

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	Jesse Thorn	Host	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn.  Louie Anderson died last month. He was 68. Louie was a great standup comic. He did it for over 30 years. As an actor, he had iconic parts in movies like <i>Coming to America</i> and <i>Ferris Bueller's Day Off</i> . He also had his own cartoon show in the '90s, <i>Life with Louie</i> . He hosted <i>Family Feud</i> for a while. He had a lot of jobs in show business. I got to talk to Louie in 2017. At the time, he'd been starring in the FX show <i>Baskets</i> . It was a pretty different part for Louie. The show starred Zach Galifianakis as Chip Baskets, a sort of mean, sad rodeo clown who lived in Bakersfield. Louie played his mom, Christine Baskets.  Louie was funny in the part because—well, for one thing, because Louie Anderson was a brilliant comic actor. But it wasn't a campy performance. There was no winking at the camera. When he played Christine, he did so with deep love and empathy. The role earned Louie both an Emmy and a Critic's Choice Award. Before we get into our conversation, let's listen to a scene from the show's second season. Christine, played by Louie, just traveled to a jail in Camarillo, California, in order to bail her son out. Here, they're meeting in the visitor's room and Christine's patience is wearing thin.
00:01:34	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:35	Clip	Clip	<b>Christine</b> ( <i>Baskets</i> ): Oh. <i>[Sighs.]</i> I can't <u>believe</u> it. When Dale told me—  <b>Chip</b> : Dale told you, huh?  <b>Christine</b> : I thought, "Oh my god, <u>my</u> son?!" I don't even see my Chippy in there. I just see a jailbird.  <b>Chip</b> : Mom, I don't want you worrying about me anymore. Okay? It's not worth it for you.  <b>Christine</b> : What did you do to get in here?!  <b>Chip</b> : Mom, it was just—it was trespassing and—and—and—and mischief, I think.  <b>Christine</b> : Mischief?  <b>Chip</b> : Mischief, yeah! General mischief?  <b>Christine</b> : <i>[Disbelieving.]</i> Mischief!  <b>Chip</b> : Mischief!

**Christine:** Like chasing a mouse around?! *[Sighs.]* Chip. Is it because I sent your French wife away?

**Chip:** No, that's not it.

**Christine:** You know, Chip, I provide a house for you. I give you food. I give you money. I bought—I bought you tennis shoes. I paid for your clown college.

**Chip:** I don't know what to tell you, mom. I'm a Millennial.

**Christine:** What does that even mееean!?  
Music swells and fades.

00:02:35 Sound Effect Transition

00:02:36 Jesse Host

*[They laugh.]*

Louie Anderson, welcome to *Bullseye!* It's great to have you on the show.

00:02:39 Louie Anderson Guest

Thank you. Great to be here.

00:02:43 Jesse Host

*[Still chuckling.]* The part of that that is—I mean, the “I'm a Millennial”, “What does that even mean?” Is the hardest joke there, but the one that I really love is, “I bought you tennis shoes.”

*[Laughs.]*

00:02:52 Louie Guest

Yeah. You know that was a little bit of—we were adlibbing that scene back and forth. You know. We needed the info in it, but Zach and I were going back and forth and when I was naming things that I provided for him, I couldn't think of... the right word. So, I just went with what would be authentic, maybe, to the character and came up with tennis shoes.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

'Cause you know, that's something—you know, that—you know, that's like, “I got you into college. I got you a car. What about those socks!? Those socks!” And I just thought, you know, there's always a real—you know, like mothers especially have this affinity for things they get their kids. Like, *[whispering reverently]* “I got you those beautiful socks that time.” My mom used to whisper it.

00:03:42 Jesse Host

I had a friend in elementary school named Evan, who is still a friend of mine, and Evan—from literally from preschool into high school, his mom would get him socks for Christmas. And she would go to the Gap and get—when the Gap was big on selling like primary colored, you know, basics. She would get him all these different color socks and he would get that for Christmas, and she never understood—she was a wonderful woman. Never understood why he wasn't happy to get socks for Christmas. *[Laughs.]*

00:04:20 Louie Guest

Probably 'cause she had no socks, growing up, and always wanted socks. I find that to be our motivation in life almost with everything—whatever we missed in our childhood, we really try to make up for in our adulthood.

00:04:35 Jesse Host

What did you feel like you missed in your childhood?

00:04:37 Louie Guest

Well, I have tons of underwear at home. So, I only—I remember, we were poor. We were on welfare. And so, every—welfare, and we had 11 children. My dad worked, but we got some help. So, you know, with different things like rent. And just small things, though.

