

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.
00:00:13	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.
00:00:21	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Drew Magary is a writer. He was a longtime columnist at <i>Deadspin</i> . He’s written features for <i>GQ</i> and <i>The Atlantic</i> . He’s a novelist. In December of 2018, he collapsed after an award show in New York. Nobody really knows why or how. His friends found him in a heap on the ground, called 911, and paramedics rushed him to a hospital. In the days and weeks that followed, his life changed profoundly. We’ll get into the particulars in our interview. And as a head’s up, things do get a little graphic.  In <i>The Night the Lights Went Out</i> , Drew recounts the accident. He chronicles his experience with brain damage and hearing loss. He interviews the people who cared for him while he recuperated. He also writes frankly about how he and his family have dealt with the aftermath. The book is harrowing, as you’d expect in a book about traumatic brain injury. Drew writes about his renewed appreciation for life, which you might also expect. But <i>The Night the Lights Went Out</i> is unexpectedly grounded and funny. In the hospital, he tries to bribe friends into sneaking him beer. Once he’s out, he finds meaning and comfort in moments as small as returning a gift to the store.  <i>[Music fades in.]</i>  Anyway, enough setup. Let’s get into it: my conversation with Drew Magary.
00:01:47	Music	Transition	Cheerful, thumpy music with light vocalizations.
00:01:53	Jesse	Host	Drew Magary, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> ! I’m so happy to have you on the show.
00:01:56	Drew Magary	Guest	<i>[Brightly.]</i> Thank you, Jesse! Nice to be here!
00:01:58	Jesse	Host	And I’m excited because you’re the first guest I’ve ever interviewed standing up. That is to say, you are standing up. I am relaxing in a—in a high-tech chair.
00:02:08	Drew	Guest	Well, once I learned that Donald Rumsfeld stood at his desk, you know, how could I not emulate the man in all his greatness?  <i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>  Who would not? Who would argue with that?! No, I have a bad back and my surgeon ten years ago said, “Well, do you sit at your desk?”  I was like, “Yeah!” I sat like everybody else, where you sit—you know, in front of your laptop and the screen beckons you closer and closer and you get like a mighty hump in your back.

He said, "Stop doing that. Stand up." And so, I did that, and it sucked for a week, but then I got used to it and I've done it for a decade now.

00:02:39 Jesse Host Wow, I feel personally criticized because literally—as you were saying about being sucked into the screen, I was sucking myself into the screen.

00:02:47 Drew Guest Yeah! It's just—there's—it's a natural, human instinct to do that. There's nothing you can do about. It's fine.

00:02:53 Jesse Host Okay. Thank you, Drew.

00:02:54 Drew Guest I'm not gonna judge you for that.

00:02:56 Jesse Host So, your book is about a time your brain nearly exploded and killed you.

*[Drew confirms cheerfully.]*

00:03:06 Drew Guest Or did explode and nearly killed you. It's more dramatic to say it exploded, although it's—you know, no one planted C4 in there and then—

00:03:11 Jesse Host As far as you know!

00:03:12 Drew Guest Yeah, and then leapt on a plunger Wile E. Coyote style to detonate it. No.

00:03:16 Jesse Host So, what did happen?

00:03:18 Drew Guest What happened was I suffered a severe brain hemorrhage and fractured my skull in three places. All of this happened—I was at a party with my colleagues from *Deadspin*. We all worked at *Deadspin* at the time. We don't work there anymore. And we had a little award show and made some jokes and then we all went to a karaoke lounge, and we got a private room to do karaoke and to get drunk and do all that stuff. And I went—I had a slice of pizza, and I had a beer and then I went to the—or I went to a hallway to go to the bathroom to go take a whiz. And I don't remember anything that happened after that. I woke up two weeks later and apparently what had happened was I had collapsed. No one saw me collapse. My colleague at the time, Jorge Corona, saw me from the room that we were in. He saw me out in the hallway, slumped on the floor. Went up to me and then immediately signaled for help 'cause he could tell that I was in dire straits. But I had no idea. I don't remember any of this.

I mean, I was bleeding. I was speaking gibberish. They got paramedics. The paramedics thought I was drunk. They tried to get me to walk up out of the karaoke bar even though it was in a basement, and I would've had to go up these like sharp, concrete steps. And my boss at the time, Megan Ramos, said, "Please, for the love of god, put him on a stretcher and get him up." And then they got me to a hospital. They still thought I was drunk at the hospital. They did a CAT scan. When they got the CAT scan, they were like, "Oh my god, this guy's in deep, deep, deep doo-doo." Transferred me to another hospital. I had an emergency craniotomy about six and a half hours after I collapsed.

And the doctor that I spoke to who operated on me said that normally people survive this sort of injury four hours within—if they're operated on within four hours of collapsing. I got six but I still managed to survive somehow. But when I woke up, it was two weeks later 'cause I'd been in a medically induced coma and I was

00:05:20 Jesse Host half deaf, couldn't smell anything—still can't—and my taste had been compromised too, and I had permanent brain damage, which I had to learn to live with for a year and change. And I'm still learning to live with, after the fact. And so, the book is all about that. Drew, I'm gonna pause you here and move back to "emergency craniotomy".

