

00:00:00	Jesse Thorn	Promo	Hey, it's Jesse. NPR is doing its annual survey to better understand how listeners like you spend time with podcasts. So, please help us out by completing a short, anonymous survey at NPR.org/podcastsurvey . That's all one word. We would really appreciate your help to support NPR podcasts. That's NPR.org/podcastsurvey . All one word. Thanks.
00:00:25	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:26	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:39	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.
00:00:55	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. Feed your Tamagotchi, jump into those JNCOs, frost those tips. <i>[Music fades in.]</i>
00:01:06	Music	Music	'Cause we're going back to 1999, baby. "Candy" from the album <i>So Real</i> by Mandy Moore. <i>Oh yeah So, baby come to me Show me who you are Be sweet to me Like sugar to my heart (oh, baby) I'm craving for you (I'm craving) I'm missing you like candy (missing you like candy)</i> <i>Sweet, sweet loving...</i> <i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i>
00:01:29	Jesse	Host	That song playing is a classic from that year—"Candy", by my guest, Mandy Moore. It was her first single. She was a teenager. It hit number 41 on the <i>Billboard</i> charts. It went gold. It made Mandy a teen pop star, following in the footsteps of her peers Britney Spears, N*SYNC, and The Backstreet Boys. But Mandy Moore never wanted to just be a teen pop star. She had dreams to act, to write her own music, and it turns out she was great at those things. For over 20 years, she's been a regular working actor. She starred in movies like <i>Saved</i> , <i>The Princess Diaries</i> , and <i>I'm Not Here</i> . On TV, she's appeared on <i>Grey's Anatomy</i> , <i>Scrubs</i> , and of course, <i>This is Us</i> . That smash hit beloved drama just finished its six-year run on NBC. Mandy played Rebecca Pearson on the show—a role that earned her Screen Actors Guild awards, along with Emmy and Golden Globe nominations. And now, like I said, <i>This is Us</i> has come to an end. When the production wrapped, Moore found herself in a bit of a crossroads in her career. <i>[Music fades in.]</i>

00:02:41	Music	Music	<p>So, she started writing music again and recording it. And she has a brand-new record. It's called <i>Real Life</i>. This is the title track. "In Real Life" from the album <i>Real Life</i> by Mandy Moore.</p> <p><i>It's too late to wait until it feels right Now I gotta start the long goodbye</i></p> <p><i>I spent every day filling every page How the world revolved around me When I saw your face I knew right away We'd be whoever we wanted to be</i></p> <p><i>In real life...</i></p> <p><i>[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]</i></p>
00:03:15	Jesse	Host	Mandy Moore, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> ! Thanks for being on the show!
00:03:16	Mandy Moore	Guest	Thanks for having me!
00:03:18	Jesse	Host	<p>Do you have to think about what the effect of your records is on people that love you from the—one of the most popular shows on network television?</p> <p><i>[They chuckle.]</i></p>
00:03:30	Mandy	Guest	<p>A completely different thing?</p> <p>I don't think about it, no. And I recognize that there are probably many, many of them that have no idea that I had a music career before and that's how I started out. And that's perfectly okay with me.</p>
00:03:42	Jesse	Host	Did you ever think about it the other way around from people who knew you from being a pop star and seeing you as an actor?
00:03:50	Mandy	Guest	<p>Yeah! That's been a different transition, just because I started my career at 15, in music and then very sort of quickly transitioned into the acting side of things when I was like 16, 17, 18. And that became kind of like my real day job for a good amount of time. And then there have been lulls and ebbs and flows and whatnot, but I just—yeah. I fully expect that maybe people are a little bit more aware of—knew me from music and transitioning into acting has been a bit more of an ongoing thing for the last few years.</p>
00:04:27	Jesse	Host	Do you think that professional musician is your career now? Or is it 50/50? Or is music a thing you do because you love it and you're going to continue to try and be on network television programs?
00:04:46	Mandy	Guest	<p><i>[Laughs.]</i> I feel like music has always been a hobby. It's the thing that I haven't found the same degree of success with that I kind of have on the acting side. So, I love that! 'Cause it means there's no expectation. I have total freedom to make music on my own terms. And although I started out in a very controlled environment as a popstar and making music with A&R folks and—you know—just the whole machinery of like the late '90s, early 2000s. But again, I think because I never really achieved the level of success that a lot of my contemporaries did, it kind of allowed the record label to like take their foot of the gas. They were like, "Go do whatever you want!"</p> <p><i>[Music fades in.]</i></p>

00:05:39 Music Music So, at 18, like I remember I made this covers record and I covered like XTC and Joe Jackson and Joni Mitchell and all this music that I was like discovering and falling in love with. "Senses Working Overtime" from the album *Coverage* by Mandy Moore.

*And all the world is football shaped
It's just for me to kick in space
And I can see, hear, smell, touch, taste
And I've got one, two, three, four, five*

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]

00:05:53 Mandy Guest And they let me put out this record, 'cause they're like, "Yeah, yeah. Our relationship is over." And that was kind of like the transition for me of starting to write my own music and be way more involved, creatively. So—but it's still like—I've never ever found the same degree of success, especially like compared to—well, you know, something like a *This is Us* in my life over the last six years. So, I feel lucky that I get to feel creatively fulfilled on both ends. But music is less of my day job. It's definitely just my passion.

