighborhood was ‘I’m rich!’ [laughs].

HollywoodChicago.com: So you were raised Catholic...

Caponera: Yeah. I talked about when I moved to the Northside in Old Town, and started going to a Unitarian Church. There was a lot of joy, gay people of color, single women in perky hats...all of these people trying to manifest their destinies. With that joyful message, I was ‘arggggh, too joyfull!’ I need to get to get back to the Catholic Church and be reminded of the evilness I grew to love as a child.

They had a meditation guy at the Unitarian Church, he was burly and played the piano during the meditation segment. But all he played was songs from the Broadway show ‘A Chorus Line.’ [laughs] It was [quoting a song] ‘And I felt Nothiiiiing...’ What kind of church was I at? It was hilarious.

HollywoodChicago.com: It’s a little different than the old neighborhood...

Caponera: There it was a blue collar mentality, having been raised with a meat packing company every four feet in the Back of the [Stock] Yards neighborhood, two blocks east of the old [International] Amphitheater.

HollywoodChicago.com: What do you remember about that amazing building?

Caponera: I knew a few guys who supposedly stole Emerson, Lake and Palmer’s organ at the Amphitheater. I thought, how did they do that?

HollywoodChicago.com: So what stereotypes were you trying to get away from in your memoir?

Caponera: It was really about where I was from, and how it tracks me through as a grown-up. What makes it unique is that I completely love where I’m from, so even though I make fun of it, there is nothing but love in there.

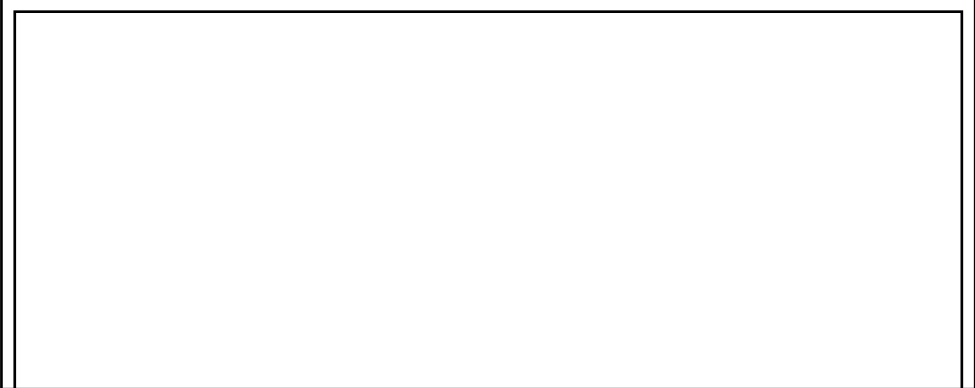
HollywoodChicago.com: Since you’ve written in multiple media, what is it about the essay format that lends itself to the type of comedy that you do best?

