

00:00:00	Music	Music	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:12	Jesse Thorn	Host	I'm Jesse Thorn! It's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:00:13	Music	Music	"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team plays. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse	Host	Rosie Perez is maybe one of the most fascinating people we've ever had on <i>Bullseye</i> . She's a native of Bushwick, Brooklyn; and she's performed on stage and screen. She was nominated for an Academy Award from her role in 1993's <i>Fearless</i> . She had iconic parts in <i>White Men Can't Jump</i> and <i>Do the Right Thing</i> . She's been a host on ABC's <i>The View</i> , served as Grand Marshal of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, and she's an incredible dancer.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
			She was even the choreographer on <i>In Living Color</i> . Through all that creative work, one thing is clear: Rosie Perez is a deliberate, brave artist who carries with her a commanding presence when she performs. And, of course, she has one of the most unmistakable voices <u>ever</u> .
			In the interview you're about to hear, we aren't gonna talk much about Rosie's acting career, but let's start with a little bit from one of her most memorable performances. Here she is playing Tina in the all-time classic, <i>Do the Right Thing</i> .
00:01:18	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:19	Clip	Clip	Music: A radio plays quietly in the background.
			Tina: <i>[Smacking noises.]</i> No, come on. Mookie, that's— <u>ow!</u> Hold up, wait a minute. First of all, it is too hot, alright? And if you think I'm gonna let you get some, put your clothes on and leave here and I'll see your black <i>[censored]</i> another week. You must be bugging.
			Mookie: I'll see you tomorrow.
			Tina: Yeah, right. And my name is Booboo the Fool.
			Mookie: So, no nasty, huh?
			Tina: No.
			Mookie: Tina, let's do something else, then.
			Tina: What?
			Mookie: Trust me.
			Tina: <i>[Incredulous]</i> Trust you? Uh, Mookie, the last time I trusted you, we ended up with a son. Remember your son?

Mookie: I do remember my son. His name is Hector. You know? What are you trying to say, I'm a bad father?

Tina: *[Muttered]* On the strength.

Mookie: Let me talk to you for a second.

Tina: What? What?

[The sound of shuffling feet.]

Mookie: Over here.
Music swells and fades.

00:01:58	Sound Effect	Transition	
00:01:59	Jesse	Host	Rosie Perez, I'm so thrilled to have you on <i>Bullseye</i> . Thank you for coming on.
00:02:02	Rosie Perez	Guest	My pleasure, thank you for having me.
00:02:05	Jesse	Host	When you did <i>Do the Right Thing</i> , you were—like—20 or 21, or something, right?
00:02:09	Rosie	Guest	20. Mm-hm.
00:02:11	Jesse	Host	Did you even think of yourself, at the time, as an actor?
00:02:16	Rosie	Guest	Mmm. Nooo.

[They laugh.]

I had, um... I had acted—the nuns put me on the stage, early on. I was the lead bunny in the Easter parade show and...

[Jesse chuckles.]

I was Lucy in *Charlie Brown's Christmas*. And I never wanted to do it, and they—*[in a cranky impersonation of an older person]* "Get on the stage!" You know.

So, um—yeah, so I didn't—it, you know, wasn't my first *[cracking on a laugh]* acting gig, if you will. But I never counted that, so uh... yeah. But, you know, when Spike first met me, he told me I was an actress. And I said, "No I'm not."

00:03:09	Jesse	Host	He goes, "Ooh, yes you are." And so, you know. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:03:12	Rosie	Guest	You met him in very unusual circumstances. Mm-hm. That's a old story.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:03:17	Jesse	Host	I'll do the CliffsNotes.
00:03:19	Rosie	Guest	<i>[Amused.]</i> You don't have to tell it, but you can if you want to. Went to a nightclub. Saw girls on the stage doing a butt contest. Got angry. Jumped on the stage. Made a mockery of it by bending over. He comes over with bodyguards, tells me to get down. I got scared. I thought they were gonna kick me out of the club and he said, "Tonight is fate."

I said, *[with disbelieving laughter]* "Huh, you wish."

And he started laughing and he said, “My name is Spike Lee.”

And I said, “So?”

And my girlfriend was like, “Wait, uuh, that’s Spike Lee!”

Producer gave me his card and my girlfriend called them the next day and the rest is history.

00:03:51 Jesse Host

Let’s talk a little bit about your early life. You referred to the nuns. You lived part of your childhood in a convent home for children. How did you end up living there?

00:04:05 Rosie Guest

I’m a product of an affair, so my mother and father were married to different people. They met up. And I happened. *[Laughs.]* And then, when I was a week old, my mother gave me to my father’s sister. Anna Domingo Daryll, God rest her soul. And I thought she was my mom. I thought she was my mom, and four years later my mother came back, ripped me out of my aunt’s home—arms, only to put me in a home. In a convent. Which was very... weird. It was very, very weird and very startling. I remember... bits of it. But the bits that I do remember, I remember them very, very vividly.

00:05:03 Jesse Host

And from day one, I remember saying to myself, “I don’t belong here.” You know? ‘Cause I was so loved. I was so spoiled. So, *[amused, her voice rising in pitch]* that didn’t mix well with the nuns. When you lived there, what was your relationship like with the rest of your family? With your mother and—you had half-siblings who also lived there and half-siblings who didn’t—and your father was, I guess at that point, living in Puerto Rico?

00:05:16 Rosie Guest

Mm-hm. He lived in Puerto Rico and in Brooklyn, my father. I didn’t know my half-siblings. My mother’s other children. They were strangers, to me. And I wanted them to be... you know, family. But they didn’t want me. And it was mainly because of—it wasn’t their fault. It was what my mother and their father put in their head about me. You know? I was the lovechild. I was the bastard child. You know.

