

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> .
00:00:14	Music	Music	"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse	Host	Look, I've been singing it for years, but Lynda Barry is a genius. She's a comics artists and writer. She started her career as an undergrad at Evergreen College. She made a regular comic there called Ernie Pook's Comeek—I hope I'm saying that right. It ran for almost 30 years! She's written over a dozen books, some of them novels, most of them compilations.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
			And, more recently, some how-to books. Her work is usually at least somewhat autobiographical. She talks about her childhood, her family, her past relationships. The stories are funny, but also poignant. Lately, she's been teaching. She's an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin, in Madison. And she has published a book about it, sort of. It's called <i>Making Comics</i> . It came out last year. It is amazing. It's her third instructional book about creativity. At the heart of it is a belief that Lynda has: anyone can draw, anyone can make comics. The struggle, she says, is putting pen to paper and getting out of your head long enough to actually make something. That very practical philosophy, combined with a 40+ year career of making brilliant comics, helped Lynda earn a MacArthur Genius Grant, late last year.
			Like I said, genius! Anyway. Enough introduction. It's time to welcome back to the show my friend, the brilliant, one and only, Lynda Barry. Let's get into it.
00:01:47	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:49	Jesse	Host	Lynda Barry! Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . It's nice to have you back on the show!
00:01:52	Lynda Barry	Guest	I'm delighted to be back!
00:01:54	Jesse	Host	And congratulations on being an official genius! I'm very happy for you.
00:01:57	Lynda	Guest	<i>[Bursts into startled laughter.]</i> Thank you very much.
00:02:00	Jesse	Host	Lynda, why did you want to write a book specifically about comics, to follow up your—what is now becoming a string of books about how to be creative?
00:02:13	Lynda	Guest	Well, one of the reasons was because of everybody that I've ever met who—when they find out that I'm a cartoonist—always says, "I wish I could draw." And I know that people can draw and I—after teaching at the University of Wisconsin Madison for about seven years—I kinda had a bunch of recipes for how to make that happen. And so that's the—the book, <i>Making Comics</i> , is kind of like a recipe book or a cookbook that's full of these exercises. And I also wanted

to make a book that, if there was a teacher that wanted to teach making comics, but they felt self-conscious about their own drawing—which is usually enough to make people not teach something—I wanted to make a book that was, sort of, anyone could do it in that anybody who wanted to use this book to lead a class could do that. Or you could use the book and pretend you were in my class.

[Chuckling.] So, there's a lot of stuff in there, you know, about my attendance policy and seating and grades.

[Jesse chuckles.]

Even though I know that people having it won't be in my class, I feel like it can scare you, a little bit, that there's a teacher there saying, "You have to be here on time and you have to attend class." But mainly, I just wanted to make a book of these exercises that—over the years—have always seemed to work. And not just work to help people make drawings, but work to actually make them feel good while they were doing it.

00:03:32 Jesse Host
00:03:36 Lynda Guest

Have you ever been self-conscious of your own drawing?
Yeah! Yeah. I think that that's part of the deal. I think that's always a little bit part of it. And self-consciousness, on one hand feels terrible, but there's always a little bit of a thrill with it, too. And so, I think that—you know—when you're drawing, it's always kind of a live performance. Especially if you're drawing with real paper and real ink, versus on a tablet that has that step back feature or the delete button. If you're going forward, it's sort of like a live performance. And it's a record of how your hand is moving. That's what a drawing is, is a record of how your human hand is moving and sort of the traces it left behind.

So, there's always an element of freak out in it, but that's the part that's good. If I can show people that that's the part that's fun—and the fastest way that I can do that is by asking them to close their eyes. And I ask them to draw something for me for one minute, not opening their eyes, and I always ask them to draw a bacon and egg breakfast with coffee and silverware—with their eyes closed—for one minute. And when people do it, they're freaking out. And then they open their eyes, and they're always super happy. They always start laughing, because they can see the bacon and eggs and the—it's all there. They didn't see it happen. And then I ask them to do the same thing but draw a mermaid. And *[laughs]* the kind of laughing that happens after that is even more hilarious, because the mermaids definitely there, but she's there in all these crazy pieces. Like, if they lift their pen while they're trying to draw her head and then they can't remember where the head is, so the features might be over an inch. Or her—they, you know—the coconut shell bra might be on the wrong side of the page. But it's also hilarious.

