00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*
00:00:12	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Roger Angell, the writer, just turned 100 years old. Let that sink in. 100. Roger has contributed to *The New Yorker* since 1944. He's mostly retired now. Mostly. He writes about a lot of stuff—primarily baseball. He was also the longtime editor of the magazine's fiction section. He was never really a sport writer, though. He never had a column; he never followed a team. Instead, he writes like a fan who's come to visit. And no one has ever matched his ability to describe how it feels to love watching a baseball game. His writing has earned him a spot in the Baseball Hall of Fame, despite the fact that he was not a member of the Baseball Writers Association of America. When I talked to him, in 2016, he'd just written *This Old Man*, a collection of stories and essays. At the time, he was a mere 95 years old. Anyway! Happy 100th birthday to Roger, the greatest baseball writer of all time—one of my favorites in any genre. Let's get into our conversation.
00:01:28	Music	Transition	Relaxed music with a steady drumbeat.
00:01:33	Jesse	Host	Welcome to *Bullseye*, Mr. Angell. It's—what a—what a pleasure to have you on the show.
00:01:36	Roger Angell	Guest	Thanks so much, Jesse! Glad to be here!
00:01:39	Jesse	Host	So, you have a really nice little piece in here about… just memories of seeing different people on the street, in New York. *[Roger confirms several times.]* And one of the people is Babe Ruth. *[They laugh.]* What—what was it like to see Babe Ruth on the street?!
00:01:52	Roger	Guest	Well, I saw—I used to see Babe playing. I saw him—I was born in 1920 and I started watching him when I was about 9 years old. And I saw him get older and fatter, but still extraordinary. And I would—I can remember coming into Yankee Stadium in that blaze of green when he came up about field-level. And he'd look around and he'd see Lou Gehrig and Frank Guzzetti—and Babe Ruth, out in right field with those little—what I once called "debutant ankles". Those little, tiny ankles that he had. *[Jesse chuckles.]* And then when he retired, once or twice—I mean, New York was much smaller back then and once or twice I saw him go by or cross—saw him across the street, mostly wearing a camel's hair coat and cap, and people would say, "Oh! Hi, Babe!" And then he

			would wave. You would—you would run into people all over town. And in the book, there's a moment I describe when my last son—my young baby son, John Henry, had gotten to be about five or six years old. And his much older half-sister, Kelly, was taking him out on his first solo bike. I mean, that was not a tricycle, an actual bike. So, they're wavering down 90th Street toward Park Avenue and at the end of the block, this old lady appears—all dressed all in dark clothes. And she sees this kid coming, just barely any control, coming toward her on a bike. And she dodges and then she grabs the handlebars and as Kelly runs up, she says, "Dangerous, aren't they?" Greta Garbo. *[Laughs.]* Only in New York.
00:03:24	Jesse	Host	*[Chuckles.]* Um, you know, when you were—you were watching—you saw Babe Ruth and the—and the great Yankee teams of the 1920s and '30s. When you were probably at your most impressionable. I mean, I think, like—everything in my life—I was reading one of your pieces, and you offhandedly mentioned Will Clark's swing and it was like such a rush of—I grew up in San Francisco in the—in the '80s and '90s, and like—it was such a rush of 1989, when I was eight years old, that I like couldn't control it. Um—
00:03:53	Roger	Guest	I still have up, on a bulletin board at home, I have a stop-frame picture of his swing. Of Clark's swing. It's such a beautiful thing. Yes.
00:04:02	Jesse	Host	So, who did you love to watch play, when you were a kid?
00:04:05	Roger	Guest	Carl Hubbell, who was pitching for the Giants, across the river, was my first pitching hero and a… well, a fabulous left-hander. Threw a screwball. And so, his pitch broke the wrong way. An absolutely dominating pitcher. He did this so often, that late in his life, he walked around, and he walked with his hand twisted around so that his little finger was facing front instead of the thumb and his palm turned outward. And I was a kid pitcher. I was about 12 or 13 years old. I wanted to be a pitcher. And I could throw a screwball—broke about a tenth of an inch, if you—about every ninth. So, I began walking around with my hand facing the wrong way at home, and my mother says, "What's the matter with your hand?" And I told her, and she said, "Don't do that." *[They laugh.]* So, there was an early hero. But I think—but the first hero that I really, aside from Ruth and the incumbent gods, the first hero that really caught my attention was Joe DiMaggio, because we heard about him before he arrived in the Pacific Coast league, burning up the league out there and then arrived and was just astounding, of course. And you could see right away who he was and that wide and unmoving stance and playing center field in a way—he never seemed to hurry and I never saw him rush out there, he just glided and flew along and made these amazing catches look easy. And the thing I became aware of with Joe was what every young fan becomes aware of—and this is a significant thing, in baseball. I mean, I never—I never write about whether baseball's a nation pastime or American game, I've never gone there. But what fans do realize, even young ones, is the passing of a baseball life. You can

