

00:00:00	Jesse Thorn	Promo	<p>Hey, all. Jesse, here. We're getting near the end of the year. I wanted to thank you for listening to <i>Bullseye</i>. Making our show isn't easy. We've got a very small staff that works tirelessly to book guests and edit interviews and keep things running smoothly. It is hard work that takes time, money, and effort. It's also incredibly rewarding. When I hear it that a guest is an NPR listener, already, it means a lot. And it means something to know that you're listening, as well.</p> <p>So, I'll get to the point. If you wanna show your gratitude, this holiday season, consider supporting the NPR Member Station in your area. Any amount. It's the single most effective way to keep shows like <i>Bullseye</i> going. It'll make a huge difference to public radio in your community. It makes a huge difference to us, too.</p> <p>To get started with your donation to an NPR Member Station, visit donate.NPR.org/bullseye or just text the word "bullseye" to the number 49648. We'll send you a text message with a link where you can find your local station and make your contribution. Message and data rates may apply.</p> <p>You can visit NPR.org/smsterms for privacy and text message terms.</p>
00:01:09	Music	Music	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:01:10	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:01:21	Jesse	Host	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> I'm Jesse Thorn. It's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:01:23	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.
00:01:30	Jesse	Host	<p>We're looking back on past <i>Bullseye</i> guests we lost in 2019. First up, my conversation from 2014 with Caroll Spinney. He died this past December, at his home in Connecticut. He was 85. Caroll was, of course, the puppeteer and voice behind Big Bird. He also played Oscar the Grouch. If you're an American under 50 or so, you probably grew up with Big Bird. And, in a way, you grew up <u>as</u> Big Bird. Because Big Bird isn't just <i>Sesame Street's</i> most popular character. He is the avatar of the children who watch.</p> <p>He's physically huge, but inside he's a three or four-year-old kid working to understand the world around him, just like you while you watch.</p>
00:02:11	Clip	Clip	<p>Big Bird: Hi, Ari!</p> <p>Aristotle: Oh, hi, Big Bird!</p> <p>Big Bird: Um, whatcha doing?</p> <p>Aristotle: Oh, I'm reading.</p> <p>Big Bird: How can you read? You're blind.</p> <p>Aristotle: I use my fingers!</p>

Big Bird: Well, I can't seem to read my book with my fingers!

Aristotle: Oh, well you got the wrong kind of book! Yeah. You see those little bumps, down there on the page?

Big Bird: Oh yeah.

Aristotle: Yeah, they're sticking up on the page.

Big Bird: Yeah?

Aristotle: Well, that's called braille!

00:02:32 Jesse Host

For the longest time, the literal person you'd watch inside that huge ball of feathers was Caroll Spinney. When I talked with him, he was 80 and he was still playing Big Bird. In fact, he kept playing the role until 2018.

When filmmaker Dave LaMattina met Spinney, he was struck at the depth of the relationship between the man and the bird—how much this iconic character drew from the life of this remarkable performer. So, he asked Spinney if he could make a documentary. The result: a beautiful film called *I Am Big Bird*.

[Music fades in.]

Anyway, here's my interview with Dave LaMattina and the late Caroll Spinney.

00:03:11 Music Music

Soothing music with light vocalizations.

00:03:17 Jesse Host

Dave, Caroll, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's great to have you on the show.

00:03:19 Caroll Spinney Guest

Thank you, Jess.

00:03:20 Dave LaMattina Guest

Yeah, thank you for having us.

00:03:21 Jesse Host

So, Caroll—you talk about this a little bit in the book, but you have been a puppeteer basically since always.

00:03:32 Caroll Guest

Yeah, and I supposed that's long.

[Jesse laughs.]

I was eight. At five, I saw my first puppet show and I couldn't wait to have a chance to try and do it, myself.

00:03:40 Jesse Host

Do you remember the first puppet that you had or made?

00:03:43 Caroll Guest

The—it was a monkey. A little monkey. I can't imagine what kind of a show I've given with only one real puppet and a stuffed, green, flannel snake.