*[Drew agrees brightly.]*

00:05:27 Drew Guest What does that mean? So, I had what was called a subdural hematoma. So, I had fractured my skull in three places. No one knows how or why. And that meant blood was leaking into my brain. Now, you're not supposed to have blood in your brain. Your brain is cushioned by cerebral spinal fluid, but there's not—blood's not supposed to get in there. But in my case, the blood vessels on the inside of the skull had penetrated what was called the dura mater and were leaking into the brain and were going to dislocate my brain. Like you know how you dislocate a shoulder? That's very painful, right? If you dislocate your brainstem, you die.

So, I had all this blood leaking in, and it was pushing the brainstem out of the way. And if it had gotten—and I can't be scientifically accurate about this, but you know, like another millimeter or two to the left or right and I'd be a dead man. So, they had to get me into the operating room. The surgeon, Dr. John Caretey, took a saw and sawed out a hunk of my skull, removed it, took a—you know, a suction straw. Like I guess if you're in a dentist's office and they put it in your mouth to get your saliva. Sucked out the blood and then put it all back together. Put Humpty Dumpty back together again. And it saved my life. And I remember I was told by my friend, Dr. David Heller, that he couldn't believe after the fact—he couldn't believe the before and after CAT scans of my brain, because when he saw the before—before I got operated on—he was like, "Well, Drew's not going to live. He's going to die." And he, uh—and then Dr. Caretey showed him the scan afterward and he's like, "I cannot believe this is the same brain."

So, I got some—I got some pretty good medical jujitsu on my side for that operation. But I wouldn't recommend having your skull cracked open and having them suck the blood out.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

00:07:15 Jesse Host If, uh—if you can avoid such things. You know, I have migraine and I learned somewhere along the way that in early medicine, one of the primary treatments for migraine was trepanation. Like there's actually, you know, evidence of trepanation in—you know—cave dwellers and trepanation is just cutting a plug out of the skull. And they would do it to let the evil spirits out.

00:07:43 Drew Guest Yeah! That's essentially what I got! But in the case of my—in my case, the evil spirits were rogue blood that was where it was not supposed to be.

00:07:51 Jesse Host So, you don't remember any of this time—the times—

[Drew confirms.]

00:08:06 Drew Guest The time that you were speaking gibberish, the time that you were put into the operating room, or the time that you were in a coma. That's right. No. To get an idea of what had happened, I had to interview my doctor, my colleagues, my friends, and my family. 'Cause they were all at my bedside while I was in a medically induced coma. And what I didn't realize—'cause I just thought of comas in the pop culture sense, where you pass out for x amount of time and then you wake up and then you go fight crime again or whatever.

00:08:59 Jesse Host But in my case, I was in a medically induced coma and they're not consistent. They will lessen the sedation and bring you out to see if you are ready to be awake again. And over the course of two weeks, I wasn't. 'Cause every time they woke me up, I would start—I would go full Frankenstein mode and start tearing tubes out of my head and like screaming and ranting and raving. And my own dad would have to like hold me down and restrain me to prevent me from hurting myself. I have no memory of any of that. None.

00:09:02 Drew Guest What is the first thing that you remember?  
It's difficult to say, because I was still loopy from all the coma drugs when I woke up. So, I had a lot of hallucinations that to me, even now scan as actual memories—things that actually happened—but they didn't. So, I do remember—I remember a nurse and I don't remember the nurse's name. I don't remember what she looked like. I just remember asking her what day it was and she confirmed that it was December 19<sup>th</sup> and I had collapsed on the night of December 5<sup>th</sup>. I thought it was the next day, December 6<sup>th</sup>. And so, I just have this memory of a woman telling me that I had been asleep for two weeks. And I think that was my first memory, but everything after that is a bunch of puzzle pieces on the floor that I have a hard time arranging. I tried to do it for the book as best I could, but I needed people to tell me—people I loved who were there to tell me what really happened. 'Cause my own memories are not particularly trustworthy from that period.

00:09:58 Jesse Host Do you remember seeing your family for the first time?  
00:10:03 Drew Guest No, I don't know if I remember the first time. I just remember one time I was awake and eventually they showed up on the scene. But I don't remember it being, you know—there was no Hallmark moment where I was like, "Oooh, you guys! I love you so much!" And all that stuff. I don't—all my memory of it is very hazy and my disposition at the time was not good. I remember I was in the hospital at Christmas and my memory was that it was an okay Christmas! Like, my wife brought the kids, and they came for an hour, and they brought me some presents and they put some Christmas type stuff, you know, on the hospital room wall and stuff. And I was happy, or so I thought!

