

Bill Cosby's FALL FROM GRACE

As rape claims pile up, the icon silently watches his legacy collapse **BY SARAH GROSSBART**

"Who really wants to put his or her family in a position of information coming out publicly that will cause great emotional stress?" Cosby said in a 2005 interview of being a celebrity under fire.

Bill Cosby was on his game. Seated on stage at Nassau's Atlantis resort in the Bahamas November 20, the comic joked about growing up in the Philadelphia projects: "If my mama was going to beat me, she would let everyone know!" He played up his public persona as a hapless husband, observing that when it came to his 50-year marriage to wife Camille, he learned long ago to

"do what I was told." He even dedicated a part of his performance — a benefit for local women's organization The Links, Incorporated — to the mother of his five children, flashing his wedding band to the appreciative crowd and thanking her for sticking with him "through it all."

But the most telling moment of the 90-minute set, which earned him a standing ovation, came at the beginning. Shortly after



Accusers (from left) Therese Serignese, Janice Dickinson and Joan Tarshis.

taking the stage in loose sweatpants and a sweat-shirt emblazoned with the words HELLO FRIEND, the 77-year-old dropped his head in his hands and pretended to sob. Joked Cosby to the crowd, "Parents are coming and taking their children home, saying to me, 'Bill Cosby, you are an evil man! We will never eat your Jell-O pudding again!'"

But not everyone is laughing. In the weeks before his performance, details of a 2005 civil case, in which a Pennsylvania woman and 13 others claimed he attacked them, resurfaced in the media. As these old stories gained new traction on the internet, more women came forward with chilling stories about how the sitcom legend sexually assaulted them too. The accusers — at presstime, there were nine new cases — vary in age and race, with accounts spanning five decades. But their disturbing claims are eerily similar: They connected with the beloved, highly regarded actor in hopes he could further their careers. Instead, most were drugged and abused — and warned to keep quiet.

The fallout has been swift and shocking: Cosby, who spent the past 40 years building a legacy as a benevolent father figure — cemented by his turn as endearing advice-dispensing pop Dr. Heathcliff Huxtable on the smash '80s sitcom *The Cosby Show* — has watched it all disintegrate in a matter of weeks. Same goes for his

planned career renaissance. In a weeklong span, a November 19 *Late Show With David Letterman* appearance was canceled, Netflix postponed its Bill Cosby special, TV Land wiped *Cosby Show* reruns from its schedule, and NBC scrapped plans for a new sitcom set to reinvent TV's favorite dad as a wizened grandpa. Still, he has never been charged with a crime (and the statute of limitations has expired in all cases). And through it all, Cosby has remained mute as his accusers build in number and fervor. "It's justice — it has to be done," supermodel Janice Dickinson tells *Us* of sharing the tale of her alleged 1982 assault. "Bill Cosby is a monster."

Same Routine

Dickinson's assertion is echoed by many women who claim they too were victimized by Cosby. The first alleged encounter came in 1967, when Cosby was making his mark as TV's first African American costar, playing an intelligence agent on *I Spy*. The last came in 2004, when the four-time Emmy winner was working the stand-up circuit, still performing some 100 shows a year. But no matter the decade, each tale followed the same plot. In Act 1, Cosby — known for wholesome spokesman gigs with Jell-O, Coca-Cola and Kodak — would allegedly target a Hollywood hopeful eager to glean career



HIS GLORY DAYS

1966

During his three-year run on *I Spy*, Cosby (with wife Camille) became the first African American to win a lead actor Emmy.

1965

"It was something to be proud of," Cosby (with costar Robert Culp) has gushed of his star-making spy drama, which aired for three seasons.

1972

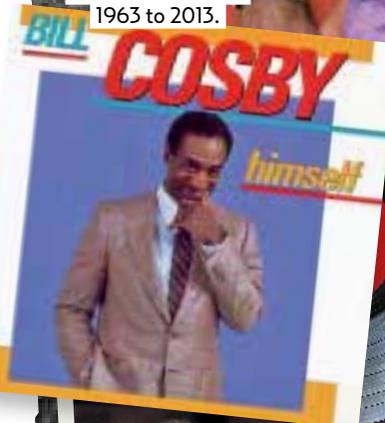
Hey, hey, hey! Cosby created and voiced *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, based on his hardscrabble Philadelphia upbringing, for eight seasons.

1982

The comedian who has said, "I can walk out in front of 5,000 and not worry about a thing," recorded 45 hit albums from 1963 to 2013.

