

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “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.
00:00:19	Jesse	Host	Coming to you from my home office, in Los Angeles, it’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Amy Sherman Palladino has worked on some of television’s most beloved comedies. She started out as a staff writer on <i>Roseanne</i> , back in the early 1990s. She went on to create <i>The Gilmore Girls</i> , maybe you’ve heard of that one. These days, she’s the creator of <i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i> . The show is about Midge Maisel and her dysfunctional family. Midge is a housewife who lives in 1950s New York. She finds out her husband is having an affair and decides to channel her pain into a standup comedy career.  The show has won its fair share of awards. A Peabody, a Golden Globe, a truckload of Emmys. In fact, we just got word that the show is up for 20 Emmys, this year. <u>Twenty</u> . Two-zero. So, we figured now is a good time to replay my conversation with Amy Sherman Palladino, from last year.  One of Amy’s superpowers, I think, is writing scenes with quick, punchy dialogue between characters. Here’s an example. This is a clip from <i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i> . Midge and her manager, Susie, are at a TV studio. Susie’s gotten Midge her first television appearance and it’s every comics dream breakthrough booking: a telethon.
00:01:30	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:31	Clip	Clip	<i>[The sound of people talking in the background.]</i>  <b>Music:</b> Light, chiming music.  <b>Midge (<i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i>):</b> So, this is really happening.  <b>Susie:</b> This is really happening.  <b>Sal:</b> You talent?  <b>Susie:</b> You bet!  <b>Sal:</b> You bring your sheet music?  <b>Susie:</b> She’s not a singer.  <b>Midge:</b> I’m a comedian.  <b>Susie:</b> Mrs. Maisel. <b>Sal:</b> You’re down for five minutes at 21:50.  <b>Midge:</b> At what?
00:01:39	Clip	Clip	

**Sal:** We do military time. 21:50 is 9:50 at night. If you get confused, just add the number 12 to whatever time it is.

*[A bell rings.]*

**Midge:** Add what to what?

**Loudspeaker:** Next!

**Sal:** Follow me!

**Midge:** Sure.

**Sal:** I'm Sal.

**Midge:** Nice to meet you.

**Sal:** This is Mrs. Maisel! A comedian! She does five minutes at 21:50. Solo act. Any props?

**Midge:** Nope.

**Sal:** Stand on the 'x'.

**Midge:** Okay.

**Sal:** Mic check!

**Midge:** *[Into the mic.]* One, two.

**Loudspeaker:** Next!

**Sal:** Thank you!

*[A bell rings.]*

**Midge:** Oh. Uuh, okay.

**Susie:** Wait, we dragged ourselves down here at 8 o'clock in the morning and that's it?

**Sal:** *[Muffled by something in his mouth.]* That's it!

**Susie:** I showered!

**Sal:** Thank you showering! We'll see you tomorrow, 1600 hours.

**Susie:** When's that? Wait, Sal—

**Midge:** Things move fast in the television business. Music swells and fades.

00:01:56    Clip            Clip

00:02:12    Sound Effect        Transition

00:02:14    Jesse                Host

00:02:17    Amy Sherman Palladino    Guest

*[Chuckling.]* Amy Sherman Palladino, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to have you on the show.

Oh, it's so lovely to be here.

00:02:19 Jesse Host Aw, I'm glad to hear that.

*[Amy confirms.]*

00:02:23 Amy Guest I'm not 100% sure if it was sincere, but it's—  
It was—it's as sincere as I can muster on the night before table read. That's what you get.

00:02:27 Jesse Host Now we're talking! What's the—

*[Amy chuckles.]*

00:02:30 Amy Guest What's the table read tomorrow?  
Tomorrow we read the last episode of season three.

00:02:35 Jesse Host Are you nervous about it because things have gone poorly or simply because what you've written is now going to come alive and you could potentially be embarrassed?

00:02:45 Amy Guest I don't know that neeervous is the exact word. It's a very big show. Our last two shows, this season, are very big. So, it's just a little—it's a little daunting. There'll be a lot of valium involved. I think it's all gonna be fine.

00:03:00 Jesse Host *[Chuckling.]* Well, I am optimistic about it, on your behalf.

00:03:03 Amy Guest Oh, good.

00:03:04 Jesse Host And I am glad to have you on the show. You grew up in showbusiness, in a very interesting way. Your father was a comic and your mother a dancer.

*[Amy confirms.]*

00:03:21 Amy Guest And you kind of grew up to be a comedy dancer. *[Laughs.]* Like—  
Yes, I was just a hilarious ballerina. It was just nothing but comedy every time I put toe shoes on.

00:03:26 Jesse Host But, I mean, it truly is, like—you really split the difference. By the time you were done with high school, you were auditioning for dance parts and writing comedy scripts. So, was that always what your expectation of what your life would be?