00:06:06 Jesse Host

So, it was difficult. And then slowly, one or two of them came around and, you know, were very, very friendly to me. And I really appreciated that. But I never really felt part of the clan, ever. Ever. So, that was a—that was a little bit difficult, as well.

00:06:10 Rosie Guest

Did either of your parents ever come?
Yes. My father came as often as he could. My mother didn’t come that often. And when she did, I was... truly made to feel different, in the sense that when all of her children gathered in the cafeteria to eat, I was told to sit at the end of the table. They were served first and I had to wait for the scraps. And then I was given the scraps. And I think that my mother did that to appease her husband, you know? He’s looking at *[laughs]* the result of her affair. So, I think that—she suffered from severe mental illness. So, I think—in her mind—it was rational behavior to treat me that way, even though I was a little girl.

My aunt came... all the time. Nonstop. Nonstop. And when I got older, I really, truly appreciated her effort, because she would leave Williamsburg, Brooklyn and go upstate, New York every weekend—

rain, sleet, or snow—to see me. And I remember, when I was older, I said, “Why did you do that?”

And she said, “Because I had to.”

And I said, “Why did you have to?”

She goes, “Cause I love you. I love you, so I had to.” You know? And that’s pure, unconditional love. And my father, when he would come to visit me, it was more like a date with my dad. He always took me out to eat. He always took me shopping. He would take me places to see, around the area. And it was special. I just didn’t treat him right. *[Laughs.]* ‘Cause I was angry. I was angry. And, you know, didn’t take me ‘til I got a little bit older to really understand what was going on. And once I did, I felt really, really bad as to how I treated him. Because that man never gave up on me. Ever. So—and he didn’t have rights, at the time, because I didn’t have his last name.

[Rosie makes several sounds of agreement and acknowledgment as Jesse speaks.]

00:08:34 Jesse Host

[Beat.]

I was thinking about your mom, who was schizophrenic.

Although, you didn’t know it at the time, when you were a kid. I was thinking about—there’s—schizophrenia runs in my family. I have an uncle who was schizophrenic. And, you know, my uncle was very severely schizophrenic by the time I can remember. But it was very difficult for me to understand. And I had a friend, in high school, whose mother was—I think—schizophrenic, although much more manageably so. My uncle was institutionalized, and she was able to work, and she had a family and so forth.

And the feeling that I remember from both of those situation—one when I was, you know, a younger kid with my uncle and one when I was a teenager, with my friend’s mom when I was in her house—was... how unsettling the unpredictability of it was, specifically. Like, not even that all things were horribly negative or brutal or anything, you know? But just that it—when you’re a kid, you just are trying to figure out what the rules of life are and it’s very hard to do that when the ground is shifting under your feet, in that way.

00:09:50 Rosie Guest

Hm. That’s well said. Yeah, that’s—you got that right. Yeah. So, you’re always walking on eggshells, waiting for the crack.

00:10:00 Jesse Host

Did you think—when the nuns at the home told you that you were talented—did you agree with them? Like did you think—were you proud of being good at performing?

00:10:15 Rosie Guest

[Takes a deep breath.] I had a lot of confidence. Even though I was very, very insecure in a lot of ways. Even when I was little, I think because I was so loved, initially, and so spoiled, I had a sense of myself. The insecurity was not having a foundation—a family and love and support. But... I knew I could do whatever they asked me to do. I knew I could play Lucy, in a heartbeat. I knew I could play Linus, which I begged them to... let me play, and they were worried that I had “lesbian tendencies”. *[Chuckles.]*

But I think that, when I felt good was when it came to dancing, 'cause it came so easily to me. My aunt told me that I was dancing even as an infant, you know, on my back. You know? Always moving. I just wouldn't ever, ever stop, she said, unless I was tired. And then that was it, I was over it. I was tired and I wanted to sleep. But when the nuns taught me how to tap [*chuckles*] and modern dance and, um... this Asian—I think it's Filipino or Thai—stick dancing.

00:11:35 Jesse Host

Yeah, that's Filipino.

[*Rosie confirms.*]

00:11:37 Rosie Guest

That's really cool. [*Chuckles.*]

Yeah. And it all came just so easily to me and it felt good when I was told that I was good at it. We didn't get a lot of praise from nuns. It wasn't like, "Oh my gosh! You're wonderful!" It was like, [*austere*] "Very good." It was like that.

[*Jesse chuckles.*]

You know, and there was the novices. You know, there's nuns and then you're a novice before you become a nun. The novice, before they were tainted—sorry for you Catholics out there. I'm talking about my own experience with the Catholic church—they were giddy about something that a child would do well there. They were the ones that would say, "Oh! That's wonderful!" And be very, you know, enthusiastic about your achievements. But the nuns that were there for a long time? They were over it. [*Chuckles.*]

00:12:38 Jesse Host

They were over it. They were like, [*flat and unimpressed*] "That's good, okay. Line up for supper." It was kinda like that.

So, you'd mentioned you were doing the stick dancing, which is really cool.

[*They laugh.*]

00:12:48 Rosie Guest

I did a little bit of that in high school with the Filipino club. It was really fun.

00:12:49 Jesse Host

It is fun.

There's a lot of banging sticks.

00:12:51 Rosie Guest

Yeah.

00:12:52 Jesse Host

It's, like, also kind of a martial art. But you were—you were doing that, and then you were doing—you were doing tap?