And so that, to me, is a different kind of drawing. There's all kinds of drawings, just like there's all kinds of alcoholic drinks. And that comics are a very particular kind. And anybody who can write the alphabet or... actually already learned how to make comics, because—you know how we call the letters of the alphabet characters? We all had to learn how to draw those characters. And,

00:05:51 Jesse Host in the beginning, writing is drawing. So, it's getting back to that very basic—and I do think it's a—it's a native human language, drawing. So, it's getting back to that—getting people right back to that. Lynda, I like that your go-to metaphor is, "Like there's all different kinds of alcoholic drinks."

[Lynda cackles.]

00:06:05 Lynda Guest You could say, like, "There's all different kinds of birds," or "There's all different kinds of fruits. Houses."
[Struggling to get it together.] I know—I guess I'm thinking about the perfect environment for making comics.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:06:15 Jesse Host And sometimes it involves a couple of drinks. *[Chuckles.]* So, what part of drawing or your own drawing were you self-conscious about? Or are you self-conscious about?

00:06:22 Lynda Guest Well, if—for instance, if I'm going to draw—like I was drawing this morning. I was drawing looking out the window of my hotel. And there are buildings and cars. And buildings and cars in general tend to be difficult, if you're concentrating on perspective or trying to get it to look right. But there is this point where I just move my hand so fast, that it's almost like a little kid drawing. And if I can get—if I can—if my hand can move faster than me arguing with it, then I'm not self-conscious. But if I'm arguing with my hand and my hand's slowing down because of it, that's when I become self-conscious. And that's the beauty of asking people to close their eyes and draw, because—for most people, particularly people who gave up drawing early on—for most people, they can draw for longer with their eyes closed than they can with their eyes open.

And, you know, most people quit drawing at about the age of eight or nine, when they realize they couldn't draw a nose or hands. And that was it! They just felt washed up and most people give up then and don't come back. But the cool thing is, for those people who quit drawing at that time, their drawing style is intact from when they were that age. And so, for comics, those people have an advantage over people who've drawn the entire time of their life, because that drawing style that is still in their hands—that never, kind of, got educated—is just perfect for making original comics.

00:07:47 Jesse Host What are the special things about comics, specifically, as a medium? The combination of words and abstracted pictures?

00:07:59 Lynda Guest You know, to me, when you put these two things together, they have a power. Like, to me, they have the power of music. You know? Where there's lyrics and then there is the melody. And when you put those two things together, there is a power. And when you keep them apart, that power is diminished. And the way you find that out is when you're in the eighth grade, and you write down all the lyrics to your favorite song.

[Jesse agrees.]

'Cause it—you—it feels like a poem: "What goes up must come down, spinning wheels have got to go around." Right? And then you look at the—you look at the lyrics and they're just lame! But

somehow, when there's music with it, it has this power. And that's how I feel about comics: that comics are this mix of words and pictures. And also, comics take advantage of the basic human ability to—a need to recognize upright human faces and the mood that that face is and also the body and the position of the body and the position of the hands. That's what human beings are interested in, and we recognize that stuff at an instant. So, that's one of the reasons why these—just these little marks can actually express someone looking furious or really, really scared or really happy or really bored. You can do it in a—just a few marks. And almost everyone can do it. Yeah, almost everyone. If you're willing to—if you're willing to give it a try.

- 00:09:17 Jesse Host It really does feel like an expression of some kind of underlying neurological reality—that our brains are looking for these specific kinds of patterns and comics are in the business of delivering those patterns without too much extraneous stuff.
- 00:09:37 Lynda Guest And that's why they've been around forever and ever and ever. I mean, when I look at the cave paintings or I look at medieval manuscripts, or even just, like, really—I found these rudimentary drawings that were by a kid from the 13th century Russia, that look just like comics. They actually look like Ivan Brunetti's comics. And so, this idea that this—I think this is a very old language. It's a language that we've had with us forever. And then, at some point, it got a name: comics.
- 00:10:08 Jesse Host Why do you think you went into comics and not prose or art? Fine—so-called “fine art”, or whatever?
- 00:10:18 Lynda Guest I did do both of those things. I did care about writing prose, and I do care about making fine art. But neither of them fly the way comics do. And I also think part of it was my childhood. And I came from a house that didn't have books and didn't have—that was just a very troubled house, but my mom was also a kleptomaniac, and she worked at a hospital. And she—her particular—the thing she couldn't resist stealing was scissors. And so, she works at a hospital, so—and there's, like, lots of kinds of scissors at hospitals, right? And especially in surgery. So, she'd come home with all these berserk scissors. And some of them were really tiny. And then I'd steal scissors from her. *[Laughs.]*