00:03:43 Amy Guest No, I was—I was supposed to be a dancer, and my mother is still waiting for a return on her investment, of all those toe shoes—which she hasn't seen, yet. But I was not going to be a writer. I had no intention of being a writer. And then—and then I got to—in an improv group, school, class, something and I met a girl and we were bored and out of work and sat around eating dingdongs and drinking tea. And we wrote a couple of spec scripts just, basically, for the hell of it. And that got us on Roseanne.

And when I got Roseanne, I was not sure I wanted to do it, because I was a dancer. I didn't go to an office and a nine-to-five. What is that craziness? That's mental! You know, people—it was a room full of men in jeans and very pristine white sneakers and button up shirts and I'm like, "This is not—this is completely not my world." And yet it was, apparently, very fortunate that I made that turn, because I get to eat now. Which I didn't get to do when I was young and danced.

00:04:51 Jesse Host So, did you have what it took to be a dancer? Especially a ballet dancer? Like, one of the weird things about being a ballet dancer is you can have all of the commitment in the world and you can even have all the skill in the world and still be wrong for it, because

00:05:12 Amy Guest

you're, like, calf is the wrong shape or something. I'm not expert.  
Uh—

Well, you—no, you sound—you've—apparently you're an expert on calves, which is all you really need to be.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

You know, when I was in ballet, I was always—I always felt like my body was not the correct ballet body. I was short waist; I was a jumper and a turner. But I didn't have, like, the elegant, like bourrées drove me crazy 'cause, like, anything that was, like, fluttery and light I wanted to kill myself. I liked what the guys did. I liked, like, the strong stuff. And I went to school in—you know, my school in LA was a school that, like, Heather Watts—who is a prima ballerina in New York City Ballet—like, she came out of that school. Like, it was a very serious ballet school. And every year, Geoffrey would come down and they would hold auditions for their summer program and, like, two or three years in a row they'd be like, "*[Clicks teeth.]*" You know what? Next year. Next year."

And like, by the third time I heard "next year", I'm like, "You know what? *[Chuckles.]* I'm gonna add some tap and some jazz to this *[censored]* and I'm gonna find a—" Because it was—it was clear to me that ballet—while I loved it and I loved being en pointe, which is insane because, you know, it's... it's just horrible for your feet and completely unnatural, but it's just a very fun *[chuckles]*—it's fun! It's just fun! It's otherworldly. It's a weird superpower when you can get up on your toe and turn. It's—and balance and hold. It's a—it's a—it's a really freeing sort of interesting way to sort of grow up. And I now, like—I proselytize to all of my friends who have children, because I really believe every kid should go to ballet class for—until they're ten. And then if they wanna quit, let them quit.

But it gives you such an amazing sense of your body and, like, who you are. And especially girls, 'cause your body gets so weird and everything changes and it's strange. But, like, just to have sort of like a balance sense of yourself and that sort of strength and—you know, ballet dancers are a little less, like, embarrassed about their bodies. 'Cause, you know, they smell bad all the time and you're always like hanging out with, like, sweat all over you and you're just, like, with each other. Like, you know, when you're doing partnering, some guy's got his hand up your crotch. It's just what it is. 'Cause that's how you're balancing. It's just a weird—it's like you sort of lose a little bit of that prudishness about *[scandalized]* "Ooh, my body! And ooh and I'm so this—and look at that!"

It sort of, like—it's a creature. It's like this other creature. And I think that dance, to me—I love working with dancers more than anything in the world. We use dancers a lot on our shows, because they're disciplined, they're focused. They—you know, they get paid nothing. If you give them a sandwich, they're happy. So, they're like—they get paid absolutely nothing and the fact that that... it's an artform just purely for the enjoyment of the artform, as opposed to any sort of, like, "I'm gonna be this famous ballerina and make a billion dollars!" Like, it doesn't work that way. So, you know, one in a million people—there's one Baryshnikov. That's it. You know. It's

like—it's like—it's not—it's not one of those artforms that you're—you go into for the commerce of it or the, "I'm gonna be world famous." You really go into it for the love and the art of it. And there's something really great about that. And I look back on those days quite fondly. Especially when I look in the mirror, now, and I see what I look like. I just didn't appreciate it.

00:08:32 Jesse Host

What kind of comic was your dad? You grew up in the Los Angeles area. Was he working the road or was he writing or what?

00:08:42 Amy Guest

Well, my dad—when I was young—was—he started in the Catskills, as every Jew has to. And he was very much in that—sort of that Shecky Greene, Jackie Mason sort of group of comics. And he toured a lot. He toured with Diana Washington. He toured with Johnny Mathis and José Feliciano and then, when we moved out to LA—or they moved out to LA and then they had me there, which I've never, ever forgiven them for. Because, like, at least get it on the birth certificate that I was east coast. I was very—it's a thing. They—he was—he did a lot of work for, like—*The Bobby Darin Show*, *The Joey Bishop Show*. Anything with like a name and a show, he was sort of a variety writer for a long time. Anything that had to do with jokes and comedy.