[*Rosie confirms.*]

00:13:02 Rosie Guest

Were you doing, like, Shirley Temple numbers?

We weren't doing Shirley Temple numbers, but I would imitate Shirley Temple all the time. I didn't connect it, because I was so traumatized, being thrown into that situation at the home, but later I discovered why I loved Shirley Temple so much. It was that that was my aunt's favorite, as well. So, she was obsessed with her and so we used to watch Shirley Temple movies together, all the time. So, I would do that on my own. That wasn't really what the nuns

had taught us. They taught us more Sammy Davis Jr. I don't know why, don't ask me.

[Jesse chuckles.]

00:13:47	Jesse	Host	But <i>[laughs]</i> , I guess they tickled their—he tickled their fancy, you know? So, um—yeah. So, yeah.
00:13:58	Rosie	Guest	Are there things that you did when you were in that home that you think back on very fondly? Like, were there sources of happiness, for you, in that situation? Yes. There was this one nun. Her name was Sister Anne. She was a novice and then she became a nun. And I remember I used to tell her, <i>[whispering]</i> “Don't do it!”

[Laughs.] But she was so kind to me and she was so funny. And we used to have good times where I would read a book and I would discuss the book with her, at length, and she just... showed so much patience with me and would endure my long soliloquies about whatever. And she was very kind. And there was another nun, Sister Antoinette, and one of my punishments was they withheld food. That's why I'm a greedy slob, this day. I have no control when it comes to food and I know, through therapy, it goes back to that—where they withheld food as punishment. And Sister Antoinette was in charge of the kitchen.

And me and this one girl—I don't wanna say her name, 'cause she's still alive—but she was crazy. *[Chuckles.]* She and I were close, close friends. And one day—one night, I'm starving. My stomach is growling, and she wakes me up, when everyone's asleep, and she said, “Let's sneak down to the kitchen.” And I was a very good girl. I just had a bad temper, 'cause I wasn't happy. But I was a very good girl.

And I said, “No, no, no! We're gonna get in trouble! There's gonna beat us!”

00:15:46	Rosie	Guest	And she said, “No, no, no. Come on. Everyone's asleep.” And we went down to the kitchen and we were just stuffing the food in our mouths. And Sister Antoinette clicks on the lights and I just started crying, 'cause I just thought, “That's it. I'm gonna get the crap beat out of me, right now.” And... she just looked at us and she goes, “Let me make you a cheese sandwich.” And we're both, like, shaking. You know? Slippers and just—I just couldn't be still. I was so scared. And she said, “Sit down.” And she made us sandwiches. So, every time, after that—every time I got punished, she would kinda look at me and wink and I knew I could sneak down and she would give me food. So, that was very nice.
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And there were wonderful, wonderful councilors and volunteers that would come to the home, during the day, that were really special. There was Mr. Neil and his wife, Betsy. They were very kind to me. They would always take me for a ride in their car. There was Ms. Claudia. She would take me for sleepovers at her house and take me to—take me shopping to buy nice clothes and... she taught me how to act out in public. *[Laughs.]* And then there was one special,

special nun—Sister Margaret Francis—who actually left the order. She had the biggest impact on me.

I remember when she was leaving, she came to see me before she left for good. She came back for a visit. And I remember, she grabbed my arm and there was—her eyes were flooded with emotion. And she grabbed my arm and she said, “Put your head down and study as hard as you can and get out. Your mind, your intelligence, is your ticket out.”

00:17:30 Rosie Guest I go, “Okay.”
And she squeezed my arm so hard and she says, “No. I want you to promise me. Say it. Say that you’re gonna do it. You don’t belong here.”

And I said, “I promise.”

She hugged me and she left, and I never saw her again. So... there were really caring people, there. Like, really, really caring people there. It wasn’t just about sadistic nuns and angry priests. There was some really beautiful folks that affected my life in a really sincere way.

00:18:06 Jesse Host Even more from my interview with Rosie Perez, after a quick break. When we come back: Rosie tells us about dancing on *Soul Train*. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:18:17 Music Music Rhythmic music plays.

00:18:19 Jesse Promo Support for this podcast, and the following message, come from TodayTix.

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00:18:50 Promo Promo *[Music fades out.]*
Music: Fun, jaunty, upbeat music.

Renee Colvert: Hi! I’m Renee Colvert.

Alexis Preston: I’m Alexis Preston!

Renee: And we’re the hosts of the smash hit podcast *Can I Pet Your Dog?* Now, Alexis.

Alexis: Yes.

Renee: We got big news.

Alexis: Uh-oh!

Renee: Since last we did a promo, our dogs have become famous.

Alexis: World-famous!

Renee: World—like, stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame! Second big news.

Alexis: Mm-hm?

Renee: The reviews are in.

Alexis: Mm-hm?

Renee: Take yourself to Apple Podcasts, you know what you're gonna hear? We're happy!

Alexis: It's true!

Renee: We're a delight! A great distraction from the world!

Alexis: I like that part a lot.

Renee: So, if that's what you guys are looking for...

Alexis: Mm-hm.

Renee: You gotta check out our show! But what else can they expect?

Alexis: We've got dog tech, dog news, celebrities with their dogs. All dog things!

Renee: All the dog things. So, if that interests you, well, get yourself on over to [Maximum Fun](#) every Tuesday!

[Music ends.]

00:19:30 Promo Promo

Music: Dramatic, suspenseful music plays.

Jasmyn Morris: This week on the *StoryCorps* podcast from NPR, we take you back to 2015, when Asma Jama—a Somali-American woman—was assaulted for speaking Swahili, at a restaurant. Tune in to hear how Asma found support from an unlikely support: the sister of the woman who attacked her.