And—‘cause you know, they were reluctant to give anyone help that had any kind of income. It’s a funny thing that they do in the welfare department. But so, every year, they give you these vouchers ‘cause they didn’t trust you with cash. That’s how I looked at it. And we would go down to Robert Hall, which was a store in the Midwest that was a men’s store. And I would get two pair of pants, two shirts, two pair of underwear, two t-shirts, two pair of socks or three, and a pair of shoes, a pair of boots, and a jacket.

And that was it. You know? That kind of had to last me. One day, one week, or one day I would wear those pants and then—you know. And I remember the guy when I came in with my mom—she said, “I’ve got some vouchers for him.” And he got on the mic—remember when they’d have a microphone or a—and he goes, “Saaaul. Saul. I got a husky coming back for you.”

*[Jesse laughs in disbelief.]*

And that was—it was—*[chuckling]* I was in shock for a second! But there was—I even knew—

00:06:04 Jesse Host  
00:06:07 Louie Guest

They were like, “Could you please stand on the husky platform?” I even knew the humor of that, then. You know?

*[Jesse laughs.]*

I just wanted to go back and bite him. You know? As a big dog. And I just had that image of me pulling the sled, as a husky. And it just made laugh inside. And then it was—you know, it was humiliating to have that announced on the store—even though nobody probably cared a bit about it. Those are the kind of things. So, I think ‘cause I couldn’t have things, I’m always buying clothes. I go, “Um, I think I might be out of shirts.” And I’ve got like 1100 shirts. You know, that kind of thing.

But I cleaned out my storage. I had six big boxes of underwear. So, I must—

00:06:44 Jesse Host  
00:06:47 Louie Guest

It’s a lot of underwear, but it is freedom from want. I think it has to—it is—it is freedom from want, but I think I must think I’m always out of underwear. Because it’s a humiliating thing, as a kid, to only have a couple pair of underwear. You know? To be without is not the worst thing in the world, but you know, you don’t wanna be humiliated by it. I think kids are always worried about being humiliated by what they don’t have in a situation. Growing up in the—we were lined up in the project lines, which I always thought, “This is cruel.” You know? And all of the kids had the same jacket from the store, where the vouchers were. It was—it was—I got a lot out of that. It created who I am. So, how can I not be thankful for it?

00:07:30 Jesse Host  
00:07:35 Louie Guest

Well. I mean, I think it’s—that’s a nice thing to say. I mean, I think that’s the thing you must come to the conclusion of. ‘Cause otherwise I could be at McDonalds going, “Do you want a large fry, or do you want a medium fry?” That could really have happened. Who knows? I mean, not that I wouldn’t be—*[stammering]* I probably would like being at McDonalds.

00:07:49 Jesse Host

I read somewhere that your conviction was that you were going to like be something and make something of yourself, but that your

			first idea of what that would be was that maybe you could become president.
00:08:02	Louie	Guest	Yes. I was convinced.
00:08:05	Jesse	Host	How old are we talking about?
00:08:07	Louie	Guest	I think it just—I think when I realized how much power the president had, 'cause I was powerless in my family, with 11 kids and an alcoholic father and a crazy mother. She was the salvation of the whole group. So, you know, I kind of thought, "Well, that'd make my mom proud, if I became president."
			And then, you know, I would be a very good politician. I could get elected. But I would be a terrible administrator, 'cause I would just like—I wouldn't wanna do any of that work. They would bring it in, and I'd go, "What?! I have to meet with who?!" I couldn't do it. And so, I just tried comedy on a dare in 1978. A friend dared me; we were at a bar and these comics were up there and I go, "These guys aren't funny."
			He goes, "You think you're so funny? Why don't you try it?"
			I go, "I will." And then next week I signed up. For a one-time thing, I never—I was never gonna be a comedian.
00:09:01	Jesse	Host	Did you know like what— <i>[sighs]</i> what comedy was? I mean, I—  <i>[Louie confirms.]</i>
			We all know what comedy is, but I mean, did you know like what an act was or like what the parts of standup were when you went to—?
00:09:15	Louie	Guest	I thought I knew everything. So. Do you know that complex? You know. Because I think I was just a ego-driven kid with... you know, probably a maniacal want. And so, I—my dad was a musician, a very successful musician very early in his life. But why the time I came along, he was done with all that. And he was a mean alcoholic who was very troubled.
00:09:44	Jesse	Host	He was 50 when you were born. Right?
00:09:46	Louie	Guest	He was 50 when I was born.
00:09:47	Jesse	Host	And he had been a trumpeter.
00:09:49	Louie	Guest	Trumpeter with Hoagy Carmichael. And—
00:09:51	Jesse	Host	But lost his lip.
00:09:53	Louie	Guest	Lost his lip. That's what he always said. And he had a little mouthpiece he always still practiced on. And he played a ukulele and a harmonica when my mom was mad at him, to try and butter up to her. So, um. So, you know, I would stay up with him and watch the <i>Tonight Show</i> , 'cause I was an insomniac as a kid. You know, most comics I think are crazy. And so, we're up all night or late at night and—even as kids! And so, I would watch the comedian. And I loved Jack Benny and I loved Jonathan Winters and I loved Bob Hope and I loved Johnny Carson and Jackie Vernon.
			I can still remember all the comedians I connected with immediately. I connected with all the comedians who had something—something different than the other comedians had.
00:10:44	Jesse	Host	We've got more with Louie Anderson still to come after a break. Stay with us! It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.
00:10:53	Music	Transition	Thumpy rock music.