And then he—the last—[stammers, thinking] I don't know, oof, 40 years of his life? He did cruises. He did—it was comedy cruises. He was—he was Mr. Saturday Night and he would go on these cruises and he was like Bono halfway through. 'Cause they—everyone was like 200 years old and they loved him. And he would go on the cruises and he would talk about—my dad was a riffer. He was a very stream of conscious kind of guy, you know. He would—he didn't work blue, which is why they loved him. But he could just get on a boat and talk about what was ridiculous on the boat and the people that they met and the—and because of that, everybody sort of felt like the show was sort of special to them. And he was just really successful at that, 'til basically 'til he was too old to—you know—do it anymore. And it was great, 'cause my mom went with him and they toured all over the world.

And, you know, it was—he—my father never, ever held a day job. He worked his entire life. He bought a house, he put me through all of my ridiculous ballet school—which is, you know, ballet is also not a cheap artform. It takes a lot of money, 'cause you—you know, you go through a pair of toe shoes, you know, in a—in a—a month or a couple of weeks, sometimes. It's a lot of cashflow to keep it going. I, you know, while he never became, like, a household name, he never, ever did anything but comedy. And that's how he supported us and that's very admirable and unusual. You know. My parents looked at it differently. They were—they were pissed, but I thought that's a great thing! If you've never held a day job, then you made your money the way you were supposed to make your money.

00:11:00 Jesse Host

We have a clip of your dad doing standup, in his capacity as the king of the high seas.

00:11:06 Amy Guest

Oh Jesus.

00:11:07 Jesse Host

On a—this is—this is a clip from a cruise to Mexico, on the *Celebrity Mercury*.

[Amy affirms.]

00:11:14 Sound Effect Transition Music swells and fades.

00:11:15 Clip Clip *[The audience shouts and cheers.]*

**Don Sherman:** But I wanted to see Mazatlán, so I go out in the terminal and all I see are busses! Busses! Busses! Busses! All those busses! And they have no place to go!

*[The audience laughs.]*

Now, I know why I can't get a bus in New York! They're all in Cabo San Lucas! I got on one of the busses. The man took me to the Golden Zone. He took me to the El Shit Hotel, he took me to a beautiful church that was packed with passengers all praying they'd never have to come back to Mazatlán again!

*[Applause and laughter from the audience.]*

00:12:03 Sound Effect Transition And then they brought us to Acapulco, which is Mazatlán spelled backwards. Acapulco. That's like a K-Mart that's out of control. Music swells and fades.

00:12:04 Jesse Host *[Chuckles.]*

00:12:05 Amy Guest He was a funny dude!

00:12:07 Jesse Host He's selling them, too. There's—there was—I don't think that there was anybody in that audience who wasn't—who wasn't bowled over, you know what I mean?

00:12:15 Amy Guest Oh no, my dad was—I'm telling you, 'cause he would go on the cruises and it was the greatest gig in the world, 'cause he would do—they had these big—they'd build these beautiful theaters, on these boats. They're like, you know, 1500 seat theaters. It's ridiculous. And they have two shows and he would go on and he would do basically one night. He would do two shows. And that was it! That *[laughs]*—that's how he made—and the rest of the time he hung out on the cruises and it would always happen about midway through the cruise. So, the cruise would start and everyone's happy and feeling great and two days in, the fathers especially start to realize they've been had, and nothing is free like they thought it was. And nothing's included like they thought it was. And the kids are starting to get weird and hang out in, like, hallways at night. And the—

*[Jesse laughs.]*

Everyone's sort of squabbling and turning on each other and then my dad would come on, halfway through the cruise, and all he would do was that. And talk about how ridiculous the cruises were. And it was like—it was like therapy. So, everybody was like, "YES! Someone understands us! Somebody feels our pain!" And, like, it would—like, literally alleviate the tension. And I believe he saved marriages. He saved people from throwing their children overboard. I mean, there was all sorts of things that could have happened if it had continued down the road it was going. It was—it was a great, great gig for him. And he was really great at it. And he was—he loved doing it. So, you know, there—there you go. I mean, and

occasionally, you know, there's—you get sick. Because everyone gets sick on those cruises, because they're filthy.

00:13:44 Jesse Host But other than that, it was a delightful experience. How old were you when you and your writing partner got the job on *Roseanne*?

00:13:48 Amy Guest I was twentyyyy—23, 24? I was young. [*Longingly.*] I was so young.

00:13:53 Jesse Host [*Laughs.*] And it was—it was season three of *Roseanne*, right? Was your—was your first year?

00:13:56 Amy Guest My first was season three. I was there three, four, five, six.

00:13:59 Jesse Host I—my *Roseanne* history is a little blurry at the edges, but that's kind of in be—

00:14:05 Amy Guest So's hers. So. There you go. Ha-ha.

