

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:13	Jesse Thorn	Host	From MaximumFun.org and NPR, it's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:00:16	Music	Transition	"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.
00:00:22	Jesse	Host	Molly Shannon, my guest this week, is one of the great comic actors in the world. You know her credits. If you're a comedy fan, odds are she's responsible for like—I don't know—three of your top ten favorite comedy moments. <i>Saturday Night Live</i> , <i>Superstar</i> , <i>White Lotus</i> , <i>The Other Two</i> . She also just wrote a book. It's called <i>Hello, Molly! A Memoir</i> . In it, Molly Shannon shares her life story. She writes about her time on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> , but also about her childhood. Shannon's mother, younger sister, and cousin died in a car accident when Molly was four years old. Her father, who survived the crash and raised Molly, was driving under the influence.
			The book is harrowing and hilarious, heartbreaking and heartwarming, and a great read.
			<i>[Music fades in.]</i>
			I'm excited to have Molly on, this week. Let's not delay any further my interview with one of my comedy heroes, the great Molly Shannon.
00:01:21	Music	Transition	Bright, thoughtful piano.
00:01:27	Jesse	Host	Molly Shannon, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . Happy to have you on the show.
00:01:30	Molly Shannon	Guest	Thank you, Jesse. I'm so happy to be here!
00:01:33	Jesse	Host	Was writing about your life something that you always knew you might do or something that you had to talk yourself into doing or be talked into?
00:01:44	Molly	Guest	Um, I wasn't talked into it. I always would write down stories about my dad and the way he talked and expressions. I was always writing about that. So, yes. In the back of my mind, I always knew that I would be writing about it. But I think as far as writing a book, I kind of had to push through the embarrassment, 'cause I felt embarrassed. I was like, "I don't—" I was like, "Nobody's gonna wanna read this. Who cares?" I—yeah, I felt a little embarrassed, so I had to kind of push through those feelings.
00:02:15	Jesse	Host	You also, you know—you start the book with the story of being in a car accident that killed your mother. And a sibling—
00:02:24	Molly	Guest	And sister. Yeah.
			<i>[Jesse affirms.]</i>
00:02:27	Jesse	Host	Mm-hm. Oh yeah. Yeah. It was a tragedy beyond words. And I imagine that, you know, you couldn't write the story of your life without writing about that. So,

00:02:46 Molly Guest you have to decide whether and how you want to tell that story in order to decide whether you're gonna write the book.
Mm-hm. Oh, well, I always knew that I could talk about that, because that, of course, affected my life. So, to leave that out of the story feels like that would be strange, 'cause it really changed my life in a profound way.

00:03:01 Jesse Host Your father was driving the car in the accident. He survived the accident and was your primary caretaker when you were a kid.

[Molly confirms.]

00:03:33 Molly Guest Do you remember what it was like when—basically, just like when everyone was trying to figure out what your life would be like? Like, what the structure of your life would be like? Like, when you would like go to school or like who would take care of you when your dad was at work, like those kinds of things? Do you remember when everything was still upside down?

Yes, 'cause we lived with my aunt right after the accident, my aunt Bernie. There was a lot of like, "Oh my god, who's gonna take the girls?" 'Cause my dad was severely injured. I mean, he was almost pronounced dead, and he was in—you know, ICU and—you know, his legs were up in chains, and he was intubated. I mean, it was horrible. You know? So, my dad comes from a big family, a lot of sisters, so they were all trying to decide where we would live when we got out of the hospital and who was gonna take us. And they didn't know how long it would take him to recuperate, so they were all wanting to take us. I think Uncle Hugh and my Aunt Bernie and Aunt Mary-Rita, they were all offering to take us. And they all had children of their own, and there were always aunts and—you know—uncles and cousins at the hospital, constantly people visiting us and bringing us gifts.

So, we were so little. So, we wound up at my Aunt Bernie's house. And it was—you know—a confusing time, because we're returning not to our own house, but going to this new house. And my dad's in the hospital, and then I—we were in the hospital, too, for a while before we got to go to my Aunt Bernie's house. So, it was like a new neighborhood, new kids. I had to start a new school. So, you know, I do write in the book that I was like—we were starting kindergarten, and I just remember being like, "Ugh." I was depressed! You know, I was just like, "Ugh." You know. We were trying to sing, you know, "The Wheels on the Bus" and I remember just being like, *[mumbling listlessly]* "The wheels on the bus go round and round," feeling very different than all the kids. Like, I felt like I'd been through a war, kind of.

So, that was strange, but we tried to settle into my aunt's house, and then my Aunt Bernie was grieving the loss of her daughter. My Aunt Bernie who took us in, her daughter—Fran—was killed in our car accident, too. So, I didn't think about that until I was an adult, that here she's in heavy grief for losing her only daughter. And she used to make us bean and bacon soup and try to be like a mom and get us registered in school. And then, eventually, my dad comes and moves into her dining room in a bed, and she has to take care of him. I mean, it was crazy.