[Jesse laughs.]

It must have been terrible.

00:03:55 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Jesse: Did you get anybody to come? Did your folks come?

Caroll: Yeah! 16 people came!

Jesse: 16!

Caroll: Yeah.

Jesse: That's not a bad—that's not a bad haul, Caroll.

Caroll: Yeah. Mothers and kids and stuff. I put a ad in the little local post office. And people came. I was surprised.

00:04:08 Jesse Host
00:04:11 Caroll Guest
00:04:12 Jesse Host
00:04:17 Caroll Guest

When you went into the service, how old were you?

I was 19.

And that was, basically, the very early years of television, right?

Yes. I was only six years old, about that time, 'cause it really started around 1947.

00:04:21 Jesse Host
00:04:24 Caroll Guest

And you did some television in—while you were in the service?

Yes. I was stationed in Las Vegas. I was in the Air Force—Nellis Air Force Base. And I had my mother ship out puppets. I'd been doing puppet shows and birthday parties and things like that to earn money to go through art school. 'Cause my father wasn't empathetic about me going to school. He didn't—had never—he didn't even finish high school, 'cause they were very poor. And he wanted me to be—go work in his factory. And I would run a machine for—it's—so that way you won't starve to death.

But I didn't think I was gonna starve to death being an artist. And—but I couldn't—jobs paid so little. So, I was able to put myself through a great deal of the expense by doing puppet shows.

00:05:04 Jesse Host
00:05:08 Caroll Guest
00:05:09 Jesse Host

You know you later worked in Boston, right?

Yes.

When you thought about what a better job was than doing local children's television, in Boston or Las Vegas, did it—did that mean getting paid more or did it mean doing a different kind of work?

00:05:21 Caroll Guest

Well, I wanted to have—to do something that had a little more meaning. It was great fun, working with the guy who played Bozo—Frank Avruch—and he's still a friend. He's even in the movie we're gonna be discussing. And it was really wonderful to be on that show and so much fun to do it. I made it up as we went along. But I realized it wasn't very important. It just—just froth. Eye candy. It was just—commercials in there.

But to get on a show like *Sesame Street*—I had no idea what I was going for. I had—I created a really fancy puppet show and went to a puppet festival with it and Jim Henson was there, scouting. Lucky for me. I was in the right place at the right time.

00:06:04 Jesse Host

But while we're talking about origin stories, I wanna bring you—Dave LaMattina—into the conversation. You directed this film about Caroll's life and work. And I wonder how you got to know Caroll?

00:06:18 Dave Guest

You know, in some ways, it was dumb luck. I wanted to always work in family entertainment and the premier destination for that, of course, is *Sesame Street*. And so, in 2005, I interned at Sesame Workshop, just in home video. I never met Caroll. And I didn't know who he was until I was talking to a friend about how much I loved the internship and she said, "Oh, I'm related to Caroll Spinney!"

And I said, "I don't know who that is."

And so, she told me these amazing stories about Caroll and how he had been Big Bird and Oscar since 1969. And I immediately ran

back and told my directing partner, who I directed the film with, Chad Walker, about it. And we said, “Man, we gotta make a film about this.”

And so, I called the one person I still knew at *Sesame Street* and said, “Hey,” you know, “do you think this is something you guys would be interested in?” And she forwarded us onto the, you know, the head of PR there. And we thought, “Well, we’re never gonna hear back from them.”

I think within a day we got an email back saying, “Oh, we love this idea. You should come in to meet Carroll.” And so, we went, a week later, and met Carroll and his wife, Deb, and Oscar the Grouch—who also attended the meeting.