see a wonderful young rookie arrive, a Ted Williams, a Joe DiMaggio, just a kid. And you can see their first great years and then moving into their full power.

And then within a decade or so, they become older players and then you can see them beginning to slow down and strain. And then they leave. They die. So, you see a life from birth to death in the space of 12 or 15, sometimes 20 years. It's very moving. I mean, everybody remembers the old age of Willie Mays, here in New York, when he'd come to play for the Mets. And he was not himself, he was just—I mean, that's another great hero of mine. I saw him arrive as a young player when I was older. And his last year, he shouldn't have done. Because I remember there was a drive to center field, there was a play in center field, and his left fielder runs over and really flipped him the ball to flip it back in. Just sort of—to throw the peg, because his arm was gone. So, and so—there's a lot of—there's a shadowing that comes over the latter part of all athletic careers.

00:06:58	Jesse	Host	You grew up to be a writer, you know, with a mother who was a legendary editor and a stepfather who was—you know, a legendary writer and legendary stylist.

[Roger agrees.]

But did you grow up to think that you were gonna be—did you ever think, "Oh, I could be a sports writer," or "I could be a novelist," or "I could be something, something, something"? Or did you always think, like, "I'm going to be a book editor or—you know, a magazine editor." Or one of these sort of jobs that your—

00:07:33	Roger	Guest	This—Jesse, I think it was both. Because my parents were separated and I lived with my father, which is not a good arrangement for anybody concerned. My sister and I were—lived with our father and saw our mother on weekends and vacations. And both our parents, they loved us and cared for us, but when I was with my mother and stepfather, in New York and then their place in Maine, later on—*The New Yorker* was all around. It was our conversation constantly. They talked about Harold Ross, the editor. He was like another member of the dinner table. Ross was always there. Ross this, Ross that. And my mother—we would be surrounded with galleys and brown pencils and eraser rubbings and doing—going down columns of editing.

And my stepfather was a writer, a very light—small slate, but he wrote the first page of *The New Yorker*, every week. The comment page, which was an editorial—in those days, fairly light in nature. But as the '30s went along into the '40s, he had to write about more serious things. The world had changed. And I used to watch him, on Tuesday mornings up in Maine. He would shut the door of his study and there'd be the thrash of a typewriter in there, now and then. But there were long, long pauses in between. And he'd come out and lunch—had lunch and eat his lunch in silence and look very grave and—writing is—writing is really hard! I began to conclude. Which it is!

And then he would—he would mail it off in the afternoon mail and say, "It wasn't good enough." And then the copy would arrive, the

rough copy of *The New Yorker* would turn up a week later, and you'd read this stuff—which was so light and flowing and easy and a pleasure to read. A cinch. You thought it took him about four minutes to write the whole thing! And I began to see what writing was like and what—the pleasure of it but also how hard it is. It's—writing is hard for almost everybody. And—but I also saw what my mother was. And as I grew up, I wanted to be a writer. I was a smart kid. I wrote well, as a kid. I was always doing things in school magazines and editor of the school paper. I wanted to be a novelist. I wanted to be Ernest Hemmingway, like everybody else of my generation. Only I wasn't.