And my wife told me after that, she was like, "No, you were a jack[censored]! You didn't wanna see anybody. You were withdrawn and sullen and didn't wanna talk to anybody." And her version is, you know, obviously the one that's more trustworthy and verifiable than mine. So, you know, I have these memories of my family, but they're all but scattershot. And so, I think less in terms—

			now—of what I remember and more about what they had to go through.
00:11:18	Jesse	Host	The moment that—or, you know, collective moment that I imagine being a huge challenge is the moment that you look at the people who have been there for two weeks—especially the people who love you who’ve been there for two weeks. Your parents or your wife or your kids, whoever. And you see in them the jeopardy that you were and are in. Like, what you couldn’t understand because you thought you were just waking up the next day. You know what I mean?
00:11:56	Drew	Guest	Yeah! That’s right! I had no—I was asleep for all the scary parts. So, the only way that I could, you know, sort out how much trouble I was in—how close to the edge I was—was to see it in the eyes really of my parents. Like every time they saw me, you know, they just—it looked like they had been through a lot and when—even when they visit me now, they’re just like—they hug me a little bit longer than they used to. They used to hug me before. You know, they weren’t—they were always loving. But you know, every time they see me now, it just seems like it’s evident in their eyes that they didn’t think that this would happen, that I would not be upright and lucid and, you know, coherent and would be able to speak to them, you know, as I did before.
			I’m a different person than I was before, but you know, I am—you know, functional in many, many ways that they did not expect me to be. ‘Cause they were told at the beginning that I might not make it. And then they were told, “Well, Drew’s gonna make it but we don’t know what he’s going to be when he wakes up. We don’t know—you know, we don’t know if he’s gonna wake up at all.” So, there was this uncertainty as to exactly who I would be or what I would be. I could’ve been an invalid. I could’ve had an entirely different personality. I did have personality changes, but you know, nothing so severe that you would say, “Well, he’s an entirely different person.” But I was not permanently incapacitated physically. I was deafened in one ear, but other than that—you know, they’re pretty—it’s nice to see in their eyes. It helps me appreciate how far I came, because I don’t know! And I can’t know, and I won’t. The only way I can know is by talking to them and seeing them.
00:13:34	Jesse	Host	How long did you have to rehabilitate in the hospital?
00:13:37	Drew	Guest	I was there for three weeks after I was in the coma for two weeks. Which I was told was sort of the most favorable outcome. There was the possibility that I was gonna be in the hospital for six months. Like, it easily could’ve happened. And I was in this state where like it made me nauseous to get up. Like even if my hospital bed was lifted up like 10 degrees, I would get nauseous and angry. And I didn’t wanna go to occupational therapy and all this stuff. And, you know, it took—you know, the staff at Mount Sinai and my family to say, “Drew, you have to do this otherwise you’re never gonna get out of here.”
			And thanks to them, I—you know, I eventually—I got up. I started doing—you know, I started arranging cones on a shelf in occupational therapy and doing an arm cycle, like to—you know, get some sort of musculature back, ‘cause I had lost 30 pounds while I was in a coma. So, you know, I was fortunate to get out as

00:14:40	Jesse	Host	<p>early as I did. But then, of course, I had to live my life after that and that's when it got a little bit dicey.</p> <p>Even more with Drew Magary after the break. Stay with us! It's <i>Bullseye</i>, from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.</p>
00:14:46	Music	Transition	Warm, relaxed music.
00:14:48	Jesse	Promo	Support for this podcast and the following message come from Airbnb.
			<p>If you've ever thought about hosting, you might have a few questions. What's it like? Where do I store my stuff? Is hosting worth it? Now, with Ask a Super Host, you can get free one-on-one help from Airbnb's most experienced hosts. Whether you're curious how to get started or just wondering if it's right for you, you can now ask someone who's already hosting. Learn more at <a href="http://Airbnb.com/askasuperhost">Airbnb.com/askasuperhost</a>.</p>
00:15:21	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:15:26	Jesse	Host	<p>Bright, chiming synth.</p> <p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Drew Magary. He's been a writer and columnist for <i>Deadspin</i>, <i>SFGATE</i>, <i>GQ</i>, and more. In 2018, he suffered a traumatic brain injury. He lost his sense of smell, a fair bit of his hearing, and he had to relearn how to do things he'd previously done automatically, like walk. He recounts the incident and his long road to recovery in the book <i>The Night the Lights Went Out</i>, which is out now. Let's get back into our conversation.</p>
00:16:13	Drew	Guest	<p>When you were in the hospital, what did you know about the ways your brain had changed and what did you have to have, you know, reported to you?</p> <p>So, I didn't know really anything. I knew that I had to have brain—I knew that they—I had undergone brain surgery. And I knew that there was a plate in my skull, although there was a certain amount of time where I thought I didn't have a plate in my skull, 'cause I had a conversation with Megan Greenwell that didn't actually happen, but I thought happened. And I still think it—I still—I still in my—I still have a memory of it happening, but it didn't happen at all. So, anyway. So, I didn't understand the full scope of what had happened. I just knew that—all I knew were the basics, was that I had to undergo brain surgery, otherwise I would die. And now here I was alive, but I couldn't get up yet. And that was really it. It wasn't until I got home, and I saw the scans and I saw the damage to my brain with my own eyes that I understood something was different.</p> <p>But it didn't—it didn't happen right away. It wasn't like—it wasn't like a lightning strike. Like it just takes time. It's a very, very gradual thing where you take in a devastating piece of news, and you don't react in the moment. You don't drop to your knees. You don't scream or anything like that. It just sticks with you. It just adheres to you and sort of grows around your psyche overtime. And that's what happened to me. I knew that something was wrong with my brain, but the other thing was that I was brain damaged! So, I didn't—I couldn't understand how—what it had done to me without people telling me what was wrong. 'Cause I didn't feel like a different person, but I was.</p>

00:17:47 Jesse Host Yeah, that's the part of that experience that, you know, reading about it made me feel the most disconcerted. It was the idea that you would be different in ways that you couldn't see within yourself.