00:10:58	Jesse	Host	<p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, we're looking back at the life and work of comedian Louie Anderson. Anderson was a legendary standup comic and a great comic actor who performed on shows like <i>Family Feud</i>, <i>Search Party</i>, and <i>Life With Louie</i>. Anderson died last month. He was 68 years old. When I talked with Louie in 2016, he'd just been nominated for an Emmy Award for his part in the FX show <i>Baskets</i>. Let's get back into our conversation.</p> <p>What about your mother? You have talked about your mother in—and your family—in your act for decades and decades. And now, this part that you play on <i>Baskets</i> is a sort of an homage to her. What was she—what was she like in your family?</p>
00:11:46	Louie	Guest	<p>She was just like a big chicken who kept her chicks safe. That's how I really look at her.</p>
00:11:52	Jesse	Host	<p>You had ten brothers and sisters.</p>
00:11:55	Louie	Guest	<p>Ten brothers and sisters.</p>
00:11:56	Jesse	Host	<p>And your mother also lost five children in childbirth.</p> <p><i>[Louie confirms.]</i></p>
00:12:03	Louie	Guest	<p>That's extraordinary.</p> <p>It's <u>really</u> extraordinary. And I had no idea—you know, looking at my mom. The first baby died, two sets of twins died, and I think—I wonder how many other things had happened that must have been traumatic. And yet, there was a sunshine about her face all the time—you know, that we depended on. She had a very big sole purpose to end up surviving whatever situation she was in with a smile on her face and lipstick on. She wanted to look—you know. She wanted to look good. She was a—you know—wonderfully sweet person, but very vain and self-centered in her own way. Because she grew up a very spoiled child and had a rich father and mother who were very disappointed that my father—you know, got her pregnant. And that was it.</p>
00:13:02	Jesse	Host	<p>Did you and your brothers and sisters have ways of getting time and attention from your parents?</p>
00:13:12	Louie	Guest	<p>You know, here's the thing. When you grow up in a family where there's a 20-year span, there's three different families. There's the oldest kids, the middle kids, and the youngest kids. And sometimes, the middle kids are part of the youngest kids, and the middle kids are also part of the oldest kids. So, there's a couple ties there. But mostly, you grow up in three different families. So, um, I was the kind of kid who had his head on his hand and would sit and listen to the adults. That's the kind of kid I was. I always think comics come from a big stew that sits on the stove for a long time. And when it—you know, you just—you're—the right ingredients were in there for the tenth child or whatever it was.</p>
00:14:12	Jesse	Host	<p>'Cause all my brothers and sisters are talented and funny and sweet and crazy and all like me. But I had the right combination and opportunity or something—or drive. I think it could be the drive.</p> <p>Well, I think when you—to become a standup comic, it requires that you be talented, but it also requires that you're willing to do this weird, scary thing every day for ten years before you are successful—five years at the, you know, at the lowest end.</p>

00:14:31	Louie	Guest	I mean, until you know what you're doing—seven years, I always say, seven years to know what you're doing. And then—I always tell comics, “You can't wait long enough to become successful.” I go, “The longer you wait,” and I always tell them, “Enjoy the ride, 'cause you'll never be able to—you'll never be able to be that guy again, or that girl.” You'll never be able to. You can't. Once you have fame and success, you can't have any of those things you used to have.
00:14:58	Jesse	Host	Did you ever get to hang out with your mom?
00:15:03	Louie	Guest	Yeah! 'Cause you know, my dad died in '79. She died in '90. I took care of my mom.
00:15:08	Jesse	Host	So, as an adult, but what about as a kid?
00:15:12	Louie	Guest	You know, I have very few memories as—of childhood. I blocked out, I think, a lot of stuff.
00:15:18	Jesse	Host	That's surprising to hear for somebody who's been doing material about his family <i>[laughing]</i> for 35 years!
00:15:22	Louie	Guest	Well, but in the sense of I had relationships with all those people. So, I'm recreating the relationships. But specifics, like when you say that I see pictures of myself in those social situations, but I don't have that clear recollection that some people do.
00:15:42	Jesse	Host	I wanna play a clip from your standup from—this is from a special from 1989, called <i>Mom! Louie's Looking at Me Again!</i> . And you're talking about growing up in Minnesota with your family, especially your folks, and you do—in this clip—an impression of your mom's social moves, her chattiness.
00:16:05	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:16:06	Clip	Clip	<i>[The audience laughs at regular intervals throughout the performance.]</i>