[*Jesse chuckles.*]

00:14:09 Jesse Host Ba-dum-bump. I'll be here all night. [*Laughing.*] Uh, it's—that's kind of in between the most intense madness of *Roseanne*. Right? Like, the first and second season was when all of the people who, you know, had been installed were getting uninstalled.

[*Amy confirms.*]

00:14:33 Amy Guest And later on was when things—maybe production-wise—got a little batty. What was it like working on that show?

Well, season three especially was great. Uh, the—my first year. And... was it four? Season three and four? Those are the two, like, really great years. Bob Myers was running the show and he was a great showrunner. Like, he was an old-school showrunner. You know, he came up, like, *My Two Dads* and, like, old school sitcom. And, you know, we never—we didn't have a table. We sat in his office, on couches, and we each held our own pad and wrote our own notes, like a writer's assistant didn't sit in there and type incessantly. Like, you know, it was a completely—it was very, very old school. It was very Mary Tyler Moore.

I mean, on—[*chuckling*] sorry, Dick Van Dyke. You know, like where you just sort of like sat around and kind of riffed and. And it wasn't as—it didn't have a corporate feeling at all. It really felt like what my vision of a writer's room still is. And because she had gone through all the madness of breaking up with her husband and she was together with Tom and they sort of fired everybody and they'd sort of taken over the show. It was—it was—those two years especially were very, sort of like, great oases, because she was happy, and she was very focused on her relationship and she had also banned the studio and the network from the set. So, my first experience in a show—there were no studio or network notes. I didn't—I didn't know they could give notes. I had literally no idea, because it was just very much the writers and then the writers with *Roseanne* or the writers with the actors.

It was the way... to me, it should be! You know, like, we would come in. We'd break our stories. We'd write our scripts. We'd do our table reads. We'd go back. We'd talk about it. We'd do our fixes, in the next day. And it wasn't until I got off of *Roseanne* and I was

on another show—and, you know, I was four years! So, I left a supervising producer and I went onto another show and I was like, “Who are all these people sitting around this table? And why are we listening to them?” Like, someone had to say to me, “This is—this is the network and the studio.”

And I’m like, “So what? We have work to do! And like, we have—like, we have to wait and get their notes?” It was like a foreign concept, to me, that suddenly there was this layer between the writers and the actors. And it was—so, basically, *Roseanne* prepared me completely for what I’m doing and yet... didn’t prepare me at all for the actual business of show. Because I didn’t—I—you know, I sort of grew up in a—in a utopian writer’s room. *[Chuckling.]* You know? So, it was—it was Xanadu.

And then seasons—the last two seasons that I was there, Bob left and then the staff started to get ridiculously big and she started to get more unhappy with Tom and then things sort of shifted. And I—when I left it, I was ready—I was ready to go.

00:17:21 Jesse Host

I wanna play a scene from one of my guest, Amy Sherman Palladino’s, episodes of *Roseanne*, back in the day. So, in this episode, Becky—who’s one of Roseanne’s daughters—has run away from home and she’s staying with Aunt Jackie.

*[Amy confirms.]*

00:17:42 Sound Effect Transition

And Darlene comes in to check on her—her sister. Music swells and fades.

00:17:43 Clip Clip

**Darlene (*Roseanne*):** What did mom do that was so horrible?

**Becky:** Everything! She wouldn’t let me see Mark.

**Darlene:** Well, you saw him anyway!

**Becky:** *[Defensively.]* Well, I had to lie about it!

**Darlene:** *[Angrily.]* You didn’t lie! I lied! I covered for you and I got grounded and you don’t even care!

*[Thumping sounds.]*

**Becky:** Look, I am sorry, Darlene. Alright?

**Darlene:** No, you’re getting off way too easy, Becky.

**Becky:** Go home, Darlene.

**Darlene:** Look. Jackie’s putting up with you. Mom and Dad are impossible. Mom and Jackie are fighting. Everybody’s yelling at everybody else and nobody’s saying what they should be saying! Becky, you’re a selfish, inconsiderate, spoiled little brat!

00:18:15 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:18:16 Amy Guest

Yeah. Those kids were really good. *[Laughs.]*

00:18:18 Jesse Host

Yeah. *[Chuckles.]* I really—I really agree.