*[Drew confirms.]*

00:18:11 Drew Guest Right? That your—that your sense of self felt unstable because it wasn't describing the actual situation you were in. You know what I mean?

00:18:11 Drew Guest That's right. And I thought, you know—I had convinced myself, because I could—eventually could walk and talk and, you know, get back home and stuff like that—that I could just be me all over again. That everything would be the same and that I could just go back to being Drew and writing, you know—'cause I could write—I could still write and all that stuff. So, I had—you know, I had all these signs here telling me, well, you are who you were. But you know, my wife pulled me aside and she was like, "You're different now. You're not—you know, you're on edge. You're not the person you were, and you have to understand that." And I just didn't. I just didn't really do it, because it seemed to me that I had this avenue to become my old self that I was determined to stay on and reach the end of.

00:18:55 Jesse Host When you talk to people who knew you and cared about you, including your family, in the sort of reporting of this book, how did they describe what you were like early on? When you were released from the hospital?

00:19:13 Drew Guest They were all very polite. Like my—the person who knew the best about how I was out of the hospital was my wife. And she was the one who was the bluntest. She was like, "You were a *[censored]*." *[Chuckles.]* And she gave it to me straight! The way you—you know, you have to do when you're married. But you know, when I was in the hospital, I was irritable and touchy and sullen and my parents were polite about it, but some of my other coworkers—like Megan Greenwell—were like, "Oh, handling—dealing with you was a real pain in the *[censored]*. Like, we would bring you food and you wouldn't even eat it! It was terrible!" And it was sort of like—it was funny, because it's one of those moments where you'd rather have some gallows humor about it than really, you know, reckon too hard with the fact that you might be looking at your friend, you know, undergoing a real, wholesale personality shift that will—you know—haunt him for the rest of his life.

00:20:07 Jesse Host You had to get back to work.

00:20:09 Drew Guest I wanted to!

00:20:10 Jesse Host Yeah, I was about to say—both because you had to pay your mortgage or whatever, but also because—you know, I imagine your identity is pretty closely tied to being a writer.

00:20:23 Drew Guest It is! Yeah.

00:20:25 Jesse Host How is it different when you started working after you had been through all of this? Or when you were in the middle of going through all of this, I guess.

00:20:37 Drew Guest I mean, there were—there were two things. One was that I could still write, which to me signaled to me that I could still be me. Right? That I had not lost that part of my brain. That was all still fairly functional. Like I could still do all that. The only problem was, I couldn't stand up for very long once I had gotten out of the hospital. Like I could stand up, but I would still get woozy. I would get

nauseous, and I would get tired. And I—to this day, I still get tired quicker than I used to because of what happened. So, I was sort of in this spot where I knew I could do what I was able to do. I could do what I was put here to do. But I had to sort of bowl through all these physiological obstacles to get there. But I reeeally wanted to do it! ‘Cause I really wanted something to do, ‘cause I was bored!

Like I was just—you know, convalescence is really boring. Like I was supposed to sit there and let my brain heal, but you know, the whole time my brain is like, “I would like to do something!” You know? So, it was this odd thing where if you looked at my writing after the accident and I had not told you that I had been in an accident, you wouldn’t have known I’d been in an accident. But the process of getting to my computer and literally standing up to be able to do it and to not like spaz out if my son interrupted me—like, when the kids would come in while I was writing in the middle of a train of thought, I would give them the look. You know? I wouldn’t scream or anything like that, but I’d be like, “What?” Like I’d be very impatient, and they would know like just to back off, which is not something you really want—it’s not a reaction you want your kids to have to you. Right?

So, you know, I’m talking too long, but anyway. The point is that the process of getting to the writing and then sometimes the content of the writing—like not how it was written, like I wasn’t like missing words or anything like that or spelling words backwards or anything. But I was mad, and you could see my general anger in the posts. When you talked to your wife in reporting for the book, what did she say about what it was like to be married to you while you were going through this?

00:22:34 Jesse Host

00:22:45 Drew Guest

I mean, she said it was hard. You know. Particularly when I was out, you know? Like she had to worry about, okay, well—I was hospitalized in New York. We don’t live in New York. She had to move the kids up, you know, to New York for a month while I—you know, struggled to get out of the hospital. You know, she had to worry about whether or not I could ever work again. You know, if she’d have to sell the house. What happens if I die? Things like that. And I didn’t have to go through any of that. And you know, dealing with me was a pain in the *[censored]*, but it wasn’t anything—there wasn’t a moment during any of this where she said, “I don’t wanna do this anymore.” Which, you know, I—you know. I will be eternally grateful for that. You know? There’s nothing else I can say other than to just try to be the best husband that I can, going forward, knowing how not to do things at the very least.

00:23:33 Jesse Host

Drew, you mentioned that you lost your sense of smell, and you lost a significant amount of your hearing.

*[Drew confirms.]*

Was that evident to you right away? Like did you notice it immediately?