**Louie:** Whenever my dad would start working on something, my mom would come around and do that babbling. She's hover around and then be like, “*[Clicks teeth. A long beat.]* Well, we all went down to Woolworths, and I was able to find some of that junk jewelry I've been looking for. And then I got that hat for Janet's daughter. And then we went over to the *[inaudible]* and I got a three-pound roast. No fat on it at all, you wouldn't believe it. Then I found these radishes as red as a fire engine. You wouldn't believe it. About this big. You know how you like them? You dunk them in the salt, and you eat them? You make that crunchy thing? I just love that. And then I was driving the car and it was going up the hill and went *[mimics a stuttery car sound]*. I think you're using that cheap—”

*[Screaming in fury.]* “SHUT UUUUP! No wonder I'm going nuts!” And you know, mom wouldn't shut up. She was very hurt, in fact. She'd kind of trail off. You know. *[Beat.]* “Shut up.”

00:17:09	Sound Effect	Transition
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Music swells and fades.

00:17:10	Louie	Guest
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I think the really great thing about that bit is you can see how much that those comics I mentioned affected me. 'Cause right in there, you have that fast Johnathan Winters babbling and you have the longer-than-you-think pause. You know, which is one of my favorite things to do. Like. *[Beat.]* The longer I can wait and still keep the attention, that's my goal. And so, I just felt that. And then you—and then you had the epitome of their relationship. You know, unconditional love and—you know, terror. You know? He was—you

00:18:04 Jesse Host know, obviously, my dad lived in terror, I think, of his—of his demons. So, you had both those things right there.  
I assumed immediately when you said “terror”, you were talking about your mother’s terror of your father.

00:18:10 Louie Guest Well, I think she was stronger than him. I mean, he drank ‘til he was 69. He quit when he was 69. My mom turned to me and went, “[*Clicks teeth.*] I told you he’d quit.” And I thought that—I just went, I just had the—I had the—that was—like washed over me. I never—I just thought—I never said much about it, but I just thought, “Wow. I had no idea she was in the long game like that.” But that she had won on some level in her mind.

00:18:39 Jesse Host Did he change when he quit drinking?

00:18:42 Louie Guest Mm—well, he didn’t drink, so that’s a change right there, because that’s an automatic thing. But you know, he was a dry drunk ‘cause he never did any work on himself. He went to one AA meeting and that was it. And we went to one Al Anon meeting, which was really good. We loved that. And then we had to quit ‘cause he quit going to the meetings. That’s how that works. He was just as selfish in that way. He found a different way to be mean. You know. That’s what mean people do. They find a different way to be mean. People who are broken and cruel and hurtful, they will have to repeat that unless they’re gonna do the steps on it and work it out.

Unless you do therapy, I mean, I don’t think you have much of a chance of getting out of that stuff. I don’t think you wake up one day and go, “Oh, that’s it. I’m nice, now.” So, I think you have to work really hard. I did lots of therapy on myself. I know that.

00:19:39 Jesse Host You’re from Minnesota.

[*Louie confirms.*]

And there’s this thing called the Minnesota Nice, that is the watch words of the entire state of Minnesota. And it means a kind of reserved politeness and niceness that is sincere, but also can be passive aggressive or conflict avoidant to the point—to the point of it causing problems. That kind of thing. And I wonder—you know, like your Midwesternness and your family’s Midwesternness—especially your mom—is like so baked into your comedy. And I wonder [*chuckles*] like if you ever think about what you lost from the niceness in your family or in your growing up, in addition to what you gained from it?

00:20:43 Louie Guest Well, I always said that—you know, they’re passive aggressive. They’ll bandage you up, but they were the ones who cut you in the first place.

[*Jesse agrees with a sad chuckle.*]

And then they’ll rip the bandage off at a certain point and then wanna re-dress it. So, there’s a—I think it’s insidious. You know, it’s that whole thing. You know, I always—Minnesota’s such a unusual place. I’ve been everywhere and there’s a real sense of, “We will open our arms to you. We will accept you.” And then they will not show you the rulebook.