1984

For five of its eight seasons, *The Cosby Show* was TV's highest rated series and, at its peak, pulled in 80 million viewers a night!



1974

Shifting his focus to film, Cosby teamed with Sidney Poitier for a trio of box office hit comedies, including *Uptown Saturday Night*.

1974

The Jell-O pitchman of 25 years (until 1999) reportedly earned \$125,000 an hour to film commercials at the height of his career.

2007

The nine-time Grammy winner (worth more than \$400 million) was inducted into the NAACP Image Awards Hall of Fame.

advice from the TV star. Pittsburgh native Renita Chaney Hill was a 15-year-old model and aspiring actress in the 1980s when she was picked by Cosby to appear in his educational television segments, *Picture Pages*. "Promises of bright lights and fame. That's where I thought I was headed, that's where everyone who knew me thought I was headed," she told the city's CBS affiliate November 20. Denver model Barbara Bowman, then 17, thought the same in 1985. During a meeting with Cosby, he led her through an acting exercise in which she had to wet her hair, sit in a chair, then act drunk as he touched her hair and neck. (Model-actress Angela Leslie, now 52, recalls a similar experience from 1992.) "I had no father figure in my life, so he zoomed right in on that," Bowman explained to *Newsweek* in February. "I was young, wide-eyed and impressionable, and he would play games with my head, and manipulated me into believing that he cared about me, that I didn't have anyone who cared as much as he cared, that I needed to trust him, that I had trust issues and that he would help me overcome those, because they would limit me as an actress."

Drugs were also a common link, claim the victims. Therese Serigne, 57, now a Florida-based registered nurse, says he gave her two quaaludes before raping her in a green room at the

Las Vegas Hilton in 1976. And California model turned trial attorney Tamara Green says that during their business lunch in the 1970s, he offered up pills that were supposed to treat her cold, but instead left her "literally facedown on the table." He later took the then-19-year-old back to her L.A. apartment. "I had no control over my body, I lost my motor skills. He had his hands all over me, kissing me and licking me," she recounts to *Us*. "He left two \$100 bills on my coffee table on the way out, which really pissed me off." For Dickinson, it was a glass of red wine and pain medication intended to alleviate menstrual cramps. "The next morning I woke up and I wasn't wearing my pajamas and I remembered before I passed out I had been sexually assaulted by this man," she recalls of the 1982 Lake Tahoe encounter. "The last thing I remember was Bill Cosby in a patchwork robe, dropping his robe and getting on top of me. And I remember a lot of pain."

Not to mention shame and confusion. Bowman says Cosby attacked her for the last time in Atlantic City. When she dared to fight back, he became enraged. "I was dropped like a hot potato by my agent. I was thrown out of my housing," she recalled to *Newsweek*. When a friend took her to see a lawyer, "he laughed me out of the office," she says. "He thought it was absolutely preposterous." She was

COSBY: EVERETT COLLECTION; I SPY: EVERETT COLLECTION; THE COSBY SHOW: EVERETT COLLECTION; JELL-O: JELL-O; PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; COSBY: EVERETT COLLECTION; ERIN: EVERETT COLLECTION; CAROL: EVERETT COLLECTION; VANCE: EVERETT COLLECTION; EVERETT COLLECTION; EVERETT COLLECTION

one of the few to seek legal recourse. Joan Tarshis told CNN she was too scared as a 19-year-old aspiring comedian in 1969 to report her assault: "Who would believe me?" That's a common reaction, says California attorney Alexis McKenna. "From my experience," she explains, "many young women are afraid to come forward out of humiliation and the fear they won't be believed." The challenge is even greater when going against a man as beloved as Cosby, says Jennifer Marsh, vice president for victim services at the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network. "When the perpetrator is somebody who is prominent," she notes, "the idea that they won't be believed is there as well as, perhaps, the fear of retaliation for speaking out." That's what kept Green silent for three decades, she says: "This is the great Bill Cosby. He has tremendous wealth, power, a PR machine, a reputation. He is Mr. Jell-O."

His Downfall

In the end, it was another comedian who sent Cosby's reputation on its current downward spiral. Addressing the crowd at the 600-seat Trocadero Theatre in Cosby's hometown of Philadelphia, Comedy Central regular Hannibal Buress brought up the 2005 civil case that was leveled against the star by Andrea Constand, an

employee at Cosby's alma mater Temple University, and 13 other victims. "I don't know what I'm doing by telling you," Buress said in the October 16 set. "I guess I want to just at least make it weird for you to watch *Cosby Show* reruns. Dude's image, for the most part, it's f--king public Teflon image. I've done this bit on stage and people think I'm making it up. I'm like, 'Bill Cosby has a lot of rape allegations.' . . . That s--t is upsetting. . . . When you leave here, Google 'Bill Cosby rape.'"