00:06:28 Jesse Host What was writing songs like for you for this record? I mean, like practically. You've always worked with collaborators. Does that mean that you're—you know, the two of you are sitting together going, "Scoobity-doobity-doo," and that—like, what is the actual functional—?

00:06:42 Mandy Guest Pretty much! *[Laughs.]*

00:06:43 Jesse Host I don't have a strong understanding of the music making process, I will admit.

00:06:48 Mandy Guest I think it differs for everybody. And it even differs like day-to-day for me. Like, sometimes I will come in with a very strong idea lyrically of what I wanna talk about. Or just—you know, the idea of like, "I really love that one chord progression in this crowded house song." Like, I'd love to try and find a song that makes me feel that way. I wrote this whole record with my husband, Taylor, and one of my best friends, Mike Viola, who also produced the record. He's produced my last three records. So, yeah. I think together, the three of us just like have always been on the same page and known—they've really be great about following my lead and letting me sort of take the helm and figure out like what this record needed to be.

I hadn't made music in about—over a decade, and I started working on a record that came out in March of 2020. We were four days away from going on the road with it. And, obviously, the world shut down and we had to sort of make different plans. And so, I think that in real life, this album that just came out is a direct reflection and response of how I was feeling during that time, I think. Trying to get a grasp on what was happening in the world and the confusion and the chaos. Writing has always been a really cathartic outlet for me. And to be able to connect and do that with Taylor, with my husband, and then bringing Mike into the fold once it felt kind of okay to do that—after a couple of months. And then I found out I was pregnant like—you know—very early on in the pandemic, as well.

00:08:37 Jesse Host So, a lot of this record is also talking about impending parenthood and what this next chapter of my life was gonna look like. And looking back on my life and reflecting on my relationship with my parents and—it just—it really kind of colored everything. I'm not that surprised to hear that you put this record together while you were—you know—just realizing you were pregnant at the beginning of the pandemic, because it feels like you're—in a way—kind of trying to explain who you are and how you got there a little bit. But—and when I say that, like I mean to yourself. *[Laughs.]*

[Mandy agrees.]

00:08:58 Mandy Guest Like, not—
00:08:59 Jesse Host Yeah! Not to the world.
00:09:04 Mandy Guest Not like this is—it's not like "This is My Fight Song" type situation.
00:09:06 Jesse Host It's a—
00:09:10 Mandy Guest It's a little quieter, I think.
00:09:12 Jesse Host Yeah, you trying to figure out how to feel right about being yourself. Thanks! Yeah! Definitely.
00:09:17 Mandy Guest Were you freaked out at the beginning of the pandemic? Were you freaked out when you found out that you were pregnant at the beginning of the pandemic?
I was freaked out I think like probably the rest of the population—just what is this world gonna be? What is our life gonna sort of constitute of like—yeah. There was just so many questions and no answers. And just living in a world of fear. So, yeah, I think that finding out *[chuckles]* that we were gonna become parents was a beautiful, personal silver lining, but it was also like made all the more terrifying just because of the state of the world and how sort of completely protective you immediately felt anyway. And I went back to work when I was like five months pregnant. And that was pretty scary, as well. Understanding that there were gonna be certain protocols in place and I did end up feeling very safe at work, but still! There were like so many question marks.

We were one of the first shows to go back into production. And so, I kind of felt like we were guinea pigs, in a way. We would shut down periodically, because someone—you know. None of the actors ever tested positive. I don't know how, for—you know—a year and a half. And thousands of covid tests—no one sort of on the—in the main cast ever tested positive. But we'd have crew members and people that worked in the office and whatnot. And in the beginning, it like kind of shut everything down for like a week at a time! *[Laughs.]*

00:10:52 Jesse Host And then we'd slowly sort of get back up and running again. And yeah, carrying a child and being pregnant for the first time was a little daunting during that time especially. But it did give me a lot to write about. *[Laughs.]* A lot to reflect on, a lot to be grateful for. So, there's two lanes of inquiry that I wanna open here. The first of them is: so, I had some interactions with the medical system towards the beginning of the pandemic, and it... one of the scariest and most difficult things about it was just how fraught it was to go to the doctor.

[Mandy agrees.]