00:21:20 Jesse Host [*Cackling.*] Yes! I—

00:21:22 Louie Guest They don’t give you the rulebook! So, I mean, they—and I don’t know if they don’t do it because they wanna eventually get rid of

00:21:35 Jesse Host you or they just wanna see if you're worthy of the rules or if you can learn on your own or something.  
I worked in Minnesota. I mean, I worked with a—with a company based in Minnesota and I would travel there—you know, once a year or whatever, working on a contract, working on partnership stuff, whatever. Right? And I always—I liked everyone there. It was—it was and is a wonderful company. But I could never—as a Californian, a San Franciscan—I like—I had no idea whether these people hated me or liked me. Every single one of them could've gone either way. I could not figure it out. And I'm—I mean, I'm a professional interviewer. I'm reasonably empathetic!

*[Louie affirms.]*

00:22:23 Louie Guest *[Chuckling.]* You know what I mean? I can—I have some emotional skills! But I had no clue whether everyone hated me.  
And they would've never answered, even if you were that direct. They would just go, "Well, you're just terrific! I just think you're—" *[In a cartoonishly intense Minnesotan accent.]* "You know what I like about you? I'm gonna tell you, eventually." You know?

*[Jesse laughs so hard that Louie keeps cracking.]*

00:23:13 Jesse Host They can't pinpoint, but they don't like that—they don't want—I don't know. I don't think they do it intentionally—or they do it very intentionally. So, I don't know if it's just inbred or whatever it is. You know? They're—they want information. They're nosy. We're nosy Midwesterners. 'Cause you're in the house for nine months; you need—you need something to talk about. You know? It's either eating or talking or watching TV. Nine months! You know, those winters. But I mean, I think you're exactly right. I don't think you know where you stand very often.

00:23:13 Jesse Host Was there a time when you decided that you were going to have an act that could play on TV, in Las Vegas, anywhere? 'Cause you—you started doing comedy in an era when you could've decided to become Minnesota's answer to Richard Pryor or later, you know, Sam Kinison or whatever.

00:23:43 Louie Guest I don't—you know, that's a really great question. There's a side of me that could be a very different comic and I could've been more of a satire. I would've—I was very political in the beginning. And I—

00:23:55 Jesse Host There's—but there's also, I mean like—

00:23:57 Louie Guest And there's a meanness in all my stuff, yeah. Yes.

00:23:58 Jesse Host There's a sharpness in your comedy. I wouldn't say meanness, but I would say sharpness. Like it is—

00:24:02 Louie Guest Well, sharpness. Okay, good. Yeah, that's a good thing. It's not mean. You're right. I don't direct it at anyone except myself. I'm the biggest target of my act. So, yes, I had a choice to go to New York or go to LA. Rodney and Joan Rivers and Henny Youngman all said, "You gotta get out of here." I had said, "No kidding."

And so, I didn't wanna go to the east coast, 'cause I don't wanna be around snow anymore. And then, I was so happy when I hit the 101 and there were palm trees. I called people. I pulled over and got to a phone like, "There's palm trees on the 101. There's palm trees on the freeway, in California." I was like I'm home! I felt home. I don't know why. I just go, "Oh, this is where I wanna be." It had a Jackie



Gleason feel to it. You know, the whole Palm Beach thing. I go, “That’s how I should live! I was—I was made to be here! This is familiar to me for some reason.”

And so—but to answer your question more specifically, I always wanted to do a show that you could bring your whole family to. Because my goal’s always been to fix a family. So, that’s why I kept it clean. Plus, I knew I could make more money. That’s why I opened for—you can’t name—you can hardly name one person I didn’t open for in Vegas. ‘Cause I had a clean 20 minutes.

00:25:21 Jesse Host

And when we’re talking about people that you opened for in Vegas—I mean, we’re talking about like The Commodores or whatever, not just—

00:25:30 Louie Guest

Ray Charles.

*[Jesse affirms.]*

Glen Campbell, god rest his soul. What a sweet guy. What a great singer. One of the greatest guitar players and singers we ever had. Forget country; he just was. He was a virtuoso. And you know, Smokey Robinson and The Pointer Sisters. You know? Natalie Cole. I mean, I—Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton. These are all people I opened for. And I loved that job! ‘Cause it was 20 minutes and I was done. And so, I knew I couldn’t offend any of those people there.

But also, I think it fits me better. I don’t think “[*censored*] you” fits my act like it does other people’s. Even in my—people will whip their head around if I say something like that—not onstage, but even in talking to them. Because you know, we’re—my dad had a dirty mouth and—my mom never swore, though. I think she might have said [*censored*] once. Maaaybe. She said “cat piss” once; it made us laugh.

00:26:35 Jesse Host

So, you decided—you sort of made it a choice at some point. Do you ever get—? Do you ever—

00:26:39 Louie Guest

I don’t—you know what? I think of—well, go ahead.