00:07:24	Jesse	Host	<i>[Chuckles.]</i> It’s a classic show business good cop, bad cop situation. You know, you have—the talent gets to be nice and then you bring in Oscar the Grouch to be the heavy.
00:07:33	Dave	Guest	<i>[Carroll chuckles.]</i> Yeah, I mean, it was absolutely insane to be sitting in that room and have Carroll, during the meeting, just sit down, reach into his duffel bag, and pull out Oscar the Grouch. And Oscar comes to life. It’s not like... it’s not like there’s a puppet there. It’s like there’s another person. And Oscar, without making any sort of formal introduction, is just alive and looking and blinking and, you know, Chad starts to tell the story about his wife having a gluten allergy. ‘Cause Carroll has a gluten allergy, and Oscar hasn’t said anything to this point. And all the sudden, he just goes, <i>[deeply]</i> “Boring!” And cuts Chad off.
00:08:03	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i> Dave: And, uh... Carroll: That’s terrible. Dave: At that point we thought we were in good shape.
00:08:07	Jesse	Host	Carroll: <i>[Laughs.]</i> What was Big Bird like when Big Bird was created?
00:08:12	Carroll	Guest	He was the ugliest looking thing I ever saw. It was built around me and it didn’t exist when I—so, I—they said—I went in for measurements and they tried seeing how they would build it and they had never built anything quite like that, before. Although, it was something that Jim had always wanted to build: a really silly and funny bird. Sort of—and his—when it was being built around me, I said, “I should get to know more of what I’m going to be playing. What’s it gonna be like?” And he said, “Well, think of Mortimer Snerd and kind of a <i>[in a nasal voice]</i> ‘well, hi there, Mr. Bergen.’” Edgar Bergen’s character. One of his many characters—well, three characters. He—so... that’s how it started.
00:08:55	Jesse	Host	Let’s take a listen to Big Bird from the first season of <i>Sesame Street</i> . And you can’t see Big Bird... but he looks like Big Bird, but not like Big Bird. It’s very disconcerting.
00:09:10	Carroll	Guest	Very much so.

00:09:11 Jesse Host
00:09:12 Clip Clip

[Laughing.] Yeah.
[Fades in.]

Speaker 1: Oh, that?!

Big Bird: Woah! That is some kind of word! Woah!

Music: Bold, rousing music reminiscent of something that would be played by a marching band.

Big Bird: *[He begins to sing. He pronounces the alphabet phonetically as though it were one long word.]*

*ABC-DEF-GHI-JKL-MNOP-QRSTUV-WXYZ.
It's the most remarkable word I've ever seen!
ABC-DEF-GHI-JKL-MNOP-QRSTUV-WXYZ.
I wish I knew exactly what I mean!
It starts out like an "A" word, as anyone can see.
But somewhere in the middle, it gets awfully "QR" to me.
ABC-DEF-GHI-JKL-MNOP-QRSTUV-WXYZ.
If I ever find out just what this word can mean,
I'll be the smartest bird the world has ever seen!*

[Speaking.] Uh, maybe Gordan would know.

00:09:55 Caroll Guest

[The clip fades out.]
[Pitching his voice high.] See, I don't think I sound like that anymore.

00:09:58 Jesse Host

[Laughs.] When did you find the... the heart of Big Bird that I think we—all of us who know and love Big Bird know now—which is this feeling of a child looking out at the world?

00:10:18 Caroll Guest

Well, I think it came from the—we had—first, we used the other songs that had been written, like "Octopus Garden" and stuff like that. And it was the writers who wrote stories. I real—and they were poignant stories that Big Bird would always try to be helpful and wanted to be liked. But he would run into dramatic situations. And gradually I—we had come upon a point where I said, "I think he shouldn't be just a big, goofy guy. He should be a kid. Even though he's 8 feet 2. 'Cause the kids come in different sizes. He—his—kind of developed as he lived his stories. Which were so beautifully written. 'Cause we had a really fabulous group of writers. At one point there were 17 of them, when we were making 130 new shows every week—every year.

00:11:11 Jesse Host

So, I think his character kind of grew into what he is. Dave, do you remember what Big Bird meant to you, when you were the age that you watched *Sesame Street*?

00:11:21 Dave Guest

You know, it's funny. I didn't, until we went back on set the first day and saw Big Bird. And all of the sudden, there's just this wave of emotion that rolls over you. I mean, it just—you don't really think about Big Bird—means to you, he's just there. He's just your friend. He's just someone that you identify with. And so I think, for—you know—at least for all of us on the team that made the film, there was some point—and episode or a skit—that, you know, it's like that moment in *Ratatouille* where you go right back to your childhood.