And after the war, I had a job writing on a GI magazine—editing and writing on a GI magazine, in the Pacific. And after the war and during the war, actually, I wrote a bunch of short stories and they—they were okay! They, you know, got into the—into *The Best American Short Stories*. But I realized that there wasn't enough in me to make me into a fulltime writer. A novelist or, you know, a short story writer. I didn't have enough confidence. And I was married. I was gonna have a young family and I also wanted to be an editor. So, I became an editor and by great good luck, I went first with *Holiday Magazine* for ten years, which I loved. Both places, I could be an editor and a writer. And at *The New Yorker*, I thought whatever I wanted to write, there was always time enough and the want of the writing, too. So, I did both. And I went on doing that. And I was—it was just a natural thing for me and… it worked out pretty well. I had a good time with it.

00:10:51 Jesse Host When you started writing about baseball, in your 40s, you were at the point in your life where baseball players are at the—you know, you were in the—you were in sort of the fat middle of your professional life and the players that you were covering, you know, were staring at the age that you were and thinking about the end of their professional lives. And I wonder—I wonder what that was like for you to—just to come to terms with that. I mean, there's this moment in any sports fan's life where you realize that all the players—that the players aren't older than you anymore. And I'm approaching the point in my life *[laughs]*—you know, I've got about five years before they all start being younger than me.

[They chuckle.]

00:11:43 Roger Guest Well, we were all fans at one point—I remember, years—when I was in my—in my 30s and I was seeing a therapist once in a while. And I had a dream that I walked out the door of our little house in the country and walked down—it was a little tiny street with a footbridge, and in the tangle of greens across the way, there was a gravestone. And I pushed it aside and on it was my birthdate—1920—and then then the present year, which might have been 1953, let's say. And I thought, "What is this?!" And the therapist said, "What does that remind you of?"

And I said, "It reminds me of those gravestones. Those marker stones for bygone players out in the center of Yankee Stadium. And then it came to me—it was the end of my dreams of being a major league ball player!

[They laugh.]

			I had died! My baseball playing years were over! I never played baseball, but they were over. *[They laugh.]*
00:12:44	Jesse	Host	Yeah, like, there is a not insignificant part of me that thinks, “Look, if I dump all this radio and podcasting baloney and just focus on the knuckleball, I got a shot! Like, it’s a slim shot! But I… the knuckleball could still be my ticket.” But I think about three years from now, I’m gonna be out of luck even on the knuckleball front.
00:13:04	Roger	Guest	Well, I think it was a lot easier—as least when I was younger—to have that kind of a dream, because ball players were not all that big. They were—they were a little bit bigger. You got to the—you got to Yankee Stadium or to the Polo Grounds and you’d—if you got a decent seat, you could see these guys were just about the same age as people you knew—like your uncle. If you had a big, strong, powerful uncle. They weren’t six feet seven. They were maybe six feet and a little more muscular. They were like us. They were like regular guys. And so, it was easy to think, “With a little luck, that could’ve been me.” Which is what every young man used to think. “With a little luck, that could’ve been me.” But you know, you can’t think that anymore. And I don’t think it’s the money or the celebrity of players that does that. It’s their size. Modern athletes are enormous. They are nothing like us! Even the ordinary—the ones that don’t seem outsized. If you stood next to Derek Jeter, that’s a huge guy! A big guy! Much bigger than you! Much bigger! If you’re standing next to A-Rod, you’d think, “This is a different species! They’re not like us.” And they aren’t. They are—they are—they are outsized, and they are skilled! And they’re much more skillful than the old, old players. And that’s just, you know, comparison. So, I don’t think that dream—that, “With a little luck it could be me.”—I don’t think that kids think that anymore. Maybe they do.
00:14:31	Jesse	Host	Did you feel like a real sportswriter when you started writing about sports?
00:14:36	Roger	Guest	When I started, Jesse, I was—I was, you know, I was a… in my 40s, as a magazine editor, and I was afraid to go into the clubhouse, because I was just a fan! I was a good fan, but I didn’t know what these guys—and I didn’t know what to ask them, or—so, I sat in the stands. This was in 1963. And it was a good year to sit in the stands, because that was the first year—the Mets had just arrived, in New York, and they were playing at the Polo Grounds. One of the worst teams of all time. And I sat in the stands and watched them and wrote about them and wrote from the point of view of me sitting in the stands and watching what was going on. And what was going on around me, which is these fans suddenly adopting—New York fans who were used to winning and used to the Yankees, the imperial Yankees across the river—suddenly, you had to, you know, board the Mets. “Let’s go Mets! Let’s go Mets!” A cry for a losing team! It was a great fan story, and I was there! So help me, they lost! But after a while, for a couple years I got my nerve up and I went into the clubhouse and I would take a lot of help from the beat writers

