

## Her funny bone is still intact: Paula Poundstone back on the road

By E.T. Robbins / News Correspondent

Sunday, April 18, 2004

**W**hen you hear the name Paula Poundstone, certain things may come to mind: Sudbury native, successful comic and something about legal problems.

It's time to set the record straight. Poundstone is indeed a Sudbury native. Successful comic is an understatement. In 1989, Poundstone won the American Comedy Award for Best Female Stand-Up. In 1992, she became the first woman to win a Cable ACE Award for her HBO special "Cats, Cops, and Stuff." Later that same year, she became the first woman to headline the White House Correspondents Dinner.

She has appeared on "The Tonight Show," "Late Night with David Letterman," "The Rosie O'Donnell Show," and she had a recurring role on the hit TV show "Cybil." She adopted three children, made appearances on Sesame Street and Storytime, and was a regular columnist for Mother Jones magazine.

But everything came to a screeching halt in June 2001 when Poundstone was arrested on a felony child endangerment charge for driving drunk with her children in the vehicle, a misdemeanor child abuse charge (the details of which are sealed by the courts) and four charges of lewd acts with a minor, which were later dropped.

Poundstone entered a residential alcohol treatment center, fulfilled the requirements of the courts and regained custody of her three children, now 12, 9, and 5. However, in a country where people's opinions turn on a dime and the media hunt celebrities with more vigor than the military's search for Osama bin Laden, it was unclear whether Poundstone would rise like the proverbial phoenix or become another Hollywood has-been.

Today, the answer is clear: Poundstone is back, albeit reflective, apologetic and ready to move on. Her wit and unorthodox observations of the world (and herself) are still present in her "Unauthorized Autobiography Tour" that will hit the Stoneham Theatre April 24 and 25.

Of course, Poundstone's life — the good and the bad — is fodder for her act. Poundstone can even find humor in one of her darkest moments.

In press materials, Poundstone says, "I haven't had a drink for 2 1/2 years and I just found out that it was alcohol you couldn't drink. What a relief. I had had no beverages at all. I was parched and dry and my skin had an almost powdery quality."

This razor-sharp wit is what made Poundstone famous. In her latest tour, she talks about everything from Abraham Lincoln to the International House of Pancakes to the World Trade Organization.

"I talk about a near-death experience with cinnamon. I talk about the state of the union address and the obesity epidemic of which I'm on the cutting edge," Poundstone quips during an interview.

Poundstone credits her kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Bump, with her success in comedy. Bump stated in a "summary letter" sent to Poundstone's home in 1965 that she "enjoyed many of Paula's humorous comments" regarding class activities. Poundstone says because Bump found something positive to say and expressed an adult interest instead of squelching her offbeat sense of humor, she became comfortable with being funny.

Are there more challenges to being a woman stand-up comic? Poundstone doesn't think so.

"When you're a comic, the important thing is your relationship with the audience...and I think that's pretty genderless," Poundstone says.

When asked about the challenging situations she faced in 2001, Poundstone quickly points out, "I had challenging situations before that. This was in the public eye and in the courts. Believe me, every day was challenging."

Poundstone says she now begins every morning by asking herself what she can do to improve her children's lives and to ensure they have choices when they're adults — from where they want to live to what they want to be. Poundstone adds that she wants her children to understand that when you make mistakes, you can also make amends.

"They know that I screwed up. I hope I set an example for them that when you mess up, you apologize and you get going again," Poundstone says.

Poundstone has indeed gotten "going again." In addition to her comedy tour, she's a regular on National Public Radio's weekly news quiz show, "Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!" and she's writing a book of comedic essays for Harmony Books, a division of Random House. But stand-up comedy remains her first love, after her children.

"I love doing my job," Poundstone says. "The idea that I get to go tell my jokes to a group of people and laugh and then I get paid...is just so much fun. You couldn't have invented such a great fun job."

*The essentials:*

Paula Poundstone appears at the Stoneham Theatre Saturday, April 24, at 8 p.m. and Sunday, April 25, at 2 p.m. Ticket prices are \$32 for adults, \$27 for seniors (62+) and \$16 for students (under 18 or with valid college ID). For more information, call 781-279-2200 or visit [www.stonehamtheatre.org](http://www.stonehamtheatre.org).