00:05:45	Jesse	Host	At what point in your childhood—if any point in your childhood—did you feel like you had—I was gonna say a normal life, but you know, you had a very unusual life just by being the child of a single father. What I really mean is just like when did you feel like you knew what your life was? Like, when did things feel settled?
00:06:08	Molly	Guest	Yeah, I think when we—we stayed at my aunt’s for probably like a year while my dad recuperated. So, I did kindergarten living at my aunt’s house, and then we got to move back to our original house. So, that felt really good, being back. But of course, because I was only four when my mom died, I had a fantasy that like, “Oh! She must be back at the house!” You know. I just kept making stuff up, because I think when you’re little—you know, you don’t understand how kid’s brains work and there’s no way you could understand they’re dead. So, I kind of went into a fantasy waiting, thinking, “Well, she’ll be behind that wall or there or maybe she’ll pop up behind the door.” And then, when she wasn’t at my aunt’s house, I’m like, “Well, maybe she’s back at our house.” You know?
			And then I did eight years at a grade school called St. Dominic’s, and I had the same kids for all eight years. So, that was very stabilizing. I have to say, I loved that, and I’m glad I didn’t switch schools. And it was just that small group of like, whatever, 23 kids. And Allison was in my class, who I wrote about in the book, and we were very close, all those kids. It was like a little family. I hated missing school; I loved my school so much.
00:07:13	Jesse	Host	Did the people, either in your—I don’t know if you went to church, but in school, like did those nuns and priests see you and help you?
00:07:25	Molly	Guest	We went back to church one day—St. Dominic’s, the original neighborhood where we lived—and most people, relatives, did not wanna talk about it. They’d be like, <i>[whispering]</i> “Oh, don’t talk about that. You know, it’ll make her cry. Don’t bring that up.” But the truth is, is I was in such pain, and you know, that I wanted somebody to understand it. So, Father Murray—who was a priest with an Irish brogue—saw us at St. Dominic’s after mass one day, and he knelt down and looked me in the eye, and he was like, <i>[with an Irish accent]</i> “Now, Molly, I know you lost your mother. You lost your sister. So sad, Molly. You know? It’s gonna be very hard.”
			And he acknowledged the loss, and I <u>loved</u> it. I was so appreciative. I was like—he took my hands and I just remember feeling so grateful, ‘cause it felt like he understood, and I <u>did</u> want to be seen. And I wanted to—somebody to understand that. So, I really appreciated that he was so direct in his expressing, you know, understanding for what I must be going through. It was great. I’ll never forget it.
00:08:30	Jesse	Host	What was that subject like inside your house?
00:08:34	Molly	Guest	Inside our house—so, my dad didn’t really talk about it. I mean, Then, as we were older, you know, I would ask him about it and stuff, but it wasn’t really talked about. Just—I mean, my dad always had—my dad had a big picture of her in her wedding gown with a rosary over her—over the framed picture on his bedside table. So, I always looked at that with the mass card and... but I mean, he would talk about her and stuff, but it wasn’t like we talked about the accident that much, growing up. Later, of course, we had questions and wanted to talk about it, but growing up? Of course, you know

that that happened and everything, it's not like we talked about it that much. No.

I mean, a little bit. It wasn't like—I'm sure if—yeah. I'm sure if—it was just... yeah. My friend, Allison—actually, I spoke to her recently about it, and she remembers—she started St. Dominic's in third grade, and I invited her over for a playdate, and she told me that she remembered like, oh, she knew that my mom had died. And she remembers playing down in the basement, and there were school desks, like those old-fashioned school desks, that we would play with. And she was like, "Ooh, that must be—" She knew that my mom had been a teacher, and so she knew that those must have been my mom's school desks. But she didn't wanna say anything.

But I was thinking that it's so interesting hearing her perspective as a child. You know?

00:10:01 Jesse Host

Especially because, you know, you were a child. Children aren't—don't have much third-position perspective on their own lives, in general.

[Molly agrees.]

But certainly, when you were so subsumed in this kind of river of the circumstances of your life.

00:10:19 Molly Guest

Yeah. Yeah. I think I was in like a little bit of a fantasy. Like, "I have a mom." You know? And then—I write about this in the book; there was a boy in fifth grade, and he was like—he passed me a note that said, "Haha. Haha, you don't have a mom." And I opened it, and I—it was the first time—I was very happy, like at St. Dominic's. I had so many friends. But I broke down crying, and it really kind of punctured my fantasy, because I was like—I felt misunderstood. I was like, "I have a mom!" I just—you know. "I do have a mom. Like, she's just in Heaven. She doesn't pick me up at school like all your moms, but I have a mother."

I felt like defensive. So, I realize like, oh yeah, he is probably right. Like, I don't have like a physical mom who's present, who—you know—can brush my hair and, you know, make me breakfast. But I have a mom. You know? But it was like a big moment there, realizing that I was more fragile than I thought. You know?