I still—when I see scissors, I still almost always have an urge to steal them. But I would steal these little, tiny surgical scissors from her, and it's gonna sound sad, but it was actually pretty awesome. And the only thing that we had that we—that was print was the newspaper. We got the daily paper. And I used to cut out the little characters—the little black and white characters—during the daily strips and keep them in a little Sucrets tin. And those were my toys. And those were, like, the little—and they were also small enough to hide from her, 'cause she was also in the habit of—if she knew you liked something—to just take it from you.

So, a lot of it, I feel like I really stared at comics and got really interested in the shapes of comics and the shapes of characters. Because another thing about comics is their silhouettes are really, really important. And so, I feel like that was very early for me. I fell in love with that stuff. And I also remember making a promise, when I was kid. Remember when you're a kid and you kind of suddenly understand the concept for the rest of your life? Like, when I first

understood that concept, I remember thinking, “I’m gonna remember something for the rest of my life.” And I—and it was just—there was a fence that was across the street from me, when I made that vow. So, that’s what I chose to remember. And I still do remember *[laughing]* this fence! From when I was, like, four!

But I also knew that there would be this point when I could read. And I looked at the comics and picked the five comics that I was going to read for the rest of my life. And one of them was *Family Circus*. It’s the only that’s left out of the five that I picked. And I still, whenever I see it, absolutely read it and love it with all my heart. What were the five?

00:12:35 Jesse Host
00:12:36 Lynda Guest

The five were *Brenda Starr*, *Dondi*, *Family Circus*, *[chuckles]* *Apartment 3G*, and *Prince Valiant*.

[They laugh.]

‘Cause they just looked like there was so much going on in all of those. You know?

00:12:55 Jesse Host

Those—I mean, like, those were the ones—you just listed—there’s one or two that maybe wasn’t in the newspaper when I was kid, but you pretty much just listed every comic strip that most baffled me, as child. *[Laughs.]*

00:13:10 Lynda Guest
00:13:12 Crosstalk Crosstalk

I think that’s why I picked them!

Lynda: I mean, I couldn’t read the—I couldn’t—

Jesse: *[Laughing helplessly.]* I remember looking at *Prince Valiant* and being like, “What is this?!”

00:13:17 Lynda Guest

[Laughing.] Right?! Well, he looked like a cute guy to me, when I was four. You know? It’s like, “That’s the dude with the pageboy.” But yeah, they were baffling, but again I made those decisions based on the drawings. *Family Circus* and *Dondi* were the only ones that had little kids in them. I think *Brenda Starr* was about to marry the wolfman, right when I picked that one for the rest of my life. You know, ‘cause yeah. I still wanna marry the wolfman.

[Jesse breaks into laughter.]

00:13:44 Crosstalk Crosstalk

I do!

Lynda: I—my husband is the closest I could find.

00:13:47 Lynda Guest

Jesse: *[Chuckling.]* Everyone’s dream.

Yeah! Lots and lots of hair everywhere is—that’s my—if I was running for election, that would be my *[wheezes with laughter]* my slogan.

00:13:56 Jesse Host

[Chuckling.] My wife once told me her celebrity crush was Benicio del Toro. That’s pretty—that’s almost the same thing!

00:14:02 Lynda Guest

Mm-hm!

[Jesse laughs.]

I do like Benicio. Yes, absolutely. But Chewbacca is actually the top choice.

[Jesse cackles.]

00:14:17 Jesse Host I'm a Wookiee-hound!
[Laughs.] Lynda, I didn't know much about the circumstances of your childhood until you described them a little bit in a talk that you gave, this past year, at our conference, MaxFunCon.

[Lynda hums in agreement.]

