

00:00:00	Jesse Thorn	Host	Coming to you from my house in Los Angeles, it's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn.
00:00:04	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team.
00:00:12	Jesse	Host	So, they call it a "man on the street" interview, vox pop. Vox populi. You've seen it a hundred times. A reporter goes out onto a busy sidewalk, asks passersby what they think of the president or the economy or a dress somebody wore on an awards show. And then, voila, they have a news package.

*[Music ends in a chorus of cheers.]*

And maybe a hundred more times, you've seen that idea used for comedy. Maybe on *The Daily Show* or Jay Leno doing "Jaywalking", or *Eric Andre*. I could obviously go on. Coyle and Sharpe basically invented that genre of comedy, back in the early 1960s. And they pretty much perfected it, too. These two guys—Jim Coyle and Mal Sharpe—would walk the streets of San Francisco in conservative suits with a tape recorder. Sometimes it was hidden in a briefcase, sometimes it was out in the open. And they'd approach people with, usually, an absurd proposition. Like, "Let's rob a bank together." Or, "You should rent your child to a stranger." Or, "Let's become one person, the three of us."

I first read about Coyle and Sharpe many years ago, in the beloved countercultural zine, *Research*. They made a book about pranks, and Coyle and Sharpe were the highlight of it. They were cult heroes. One of their records was re-issued by Henry Rollins. They were beloved on the legendary freeform radio station, WFMU. But they weren't very well known outside of the folks who'd listen to them on the radio, in the early 1960s. It was an incredible story. Mal Sharpe was basically a San Francisco bohemian. Jim Coyle was maybe an actual con man? Even Mal didn't seem to be entirely sure what his story was. Their work predated the '60s, as we think of the '60s, now. I mean, they weren't hippies. They were—I mean, you could see Mal around town in a beret from time to time, if you're wondering what kind of guy he was. But it was a world before people were on the lookout for someone acting *[chuckling]* crazy and tricking them.

And so, these really straight people would get roped into these insane schemes. I mean, truly mad schemes. I think because their radio show was daily, they just *[laughing]* had to generate a huge amount of insanity and the more insanity you make, the more insane your insanity gets. What they ended up with was something that was almost avant-garde in its total madness. Again, long before the '60s were the '60s. I remember the first time I listened to their recordings, and what blew me away was that something that was then 40 years old could feel so vividly hilarious, but also like it was from another world. I mean, I was born and raised in San Francisco, and I was not born and raised in this San Francisco.

00:03:25	Jesse	Host	Mal went on to become a Bay Area broadcasting and advertising legend. He had a public television show, in San Francisco. He had a band that played regular gigs in North Beach. He had a public radio show playing hot jazz on KCSM, in San Mateo. He was a bon vivant of North Beach. But, at the time, I didn't know any of that
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stuff. I was just listening through a hole in time to the craziest thing I had ever heard in my life. Anyway, I was doing college radio, at the time. And, somehow, I found Mal Sharpe's email address. It was an AOL address. I think [chuckling] he kept that AOL address through his life. And I sent him an email and invited him onto my college radio show. He was already an older guy, but he was glad to do it. He was always glad to talk about his work with Coyle and Sharpe. He was very proud of it. And it was an incredible conversation.

In fact, I think it may have literally been the first interview I ever did, in my life. Anyway. The reason we're talking, this week, about Coyle and Sharpe, is that Mal passed away a couple of months ago, at the age 83. It was a great loss for comedy and for the Bay Area alternative culture community—especially in North Beach. But enough time has passed, now, that I feel like I can remember him as the bright, genial light in my life and in the lives of so many others that he was. Anyway. Here is a little bit of one of the greatest Coyle and Sharpe bits of all time. This was not a hidden microphone. This was the two of them with a portable recording kit that was, like, the size of a backpack.

And they walk up to somebody, on the street. This is someone they have never met before, in their lives. They always said that they liked to go to Union Square, in San Francisco and look for people wearing long wing shoes. Because they were the most likely to be serious and credulous.

00:05:37 Clip

Clip

**Mal Sharpe:** This is Mal Sharpe with another in the series, "Job Opportunities". Every day, I bring an employer out onto the street and have him offer a San Franciscan an interesting and novel job. Now, I have James P. Coyle with me, our employer of the day, and I've just stopped a young man who we're gonna offer a job to.

**Jim Coyle:** I am James P. Coyle and I'm very glad to meet you.

**Speaker:** Same here.

**Jim:** The nature of the job is—it's a little unusual. Just like anything else, there are certain risks entailed in it. You would be working down in a pit, in which I have created—through scientific endeavor, I have created intense flame. People throw objects in the flaming pit. You go through. You pick them up. They name the object; you pick them up. And I charge them admission.

**Speaker:** Yeah, I think I'd be interested. It's something new and exciting. You know, and I like exciting.

**Jim:** The reason I ask, I had an employee before—and I will tell you this directly and honestly—uh... he was a little careless and he—and cautious. I gave him specific instructions and he perished. Now, I want you to understand this before we get any further.

**Speaker:** Oh, yeah.

**Jim:** He did perish.

**Speaker:** I understand. Well, that's—mistakes can happen, sometime.

**Mal:** Now, as I understand it, the death index on this job—they give us a death index—is about 98%. In other words, if you took this job, the chance of your actual perishing would be 98% in favor of your perishing.

00:06:57

**Speaker:** It's a chance! I like to take chances.

**Jim:** What we're trying to do, really, is to create a living Hell. Have people pay admission, they look down in the pit, they see you down there. The flames are all around you. There will be four maniacs with you and you've gotta control them.

**Speaker:** Now, wait a minute, how—I understand that you say four maniacs?

**Jim:** Yes.

**Speaker:** Yeah. And, uh... you mean I got to tell them what to do or try to keep them together or something like that?

**Jim:** Yeah! That's exactly.

**Speaker:** Oooh, yeah.

**Jim:** Control them and see that they don't interfere with you, because they will. That's what they're gonna try and do. They're fully costumed, they're fully protected, and they're gonna be attacking you. And this is part of the attraction.

**Speaker:** Oh, I see. It sounds very interesting.

**Mal:** Have you worked with maniacs before?

**Speaker:** No, never!

**Jim:** Have you worked with flame before?

**Speaker:** No, not necessarily.

**Mal:** One other aspect—large bats fly through the air. You've seen bats, haven't you?

**Speaker:** Yeah.

00:07:48

**Mal:** Okay, so there's very large bats with—uh, I might say extremely large teeth from the photo I saw. They'll be swooping down over your head. Would the bats at all deter you from doing your job?

**Speaker:** No, I don't think so! If I had a job to do, I'd try to do it regardless of the bats or anybody else.

**Jim:** Now, I am—I'll explain the situation—to start with, I wanna be sure you can handle the job. I am paying \$46 a week, initially. Is this agreeable?

**Speaker:** *[Amused.]* Sounds okay.

**Jim:** And I am offering not only the \$46, but during the 12 hours that you'll be down in the pit every day, I will provide nourishment to you. In other words, I will provide one meal during the 12-hour period. Will that be satisfactory?

**Speaker:** *[Chuckling.]* Sounds okay.

**Mal:** Have you ever consumed bats?

**Speaker:** No, I haven't.

**Jim:** Would you look forward to the idea of actually consuming bats?

**Speaker:** Eating one?

**Jim:** Yes.

**Speaker:** *[Amused.]* I guess so!

**Mal:** In other words, your lunch—you go down and open up your little brown paper bag that Mr. Coyle had prepared, and inside there would be a bat and then you would just prepare it down in the flames.

**Speaker:** Oh, I have to cook it myself?

**Mal:** Yeah.

**Speaker:** *[Laughing.]* Oh-ho-ho, no!

**Jim:** Why?

**Speaker:** Oh, no, I—well... I could—if you could cook it for me, I wouldn't mind eating it. But you know.

**Mal:** Why?

**Speaker:** A bat. Well, as long as I didn't see it cooking, you know, I think I could devour it.

**Mal:** Have you ever had any experience with snakes? Large snakes?

**Speaker:** Nooo.

**Mal:** See, the bats—the bats actually their foe's down in this pit. The reason why the bats are there, it is because there are snakes in the pit. The bats attack the snakes and the snakes will be curling around your feet as you're trying to handle the maniacs. Now—

**Speaker:** There—I'm not scared of snakes, though.

**Mal:** What?

00:08:51

**Speaker:** I'm not scared of snakes.

**Jim:** Are you at all—and be honest—are you at all afraid of the maniacs?

00:09:31

**Speaker:** No, not really.

**Jim:** What are you gonna do with them, if they start attacking you?

**Speaker:** Fight 'em off!

**Jim:** And this is what the people pay for—the people who are looking down in the pit pay to see you, surrounded by flames, picking up objects that they throw down to you. You'll be attacked by the maniacs and the bats. The snakes will be crawling at your feet. This—you understand, this is what the people pay for.