00:23:47 Drew Guest

No! I never realized during my hospital stay that I lost my smell. Nobody told me. I was given a lot of food and I was like, “Well, this tastes good but, you know, kind of dull.” Like it’d been like muted a bit. And I was like, “Well, maybe that’s just my concussion or something like that.” Without realizing that I couldn’t smell anything,



'cause it just did not—straight up did not occur to me. And I did notice that my hearing in my right ear was not terribly good, and I would snap my ears—my fingers by it and I wouldn't hear it very well and I didn't—I couldn't tell if it was deafened entirely or if it was picking up something but just not a lot. I assumed it was picking up something. And it was in the report at the hospital, but they were so concerned, and I was so concerned about getting out of the hospital that I just didn't think about it.

Until I got home, and the ear just was not getting better. And then I went to an ENT, and that's when I saw the brain damage for the first time and that's when he told me for the first time that I was permanently deaf on the right side of my head.

00:24:49 Jesse Host  
00:24:50 Drew Guest

How did you feel about that?

Awful! I said, you know... I was like, "Well, that's sucks!" You know? But it was another thing where I couldn't hear 100% out of my left ear. That had been damage too, but I could hear some things. And I didn't really understand, 'cause I didn't know anything about hearing loss, the toll that it would take on me to try to hear the world with just 40% of functioning hearing and what it would do—you know, to my energy levels and what it would do to my mind when, you know, I step into a crowded room and everything's a blur because I can't process all the sounds that are going on within it all at the same time.

00:25:30 Jesse Host

What was the hardest thing to relearn? What was the thing that surprised you with how difficult it was to relearn?

00:25:38 Drew Guest

I think it was learning to be a deaf person. So, I'm—the hearing was the one thing I was not willing to let go. Like smell... you know, smell's pretty low on the—on the triage list of senses, right? Like it just is how it is. You're not gonna sacrifice your eyesight for your nose anytime soon. But my hearing—I was not willing to part with it. I kept saying to my wife, "You know, I'm gonna get hearing aids." And then when the possibility of me getting a cochlear implant was introduced, I was like, "I'm getting the cochlear implant! Hell, maybe I'll have to pay for it myself, but I don't care. I want that ear back if I can get it. Holy smokes." And I just kept at it and was willing to do whatever it took because adjusting to life, you know, as a severely hearing-impaired person was just very hard.

And you know, you could even say—you know, if you're someone who like watched *The Sound of Metal* or admired that movie, you could say I even cheated by getting a cochlear implant and going back to sort of the realm of the hearing. But you know, it took years for me to get used to just the idea of having—being a hearing aid person and how to live life when I don't have my hearing aids in. Like, I sleep—for example, I sleep with my good ear turned to the pillow. So, I turn a literal deaf ear to the world so I can sleep soundly. Which is great!

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

And so, my literal sleeping positions have changed since then. So, I only sleep on my back or my left side. Before, I used to rotate around like a shish kabob. But now I just stick to one side or my back. So, I had all these weird sort of—I guess I should say accommodating ticks that I developed to sort of help myself live as

this new person. And it took time. It wasn't always—it wasn't always hard. Sometimes it was just an understanding that this is what I have to do. But it was never ever going to be instant. That was for certain.

00:27:34 Jesse Host  
00:27:36 Drew Guest

How old were your kids when this happened?

So, my kids are 15, 12, and 9 now, which would mean 13, 6—no. Yeah. 13, 9, and 6 at the time. So, not an age you want them to endure that sort of thing.

00:27:52 Jesse Host  
00:27:55 Drew Guest

Yeah. What was it like for them?

You know, I didn't interview them for the book 'cause I thought it would be, frankly, kind of exploitative for me to do that. Like, you know, I think you can go a little bit too far with that sort of thing. Before I went to therapy, sometimes I would guilt trip them with it if they were misbehaving. I was like, "Hey! You know, I nearly died, you know. So, you should eat your beans." Or whatever. Something horrible like that. But then it—ever since then, whenever we talk about it, you know—I try to talk to them about it as factually as I can. You know? Like I try to give them as much information as I can, because the information that I got, you know, in writing the book helped me immensely. You know, sort of understanding what happened to me helped me understand what to do going forward.

And so, I just think that educating them as best I can is all I can really do. And the—you know, the sort of emotional labor of it came when I was struggling in rehab. Or I should say in recovery. And you know, and my daughter saying to my wife, "Well, I liked the old Dad better." You know?

00:29:00 Jesse Host  
00:29:01 Drew Guest

*[Beat.]* Why did she say that?

'Cause I was angrier. You know, I would snap at her. I was less patient. I was less kind. I was less understanding. So, it made perfect sense. You'd be—you know, if you were a kid—you know, you're used to your dad being one way one moment and then he's, you know, oddly hostile in certain moments after that and you don't really get why and you—you know, maybe you wonder if it's something you did or something like that. But I remember, they were—you know, they were all very confident and very willing to say their piece to me and especially to my wife, to tell her to tell me how I was acting. That my—that my daughter didn't wanna eat dinner with me, because if she—if she didn't eat what I cooked, then I would fume at the dinner table about it. Stuff like that. Like very basic, small truths that add up to, you know, a lot for them to handle.

00:29:51 Jesse Host

Did your doctors or physical therapists talk to you about the emotional and personality side of this recovery process?