00:14:34 Lynda Guest What was your family, when you were a kid?
 Well, so my mom's from the Philippines. She came to the states when she was in—uh, she was probably in her early 20s. And then the rest of her family followed pretty rapidly. And my dad's white, and he split really early on. So, I grew up in an extended Filipino family. The language in my family sounded like this, "*Matigason ulo ni Lynda. Nakupo!*" That means: "Hard is the head of Lynda, oh my!" *[Chuckles.]* And it was an immigrant family and had a lot of crazy things that happen in a lot of immigrant families with, you know, a million people living in the same house. I felt really fortunate to have grown up in that family and with that extended family and particularly with my grandma.

But, yeah, that was my childhood. And, like a lot of immigrant families, I didn't learn to—I understand Tagalog, especially when people are mad. I understand it. But not as well as I could, and I don't speak it and neither do my cousins. It's this idea that if we learn to speak it, there was a fear that we'd have an accent. That's what my grandma told me. And they wanted us to be Americans that did—that had no accent at all. But, of course, now we know that we wouldn't have had accents. But still, that was one of their fears. It's kind of sad.

00:15:47 Jesse Host So, your grandmother was the person, maybe, who you spent the most time with as a kid? The family member?

00:15:54 Lynda Guest She was—yeah, well she was the—she was kind of the person who, sort of, ran the household and was home with us—you know, when our parents were off working. And it was this big, extended family and so she was really, really, really important to us. She's from Iloilo, and we were all schooled with the Iloilo school of childrearing, which is really story-based. Like, she'd say, *[with a Filipino accent]* "Lynda, when you were born, the God—he made a castle for you, when you're dead. When you're dead, in Heaven, he made a castle for you to live in. And it's made of gold bricks. It's so beautiful, Lynda. But every time you're bad, he takes one brick! And your castle is getting very, very small."

[Jesse laughs through his nose.]

She would do that. And sometimes she'd just look and me and make a—the symbol you do with your finger and thumb to show how something's really small? That's all she'd do, and say, "That's how small your house after you are dead *[laughing]* is going to be."

[They both chuckle.]

00:16:50 Jesse Host We'll wrap up with Lynda Barry after a quick break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:16:57 Promo Promo **Music:** Guitar strums as singer counts out "One, two, one two three four." Up-tempo guitar and harmonica music plays in the background.

Justin McElroy: Hi, everybody! My name is Justin McElroy.

Dr. Sydnee McElroy: I'm Sydnee McElroy!

Justin: We're both doctors, and—

Sydnee: Nope. Just me.

Justin: Okay, well Sydnee's a doctor and I'm a medical enthusiast.

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: And we created *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine!

Sydnee: Every week I dig through the annals of medical history to bring you the wildest, grossest—sometimes dumbest—tales of ways we've tried to treat people throughout history!

Justin: Eh, lately we do a lot of modern fake medicine. 'Cause everything's a disaster. But it's slightly less of a disaster every Friday, right here on MaximumFun.org, as we bring you *Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine*. And remember:

Sydnee: Don't drill a hole in your head.

[Music ends.]

00:17:39 Promo Promo

Music: Upbeat, fast music.

Yo quiero malade!

Felix Contreras: Hi, this Felix Contreras from NPR Music's *Alt. Latino* podcast. As part of our black history month coverage, we take a look at the Afro-Latin root of Reggaeton and its rise over the last decade to become one of the most listened to musical genres on the planet. To check it out, download *Alt. Latino* from wherever you get your podcasts.

00:18:02 Jesse Host

[Music fades out.]

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Lynda Barry, is a writer and cartoonist. She's published dozens of books. Her latest is called *Making Comics*. It's an illustrated guide on how to make comics! Let's get back into our interview.

00:18:30 Lynda Guest

What, when you got to college and learned about the experiences of all these people who had had very different experiences than you—what was something you learned about that you immediately thought was great?

Well, you know what it was, was when I met my teacher, Marilyn Frasca. And the way I met her was, I used to model for life drawing classes. And I got into it by accident, because my roommate modeled. I didn't know what it was. I had never taken a life drawing class. But she modeled and she made four bucks an hour, right? Which was a lot of money in 1974! And so, one day I was sitting in

the cafeteria, and one of the drawing professors mixed me up with her and saw me and said, “You model, right?”

And I go, “Yeah!” *[Laughs.]*

And he goes, “Well, my model just canceled. Come on—you know, can you model? I have a class waiting?”

