



Can I Go Now?: The Life of Sue Mengers, Hollywood's First Superagent

Brian Kellow

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A lively and colorful biography of Hollywood's first superagent—one of the most outrageous showbiz characters of the 1960s and 1970s whose clients included Barbra Streisand, Ryan O'Neal, Faye Dunaway, Michael Caine, and Candice Bergen

Before Sue Mengers hit the scene in the mid-1960s, talent agents remained quietly in the background. But staying in the background was not possible for Mengers. Irrepressible and loaded with chutzpah, she became a driving force of Creative Management Associates (which later became ICM) handling the era's preeminent stars.

A true original with a gift for making the biggest stars in Hollywood listen to hard truths about their careers and personal lives, Mengers became a force to be reckoned with. Her salesmanship never stopped. In 1979, she was on a plane that was commandeered by a hijacker, who wanted Charlton Heston to deliver a message on television. Mengers was incensed, wondering why the hijacker wanted Heston, when she could get him Barbra Streisand.

Acclaimed biographer Brian Kellow spins an irresistible tale, exhaustively researched and filled with anecdotes about and interviews more than two hundred show-business luminaries. A riveting biography of a powerful woman that charts show business as it evolved from New York City in the 1950s through Hollywood in the early 1980s, *Can I Go Now?* will mesmerize anyone who loves cinema's most fruitful period.

Can I Go Now?: The Life of Sue Mengers, Hollywood's First Superagent Details

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Emily says

I read this book when I began working at Sue Mengers' former workplace (there is no better place to brag about my ~industry connections~ than in a review of this book because it is TRULY what Mengers would have done), and found myself enraptured by the same things that captivated her: the proximity to celebrity. If you're someone who likes celebrity biographies and memoirs, my feeling is you have a 50/50 chance of liking this book. Mengers was a businesswoman who was attracted to creative talent as a business venture, not a creative one. Unlike most showbiz biographies, this book has little to do with the creative process or the specifics of craft. This is a book about what celebrities make, but rather what makes celebrities. If this is something that interests you (and god knows it interests me), you'll get a generally compelling journey through iconic eras (hardscrabble immigrant history, Mad Men NYC, decadent 70s Hollywood), and lots of exhaustively source gossip.

Kirsti says

I'm glad Mengers was able to overcome sexism to achieve success and fame, but it's hard to sympathize with someone who alternates between tantrums and baby talk. Unless the person is an actual two-year-old, I mean.

Mengers wanted only A-list stars, which makes sense financially. But she never really put any effort into finding new talent to develop. So she missed out on the early careers (or in many cases the entire careers) of Barbra Streisand, Henry Winkler, Sally Field, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, and many others. Eventually her A-listers either left her when they sensed weakness, made too many flops, or simply aged out of their prime positions.

Cliff Morrison says

This drably written book paraphrases a great deal of material from earlier sources, among them Robert Evans' and Ali MacGraw's autobiographies. Here and there Kellow adds interesting information, but did we really need to know such details as that Trini Lopez thought Sue Mengers was adept at a particular sex act? Does anyone except Trini Lopez care? I doubt it. Even so, "Can I Go Now?" is a slightly better book than Kellow's earlier biography of Pauline Kael.

Lee Anne says

Pretty much the reason half the movies of the 70s were what they were can be attributed to this woman. Agent at one time or another to Ali McGraw, Sidney Lumet, Candice Bergen, Ryan O'Neal, Peter Bogdanovich, and, most importantly, Barbra Streisand, Sue Mengers wheeled and dealed her clients separately and together into the seminal films of the times. I found myself loving and hating her, sometimes on the same page--when she screwed up, she baby talked about herself in the third person (ugh!); but she

spent most of her life wearing caftans, lying in bed watching television, and getting high (fun!). A page-turning look at one of my favorite periods in movie history.

Michelle says

In this colorful fascinating look at the life and times of one of Hollywood's legendary female agent Sue Mengers (1938-2011), biographer Brian Kellow introduces her as a "self-panicker", meaning she was able to take herself less seriously, her behavior funniest to herself. Indeed, Mengers could be comical and charming especially when advocating for her clients. Refusing to conform to social graces, Sue was known for her direct, abrupt and honest opinion, rudely dismissive, she talked about people behind their backs, mothered her clients with unsolicited advice, yet she was enormously successful.