00:18:20	Amy	Guest	That Sara Gilbert, man! She was a really good—but Lecy was great, too. They were just great, those two.
00:18:25	Jesse	Host	Everyone—I mean, one of the things about <i>Roseanne</i> is—
00:18:29	Amy	Guest	The cast was sensational.
00:18:30	Jesse	Host	Every single person on the show is extraordinarily good and, you know, like... you start with one of the most specific and powerful comic voices of her generation. You know, one that was, like—that, like, needed—that was needed and important. And then you just add exceptionally great actors who are also really funny. Like, any—any time, you know, you could be like, “Oh yeah, and number three on the call sheet is Laurie Metcalf.” You know?
00:18:04	Amy	Guest	Yeah, I know. I know. And Laurie was the kind of person, you know—what I learned, also, on <i>Roseanne</i> is that comedy wasn't all—was not about jokes. And <i>Roseanne</i> didn't have a joke quota. You know. There was no mandate that we had to leave a scene on a joke. There was no mandate of how many jokes had to be on a page. It was all about people talking to each other. And Laurie was somebody that you could give something to that the joke was not in the structure of the words, but you knew she—how she was going to make it funny. 'Cause she was just, like, that brilliant.
			And that's another, you know, very strong lesson to learn—that it's not always about... it's not always about ba-dum-bum. It's about, you know, what are they saying to each other? What the situation? And really knowing who your characters are and what their voices are. And what point of view they're gonna come at. Because that's where the comedy's gonna come. And those two girls were just great, because they knew how to just play it. They were just so real! They were such real [ <i>chuckling</i> ] teenagers. You know? They drove you crazy in the way that teenagers were supposed to drive you crazy. But they really just were—they—I think that those were the two best teenage characters on television, almost comedy and drama ever—are—were Lecy and Sara.
00:20:22	Jesse	Host	There's so much fear and anger in <i>Roseanne</i> that you don't find in a lot of family sitcoms. And, you know, it typically gets resolved. I mean, that's what a sitcom is for. But it... and I mean, I guess it must just come from Roseanne's voice, as a comic. But, like, there is real dark feelings in that show that... were sooo uncommon on—you know, even like the, you know, Norman Lear sitcoms of the '70s. Like, there's so many people getting in real fights and people really... being freaked out about circumstances in their life. You know. Economic circumstances and elsewhere. That you—that you don't get in all—you know, you weren't getting in other even good sitcoms of the time.
00:21:24	Amy	Guest	Well, the best comedy is drama. That's—and the best dramas are comedies. You know? <i>Sopranos</i> was one of the funniest shows on television. So, I—to me, like, comedy and drama are simply... one is less pages than the other.

[*Jesse chuckles.*]

'Cause it—'cause it really is, like, great comedy—you know—is going to be—is going to be willing to go for those moments and go for the real moments. That's where you're gonna get the real funny but then you're gonna really knock someone on [*censored*]. Like, to me that's great comedy. And that's what great drama is, too. It's

just—it's a—'cause it's about, again, the mantra on *Roseanne* was, "Make the big small, make the small big." It was—that was the thing. It wasn't about, like, you know, a big situation. It was about the small thing that happens in life that throws people off kilter.

And that's something that I have taken to heart for the rest of my career. Because I think it's the most important thing.

00:22:22 Jesse Host

We'll wrap up with Amy Sherman Palladino after a quick break. Don't go anywhere. Amy will tell me about the big TV executive meeting where she pitched *Gilmore Girls*. But did you know it wasn't her first idea? The execs hated her first idea! More on that coming up. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

00:22:41 Promo Clip

**Music:** Slow, tonal music.

**Shereen Marisol Meraji:** Until recently, Edmond Hong says he didn't speak out against racism, because he was scared.

*[Scene changes. The sound of traffic and horns honking.]*

**Edmond Hong:** My parents told me not to speak up! Because they were scared! But I'm tired of this!

*[Scene changes.]*

**Gene Demby:** Listen now, on the *Code Switch* podcast from NPR.

00:23:00 Jesse Host

*[Music fades out.]*

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're replaying my conversation with Amy Sherman Palladino. It originally aired last year. She's the creator of *The Gilmore Girls* and *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. This year, *Maisel* is up for a monumental 20 Emmy awards. Let's get back into our conversation.

00:23:33 Amy Guest

I heard somewhere that when you sold *The Gilmore Girls*, *The Gilmore Girls* was not the pitch that you had brought into the room intending to sell. Is that true?

It wasn't even one of the first five pitches that I brought into the room.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:23:46 Jesse Host

It was literally the afterthought pitch because I had a whole other pitch. I had optioned an article and I'd worked on it and then I had like a couple of—

00:23:48 Amy Guest

Wh-what was the article about?

It was actually a really great article. It was about a girl who was a Filipino girl. Her parents were very, very traditional, old country. And she was the first-generation American kid born. And she was really smart, and she started a zine at, like, her school and she was not a traditional beauty. She was just, like, a really interesting, smart girl. And, like, she was so admired at school and, like, her boyfriend was the handsome, like, captain of the football team. She was just a very interesting individual. And she was—but she had a big battle between the traditional role that her parents thought that she should be fulfilling, as a girl in a Filipino family, and as a very American born girl who wanted to be an American girl.

00:24:52 Jesse Host And it was a great—it was a great series and they just wanted to order lunch the whole time I was talking. So. *[Laughing.]* Apparently I was the only one who thought it was great.  
*[Laughing.]* And I mean, you were in there with the—that was, like, really working on and selling a really particular thing.