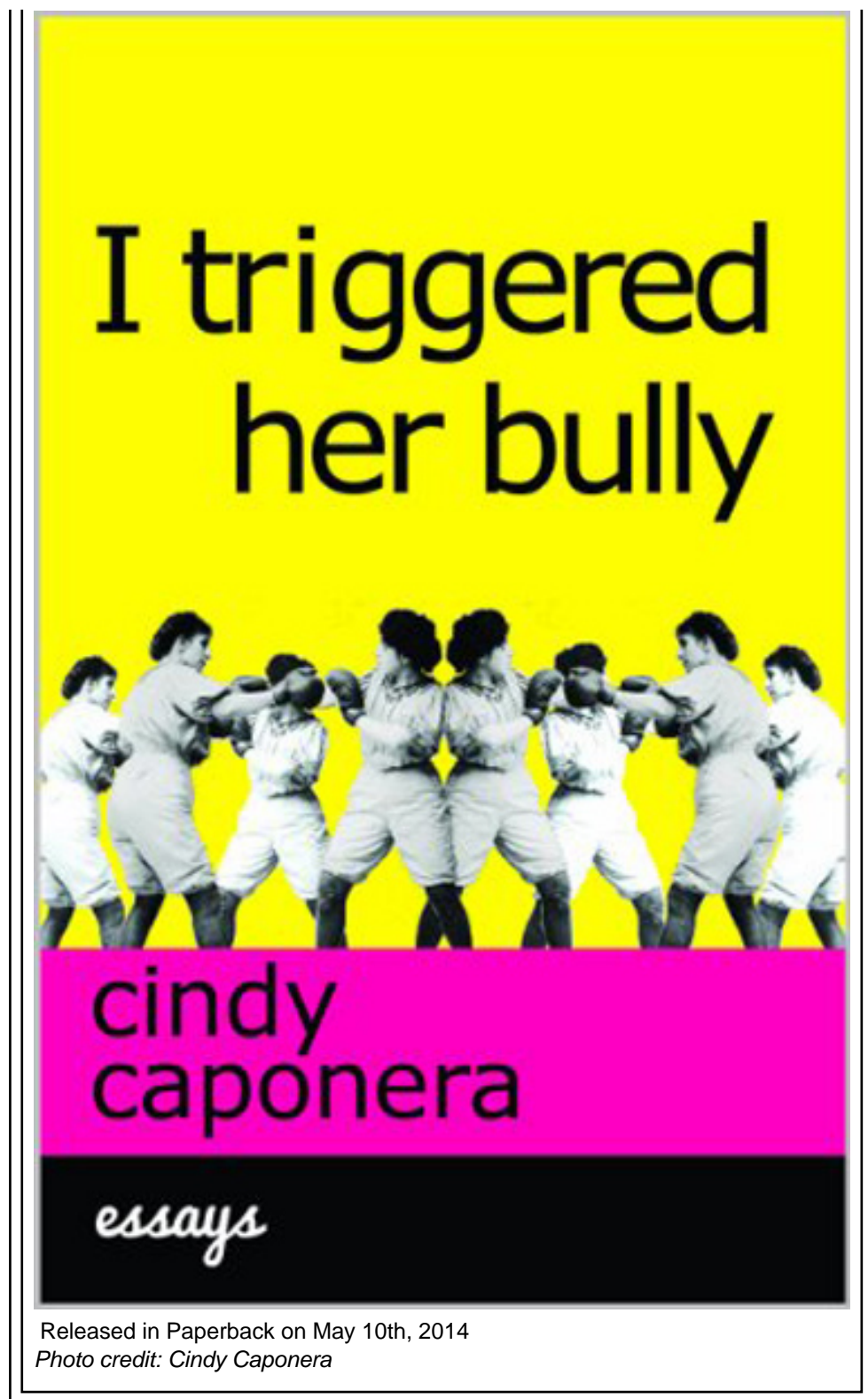
Caponera: It has to do with starting out in improvisational comedy. I honed that, even from my earliest days. My work is character driven, so ultimately I’m trained to become that character, and then I begin to ‘talk’ as that character. If we played that game of character interview, they would tell us to take a bus or go to the airport and make fun of people. I was good at creating those worlds, getting to the essence of character, and being that person.

HollywoodChicago.com: So you applied that to the memoir...

Caponera: There was this lady I used to work for at an elevator company, she got hammered every lunchtime, and smoked a lot of cigarettes. For the rest of the afternoon, it was about her not being drunk. So it was all that for me...just observing behavior of people like that, and my relatives. I would become their characters, and talk like that about them forever. So in the memoir, in the individual essays, I am these characters. That’s why I did all my solo shows, because I got to say all the words. It’s just sitting and telling a story. I just used my writer skills and formulated it into a beginning, middle and end. And it’s fun that way.

HollywoodChicago.com: The comedy essay collection is a popular format for stand up comedians, social observers and perverts screaming about socialism. Was there any essay-style books that you really admired, and wanted to foster or emulate in your book?





Caponera: Well, they were really more like story stories than essays. [Master short story author] Raymond Carver was a huge influence. My friend Adam McKay [writer/director of the 'Anchorman' series] wrote the forward to the book, and compared me to Raymond Carver. Adam and I were hired at 'Saturday Night Live' together. He came after me at 'The Second City.' He quickly ascended to head writer, because he's a genius.

HollywoodChicago.com: We're in an era in which it's much easier to publish a book – with the new download-a-book format – but much harder to understand how to get it to an audience. What is your take on the modern era of publishing, and what social ills can be cured in the reading of your prose?

Caponera: To answer the second part of the question, I just want people to know they are not alone. That is what I think. At the end of the day when you read the book – after you're done laughing your ass off – you're not alone. Everyone is crazy.

I do a piece about not having kids. The title is 'Bum Pussy.' It's based on the reply my husband gives whenever anybody asks us why we don't have kids. 'She has a bum pussy.' [laughs] He stole my joke. Because I didn't have kids, it took me a long time to forgive my mother for perceived wrongs. I was never able to be a mother with my mother. And now that's she has passed, I will never have that. It's bittersweet. I don't regret not having kids, I regret not being able to identify that way with my mother.

HollywoodChicago.com: And your thoughts on the modern era of publishing?

Caponera: This is self published, and I went from A to Z on the process of getting it published. All I had in the beginning were these essays. I knew it would take a half a year if I went the conventional book publishing route. I didn't want to write a book proposal or mess with a publisher. I did a Kindle E-book, and one of the Kindle representatives happened to be married to a woman I know in New York. He found it without me saying anything, and he put the book on Kindle Singles. He then kept promoting it, because he loved it so much. So now we've released the paperback, which I self-published through Amazon Create-a-Space.