00:11:24	Mandy	Guest	<p>Which is a big part of being pregnant. So, what was that like to know that you were kind of entering an unknown and a little bit scary world just to like go and get an ultrasound or whatever. Just to go and get an ultrasound. Yeah! It was strange. It was strange times. But you know, masked up and had your hand sanitizer. You sort of like weaponized yourself as best as you could, going out into the world. And like I tried to keep myself in my little bubble. But yeah, I also knew like I have to enter into the world. Like, this is a big part of our existence, and this is important, and this is an important part of making sure that my health is okay, and the health of my unborn child is okay. So, you sort of like cast aside all those other fears and doubts and just keep putting one foot in front of the other.</p>
00:12:35	Jesse	Host	<p>But it was a strange time. Especially, also you had to do most of that solo. Whereas for the most part, you'd be—you know, hopefully sharing it with your partner. You know. Also, silver lining of the world being kind of closed was that I got to share this time with my husband when my husband's a touring musician. And like 90% of his life is spent on the road. And I guarantee, we never would have spent this kind of concentrated amount of time together during this very special time. So, I was really grateful that we got to ride the waves <i>[laughing]</i> of that time together.</p>
00:12:45	Mandy	Guest	<p>What was it like to share your—I'm sure you and your husband each had your own anxieties about parenthood—to share them in a house that you basically never left?</p> <p><i>[Chuckles.]</i> That we couldn't escape each other? Well, we discovered over the pandemic that we very much like each other, which I was grateful for, and really enjoyed spending 2+ years confined together. It was—yeah! I loved being able to share those—there were—there were fears, but we had actually been trying to start a family for a while. So, I think there was more relief in it finally coming to fruition and gratitude than there was—I mean, obviously as things progress and you actually see this child growing in you physically, it becomes more real and you're reading all the books and taking weird Zoom baby classes.</p>
00:13:59	Jesse	Host	<p>And that's—for sure, it elicits conversations about what kind of parents do we wanna be, what kind of influence do we wanna have on our kids? What do we want the future to look like? Where do we wanna live? Like what kind of schools—? I mean, all of those things that, yeah, you don't really think about I guess until you're in that situation. It's more fun to just ignore that stuff and think about—you know—romanticized version, I guess.</p>
00:14:08	Music	Transition	<p>Even more still to get into with Mandy Moore after the break. Stick around. It's <i>Bullseye</i>, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.</p> <p>Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.</p>
00:14:12	Jesse	Host	<p>It's <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Mandy Moore, the singer-songwriter and star of <i>This is Us</i>. Let's get back into our conversation.</p>
00:14:38	Mandy	Guest	<p>Did you have to make a plan with your husband on what to do about having a baby when he is a touring musician, you're a working actor and sometime touring musician, and there is a deadly pandemic spreading through the land?</p> <p>Did we have a plan in place?</p>

00:14:40 Jesse Host Yeah! Did—how do you—how did you figure out like—?

[Mandy laughs.]

00:14:51 Mandy Guest ‘Cause normally, it would be like, “Well, our parents come to stay with us for as long as possible.” Or maybe if you’re lucky, they live in the area. You’re shaking your head “no”.

Well, I mean, no. The only plan we had in place was—he wasn’t working, ‘cause he wasn’t touring. And I was working, and I went back to work in fact like a month after Gus was born. So, our plan was to have the support that we needed in order to ensure that like I could go back to work. And I was nursing him, and so I needed to have someone there to kind of like help facilitate that. And Taylor was around to do that some of the time, and we had someone else that would step in and help when he couldn’t do it. And it was great, actually.

It ended up working out really well. I feel lucky that I have a job that I love that allowed me to bring my child to work like consistently, without hesitation. No one—no one felt put out by it. No one—whenever I was like, “Hey guys, I need—you know—ten minutes to go nurse my baby or I need to take a break to go visit him or I need to eat something,” like no one questioned that. And I felt very—yeah, very supported and very understood in that whole situation. It was really lovely.

00:15:55 Jesse Host I’m sorry to ask you such a dumb question, but did you ever find yourself at work feeding your child in old lady makeup.

00:16:02 Mandy Guest I did. A lot. I have lots of pictures of it, too.

[Jesse giggles.]

00:16:09 Jesse Host Just for like therapy purposes later, for Gus.
[Laughing.] Just because there’s parts of this—of what you were filming where you were—what?—like 85, right? Onscreen?

00:16:16 Mandy Guest Yeah. I wasn’t quite ever that age nursing him, but I was in my early 70s.

[Jesse affirms with a laugh.]

00:16:30 Jesse Host And I would call myself grandma mom when I would—*[laughs]* to nurse him, then. Yeah, loots of photographic evidence of that happening.

00:16:37 Mandy Guest Just I think all mothers can relate to that moment when their baby looks up at them and wonders why they’re 80s years old!
Why they’re 40 years older?

[They laugh.]

00:16:40 Jesse Host *[Imitating a confused baby.]* “Waaah-huh?”

00:16:41 Mandy Guest Yeah. “What happened?” I think he smelled me and recognized my voice, ‘cause he was never confused. But yeah, I mean, from an early age, he saw me in like different wigs and I guess he’s—I don’t know. Again, you gotta give him something to go to therapy for later in life. Right?

00:16:56 Jesse Host It must have been odd to be going through that beginning in your life as you were doing the work that was the end of this show that—

you know—had been—had redefined your career—defined your career, to some extent.

[Mandy agrees.]

And like, to be there, like look around with these people that you've been working with for seven years or whatever, say, "This is the last time I'm gonna see them. Also, I guess I'm a parent now for the rest of my life."

00:17:22 Mandy Guest Yeah. Strange juxtaposition of like starting this very—the most important chapter of my life as—you know—something that is very seminal and important to me is ending. But also, something really beautiful in that as well. And I've tried to embrace that and I'm excited, because I don't really—beyond like this record and going on the road—I don't know what comes next, beyond being a mom. And I'm excited about that. And I'm really—I'm—it's lovely to have job security, but I'm like, "Oh, I'm gonna give myself some time to process what I just experienced and lived through for six seasons." And also like, I went back to work with him when he was a month old! Like, I'd love to just have a moment to be mom and then figure out what comes after.

00:18:09 Jesse Host And also go on tour. *[Chuckles.]*

00:18:11 Mandy Guest Go on tour and bring him on tour. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:18:14 Jesse Host Your husband is going with you, right?