*[Amy confirms.]*

00:25:41 Amy Guest Which was a relatively new phenomenon, in television. Like, you know, there had been—or, there was original programming on cable, but not that much of it. And network television programs were still by and large designed to appeal to everyone. And the idea that you were making—that this network was making programming for, you know, Indid younger women, significantly, was a big deal at the time. And it sounds like they just heard, “Oh it’s a mom and a daughter who are friends as much as they are mom and daughter,” and were like, “Yeah, that’s a thing that makes sense with our thing.”  
Yeah. It—that was literally the pitch. It was just, “It’s a mom and a daughter and they’re just more best friends than mom and daughter.”

And they’re like, “Oh, hey, that’s—go write that.”

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

And I walked out. And I turned to Gavin Polone, who was my manager at the time, and I said, “I don’t—I don’t know what that show is!” Like, it was a sentence.

And he goes, “Well go found out!” *[Laughing.]* And so, like, it’s like, “Well, now you’ve gotta go home and figure it out, because we just sold it.” So, that’s basically the way *Gilmore* was sold. But you know what, that’s—to be honest with you, that’s the way *Bunheads* came about and that’s the way *Maisel* came about. Every time I’ve walked into a room with a really, like, planned—it’s never been the same as I’m just in a room shooting my mouth off, as usual, talking a mile a minute, wearing a hat that makes everybody nervous.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

00:26:44 Jesse Host And then something I say sparks somebody who’s huddled in a corner and peeks their head out for five seconds from behind their hands to go, “Go write that!” Now maybe they just wanna get me out of the room, but it’s like literally every single time I’ve—on all three of those shows, it’s kind of all happened the same way.  
*Gilmore Girls*, I think, also has... carries, like, a very specific kind of television fantasy in a very unusual way. Like, there were a whole, you know—I don’t know if this is still the watchword at USA, but for a long time USA was supposed to be the blue skies network, right?  
And it was like, where—

00:27:06 Amy Guest Oh, were they? *[Chuckles.]*

00:27:07 Jesse Host Yeah. And you know, all the—all the procedurals, including the really great ones, you know—*Monk* is a great show—were all, you know, they had their—they had their elements of conflict, but the

goal was to give you an escapist experience and *Gilmore Girls* has some of those qualities, especially in its setting. You know what I mean? Like—

00:27:30 Amy Guest Stars Hollow, yeah. Absolutely.  
00:27:31 Jesse Host Yeah. It's in—it's in kind of a dream town.

*[Amy agrees several times.]*

Which, I mean like both—like, the kind of town you would like to live in and the kind of town that kind of shares qualities with a dream. You know what I mean? Like—but at the same time, there are a lot of weird edges in there, in a way that those kinds of shows don't typically have. You know, usually they have, like, one edge. You know?

And I'm just—I don't know, I think it's cool that it was on TV for so long.

*[They laugh.]*

00:28:04 Amy Guest You know what I mean?  
I think it's amazing it was on TV for so long. It was—you know, *Gilmore* was basically—it was based on a tragedy. It's a tragedy. It was the dissolution of a family. It was a girl who rejected everything that her parents stood for and even to the very end of *Gilmore Girls*, that rift was never healed. It was—it's what drove the narrative of *Gilmore Girls*, was alienation and *[laughing]* pain. You know? I mean, Emily only got a relationship with her granddaughter out of blackmail. You know? And only got her daughter back into her life via blackmail. It's—that is the basis of *Gilmore Girls*. It's just they happen to live in this very cute, quirky town that was fun. And because the point of the whole thing was, to me, like—if the family you have doesn't work out, go out and create a family that does. And that's what—you know, that's what Lorelai did. She found this place that she felt like family. And that's how her family in her mind would relate to each other. Because her family did not do that for her.

And so, I think that the rough edges just come from the fact that this whole thing is based on people that were very hurtful to each other, on all sides.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

00:29:28 Jesse Host Yaaay! *[Singing.]* Dun-na-dun da-dun-da!  
Yeah, I mean like I feel like the difference between—the difference between *Gilmore* being a sitcom and being a drama, besides the number of pages—I mean, I'm sure that you could write a drama's worth of pages for a sitcom script, being who you are. That being your superpower. But one of the big differences is, like, all sitcoms are based on a family that... is, you know, made, unresolved, and then resolves. Like, there is something that creates, uh, a disjuncture in the family. And then the narrative of the show and the relationships come back together, at the end. Like, you know, whether it's a literal family or whether it's—you know, the people who know your name at the bar, right?

[Amy agrees.]

And *Gilmore Girls*—what’s special about it, I think, is that it has—it has that kind of classic sitcoms ersatz family, right? It’s Lauren Graham’s character and her daughter and her best friend and her friend down at the diner and—depending on the season, the person she’s having a romance with. But it’s also [laughing]—it’s also the—like, one of the realities of that family is that her family is fundamentally broken.

00:30:57 Amy Guest

Completely broken.

[Jesse agrees several times.]