00:11:18 Jesse Host

More still to come with Molly Shannon. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:11:25 Music Transition

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

00:11:30 Jesse Host

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Molly Shannon. She is a veteran of *Saturday Night Live*, an accomplished comic actor. Recently, she starred in the TV shows *White Lotus*, *The Other Two*, and the new show *I Love That for You*, alongside Vanessa Bayer. Shannon also just wrote a new book. It's called *Hello, Molly! A Memoir*. Let's get back into our conversation.

Your father was immensely cool and fun and charismatic. Also, a single parent and an alcoholic. You later learned he was a closeted gay man. Was he able to be there for you and your sister?

00:12:16 Molly Guest

Yes. He really was. He was—he was like my biggest supporter. He was really fun, and he was very silly. Like, he made everything fun.

Like, if we went to a candy store, you know, he'd be like *[whispering]*, "Let's pretend like we're blind." We were very close. It was like almost like a brother sister relationship. Like, he'd go, "Wanna do that? Like, pretend like I'm blind." So, we would go to like, you know, Stauffer's Candy on Chagrin Boulevard, and he would be like—pretend like he was blind, and be like, "Is this chocolate?"

It was always like acting stuff, and he was very silly. My friends loved him. And you know, of course he could also get stressed out and be in bad moods, but he was also equally fun and easygoing and very interested in my life and, you know, always like taking us to piano—I mean, very involved, and had to clean the house and cook us dinner every night. And you know. So, I think sometimes when people think alcoholic, they just assume, *[slurring]* "I got drunk every day." It wasn't like that. He would have like large periods of sobriety with, you know, slipping again, but really also was a very—I always felt deeply loved by my father. Yeah.

00:13:33 Jesse Host

There's also this thing, which is—and you know, I think when you're a kid, the one thing that you really want, or one of the essential things that you want from a parent is to know what you're gonna get. And when someone is an addict, you can't necessarily rely on knowing what you're gonna get.

00:13:56 Molly Guest

Yeah, exactly. That's true. So, when he was in periods—yeah, I write about that a lot in the book. Like, there would be certain times where I was like, "Oh no." Like, St. Patrick's Day, when we did the show—which was a big drinking day—I really dreaded it. I was like, "Oh no, I know he's gonna go downtown and he's gonna drink too much." And I would worry—yeah, you worry, so you have to become like a little adult at too young of an age. It would stress me out. So, I would make up—you know, "Oh, you can't pick me up in my classroom, because they're not allowing the parents to come. You have to meet me on the street." You know? Stuff like that.

Or I could tell from stage—from our St. Patrick's Day show—how drunk he was by how he would wave. Like, *[unhappily]* "Oh god." But I would pray and worry all day. "Oh, I pray, pray, pray that he could come home and just take a nap and have a coffee so he kind of sobers up before the show." So, yes, there were those worries. I'm not saying that was every day. It would be more like if it was like a party type situation, where he might overdo it, like a wedding or—you know, I would go take a sip of his drink to see if I tasted something he—you know—splashed in it or—you know. I was worried. It was hard to just relax.

But then, thank god when he found AA, he did get sober for long periods of time. And that was like a great relief, but that wasn't until I was older. So, that was probably like—yeah, 14, he started going to AA. 15. And I would go to Al Anon meetings in the basement of these churches with like 50-year-old women. And yeah, so I loved then, when he didn't drink. That was fantastic, when he really worked his AA program. So, I'm so glad that he found sobriety. You know?

00:15:36 Jesse Host

There's a story that you tell in the book that you've told elsewhere about being 12 years old and sneaking onto an airplane to New York City. I had like... I had heard about this. "Did you know Molly

Shannon, when she was 12 years old, snuck onto an airplane to New York City?" It's like one of those things you hear and you're like, "Yeah, way to go 12-year-old Molly Shannon."

[Molly agrees with a laugh.]

"That fits in with my narrative about the great Molly Shannon. I love everything about it. Great thing to hear."

I don't think I was prepared, in reading the story, for the extent to which your dad was somewhere between complicit in and actively supportive of this *[laughing]* horribly dangerous and foolhardy decision.

00:16:27 Molly Guest Mm-hm. He really was like that. He's the one who dared us, originally. He was like, "I dare you to do it! That'd be a great stunt!" You know?
00:16:34 Jesse Host Now, Molly, you know that most parents don't dare their children.

[They laugh.]