00:18:15 Mandy Guest He is. Yeah, my—

00:18:17 Jesse Host Is he also gonna be performing on this tour?

00:18:19 Mandy Guest I mean, he'll be in the band! Yeah! My husband and my brother-in-law. So, it really will be like a *Partridge Family* situation. We'll bring Gus with us and—yeah. Just bring him around the country. And it might be the worst idea of all time, but I'm also like, "You know what? This is gonna be like some weird family summer vacation." And it'll be fun to tell him one day. Like, "You went to 25 cities around the country when you were 15 months old."

00:18:46 Jesse Host So, *[laughs]* let's talk a little bit about your early career—your teenage years and before. I know that you started singing and acting—you know—the way that children start singing and acting, when you were a child, when you were 10/12 years old.

[Mandy confirms.]

Did you aspire at some point to do it professionally immediately? Like, did you ever say to your mom like, "Bring me on auditions," or—

[Mandy confirms.]

00:19:16 Mandy Guest "Get me a record deal," or whatever. *[Chuckles.]* Stat! No, I was very self-motivated. I don't know where it came from. No one in my family is artistic. No one's remotely creative. My dad's an airline pilot—or was an airline pilot. My mom was a stay-at-home mom. Yeah. I—but I remember we were fortunate enough to go to a really great school in Orlando, where I grew up. And it was a private school, and every kid had to attend drama and music class. So, I think that was my introduction. I don't know if I would've been introduced to music or theatre in any regard if it weren't for school. And every kid had to participate in the fifth and sixth grade

plays, which they put on at like the big, touring theatre in town where all the touring Broadway shows came through.

And I was six, and I saw the sixth-grade production of *Oklahoma*, and the girl who played Laurie—I just remember her singing “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning”, and she was incredible. And I remember like sitting up in my seat and looking all around me at like the audience in awe at how talented this girl was. And I’m like, “I wanna do that. I wanna make people feel like that.” It’s something like electricity pulsed through my body, and I remember I would like walk around the house mimicking a song and asking my parents if I sounded like her. And I’d sing *The Little Mermaid*, and that quickly transitioned into just like finding theatre. Like, Broadway musicals and like cast recordings and listening to those. And I remember my mom went to like a Bette Midler show when I was kid, and she got one of those like souvenir like books from the tour, and I would just thumb through it. And with Bette Midler and all of her like crazy costumes! [Laughs.]

But I remember thinking, “I wanna do that!” And I remember, you know, from like 10 or 11 or 12, seeing *Beaches*—which far too young to see that movie, but being so moved by it—I just loved Bette Midler.

00:21:10	Jesse	Host	I mean, some would argue that Bette Midler, not necessarily for children in general.
00:21:13	Mandy	Guest	Not—no, no, no. But for me—
00:21:15	Jesse	Host	Wonderful as she—Bette Midler, go on <i>Bullseye</i> . You’re always welcome here. We’ve tried to book Bette Midler before. You’re always welcome here.
00:21:18	Mandy	Guest	Oh my gosh. Come on, Bette.
00:21:21	Jesse	Host	But maybe not the main thing that she’s for—
00:21:23	Mandy	Guest	For a ten-year-old? No. I—yeah, I was not her target demo, but somehow I found her and found her music and she was just on a pedestal to me. And I wanted to have a career like that. I wanted to do movies and Broadway and TV and—
00:21:34	Jesse	Host	Play bathhouses.
00:21:36	Mandy	Guest	Play bathhouses in New York City with Barry Manilow!
00:21:38	Jesse	Host	Make catty remarks!
00:21:40	Mandy	Guest	Yeah, exactly! And that evolved into finding— <i>The Orlando Sentinel</i> used to have an audition hotline on Fridays where you could call and find out like what the local, upcoming auditions for all age groups were. And I would write down whatever was in town, all across town, in far, little-reaching suburbs around Orlando, of what was casting for people my age. And then my parents were very kind to schlep me across town and audition for like—you know, a local production of <i>Gypsy</i> or something. And I just—one thing led to another. I sang the national anthem at sports events. Anything I could do to just sing and be out there and performing, I wanted that opportunity.
00:22:29	Jesse	Host	I mean, I imagine that at some point, when you were trying to sing the national anthem at sporting events, you must have figured out like, “Oh, I’m actually pretty good at singing.”
00:22:41	Mandy	Guest	I don’t know if I ever felt that way. I felt good singing. But I never remember a time where I was like, “Ooh, I’m <u>good</u> .” Like, I just—I loved it. I loved the feeling that overcame me. And that was the driving factor. I was like, “Ugh! I can’t get enough of this! I can’t get

enough of like being onstage and feeling that like magic." I don't know!

00:23:03 Jesse Host This question contains no judgement. How much of it was the act of singing—like the way that you feel when you're singing in the kitchen while you're doing the dishes? How much of it was the act of like entertaining an audience, knowing that you're like touching them and changing them and they love you?

00:23:20 Mandy Guest Entertaining an audience, for sure. Just miles of difference. I mean, I still love being at home and like puttering around the house singing, but there is something different about being onstage and getting to do it for an audience and like, again, something that sort of gets turned on in you. And the reciprocal thing of you give them energy, they give energy back to you. It's—that dynamic and that rush of adrenaline is something that can't really be reciprocated in any other place.