And, for me, it was a lot of the stuff with *Big Bird in China*. I remember Big Bird feeling so lost in that film. And I remember, as a child, really identifying with that and... I don't know, it just—having someone to identify with and see, on screen, go through what you go through as a child—I guess for me he was just, I don't know, a friend.

00:12:14	Jesse	Host	You know, I watched <i>Sesame Street</i> as a small child, and I was born in 1981. And then I am now watching it with my son, who's two. And every—each time, as I've returned to the show, that feeling of recognition of Big Bird as being... your—as being you, on screen. The best part of you, on screen. You know, maybe not the most sophisticated part of you, on screen, but the part of you that—you know—wants to understand the world and be kind, is so powerful. Like, just such an overwhelming feeling.
00:12:55	Dave	Guest	Yeah, you know, Sonia Manzano—in the film—said—who plays Maria—says that she always preferred Big Bird because he's complicated, emotionally. Like a kid is. And to just have that to identify with—I'm having the same thing. I was born in 1980 and I have a son who will be two, in August. And we took him to see a stage show, and just to see Big Bird there, even, and how he interacts with kids. And seeing my son go through it, now. It's remarkable. It's still the same. It still has the same effect. We may have felt like we outgrew it, but once you're back into it, it's right there. It's the same emotions.
00:13:32	Jesse	Host	Caroll, can you tell me a little bit about how you physically inhabit the Big Bird costume?
00:13:39	Caroll	Guest	Well, it's—it's funny, it's rather low-tech, mostly. I—it—I put on the bird feet. And the leggings used to be a kind of a strap that reached up and onto a belt I'd strap around me. And I'd wear shorts. And the feet are attached to the legs.
00:13:58	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Caroll: But then they— Jesse: I liked seeing—I liked seeing an actual—like, you strapping on an actual belt [<i>laughing</i>] to hold up your leg pants. Caroll: Right.
00:14:07	Caroll	Guest	Well, then they made it more practical. They made it like a—more like hip boots, where you put on, you know, pants that are made of rubber and those—that case, and the feet are attached just like hip boots. But this—now, they're—it's all orange fleece and—with those pink, stripe circles around his legs. Then the rest of it is a—all put together, one piece. And my assistant picks it up by the lower beak and a tab, that you can't see, which is hid in the feathers. You know, yellow cloth. She could pick it up and it's, like, made of series of hoops getting wider to make his size and smaller as it goes up the neck. I step—I lean over, and they slide him over me. I reach up and put my hand in this head and wiggle my fingers into place to get the controls so my little finger will move the eyes. I've learned, since I have a monitor inside to study, I look down and study his face—how to angle him to show—for either joy or worry or angst. My left hand goes into the left arm and the right one can move up and down, because of a fishing line and a seesaw movement. But it can't grab anything like my left hand.

00:15:23	Jesse	Host	Any props I use have to be picked up by my left hand. So. You'll hear the rest of my conversation with Carol Spinney and Dave LaMattina after a break. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:15:33	Music	Music	Thumpy, energetic music plays.
00:15:35	Jesse	Promo	Support for NPR and the following message come from Collette Travel.