00:19:50 Jesse Host

[Music fades out.]

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is the actor, TV host, dancer and celebrated boxing enthusiast: Rosie Perez. She's performed in classic films like *White Men Can't Jump* and *Do the Right Thing*, among many, many others. She's also a brilliantly talented dancer and choreographer. She got her first big break on *Soul Train*. Let's get back into our conversation.

00:20:18 Rosie Guest
00:20:19 Jesse Host

Have you ever seen the Werner Herzog documentary *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*?

No.

[Rosie makes several sounds of acknowledgment as Jesse talks.] It's about this guy who served in the Airforce. His name is Dieter. And he was a prisoner of war in Laos and was held captive and forced to march and all these really horrible things. And there's this scene, in the movie—he's in his house, in Marin County, in

California. And it's a pretty nice house and he's okay and he goes into his kitchen. He lifts up the floor, and he shows that he has—like-enough food for, like, years.

And he says, "I can—I can only sleep knowing that this food is here."

And I was listening to you, years ago, on a show on WNYC, in New York, that was like a *Desert Island Discs* kind of thing. Like a "what would you bring if you were, you know, if you were stranded on a desert island for a year" or something. And you had written on their, like, intake form or whatever. You know, some different things—Billy—all the Billy Wilder movies, was one of them I remember. Like one of them was, like, "a loot of tampons."

[Rosie laughs.]

And *[laughs]* like, they definitely—there was no category for, like, what food might you need on this trip.

[Rosie laughs.]

You know what I mean? Like, they—I think it was supposed to be taken as read that they would provide all the, like—all the, like, personal necessities that you would need. All the toilet paper and everything. But you had written that in and that immediately made me think of that scene in *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*. Which is that, like—I mean, you were partly goofing around and it was really funny, but also it was like when you've been through the trauma of really not having, that trauma lives with you for the rest of your life no matter what the other circumstances of your life are become. 100%. And I wasn't really, initially, trying to be funny, but I knew it was funny. When I would—when I was—when I would watch movies and, like, if it was a war movie or someone's trapped on a desert island, once I got my period I go, "What are they gonna do?" I always thought that. And it's because, you know, when I had to be at my mother's house—my court-appointed visits... the environment—it was, I mean, abject poverty. And there was time where there weren't even any sanitary napkins. And that stuck with me. And even to this day, my biggest, biggest bill—my biggest expense—is food and groceries. Because of the abject poverty and because of the punishment that I endured.

00:22:08 Rosie Guest

And it *[laughing through her words]* drives my husband crazy. You know?

[Jesse chuckles.]

'Cause he goes, "Why do you go to Costco?! It's just us!"

I go, *[desperately]* "Just in case!"

[Laughing.] You know, it's just—you never know if the apocalypse is gonna happen!

00:23:23 Rosie Guest

You know? And so... um, seriously speaking—after 9/11—my first stop—I went to the corner store and, I swear, almost bought out

that entire store. I was—I was terrified. I was terrified to be without. And then I realized... I'm like that without a crisis. It's just a part of who I am, now. And I try my hardest to manage it. But it's still difficult. It's still difficult, you know, for me. It's a subconscious kind of reach for the, you know, 18-pound bag of coffee beans.

[They laugh.]

You know? It just is what it is, you know?

00:24:13 Jesse Host *[Rosie agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]*
You ended up moving in to, like, something of a more traditional group home a little later in your childhood. And you went to regular school. And this was in upstate New York, right?

00:24:55 Rosie Guest
What was it like to go to regular school—even in the unusual circumstances of living in a group home—and I would imagine most of your classmates were not living in group homes, but what was it like to go to regular school when you had spent, you know, years of your elementary school age life in this, you know, very difficult and also very insular environment of the convent?
Mm-hm. First of all, the group home different to—as to what you—people know what group homes are, today. It wasn't run by the state. It was run by the Catholic church, so that's—one was different in itself. And this one was a specific group home for either academically or socially advanced kids. Kids that they thought could make it in the quote-unquote “outside world.”

You know, we had a nice house. You know. A car. Group home parents, which was weird as hell. And eight other girls. And it was bittersweet, because as soon as you left the house—whether you were standing on the front lawn, in the plush, you know, two acre lawn, on the plush two acre lawn—you knew immediately from the other kids in the neighborhood that you were different. And they were sure to let you know it. When you went on the school bus, it was the same thing. When you went inside the school, it was the same thing. And that shook me, inside. And it made me sad, but I was too proud to show that sadness. And I had learned skills to protect myself, subconsciously, and I fronted. But, you know, most of the kids thought I was aloof and too cool for school. You know? Or they just thought I was weird. Which I was.

[Jesse chuckles.]

But I fell in love with suburbia. And it's so funny to me... watching hipsters come to Brooklyn fleeing the suburbs. And I go, “WHY?!” Yes, Brooklyn is beautiful. It's all that. I live here. I don't wanna leave, but my god! I would love a weekend trip to the suburbs! It's gorgeous!

[Jesse laughs.]

Are you kidding?! *[Laughs.]* You don't hear your neighbors next door to you. You get in a car and there's free parking in the supermarkets! It's just lovely! You know? And you look at the foliage and it just—it's just—it's just wonderful!

00:27:11 Rosie Guest And I loved having friends who *[laughing]* had a lot of money. Because I would go into their houses and I would say, “Oh my god! This is just like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farms!*”

And they were like, *[flatly]* “What?!”

[Jesse chuckles in the background.]