00:23:49 Jesse Host I feel like you're having a sense memory right now. *[Chuckles.]*

00:23:52 Mandy Guest Totally! I am! I'm like taking—you're taking me waaay back!

00:23:56 Jesse Host Your gestures have gotten much stronger since we—

00:23:57 Mandy Guest *[Laughing.]* Sorry. Sorry!

00:23:59 Jesse Host You're—it's great! I'm enjoying it.

00:24:01 Mandy Guest I get excited, yeah.

00:24:02 Jesse Host You're selling the national anthem, right now. Here I am at the Orlando Magic—

00:24:07 Mandy Guest I would have my pitch pipe, and I had an American flag hair bow. Like, I got real into it. And I remember I was at an Orlando Magic game once with my dad. We had season tickets during the Shaq-Penny Hardaway days, the glory days of the Orlando Magic. And we—I watched a girl my age walk out and sing the national anthem, and I had no idea. And that's when it dawned on me I can do that. I wanna do that. And so, I sent in an audition tape. My mom dropped it off with fresh-baked cookies. I think that really sealed the deal. And I got asked to do it, and then one thing led to another. I became the national anthem girl for like the Orlando Arena, as it was called at that time. And I sang for the roller hockey team, the ice hockey team, the arena football team.

00:24:58 Jesse Host Like, I kind of made my rounds there.

00:25:00 Mandy Guest That was the golden age of professional roller hockey. *[Laughs.]* The golden age! I think they were the Orlando Jackals, if I remember correctly. But yeah, I became like their good luck charm during the playoffs one year.

00:25:10 Jesse Host I think Orlando is a very interesting place to come up in the entertainment industry, because—you know, there's places like—you know, Chicago has a world of people who are doing theatre at the highest levels within Chicago. Right? And they get the occasional job on a movie that's shooting in Chicago or whatever. Mostly, they're performing with Steppenwolf or something.

[Mandy agrees.]

If you're in Los Angeles, you're like living within the television and to some extent film industry completely just because you're in Los Angeles. If you're in New York, maybe you're doing a Broadway thing. And Orlando is not Kansas City where it's like regional theatre or nothing, because Orlando is a place with lots of professional entertainment, but it is a very particular kind of

professional entertainment. Right? It's like when you see a show on a cruise ship and you're like, "These people are for real professional entertainers, and they are in this lane doing this thing." Right? You're like, "This person can really sing. They know how to work this job, and also they're working on a cruise ship: the weirdest place you could ever work in the history of the world. Right? And Orlando is full of jobs like that! *[Laughs.]* Right?"

[Mandy confirms.]

00:26:38	Mandy	Guest	There's 75 theme parks. There's 1000 cruise ships. There's many tourist attractions of various kinds. And then I'm sure there's also just regular, regional theatre. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> But... Yes. Yeah, it's weird 'cause I just feel like I was a normal kid who lived in the suburbs. I had no connection to like <i>The Mickey Mouse Club</i> or like any of the so-called industry that was there. I truly was just like a normal theatre kid that could've been in any town across the country. I think people hear Orlando and the time period in which my career kind of started and they're like, "Oh! Were you friends with all those people?"
00:27:14	Jesse	Host	I'm like, "I had no awareness of any of that stuff." It wasn't until things sort of started for me that I kind of made that connection.
00:27:16	Mandy	Guest	Did you wanna be a teen Bette Midler?
00:27:17	Jesse	Host	I wanted to be on Broadway. Yeah.
00:27:19	Mandy	Guest	Sing "Castle On a Cloud" or whatever.
00:27:25	Jesse	Host	Sing—exactly! Oh my gosh, that would've been the dream, to be in <i>Les Mis</i> or some show in New York or something. For sure. So, how did you end up becoming a pop star?
			<i>[Mandy laughs.]</i>
00:27:31	Mandy	Guest	Besides being good at singing. I mean, you're an exceptional singer.
00:27:37	Jesse	Host	Well, that's debatable, but—oh, you're kind. But I think I was— I think the marketplace has proven that you're good at singing.
00:27:42	Mandy	Guest	You've been a professional singer for 25 years or whatever. Yeah. Oooh goodness. Well, I was singing the national anthem at the ice hockey team, and as I was coming off the ice to walk to my dad—who was sitting in the penalty box—these two gentlemen like waved the two of us over, and my dad and I like walked over there. And they were like, "That was great."
00:28:18	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	"Thank you?" And they told me that they worked in a recording studio. One was an engineer; one was a songwriter. And they had some music if I ever had any interest in recording in a studio. Which, you know, is the shadiest way to open a conversation to a 13-year-old and her dad. Jesse: It's a shady way to open a conversation to an adult man, yeah. Mandy: Open any conversation with anybody. Correct, correct.
00:28:23	Mandy	Guest	Jesse: Like— But! I like just jumped at that prospect, and my parents were like, "Well, you're going into high school—freshman year of high school.

You have some money from some local commercials that you've done. If you wanna spend your money—you know—for five days in this recording studio, recording some original songs, like it's your money to spend. So, go for it." And I did. And it was probably—oh my gosh, like day three, a guy who worked for FedEx who had been in and out of the studio and knew all the goings on there, approached my parents and these two producer/engineer guys and said, "I have a friend who is the head—" Like, "I have a friend of a friend of a friend who's the head of Urban A&R at Epic Records, and I can send this like demo off to him."