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00:16:10	Promo	Promo	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i></p> <p>Music: Holiday music plays.</p> <p>Speaker: Did you get a smart speaker for a gift, over the holidays? Well, consider it the gift that keeps on giving, right?! Because it can help you keep up with the news. Just say, "Play NPR" to hear your local NPR station and all your favorite NPR shows, as well.</p>
00:16:24	Jesse	Promo	<p><i>[Music ends.]</i></p> <p>Hey, it's Jesse. The year is drawing to a close. And remember that now is the perfect time to give to your local NPR Member Station. You can make a difference in your community, keep public radio going, by giving at donate.NPR.org/bullseye. Again, that's donate.NPR.org/bullseye. And thanks!</p>
00:16:47	Promo	Promo	<p>Music: Upbeat, sci-fi sounding music plays.</p> <p>Dan McCoy: Hey! I'm Dan McCoy.</p> <p>Stuart Wellington: I'm Stuart Wellington.</p> <p>Elliott Kalan: And I'm Elliott Kalan. Together, we are <i>The Flop House</i>.</p> <p>Dan: A podcast where we watch a bad movie and then talk about it!</p> <p>Elliott: Movies like--<i>Space Hobos! Into the Outer Reaches of the Unknown and the Things That we Don't Know: The Movie</i>, and also--<i>Who's That Grandma?</i></p> <p>Stuart: <i>Zazzle-Zippers! Breakdown 2 and Backhanded Compliment</i>.</p> <p>Dan: <i>Elvis is a Policeman!</i></p> <p>Elliott: <i>Baby Crocodile and the Happy Twins!</i></p> <p>Dan: <i>Leftover Potatoes?</i></p> <p>Stuart: <i>Station Wagon 3.</i></p>

Elliott: *Herbie Goes to Hell.*

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00:17:34	Jesse	Host	<p>Dan, Elliott, and Stuart: <i>[In unison]</i> Byeee!</p> <p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. This week, we're looking back on <i>Bullseye</i> guests we lost in 2019. Right now, we're listening to my conversation with Caroll Spinney, who died in December. For over 50 years, he played Big Bird on <i>Sesame Street</i>. He was the subject of the 2014 documentary, <i>I Am Big Bird</i>. Dave LaMattina, the film director, is also in on the conversation.</p>
00:18:11	Caroll	Guest	<p>Are you ever—when you're in the costume—especially now and recently, worried about just, simply put, your safety?</p> <p><i>[Beat.]</i> Uh, well, I don't think there's generally much danger. Although I did have some very dangerous moments when, one time, a klieg light missed me by 18 inches. Weighed over 100 pounds.</p>
00:18:24	Jesse	Host	<p>Because you have to walk around, only—and your only reference is a view through the camera's eyes. You can't see out of the costume, right?</p>
00:18:32	Caroll	Guest	<p>No, I can't. But—and it used to be—the television wires going to the TV sets was like an inch and a half thick. It was a very big cable. Now it's the size of a regular little cable. So, that's not quite so dangerous. But also, a real tripper. And I have fallen down a few times. Fallen off a few stages. One—quite a fall, one of them. In Guam.</p>
00:18:55	Jesse	Host	<p>I guess what I mean is that, you know, without being indelicate—while, by all appearances, you seem to be a really healthy dude, you're also an 80-year-old man.</p>
00:19:06	Caroll	Guest	<p>Yeah.</p>
00:19:07	Jesse	Host	<p>For whom... if you, you know—if you fell and... whatever! Things happen, right? You could break your hip and get a blood clot and die!</p>
00:19:17	Caroll	Guest	<p>Yeah. Well. I guess everybody has that problem when they reach 80, too—also. But...</p>
00:19:22	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<p>Jesse: But <i>[chuckling]</i> not everyone has the problem of walking around in a giant yellow suit, right?</p>
00:19:27	Caroll	Guest	<p>Caroll: No—walking around when you can't see. And you have to walk confidently. And I try to study everything that's around me. And my assistant, Lars, I'll have her aim me, because I can't see. We have a little—we can remove a feather or two, but now we're in HD, you can't do that. You could even see that little spot there's a feather missing, 'cause everything shows. But it—there's some danger. One time—that same klieg light smashed to piece and it was—had been lit. So, a big burning chunk of asbestos—and I didn't think it burned, but it was like a glowing coal. It landed in one of those... fluffy rings of pink on—around his legs. And set—the cloth they had used to make it was highly flammable, it turned out.</p>

And suddenly I'm looking down, inside, and I said, "I—it suddenly feels hot." I look down and I see nothing—orange flame, and they were—started getting long enough to go up, inside the suit. And I was like, "Oh my god." I said, "Hey! I'm on fire!" And the—all the people were just looking—worrying about—'cause I had almost gotten hit. It was only a matter of seconds between the hit and me being on fire. And one of the camera men—I'll give his name, Richie King—he saved my life. 'Cause he went over and he patted the flame out with his hands.