**Speaker:** Yeah—well that's—they pay to see it! I'll give them their money's worth.

**Jim:** Now, do you—what I'd like to know is that you fully understand the job. Can you, in your own way, recapitulate what I've told you about the job, so that we know that you do have an understanding of it?

**Speaker:** Yeah, so it's me. You want me to work in some kind of a pit, that you say you're trying to develop a living Hell. And in this pit I'll wear some sort of a uniform and there'll be a lot of flames and I have to work with maniacs and... watch out for bats flying around. And I'll get one meal a day. I'll be in there for 12 hours. And I'll have to eat a bat.

**Mal:** And you will take the position?

**Speaker:** *[Chuckling.]* Yeah, I'd like to try it.

00:10:43 Jesse Host

**Music:** Discordant, rising music ending in a ringing note.  
That was Coyle and Sharpe interviewing a passerby for a job working with maniacs, in a living Hell.

00:10:51 Music Transition

Relaxed, percussive music.

00:10:55 Jesse Host

I'm gonna play a little bit of my first ever interview with Mal Sharpe, now. This was one of the first—one of the first interviews of any kind, certainly for broadcast, that I had ever done in my life. This is 2002, we think. According to the labels on the CDR where we found it. I was in college. My show was called *The Sound of Young America*, back then, and was co-hosted by my friend Jordan Morris—with whom I still podcast, today—and our friend Gene O'Neil. So, you'll hear their voices, as well.

*[Music fades in.]*

00:11:36 Music Transition

Mal was calling into Santa Cruz—KZSC, the Heavyweight '88—from his home in Berkley.

00:11:41 Jesse Host

Relaxed, percussive music.

So, I think the question that leaps immediately to mind is: if you're—if you're living in Lindon B. Johnson's America, how does it come to

your mind that what you're going to do for a profession is walk around with a hidden microphone or—in this case, I suppose a non-hidden microphone?

00:12:01 Mal Guest Well, you know, probably much like you three folks, there. You know, you kind of get out of school, you're desperate for something to do, but you don't wanna have a real job, you know? I sort of sense that you guys aren't gonna pursue [*chuckle*] normal—maybe you are!

00:12:15 Jordan Host Boy, he—he surely has us pegged.

00:12:17 Jesse Host I was—I was planning—

00:12:18 Mal Guest [*Chuckling.*] Especially you, Eugene!

00:12:20 Jordan Host [*Gene makes an amused, disappointed sound.*] I just kinda want a job where I don't have to wear pants.

00:12:22 Mal Guest [*Mal agrees with a laugh.*]

00:12:23 Gene Host [*Laughing.*] Exactly.

00:12:24 Mal Guest Oh man, it's so true. I'm a total bum.

00:13:03 Jesse Host You know, so—I mean, Coyle and I—I mean, I met this guy, Coyle, you know. He loved to put people on. You know. And I'd hang out with him here, in San Francisco, and we kind of went back to New York. And—you know—and he just couldn't stop putting people on. And so, I had a little broadcasting background. I mean, that's what I'd done in school, so I could run a tape recorder. He couldn't. So, we decided to see if we could just do this and make a living at it, you know? Which—instead of taking jobs. And so, we put about three years of time walking around San Francisco, accumulating sequences like this, before we finally got a record contract. And then a show on KGO.

00:13:08 Mal Guest What were you doing, in the meantime, while you were—while spending all your time walking around San Francisco with a tape recorder?

00:13:44 Jesse Host Uh, eating a lot of peanut butter sandwiches. I played trombone in a Dixieland band, on Broadway and North Beach, and I made seven dollars on Saturday night. I can't—I don't know how I—I really don't know how I survived, you know. Things were a lot cheaper then. You know, we're talking about 1961 or something, you know. So, your rent was about 60 bucks and, you know, sometimes—lo and behold—Mom's check showed up, you know, or something. I don't know. You know. It was a—it was one of those things where you just give it all up to try and do some crazy thing, you know, that—you know, you're on a mission. I can't explain it, you know.

00:13:53 Mal Guest When you were—when you were setting out to do this, what—how did you formulate the ideas that you used, in your interviews?

00:13:53 Mal Guest Well, you know, like that one there—we—I mean, we would get up in the morning. We'd meet in some coffeeshop, like in North Beach, in San Francisco, and we would—we would premise-ize. We would come up with ideas. But a lot of it was just conceptualizing, you know? You'd look around the room and you'd see a clock on the wall or you'd—and we'd write down in our envelope, "Be a human clock." You know. And we would just need a note like that. "Be a human clock." Or, "Tree-head." Or, you know, I don't know.

*[The others laugh.]*

“Coffee instead of blood,” you know? And then we would stop people on the street, and we would have this list of things, and—you know. You know, we would say, “Well, have you ever thought of being a tree?” You know. And then the person would start talking to us and then we would just kind of extemporize and—some of the things, like that thing we just heard, was a kind of common theme. We were constantly trying to get people down in pits with animals and fighting and, you know, killing birds and ravens attacking them. And, you know, just—so, you know, once we get off on that direction, you know, each of us would just—it was good there were two of us, ‘cause we could kind of pile things on, one after another, and think of stuff—you know—as we were there.

00:15:02 Jesse Host

So, this whole—this whole thing didn’t—this whole business of Coyle and Sharpe didn’t last for an exceptionally long time, correct?

*[Mal confirms several times.]*

Now, you’ve still managed to not have regular jobs for the rest of your life. So, can you tell us about those not-regular jobs?

00:15:20 Mal Guest

*[Chuckles.]* Well, you know, Coyle and I—yeah, we kind of crashed and burned. You know. We went down to Hollywood and that’s a whole story. But we did a television part in the show and then—I don’t know. We kind of split up. I got a job writing—kind of producing and creating very creative radio commercials on Hollywood. It was a real interesting job. But I kept getting calls for these man on the street things, especially from commercials. And so, finally I could make enough money doing that, so I was kind of off on this man on the street thing, again. But without Coyle.

And without him, I wasn’t so much into the put-on stuff. It was more just, kind of, using real people on the street and kind of having fun with them, in a way. I mean, it was—it was a slightly different approach. So, I did a lot of that and I did a lot of short films, when I lived in LA. And just, kind of, freelance things. And then I moved back to San Francisco, in ’79. And I just kept getting commercials. And then I went to work for Tamil the Camel. I was on call. A rock and roll station. As a—as, like, a man on the street reporter. And they sent me to things like Superbowls and political conventions. It was a great job.

00:16:32 Jesse Host

Well, how do you feel about this, sort of, cult status that your work has only just very recently achieved, through some sort of—I mean, I know you had some sort of connections with WFMU, which is a famous freeform radio station, in New York.

*[Mal agrees.]*

And—or actually, specifically in New Jersey. I mean, how does that feel to you, to have had records that have—you know, they sold 15,000 copies a piece and you were a popular radio personality in San Francisco. But now, all of the sudden, you’ve gained some sort of underground national prominence.

00:17:02 Mal Guest

Well, you know, I don’t really feel that way. You know. For me personally, I don’t walk around feeling like *[laughing]* I’ve finally arrived or anything. It’s just kind of weird, you know. Guys like you call up. You know what I mean? You know, it’s not like—it’s not like,

00:17:21 Jordan Host you know, *Inside Edition*, you know, and *Oprah* ringing my bell every day. You know, it's kind of—  
 00:17:27 Jesse Host Actually, people call us “The Oprah of Santa Cruz”. The collective  
 00:17:31 Mal Guest Oprah.  
 00:17:34 Gene Guest Each of us—each of us combined with the other two makes Oprah.  
 00:17:36 Crosstalk Guest Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Exactly.  
 00:17:36 Crosstalk Guest It says “Oprah” on my driver’s license.  
 00:17:36 Crosstalk **Mal:** Yeah. Right. Yeah. You get in a magazine and, you know.

**Jesse:** That’s just—

00:17:40 Mal Guest **Jordan:** He wrote that with crayon.  
 So, I don’t know. I mean, it’s nice to have this stuff kind of recognized and—among certain kinds of people, it’s—you know, it’s nice to know, like, the writers for the *Saturday Night Live* or something like that, that they know about this stuff. You know. The—you know, the actual people on the street, most Americans, I don’t think we have a lot of top hat awareness, but—I mean, after so many years, I mean, the stuff sat in my basement for, like, 30 years until I got this call from Henry Rollins. You know, about six years ago. And Henry was really the guy who reissued the first Coyle and Sharpe CD that kind of brought it all back, you know, in a way.

00:18:21 Jesse Host Well, let’s hear one more piece. We’re almost out of time, but we’ll hear one more piece.