It was a bit Buress had been doing on and off for six months. But when video of the performance

"Bill Cosby cannot be prosecuted for his crimes of rape. But he must now endure the scorn and humiliation that has finally come to pass."

ACCUSER BARBARA BOWMAN TELLS US

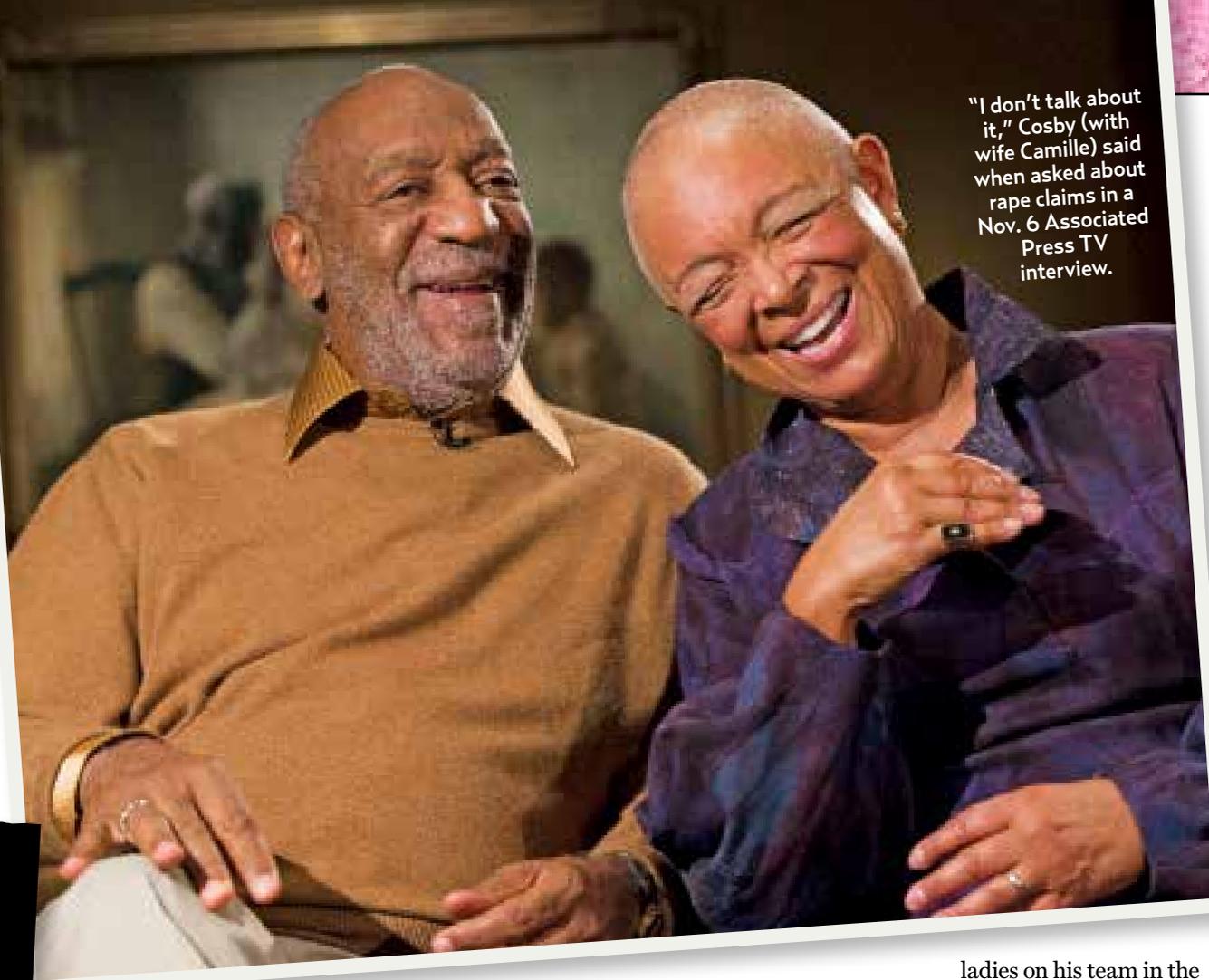
was posted the next day on PhillyMag.com, it quickly went viral. Within days, Buress was one of the top three trending topics on Facebook. An October 21 interview on Howard Stern's SiriusXM radio show only sparked more interest. Soon people were heeding his request. According to the *Washington Post*, Google searches for Buress' Cosby keywords spiked as curious fans sought out information.

of her first alleged attack to the U.K.'s *Daily Mail*. "He laid me down on the couch and started caressing and touching me all over," she told the British paper. "Then he put my hand on his penis, covering it with his hand. He had me masturbate him. I couldn't see what was going on. When it was over, I ran out of the room and threw up."