00:26:44 Jesse Host

Do you ever get the—I know a lot of comics who enjoy the part of their act that is the weirdest that they can put over that works. Like, part of the challenge—part of the joy of being a standup comic to them—you know, the main problem is you solve, “How do I come up with a thing that the audience enjoys?” But then the bonus problem is, “What’s the—what’s the least likely or weirdest thing that I can come up with that I can get the audience to enjoy?”

00:27:18 Louie Guest

I agree with you. I mean, I think there is a part of all of us and I think that—you know, where I’m coming from or even that part of it—I used to get a little darker. I’d go, “You know, I just read an article.” This was a joke a did a long time ago. “I just read an article where a guy killed his whole family, today. You know, people go, ‘I can’t believe that happened!’ And I go, ‘I can’t believe it doesn’t happen more often!’” And that would sit on my audience with a [*sheepishly chuckles*]. But that is really—that’s the essence of who I could be, right there.

00:27:56 Jesse Host

*[Laughing.]* You gotta tell the tag on that joke, ‘cause the tag on that joke is a homerun. The—

00:28:03 Louie Guest

“I don’t think it starts out where you’re gonna kill everyone, but the rush of the first one must just carry you through to the dog!”

*[Jesse cackles.]*

You know, and I'm trying to tell the perfect joke. That's really what the difference is between me and maybe those other people. I'm trying to get the best possible performance out of a joke. Honest to god. I want a joke that's so good that you—that it's like a piece of, you know, beautiful whatever you like to eat. Like butter in your mouth. Or you know, a piece of steak that you just think about from the place that you love—your favorite steak. I want you to savor what I have to say, and I want you to lay in bed next to somebody you love—or you hate, I don't care—and I want you to mutter that before you go to sleep. That's my favorite thing. I want you to mutter that. I want it to get in your subconscious and I want it to be there, and I do all this without knowing that. I didn't plan it. It just—it's become—you know? Like, that's my—my goal is to leave a little of me behind after every show.

00:29:11 Jesse Host When you agreed to take this part on *Baskets* and when you started to think about it as in a lot of ways an homage to your mom—and especially because you chose to play it as a realistic character. It's not a drag performance or a camp performance in any way. Did you feel a burden of representing your mom? Or was that something that you had dealt with long before, when you decided to do jokes about your family onstage?

00:29:50 Louie Guest I felt like a burden to represent myself as a great actor.

*[Jesse affirms.]*

And I used Richard Pryor as an example. I said, when I do this part, a few things—I said, "You're not gonna complain ever on this set. And you're not gonna say no to anything they want you to do. And you're gonna cut yourself wide open when you get there every morning. You're gonna lay it all out there. You're not—you're not holding anything back."

00:30:26 Jesse Host Was that scary to do?

00:30:28 Louie Guest Isn't it? Every day? Isn't that what we should be doing? Laying it all on the line? Instead of constantly... backing off the interaction of the real truth? But you know, my thing is—is if I could get the relationship with the audience to the point where I could say, "Look at this! This is the most painful part of me. And yet, I can laugh at it and so can you. And you can laugh at your most painful part, 'cause you can heal it, then."

00:31:07 Jesse Host I wanna play another clip from *Baskets*. And my guest, Louie Anderson, who plays Christine, Zach Galifianakis—the title character's—mother. And in season two of the show, which is the last show. By the way, Louie nominated for another Emmy Award for his performance. Um. She is thinking about being romantic for the first time in a long time. And she's talking with Martha, who is her friend and Zach's character's, about a new flame.

00:31:45 Sound Effect Transition Music swells and fades.

00:31:46 Clip Clip **Christine:** Did you get Lambchop? I don't want her pee in there. That dog pees everywhere. I've seen it.

**Martha:** No, I don't think she has to pee. I think she just misses her Mee-maw, probably.

**Christine:** Yeah, okay.

**Martha:** How are you doing?

**Christine:** I'm good! I'm keeping myself busy. You know, we've got—you know, people coming over to pay their respects and that's always a nice thing.

**Martha:** Yeah.

**Christine:** *[Sighs.]* You know. I, uh—remember that guy?

**Martha:** Yeah?

**Christine:** I went to see him.

**Martha:** Oh, that's great Mrs. Baskets—

**Christine:** Denver! And you were right. There was a sexual vibe.

**Martha:** Did I say that?

**Christine:** You did. And I had a terrific time, Martha. *[Breathlessly.]* That city, *[sighs]* you know—it's so high, so technically I guess—you know. I'm part of the Mile High Club. *[Chuckles.]*

**Martha:** *[Awkward but positive.]* Well, that's great. Music swells and fades.

00:32:35 Sound Effect Transition

00:32:36 Louis Guest

*[They laugh.]*

I love that scene. You know what, that scene was a really important scene—all of that stuff, there. 'Cause Christine, you know, hadn't probably hugged anyone for—what? 25 years or more? That's how I figured it. I don't think anybody paid any attention to her and she was taking care of the kids and maybe because she got so fat, she didn't think she was desirable. And then here's this guy who has a likeminded situation with his child and yet he's so kind and loving to her, she has—she's perplexed! It's this when he hugged me—hugged Christine at the end of the Reagan Library thing, I worked a long time on the expression that I would have inside for that hug. And I got it. 25 years of not being hugged.