00:18:26 Clip Clip *[Mal agrees.]*  
*[A bell ringing.]*

**Speaker:** Hi, there!

*[The bell rings several more times. A door thumps closed.]*

**Jim:** Say, you’re a painter. Do you—can you give us an estimate of what a particular job would be, what it would cost?

**Mal:** It’s about a two-story house.

**Speaker:** I’m not a painter. I’m a printer.

**Mal:** It’s, uh, it’s down—

**Speaker:** Printing!

**Mal:** Not too far from here. About five blocks away.

**Speaker:** I don’t do any painting.

**Jim:** Oh, it’s just—you misunderstand. It’s not a huge building. It’s a small—it’s a duplex type structure, right here in the neighborhood. And we have the color scheme laid out.

**Speaker:** I don’t do printing!

**Mal:** You don’t do printing.



00:19:05 Clip

Clip

**Speaker:** *[Becoming agitated.]* I mean, I don't do painting! Painting! You want a painter?! *[Inaudible]*

**Jim:** You don't do printing? We don't want any printing at all! We have no desire. You said you don't do printing.

**Speaker:** Well, I—you're getting me all confused, too.

**Mal:** Half of the building is concrete, and they said to us, a few years ago when we got it, "Don't worry. You know, these things last. You're not that near to the ocean." And all the paint is starting to chip off the front of the building, now. And it really, you know it's beginning to go to the devil.

**Speaker:** I don't see where it concerns me.

**Jim:** Well, let me explain. It hasn't been at all resistant to the elements.

**Speaker:** I don't do painting! I'm a printer!

**Mal:** Could you come down, let's say in an afternoon? Just give us an appraisal? You don't have to—

*[Thumping noises.]*

**Speaker:** I don't even do that kind of thing! I have nothing to do with painter—painting houses or anything. I print on paper!

**Mal:** Well, what do you paint?

**Speaker:** I don't paint anything! I don't know where you got the idea. It says, "Print Shop" up here. It doesn't say "Paint Shop".

00:19:55 Clip

Clip

**Jim:** What is the chance of your printing the place? If you don't do paint.

**Speaker:** That's all ridiculous! I don't do anything with houses or anything like that! I print on paper! Envelopes, letterheads, business cards!

**Mal:** Well, could you send—uh, what, do you have assistants?

**Speaker:** I have nothing to do with painters!

**Mal:** Oh, I see. You have assistants.

**Speaker:** I'm not even interested in painting.

**Jim:** Oh, alright. Would you be able to come down, uh... oh, sometime tomorrow afternoon? Just to get an idea of what it would be like?

**Speaker:** There's nothing to do with printing on it, is there?

**Jim:** There would be printing.

[A thump.]

**Speaker:** What are you gonna have—

**Jim:** Print the house, you see.

**Speaker:** No! N-O. Capital letters. I'm a printer, I'm not a painter!

00:20:42 Mal Guest

**Jim:** Please don't get mad at us. [Thumping sounds.]  
[They laugh.]

00:20:46 Jesse Host  
00:20:47 Mal Guest

That's one of my favorite pieces. We really bugged that guy.  
Thanks for coming on the show.

00:20:51 Gene Host

This is the best interview I've ever been involved with. I really appreciate you guys.  
Wow! And you've interviewed a lot of crazy people.

00:20:55 Jordan Host

[They laugh.]  
I think it went so—I think went so well 'cause we're all drunks.

00:20:59 Mal Guest

[Everyone laughs.]  
Your show sounds perfect. I mean it. Really. It's really—I think it just sounds great. I think this kind of radio is disappearing and I hope you guys stay at it.

00:21:06 Jesse Host

Mal Sharpe, from 2002. We have another interview with Mal and even more comedy from Coyle and Sharpe coming up after the break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.  
[Three gavel bangs.]

00:21:18 Promo Promo

**Music:** Laid back music plays under the dialogue.

**Speaker 1:** *Judge John Hodgman* won a Webby, in the Comedy Podcast category. After 10 years of production, *Judge John Hodgman* has finally won: the Susan Lucci of the Webbys. What is *Judge John Hodgman*?

**Speaker 2:** Comedy writer and television personality, John Hodgman, settles disputes between friends, family, coworkers, partners, and more.

**Speaker 1:** Is a machine gun a robot?

**Speaker 2:** Should a grown adult tell his parents about his tattoos?

**Speaker 1:** Should a family be compelled to wear matching outfits, on vacation?

**Speaker 2:** Listen to *Judge John Hodgman* to find out the answers to these age-old disputes and more!

**Speaker 1:** If you haven't listened to *Judge John Hodgman*, now is a great time to start.

**Speaker 2:** *Judge John Hodgman* is available on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and wherever you get your podcasts.

*[Music fades out.]*

00:22:10 Promo Promo  
*[Three gavel bangs.]*  
**Music:** Relaxing music.

**Speaker:** Let's all close our eyes, take a deep breath, let it out, and listen to NPR's *All Songs Considered*. It's a music podcast, but it's also a good friend and guide to find joy in troubled times. Hear *All Songs Considered*, with new episodes every Tuesday and Friday, wherever you listen to podcasts.

00:22:29 Jesse Host  
*[Music ends.]*  
Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. This week, we're doing something a little different. We're looking back at the work of Coyle and Sharpe. They were a comedy duo who recorded a series of hilarious and bizarre man on the street put-ons, in the 1960s. Jim Coyle died in 1993. Mal Sharpe, who was a friend of mine, died this past March. He was 83. I got to interview Mal twice for my show. We're about to hear another one with him. But before we do that, I wanna play another bit of Coyle and Sharpe.

This bit is another classic. They find a random guy on the street and they approach him with a pretty straightforward proposition. "Are you willing to give up being an individual and to join Coyle and Sharpe to become one collective person?" They say that they call this belief Threeism.

00:23:17 Clip Clip  
**Mal:** Excuse me. Can we take a moment of your time? What we'd like to do is acquaint you with the concept of Threeism. Are you familiar with this?

**Speaker:** Pardon me?

**Mal:** Threeism.

**Speaker:** Threeism? No, I'm not.

**Jim:** Three people get together and merge their identity as one. Would you ever consider giving up your identity, as an individual, to be 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of one person?

**Speaker:** Is this a religious concept?

**Mal:** No. No, it's just a spiritual idea that we have conceived with some other people.

**Speaker:** Uh, I'd have to know more about it.

**Mal:** Can we give you a demonstration of Threeism?

**Speaker:** Right now?

**Mal:** Yes.

**Speaker:** *[Chuckling.]* Well, I'm kinda in a hurry. I have an appointment at 7 o'clock, and I haven't eaten yet.

**Mal:** Could we accompany you to your meal and show you how Threeism will work? We will help you make the selection of your food.

**Jim:** There is nothing we will do that will not be a unit decision.

**Speaker:** Wait a minute. Now, that's two against one for me eating and my place! The dinner's ready. Run all over for dinner at my place?

00:24:07    Clip            Clip

**Jim:** We *[inaudible]*.

**Mal:** Yes. We could eat dinner at your home.

**Jim:** And, can I ask you, what are we having for dinner?

**Speaker:** I don't know, yet?

**Jim:** And how will you introduce us to whoever else is in the house?

**Speaker:** Well, how am I supposed to introduce us?

**Jim:** How would you introduce us?

**Speaker:** These are 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of my personality.

**Jim:** Would you do it? On a permanent basis.

**Speaker:** Following you for the rest of my life?

**Jim:** Right! Exactly. We're asking you to make that decision now.

**Speaker:** You know—you're asking me to make the decision right now?

**Jim:** Yes!

**Speaker:** Well—I can—I decline.

**Mal:** No, no, no. There are three of us right now. If we could stay together, it would be so much better.

00:24:37    Clip            Clip

**Jim:** Let us go away as one, now! No more personal decisions on your... on your own part.

**Speaker:** You're out of your mind!

**Mal:** Hey! Which one—why are you walking away? Threeism!

**Speaker:** I told you, I—I changed my mind!

**Mal:** You're walking away.

**Jim:** Can you just explain why you walked away? What did you say we were?

**Speaker:** I'm sorry, but I don't wanna be a Threeism.

**Mal:** He said we're out of our minds.

**Jim:** And you know, that's just because you don't understand a concept you've never been exposed to!

**Mal:** What are you doing? Getting an officer?

**Speaker:** No, I'm looking for the bus.

**Mal:** Let's go on the bus together.

**Jim:** What are we trying to railroad you into? Tell us.

**Speaker:** I don't know! That's your concept. A better life.

**Jim:** You're turning down an opportunity for Threeism?

**Mal:** You are in our destiny. You are. You are.

**Speaker:** I don't know who told you that.

**Jim:** You are the tertiary person, the triad.

**Mal:** It's an awareness—it's an awareness of the meaning and the destiny of Threeism.

**Speaker:** Who thought up this Threeism?

**Mal & Jim:** We did.

**Speaker:** When did this begin?

**Jim:** Last week.

**Mal:** We'll tell you honestly.

**Jim:** It came to us, and we accepted. We've been—

**Speaker:** Here's my bus.

**Mal:** Alright, we're going with you.

**Jim:** May we go with you?

**Mal:** We haven't eaten! We haven't eaten in a long time.

**Speaker:** Neither have I!

**Mal:** Now, we're getting on the bus with the gentleman. Are you gonna pay the fare, sir?

**Speaker:** I got 15 cents.

**Mal:** Now, we're walking down the aisle of the bus with the triad person. Could we stand together, as a triad, here in the bus?