00:16:39 Molly Guest I know. Yeah.
00:16:40 Jesse Host Typically, that's something that like a kid in the neighborhood with one of those like Jughead hats does.
00:16:49 Molly Guest Right, exactly. Yeah. No, but he did—he had dared us, which is why when we pulled it off, he couldn't be that mad. Because we were like *[laughing]*—it was, you know, his original idea. And—yeah. But we—no, we really did do that.
00:17:04 Jesse Host Was he... was a big part of your childhood *[chuckling]* him daring you to do dangerous things?!
00:17:15 Molly Guest Um, was it a big part of our childhood? Well, he would do stuff like if we were—you know—at a mall and seeing a movie and the mall was closed and they'd pull those gates down at the store so you couldn't get in, but you could like—they were like those fences? He'd be like *[conspiratorially]*, "Stick your hand in and see if you can—" Like, if it was a wig store, "See if you can pull out a wig!" You know? And so, we would do stuff like that. We cleaned out the—part of the house, there was like a section where leaves got under near the basement window. So, he was like, "I'll take you to the amusement park." But then he was like, "See if you can sneak in," 'cause he didn't wanna have to pay. So, we would go around the back at Jug Lake and hop over the barbed wire fence and then come in and we would meet him at the front.

So, he would encourage stuff like that! He did do that. Like, "See if you can do it. See if you can do it." And so, we did do that.

[Laughs.] I know that sounds crazy! But we did do that, yes. And then he was like, "Good." 'Cause he didn't wanna have to pay for it. Or he would—you know, 'cause he was a single parent with a disability, so he worried about money and stuff. You know, that type of thing. Not all the time, but stuff like that.

00:18:24 Jesse Host Were you aware that your—of how different your family situation was than the other kids at Catholic school?

00:18:34 Molly Guest I have to say, my friends loved coming to my house, 'cause it was fun. You know? It definitely was fun. And my dad was fun, and my dad was very interested in my friends. And so, I think they liked coming—Anne and Allison—and they liked coming to my house to play. It was like lots of games, and we would make up dances. And

so, it was fun. And my dad was also very interested in them and wanting to hear their stories. They felt very understood by him, sometimes in a way that their own parents didn't understand. So, a house that might have looked like, "Oh, well, that house is perfect and they're normal," some of those people were going through their own things, even though the picture looked so pretty. You know what I mean?

So, a lot of my friends adored my father. He was very understanding and cool, and he had a kind of a different outlook about life, and he taught me a lot about the world. And it was unconventional, but he was a great teacher. You know? Yeah. Did you have the expectation that it was okay for you to be an artist for a life?

00:19:35 Jesse

Host

00:19:43 Molly

Guest

So, as far as being an actress, I felt it was hard. I was in high school, and it was hard to admit that I really wanted to do that professionally. I knew that I did. I did plays at Heights Youth Theatre when I was—you know—a preteen and teen. And I really felt the calling. I was Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. I started getting recognized in the neighborhood, like, "Oh my god, that's the girl that plays Dorothy!" And you know, I loved it. And my dad loved it. And tons of kids would come to these Heights Youth Theatre productions. They were very popular, and I would get starring parts in them. And I really loved it. But then, in high school, I was a little embarrassed to admit that I really wanna be an actress. So, I thought, "Well, I should—you know, I gotta prove that I have the—I've got the goods."

So, during an assembly, I decided I would—they had like a talent day where, on Fridays, people would get up and show their talent. And I decided I would get up in front of the whole school and sing a song. The microphone went out and the performance was a total bomb. I mean, it just—I ended up not even able to sing; the microphone didn't work, and then they liked called. "Okay, that's over. It didn't work." And I was like oh god. But finally, by my senior year, I had admitted I wanted to be an actress. I applied to NYU Drama School. I got in. And then, the very like last few weeks of school, they did some like assembly again, and I got up in front of the school and sang "Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart", a Judy Garland song, and it was like everything was coming together.

But yes, it was very hard to admit that, because I thought, "Well, do I have the goods?" And it was hard to admit it out loud. Like, "I wanna be an actress!" You know?

00:21:14 Jesse

Host

00:21:22 Molly

Guest

Did you wanna be... Judy Garland? Or were you doing a bit? To what—or what was the mix? I didn't wanna be Judy Garland, but my dad idolized women like Judy Garland and Rosalind Russell and those strong performers, or Elizabeth Taylor. So, we grew up listening to Judy Garland. You know. After my dad would finish cleaning the house, he would play—you know, [*singing nasally*] "Swaneeee—" Like Judy Garland would blare through the house when the house was sparkling clean. So, yeah. So, that's a performer I kind of grew up watching, *Easter Parade*. So, yes, I kind of wanted to be like those women. Yes. Yes. But I also wanted to be an actress. Kind of both—like an actress slash performer, live performer, that type of thing.