I go, “You know! Barbara Stanwyck?” They didn’t know what the hell I was talking about. “And *Christmas in Connecticut?* Never saw that one, either? *The Holiday Inn*, how about *The Holiday Inn?* Your house is just like *The Holiday Inn*, with Ben Crosby? Nothing?!” *[She stammers in disbelief.]* You know. ‘Cause these were kids who had the privilege and the—and, uh—of being casual. Of being comfortably casual, that they didn’t think twice about their environment. I thought about everything. And, I mean, the girls in the group home—I know they resented me, because I made friends outside of the group home, in the community and in the schools. Very quickly. Very quickly.

I didn’t have that much of a chip on my shoulder. And I was just a friendly person, as well. But I lived for sleepovers! Are you kidding me? I remember, this one sleepover, this girl—Eileen, who I’m still friends with, to this day—she lived about a half a mile from where the group home was, and her mom, Jean, God bless her. She lives in Florida, now. Took me under her wing. And I remember, one time, I had told Eileen something horrible that went down in the group home and it was very violent, and she told her mom and I was very angry at Eileen for doing that.

00:28:49 Rosie Guest And her mother goes, “Don’t be angry at my daughter. That’s what friends do. She told me because she cares about you.”

I went, “What?” That was weird, to me.

And she goes, “My god, what they did to you there. You can come here anytime you want.” And it was like my second home. It was my second home and I remember the first time Jean made us hot cocoa with mini marshmallows.

I went, *[squealing]* “Oh my god! We’re like a commercial!” And they thought I was hilarious. And I wasn’t being funny, at the time, but I knew it was funny. You know, and I would laugh along with it and—and then we would sing—we would watch *The Muppet Show* and sing the opening to *The Muppet Show* with our hot coffees with mini marshmallows in it, and I’m just twinkling my toes with joy! *[Laughs.]* And Eileen just would laugh at me, so much and... and Ms. Jean—she just would hug me and I would freeze up, ‘cause I wasn’t used to that type of affection, outside of—you know—my aunt or my cousins who I thought were my sisters. You know?

But she was wonderful. So wonderful that she writes me every single year. She sends me a Christmas card, she sends me an Easter card, tells me happy new year. Eileen always gives me update letters, which I love. That’s so suburbia, too. You know.

[Jesse chuckles.]

00:30:16 Jesse Host Um, you know. So, it's...
Do you get those kind of—those kind of Christmas cards that have pictures of the whole family?
00:30:20 Rosie Guest Mm-hm.
00:30:21 Jesse Host That you print out at the drug store, or whatever?
00:30:23 Rosie Guest Exactly! Exactly, and they all have those ugly Christmas sweaters on? Yes, and I live. And I put them all on the—on the refrigerator. My husband goes, “I don’t get it. I don’t get it.”

[They laugh.]

00:30:44 Jesse Host Yeah, so, um... Yeah, so it was bittersweet. It was—it was quite bittersweet.
When did you start going out to dance?
00:30:49 Rosie Guest *[Beat.]* I always was dancing, but to a nightclub? I think I was 12 or 13?

[Jesse laughs.]

I don’t know what I wrote in the book. *[Laughs.]* What, that’s not normal?

00:31:02 Jesse Host *[They laugh.]*
[Jokingly.] I think most people wait ‘till 14.

00:31:05 Rosie Guest *[They laugh.]*
Well, actually I—it wasn’t that I wanted to go to the nightclubs. It was more like, you know—to go to the nightclubs, it was more of trying to be accepted by my half-siblings. So, they would use us to—we would practice dancing the hustle for hours. All day. And then, at night, we would get dressed up. We—I don’t—I don’t know who we thought we were fooling, at the doors. But, in Brooklyn, it didn’t matter. They would let you in, back then, anyway. And we would go to these, like, borough disco clubs.

And my half-siblings would use me to show off on the dancefloor, and then when a girl would come up, then I would have to sit down. And I wasn’t allowed to talk to anybody. I wasn’t allowed to drink anything but water that they got me. And I would just watch them all night long, until they were done, and then we would get back on the train and go home to my mother’s house. That’s how I was introduced to the club scene.

00:32:07 Jesse Host You eventually moved to Los Angeles, to go to community college. What—were things completely different in LA than they were in New York?

00:32:18 Rosie Guest They were very different. You couldn’t just hop on a subway and go anywhere you wanted to go. It was very much a car culture. Still is. It was very much of an... culture of isolation. So, as soon as someone finishes work or finishes school and they go home, that was pretty much it. Unless they had something else on their schedule. They didn’t casually walk out of their house and went for a walk or casually turned up at their friend’s house and like, “Yooo! What are you doing? Come on in!” It wasn’t like that. You had to make an appointment, which I found so strange.

Said, "Hey, what are you doing? Can I come over?"

"Huh? When?"

"Now!"

"Oh! Did we have a date?"

"What are you talking about? You're my friend! What do you mean a date?! I gotta make a date with you?! To see you?!" So, it was very different. It was very unsettling. And it was also extremely dangerous. New York had done away with gangs. That was, like old school. And when I went to Los Angeles, the gang culture frightened me. It scared the heck out of me.

00:33:24 Rosie Guest

And I remember telling my college friend, I said, "This is like Sodom and Gomorrah, out here, with sunshine. This is like crazytown."

And she goes, "How can you say that, being from New York?"

I said, "New York, we understand crazy. We get crazy. If crazy comes to you, you go—yo. Get—move. Thank you."

[Jesse guffaws loudly.]