**Speaker:** I'm tired. *[Laughs.]*

00:25:09 Clip

Clip

00:25:43 Clip

Clip

**Jim:** Now, isn't this—isn't this the first example of Threeism. Suddenly, instead of yourself alone, getting on the bus, there are three of us on the bus. Right? Isn't that true?

**Speaker:** *[Laughing.]* That's true.

**Mal:** And we're riding to your home?

**Speaker:** Yeah.

**Jim:** What bus is this?

**Speaker:** 6 Masonic.

**Jim:** And is it so bad? Is it so bad?

**Speaker:** Well, there's a lot of people on the bus.

**Jim:** But there's three of us, together, on the bus.

**Speaker:** This guy's as close to me as you are.

**Jim:** He didn't speak with us. We haven't chosen him as a Threeist.

**Speaker:** Oh. You've chosen me.

**Jim:** You have come into our destiny and you shall remain, thus forth. Hence forth, from the 6 Masonic bus, to your home, and forevermore, you shall be with us. Is that not true? Answer us, thou, to thy triad companions waiting for thy answer.

**Speaker:** No.

**Jim:** *[Whispering.]* Can we tell you something?

**Speaker:** Yeah.

**Jim:** This is a joke.

**Speaker:** *[Lets out a wheezing laugh.]*

That was Coyle and Sharpe pitching Threeism to a hapless passerby. It appeared on their album, *Audio Visionaries: Street Pranks & Put-Ons*.

Thumpy transition music.

The second time I talked with Mal Sharpe, on the show, was 2006. Mal had recently put out a boxset featuring Threeism, which you just heard, and a bunch of other stuff. After Mal was on the show, that first time, we would check in with each other over email, every once in a while. He was just that kind of guy: not just—not just, like, an all-American dad type, but also someone who was curious about what people were up to. I think his curiosity was what made him such a great man on the street interviewer. He and his daughter, Jennifer, had done the work of digitizing their huge archive of Coyle and Sharpe recordings. And, at the dawn of podcasting, they had been kind enough to share them with me so that I could make a podcast out of them.

00:26:12    Clip            Clip

00:26:45    Jesse            Host

00:26:54    Music            Transition

00:26:59    Jesse            Host

It was not a [chuckles] particular money-making proposition. They were glad to get a little promo for the boxset that Mal had put together. And it is a great boxset, by the way. And I was glad to have a little content to make into a podcast, because podcasts were new, and we just did whatever we thought was a thing. You know? And I thought it was somethin’.

Anyway, let’s get into my 2006 interview with Mal Sharpe.

[Switching to the 2006 audio.]

			Mal, welcome to—welcome back to <i>The Sound of Young America</i> . How are you?
00:28:17	Mal	Guest	Great!
00:28:18	Jesse	Host	So, what I want—let’s do this a little bit chronologically. Before you were in Coyle and Sharpe, before you met James P. Coyle, what were you doing with your life? You were—you were graduated from school and you’d moved out to the Bay Area.
00:28:36	Mal	Guest	Yeah. I’d had, like, six months to kill. Because of—it’s unfashionable to say this, now, but I had to go in the Army. I’d been in ROTC in college, because I didn’t wanna be an enlisted man and run through, you know, fields in Korea, unfortunately. But anyway, so, uh... and so I was—I went out to San Francisco. There was kind of this beat generation scene going on, out there. And I really didn’t know anything about the Bay Area or anything. I just kind of borrowed some money from loan company, in Lansing, Michigan, and flew across American and arrived in San Francisco. Kind of a blank slate.
00:29:15	Jesse	Host	Did you say borrowed some money from some loan company?
00:29:18	Mal	Guest	Yeah, the Eagle Loan Company, in Lansing, Michigan. You know, I got money to get an airline—a ticket on a Boeing 707.
00:29:26	Jesse	Host	This is like—was this, like, a company advertising loans for potential beatniks or something?
00:29:32	Mal	Guest	[Laughing.] Yeah, right. Yeah, fly—beatniks going to San Francisco? Yeah, right. Yeah, right. Beatniks. “Yeah, come in. You know. 4%, you know, per year.”
00:29:43	Jesse	Host	“We’ll invest in your career in performance poetry.”
00:29:46	Mal	Guest	[Laughing.] Right. Yeah. Anyhow. I don’t know. I needed the money and I borrowed it from this loan company and flew out to San Francisco and that was it, you know.
00:29:57	Jesse	Host	What were you doing when you first—well, first of all, how old were you, at this point?
00:30:00	Mal	Guest	I don’t know. I was about 22 or 23. I got a job in Macy’s. You know. So, I’m Mr. Sharpe in the sporting goods department. And kind of just, you know, looking around. You know. On the road, in my own way, I guess. Lotta of people were on the move, then. And heading west, out to the West Coast.
00:30:23	Jesse	Host	This was still—this was still the ‘50s, right? Is this, like, ‘58 or something?
00:30:27	Mal	Guest	Well, it was about ‘59, yeah, that I—yeah, that I came out to San Francisco.
00:30:33	Jesse	Host	What was the city like in that time?
00:30:36	Mal	Guest	Well, you know, it was before the hippies. And kind of the beatnik thing was going on, but that was kind of in certain parts of town. North Beach. San Francisco was kind of a simple—we were just

talking about this, the other day. There was still this kind of naivete to San Francisco. It wasn't, in anyway, like a hip or big-league city. You know, if you wanted to really do anything, you had to leave here and go to LA or New York. All the advertising agencies had, you know, little accounts.

But all this stuff was bubbling under, in San Francisco. You know. The whole Lenny Bruth, Swartz, Saul thing and Kingston Trio and Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond. All that stuff was kind of going on in this very, kind of, sunny, foggy, innocent atmosphere, in a way. It was kind of a breeding ground, I guess. But, you know, somehow you didn't even know it that much. You know? It—things didn't have that kind of media buzz like, "Woah, this is a happening place." Or anything. It was just kind of a sleepy place, in a way.

00:31:41 Jesse Host  
00:31:44 Mal Guest

So, how did you end up meeting Jim Coyle?  
Well, you know, you could—I didn't have much money and you could move into these, you know, they were called residence clubs. They were like boarding houses. But even that term's probably gone now, from the American psyche. But they were, like, these mansions that had been turned into these rooming houses for young people. And you could move in for about 80 bucks a month. You got a little room. You know, one of these old San Francisco mansions that were fantastic, but they almost were in disuse. So, you could have a room and two meals a day for about 80 bucks a month. Which was a great deal. And you could lead your life instead of renting an apartment, which would have been \$140 a month. You know.

00:32:28 Jesse Host  
00:32:31 Mal Guest

And Jim Coyle was living there, as well?  
Yeah. I went down to supper, one night, and sat at—you'd sit at, you know—you'd sit down at some table and—I don't know. He was going on and on. He was telling these two young women about—eeh, he was—belonged to some religion or something like that. And they went out to Marin on the weekend and they would lay on these rocks in the sun like turtles, or something, and commune with... nature and the sun. I don't know. Some weird thing. And I said, "What is this guy up to? This is such—"

But he was so convincing, and these girls' jaws were dropping, you know. And I mean, I was kind of convinced by him too, you know. But I was also intrigued and went up to his room where he was reading Bruckner and Mahler. I mean, listening to Bruckner and Mahler on his record player. Reading Nietzsche.

00:33:17 Jesse Host

It would probably be even more impressive if he was just sitting around reading Mahler.

00:33:21 Mal Guest

*[Laughing.]* Yeah, right. The score! Or he had Mahler frozen and he was just...

00:33:30 Jesse Host

*[Laughs.]* I mean, like, one of the things that I was thinking of—as I watching the DVD that's included in this set—is that the credulousness of Jim Coyle... he's so sincere that it's almost like... there's almost, like, something terrifying about it. At least, there was for me. Like, I was like, "Wooah. Like... this is weird!"

00:33:57 Mal Guest

Yeah, Jim, he's kind of a conventional looking guy, but he kind of had a thing that Andy Kaufman had, you know? Where Andy Kaufman, like, gets so believable that it's kind of scary, too. You're like, "Is he really yelling at the audience? Or is he really



antagonizing these people? Or is this a joke?" You know. Don't you think?