Born in Hamburg, to Jewish-German parents, the family arrived in the US and settled in Utica when Sue was five years old. Taking elocution lessons as a child, she never forgot the cruelty of others who thought themselves better. Ruth, her mother was highly critical, her father largely unsuccessful ended his life in the Times Square Hotel (1946). Ruth was very disappointed in her daughter for not following the traditional path to become a wife and mother. After Sue became famous, she refused to discuss her memories of Germany or her younger years when interviewed.

One thing was certain, Sue had no intentions of remaining in the secretarial pool at William Morris long, though she was known as the "everything girl". Sue dated famous lyricist songwriter Billy Rose(1899-1966), requesting his driver pick her up in front of a posh hotel, projecting herself to be a person of prestige and importance she hadn't acquired. Korman Associates hired Sue (1963-1966) convinced that she would be an asset to the company. By that time, she had revived the career of Anthony Perkins, befriended Barbra Streisand and Eliot Gould, in representing both actors, she developed a lifelong appreciation for Streisand's talent. Other famous clients and friends: Robert Evans and Ali McGraw. Sue didn't work with new or unproven actors, only those she considered "A-List" and established talent, pushing her actor's towards the challenges of higher success in the hit and miss hit film industry.

By the 1970's Sue was at the peak of her career, befriending and managing a large group of famous actors and actresses: Barbra Streisand, John Travolta, Robin Williams, Ryan O'Neal, Marlo Thomas, Ali McGraw, Gene Hackman, Christopher Walken, Candice Bergen. Jack Nicholson and David Geffen were good friends that she never represented. Sue hosted popular home parties attended by the rich and famous, she followed all the latest in celebrity culture. "The Last of Shelia" (1973) starring Dyan Cannon was based on her life. In 1973 she married John Claude Tramont (1934-1996), a handsome Belgian film director, who enjoyed culture, travel and discussing international politics. Sue had never had a lasting serious relationship until she married, and was known to openly and publically argue with her husband. The Tramont's bought an apartment in Paris, where John Claude lived for several months out of the year, enjoying the after hours clubs. Before he died of cancer, he was upset that he wouldn't outlive his wife, assuming she would die first from her poor eating habits, lack of exercise, and excessive cigarette and marijuana smoking.

In 1986 Sue announced her retirement, she was 54. The Tramont's celebrated on Fire Island. Eventually growing restless, she returned for a limited 3 year contract at William Morris, which wasn't renewed. Sue felt like a failure: the majority of clients she managed in the past had all moved on, the film industry had changed greatly due to soaring production and advertising costs, higher requirements and emphasis were on profit, with little room for the hit and miss risk that made the film industry thrive in the past. In her later years, Sue scanned the papers and media to see who was worthy to attend her parties: celebrities were younger who

visited her, Jennifer Aniston, Matt Dillon, Tina Fey, Jennifer Lopez, Eva Mendez.

Toward the last years of her life, Sue took multiple medications for various health issues, including mild strokes, and required a shunt for hydrocephalus. Following Sue's wishes her personal assistant April Shultz destroyed her business archive. Boaty Boatwright, Sue's closest friend of 6 decades remained with her until the end of her life. Boatwright supported Kellow's work and effort as Sue's biographer, with a long list of other friends and celebrities who cooperated.

Kellow is an award winning bestselling author, his work featured in several notable publications. He is also the biographer of "Pauline Kael: A Life In The Dark" (2011) and "Ethel Merman: A Life" (2007), and lives in NYC.

Eliza says

Good historical reference.

Mediaman says

This book should have been much better than it is. The book's subject is fascinating--Mengers was either mentally ill or evil, you pick. And while the gossipy trash can make the reader laugh at her audacity, there isn't much substance to it.

The opening skips through her first two decades in a couple pages (it's fascinating that she was born in Germany on an unknown date and moved to America at about age 6, speaking no English), but then filler starts. Too many details about others, not enough details about her. This pattern continues throughout the book. The author must have realized he didn't have enough material to fill a complete book, so he veers off onto tangents about people she worked with, giving us their history or details about movies that have nothing to do with Mengers. It all detracts from the agent instead of adding to her story.

The ending is equally weak. Her final decade is covered in just a few pages.

The stories in between sound like things the writer pulled out of tabloid publications. He always makes Mengers look good (even when she's very, very bad) while having no problem making accusations about others. Some of the most obvious things are somewhat overlooked (like her repeated attraction to gay men) while completely inappropriate things are included (Menger falsely suggesting famous people were sleeping together). And there's way too much Barbra Streisand in this, though some of the insight on some Streisand pictures is interesting. There are also a number of factual and cultural errors in the book.