			and columnists who were there. Who got—you'd gotten to know them, and they always helped me out. They filled me in and made these—made me feel as if I was almost a pro, myself. And I got to be more at home in the press box and enjoyed that. And—but a lot of help along the line. And by then, I'd learned what I—what I… needed most of all was to find some great talkers—baseball players or managers who could talk and would fill up paragraphs with their *[chuckling]*—their stuff. And I—as I say in the book, I collected them the way a millionaire—billionaires collect great paintings. Great talkers. The 350 talkers. *[Laughs.]*
00:16:29	Jesse	Host	Who were your favorite talkers?
00:16:31	Roger	Guest	Uuuh, let's see. Roger Craig—the inventor of the split finger fastball. An old Dodger pitcher who pitched for the Dodger—yeah.
00:16:41	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	**Jesse**: The manager of the—
			Roger: And then the manager of the Giants. And—
			Jesse: And the manager of the aforementioned 1989 San Francisco Giants. Which were so important to me. *[Chuckles.]*
			Roger: Yeah! I'll say! I'll say! Yeah, I know! I know!
00:16:49	Roger	Guest	Uh, Joe Torre, obviously. Uh, the great catcher and hitter, Ted Simmons, come to mind. Jim Frey, who once—the former manager of the Royals. Ted Williams, a great talker. All these guys I hung around and ran my tape and took a million notes and put the stuff down in paragraphs. I remember going out once to start spring training, in Scottsdale, and to see the Giants. And Roger Craig was out in left field and I walk out there and he's talking to a friend of mine, a writer named David Bush, and we shake hands and David says to Roger Craig—he said, "Do you know Roger—" meaning me, "—has a new book out? Did you know that?"
			And Craig looks at me and he says—said—he said, have you read it? And he said, "Read it?" He said, "Hell! I wrote half of it!"
			[They laugh.]
			And another—the other thing is… if you're doing this, you really want to—you find people who will take you in a little bit, even though you haven't been a pro. Some pro players will not really talk because you haven't played the game. But there's some kind of a barrier or step over or a good guy who says, "Yeah, he's one of us." And I didn't wanna be "one of us" as pals, but I wanted them to talk. And I remember trying to get Ted Simmons to talk to me. A very, very smart guy and a terrific hitter and a great catcher. He became a better catcher as he went along. And he was also—strangely enough—he played for the Cardinals. He was a collector of American furniture and a notable collector of American furniture. So, one day, I'm sitting with him maybe in his spring training and he's not giving me in anything. He won't talk.
			And I changed the subject to American furniture and Simba, as they call him, Ted looked at me and he said, "Stop right there." And he said—or he said, "Roger, I don't know if you know anything about American furniture or not. And if you did, maybe we might have an interesting conversation. But I don't know that." And there was a