00:34:17 Jesse Host

Yeah, I mean, I—watching it, I was thinking, you know—I was looking at you and I was thinking, "Well, this—this makes sense to me. You know." Because you're a—you're really—you're very—you're a very genial guy. You know. Similarly, regular-looking to Jim Coyle. And I was thinking, you know, "I can see why people would relate to this guy." And then I'm looking at Coyle and I'm thinking, "Man," you know, like, "I think that I would accept whatever he told me was true." Because—almost because I would be worried that, like, if... that—I would be sort of a combination of convinced that it must be true and, sort of like, concerned that even if it wasn't true, if I somehow pierced the bubble of truth that he was creating, that he would explode or something.

00:35:11 Mal Guest

*[Laughs.]* Can I—can I get a copy of that paragraph?

*[Jesse agrees with a laugh.]*

That's very true, you know? That's very true. You know, he—I'm glad you picked up on that. I mean, he was so intense. He was so—I mean, he would walk in the door and sort of look like what, in those days, the typical IBM executive, who was like the model American citizen. You know. Irish and kind of ruddy complexion and kind of a ordinary looking guy, to a certain degree. But then, yeah, this intensity would build up, you know. And he would sweep you into his aura. And yeah, that's what he would do with people.

And of course, Jim Coyle was a guy—he was kind of a harmless conman, but he lived to put people on. You know, this was not just something he did as an act. Which was kind of more my thing. I kind of enjoyed being with him and doing all this. But Jim, almost compulsively, wherever he went—if he went with you to a party, you knew he was gonna go over and start in on the hostess and it was gonna even get uncomfortable, maybe. You know. And, um... you know, he was one of those people.

00:36:19 Clip Clip

**Mal:** Can we have your name, please?

**Walter Schwartz:** Yes. Walter Schwartz.

**Jim:** Walter, Ozar Menderes, who is a person of medical background, here in the Bay Area, has come up with a rather interesting theory. He claims that the head—the actual size of the head, including the current limitations that exist because of the ramifications of the bone structure—the actual size of the head can be expanded to accommodate—actually special dimension, not only for increased brainpower, but for many of the activities in the body which would, if they took place in the head, be more efficiently performed. Would you go along with this idea?

**Walter:** Certainly, I would go along with this idea, if it would serve any fruitful purpose—individually, collectively, or for the good of society.

**Mal:** Do you think that people are participating in this experiment are gonna feel self-conscious? Their reads won't be round, or their heads are actually elongated—in some cases two or three times the

size of the head as it is today. In other words, it becomes very high and narrow. This is—yeah.

**Jim:** This is—is projected, concept.

**Walter:** Yes! They may—some may feel self-conscious and some may even desire it, because of sort of a—status seekers.

**Jim:** What do you mean, exactly, by that?

**Walter:** Well, they might feel slightly superior that they've gone through an operation and now they have greater potential than the average other citizen.

**Mal:** In other words, you think perhaps some snob appeal would develop with the elongated head.

00:37:46    Clip                    Clip

**Walter:** Yes! It could appeal to some people in this way, that they would have an elite society, that—

**Jim:** Through expanding the head size. Would you, yourself, be willing to submit your head for such purposes?

**Walter:** If I thought and was convinced that it would serve any useful purpose—either to myself, individuals, collectively or society as a whole—I most certainly would.

**Mal:** And you wouldn't feel at all embarrassed that your head would be elongated, perhaps, as long as your body?

**Walter:** Nooo. No, I wouldn't. Um. I don't believe I would, at this time.

**Mal:** If you were staying in France and you had this elongated head, you got a hotel room and the bed—most of the French people are a little shorter than the average Americans—the bed was rather short. Would you and your—and your head was the same size as your body—which would you place on the bed? Your body or your head? One section would be drooping onto the floor of the hotel. Which section would you place on the bed?

**Walter:** I think I'd place my head on the bed. And the rest of the body hang over and straddle on the floor or whatever, or chairs, or whatever'd be necessary.

**Mal:** And when the maid came in, in the morning, if you were still sleeping—she opened the door, what would she see asleep on the bed?

00:38:59    Jesse                    Host

**Walter:** That—my head.  
What was the—what was the appeal of being with somebody like that, to you, who was—at the time—you know, like, maybe a little counter-cultural but otherwise a pretty regular guy?

00:39:10    Mal                        Guest

Yeah. Uh, I don't know. It was kind of dangerous. I mean, he had such a sick sense of humor. He was so bright. He was just very funny and... he was also very intellectual. And, you know, he did read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and all this stuff kind of drew

you in. He almost had, like, acolytes. Well, he didn't have a lot. But there was always one or two other people around that were kind of held in his sway, in a weird way. You know? So—but to go out with him, you know—to go out with him and, you know—he'd turn his collar around and look like a priest and we'd go to movie theaters and they'd say, "Oh, Father Coyle, come right in." And...

*[They laugh.]*

So. You're just conning, you know, somebody at the counter out of a box of popcorn, but there was still something—he just loved playing the part of a priest or something like that. I can't explain it. Just hanging out with a guy like that was really fun. You know. What led the two of you into thinking that this could be something besides just something that you did as a goof?

00:40:09 Jesse Host

00:40:17 Mal Guest

Yeah, I think we both wanted to, you know, have jobs. Do something to make a living. You know? I mean, even though he conned his way into jobs. He always had some jobs. And one time he even flew as a co-pilot in a training program for TWA.

*[Jesse bursts into laughter.]*

I mean. He got that part, you know? But, you know, we kind of thought these things are kind of funny. You know, we—after I went in the Army, I was stationed in Long Island city and I lived in Greenwich Village, 'cause they didn't have like an Army post. I was at—where they made Army training films. And I went and lived in Greenwich Village, in this room. And one day I bumped into Coyle on the street. He had come back from San Francisco. We weren't even in touch. But—so we hooked up again, in Greenwich Village. And, you know, we'd stand on the street corner and try and sell people toasters. Or we would go to, you know, weird social events. And we were just having a good time, you know. And we finally decided, "Well, what if we could go back to San Francisco? Be out in the sunshine again and record this stuff and do something."

We just thought it was so funny. And, you know, at least we enjoyed it. You know. So, that's—that was kind of it. It was vague, but, you know, the kind of thing young people do. *[Chuckles.]*

00:41:28 Clip Clip

**Mal:** Can we have your name, please?

**Pat Paulson:** Yes, it's Mrs. Pat Paulson.

**Jim:** Can we ask you a question? Would you, yourself, approve the idea of a commercial agency—the purpose of which is to purchase children from homes and then redistribute these children to other homes on a lease basis, for a profit?

**Pat:** Well, that might not be a bad idea. Of course, I don't know. I would miss mine awful much.

**Mal:** There's a—there's a group here in the city which actually is getting children. We're not sure of the source, yet. They're getting children. They have been 50 and 75 children and they're renting them out to people in the area.

**Pat:** Really?

**Mal:** Yes.

**Pat:** How—how can they do that? What about the parents?

**Jim:** They have actually purchased these children from the parents. They've purchased these children. The parents have gone along with an idea whereby the children are turned over to these people permanently. For instance, if somebody wants a little 9-year-old boy in his or her home for a weekend, there's a set fee. Do you approve this?

**Pat:** No! I wouldn't approve of that! I think any child, away from it's own home, would be unhappy.

**Mal:** Even if it was getting a percentage of the profits from the organization? In other words, if the child knew he was gonna get 25% while he stayed with a group of people.

**Pat:** Weeell, to a child, I think the happiness of their own home is more important than any money, whether—

00:42:46    Clip            Clip

**Jim:** You don't think that it might be helpful to a child to have a very commercial attitude in regard to himself, at an early age? Knowing that he's being leased?

**Pat:** Well—everything is too commercial. This is, um—this is—the whole world, today, is too commercial.

**Jim:** We are, ourselves, involved in this agency. And we have two of the children with us, today. We'd like you just to meet them and tell us whether you think they're happy or not. Would you do this? They're right here.

**Mal:** They're right here.

**Jim:** Tell us?

**Mal:** Will you meet them?

**Pat:** Well, yes, I'll meet them, but I don't think that they could give me a reaction, right now.

**Mal:** What are your names, boys?

**Ronald:** I—I'm Ronald.

**Jim:** How old are you, Ronald?

**Ronald:** I'm, uh, 13.

**Jim:** And what is your name young—?

00:43:26    Clip            Clip

**Andy:** Andy.

**Jim:** And, uh, we've been sending you around to different homes in the community, now, for about four and a half months. Would you describe yourself as unhappy or happy?