And so, I almost burned to death at the same time as almost being crushed to death.

00:20:44 Jesse Host

I wanna play a clip that you share in the movie, Dave, that I—it was something that I hadn't thought about since I was a toddler, I guess—or hadn't seen since I was a toddler. And that is the show that came after the passing of the character Mr. Hooper—which was precipitated by the passing of the man who played him. And, you know, Mr. Hooper's store was sort of the center of *Sesame Street*. And there was really a lot of question as to how to address that this had happened.

00:21:32 Clip Clip

And Big Bird turned out to be at the center of it. Let's take a listen.
Susan: Big Bird... Mr. Hooper's not coming back.

Big Bird: *[Beat.]* Why not?

Susan: *[Beat.]* Big Bird, when people die... they don't come back.

Big Bird: Ever?

Susan: No. Never.

Big Bird: *[Voice wavering.]* Why not?

Luis: Well, Big Bird... they're dead. They can't come back.

Big Bird: *[Getting upset.]* Well, he's gonna come back! Why—who's gonna take care of the store?! And who's gonna make my birdseed milkshakes and tell me stories?

David: Big Bird, I'm gonna take care of the store. Mr. Hooper, he left it to me. And I'll make you your milkshakes and we'll all tell you stories.

[Big Bird makes a quiet sound of distress.]

And we'll make sure you're okay.

Susan: Sure, we'll look after you.

Big Bird: Oh. *[Beat.]*

00:22:29 Jesse Host
00:22:31 Caroll Guest
00:22:35 Jesse Host

I mean, it's hard for me to listen to even now.

Oh, I'm starting to cry, myself.

What was it like when you got that—when you—when they handed you that script?

00:22:40	Caroll	Guest	<p>Well, I was one—it's—one of our funniest writers was the one that wrote it. It was the head writer at that time. Fabulous. Norman Stiles. I thought it was probably the greatest script I'd ever seen come down to us, to use. And I thought it was beautifully done. Because the question was: do you tell four-year-olds about people dying? And they thought you could just—we'd just say, "Well, Mr. Hooper has retired in Florida." You know.</p>
			<p>But that was just an easy way out. So, they did some research and said, "We think we can do this." And I think they did a great job. I think it would be a good service to have that as a video to show children who've lost their grandparent or something. But anyway, it really was—I think—beautifully done. One of the finest things we ever did.</p>
00:23:27	Jesse	Host	<p>Dave, do you remember—do you remember when that happened?</p>
00:23:30	Dave	Guest	<p>You know, it's funny. I don't remember watching that episode as a child. I don't know if it was—happened at a time where I was either too young or too old, but I don't remember watching it as a child. So, the first time I watched it was when we dug back into—for this film.</p>
			<p>And, as a filmmaker, from that perspective it's really hard to tell that story, because you can't improve on the genius that is Norman Stiles and Caroll and the cast and John Stone, who directed that episode. It was—it was perfect. But you need to tell the story. And that's one of those scenes that, you know—Chad, who also edits the film, put together and we watched on the first try. I mean, I was—actually happened to be on a train on the way to go to the funeral of my best friend from childhood. And, um... it was like I was watching it for the first time. Because I, you know, I'm sitting on the train crying.</p>
			<p>And... yeah, it's just such a wonderful, wonderful performance that—even though I don't remember it from childhood—it still struck me the same way, all these years later, which is—you know—a testament to all those people who were involved in that episode.</p>
00:24:34	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Beat.]</i> Dave, what's the thing that you saw in Caroll that you saw reflected in Big Bird that made you wanna make a feature documentary?</p>
00:24:44	Dave	Guest	<p>Love. Just... the love that radiates from Caroll and his wife, Deb, is remarkable. It's intoxicating to be around. It makes things a little bit brighter, I think, for all of us that have been a part of this film. And I think that it has made us live our lives a little bit differently, just knowing—getting to know Caroll. Let me remove Big Bird from the equation. We said to someone, the other day, you know—well, a lot of times, now, we approach a situation—you know—we get a lot of fan mail directed to Caroll. And a lot of it takes a lot of time for us to respond to or to share things with, but we do it. Because our, sort of, way we approach things now is, "How would Caroll and Deb do this?"</p>
			<p>That love is so intertwined with Big Bird. You know, you can't—you can't separate it. That's what makes Big Bird—and someone says that, in the film. "That's what makes Big Bird who he is." And so, that is something that we were really... amazed to discover, when</p>