But it was Cosby himself

who inadvertently caused the story to boil over. In a November 10 PR stunt to offset the growing controversy, Cosby invited his nearly 4 million Twitter followers to "Go ahead. Meme me!" using his website's meme tool. Among the responses — featuring a smiling, sweater-clad Cosby: MY TWO FAVORITE THINGS: JELLO PUDDING & RAPE and THAT FEELING YOU GET FROM BEING AMERICA'S MOST BELOVED SERIAL RAPIST. For the alleged victims, the intense reaction was a relief. As Bowman tells *Us*, "I'm grateful the masses are taking his evil deeds seriously." Within two weeks, his tally of accusers had

They got plenty. Eleven days after Buress' act, Bowman — who had initially come forward with her story back in 2006 — recounted the tale



"I don't talk about it," Cosby (with wife Camille) said when asked about rape claims in a Nov. 6 Associated Press TV interview.

reached critical mass: Carla Ferrigno, now wed to *The Incredible Hulk* star and *Celebrity Apprentice* alum Lou, shared a 1967 encounter where Cosby came on to her in his Hollywood home. Meanwhile, sources came out of hiding to share their experiences. "Bill Cosby is a strange man," says one insider. "He'll call up

ladies on his team in the middle of a workday just to heavily flirt with them. It's really uncomfortable."

Staying Silent

The only person not speaking out is Cosby.



Ennis (with his dad in 1994) inspired the *Cosby Show* character Theo Huxtable.

Cosby's OTHER TRYING TIMES

The once-lauded star's personal life has been marred by challenging trials and tribulations

Though the star has been open about his infidelities and addressed his now-settled civil suit in 2005 — "Nobody ever wishes for a situation [like this]," he told a *National Enquirer* reporter. "This is all about celebrity, period!" — he's staying silent for this go-round. The accusations were also left out of Mark Whitaker's recently published biography, *Cosby: His Life and Times*, a book completed with Cosby's cooperation. (Whitaker later said he couldn't corroborate the claims.) And during a November 6 Associated Press interview with Camille about the couple's donations to a Smithsonian art exhibit, the comedian stonewalled when asked about the situation. "No, no, we don't answer that," he said. As the interview wrapped, he chided the reporter for daring to even bring up the stories ("We thought that the AP had the integrity to not ask [the question]") and directed him to leave the entire exchange out of the piece: "I would appreciate it if it was scuttled."

He'd rather have his attorney do the talking. On November 19, Cosby hired Marty Singer, the

high-powered lawyer to the likes of Charlie Sheen and John Travolta. Singer released a statement to *Us*, blasting the claims as "increasingly ridiculous" and adding, "It is completely illogical that so many people would have said nothing, done nothing, and made no reports to law enforcement or asserted civil claims if they thought they had been assaulted over a span of so many years."

Fellow comedian Whoopi Goldberg also cautioned against a rush to judgment. "Until you know that it's true, it's an allegation," the *View* cohost remarked on the November 20 episode. "People tend to jump on the bandwagon. . . . But for me, I'm going to wait." Ever-outspoken Donald Trump is less generous. At a November 19 event, the business mogul told *Us*, "He's gone dead silent and, frankly, it makes him look guilty as hell." Regardless of public opinion, Dickinson says she will continue to speak out. "I'm doing it for all the women who've had their innocence robbed," she tells *Us*. "And I want women who know Cosby to be worried. It happened to me; it could still happen to them." **US**

Wayward child When daughter Erinn, then 23, checked into rehab in 1989 to treat cocaine addiction, Cosby cut ties. He called his parenting method "tough love."
Devastating loss While fixing a flat tire on an L.A. highway in January 1997, his only son, Ennis, 27, was murdered. Cosby said it left him with "terrific pain."
Explosive scandal Two days after the murder, Autumn Jackson, claiming to be Cosby's daughter, was arrested for trying to extort \$40 million from him. He admitted to an affair with her mother and took a DNA test to prove no paternity. Jackson, 40, refused a test and was imprisoned.