

## EAST END LIVING

# Spike Unleashed: Bill Boggs Grabs a New Leash on Comedy

BY VINCENT ANTHONY

**T**urns out you can teach an old dog new tricks. *Spike Unleashed: The Wonder Dog Returns*, the sequel to Bill Boggs's hit satirical novel *The Adventures of Spike the Wonder Dog*, sees its narrator Spike digging into uncharted territory thanks to the newfound inhibition that comes along with maturing into middle age (in dog years).

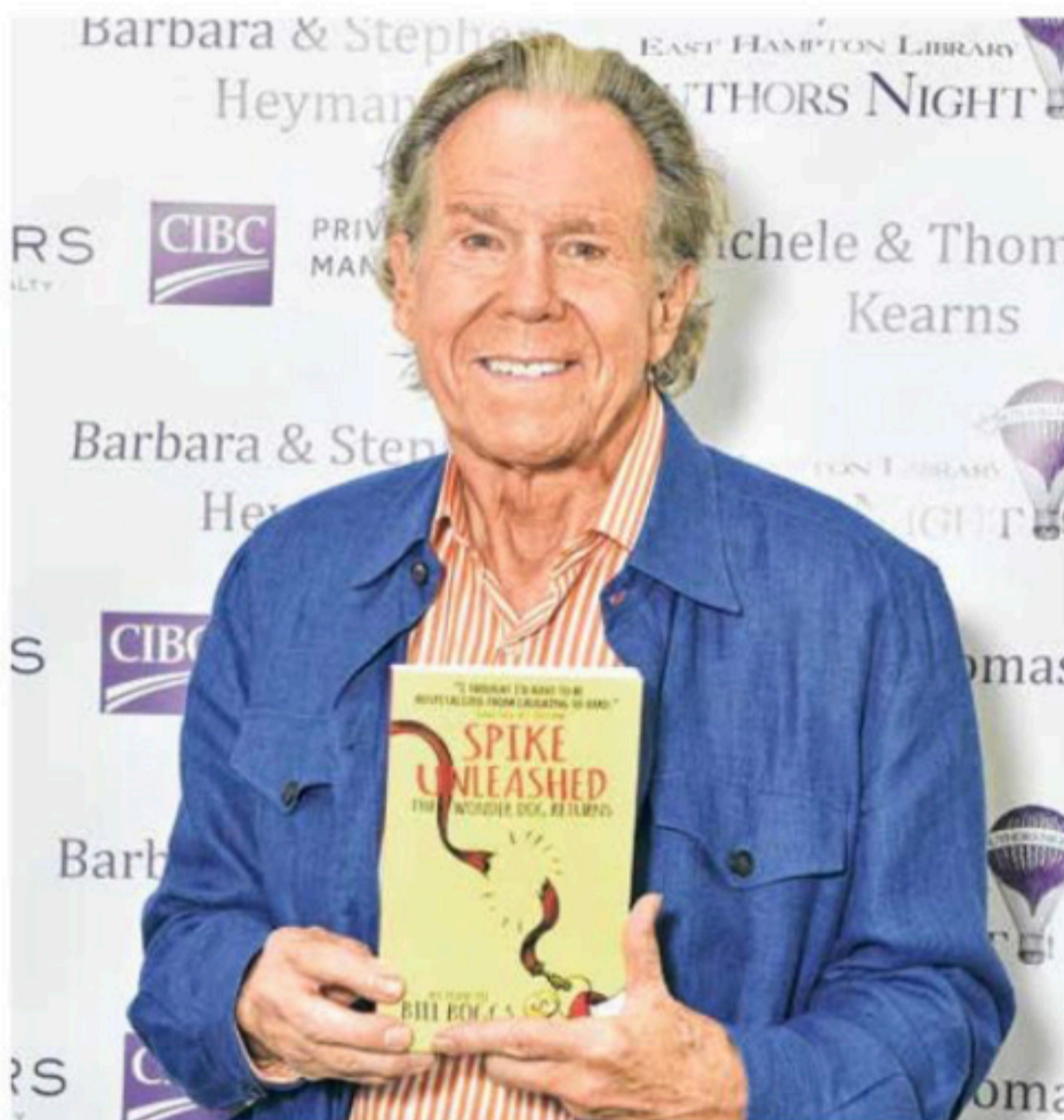
"Spike is in the prime of his life in the second book, perhaps even more worldly and astute in his view of what's going," says the man who gave man's best friend a voice.

Billed "as told to Bill Boggs," the Spike series is penned by the famed TV host, producer and writer who has won Emmy Awards for his work on a list of networks that could spell out nearly the entire alphabet over the course of his decades-long career. The first installment, published in 2020, marked Boggs' first publication since his 2009 self-help book, *Got What It Takes?*, and his first novel since 1980's *At First Sight*. However, Boggs doesn't see it as a return to writing — because he was writing throughout his entire career in one way or another.

"What I'm returning to here is my comedy roots," says Boggs. "All my life I've been involved in comedy in one form or another."