Nobody told me anything, in case it never came to fruition. And they did! They sent this demo. This man, through whatever chain of friends he had, sent my demo off. And this guy, David McPherson, who used to be the head of A&R at Jive Records—he signed The Backstreet Boys—had just moved over to Epic Records. And he heard something he liked, and he flew down to Orlando, and I sang for him, live. I sang a song from a Broadway show, because that was *[chuckles]* the nerd I was.

00:29:43 Jesse Host
00:29:44 Mandy Guest

Like in an office?

In a recording studio. And I sang a song for him, and just like had a normal conversation. And at this point, it was like early fall. And I had started high school. And I remember I was way more concerned with this meeting getting over, because it was a Friday night and I wanted to go to my homecoming football game. Like I had no concept of this really being a reality that could happen to me and change my life. I was like, "This is cool that this man flew down from New York and I get to sing for him," but I really—I had just started making friends and I wanna go to my homecoming football game. And that was the meeting that sort of changed everything. It changed my whole life.

00:30:24 Jesse Host

I had not spent a ton of time thinking about the process of becoming a teen pop star until I started preparing for this interview.

[Mandy laughs.]

But something that I thought about as I was doing this was I was like—one of the craziest parts about it, to me, is that like you're a freshman in high school, so you're like 14 or 15.

00:30:44 Mandy Guest
00:30:45 Jesse Host

14.

And you were at the top of the pop star hill—or at least, the—you know, the second highest crest of the pop star hill like 18 months later or something!

[Mandy confirms.]

So, like the thing that I couldn't wrap my head around is the idea of how much changes sooo fast! And like things move slowly when you're a teenager, relatively, but like I was like, "I can't even—!" Like! *[Struggling for words.]* I know that—

00:31:12 Mandy Guest

It was less than 18 months. This was the fall of 1998. I started making my debut album in January of 1999. And by May, I had come out to LA and done my first music video, and then immediately flew back across the country and started the N*SYNC summer amphitheater tour, where I was like the opening act like *[chuckles]* on this stage that is outside the mainstage. You know,

it's the second stage. You come through like the turnstile after they tear your ticket stub and there's like—you know—four people watching. I started out there.

00:31:49 Jesse Host What was the show? Was it you and a mic? Did you have dancers?
 00:31:52 Mandy Guest It was me and four backup dancers. And like a track and singing live but—you know—doing some bad dance moves, 'cause I'm the worst dancer in the world. But—

00:31:59 Jesse Host I saw Faith Evans do that one time.
 00:32:01 Mandy Guest *[Excited.]* Really?!

00:32:02 Jesse Host With two backup dancers, opening for Nas. And like Faith Evans can sing!

[Mandy agrees several times.]

Like for real. So, Faith Evans is there just like blowing the house down with her singing. *[Chuckles.]* But also, the stage is built for Usher. And she just has these two dancers and a track. Like, she had huge hit songs! Like, this is not before she was famous or anything. And it was the—it is one of the oddest forms of performance.

00:32:29 Mandy Guest Yeah. And that was such a moment in time, when that was happening, too. Where you had the backup dancers and—
 00:32:34 Jesse Host I saw Kelis do that opening for The Roots one time.

[Mandy reacts with excitement.]

Just Kelis and two dancers opening for The Roots! And you're like, "What is this?!" *[Laughs.]*

00:32:43 Mandy Guest So strange. Yeah! That was my life too for a minute, at least! From N*SYNC, it went to The Backstreet Boys and their Millennium tour. You know, "I Want It That Way", that record. And we were in giant arenas, and their show was in the round I remember. So, here I was like at 15, fearless! Just walking up with my background dancers and like doing my 30-minute set. You know, like five, six songs or whatever and then bouncing. But I just had like not a fear in the world. I was like, "Oh yeah! I—" Even though my life had changed exponentially! I—it wasn't like an expectation of like, "Oh yeah, this makes sense." It was more of like, "Oh, cool! I have this opportunity. Like, I'm gonna take it! And I'm gonna run with it and appreciate it, and this is so cool!"

And I went from watching these guys on MTV like getting ready to go to school in the morning, and now I'm like—my tour bus is parked next to theirs. It was wild!

00:33:44 Jesse Host I watched the video for your hit song, "Candy".
 00:33:49 Mandy Guest Oh gosh.
 00:33:50 Jesse Host Which is—it's just amazing. Like, there's this part—first of all, everyone is wearing those kind of like slightly flared cargo pants. Like slim cargo pants.

[Mandy confirms.]