HollywoodChicago.com: Will you also release the paperback to bookstores?

Caponera: Well, this is such an ongoing learning process. Some bookstores won't order from Amazon. So if I want to do readings, I have to set it up as an 'event.' But luckily I have a lot of television writing credits, and a lot of fancy friends – like Adam McKay, Stephen Colbert and Amy Sedaris – who put the word out and helped me out.

HollywoodChicago.com: Whenever I interview alumni of 'The Second City,' they all have perspectives on the type of atmosphere that

characterized their years in that institution. What perspective do you have on your time and place in The Second City, and what type of attitude and performers personified your era?

Caponera: I don't know what my era was, I was there twice. I was first hired in 1984 for the touring company, and I stayed until 1987. I was suppose to go on mainstage at that time, but Bernie Sahlins [founder of The Second City] brought Bonnie Hunt from a touring company and made us compete against each other. He took my job, so I quit. After that I did a solo show at the e.t.c. stage, and was rehired in 1990. That was when Amy Sedaris, Steve Carrell and Stephen Colbert was right underneath me.

HollywoodChicago.com: Which era had more drugs?

Caponera: [Laughs] The first one. I think someone sold cocaine out of the lighting booth. I didn't know what was going on.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the process for you in landing a writing gig on 'Saturday Night Live'?

Caponera: I left Chicago in August of 1993 when my friend Christine Ebersole ask me to nanny for her newly adopted baby. She was doing a play on Broadway, and it was trying out in New Jersey. Three months after I got there, she was done with it, and the play never came to Broadway. She took the kid and went back to Los Angeles, and I was like 'what!?' I was in New York City with no job and no apartment.

I ended up doing two seasons with the TV series 'Exit 57' on the early Comedy Central. In the summer of 1995 I got a call, it turned out that a guy that I went to acting school in 1984, Steve Higgins, had become a producer on 'Saturday Night Live.' He's now Jimmy Fallon's producer and announcer on 'The Tonight Show.'

HollywoodChicago.com: So he hired you on SNL?

Caponera: Yes, he brought me in. I had \$1.50 in my pocket when I got hired. At about two months in, I had this anxiety that I had to have sex with everyone in the office. My shrink would tell me to say to them 'you're a good friend,' and I told her how is that going to work out when I'm buttoning up my blouse? [laughs] It got so bad I had a complete body rash.

HollywoodChicago.com: Which cast member and which guest host did you feel instinctively knew the right tone for the type of sketch that you would contribute to?

Caponera: The host that I loved the most, as far as my tone was concerned, had to do with me living at 5th and A, and it was still an area in which people would leave needles on the ground. It was still rough. I was walking my dog, and I saw an old cup. So I had this idea about somebody going back to a party and trying to get their cup back.

So I wrote this piece called 'The Cup,' and it was the week that Robert Downey Jr. was hosting, four months out of rehab. He killed the sketch at the table read, absolutely killed it. And then at dress rehearsal, the sketch died. It wasn't picked for the main show. After I knew 'The Cup' was getting cut, I kept kidding, 'do you guys have notes for The Cup?' It became a running gag for me. Robert Downey Jr. was my guy.

HollywoodChicago.com: And the cast member?

Caponera: Colin Quinn and I were from the same school. We would write these sketches about failed relationships, and the Harvard guys wanted to put robots in it. [laughs]. I also got along with Will Ferrell and Molly Shannon.

HollywoodChicago.com: We've all heard horror stories about the difficulties for women in the comedy business in general. In going up the ha-ha ladder, what was the most humiliating test for women in that competitive and grueling business?

Caponera: I had one particular story while I was at SNL. We were in a pitch meeting with Chevy Chase, who was the guest host. I was pitching him an idea, and I got a big laugh from him. And he said after that, 'why don't you give me a hand job.'

Here's my deal...I will look at a d*ck all day long, just don't bore me with how you hook up your DSL. That's where my lawsuit would come from. [laughs] You have be prepared to deal with a certain amount of stuff, and if you can give it back you're going to be good.

HollywoodChicago.com: Have you witnessed people ruined by it?

Caponera: There are always complications, as there is in any man and woman dynamic...as in, do you want to f*ck? I'm glad I'm at the age I'm at, because no one wants to f*ck me anymore, and we can get to work. [laughs] We can just do our work!

There are a lot of women who get hired that are not that hilarious, because how funny does a man want them to be? They don't want to hire the funny women, because they don't want to be around that much funny. I had a situation at a pitch meeting where I got a huge laugh, and somebody actually said to me, 'well, it will get a laugh, but do you want that kind of laugh?' I told him, 'are you judging laughs now, because usually you don't give a sh*t what you put up as long as it gets a laugh.'