Boggs began his career with a corporate writing job at Armstrong World Industries that he describes as "deadly dull," adding, "It didn't take me long to realize that this was not my bag." Nevertheless, the workplace ended up yielding a rather fruitful collaboration for Boggs. After helping his friend, Jay Tarses, secure a job there as a writer, Tarses eventually struck up a relationship with another colleague, Tom Patchett. The pair began writing sketch comedy routines, and when Boggs saw them in action, he had a "bolt of lightning" and persuaded them to pursue a career in comedy — with him as their agent. The duo went on to have successful careers in comedy, and Boggs went on to find success as an in-demand TV host, eventually hosting the show *Southern Exposure* in High Point, North Carolina before hitting the big time in New York City.

Drawing upon that early experience in High Point, Boggs found his inspiration for the Spike series. While



BILL BOGGS WITH HIS SEQUEL TO "THE ADVENTURES OF SPIKE THE WONDER DOG"

working and living there in the 1970s, Boggs had a dog named Spike, an English bull terrier with an eye spot. After appearing on camera with Boggs, Spike became known as "Spike the Wonder Dog." Tragically, before Boggs moved to New York, Spike was killed in a car accident.

"I don't remember where I got the idea," Boggs says. "But the idea was simply this, what would have happened if Spike hadn't gotten killed and came to New York in today's world? That was the germinating essence of the story."

When he first sat down to write, he tried setting the story in the mid-1970s, before pivoting to its present-day setting.

"Within one page I realized it was ridiculous. Why would I want to satirize 1975 when I could satirize what's happening right now?" he recalls, adding a bit of advice: "In the creative process be willing to abandon your preconceptions. (The story) came through me like a geyser."

While the only dog Boggs currently possesses is, he says, the one that lives in his head, Spike, other aspects of

his present-day life inspire the tale. Starting in High Point, Spike and his human, Bud, eventually make their way up to New York, out to the Hamptons, and even down to Palm Beach, Florida. Of course, having lived in all three places gives Boggs first-hand knowledge.

"It helps me set the location perfectly," says Boggs. "The end of the book, the last third of the book is set right here in East Hampton. Bud and Spike come out for a play they've been cast in written by Bill McCuddy, *Pardon My Privet*, a comedy of manners, at Guild Hall."

Boggs says he uses what he sees to inspire him, from the action on the sidewalks to the arrival of the Jitney, to the Palm Restaurant, to the route out to the East Hampton airport. "It enables me to write with some authenticity," he adds.

New to this sequel is, of course, some pandemic-related humor. The first installment was published in 2020, but written prior. *Spike Unleashed*, naturally, was written after.

"It gave me the opportunity to create some humor around the pandemic,"

says Boggs, detailing a hilariously satirical scene in which an unidentified Kardashian ends up electrocuting Spike. "She's wearing a PEF (personal electric fence), one of the many inventions in the book that I made up, to keep people away from you."

Plenty of other celebrities are mentioned in the book, such as Andy Cohen, Jimmy Fallon, Kate McKinnon, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Nancy Pelosi, Geraldo Rivera, Bill Maher and plenty more. So far, no pushback, though Boggs does note, "I haven't heard from Prince Harry yet!" (The Prince is Spike's co-star in the novel's fictional "Florida Man" film.)

"The book is full of messages," says Boggs, but there is a constant thread of excess throughout the story. "Spike is an outside voice commenting on our society, on human foibles and habits, our excesses, and essentially our problems. ... Like Bill Maher said, 'The dog can say anything and you can't be blamed.' Everything that's in the book is essentially Spike addressing what I'm seeing in society."

Aside from inducing laughter and providing social commentary, Boggs says there is another, more personal purpose behind penning this series.

"I've created 600 pages of original, fresh comedy. It's well-reviewed. The goal has always been to turn this into a cartoon. That's been my goal from the first week of writing," he says, hopeful to sell the rights to a studio and "pick up a decent advance." With it, he hopes to rent a villa in Tuscany and invite his lifelong friends to spend a week together.

"I want to be out there looking at the hills of Tuscany, having a glass of wine, saying I pulled it off. That's what I visualize."

As for Spike's fans, his hope is simple: "My goal for readers is for you to laugh out loud. A society that can't laugh at itself is in big trouble. It doesn't mean we can't take things seriously and make progress."

Boggs recalls that, in his high school yearbook, a friend wrote, "Never lose your sense of humor, it's the most valued possession you have." With a successful comedy book series at 77 years old, it's clear that Boggs's sense of humor isn't lost — in fact, it's winning.

To keep up with Bill Boggs, visit [bill-boggs.com](http://bill-boggs.com) or follow him on Instagram @realbillboggs. For more on Spike, visit [spikethewonderdog.com](http://spikethewonderdog.com). The new book, *Spike Unleashed: The Wonder Dog Returns*, is available now wherever books are sold. See Boggs talk Spike in person at Molloy University's Madison Theatre on October 12. Purchase tickets at [madisontheatre.org](http://madisontheatre.org)

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