			pause and then he said, “And beside, my insurance agents told me not to talk about my collection of American furniture anymore.” *[Laughs.]* They were afraid somebody’d come and swipe some of the furniture, which did go in the museums.
00:19:07	Roger	Guest	Anyways, went on and on and then one day, a couple years later—out in Suncity, Arizona—he was a little bit older, but still playing and he came out of a game early. And I went out to right field to the lockers and he and I were sitting in the locker room. Again, nobody else is there. And I’m still weighing my empty notebook and I’m thinking of something to say and I said, “Ted, you’re a switch hitter. You throw right, but you’re a much better left-handed hitter than a right-handed hitter. Why is that?” And he looked at me and he said, “Why do you think it is, Roger?” And I said—thrashing around, I said, “Well, it occurs to me that as a catcher you have to throw the ball back to the pitcher over and over and over again, so maybe your right hand is too strong when you’re at bat. Maybe your top hand is too strong when you bat right-handed.” And he looked at me and he said, “I didn’t think you’d have noticed that.” And then he was mine. Then, from then on, we were buddies. He would talk about anything. I couldn’t shut him up. I’d stepped over that little barrier. I noticed something that was faintly professional. *[Chuckles.]*
00:20:13	Jesse	Host	We’ll finish up with Roger Angell after a quick break. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:20:20	Promo	Clip	**Music**: Twangy guitar music. **Lisa Hagen**: There are these networks of staunchly pro-gun groups, on Facebook. And one of them is run by these three brothers: the Dorr brothers. It turns out, they don’t just do guns. The Doff family name has been attached to other causes. **Speaker**: Their goal is to eliminate public education and to replace it with Christian schooling. **Lisa**: The roots of the Dorr family, on the *No Compromise* podcast from NPR. *[Music fades out.]*
00:20:46	Promo	Clip	**Music:** Fun, cheerful, soft music. **Benjamin Partridge:** If you’re looking for a new comedy podcast, why not try *The Beef And Dairy Network*? It won Best Comedy at the British Podcast Awards in 2017 and 2018. Also, I— *[Audio suddenly slows and cuts off.]* **Speaker 1:** There were no horses in this country until the mid to late sixties. **Speaker 2:** Specialist Bovine Arsefat— **Speaker 3:** Both of his eyes are squids' eyes.

Speaker 4: Yogurt buffet.

Speaker 5: She was married to a bacon farmer who saved her life.

Speaker 6: Farm-raised snow leopard.

[Strange electronic audio.]

[Beginning audio returns]

Benjamin: Download it today. That's the *Beef And Dairy Network* podcast, from MaximumFun.org. Also, maybe start at episode one. Or weirdly, episode thirty-six, which for some reason requires no knowledge of the rest of the show.

00:21:28	Jesse	Host

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Roger Angell, the writer and editor. He's worked for *The New Yorker* since 1944, editing their fiction section, writing some of the best work anyone has ever written on baseball. He just turned 100 years old. We're celebrating his 100th birthday by listening back to my conversation with him, from 2016. Let's listen.

Well, one of the great pieces that you wrote was a profile of Steve Blass, a baseball pitcher who had been truly great and essentially lost the ability to do it.

00:22:02	Roger	Guest

Couldn't throw the ball over the plate.

[Jesse affirms.]

Well. Steve Blass had some kind of a psychic breakdown. This happened just after Roberto Clemente, the greatest star—the Pirates—had been in the second World Series, Parson Orioles played in '73 and '79 I believe. And played in great World—two great World Series. Roberto Clemente had been killed in a plane crash—by far, the greatest player on the Pirates. And Steve Blass had been a starting pitcher, but not a great, great pitcher. And suddenly, in the World Series—I think it was the '79 World Series. I'm blanking on it a little bit. Suddenly, pitched above his level and was winning and winning. And the next year, he came and he could not throw strikes anymore. He was all over the place. And over a period of the next three or four years, he lost and lost and lost and suddenly he was—couldn't get the ball anywhere near the plate. And dropped out of the Major Leagues and then tried 100 different ways to come back and couldn't do it.

And I went to see him, just as this was ending. And he—I spent four or five days with him and his family, in Pittsburgh. And—a very engaging, sweet man—discussing his mysterious, psychic… alteration. Which had ruined him. I was very privileged. I was very privileged. If you get the confidence of a player—not everyone, but if you get the confidence that they will sometimes—turned out, they wanted to—or they want to tell you something. They want to tell you. Um. The wife of a young, semi-pro pitcher that I spent months with, herself, during the baseball strike in 1981—her name was Linda Kettle. And we and her husband—not yet her husband, but

her pitcher, consort, later husband, Ryan Goebel—spent a week together at the lowest level of semi-pro ball.