I’m like, “Suuure.” And so I followed him and I didn’t understand that in life drawing classes, there’s this whole protocol where you take your clothes off, like, behind some curtain and you wear a kimono and you come out and you look very together and take the kimono off and hold this pose. The only naked posing I had seen was *Playboy*, right? So, I took my clothes off right there. Like, kicked my underpants off my foot and, like, “What do you want me to do?”

And he looked kinda—I remember him looking kinda shocked and everybody else looking kinda shocked. *[Laughs.]* And so, I stood on this little table thing and he said, “Can you do some quick poses?”

And I said, “Sure.” And I started doing these *Playboy* poses. *[Laughs.]* ‘Cause I just didn’t know better. And he—at one point he asked me to tone it down.

[They laugh.]

But anyway, it turned out that I was a really great model, because when I was a kid I was obsessed with Medusa. And I used to practice holding still, like I had turned into stone. And it was during that time that I would model that I found that I could really watch people while they were drawing me. I mean, even if they were drawing my face and staring straight into my eyes, they couldn’t see me watching them. And there was something about being on that end of drawing and watching how people did life drawing. And then one of the professors—so I modeled for everybody. And one of the professors was his teacher named Marilyn Frasca, who smoked. Everybody smoked the whole time while, you know, while they were teaching. That was a time when people smoked while they were, you know, decorating cakes and doing surgery. It didn’t matter, everybody was smoking.

00:20:38 Lynda Guest

And there was something about the—her—the way she taught that the drawings in her class were more far-out and strange. And I couldn’t tell what she was doing that was so different. And that’s when I decided I didn’t wanna be modeling for her class, I wanted to be in her class. And that was the first time I met a teacher—you know, you always just sort of take your teachers for granted that they’re there and they’re gonna show you something. But it was the first time I had a teacher where I really felt like I wanted to know what she was about. I wanted to know how she saw the world and I wanted to get something from her. And I feel like the work I’m doing now is directly related to everything that I learned from her, at that time, at the Evergreen State College.

00:21:20 Jesse Host

Did you show your work to your family?

00:21:22 Lynda Guest

No. And not only that, they wouldn’t have been interested. The only person who actually looked at my work, one time, was my little brother, Mark. I had drawn this picture—it was a comic and there

was a little girl stand—the draw—the image was a little girl standing on a—on a chair, and she was praying to a hanging lightbulb. That was something that I had. You know what, I still do to this day, weirdly. But I used to think that anything that had light in it had God in it. So, she was—that’s where she’d just go to this lightbulb to pray. Anyway, so there’s this drawing and my little brother goes, *[with a breathy, childish voice]* “Lynda! Is this drawing supposed to be symbolic?!”

And I went, “Well—”

And he goes, “Tell me in a minute, my show’s on.” *[Chuckles.]* He didn’t wanna know ‘til the commercial came on. And then forgot that he wanted to hear it. But I was lucky, because they really weren’t interested. So, they never—I never had that conflict of what do you—what does your family think? ‘Cause they didn’t.

00:22:14 Jesse Host

When you write—and this book and many of your books have a lot of text for comics—

[Lynda hums in agreement.]

Do you write... on a piece of paper, with a pencil or do you—do you write on a... computer word processor? Or do you write straight into the—straight into the drawing and then ink it?

00:22:38 Lynda Guest

I don’t ink it. You’re—what you’re seeing, on my work, is first draft. So, I do it with ink right there. And if I make a mistake or I’m not happy with what I did, I’ll draw the whole thing over. But for me, it’s like a live performance. And just like you and I speaking now. And this is a—I owe this to my teacher, Marilyn Frasca, but it’s as if I get into a certain state of mind and I tend to write very slowly. I don’t mean like I think of the word and then write it slowly. I mean, I literally write the alphabet very slowly and I’m—and I try—I do this trick, in my head, where I try to only hear the next word that I’m going to write. I don’t wanna know more than the next word. And then, as I’m writing that word, it’s like I just listen for the next one.