That all—I mean, we're very similar ages, so I remember these things very vividly myself, from my own post-adolescence. But like—and everybody—you have a long shirt on. Everybody else has a midriff shirt on, and you all climb into a lime green Volkswagen

00:34:28	Mandy	Guest	new Beetle. And as I saw you driving this Beetle in the video, I thought, "I bet she doesn't have a driver's license." <i>[Chuckles.]</i> Oh, correct. They were towing the car.
			<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>
00:34:42	Jesse	Host	Yeah! I was 15. Didn't even have my learner's permit. But it was epic! I was so excited to even pretend and get behind the wheel of a car. Yeah, it was so much fun.
00:34:53	Mandy	Guest	How sanguine were you about the fact that being a teen pop star is not typically a lifelong job?
			Hmm. I... yeah, I was aware of that. And I think that's why, when I was lucky enough to get any sort of foot in the door, I was like, "I wanna try my hand at all of this. I wanna act. I wanna be on Broadway. I wanna—yeah, I wanna do movies and TV and anything anyone'll let me try." <i>[Chuckles.]</i> And so, I knew that like music wasn't going to be the only thing on the resume, hopefully. But I was just happy 'cause I'm like, "Oh!" It like—you know, it opened the door, and other opportunities did present themselves because of it.
00:35:29	Jesse	Host	We have so much more to get into! Stay with us; it's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:35:36	Promo	Clip	Music: Relaxed, cheerful guitar.

John Moe: Hey, it's John Moe. Join me on *Depresh Mode* for conversations on how mental health shapes our life. This week, David Sedaris, with stories of his late father that he's finally willing to tell.

David Sedaris: I think there's a difference between—you know—a good person and a good character. Like, he was a good character—my boyfriend, Keith. And my father was another one of those people. He was a really good character, but he wasn't a good person.

John: *Depresh Mode* with John Moe, wherever you get your podcasts.

00:36:11	Music	Transition	<i>[Music ends.]</i>
00:36:15	Jesse	Host	Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
			It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Mandy Moore. She starred on the acclaimed drama <i>This is Us</i> , which just aired its final episode last month. She's also a singer/songwriter. She recorded a handful of hits as a teen pop singer in the early 2000s, and she's writing and recording still. Her newest album is called <i>Real Life</i> . Here's another track from it. "Little Dreams".
00:36:38	Music	Music	"Little Dreams" from the album <i>Real Life</i> by Mandy Moore.

*What's the missing puzzle piece
That's gonna make me whole
Is it some kind of alchemy
Turning lead to gold
Shifted priorities
Shaking up my house
Deep dive on a memory
Got me overwhelmed*

*Something 'bout the little dreams
Gets us through another day
Rolling with the little dreams
Instead of waiting on a bigger wave*

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.]

00:37:17 Jesse Host I remember when *A Walk to Remember* came out. And I don't think it'll shock anyone in the audience to know that I did not rush to the theater to see the film.

[Mandy affirms.]

00:37:28 Mandy Guest Not—not the—*[chuckles]* not the type of movie that—
00:37:30 Jesse Host You weren't the target demo, yeah, yeah. *[Laughs.]*
Yeah, 21-year-old or whatever I was Jesse Thorn would run to see. But I remember very vividly—you know, it's not the kind of movie that is gonna get ecstatic reviews, but I remember very vividly—I think I was watching *Siskel and Ebert* or something—or maybe I was just reading a review. And I remember hearing that you were great in it. Like—

[Mandy "aw"s.]

00:38:05 Mandy Guest That this—sure, this is a—you know, this is the kind of movie that it
00:38:07 Jesse Host is. It's a nice version of that. But you know, it's not Werner Herzog or something. But—but just *[chuckling]* being like, "Aw! That's great! Way to go, Mandy Moore!"

Aww! Thanks, Jesse!
You know what I mean?

[They laugh.]

00:38:18 Mandy Guest But did you have the same attitude about starring in a movie that you did about going onstage before The Backstreet Boys? Like, did you know to be scared?

I was definitely more scared of that, for sure. I don't know why, but yeah. I mean, it—well, I guess I do know why! It's—you have, you know, the machine of like 200 people around you putting together a film. Whereas you go onstage, and all that responsibility is just on your shoulders. So, you forget the words, or you mess up a dance move, like that's only on me. And I can take responsibility for that.

00:38:38 Jesse Host Mandy, I don't mean to be rude here, but normally the other way around is how it's supposed to work.

00:38:42 Mandy Guest I know! I'm—I'm—but I—no, I was fine to sort of go up there and feel like I have confidence in myself and like what I can bring to the table. And I know these songs, and I'm just gonna go up there and enjoy myself. And I feel my best when I'm onstage. But not really having had any real experience on a set, I didn't know how to hit a mark, especially during *A Walk to Remember*. Thank goodness I worked with kind people who were like, "This is how you basically do anything on camera." *[Laughs.]* I didn't know—I just really didn't know anything. And it was a real like tutorial on how to be an actor. So, that scared me a lot more. But I loved it, too!