I thought of my mom and—'cause from 1979 'til '90, I don't think my mom got hugged again from the opposite sex. Well, if she did—Like romantically.

00:33:51 Jesse Host

00:33:52 Louie Guest

If she did, she wasn't telling us.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

I hope she did. I hope she—I hope she did. 'Cause she was a sweet person, but she—you know, she made people instinctively feel better. She knew how to make people feel—I learned that from her. She goes, "You know, you should be nice to everybody, Louie?"

And I go, "Why?!"

She goes, "Cause you don't know what kind of day they had."

*[Grumpily.]* "So what?! What about what kind of day I had?" You know when you're a dumb teenager?

00:34:23 Jesse Host

We'll wrap up with Louie Anderson in just a bit. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

00:34:30 Promo Clip

**Music:** Bouncy, cheerful synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** Hi, I'm Jesse Thorn, America's radio sweetheart.

**Jordan Morris:** And I'm Jordan Morris, boy detective.

**Jesse:** Our comedy podcast, *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* just celebrated its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Jordan:** It was a couple months ago, but we forgot.

**Jesse:** Uuh, yeah. Completely. Our silly show is 15 years old. That makes it old enough to get its learner's permit!

**Jordan:** And almost old enough to get the talk!

**Jesse:** Wow, I hope you got the talk before then. A lot of things have changed in 15 years. Our show's not one of them.

**Jordan:** We're never changing, and you can't make us!

**Jesse:** *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*, the same forever! At [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get your podcasts.

*[Music fades out.]*

00:35:15 Promo Clip

**Music:** Low, unsettling music.

**Ross Blocher:** *[Using a spooky, deep voice.]* Somewhere between science and superstition, there is a podcast.

*[Several crashes and a blood curdling scream.]*

**Ross:** *[Ominously.]* Look, your daughter doesn't say she's a demon. She says she's the devil himself!

**Carrie Poppy:** *[Dramatically, with a cartoonish southern drawl.]* That thing is not my daughter! And I want you to tell me there's a show where the hosts don't just report on fringe science and spirituality but take part themselves!

*[Cheerful music fades in.]*

**Ross:** *[Speaking normally.]* Well, there is! And it's *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!* on Maximum Fun.

**Carrie:** *[Speaking normally.]* This year we actually became certified exorcists.

**Ross:** So, yes, Carrie and I can help your daughter!

*[Demonic gurgling sounds.]*

**Carrie:** Or we can just talk about it on the show.

*[Ominous music returns.]*

00:35:59	Music	Transition	<b>Ross:</b> <i>[Spookily.]</i> Oh No, Ross and Carrie! on <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> . Thumpy synth with light vocalizations. I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to <i>Bullseye</i> . We're replaying my 2017 conversation with the late Louie Anderson.
00:36:04	Jesse	Host	
00:36:16	Louie	Guest	Are you comfortable looking at yourself onscreen? Sometimes. I got really fat the first year. I was really fat. And the second year, I tried to lose some weight, 'cause Johnathan thought it would be better physically for me. He was just real straightforward with me about it. And then the third year now, I did take control and have become—I am a healthy—I'm eating very healthy and I'm a really healthy person right now. The most healthy person I've ever been. I don't smoke. I don't—well, I drink. I would drink a glass of champagne if you had a really good champagne, but— <i>[chuckles]</i> that's about my limit, there. But I don't—I'm serious about living as long as possible.
00:37:03	Jesse	Host	Why's that?
00:37:05	Louie	Guest	<i>[Sighs.]</i> This is hard, because I lost my brother <i>[choking up]</i> a couple years ago. <i>[Crying softly.]</i> My baby brother, Tommy. <i>[Pushing through it.]</i> And uh, he was 60 and I couldn't save him. So, I thought, "Maybe I'll save myself."
00:37:35	Jesse	Host	<i>[Beat.]</i> He was bipolar, right?
00:37:37	Louie	Guest	Yeah. He was everything, but he was—he had really worked a lot of that out. I mean, occasionally he would throw a plate of food against the wall <i>[laughs weakly]</i> , but who doesn't? I mean, he was a lovely person. He was my baby brother.
00:37:54	Jesse	Host	That's a really...
00:37:59	Louie	Guest	<i>[Collecting himself.]</i> It's a hard one for me, still. Every day. 'Cause we grew up like this. We were very close, very close. We had endured the same stuff all through... <i>[sighs]</i> . You know, I've lost seven siblings. It's very hard. Very, very hard. I learned all my stuff in all of that loss. I learned a lot of stuff. And I cherish every moment with who's left in my family.
00:38:36	Jesse	Host	It can be hard to feel responsible and want to care for someone who you love in your family.
			<i>[Louie agrees.]</i>
00:39:03	Louie	Guest	I mean, in general, but with bipolar particularly, because it's... Well, we were never taught to care for each other. We were trying to survive. We weren't taught to care for each other. That took a lot. We all had to learn that on our own, even though my mom was so caring. You know. It's like—it's like a hug while people are shooting at you. It must be how the people in Syria feel. You know, you wanna take care of your kids, but you got—you just—you know, they're trying to kill all of you. It's just very similar. It's not as drastic