Absolutely, completely broken. And doesn’t understand each other at all. They literally—they had seven years of talking to each other and they still didn’t understand each other. Like, they just did not—she did not understand her mother and her mother just did not understand her daughter. And that—and then eventually, like, Rory was sort of stuck in the middle. [Chuckling.] Because she wanted, you know, her mother was her best friend and she wanted a relationship with her grandmother, but it’s like how do you pick sides? It’s—it was a war. It was an emotional war. And they—the interesting thing about *Gilmore Girls* in that—I will say the one—I’ve always given them credit for this, the one really good note in my entire career that I’ve gotten was when I wrote the pilot, initially—or when I pitched the pilot initially—I didn’t pitch it—I pitched it up to the first Friday night dinner.

And I—and to me, episode one was that Friday night dinner. And Susanne Daniel said to me, “Boy, I’d really like to see that Friday night dinner.”

And I’m like, “Oh, alright.” You know. I didn’t know. I came from a half hour. I’m like, “That’s just more pages, right? Okay. I’ll just—you know—” And, literally, it was the Friday night dinner and the battleground and setting the battle lines, in that house—that that was gonna be the house where war took place, that I believe got it on the air and made the show.

00:32:20 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:32:21 Clip Clip

**Rory (*Gilmore Girls*):** Sooo, grandpa. How’s the insurance biz?

**Richard:** [Bored.] Oh, people die. We pay. People crash cars. We pay. People lose a foot. We pay.

**Lorelai:** Well at least you have your new slogan.

**Richard:** And how are things at the motel?

**Lorelai:** The inn? They’re great.

**Emily:** Lorelai’s the executive manager now. Isn’t that wonderful?

**Richard:** Speaking of which, Christopher called yesterday.

**Lorelai:** Speaking of which! How is that a “speaking of which”?

**Richard:** He’s doing very well, in California. His internet startup goes public, next month. This could mean big things for him. Very talented man, your father.

**Lorelai:** She knows.

**Richard:** He always was a smart one, that boy. You must take after him.

**Lorelai:** Speaking of which! I’m gonna get a coke. Or a knife!  
Music swells and fades.

00:33:03 Sound Effect Transition

00:33:04 Amy Guest

I think without that scene, it would have been lighter and fluffy, and it would not have had the weight of, “Oh, these people are really gonna do battle with each other. *[Laughing.]* There’s gonna be—there will be blood!” And that was a great—it was a—it was a great note, and I will—I will—my hat’s off to Susanne for making me do it. Let’s talk a little bit about *Mrs. Maisel*. I read somewhere—and this may or may not be true—that, you know, you obviously have collaborators in writing this show, including your husband who has been a creative partner and business partner with you for quite a long time. But I read that you, personally, wrote her standup. Is that actually true?

00:33:25 Jesse Host

00:33:47 Amy Guest

Well, we write her standup. I mean, Dan and I—if it’s Dan’s script, he’ll write it. If it’s my script, I’ll write it. But we always write her standup. Because her standup comes from story. That’s how it was conceived. Because we had to decide what—you know, I had to decide what kind of comic she was gonna be. And my father was an observation—I mean, you saw that he’s a ranter. He was a—he was a stream of conscious kind of guy. You know. He—the guys—the people that I admire, the Mel Brookes, they just blathered funny! And that was the kind of comedy that I loved and the kind of comedy that I thought, “If you take an actress who wasn’t a comic, you gotta give her a way into the character that she’s gonna be able to understand.”

‘Cause it’s a whole different muscle, being a standup comic. It’s a—it’s a very different way of thinking and creating your voice and I needed to give an actress a way to get in there that she could understand, and I thought, “Well, you give her—make sure that every act she has is grounded in something that’s happening in the episode.” So, she’s basically staying on story. And because of that, it just—it comes—it has to—‘cause as it comes from the character, it comes from the story, that’s something that we can do. You know.

I don’t write ba-dum-bum jokes. We’ve got some very, very good road comics who come in and helps us, especially with—‘cause we have so much comedy in it. We have so many standup routines. And they help punch up and things like that. You know. So, they’re involved in the whole process. I’m not trying to diminish their accomplishments or—because they’re very important to me and if they leave me I’ll kill them.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

But the crux of what her comedy has to be—it's intertwined with what we're writing, anyhow.

00:35:37 Jesse Host Were you worried that you would get it wrong somehow? I mean, like, I remember when *Studio 60* was on TV, how mad every sketch and improv friend I had was about the sketches on that show—that they had decided to show. *[Chuckles.]*

00:35:53 Amy Guest Yeah. Um. Yes, actually. We were very concerned because—because the world is... it's very specific and it's a hard world to show people. You're in a club. You think, like, "God, there's so many, like, weird people here and interesting relationships and it would be such a—" But the thing about comedy and comedy clubs is they're very sad places. *[Chuckling.]* They're not—they're not inherently funny places, because most good comedy comes from pain and unhappiness and a lot of comics are not happy pappy campers, offstage. That's why they're funny onstage. So, there's a lot of, like, darkness to a comedy club that I think when people think, "Oh you do something in a comedy club, it's just gonna be so funny and everyone's gonna be sitting around making each other laugh." And it's like—but that's—that was not my experience, a) with my father, his friends, or my friends who were standups. Or even when I worked the—I worked in The Comedy Store for a while. Not as a standup, just worked there. So, it was very observational.