00:29:07 Drew Guest

Nnno. Because I never told them, "I'm having these problems." 'Cause I didn't feel like I was having any problems. And I remember, I went to a neuro rehab doctor when it was clear that I was having issues with my temperament, and I wanted a pill. I just wanted any pill. And I said to him—I downplayed it to him. I said, "Well, I'm a little bit crankier than I used to be." I remember, that was the exact verbiage that I used. And it really—it understated the idea that I was not as pleasant of a man as I had been. And they said, "Okay, alright, alright." And I think it's one of those things where, you know, if you don't bring it up to a doctor, well doctors are busy people. They're not always going to—you know, they're not gonna stay the extra ten minutes and be like, "Are you really

okay, Drew?" You know, stuff like that. It just happened to be that way.

The other thing was that, you know, I was—I was operated on in New York and then I went down to Maryland and the doctors—you know, they had my charts and all that stuff, but—you know, they weren't there when I was sitting in a coma or when I got out of the coma. So, it's a bit disparate and you know, you may not have every piece of the puzzle when you're talking to a patient about this sort of thing. I don't begrudge them for any of that. It was still work that I had to do.

00:31:23	Jesse	Host	How much of what you had to deal with, emotionally and interpersonally, was stuff that was born of the injury and how much was stuff that had been unaddressed in your life otherwise?
00:31:45	Drew	Guest	Well, that's just it! I think that there was stuff that I had before the injury that I should've worked out. But I was doing pretty well, and life seemed to be pretty good. And so, I was like, "I'm all good." You know? And so, an extremely mixed blessing. You know, I would not have been compelled to go to therapy without this injury. And once I got there, you know, there were parts of me where—you know, it's not unlike my time in the hospital, where—I'm not quite certain where old Drew ends and where new Drew begins, because there are still plenty of remnants in there. And maybe some of those remnants had anger issues in the beginning that had always needed to be worked out and simply hadn't been. And all this did was exacerbate them and bring them to light and reveal them, you know, more than they had already been revealed.
00:32:32	Jesse	Host	We've got even more with Drew Magary after a quick break. Still to come, we'll talk about how—after recovering from a catastrophic brain injury—he decided to quit his stable writing job. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.
00:32:47	Music	Transition	Jazzy music with light vocalizations.
00:32:49	Jesse	Promo	Support for NPR and the following message come from LEGO. Who would've thought that the key to inner peace would be so simple? Take some me time to deep dive into a LEGO set. Whatever your passions are, from wonders of the world to movie magic, intrepid space exploration, and pop culture icons, there's a LEGO set waiting for you. Experience the joy of a rewarding challenge at <a href="http://LEGO.com/adults-welcome">LEGO.com/adults-welcome</a> . Build something you love and find your flow with LEGO sets. Adults welcome.
00:33:25	Promo	Clip	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> <b>Music:</b> Cheerful acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Look, it's a rough world out there, especially lately. I get it. So, let's take care of our minds as best we can. I'm John Moe, host of *Depress Mode with John Moe*. Every week, I talk with comedians, actors, writers, musicians, doctors, therapists, and everyday folks about the obstacles that our world and our brains throw in front of us. Depression, anxiety, traumatic stress, all those mental health challenges that are way more common and more treatable than you might think.

**Patton Oswald:** The first time I went to therapy, I was so ashamed, and I was like, "I can't believe I gotta go into therapy. Like, I thought I could be a man. And Humphrey Bogart was never in therapy!" And

then my dad said, “Yeah, but he smoked a carton of cigarettes a day.”

**John Moe:** Give your mind a break, give yourself a break, and join me for *Depresh Mode with John Moe*.

00:34:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:34:18	Jesse	Host	Bright, chiming synth. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. My guest is writer Drew Magary. His newest book is called <i>The Night the Lights Went Out</i> .
			There’s this stereotype that comics don’t wanna go to therapy because they’re worried that if they get less messed up, they’re not gonna be funny anymore. And, uh, <i>[chuckles]</i> I feel like if I was in your position, there’s a part of me that would wanna go like, “Well, I’m a columnist. So, I need to be upset about different stuff.”
00:34:49	Drew	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Like—
00:34:51	Jesse	Host	<i>[Playfully intense.]</i> I need to—I need to have <u>takes</u> ! Yeah. <i>[Laughing.]</i> I need to be cranky or else I won’t have anything to be cranky about on my blog posts!
00:34:59	Drew	Guest	Yeah! I did think about that when I went to therapy. I was like, “Oh, what if I—you know, what if I’m happy and then I—you know, I’m just content and I’m like well, I don’t have to write anything ‘cause I’m happy, though? What happens then? Then I’m gonna be unhappy!” But fortunately for me, I still get irritated about things that are out of my control, so I can write about that irritation quite well. And I can write about things critically and I can write about, you know, how I relate to things other than just being pissed off about them, which you would never know is possible on the internet these days, but it is true! You can do it.
			And in some ways, you know, I hope that, you know, it made me more open and honest on the page. Like, you know, maybe there’s not as many—you know, Molotov cocktails, you know, in the copy as their used to be. But you know, it’s okay! It’s okay to change and evolve and have your work change along with you.
00:35:50	Jesse	Host	You kind of made your name writing for the website <i>Deadspin</i> , which was known for its kind of, uh, irreverent look at the world of culture through the lens of sports.  <i>[Drew confirms.]</i>
			And was a part of the sort of broader <i>Gawker</i> family of websites which were all known for kind of in a large way creating the voice of a certain era of media.  <i>[Drew agrees several times.]</i>
00:36:31	Drew	Guest	Certainly online. You know, personal, casual, opinionated—
00:36:32	Jesse	Host	Snarky! Of course. Snarky, fun or funny in some combination, <i>[chuckling]</i> depending on the particular thing.  <i>[Drew agrees.]</i>

And *Deadspin* kind of collapsed in on itself not all that long ago. Where in the timeline of your life and career did the black hole-ization of *Deadspin* happen?