**Ronald:** I feel fine about it. I think it's real good.

**Mal:** And your little friend, here—once again, how old are you?

**Andy:** Nine.

**Mal:** You have little freckles on your face, there. How many homes have you been to in the last three years?

**Andy:** About 14.

**Mal:** He's been to 14 homes. And you can see, can't you? Wouldn't you say from looking at them? They're happy?

**Pat:** Well, they look happy enough. They have a bag of candy. That's enough to make any child happy.

**Jim:** Right, exactly, and we've given the candy to them. We're taking care of them. And said that you're opposed to this.

**Pat:** Weeell, and my answer is no. In my opinion, you aren't taking very proper care of them. They should be home eating a carrot stick instead of a bag of candy.

**Mal:** Maybe that's right. Now, this afternoon—normally, these two fellows are actually brothers and normally we rent them on a weekend basis for \$17 a day. Now, you've shown some interest in them. You think they should be in a home this weekend. Could we let you have them, for \$10.50? The two brothers, Ronnie and Andy, in your home this weekend.

**Pat:** Heavens no! I have two of my own. That's enough!

**Jim:** It's a trial! Don't you think, if you had Ronnie and Andy in your home over the weekend, you'd be able to determine whether they're happy.

**Pat:** Well, I don't see any normal boys standing on a street corner, talking to strangers, saying that they're being paid money to go live with somebody would be happy!

**Mal:** Ronnie? Could we ask Ronnie—Ronnie and Andy, would you like to go to this lady's home this weekend?

**Ronnie:** Sure! Yeah!

**Jim:** And you know it's at the discount rate. You won't be getting your full 25%.

**Ronnie:** Doesn't matter.

**Mal:** How about you?

00:44:30 Clip

Clip

**Jim:** Andy, would you like to go into this lady's home?

**Andy:** Okay! Uh-huh.

**Jim:** Ronnie, tell us, what was the last home you were in? What was it like?

**Ronnie:** It was very—it was a very nice home, you know. It—some—some nice people who already had, um, three children.

**Mal:** See, they already had children.

**Jim:** Could we place them in your home, this weekend? And we give them some sedation, so they aren't too wild. This is one of the reasons why they're willing to go.

00:45:25 Jesse Host

**Pat:** I think you ought to be out teaching these boys how to play baseball, instead of standing on the street, trying to sell them! I mean, one of the really remarkable things about this story is that—the fact that it happened all in the early 1960s was very fortuitous, because this was really, sort of, the first period in time that technologically you could do this, as anything more than—you know—running illegal con games. That you could do a prank and document it well enough that it could be something that could entertain others. Because this was the first time that, you know, there was actual, portable tape recorders. Among other things.

00:45:58 Mal Guest

Yeah, exactly. I mean, that's a really good point. And, you know, we didn't think of that, at the time. But, you know, I've been interviewed by the BBC. They consider us, like, you know, historical figures. And [*chuckles*] that sort of thing. But yeah, it—for the first time, there were smaller tape recorders. Not what we have today, but still smaller. And they were used by—mostly private eyes. It was a famous private, in San Francisco. Hal... Hal Lipskit or something like that. Coppola's movie, *The Conversation*, kind of, I think, was based on his career. But we went down and we would hang and I would hang out with these private eyes, at this—at this—at this store that had—Brookes Camera, but they also had—in this camera shop, they also had miniature tape recorders and microphones. And we'd be up there with the private eyes and they'd be stuffing them in briefcases and stuff.

00:47:02 Jesse Host

And that's what we did! We were kind of the first entertainers, probably, that walked around with this gear—you know—in a little briefcase. You know.

Was this—did you—did you actually have a job doing this, before you went out and bought a tape recorder that fits in a briefcase? Or did you buy a tape recorder that fits in a briefcase in order to think that you could get a job doing it?

00:47:17 Mal Guest

No, we bought the—we bought the tape recorder. I mean, we had the tape recorder... and this little gear for probably two years before we ever, you know, made a cent. I mean, we just—we just bought this thing and started walking around San Francisco. And we walked around San Francisco for two years. Every single neighborhood you can imagine. We'd be in neighborhoods we didn't even know existed. Things like the Excelsior district. We didn't know where we were! You know, we would get up everyday and just go

some—a street that was different and had a bunch of stores we hadn't been in the day before. 'Cause we'd walk in the stores with this hidden stuff. You know, mortuaries and antique stores and printing—you know, printing shops or—you know, just whatever the next store was, we'd stand outside for a second and try and come up with a premise and, if nobody else was in there and the guy was—you know—available. You know, we'd strut in. You know, in our suits and propose something to the fellow. You know.

00:48:15 Jesse Host

What were you—what were you doing with this, um, *[chuckling]* tape that you were recording when—as a—like, did you have, like, a—were you creating your own “Best Of”s and inviting girls over to listen to them, or what?

00:48:30 Mal Guest

Aha. No, we weren't. Um. Interesting concept. No, we were just collecting this stuff and, ultimately, we got a contract with—and we would edit them. We'd sit in Jim's house with some early editing. You know, splicing tape—which is gone—and razor blades and we'd put these things together and make little demo tapes and go around to radio stations and... Ultimately, here in San Francisco, we got a record contract with Fantasy Records, which—they through us out, though, after about six months. But yeah. You know, we were just collecting the stuff. You know. It was just some dream, you know, that the venture would go someplace someday. You know. Can't explain it.

Haven't you done something like this, Jesse?

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:49:20 Jesse Host

Isn't this show like that?

00:49:25 Mal Guest

*[Dramatically.]* Me?! Meeeee?!

But, uh, yeah, I don't know. We just did it! I don't know why. We just thought it would work out.

00:49:32 Jesse Host

We'll have more with my interview with Mal Sharpe after the break. Plus, more bits! Stick around. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

00:49:41 Promo Promo

**Janet Varney:** Hey. I'm Janet Varney, host of *The JV Club* podcast.

*[School bell rings. The muffled sounds of talking in the hallway.]*

**Janet:** Ah, high school. Was it a time of adventure, romance, and discovery?

**Speaker 1:** *[Cheering.]* Class of '95! We did iiiit!

**Janet:** Or—

*[Rain sound effect.]*

**Janet:** A time of angst, disappointment, and confusion?

**Speaker 2:** We're all tied together by four years of trauma, at this place, but enjoy adulthood, I guess!

*[A chorus of boos.]*

**Janet:** The truth is? It was both!

**Music:** Bouncy music fades in.

**Janet:** So, join me on *The JV Club* podcast, where I invite some great friends, like Kristen Bell, Angela Kinsey, Oscar Nunez, Neil Patrick Harris, Keegan-Michael Key, to talk about high school: the good, the bad, and everything in between.

**Speaker 3:** My teenage mood swings are *[voice dropping into something gruff and aggressive]* gettin' harder to manage!

**Janet:** *The JV Club*. Find it on [MaximumFun](#).

*[Music fades out.]*

00:50:28    Promo        Promo

**Music:** Soft, synth heavy music.

**Manoush Zomorodi:** How do we reinvent ourselves? And what's the secret to living longer? I'm Manoush Zomorodi. Each week, on NPR's *TED Radio Hour*, we go on a journey with TED speakers to seek a deeper understanding of the world and to figure out new ways to think and create. Listen now.

00:50:48    Jesse        Host

*[Music ends.]*

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Right now, we're replaying my 2006 interview with the late Mal Sharpe. In the early '60s, Mal and his friend Jim Coyle basically invented hidden microphone pranks. They'd roam the street of San Francisco and talk with random strangers about absurd, hilarious propositions. They were called Coyle and Sharpe. Jim Coyle died in 1993. Mal claimed it was in a skydiving accident. Mal died earlier this year. Let's get back into our conversation.

00:51:25    Mal        Guest

What were the things like that you created at the—at the very beginning?

Well, on this new—this new boxset, *These Two Men are Imposters*—I have a bunch of unedited early stuff that we did. I found some stuff in some drawers and things like that, that had never been used before. You know, it was on these big reels of 10- or 11-inch tape. And it would be things like—we'd go down to the marina district, in San Francisco. There'd be an apartment for rent. You can hear us kind of walk in and one of these tacky, kind of, landlords. You know, lived in the building. You know. Like a supervisor, yeah. One of those guys.

*[Jesse affirms.]*

And we would, you know, the hidden tape recorder'd be clunking away. We'd be walking up the stairs with him and he'd show us the apartment and, like, in this particular thing that's on the—in the CD, we—Jim then explains that he doesn't really care about the rooms, that's it's the closets. He lives in the closets.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

And he doesn't want any light, in the closets. And so, then the guy is all involved with, "Well, why don't you come in this room. This is



kind of a dark room and maybe you could get a closet in here you'd like to live in." You know, things like that. You know. Wandering into, you know, apartments for rent. We did a lot of things in mortuaries where we walked in and told the mortician that Jim had had an unsuccessful life and he—Jim wanted to be buried and dug up again. To, like, renew his life. To start again. And [chuckles] you know, the tape recorder'd be on the—in the briefcase on the guy's desk and it would all be kind of tense and... you know, he'd say, "Well, who would be coming to this funeral?" And it was always several of our friends and one animal.