00:22:00	Jesse	Host	You were in college when you created the character that became Mary Katherine Gallagher, right? So, like that is—you know, remains your signature creation.
			<i>[Molly agrees.]</i>
			One of the—in my opinion, one of the best things. Just an incredible thing. And so distinctive <i>[laughing]</i> and distinctively you that like—I was like, “Oh, so she was just doing—she was being Molly Shannon.” <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:22:35	Molly	Guest	Yeah, yeah, yeah. When I did that at NYU?
			<i>[Jesse affirms.]</i>
			You mean, that I was—that it was so close to myself is what you’re saying?
00:22:43	Jesse	Host	No, no, not that it’s so close to yourself, but so close to yourself as an artist. Like, it was—it was your voice.
			<i>[Molly agrees.]</i>
			Like, that thing is your thing. You know what I mean?
			<i>[Molly agrees.]</i>
00:22:56	Molly	Guest	It’s not—it’s definitely not anybody else’s. It is original to you. Exactly. Exactly. And I didn’t say that at <i>Saturday Night Live</i> , but really she is like an adult child of an alcoholic. It’s a nervous, accident-prone, wanting to please—you know—scared, but wanting to like plow through the fear and succeed. You know. It’s all of those things, which is another reason why I wanted to write the book, because people will ask comedians, “Oh, you know, do you come from a dark place?” Or this or that, and I’m like yeah, most comedians do. So, it kind of gives like a backstory to where those characters come from in the work. And so, hopefully to make the work more meaningful, if you can place it in that history. Does that make sense?
00:23:36	Jesse	Host	Yeah. Let’s hear—let’s hear Mary Katherine Gallagher, ‘cause it’s one of the great things. We’ll play a clip from it on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> .
00:23:42	Molly	Guest	Oh, thank you.
00:23:43	Jesse	Host	My guest, Molly Shannon’s, first gargantuan, breakout, monster character.
00:23:49	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:23:50	Clip	Clip	<i>[The audience laughs at regular intervals.]</i>

Priest (Saturday Night Live): *[In an Irish accent.]* Okay, students and members of the faculty. Our next auditioner for St. Monica’s Talent Show is Mary Katherine—

Mary Katherine Gallagher: MARY KATHERINE GALLAGHER! *[Gratuitous crashing noises.]* I slipped. *[Giggles.]* Mary Katherine Gallagher. Mary Katherine Gallagher.

Priest: M-Mary Katherine.

Mary: Mary Katherine Gallagher.

Priest: Mary Katherine. Yes, right. I think I have it now. Uh—

[Loud crashing continues.]

Mary: Mary Katherine Gallagher. That's me!

Priest: Uh, right. I think I've got it now. Okay.

Mary: Okay.

Priest: Everyone, could we have some attention please for Mary Katherine G—

Mary: Gallagher. *[Breathing unsteadily.]* I've slipped.

Priest: What's wrong? Where are you?

Mary: I feel sad. *[Laughs uncomfortably.]*

Priest: Come out here. Come out.

Mary: Okay.

Priest: I—do you want to—do you want to audition or what?

Mary: *[Breathless.]* Yeah.

Priest: You do?

Mary: Some—sometimes when I get nervous, I stick my hands under my arms and then I smell my fingers like that.

[The audience erupts.]

Mary: So, that's gross. That's gross. *[Chuckles.]* That's gross.

Priest: Well, that's very interesting, Mary Katherine. Yes.

Mary: 'Cause it smells so bad.
Music swells and fades.

00:24:45 Sound Effect Transition

00:24:47 Jesse Host

So, there's—to me—two things about Mary Katherine Gallagher. One is, it's funny to see somebody throw themselves into chairs. One is the really raw and intense emotional content of the character.

[Molly agrees.]

This girl who so desperately needs to connect with the people around her, so doesn't know how, is such an open wound. Very sweet. Such an open wound. From the beginning, did you have both of those pieces? Or did you start throwing yourself into chairs and figure out why you were doing it?

00:25:30	Molly	Guest	<p>That's a great question. So, when I first did it, there were no chairs involved. It was just the kind of emotional character, nervous. It was—at NYU, it was a completely different context. The character got created because Madeleine—I got cast in this comedy review show with Adam Sandler, and it was just a kind of show where we made fun of the teachers. It was called <i>The Follies</i>, and it became a giant hit on campus. And during rehearsals for that NYU show, Madeleine Olnek was like, "Let's do an exercise where we just, you know, make up characters. And I'm gonna pretend to be this snotty director, and your job is to come in and try to impress me, try to get the job and make up a character. And just don't overthink it. Walk through the door."</p>
			<p>And I did the exercise. I walked through the door. I went, "Hi! I'm Mary Katherine Gallagher." I just made it up on the spot, and then I improvised. And she was very, mm, not impressed. And I would have to keep trying, trying, trying to get her to pay attention to me. And they ended up loving the character; they built the whole show around the character. But the original version, she was like a—like a murderer. It ended up being like a murder mystery, and people on campus loved it. And she wore, I think, all red at the time. So, I developed the character live, in front of an audience. But the essence, the emotionality, that kind of nervous [<i>gasp</i>], like you know pushing my hands against my legs and rubbing my—the nervousness, the spirit of the character was there from the beginning. 'Cause, yes, I'm pulling from myself.</p>
			<p>Then, as I continued to develop it onstage, in stage shows in LA, we started adding stuff, where I would begin the sketch in these stage shows that I did in LA where I would trip over a folding chair, drag it, then set it back. Like, "Oh, sorry!" Like an accident. So, I would do that every show. Then that developed over the years. And I think when I got an—or actually, maybe in my stage show I would start setting up little groups of metal chairs that I would fall into. I'm trying to—god, it's such a good question! 'Cause I'm trying to remember how that developed. And then it became bigger, bigger. Like, when I first did it on <i>SNL</i>. So, I think it just developed over time. And also, I was in a very reckless period of my life where I just didn't care about bruising myself or cutting myself or hurting myself. I just didn't care, and I didn't care. And it felt good to be physical and kind of get it out.</p>
			<p>But yeah. So, to answer your question, the emotional aspect was always there. The chair thing was kind of developing over time, adding those physical beats as it—as I continued to perform it in LA, then on <i>SNL</i>.</p>
00:28:08	Jesse	Host	<p>Were you self-consciously miming your own feelings, or did you realize later that you were miming your own feelings?</p>
00:28:16	Molly	Guest	<p>I didn't really think about it. It was just very organic, and I would—I would have certain beats that I had to hit, but I didn't think about it that way. I just—I just thought—I would just play the performance, like where I want to go on—like, in my stage show, it was that I was trying to get a part in a David Lynch movie. And I would just improvise in front of an audience. And that's how I really developed the character. [<i>Chuckles.</i>] You know? Me, and this guy—Rob Muir—and he was—you know, it was a little sketch, and it was a full</p>