I didn't see this happy, funny, hilarity world. I saw a lot of dark souls *[laughing]* going through there. And so—and it's a very—it's like—it's like they've been trying to crack, like, how to be a chef and show that on television. Like, I don't think that's a world that anybody has figured out how to show people. So, what we've tried to do is make sure that—because Midge is a complete novice to this. She has no—she had no knowledge of how to go about this. We sort of felt like as long as we were going through it with her—through her eyes—we—it's easier to sort of show people what the world is, because she's experiencing it firsthand. And we're not saying, "Hey! Here's the world fully formed." You know, she's learning how to be a comic. She's learning what it is to put an act together. She's learning what it is to bomb and not succeed or be alone or have to make choices that she wouldn't have had to make if she was just living on the Upper West Side and going to the butcher's shop every day.

So, because—and also because we decided a long time ago this is not—you know, when I pitched this, I said, "This is not the story of a standup comic. It's a story of a woman who hit—who hits a point in her life, and she discovers a whole other way to live her life." And the idea of taking a woman who was not a 1950s housewife, who was dissatisfied with her life or staring out a window thinking, "There's something better out there," but a woman who really loved her life! *[Laughing.]* Who really thought, "I've scored. This is great." Having that ripped out from under her and then discovering this whole other... way to live. That was a journey that I thought was worth taking. And because she blows—her life blows up, everybody's life around her blows up.

So, it was not about, “I’m just gonna show you what it’s like to be a standup comic!” It’s just an element of what this woman is. It’s as much a buddy comedy, with her and Susie. It’s as much a family story, with her and her family. It’s as much a—it’s as much a... starry-eyed, crossed lovers story with her and Joel, who really do love each other, but were sort of children and blind when they went into their marriage and probably will never figure out how to be together, even though—at the end, they’ll be in the pool like Desi and Lucy with the kids and the other spouses are walking around the background and they don’t get [censored] what they’re doing. They’re just dealing with each other, like—it—there’s so many family dynamics going on, there, that—to me, like the comedy’s just one element of it.

00:39:30	Jesse	Host	What have you learned in the course of making, now, three seasons of this show about that character, that you didn’t—that you didn’t plan, going in?
00:39:40	Amy	Guest	That I’m going to die very soon.

[Jesse laughs.]

It’s aaall going to come—um, well, you learn how hard it is to do a period show. Just on—just on a nuts and bolts level. It’s really hard. I’ve learned the value of if you don’t have all the best people around you, you will fail no matter how good the script is, when you’re taking on something like this. And I’ve learned that once you commit to a road, you can’t veer off that road. So, our road is this woman and her world expanding, expanding, expanding. We can’t suddenly take her off that journey. We have to, like—we’re all in. And at some point, somebody’s gonna put the breaks on and go, “See ya!” You know. “Parking passes revoked!” [Laughing.] It’s—“We’re done!”

But it is an all-in commitment on this show. And it’s full steam ahead on every episode and we’ve got the actors who are willing to do it. We’ve got the crew that can shoot it. And as long as everybody says alive, it’s—even if we fail, it doesn’t matter. Because it’s about just pushing that forward and not being afraid or worried that we’re not gonna live up to whatever we’ve set up before. It’s just about—you gotta keep going. You gotta keep, you know—shark! You keep moving or you die.

00:41:05	Jesse	Host	Amy, I’m so grateful to you for taking all of this time to be on <i>Bullseye</i> . It was really nice to get to talk to you.
00:41:09	Amy	Guest	It was lovely to talk to you too, sir!
00:41:11	Jesse	Host	Amy Sherman Palladino, from last year. You can watch every episode of <i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i> right now, on Amazon Prime. Hopefully sequentially, not simultaneously. Also! Did Amy Sherman Palladino wear a fun hat to our interview? We’ll never know! She was in New York; we were in Los Angeles. It’s a mystery for the ages.
00:41:30	Music	Transition	Chiming, relaxed music.
00:41:32	Jesse	Host	That’s the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is produced out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. You might have heard my children making noise upstairs. Jesus, our associate producer, recently went out on his first Pokémon walk in a long time. He caught two shiny Grimers and a monster called a Qwilfish.



*[Chuckling.]* Jesus was also kind enough to share some excess Pokémon with my children, who are what I would call Pokémon-aged.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Our thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it. I don't know if you know this, but bands can't tour right now. So, it's a perfect time to support The Go! Team by hitting up Bandcamp or wherever you like to buy music and buying one of their awesome, awesome records.

You can also keep up with our show 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.

00:42:50    Promo            Promo

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

*[Music fades out.]*