as—*[stammering]* the alcoholic family, it's not as drastic, but it doesn't feel any less drastic when you're in it.

00:39:42 Jesse Host I mean, I think there's an element of survival in being one of 11 children, in almost any situation.

00:39:49 Louie Guest Yeah, I mean, you know, that—you know people will ask me, "What was it like growing up in a big family." I have no idea! I didn't grow up in a little family. I only know how it was growing up in my family. And there were really wonderful things in my family. Look at who I became! I couldn't have become this good a person if there wasn't that much good in my family.

00:40:09 Jesse Host I noticed you're wearing a wedding ring. Are you married?

00:40:12 Louie Guest I am not married, no. This was a gift from somebody who loved me a lot. And it fits on that finger; that's the real truth. You know when something fits on a finger, you wear it on that finger?

*[They chuckle.]*

It's true! My other—I have my Tommy rings. I didn't bring them today, but I have two rings that Tommy gave me, and they fit on it. But yeah, no. No, I'm not married.

00:40:34 Jesse Host You have an incredible—to be a great comedian, and especially the kind of great comedian who is able to perform for any kind of audience, the kind of comedian who can open for The Pointer Sisters and do the *Tonight Show* and open for Lynyrd Skynyrd or whatever and kill in all of those places, you have to have an extraordinary sense of what the audience will go for, basically. Like, what will work for them. And I wonder if you're ever—if you've ever—if you ever feel constrained by that? There's—

00:41:16 Louie Guest Alright, you mean like—well, go ahead, give me a—'cause I'm not sure of your question—

00:41:20 Jesse Host I'm sure there are versions of you that would be great that don't work for everybody. Right? Onstage.

00:41:28 Louie Guest Yeah, no, I—listen. I agree with you. And I no longer am that comedian. I'm not out to please everybody anymore. You know, I wish—if I were to do it all over again, I'd be less popular and much more artistic.

00:41:51 Jesse Host I think you're very artistic in your work, so I hope you wouldn't—I don't hope you don't feel otherwise, but—

00:41:55 Louie Guest No, but I mean—I think I'd be much more controversial. Maybe that.

00:41:58 Jesse Host Interesting.

00:41:59 Louie Guest 'Cause I would be—I mean, I would have a much harsher truth to all the characters. You know? Like, you know. I softened everything—I made my dad a human being in my cartoon. I took who my dad was, and I softened him up, but you still knew he was dangerous at any moment, in the cartoon. Even then. And that's what I was going for. And that's who I am, onstage. I'm there. I'm very friendly. But I'm—I'm a very dangerous person.

00:42:32 Jesse Host Well, Louis, given how dangerous you are, I think I better get out of here.

00:42:36 Louie Guest *[Cackles.]* But you know what I mean by that "dangerous" thing. Yeah.

00:42:38 Jesse Host I do, don't worry. I think—

00:42:39 Louie Guest No, I'm not—I'm not worried. You know, that's the greatest thing. At a certain point in your life, when you get older, why worry? I always tell people, you know, "Worry will not extend your life one second.

			Stay in the present if you can. It's the hardest thing to do. Or send me presents. I love that."
00:42:57	Jesse	Host	Well, Louie, I'm so grateful for you—to you, for coming here and talking to me. Thank you so much for being on <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:43:03	Louie	Guest	Thank you, Jesse.
00:43:05	Jesse	Host	Louie Anderson from 2017. If you haven't seen <i>Baskets</i> , he is absolutely extraordinary in it.
00:43:12	Music	Transition	Twangy, upbeat synth.
00:43:15	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, we've just been watching this [ <i>chuckles</i> ] English antiques reality show called <i>Antiques Road Trip</i> all the time. I'm really into it.
			Our 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 get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation". It's by the group The Go! Team. Thanks to them and thanks to Memphis Industries Records for letting us use that.
			You can also keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post our interviews in all those places. And I guess that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.
00:44:12	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.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>