improvisation. And we would invite a big audience of 200 people, and I would just make it up on the spot. I had certain beats I had to follow, but it was very loose and different things would happen in every performance.

00:28:56 Jesse Host Did you ever actually hurt yourself?
00:28:58 Molly Guest I mean, I would cut—no, nothing major. But I would definitely cut myself and bleed and my muscles would hurt but thank god I never broke bones or broke my back or broke my neck. Thank god! You know?

00:29:10 Jesse Host Like, I took a physical theatre class in high school from a guy who was a clowning expert.
00:29:17 Molly Guest Woah!
00:29:18 Jesse Host And like, he showed us ways to do physical bits onstage where you don't get hurt, that are—you know, things that... commedia dell'arte performers passed to vaudeville performers passed to circus clowns.

00:29:34 Molly Guest Woooah!
00:29:36 Jesse Host You know, like things that you can do to fake take a punch or fake fall or whatever. Right? And I remember thinking how incredible it was that there was this like institutional knowledge, but then when I was in my early 20s or something, and doing sketch comedy, and realizing that people were doing these things without those skills?! It was like scary to me! *[Laughs.]*

00:30:06 Molly Guest Oh, that's so interesting!
00:30:07 Jesse Host I was like, "Oh, so you're just actually hurting your—?! Like, no one has taught you the secrets of—"

[Molly agrees several times.]

I didn't remember or know all the secrets, but I knew they existed. I was like, "So, this isn't a function of you being hyper-professional. This is a function of you truly just being willing to get hurt if that's what it takes."

00:30:28 Molly Guest Yeah, exactly. That's dangerous. I actually don't like that now. I'm much safer and I don't like that, and it's scary. 'Cause you can really get injured. You know? Now that I've done physical comedy for years, I would never do the stuff that I did then, now that I'm a mother and I have children. It's crazy! It's so dangerous and risky! And I don't like that, anymore.

00:30:49 Jesse Host We'll wrap up with Molly Shannon in just a minute. After the break, we'll talk about what it was like to leave *Saturday Night Live*. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:31:00 Music Transition Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
00:31:04 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Molly Shannon. Let's get back into our conversation.

00:31:14 Molly Guest Did you do that character in your audition for *Saturday Night Live*?
No, I did not do Mary Katherine Gallagher, 'cause there was a woman who was kind of like a unofficial talent scout out in LA, and she was very hard to jump over. She was more interested in boys than—in men than women. And ugh, it was so hard to get through to her. And I eventually kind of jumped over her and just did my own show. And I had Marcy Kleinman, who was in charge of talent, and she came to see my show. But that woman heard that Marcy had seen my show, so she chimed in and said, "Well, you know,

whatever you do, don't do that Catholic school girl character, 'cause you'll never get hired. Lorne Michaels will hate it."

00:31:58 Jesse Host
00:32:03 Molly Guest

And it was terrible that she said that! But I was like, "Okaaaay." So, I thought maybe she's right. So, I did not do that for my audition. No. So, what was it like to pitch it when you eventually did? It was really hard to pitch it, because people didn't really get what it was. Like, I remember pitching the character to a writer. I won't say who it was. But I had done the character Mary Katherine Gallagher for so many years in my stage show, so I knew it worked. It was like a hit! People loved it! And I had really developed it and would be like, "Okay, that works. That works. That works." Like, so it's like a tight five-minute sketch that would kill onstage! Like, literally like people would scream! It got a raucous response. So, I knew it worked.