You know? In LA, you don't know who's crazy! And it just happens and you're like, "Oh my gosh!" And it was very, very weird. It was very weird. And it was very lonely, being out there without my New York base, my New York family. It was very hard for me to connect. I really didn't like it. I really, really didn't. The only thing that I did like about Los Angeles, when I first went out there, was that there was a lot of parking. There was ample free parking.

00:34:17 Jesse Host

[Chuckles.] You got discovered dancing in a club when you were, like, 19 I think. And invited to perform on *Soul Train*. There's a—there's a few video compilations of you dancing on *Soul Train*, that are on YouTube. They're basically the best thing on all of YouTube—except for, maybe, there's also a video where just a bunch of golden retrievers are all swimming in a swimming pool together.

[Rosie laughs.]

And they love it so much. They're having a big party. But besides that video, *[laughs]* which is also really great, I think these YouTube compilations of you dancing on *Soul Train* are amazing. And what's amazing about it, to me—and, like, I wasn't dancing at clubs in, you know, 1983 or whenever this was, but what's amazing to me about it is, you know—*Soul Train*, first of all, was not at the time a hip-hop show, at all. And the styles of dancing that were being done on *Soul Train*, in the mid-1980's were very different from what you were doing. So, there were sort of fluid styles and then a little—maybe a little bit of, like, popping and locking or something.

And, in these videos of you dancing on *Soul Train*, you basically... lock into the camera... deliver the most powerful face I've ever seen in my life.

[Rosie chuckles.]

And I'm talking about powerful in all categories. And then you basically just do a dance that, like, I could only describe as like—I guess we'd have to—maybe have to bleep this, on the radio, but ass-kicking?

00:35:56 Jesse Host

[Rosie chuckles.]

Like a pow-pow-pow dance. And *[laughs]* and I think of you, like, showing up from New York on this TV show and being like, "I've got this other thing that I do."

[They laugh.]

And you do it with such extraordinary conviction! And, like, you don't—you're not as—you're not dancing in the style that the other people are. Like, some of the other people are dancing really beautifully or coolly? You know, there's great dancers on Soul Train, of all kinds.

[Rosie agrees.]

But, you are, like—like a visitor from another planet.

[Rosie laughs.]

00:36:35 Rosie Guest
00:36:38 Jesse Host

You're like, "Oh, this is what I do."
Well. *[Laughs.]* Okay. And the question?
[Through laughter.] Were—were you...

[Rosie giggles.]

00:36:49 Rosie Guest

Yeah, the question is were you, like, aware of that when you were doing it? Were you—did you, like, get there and you're like, "Welp. They all dance like this. I dance like that. I'm gonna lock eyes with the camera and take care of business."

No. When I first went there... I was dancing hip-hop and Don Cornelius told me to stop. And he says, "We don't do that *[censored]* here."

I went, "Okaaay! Got it!" And I wasn't dressed appropriately, either. So, I had to change clothes and come back. And I wasn't used to dancing in high heels, so... I didn't know what the heck to do, honestly. I really didn't. The way I was moving my body was, in a way, a virgin who thought they were being sexy would move their body. It was exaggerated beyond, but I didn't understand that. And it also was kind of tongue-in-cheek, because my college girlfriends—I got them into—shout-out to Carol, Nia *[chuckles]*, Tracy—and so, we were watching everybody else take it so seriously. Specifically going down the Soul Train Line.

And I didn't know what to do. My heart is pounding, and I think Carol was giggling the whole way. She's like, *[giddy]* "What are you gonna do? What are you gonna do?"

I go, *[stage whispering]* "Shut up! Shut up! Come on."

[Jesse laughs.]

I go, "I don't know. I don't know!"

And then she goes, "Let's have a contest who's gonna be the wildest."

00:38:14 Rosie Guest

And I was like, "Okay!" And so, I didn't fully understand what it meant that a camera was on me and that millions and millions of people would be watching. So, it was kind of a dare, the first time I went down. So, I was half frightened to death and half cracking up.

And when I went down and I did it, the first time, Don Cornelius goes, "Get back up there and do it again!"

00:38:48 Jesse Host

I went, "What?!" *[Laughs.]* And that was it! It stuck! We'll wrap up with Rosie Perez after a break. Don't go anywhere. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:38:55 Music Music
00:38:58 Jesse Promo

Interstitial music plays.

This message comes from NPR sponsor: Smartwater.

Smartwater is for the curious drinkers. The ones who are always looking for ways to make things a little bit better. That's why Smartwater created two new ways to hydrate: Smartwater Alkaline with 9+pH and Smartwater Antioxidant with added selenium. And now you can order Smartwater by saying, "Alexa! Order Smartwater!"

Smartwater: that's pretty smart!

00:39:27 Promo Promo

[Music fades out.]

Music: A brassy instrumental version of the Christmas classic "Up on the House Top" by Benjamin Hanby.

Speaker 1: Heeey, cool shirt!

Speaker 2: Oh this? Thanks! I got it at MaxFunStore.com.

Echoing Voiceover: *[Mysteriously.]* MaxFunStore.com.

Speaker 1: Hmm, that's strange. I visited MaxFunStore.com—

Echoing Voiceover 2: *[Breathlessly.]* MaxFunStore.com!

Speaker 1: —a few weeks ago and didn't see it.

Speaker 2: That's because they just launched a ton of new stuff. Right in time for the holidays!

00: Promo Promo

Speaker 1: Oh, cool.

Speaker 2: There's patches, mugs, totes, stickers. Even a onesie!

Speaker 1: Nice! Those'd make great gifts for everyone I know!

Speaker 2: Great! Because I already got you something from there.