we—when we jumped into this project. And really happy that we feel like we capture it in the film.

00:25:49 Jesse Host When I started watching *Sesame Street* with my son, who's a toddler, and I was reminded of how deep that... how deep that well of love that seemed to come out of that show was. And still does come out of that show. I wonder if that's part of what has kept you, Caroll, so deeply tied to this world for 45 years.

00:26:17 Caroll Guest Well, I—kind of encouraged by the fact an awful lot of artists, or performance or paint, do seem to have a long life and it—there's—perhaps it's because there's a lot of purpose, in life, for them and it's not—hasn't become boring.

And I—my hero is Señor Wences. You remember? “S'alright? S'alright.” And he did the funny things on Ed Sullivan. Course that's way before your time, but still sometimes you'd see his stuff. He performed on the very last day he lived. On stage in Madrid, where he's really from. And it was a basically half-puppet act and mostly a ventriloquist, but without a traditional ventriloquist dummy. He'd draw a face on his hand and use his thumb, folded, as a—as the lower jaw. And talk to Yan.

Well, he performed on the last day of his life. He went home and went to bed. And he—that was what he—he didn't get up. But *[chuckling]* kind of a nice way to go, since he was 102. So, he's my great hero. I'd love to emulate him, and I don't know if I'll be that lucky. I feel 80 is—definitely feels older than 79. So—but I'm very optimistic. And optimism, I think, is a—is one of the things that is good to live on.

00:27:38 Jesse Host Well, Dave, Caroll, thank you so much for taking the time to be on *Bullseye*. It was really great to get to talk to you.

00:27:42 Caroll Guest Well, I love NPR, and thanks for asking us to be on.

00:27:45 Dave Guest Thanks for having us.

00:27:46 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** And Caroll—

Caroll: Thank you, Jess. Thank you.

Jesse: Thank you for all the work that you've done.

00:27:48 Caroll Guest *[Music fades in.]*
[In his Big Bird voice.] Thank you very much, Jess. Haha.

[Returning to his regular voice.] I didn't notice you were here, Big Bird. You used to take up a lot more room.

00:27:55 Music Music *[They chuckle.]*
Interstitial music plays.

00:27:58 Jesse Host Caroll Spinney and Dave LaMattina. Dave's documentary about Caroll is really great. It's called *I Am Big Bird: The Caroll Spinney Story*.

00:28:08 Music Music *[Music fades out.]*
Rhythmic music plays.

00:28:12 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is produced at MaximumFun.org world headquarters, overlooking MacArthur Park in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where, the other day,

Anderson Paak played a concert! Hey! Anderson Paak! Come on *Bullseye*, please! *[Laughs.]* We wanna have you. Invitation is open.

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 and 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 we have been doing this show for almost two decades, now. When someone who has been on this show passes away, it's a reminder that I've been doing this a very long time. You can find almost all of our archives on our website, at MaximumFun.org. You can also find many of them in your favorite podcast app or on Facebook or YouTube. One guest who passed away who I really loved talking to—I had him on the show twice—was Harvey Pekar, the creator of the comic *American Splendor*, which is one of my favorite works of American literature. And Harvey Pekar was everything you would hope you could find in a... grumpy uncle. A wonderful, brilliant man and a great interview subject. I talked to him by phone a couple of times, back when I was producing this show out of Santa Cruz and you can find those interviews on our website, at MaximumFun.org.

I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

00:29:54 Promo Promo

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]