And at the end of this time, she said, “We’ve given you our lives.” And this is the responsibility of a writer. This happens again and again. People start to talk to you about their lives. They’re telling you everything that’s going on with them. So, this happens with writers and you have to take it very seriously. People wanna give you their lives and you can’t just make a story out of a life. You have to somehow justify what you’ve done and make—and put enough in there so that there are glimpses of a life. You can’t do more than that. But it’s a great privilege and it’s scary.

00:24:46 Jesse Host Did you feel weird about the fact that you were writing about sports—a subject that is so important to so many people, but for so many other people—and I know this as a public radio host—like, could not be less interesting, compelling, or capital “I” Important. I know, because these people will probably—are probably composing a note to me right now about the fact that *[laughing]* we’re talking about baseball.

00:25:14 Roger Guest Well, I never—Jesse, I never cared about this! I mean, I don’t—I don’t go out and go into a party and expect that I’m gonna be talking baseball! If somebody comes along and wants to talk baseball, great! But I mean, I’m just a old guy! I talk about almost anything or try to. If it’s baseball, fine! And people’ll come up to me and say, “I’m sorry, I don’t know anything about baseball.”

I said, “That’s okay! Come on.”

[They laugh.]

It’s not compulsory. But, uh… also one of the opposite, which is meeting people I didn’t know—just people at some dinner party or something—who are competitive fans and… they—I would say something or other, if pushed about it—I’d say something about the Mets or the Yankees or whatever. And they would say, “Ooh, that’s not true.”

[They laugh.]

I would say, “If you say so!” I don’t know! *[Laughs.]* It’s so funny. These are only the men. It’s men that wanna compete a little bit in their sports expertise. It’s much harder to be a fan, now. The distance of money and the way the stands are built and the televised interview and the online stuff, they're not nearby. It's—it’s too bad. But I think that if—we can still bridge this gap. It takes an effort. It takes an effort. And the wonderful thing that sustains you is the difficulty and the surprises of baseball. Nobody can predict what’s gonna happen, in baseball. Everybody asks me who’s gonna win this year. I say, “I have no idea.”

And they say—and they’ll say, “Who’s gonna win the playoffs? Who’s gonna win the World Series?”

I said, “I don’t have any idea!” And over and over again, stuff happens and you just—I mean, two years ago, the Giants and the Royals were both wildcard teams playing the World Series? And

			they played a terrified World Series. Absolutely fabulous. Nobody—no sportswriter predicted this. Baseball is completely unpredictable. And it's—it looks boring. The same thing happens over and over again, pop flies, strike outs, base on balls, foul balls. And then almost regularly, almost every fifth or sixth game, you see something you've never seen before. Absolutely astounding. It has something to do with the law of averages. But no other sport does that.
00:27:36	Jesse	Host	I—you know, baseball especially, but sports in general is this series of stories on different scales, you know? This story of an at bat. The story of a game. The story of a season. The story of a player's year and a player's career. And, you know, it sort of frames—for people who follow sports—our own lives, to some extent.
00:28:00	Roger	Guest	Lives is the point, yeah.
00:28:01	Jesse	Host	I wonder how you see those things differently, as now a 95-year-old man… relative to when you were a kid or when you were a young man or when you were in middle age?
00:28:19	Roger	Guest	Well, it's hard to remember what it was like when I was a kid. And I think it's hard to remember what it's like when I was a young man. It's a little difficult. My memory's okay, but things move on. But the thing about being involved with something like baseball is that it is played by human beings and we tend to forget this. Athletes are so far away from us and so powerful and so rich that do—we forget this. And Joe Torre, a great favorite of mine, his—one of his last statements, he was—there were—the Yankees were pushing him out. And he said—talking about his players—and he said, "This is not machinery, out there. It's not—it's blood that runs through their veins." A wonderful thing. I remember a moment with the Pirate manager, Jim Leyland. I was with the Pirates somewhere and he had just… called in a pitcher and sent him down to the Minors. And said how hard that was. And I said, "Did you tell him that you would see him again? Maybe that you hoped he'd come back? And you'd see him back up here? And that it would just be a matter of time?" And he said, "No. You can't do that. These are human beings. You can't—he's probably not gonna make it back. He's probably not good enough to make it to this—you owe it to them not to do that." And not every manager does that. Many managers would just, "Oh, we'll see you again. You're gonna be great," and then, "Goodbye." And Leyland said, "I don't do that. I try not to do that." The great thing about Joe Torre was he'd been a player and he never threw a player—never threw a player under the bus. I never heard him demean or dismiss a player if his—if there was a question about somebody who was—who was slumping or couldn't strike anybody out anymore, he would say, "Oh, David is concerned about his slider." Or, "So-and-so isn't happy with his at bats." And the insatiable writers' minds would shift for a minute to the player and not to the story. Torre had played in the National—he was a great catcher and All Star. And led the League in batting, one year. But what he talked about with his players was the next year, after he won a batting crown and when he batted 90 points less. His batting average went down by 90 points. And then he would bring up the year—the day when he bat—I think playing against—the