00:37:00 Drew Guest So, it was less than a year after I got hurt. You know, my colleagues at *Deadspin* saved my life that night. And so, I was sort of tied to the site by blood almost. And you know, I never wanted to leave. I never wanted to write anywhere else. And you know, what happened at the end of October in 2019 is that we were handed down an edict by our new ownership saying we couldn't write about certain things that they didn't want us to write about. And it was the culmination of a lot of just horrible stuff that they had done to water down the site, including putting advertising on that made the site essentially unreadable for people who wanted to read it.

00:37:35 Jesse Host So, the website's ownership had traveled to the unlikely home of Univision for quite a while.

00:37:41 Drew Guest Yes. That was after the Hulk Hogan case, which ended up bankrupting *Gawker* and Univision scrapped it—picked it up off the curb.

00:37:48 Jesse Host Yeah. And then it had been sold on from there.

*[Drew confirms.]*

And one of the edicts of the new ownership—eventually—was that the site not cover things that weren't directly or indirectly about sports.

00:38:08 Drew Guest Stick to sports! Right.

00:38:09 Jesse Host Yeah. So, the site had long featured the occasional thing that was in keeping with the tone of the site but didn't have anything to do with sports.

00:38:18 Drew Guest Right! And it was what kept us us. Like, it was—and Megan Greenwell did a study. She—you know, when—she took it to management at the time. She said 95% of our posts are about sports 'cause we're a sports website. 'Cause we all like sports. But sometimes we would venture away from sports, and it was because readers trusted us to do that, that if we wanted to argue about what the best sandwich is, that the readers would wanna do that anyway, 'cause that's fun and that's part of just—you know, when you go to a baseball game, you don't talk about baseball for three hours. You talk about other stuff, too. You talk about life.

So, you know, it was just absurd to us, because that little part of it—it was not a huge part of the site and yet it was just this idea that we were not being trusted with our own voice. Someone else—you know—was, you know, handing down edicts. 'Cause they said, "Well, we don't—we don't actually like what you do. We own you, but we don't actually like what you do, and we want you to do it different." And we didn't wanna do that and we didn't wanna do it without each other. So, that's why we all quit at the exact same time.

00:39:15 Jesse Host Was it scary to go through that as you were trying to find your feet? I mean, like literally trying to get your feet under you! I didn't mean to make that weird pun or whatever. But, like—

00:39:27 Drew Guest No, no, no, no! You can do that. No, 'cause I was up and walking and exercising by then. So, I was like—I was mobile.

00:39:35 Jesse Host But you were still trying to figure out like what it meant that you had gone through this. There was still physical ramifications that you were dealing with.

*[Drew confirms.]*

And you were walking off a gangplank with your colleagues who you loved, who had saved your life.

00:39:52 Drew Guest Yeah! And I didn't have health insurance if I quit. We would've had to pay COBRA. Which we did.

00:39:57 Jesse Host So, was it scary?

00:40:00 Drew Guest It was one of those things where—so, we quit like over the course of like a week. I'll say a week. I mean, really it was a few days, but once my editor—Barry Petchesky—was fired by the CEO of GO Media, a man named Jim Spanfeller, we all sort of agreed that we couldn't do this anymore. We didn't wanna work for these people anymore. But I like—you know, I liked my job, and you know, I didn't wanna be jobless and I wanted health insurance and I wanted something to do and so I was still—you know, I was not in the first wave of people to quit.

00:40:34 Jesse Host And you also, Drew—I mean, to be fair like as the proprietor of a—of a blog, myself—you know, you were working for one of the few outlets that had found its way out of the blog explosion. Right?

*[Drew agrees emphatically.]*

As social—as social media had decimated the blog landscape, you had an actual job writing for one of the very few outlets that had survived that decimation and was still pretty successful.

00:41:08 Drew Guest Yeah, and it was like where else would we be able to write like this? 'Cause there—you know, there really wasn't—and after we all quit, quickly found out that there wasn't a lot of places that we could do this. Not even me. But it was—you know, it was—I remember it was Halloween of 2019 and like Lauren Tyson had quit and Tom Ley, who runs *Defector* now, told us he was gonna quit. And I was like, I have to—like, I was thinking of reasons not to do it, you know, to see if—you know, maybe there would be a way to sort of keep it together somehow. But it just became obvious that it wasn't gonna happen and that I was gonna have to quit.

And I said to my wife, I said, "Are you—" You know, I explained the situation to her, and she was like, "Oh! You have to quit."

And I was like, *[relieved]* "Oh! Alright. Okay." She sees it the same way I see it. I'm not—I'm not brain damaged this time. I know the lay of the land perfectly. And I quit that morning. I handed in my resignation that morning. And it wasn't—it wasn't scary once I had made the decision. Once I made the decision, it was crystal clear that it was the correct decision. And I—to this day, I don't regret it one bit.