Speaker 1: Thanks! Now, excuse me a moment, I need to look up MaxFunStore.com—

Echoing Voiceover 2: *[Distorted.]* MaxFunStore.com!

Speaker 1: —on my smartphone. You know, to see what’s new.

Speaker 2: Yeah! You can’t go wrong with anything from MaxFunStore.com.

Echoing Voiceover 1: *[Enthusiastically.]* MaxFunStore.com!

[Music fades out.]

00:40:10 Promo Promo

Music: Low string music.

Speaker 1: How do you make an older parent struggling with health problems happy?

Speaker 2: I tell them I was getting engaged to a war photographer and that he and I just bought a parakeet named Gino.

Speaker 1: This week on NPR’s *Invisibilia*—what happens when the roles we’re used to performing with our loved ones get mixed up.

[Music ends.]

00:40:30 Jesse Host

It’s *Bullseye*, I’m Jesse Thorn. My guest is Rosie Perez. You’ve seen her in *Do the Right Thing*, *White Men Can’t Jump*, *Search Party*, on *The View*. She also choreographed the groundbreaking sketch comedy series, *In Living Color*. Let’s get back into our interview.

You choreographed the Fly Girls on *In Living Color*. Did you know, at the time, the impact that that was having as, you know—I mean, that was one of the first representations of... or at least, one of the first, kind of, first-person representations of hip-hop culture on bigtime national television.

00:41:05 Rosie Guest

100%. 100%, I knew it. I had that discussion with Keenen. And I said that very thing. I said, “This will be the first time, on national television—national network—you’re going to see hip-hop with every show. This is big. This is big. I don’t wanna do that solid gold dance that’s out the window, and I want the Fly Girls to look a certain way. And I want them to dance and walk a certain way. I want them to blow middle America out of their mind.”

And he said, “Okay. Do it.” And after a couple of shows, I came up with the idea of booking the hip-hop artist at the end of the show. No band, no DJ, just give them a mic. If they wanna sing to track, let them. If they don’t, let them. And Keenen loved that idea, as well. I knew exactly what I was doing. And the reason why I did know that was my time on *Soul Train*. Because when I started sneaking in a little bit of hip-hop moves, the other kids loved it. There were some kids that knew how to do it and they just started to become bold and brazen, as well.

00:42:45 Jesse Host And, you know—and I remember the impact that that had on the masses. So... I did know. I didn't know how big of a phenomenon the Fly Girls were going to be, though. Does that make sense? Yeah. I don't—I don't wanna—I don't want anybody to miss something that you just said, which is something that I didn't know until earlier today, when a friend told me about it—which is that not only were you responsible for the choreography of the Fly Girls, who obviously did become an—huge culture phenomenon, but you were a big part of bringing music into *In Living Color*. That is, live hip-hop. Which, at the time, was something that basically wasn't on television. Certainly not on network television. It was, like, roughly contemporaneous with Arsenio Hall starting to bring live hip-hop music onto late-night.

00:43:57 Rosie Guest But this was like, you know—I was an early adolescent, at the time, and I watched it in the living room with my family, with my parents, you know? There would be Arrested Development or Leaders of the New School or whatever. You know. Brand Nubian. On television. And you were a big part of bringing those music acts into the show, which had not been part of the original plan.

00:44:13 Jesse Host Yeah. I mean, the other producers tried to shoot it—the idea down. And so did the network. And so did the—what is it called—the people that censor everything?

00:44:14 Rosie Guest Standards and Practices. *[Chuckles.]*

Standards and Practices. I was not their favorite person. *[Laughs.]* Yes. But I kept telling Keenen, “This is gonna be big. Little America has no idea who Busta Rhyme is.”

[They laugh.]

“Let alone Leaders of the New School.” You know. You know. Or Nice & Smooth. Heavy D & The Boyz. Like you said, the Brand Nubians. I mean, and on and on it went. I did get upset after a while that—well, rightfully so, it was Keenen's show. He allowed his brothers to book some acts that I wasn't... behind at all. And I was like, “You're killing the credibility of what I'm trying to do here.” You know? And then finally, Keenen gave me the reigns back. Which was—which was good. You know.

00:45:10 Jesse Host He was—he was a fair boss. He really was. He was a good boss, actually.

You were diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, given all these childhood traumas—only, frankly, some of which we've touched on in our conversation. Have you found it difficult, in your life, or have you developed skills to find places in your life to be... comfortable or peaceful or feel secure?

00:45:35 Rosie Guest There are many places of my life that I can feel comfortable and peaceful and secure. What happens are—is that the waves come. Out of nowhere. And that is part of my... struggle with PTSD. Because when you're having a good day and everything seems fine and dandy and then all of a sudden this wave comes over your head and you're like, “Woah.” In the sense that all of a sudden, a feeling of “blah” will come over me for no reason. Or a feeling of innate sadness. And I'll say, “I don't know why I'm sad.” You know? “I don't know why I'm feeling this.”

And through therapy—intense therapy—I learned that that has to—those are—those are signs of my depression coming up to the surface. Those are—those could be triggers of my PTSD, and thank god I got help. Thank goodness life is sooo much better. I don't know if therapy's for everybody, but maaan. It sure has done me wonders. And I thank goodness that I had enough courage to go ahead and do it. And I'm still in therapy. I don't go every day... anymore. [Laughs.] But—I mean, it was bad for a while.