But on paper, at *SNL* when I wrote up the beats, I remember showing it to a writer when I'd just gotten hired. And he looked at it and he was like, "Naaah. The reason this can't work is because, you know, that's not a real joke and that's not da-neh-neh." And he kind of like explained it to me, and it just made me mad 'cause I was like I know it works. So, I could've listened to him, but I didn't. So, then I went to somebody else. I went to this guy, Steve Koren, 'cause I was really like—I wanted to get it on air. And you really have to write for yourself to get on air. You're competing with 17 other comedians for spots, and you have to write yourself to get on air.

00:33:08 Jesse Host
00:33:15 Molly Guest

But you maybe felt like you wanted some permission or help to do that, from one of these other—
A more—yeah, established. You know. Well, at the time, I had just started. So, then I found this other writer, Steve Koren, and I said, "I had this character." And he was like—and I go, "Here's a picture of the character. I do it in my stage show."

And he was like, "Okay, good!" He goes, "Let's just write up what you do in your stage show." So, we wrote it up together and that was the first—that's the one you just played. That's—that was a version, only we made Gabriel Byrne the priest. And he buoyed it with a few more jokes that I could land on and hang onto. And we made it, you know, she's auditioning for the talent show instead of a David Lynch movie. But it was the same stuff from my show. So, we just—yeah, he was like, "Tell me exactly what you in your stage show." And we wrote up our first sketch! And we put it in the readthrough table, and—yeah. And like I said, I showed him a picture of the character and he was like, "Oh, this is great."

We decided to set it in a Catholic school and put it at the table—the table read, along with all the other sketches that were submitted. Sometimes there's 45 sketches submitted. And they only pick—you know, whatever. Ten or something? Or—I forget the exact amount. But Lorne liked it right away. He was like, "Oooh! I like this!" He was—he was razor-focused on it. And then he came to me, and he goes, "You know what, Molly? I wanna save it for the Gabriel Byrne show, who's hosting next week, 'cause he'll be a great Irish priest." So, he was all over it. But then, when it was that show, I think they still didn't realize what it was going to be, physically. Because when

you're reading it at the table for *SNL*, you're just reading stage directions. Like, oh she comes out. You know, then she falls into some metal chairs. They're just reading it and they're not really knowing what it is, physically, 'cause you're just performing it sitting down at a table. You know?

And so, it made it onto the show list. It got on, but it was—when you go in for the dress rehearsal, it was at the very bottom of the order, which usually means it's stuff they don't believe in. And I'm like, "Oh, god. They're not—I don't think they know what this is. Why is this at the bottom of the show order? That's not—that's a mistake. I think they don't understand what this is." And then, during that Saturday before the live show, they have what's called—you rehearse for the dress rehearsal. And they ended up running out of time, and then it was like the dinner break, which means I didn't even get to really rehearse it. That means camera blocking. That—so, I think basically the director just came out during the dinner break and was like, "Okay, show me what you're gonna do." And we talked through it, but it wasn't like the formal, good rehearsal, 'cause they ran out of time.

00:35:48 Molly Guest

And so, I was like, "Oh my god. Okay, well, for the dress rehearsal, I'm gonna have to go crazy and really show them what this is, 'cause they don't get it. 'Cause I'm about to go [censored] nuts, and I'm gonna just have to show them. And I'm gonna have to blow the roof off the house." And so, I did. And then—and so, it was the very bottom of the show, and then between dress and air, you go into Lorne Michaels's office at like 11 o'clock, and you see which of the dress show sketches will make it to air, 'cause many get cut. And you walk into his office, and you look at the bulletin board, and you see the new order of the live show and then what's cut. And Mary Katherine Gallagher—that sketch got moved from the bottom to the top! And I was like, "Yes! Now we're talking!"

And that was the first sketch I ever got on air! And it was an enormous success! It was fantastic! And I just was—it was a great lesson in kind of writing for yourself and writing what you know and writing from your heart. And people really related to it; I got like a crazy response where people on the street would go, [excitedly] "That character you did, that reminds me of my sister!" And then the camera man would say, "Oh my god! My cousin saw that! She said that reminds me of her!" And then you know, people come up to me in the street and duh-deduh-de-duh-duh-duh. You know. So, speaking of an adult child of an alcoholic, I was like—I was just writing what I knew from my childhood. So, I was like, "Oh, this is so great. We're onto something!" You know what I mean?

00:37:14 Jesse Host

I mean, I think there's people who throw themselves into furniture in order to protect themselves. And I think one of the things, when I watched you on *Saturday Night Live* that I always admired, was it felt like you were throwing yourself into furniture for the opposite reasons. Like, to reveal yourself! Like—

[Molly agrees.]

00:37:36 Molly Guest

You know? It was—your characters were so openhearted. Oh, thank you, Jesse. And you know what's so interesting is Lorne loves that stuff. He loves comedy with trauma or comedy with big

heart. That's like—I think he loves that stuff! And it's my favorite kind of comedy, 'cause I don't like when people make fun of the characters. Like, I'm like—I care about that character and I wanted to show—*[choking up]* this makes me sad. I didn't want to show her heart to people, and it meant so much to me. So, I wanted people to be able to like see it and relate and laugh. You know? And I wanted to be able to write a story from a girl, from me, not reacting to the boys. Not like—you know, like, be a girl. Tell your story. Come from within. Maybe people will relate to it. And it was crazy like how many people related to it!