			Cardinals, playing against the Giants—he was the first National League player ever to bat into four double plays in one game. He always mentioned that. And the players loved him for it, because he knew how hard this game was for them.
00:31:03	Roger	Guest	And I remember Jim Frey once talking about how hard batting was for a 230-240 hitter. He said, every at bat is crucial. Every at bat, for the 235 hitter is crucial. One more hit per week transforms him into a 290 hitter. One hit a week, through the—or a 300 hitter. One hit per week will do that at the end of a season. And he talked about Hank Aaron and somebody once saying to Hank Aaron, "Well it must be nice to come to the ballpark every day and know you're gonna get two hits." And Hank looked at this guy and said, "I don't ever think that! I don't ever think I'm gonna get two hits, when I come to the ballpark." And there was a pause, and he said, "If I don't get two hits today, I can only get them tomorrow." *[Laughs.]* So, it's different for the Hank Aarons. *[They laugh.]*
00:31:57	Jesse	Host	You spent most of your—or a huge chunk of your career as the fiction editor of *The New Yorker* and I wonder, of all the writers that you worked with, who you had the most fun working with and who you found the process of working with the most rewarding?
00:32:18	Roger	Guest	I don't think there's a single one—the whole—the whole process, if you get to know—I mean, like, the biggest apprehension about editors—there's a feeling out there that, I mean, often shared by writers and experienced writers, that the editor's trying to ruin your great work. And some well-known writers still think this way. But my experience and the experience at *The New Yorker* editing fiction is that you are working—again, you're working with the writer about something that is so difficult. You're there with a manuscript or galleys between you and you're trying to clear up a sentence or a paragraph. And you get hung up on this. I mean, it was John Updike—there are a lot of people I work with over a period of years. You know. John Updike. VS Pritchett, the great British short story writer. Donald Barthelme. A lot—about 20 people that I edited for many years, and you would find yourself trying to straighten out what had happened to this paragraph. Something happened—mostly about the tone. Was it too—was it too… brusque? Was it too tough? Was it too sentimental? What's wrong with this sentence? Updike was the perfect example of that. He wrote really finished, wonderful finished copy, but inevitably—in every story—there's a place where you'd point out something and he'd say, "Yeah, I think you're right." And then he would try to do the sentence or the group of sentences over again. And you would throw in your two cents worth. And then John would call up the—he always wanted the last proof. And he would call up the—from his place in Massachusetts. Probably most of the time would do this by phone. And he'd call up and he would have rewritten two or three sentences and you would write them down and they were better and they'd solve the problem better than anything either of you had been able to figure out the day before.