*[Jesse bursts into surprised laughter.]*

And the highlight, for us, would be when the guy would say, "What kind of animal?" And then [laughing] it was—it was always wolverines or cattle or some—something that would have to be tied up, that might attack somebody, but probably wouldn't. You know. So, it would be this whole scene of—taking place in some graveyard where he'd be burying Coyle and digging him up and there'd be—you know, wolves trying to get at him and, you know, stuff like that. And it would be—it would be places like that. Antique stores, you know, where we—did a lot of things involving death, for some reason. But antique stores where we—our uncle had died and—without signing a document that would have given us a lot of money. And if we could dig him up and bring his body into the antique store, that particular store had the kind of furniture that was in his home. He'd be comfortable and we could—we had a way of getting his arm to move to sign the document. You know. Could we bring the body in, that night? You know. Stuff like that. We—they would call the cops a lot. You know. We'd end up jumping on busses to get away from the sirens and things.

00:54:14 Jesse Host

There's tape of you and—you guys getting arrested, on that third CD that you mentioned.

00:54:22 Mal Guest

Right. Yeah, that's another thing. That particular tape was lost for years. And we had signed an agreement with a judge, when we were going up for trial, that we would never play it anywhere. But I figured, since it was 40 years later—yeah. I mean, we had been out in the avenues in San Francisco and we'd stopped some guy. Some guy in a suit. He was walking toward his car. We asked him if we could—if we could borrow his car for the weekend. Um.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

We wanted to go over to Marianne and go out to eat in some outdoor restaurants and things like that. And we'd bring it back on Monday. And... and he didn't wanna lend it to us. And, you know—'cause he didn't trust us. And, of course, we always would explain that, wouldn't an experience like this—if we—he got the car back on Monday, wouldn't he realize that he could trust human beings? And it would be a very learning and growing experience for him. And you know. Very beneficial. All the time, of course, that we were talking, we were growing more suspicious. Deliberately so. So, it turns out—so, he wouldn't do it and he got in his car and he drove away.

And we walked down the street and we were interviewing some kid on the street corner. And the cop car pulled up. The guy was in the

back. And it turned out he was a cigar salesman or something. He had been collecting all his money. He had a lot of money on him. And he thought we were setting him up to rob him. You know, so he got the cops. And they grabbed the briefcase out of my hand with the hidden tape recorder in it, so it recorded the whole arrest. And this was in the days before the Miranda thing, where they had to tell you your rights. And, ultimately, we were in a cell and they called me out, because they suddenly discovered the tape recorder and they didn't know how to turn it off.

*[Jesse giggles.]*

Anyway, we had a trial. They had a—they had a jury. It was jury selection day at the Hall of Justice, in San Francisco. And they called us in the back room and the judge said, "This is ridiculous. And if you sign this waiver and never play this tape of the arrest again, you know, you guys can go home." And we were happy to do that.

00:56:22    Clip                    Clip

*[Ambient, shuffling sounds, likely of the briefcase being moved around. The noises are loud enough, at first, to largely obscure the voices of anyone talking.]*

**Jim:** It was this *[inaudible]*. This particular car.

**Speaker:** Just a plain, ordinary Cintra.

**Mal:** Just a smaller car, this would be.

**Jim:** What would be the chance of, when you finish with it this evening, of taking in a spin it?

**Speaker:** Rather, uh, hard. I live way down in nowhere.

**Mal:** Oh, we could go with you, now, and then when you get done, tonight, we could just go out for a ride and that'd be easy.

**Speaker:** I'm pretty busy right now.

**Jim:** Why don't we get you home, on a bus or something like that. Can we take a spin in it?

**Speaker:** That's just not very ethical, that's all. I don't trust that.

**Mal:** What do you mean, that—?

**Jim:** What, do we look *[chuckles]* evil or something?

**Speaker:** No, just that it's a company owned car and I'm not allowed to lend it out.

01:57:03    Clip                    Clip

**Jim:** Oh, you're intimating we're gonna steal the car?

**Speaker:** No.

**Mal:** Let's forget the company policy. You sit in the backseat and we'll take it out for a spin, tonight.

**Speaker:** No thanks.

**Mal:** You can bring somebody with you.

**Speaker:** No, that's alright.

**Jim:** Can we drive over the Golden Gate Bridge, now?

**Speaker:** No.

**Jim:** Can I just ask why, so we'll understand?

**Speaker:** Well, I just—I told you, it's against company policies. I'm sure if you go right down here, they'll let you drive any one of their sample cars, if you're interested in going there.

**Mal:** Yeah, well, we wanted to drive one that somebody's already had. We really wanted to drive your car. We saw you and then we saw the nice little car.

**Jim:** Could we have it over the weekend?

**Speaker:** No, I'm sorry, I told you it's against store—company policy.

**Jim:** Just Saturday and Sunday.

**Speaker:** No. I'm sorry.

*[The car door slams shut.]*

**Jim:** No?

*[The sound of the car starting.]*

**Jim:** *[Inaudible.]*

**Mal:** I don't know. I really don't.

*[The sound of the car driving off. Audio ends and picks back up at a later time.]*

*[Shuffling sounds.]*

**Mal:** Say, excuse me, are you in a rush?

**Speaker:** Yeah, I have to go down to the corner, sorry.

**Jim:** You're walking down the street here? Frequently enough?

**Speaker:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Okay, we'll see ya. Thanks a lot. Take it easy.

**Mal:** H-here are the police. Here we go.

**Cop:** Get your hands out of your pockets.

01:57:32    Clip                    Clip

01:58:11	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Thumping sounds. A voice over the radio, muffled and inaudible.]</i></p> <p><b>Mal:</b> We didn't do anything.</p> <p><b>Jim:</b> Can you take it easy with that thing? With the tape recorder in it? By the way, when you started the car, we wanted to tell you.</p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> Well, I mean, it's rather unusual for you guys to just—</p> <p><i>[Thumping noises and engine sounds.]</i></p> <p><b>Mal:</b> You want us to explain what we did?</p> <p><b>Cop:</b> You're right, but we'll do the explaining at the police station.</p> <p><b>Jim:</b> We wanted to tell you.</p> <p><b>Cop:</b> You gentleman ever been arrested before?</p> <p><b>Mal:</b> No.</p> <p><b>Cop:</b> No arrest records? Here or in any other state? Where's your home at?</p> <p><b>Mal:</b> Here, in San Francisco.</p> <p><b>Jim:</b> We could save a lot of time if you let us explain.</p> <p><b>Cop:</b> Well, we'll—that's right. We're gonna talk at the station.</p> <p><b>Mal:</b> One thing we'd like to make easy. This is a precision instrument.</p> <p><i>[Audio becomes distorted and intercut with loud squealing.]</i></p> <p><b>Jim:</b> I think we should have a right to tell you what it's—</p>
00:59:08	Jesse	Host	<p><b>Mal:</b> First of all—</p> <p>Were you—were you learning anything doing these over these—I mean, before you were even—before you were even on the airwaves, you were doing this for two years? Were you, like, refining techniques?</p>
00:59:22	Mal	Guest	<p>Yeah. I think we developed a lot of premises. A lot of rapport. Yeah. It was a lot of chops that, even to this day, are very useful to me. You know. Creating things, premise-izing, having concepts in your head before you walk into a situation. We learned a lot. You know. Human nature. Who would be the good subjects—that we had to get people with good voices, people that spoke up. We loved to get truck drivers. “Prollies” as we called them. Good proolly types. You know? But, you know, get these truck drivers to yell and scream at us, you know. Construction workers. So, it was a good, kind of, human interest learning experience. You know. For us.</p>
01:00:06	Jesse	Host	<p>How did you—how did the two of you dissolve your partnership?</p>
01:00:12	Mal	Guest	<p>Um, that's a good question, Jesse. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> We had done a television pilot that you were mentioning, earlier. <i>The Imposters</i>, for a company in LA. We finished that. We couldn't get another radio</p>

job. And... the partnership was getting a little frayed, much as a lot of partnerships and marriages and things begin to get, you know, a little bit of pressure on them. Jim was a kind of very, very eccentric guy. Extremely paranoid. It was hard for me, sometimes, to deal with this. And—but anyway, he was married. I was married, then. And we were living in West Los Angeles. And one day I went over to his house to kind of do something and no one was there. And the landlord told me that they had left—Jim and his wife, Naomi. They'd gotten in his car and taken off. They'd gone to New York. And that was the last time—well, I didn't see him then, but I didn't really talk to him again for 18 years. You know, he just split.