HollywoodChicago.com: What kind of emotional fortitude do you have to have to handle stuff like that in that world?

Caponera: To my own detriment, I did not have the wherewithal to emotionally back up what I knew what my beliefs were. So the reason I got my ass kicked there had nothing to do with gender politics. It had to do with me not telling someone, 'you shut up, I'm doing my thing.' I didn't have it.

HollywoodChicago.com: You did a one season acting bit on the Lifetime sitcom 'Sherri,' and written several more sitcom episodes. What is bizarre about creating a parallel universe that comes with a laugh track, and do you wish we had a laugh track in real life?



Cindy Caponera (seated, center) on 'Saturday Night Live'

Photo credit: Universal Studios Home Entertainment

Caponera: The 'Sherri' thing was so fun, because I wrote a character that I wasn't planning on playing. They usually don't bring in the main players until the Friday before a taping, because they don't want to pay them for a table read. So the producer said to me, why don't you read the part? And afterward, she asked me to do the part. The first night I did the character, the sky opened, and the audience lost their sh*t. In that crazy, unexplainable way, it became a break out character.

The great thing was since I was a writer on the show, and not necessarily a cast member, I'd change my lines all the time. There was simply no strings attached, I already had my job as a writer. This was just cake.

And no, I don't want a laugh track in real life.

HollywoodChicago.com: [Laughs] One of the benefits of being in show business is the opportunity to meet heroes that maybe you even dreamt of meeting as a girl growing up on the Southside of Chicago. In your SNL or show biz experience, which hero did you get to meet?

Caponera: I met Dick Van Dyke. The night I met him, everyone who was there, young and old, wanted a piece of Dick Van Dyke. He has such mass appeal, still. In a related story, last week I was working with Phil Rosenthal [creator of 'Everybody Loves Raymond'] on the new Henry Winkler show. And the woman who portrayed Millie Helper on 'The Dick Van Dyke Show,' Ann Guilbert, is playing the grandmother. I got a picture with her, and she had to put her cigarette out first. Henry Winkler was there, too, so there is stuff that is pretty cool.

I met Phyllis Diller through a silent auction – she would auction off an audience with her. We all went to her house, and she had the worst hor d'oeuvres. When you walk into her house, I noticed this huge golden bust of Bob Hope, and a huge portrait of Hope. I wouldn't make any assumptions, but something had to go on between Phyllis and Bob. So she told us some stories, including that she started out in San Francisco at The Purple Onion, and the poet Maya Angelou was a dancer there. I asked Phyllis if Maya Angelou was boozy. Phyllis said, 'no, but she was a big slut.' [laughs] I know why the caged bird sings! It was hilarious.

HollywoodChicago.com: What part of being a Chicagoan is still present in your everyday life, and how do you use it most effectively when dealing with the day-to-day circumstances, especially when a survival mechanism is necessary?

Caponera: First, there is a huge community of Chicagoans in Los Angeles, so I always feel at home, and there is always that connection. The other thing is about developing my work style, and who I am in that way. I want to be nice and effective. I think you can be both.

I want to create an environment in which the primary purpose is the project, before everything. Do your best, we'll all be fair. But there will be some hard decisions. What works for me now is to give a writer as much integrity as I can. I'm showing up with my reputation proceeding me, knowing how to do what I do, and I'm going to give you everything I've got.

"I Triggered Her Bully" by Cindy Caponera is available in a Kindle Single Edition, [click here](#). [22] or as a paperback available on Amazon, [click here](#). [23]



[24]

By [PATRICK McDONALD](#) [25]
Senior Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
pat@hollywoodchicago.com [24]

© 2014 Patrick McDonald, HollywoodChicago.com

Source URL (retrieved on Mar 28 2024 - 9:15pm):

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/24049/interview-cindy-caponera-on-her-new-book-i-triggered-her-bully>

Links:

[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>

[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/adam-mckay>

- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/amazon>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/back-of-the-yards>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/chicago>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cindy-caponera>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/exit-57>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/i-triggered-her-bully>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/international-amphitheater>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/interview.html>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/kindle-single>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/molly-shannon>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/patrick-mcdonald>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/robert-downey-jr>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/saturday-night-live>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/sherri>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/southside>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/stephen-colbert>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/the-second-city>
- [21] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/will-ferrell>
- [22] http://www.amazon.com/dp/B00IXCU3JK/ref=cm_sw_r_udp_awd_b1Zotb11TJA1B
- [23] http://www.amazon.com/Triggered-Her-Bully-Cindy-Caponera/dp/0615984681/ref=sr_1_1_title_0_main?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1401134132&sr=1-1&keywords=i+triggered+her+bully
- [24] <mailto:pat@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [25] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#PAT>