			I think a lot of readers tend to think that what they see on the page was always meant to be that way. That it was—that it was—came out of, like—from some beautiful forge or something, out of the writer's mind. And as perfect sentences that they're reading in the book. And writers know that's just the last proof. That's the last stuff you had to—you finally had to go to press and it's the best you can do for the moment. It's so interesting. And the collaboration with writers and editors is very intimate. It's very strange. It's a very intimate and moving friendship centered on the difficulty of writing.
00:34:56	Jesse	Host	Well, in the title piece of the book, *This Old Man*, you write kind of about—you open with a series of paragraphs that's just about the ways that—what 95 means to a person's body, basically. And—
00:35:12	Roger	Guest	Yeah! My arthritic fingers, that's the first thing. *[Laughs.]*
00:35:17	Jesse	Host	Yeah. Exactly. And I wonder, like, when you wake up in the morning and you're like, "Aw jeez, look at these arthritic fingers and all these different things and like all—you know, my back hurts—"
00:35:26	Roger	Guest	I don't—I'm used to my—I'm used to my fingers. That's—I'm not saying it about those anymore. *[Chuckles.]*
00:35:30	Jesse	Host	Right. But like, what are the things that excite you enough that you're like, "Hey, let's get out there and face the day." And not only get out there and face the day, but like—do things like what you do, which is to say you still work pretty consistently and… you know.
00:35:47	Roger	Guest	No, not much. I'm semi-retired. I'm just about retired. And my eyes are getting worse. I'm not doing a whole lot of work. I hope to find—I've been doing this book and I'm gonna find something else to do—um. Yeah, but I'm—yeah, I'm lucky at 95. I'm 95 and I can still go to work, which is very—I'm extremely lucky.
00:36:04	Jesse	Host	You were remarried recently. Like, what are the—
00:36:06	Roger	Guest	I remarried, yeah! I mean, this is—but I have a wonderful wife and we're—this has happened and the piece that I'm in, it covers a lot of ground. And I say that one of the extraordinary things about being old is that the need for—my wife died in 2012, my wonderful wife of 48 years, Carol, and I thought everything was over. But we go on. And—or we take these terrible losses and somehow persist, and life goes on inside us and we wanna be connected and we want love and intimacy and romance and friendship like everybody else. And it's a great story. It's—I mean, it's just—we just recently, in our times, have began to realize that old people are essential and romantic and living. Still happy to be here and doing the best they can. And this is good news for us all. And my wife, Peggy, is a wonderful thing that has happened to me. And it's—it's just—there's no accounting for it. It's so great. But all old people are like this. We're—this is how we are, and I think this is just—the news is just getting out. Certainly, to our children. It's a big shock to our children that we are—we are the way we are. I quote a line from—I read somewhere from Laurence Olivier, that's—he said, about old age—he said, "Inside, we're all 17 with red lips." *[They laugh.]* A great line.
00:37:39	Jesse	Host	Well, Roger, I'm so grateful for the book and so grateful that you took the time to come in and talk to me about it. It was really nice to get to talk to you.

00:37:50	Roger	Guest	Same here, Jesse. Thank you very much. I enjoyed it a lot.
00:37:53	Jesse	Host	Roger Angell, everyone. He's written several perfect books about baseball. The first and maybe still the greatest is *The Summer Game*, but you really, truly can't go wrong. His most recent book is called *This Old Man*. It collects some of his newer work, including an article that went viral that he wrote for *The New Yorker* about what it's like to be old, which is absolutely wonderful. I got to tell Mr. Angell this, at the end of our interview, but it was such an incredible honor to interview my favorite writer of all time, someone who's writing actually changed the course of my life. And it's funny to think that that could be *[laughs]* writing about something as non-essential as baseball. But it was. So. I'll say it one more time, for his 100th birthday: thank you, Roger Angell.
00:38:45	Music	Transition	Thumpy, brassy transition music.
00:38:48	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is produced out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where my six year old son is running approximately 40% rate of, upon completing talking to me and turning around to walk away, letting loose wind. The children, they are our future. 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, as well. 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. You can also keep up with the 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.
00:39:42	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*