01:01:23    Jesse            Host            And it was over. And it was kind of a relief, in some ways, that it was over, because it was getting to be a bad marriage, you know. I—I mean I can only imagine that, you know... this relationship must have been kind of seriously intense. I mean, I—honestly, I can't imagine anything dealing with the man that I see on the television screen as not being intense.

*[Mal chuckles.]*

01:01:42    Mal                Guest            I imagine, like, eating a grapefruit with him would be intense. *[Chuckling.]* Well. Uh, it was! You know, and I think when we were both single and we were just, you know, drifting around San Francisco and sitting on curbs and eating sandwiches and... and having these adventures, it was a great adventure! You know. It really was a great adventure. I think, in a way, why I've been attached to this stuff my whole life and maybe even put out this boxset—I could have let this stuff go a long time ago, but it kind of almost represents some kind of youthful exuberance and stupidity and intensity that you can only have when you're 24 or 23. You know. And... I don't know. I don't know where we started this question. *[Laughs.]* 'Cause I'm lost in a lot of different thoughts here. But—yeah, ultimately it was—it was probably too intense, you know? It was too intense.

01:02:40    Jesse            Host            You went on to basically make your career out of doing this kind of thing and you eventually sort of became known as the man on the street guy.

*[Mal affirms.]*

01:03:18    Mal                Guest            Both locally, in the—both locally, here in the—*in the Bay—*or, excuse me, not here in the Bay Area. I live in Los Angeles, now. Both locally, in the Bay Area, and nationally. Was it—how was it different to work—to be working by yourself for so long after having this kind of catalyzing, you know, five- or ten-year relationship with a—with a partner?

Well, you know, I... I sorta left doing the thing with him. I went to work on a—with a company in LA that created radio commercials. And I really enjoyed that work. We were creating. You know, it was in the middle of the '60s. The Beatles were happening, and sound got really interesting. The Mode synthesizer arrived, and this whole thing sprung up. And I loved creating this stuff and making it, but I kept getting calls for man on the street interviews. And so, slowly I started taking these things and developed a style that wasn't as antagonistic. You know, as intense as my thing with Jim. And,

ultimately, I kinda fell into my own style, which was a little more friendly. A little more drawing people out, bringing out their humor, having a good time with them, on the street.

And, so it was rather different, but still very enjoyable to me. And compared with other jobs I could have had, even the one I had at this production company, it was great being outside all day. You know. Walking around with a tape recorder. It was—I liked meeting people and engaging them and having a good time with them. So, it turned out pretty—for some weird reason, nothing I had ever intended to do in life—it turned out to be a really nice career. Mal Sharpe, of Coyle and Sharpe from 2006. I wanna send you off with one more classic Coyle and Sharpe recording. This is “Wolverine Football”.

01:04:36 Jesse Host

01:04:46 Clip Clip

*[Throughout the clip, sounds of a football game in the background punctuate the dialogue—shouts, cheers, the occasional blow of a whistle.]*

**Jim:** *[Using a German accent.]* Say, what’s this, uh... what is this called?

**Speaker:** What?

**Jim:** The games they play here.

**Speaker:** It’s football.

**Mal:** *[Also using a German accent.]* You’ve participated in the game? You are a coach?

**Speaker:** No, I used to play. That’s about it. My playing days are over.

**Jim:** We are from Hansiotic Zoologicalive. I ask you this question: we have, this ourselves, a group of animals that we have brought from our country. And we would like to have them do things that people can do. But you know the game. You know the football. Would you be able to take the animals and train them to play? Make a team of them to play these boys?

**Speaker:** Animals?

**Mal:** Yeah.

**Jim:** Yes.

**Speaker:** What kind of animal?

**Jim:** We have some animals that you would, uh... oh right, oh they say, are fierce. We have wolverines, which are very fast.

01:05:31 Clip Clip

**Mal:** You see, we are keeping them very hungry so that they remain vicious in a game.

**Speaker:** How big are the wolverines?

**Jim:** They are as big as—oh, how do you say—a Great Dane.

**Mal:** But the wolverines we have all weigh over 300 pounds.

**Jim:** We have taught the wolverines foot soccer. We have one wolverine soccer team.

**Mal:** We have taught the wolverines to run on their two hindfeet.

**Jim:** But now we wish for America to see the athletic wolverine playing other human beings in an American sport. Baseball, this is out of the question.

**Speaker:** There's a lot of good coaches around [*inaudible*]. And I know they'd be—they'd be all eager to—the work with wolverines. It's something that nobody ever done before. Be kind of a challenge.

**Mal:** Could we tell you that one of the wolverines has beaten us in a footrace?

**Speaker:** How do they throw passes? How do they center the ball like that kid's doing, right now? How do they—how do they get through the four legs and throw it back to the dog behind them?

**Jim:** This—we have the king wolverine who teaches other by example. He is huge. He is most fierce. And he would be the best, probably.

**Mal:** He has been elected the captain by the other wolverines.

**Jim:** Wolverines against humans in football. This is what we wish. Now, what would be bad? You said, before, trouble with centering the football.

**Speaker:** Well, they gotta center between the legs, right?

**Jim:** Who does?

**Speaker:** The—uh, the center.

**Jim:** Yes?

**Speaker:** That'd be the wolverine. Right? He'd have to center that ball back, between his four legs.

**Mal:** Let us bring, to you, to your home, one of these animals. You keep it with you.

**Speaker:** I live in the city.

**Mal:** Yeah, you keep it in the city.

**Speaker:** Yeah, but I haven't got no backyard.

**Mal:** No backyard! In the apartment.

**Speaker:** A wolverine in an apartment?

01:06:34 Clip

Clip

**Jim:** You could keep those that turn out best.

**Speaker:** I live in a five-room flat and no backyard. And no back porch. Where do I keep all the team?

01:07:10 Clip Clip

**Mal:** We have the wolverines on a chain. We have them on a chain, they are linked together. You just bring them in. You put a small spike in your living room, and you will not care that there may be some bodily harm to you, because they are ferocious.

**Jim:** No, this is not—

**Speaker:** What are they gonna do to me?

**Mal:** Bite!

**Jim:** We know this. Something like this takes time. You don't overnight take animals. You don't take beasts and make them athletes. If you could train them so well, we have, then, a game where they play these boys, here.

**Speaker:** Well, wolverine'll tear them apart! You say they were vicious. You keep them hungry, alright? Then they gotta—they gotta—they have to either tackle the player or touch the player. There's a—

**Jim:** Who tackles? Who would tackle?

**Speaker:** The wolverine would have to grab them. Or either—you know—either with their paws or with their jaws.

**Mal:** Would you suggest that we—

**Speaker:** Basically, if the guy had the ball and the wolverine tried to get him, he'd probably take a hunk out of his fanny, but he'd catch him.

**Mal:** What were these first fundamentals you would teach the wolverine?

**Speaker:** First you have to teach him how to stand still and line up! That's the first thing.

**Mal:** Yeah. Yeah. Then what?

**Speaker:** Then that's it. If they can get that far, then I'll teach them the rest.

01:08:10 Jesse Host

Coyle and Sharpe. Mal Sharpe passed away in March. He was 83 years old. I can't begin to express my gratitude to Mal, for the kindness that he showed me, through my career—from when I was a clueless 19- or 20-year-old, until the day he died. But, to be honest, he was just that kind of guy. I think that one of the reasons that, when they revealed it was a prank at the end of every Coyle and Sharpe recording—which they did, every time—the person almost without exception laughed, was because Mal was the kind of



person who would make you feel comfortable in any situation. Even when he was pitching you wolverine football.

Anyway. Thanks, Mal. You'll be remembered. Why don't we read the credits over one of Mal's recordings? His music recordings! His band was called The Big Money in Jazz Band. And they were a mainstay in North Beach, for decades. Take it away, Mal and company.

01:09:17 Music Transition

A brassy instrumental from Mal Sharpe's The Big Money in Jazz Band.

01:09:21 Jesse Host

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is recorded out of the homes of me and the staff of MaximumFun, in and around Los Angeles, California. Here's an update from Jordan Kauwling, my colleague's home: she and her roommates threw a *Clue/Clueless* party, at their house, where they dressed like the cast from the movie *Clueless* to play the boardgame *Clue*.

Our 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 the aforementioned Jordan Kauwling. 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. Our special thanks, this week, not only to the late, great Mal Sharpe, but to his brilliant daughter, Jennifer Sharpe, who is a public radio colleague of many, many years and put huge amounts of effort into preserving her father's legacy—without which, none of what we just played would have been possible. So, thank you to Jennifer. She's a wonderful lady and I know she's hurting 'cause she lost her dad, but we loved him too, Jennifer. And thank you.

01:10:45 Promo Promo

You can keep up with *Bullseye* on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

**Speaker:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*