The biggest issue is that Mengers lived her life as a lie and believed lying was the way to being successful in show business. She was immoral and out of control. Someone needs to write a more balanced view that shows the damage her flaws caused, but this book fails to do that.

John Behle says

A good example for me of a two-star book. This bio of Sue Mengers is a recounting of her Hollywood agent ("superagent" in this case) life. The glory run of the '70's and '80's are the highlight.

Lots of name dropping, profanity and breathless celebrity gossip from decades ago, but it was OK.

I was glad when I finished, closing the back cover with a "whew."

Chris Roberts says

Burning drive makes for a cinema maverick,
Sue smiles, buries the knife, turns another trick,
let them know who earthquakes Hollywood & Vine,
get into the rhythm, booze, cock and fine dine,
back lot hustle, flat on her back, sign here and here,
yes, you will be a star, now fetch my cigarettes, that's a good dear.

Chris Roberts

Nola says

Well I expected more in this story and I didn't get it. Doesn't really divulge much of the person except that she was loud, gruff and not easy to work with. It didn't delve much into her life really.

Philip says

A three-star rating because it was readable and entertaining. But the woman was a train-wreck, someone I wouldn't want to know personally, yet she inspired a number of loyal friendships, despite a sense of entitlement grandiose enough to have encircled the earth. Ugh.

Kevin says

Some of the biggest celebrities in Hollywood are among the more than 200 people Brian Kellow interviewed for *Can I Go Now?*, his brash, smart and compelling biography of Hollywood superagent Sue Mengers. Barbra Streisand, Jack Nicholson, Ali MacGraw, David Geffen, Cher, Woody Allen and Robert Evans lead

the pack of those closest to Mengers (1932--2011) who share their fresh and uncensored anecdotes.

Alternately caustic, kind, vindictive and loyal, Sue Mengers was as oversized a personality as any of the top-caliber stars she represented during her nearly three-decade career. Most agents kept low profiles as they pitched clients for Hollywood projects, but Mengers--usually wearing a voluminous caftan, pink-tinted glasses, and chain smoking--attracted celebrity clients through her outrageous behavior and uncensored opinions. (She bolted early from an advance screening of *Schindler's List*, later telling her host, "If I have to see any more Jews in pajamas, I'm going to kill myself.")

Unlike most agents, Mengers wasn't interested in finding and nurturing new talent; she wanted to represent established artists. "Sue didn't find people off the streets," remembers Ryan O'Neal. "She stole them from other agents." Possessing a fierce work ethic, Mengers built a strong web of professional and social connections. But her abrasive personality eventually eroded those relationships.

Kellow (Pauline Kael: A Life in the Dark) offers fascinating behind-the-scenes details on how egos, turmoil and contract negotiations created some classic films and ruined others. Movie buffs will be dazzled by the impressive number of Hollywood greats offering first-hand interactions with Mengers.

Nancy says

Excellent biography by an excellent biographer! It was particularly interesting to me because I was familiar with most of the people talked about and interviewed in the book. I never knew very much about Sue Mengers other than recognizing she was a big time agent. She lived in a very vibrant time in the movie business and I learned a lot!

Donna says

What a force that woman was! She certainly changed the salary game for actors, she was correct in stating, "Why should the producers make all the money?"

Her early life was challenging and cruel. It's sad her mother was so critical and sadder neither could forgive and reconcile. At least she used the frustration to drive herself to succeed. I admired her ambition. Some of her methods were questionable, but she seemed to be more aboveboard than her peers. She also blamed herself for "not closing the deal".

The little kiddy voice was annoying; I'm not sure how people could stand that. I do have to remind myself show people have a different ego system. She apparently had her own peculiarities to deal with as well.

She grew up idolizing the big studio stars and the glamour they projected. At the top of her game she reached her goal of mixing in with the "A" list.

As the direction of the movies shifted to action driven and the star became special effects, her career wound down. She still maintained an influential status, but wasn't the major player. She didn't understand the change in entertainment. She fell out of step.

So she had dinners to bring her “twinkle-lees” together. Thinking about it, every era has someone (or a select few) who seems to know how to attract and mix the right creative talents. A few that come to mind, the Algonquin round table in NY, Gertrude Stein’s atelier in Paris, Mama Cass was said to have brought many musicians together in her time.

Sue had to be pretty special because she did have loyal friends to the end, as well as having the respect of her industry. I now have to check out old Vanity Fair articles and watch a few movies that are loosely based on Sue Mengers!

Lenny says

Excellent bio of a little pisher.