I was like, "Oh my god!" It was like so exciting! I was like, "Wow! I can't believe so many people identify with this character. You know?"

00:38:34 Jesse Host

[Chuckles.] A lot of people get onto *Saturday Night Live* because they're extraordinarily hardworking, focused, and driven. It requires certain specific skills. There's not a lot of other venues for those skills. Like, you have to get—you have to be talented, work hard, be good, drive towards it. And those people often also have points in mind beyond *Saturday Night Live*, because that's just the kind of person that can get that stuff together.

[Molly agrees.]

I definitely feel how hardworking, focused, and driven you were in doing this crazy thing you did. I also get the impression that like by the time you were done being on *Saturday Night Live*, it wasn't because you were like too big to be on *Saturday Night Live* anymore. It was because you were like just *[chuckles]* ready to have a different, more chill life.

00:39:40 Molly Guest

I was! 'Cause I feel like I've been working so hard, like achieving and driven to like make it, and working so hard that I was like, "Ahh." I just—I wanted to just enjoy my life and I really knew I wanted to have children, and I just wanted to meet friends for coffee. And I remember when people used to say like, "Oh, *SNL*'s a great steppingstone."

I was like, "A steppingstone?!" Like, I don't consider it a steppingstone at all. I was like, "I can't even believe I got here! Like, this is the greatest thing ever in my life. Like, I could freeze now and be so happy and fulfilled that I made it this far, and never do anything beyond." Because I really knew what it was, this variety of experience with Lorne Michaels. I knew it was a one-of-a-kind, spectacular show. And I still feel that way. It's just the most—just the greatest. It's definitely hard. But I realize like when I went through that, you know—when I got really famous on *SNL*, I realized like I've had this anxious feeling like when people compliment me. Like, oh—there was like a gnawing feeling, and it was really like—I really just wanted kind of my mom to be there to say she was proud.

And I realized when she wasn't gonna come back—like, you could have people clapping and you could do backflips and people coming up to you, and it still wasn't gonna bring her back. I was like—I sunk into a depression for many months. But when I came out of it, I felt really great. I was like, "Oh, I can just enjoy being

creative. It doesn't fix anything. This isn't gonna bring my mom back from the dead. Fame doesn't fix anything." And then I developed a healthy relationship with the arts and being creative, 'cause I didn't wanna kill myself or be so hard on my body. I just wanted to be creative and have a happy, healthy life. And so, I started to treat *SNL* like a creative arts comedy camp. Like, "Oh, this is so cool." Like, you know, even if you don't get something on, just enjoy it. It's been—like, all these great writers and performers. And I just tried to like treat it like a creative experience and not worry about being the best, but just enjoy where you are and being an artist.

Because I think that—so, my whole perspective changed, where I just was like, "Oh, I can relax a little bit." And yes, when I left the show, I wasn't leaving to do anything. I just wanted to spend time with my dad. I wanted to date. You know. I mean, I was dating my husband, but I wanted to enjoy just my relationship. I knew I wanted to have children. I was just leaving to go have more of a personal life. And it felt great.

00:42:07 Jesse Host Well, Molly Shannon, we're out of time, but I'm so grateful to have gotten the chance to talk to you.

[Music fades in.]

I admire you and your work so much. And the book is really beautiful.

00:42:16 Molly Guest This has been a pleasure.

00:42:18 Jesse Host Thanks, Molly.

00:42:19 Music Transition Bright synth with light vocalizations.

00:42:21 Jesse Host Molly Shannon, everyone. One of the greats. Her new book is called *Hello, Molly! A Memoir*. It's out now. And it is—it is a really great read. I've actually heard it's a really great audiobook, too, by the way. You know, these celebrity memoirs, they're not always real books. And this one is. Shannon's newest show, *I Love That for You*, premieres this week, on Showtime.

[Music fades out.]

00:42:48 Music Transition Harmonic synth and vocalizations.

00:42:51 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. You know, I was driving my son to school in Altadena, just northeast of Los Angeles. Eight o'clock in the morning, driving down one of the main drags in this little town. Guess what I saw? A coyote walking around like it owned the darn street! Southern California, for you.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio, Valerie Moffat and Richard Robey. I'll tell you what, me and Richard went to see Son of Kemet the other day, at the LodgeRoom, here in Los Angeles. Sons of Kemet, past guests on *Bullseye*. Uh, WOW! That was a great show. If you get a chance to see Sons of Kemet, whoo boy! That was—that was a heater. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation", written and recorded by The Go! Team. Our thanks to The Go! Team and thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

00:44:18 Promo Promo

Bullseye is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us in any those places. Follow us there; we'll share with you our interviews. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]