And then, sometimes, at that point the—it’s almost like the screen goes dark. Or the story just stops. And then, at that point, I’ll start drawing. And then while I’m drawing, the story starts up again. So, everything happens. The stuff that you’re seeing in my work, there’s nothing that’s penciled. It’s not drawn out beforehand. It’s first draft. But for every page that you see, in one of my books, there’s probably ten other pages. It’s not that they didn’t make it in—yeah, they didn’t make it in. But it’s not like there was something wrong with them. It’s just that—I just make an enormous amount of—if you’re just doing everything that way, you end up with an enormous amount of work. Versus this idea—if you’ve ever had to write a bio, for example, and they tell you, “We just want it to be 250 words.” And you try to do it on a computer, that can take you hours. Right? ‘Cause you’re just, like, hitting that delete button, trying to make the sentence just right.

Or you can skip the middleman and just write it by hand *[chuckles]* on a piece of paper. So, I’ve just learned to work that way. And I have—I’ve never been good at doing roughs or sketches beforehand. It has to be—it has to be live. It’s in that imperfection

where the soul of the whole thing happens to be. Chris Ware talks about—he's in love with snowflakes and snow. He's really fascinated by them. And also, in particular, how snowflakes have to form around some piece of grit or a piece of dust. And I do think that there's something about that imperfection, that thing that's a little bit out of your control, that—to somehow maintain a place for that. Somehow, in the—in the imperfection that that living thing is, the deeper thing is. And often, we won't see it until years later, when we look at something.

00:25:14 Jesse Host Let's talk about story, for a second. Because story is something that is a really important part of making a lot of kinds of comics and it's something that is covered pretty extensively in this book. And, you know, isn't a part of—it is much less a part of drawing, for example. Which is, you know, was one of the subjects in one of your previous books. How do you access story in a way where you are not asking yourself to be in control and get it right?

00:25:49 Lynda Guest *[Takes a deep breath.]* Well... one of the things is that everybody's working with stories, all day long. I'm doing this book tour with Chris Ware, right now, and he pointed out that all—that's all we do, all day long, is kind of rewrite the day. You know, when you lay in bed and kind of go over your day and, "God, I wish I had said this!" And you don't just do it once. You actually imagine the whole scene. You reimagine the whole scene. And this time, you reimagine yourself saying that thing. And somehow, sort of, fixing it. Like, I think that the—that stories don't exist independently. They're not just something that just flies out into the world.

I really think they're connected to some sort of need, in the same way our kidneys sort of *[chuckling]* develop to—I always compare—I always compare this work to kidneys. I don't know why. I used to do it to the liver, but I just feel like when people picture a liver, they just turned off. And kidneys are cuter, somehow.

[Jesse laughs.]

00:26:45 Jesse Host But I feel like—I feel like—I'm glad you have a hierarchy of internal organ cuteness.

00:26:48 Lynda Guest *[Cackles.]* Well, I—my liver is gorgeous, personally. But most people are flipped out by their livers. But, um—

00:26:53 Jesse Host My spleen is like a golden retriever puppy.

00:26:55 Lynda Guest *[Lets out a wheezing laugh and then an airy whistle.]* I'm whistling.

[They laugh.]

But I do think that this whole thing—everything that we call the arts, I feel like has an absolute biological function. And I think of them as our, kind of, external organs. As something that we need to keep us—I don't know, together. And storytelling is a huge part of that. So, the—for me, with that belief, basically it's as if the—I turn it over to another part of myself. Sort of the dreaming part of myself. But it's amazing how fast, whether you're writing something autobiographical or fiction, basically all you need are a place and a character and often an object—a thing.

I have a student who works with people in prison, and there is a game that is played in prisons all over called cities. And it's usually

played at night and people are shouting to each other through the vents, but basically what they do is they say, *[pretend shouting]* “My name’s Carla! And I work in a nail salon!”

And then somebody will yell what the problem is. “And you’re a junkie! And you need a fix!” And then another person will yell something, and then they all play the roles and start making this story up. She actually figured out how to make a game of it that we used in my class, which is you make a stack of index cards that have places, a stack of index cards that have problems or a desire, and a stack of index cards that have characters. And then you just put three together, and it’s as if—instantly—a story just comes to mind.

So, we’re storytelling people. It isn’t anything we have to learn how to do. What we do have to oftentimes learn how to do is set the conditions for that. And that’s one of the reasons why I, you know, you’ll see that in *Making Comics* and in my other books that I talk a lot about using a timer. Because there is something about having a very limited amount of time to tell a story that allows a story to form this structure. You can do it faster in five minutes than you can if you have five days to think about it. And people who do improv and do it well are perfect examples of that.