00:42:16 Jesse Host You and your colleagues started a new venture called *Defector*.

*[Drew agrees emphatically.]*

Which at least from the outside seems to have been a pretty significant success.

[Drew confirms.]

It follows directly in the—in the footsteps of your old gig. One of the big differences, though, is that unlike *Deadspin*, which launched when—you know, writing something neat on the internet would get out all over everywhere and be shared on other people's blogs and blah, blah, blah, blah. And people were excited about the prospect of new blogs. You did it in the context of, you know, [laughing] 9/10 blogs being wiped off the face of the earth. So, it must have been scary to think like not only are we starting over, but we're not starting over in 2006 or whatever. We're starting over in a completely new landscape.

00:43:21 Drew Guest  
00:43:23 Jesse Host

In a pandemic, too!

Yeah! [Chuckling.] Where we'll have to like figure out if we can reconnect with these people who liked us and also figure out how to connect to new people.

[Drew agrees.]

00:43:36 Drew Guest

That part of it must have been terrifying.

So, no. It wasn't, because we knew that we were gonna start *Defector* by Christmas of 2019. We had been offered seed money by an investor, so we knew we were gonna be able to get the band back together again. And then the pandemic hit and then the seed money just wasn't coming. You know, it was—we were like, "Where's the money? Where's the money? Where's the money?" And they were like, you know. It wasn't coming. And then we were like, "You know what? We can just do this ourselves." And once we decided to do it, we were so excited to just be together again doing it that that was more exciting than anything else. I think, you know, I was cocky because I'm me. I think my coworkers were nervous, but we didn't have anything to lose because if *Defector* had failed, well, we just would've been as jobless as we had been before we started it.

So, it was really sort of like, "Look, let's see if we can make ourselves jobs. And the worst thing that happens at the end of it is we still don't have jobs when we're done. But at least we'll have made some money for like—at least we'll have given ourselves jobs for like two months or something like that." And then what happened was that the site completely succeeded! And we were able to hire people! And we're doing great, and we can pay our own health insurance now. So, it's fantastic.

00:44:51 Jesse Host

To what extent do you feel like a different person now that you have been through the three experiences—one of which is being transformed by this brain injury into a different person, physically, by change in the physical landscape of your brain.

[Drew agrees with a chuckle.]

The process of going through an intense rehabilitation of not just your body but your—of your—of your mind and your feelings and your way of relating to the world. And! Completely flipping on its head the thing that you do for a living, from which you had derived

your identity. [Chuckles.] Like, doing all of those things in the course of 18 months or whatever!

00:45:47 Drew Guest It was a lot! It was a lot. The one thing that I learned, though, is that the brain is a fabulous organ! When it got the damage, it recognized the damage and started to rewire itself—you know, to work around what it had. So, this was not anything that I necessarily did consciously. Like, I lost part of my taste, but like my brain sort of rewired itself so things that tasted blander or I thought were missing, that there were facets to it again. Not—they weren't—didn't taste the same as they used to, but they taste like something. And so, I've just been frankly grateful to sit back and, you know, watch this stupid organ do its work. 'Cause I'm not doing anything! It's the—it's the neurons doing all the work! But they all have, you know, essentially done their duty in terms of human primal adaptability.

Like, I just—that is life. You know. You go through bad things, and you learn to just live as you go! Like, it's—you survive as best you can, and you just keep going, as my wife kept going when I was in my—on my deathbed. And you know, all throughout this—you know, I think I've been less trepidatious and less stressed out, although my stress certainly manifested itself in interesting ways, than I had been just sort of amazed at—you know... just how much has progressed since then and how comfortable I've become in this skin. I think I like myself more now than perhaps I ever have! Although, you know, maybe I'll screw up tomorrow and I'll ruin it all over again, but I—I don't know. It's just been a learning process and it's been fun to learn, even though it was stuff I didn't wanna learn when I started.

00:47:43 Jesse Host Drew, thank you for taking all this time to be on *Bullseye*. It was really nice to get to talk to you. I really enjoyed your book.

00:47:48 Drew Guest [Loudly and joyfully.] I enjoyed you enjoying the book! And I loved talking to you! You asked some tough questions. I'm gonna go back and I'm gonna think about them more, tonight! Thank you so much, man.

00:47:58 Jesse Host Drew Magary. His book is called *The Night the Lights Went Out*. Find it at your local bookstore.

00:48:04 Music Transition Relaxed, brassy music.

00:48:09 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where, this week, I took a walk over to the Lummis Home! The home of Charles Lummis, one of the most important early Angelinos. He popularized southwestern aesthetics—one of the first aesthetic movements truly native to the United States. Fascinating guy, Charles Lummis. You should go visit his house if you're in northeast Los Angeles, sometime.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producer is Jesus Ambrosio. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. We also get help from Casey O'Brien. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Thanks to him for loaning us his Serato controllers. We needed to borrow someone's Serato controllers. He was nice enough to lend us his.



Our theme song is called “Huddle Formation”, recorded by the group The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. They’ve got a brand-new record in stores that is great.

You can also keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all our interviews there. And I think that’s about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:49:23    Promo            Promo

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

*[Music fades out.]*