But, you know, I—you know—I check in, now. And I—and I do the work, you know? I do the work. And life is so good. I have a wonderful career. I have a great career. I've... I've done so much better, in regards to my relationships with friends and family. I have a wonderful husband, a wonderful marriage. You know. I love my charitable work. I love my activism work. It—my life is so full. And yet there are days where I feel... like it's doomsday. And I have to sit down with myself and I have to do the work. And I have to remove my... my soul from the past and get inside... the present. And understand I'm here. I'm right here. I'm not back there. All of that is gone. I've broken up with my past and I'm moving forward. You know?

I'm not forgetting about it. Just like you don't forget about an ex-lover, but you don't wanna go back that one, you know what I'm saying? [Laughs.] And you just wanna move forward with it. You know? But it's a struggle and I—and I envy people who say, "I used to have PTSD and now I'm good." Wow! Really?! Gosh. I wonder how that feels. You know what I'm saying? You know. When I—you know, for instance, how my PTSD may trigger—I could be in my kitchen. My beautiful kitchen that my husband redid for me. And I'm cooking away—my favorite pastime, cooking and eating. And then all of a sudden, I will have this sense that someone's gonna come up against—up behind me, in my own house with the locked door, with a knife and stab me in the neck.

00:49:03 Rosie Guest

It's completely irrational and that thought and that image of someone possibly behind me happens in a nanosecond. And I'll turn around and I have to tell myself, "Nobody's there. You're out of danger. You're not in the home. You're not in—you know—your mother's house or the dangerous streets of Bushwick. You're not there, anymore. It's just—it's just a—it's just a PTSD flash. Calm down." You know? And I'll take a deep breath.

But those still happen. They don't happen all the time, as they used to, but they still come. That's what I call a wave. I heard this acceptance speech from the great, late Helen Thomas—the White House correspondent. I was—was privileged enough to be at the banquet that she was receiving the award for her work in journalism. And she had said that she was very nervous about her first assignment overseas, which was covering the Kennedys' trip—I don't know if it was to France or England—and she was stressing herself out and the woman that she was staying with, another fellow journalist in France—I think it was France—told her, "You need to calm down. You need to calm—why are you so nervous?"

And she goes, "I'm—I think I'm gonna fail. I think that—"

She goes, “Where is that from?”

She goes, “I don’t know, but I just feel like I’m—I’m so scared of failing.”

And she says, “Well, you know what you need to do? You need to go down to my cellar, my wine cellar, pick out the best bottle, and we’re gonna crack it open, have a good time.”

And said, “Are you crazy?! We have to get up in the morning!”

00:50:47 Rosie Guest She goes, “Even more reason to do it!”
Helen Thomas goes downstairs. She picks out a bottle of wine. Her friend looks at the bottle and says, “Oh no. Life’s too short to drink the house wine. Go downstairs and get the good stuff, honey.”

And I live by that code. Life’s too short to drink the house wine, go get the good stuff in life. Whether it be therapy or work or a wonderful partner or a beautiful home or living out your dream career—that’s the good stuff. Hold on to it. Having the best friend that you could call at three o’clock in the morning, like my girlfriend Julie Shannon, or Iliana. Having a sister like my sister Carmen, who’s ride-or-die. You know. That’s the good stuff.

00:51:37 Jesse Host And when those waves come, I always tell myself, “Life’s too short to drink the house wine. Go get the good stuff.”
Well, Rosie—you have dinner reservations and I gotta take my daughter to a birthday party. So, I’m gonna cut it short. I’m sorry that we didn’t talk too much about your amazing acting work, which is one of the reasons that I [*chuckling*] invited you on the program. But I am so, so grateful to have gotten to talk to you and I thank you very, very much for coming on *Bullseye*. I really admire you and your work. And thank you.

00:52:05 Rosie Guest Thank you for this wonderful interview. I really enjoyed it. I was thinking, “Dear god, I hope it doesn’t suck.” And it truly did not.

[Jesse barks a laugh.]

00:52:15 Jesse Host So, thank you. [*Laughs.*]
And also, real talk, Rosie—like, usually when somebody comes and does an interview—and this is, you know, this is a—for understandable reasons, people do an interview ‘cause they got something to sell. And you’re not here ‘cause you got something to sell. You’re here out of the kindness of your heart, because I bothered you on twitter.

[Rosie laughs.]

00:52:42 Rosie Guest And I’m very grateful to you for taking—for taking all this time, for that reason. It’s very, very kind of you. So, thank you very much.
00:52:46 Jesse Host Well thank you. And I am a fan of your show, so there’s that too.
Rosie Perez! Like we said in the interview, she doesn’t really have anything to promote right now, so what can we plug? She’s basically great in everything that she does. She’s also the co-founder of The Urban Arts Partnership. It’s a long-running, New

00:53:06	Music	Music	York nonprofit that works in education and the arts. You can find them online at UrbanArts.org .
00:53:09	Jesse	Host	Thumpy interstitial music plays. That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is produced at MaximumFun.org headquarters, overlooking MacArthur Park in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where my producer Kevin saw a kid take a giant palm frond, that was on the ground, and throw it in the trash. Helping to keep our park beautiful. What's the generation after Millennials called? I don't remember. But they're good folks.
			The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our production fellows are Jordan Kauwling and Melissa Dueñas. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it.
			And there are nearly 20 years of <i>Bullseye</i> and <i>Sound of Young America</i> interviews available for free, on our website, at MaximumFun.org . You can also find many of them in your favorite podcast app by subscribing to <i>Bullseye</i> . I recommend, for example, the time Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim came on the show. This was back when I used to tape it in my apartment. And they just wanted to talk about jazz. Just talked about jazz, the whole time. It was a lot of fun.
			We're also on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Just search for <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> . You can keep up with the show, there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.
00:54:33	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>