00:29:08 Jesse Host

What are the special qualities of comics? What are the things that comics are particularly great at, relative to prose or film or purely visual art?

00:29:22 Lynda Guest

Well, they’re really fast. That’s one thing. And they also allow for a different kind of memory or thinking. I’m thinking, right now, about working with—I was able—I was lucky, at the university, I got to work with some law students who were part of The Innocence Project. So, you know *Making a Murder*? You know that—the Netflix series?

[Jesse confirms.]

This was a—this was the group—that group of people that worked with that. And I got them to take some index cards and draw the central scene from a case they were working on. I gave them some really basic, like, rudimentary ways to draw people. Like, just super, super—almost like little kids. But to draw that central scene, and then to draw a scene that happened before that scene and a scene that happened after. And then I’d say, “So, now let’s draw the scene that’s in between these two scenes.” And when you start to do that, with drawing—drawing these scenes—all of the sudden, you start to realize the piece of information that’s missing. Or a piece of information that you didn’t realize you had until you drew it. It’s as if there’s another part of you that has access—has access to being understood.

I found the same thing when I was working with medical students at Penn State Hershey—to just watch them drawing themselves in a surgical procedure or *[laughs]*... this one woman came in. Was it the—*[stammers]* a medical student, and I had them draw a scene from—a scene from the day before that really stood out to them. And it—she drew his picture of herself actually holding a living, human heart. She got to hold this heart while this woman was

having something done. And then, afterwards—and then what happened afterwards and what happened afterwards, and then the last frame was the woman coming out of her anesthesia and then meeting this medical student and saying to her, “I hear you held my heart.”

00:31:13 Lynda Guest

[Laughs.] I mean—like the—but the drawings themselves, even though they look like, you know, *Beavis and Butthead* kind of—I mean, it’s—you can’t really believe you’re looking at a surgical procedure, and it does look like eighth graders are drawing it. But there is some information there that is able to come through that is very different than the kind of information that comes through from talking.

So, just in terms of—I don’t know, inquiry. Just in terms of trying to understand something in depth, the act of adding drawing—in particular, comic drawing, can just get you somewhere deeper and in a way that you can’t get to with just words. You just can’t get there with just words.

00:31:55 Jesse Host

[Beat.] Lynda, I’m so glad you came back on *Bullseye*. Congratulations on the new book, *Making Comics*, and congratulations on your genius certification. I—

00:32:03 Lynda Guest

Oooh, thank you so much! I love talking to you and—from when I was at MaxFunCon and I got to meet the people who are fans of you and your show, I just felt like there was such a solid, cool family. So, I’m delighted to be one of the third or fourth cousins of this family.

00:32:21 Jesse Host

Lynda Barry. Her new book, *Making Comics*, is out now from the great publisher, Drawn and Quarterly. It’s one of a number of books she’s written about creating, including *Syllabus*, *Notes from an Accidental Professor*, and *Picture This: The Nearsighted Monkey Book*. They are absolutely, breathtakingly inspiring. I cannot—whether or not you think of yourself as a drawer or artist of any kind, you cannot help but be inspired by these incredible books. They are animated by her fun, lively, hilarious voice and her passion for drawing pictures of animals smoking cigarettes. But they *[laughs]* are also incredibly instructive and will get you to put one foot in front of the other to make things in a way that few things I’ve ever read have. They’re really special. So, check out her work.

And, of course, *[chuckling]* her decades of legendary work in alternative comics is also great. But she’s been teaching lately. Relaxed transition music.

00:33:24 Music Music

00:33:28 Jesse Host

That’s the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is produced at MaximumFun.org world headquarters, overlooking McArthur Park in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where this week, our colleague, Chuy, brought avocados from his dad’s avocado orchard in Temecula. So, thanks for the avocados, Jesus and Dad Ambrosio.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer and brings the avocados. We get help from Casey O’Brien. Our production fellows are Jordan Kauwling. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find a collection of music that he has made for *Bullseye* on Bandcamp and it is pay what you will. Just search there for DJW, *Bullseye*.

Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it. And we have decades of interviews in our archives at MaximumFun.org or in your favorite podcast app.

We're also on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* there. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

00:34:39 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]