			Well, I did <i>The Princess Diaries</i> first, with Anne Hathaway, and that whole group, and Julie Andrews, and Garry Marshall directed it. I mean, it was amazing. And that kind of solidified, “Oh, I wanna do more of this.” ‘Cause it was a summer camp experience. I was 16, and I was surrounded by like a bunch of people my age. And—
00:39:39	Jesse	Host	Garry Marshall had a rep for being like the nicest man in show business.
00:39:42	Mandy	Guest	He was the <u>loveliest</u> . Oh man! Yeah.
00:39:45	Jesse	Host	Just hanging out at his theatre in Toluca Lake.
00:39:48	Mandy	Guest	Yeah. He was just—what an incredibly gentle soul. And so—yeah, I’m so grateful that was my entre into this wild world. I feel like I was ushered in with— <i>[sighs]</i> yeah, just he was the best. So, that experience was great and it—again—opened the door to more opportunities and <i>A Walk To Remember</i> and <i>Saved</i> and just like getting to do fun, random, crazy things from there.
00:40:17	Jesse	Host	I was thinking that you’ve had multiple new starts in your career, because you were still a pretty young woman when you had your first marriage—which, by all accounts, was kind of lousy, and you were not making a lot of music. You were working some as an actor, but not working a ton as an actor. And you know, <i>This is Us</i> came when you were in your 30s, I guess, if I’m counting correctly. And it’s like a—it’s like a whole new set of stuff. So, when you got out of your first marriage and you had to be like figuring out what your career was going to be, what did you decide? Like, what’d you decide for yourself or what did you—you know <i>[chuckles]</i> —tell your manager you wanted? Or—?
00:41:03	Mandy	Guest	<i>[Chuckles.]</i> I don’t think it was any coincidence that like, yeah, work was just not an option. It wasn’t—nothing was firing on any sort of cylinder while I was in a really unhealthy relationship. And it’s wild to me, but again no coincidence that months later the skies parted, and the world opened up, and this opportunity—not fell in my lap; I worked for it! But there were years and years of just like trying to find my footing and nothing sort of sticking, and that sort of overwhelming sense of rejection, which is very much the life of a creative person in any context. And—
00:41:41	Jesse	Host	An actor, especially.
00:41:42	Mandy	Guest	And an actor, especially. And I—it’s not like I hadn’t been through that before, but I just kept walking away with this feeling of like, “Maybe the universe is trying to tell me this is—like, I’ve had my moment and I should be grateful, and just figure out if I wanna go back to Florida, if I wanna go back to school, what this next chapter’s gonna be. Because I don’t think this is working, and this is just crushing my soul with each like continued ‘no’ and door closing.” And I remember very distinctly like the kind of shifting teams and sort of getting a whole new group of people around me, and—with the idea of like, “Okay, so there’s—you know—a pilot. A traditional pilot season, out here in Los Angeles.” It’s like January to May, and it’s where all the networks like—you know—figure out what shows they’re gonna make, and you make your first episode and then they figure out which ones they’re gonna pick up and put on their fall lineup or mid-season line up.

And I had been auditioning for the shows, and nothing was working. And these new folks in my corner were like, “Let’s put that aside, and let’s look at the bigger picture of like if you wanna do television and films and stuff, let’s look at like—you know—the new world of

streaming services. Those kinds of shows are casting all year round.”

And I was like, “Great, I love this gameplan.” *[Chuckles.]* And then two weeks later, I get this script sent to me for the untitled Dan Fogelman project on NBC. I’m like, “What?! This is exactly what we said we didn’t wanna do! I just don’t know if I can—you know—face something not coming to fruition again.” And then I read the script and thought, “Oh, this is why they sent it. It’s excellent.” And just thinking I’ll do whatever it takes to be a part of this, because I knew Dan Fogelman’s work, and I had actually worked with him on the animated film, *Tangled*. So, I knew him on the periphery. ‘Cause those films, it’s like there’s—the Disney animated films, and there’s like 500 people in the control room, and one of them’s the writer. And there are two directors, and it’s—yeah. It’s a totally different experience.

So, I knew him on the periphery, and then I knew the director’s John Glenn. I loved *Crazy, Stupid, Love*, a film they had directed. And so, I was like, “Even if this doesn’t happen and move forward, I feel like if I’m lucky enough to be a part of this, we’ll make something we’re really proud of.” And then, I ended up getting cast, somehow! And I remember watching the pilot for the first time going, “Oh yeah! I think this is gonna get picked up! Like, this is fantastic!” I mean, it was such a special first episode of television. And it only just grew from there!

00:44:24 Jesse Host

What would’ve happened had you moved back to Florida?

00:44:27 Mandy Guest

I think I would’ve gone to school and studied journalism. I always loved journalism.

00:44:33 Jesse Host

Don’t recommend.

[Mandy laughs.]

00:44:36 Mandy Guest

I do not recommend.

That was like my backup plan. That was something that I had been tossing around. But even just like getting out of California was high on my priority list. And where I would sort of go from there? I don’t know, but I just—yeah, I needed a change of scenery, I thought.

00:44:51 Jesse Host

I could see like a Colin Hay type lifestyle for you, where—you know—you’re writing like cool singer-songwritery things. You got a residency somewhere cool in—you know, somewhere cool. And then just once in a while, when being a cool singer-songwriter isn’t paying the bills, you’re just like, “Well, gotta go perform my hit songs for a couple months.”

[Mandy agrees with a laugh.]

00:45:16 Mandy Guest

Those are great hit songs, in both cases, but—

Oooh my gosh. Oh, I love them. That’s a cool plan! That’s good to know. I’m gonna keep that on the back burner.

00:45:21 Jesse Host

That’s on offer. I want you to know.

00:45:23 Mandy Guest

Thanks! Thanks, I love that idea.

00:45:25 Jesse Host

I think, technically, that *The Princess Diaries*—in which you were the mean, popular girl—is playing against type, but *[chuckles]* I wonder if—I wonder if six years of radiating warmth on an

00:45:50 Mandy Guest emotionally rich, heartstring-pulling network television program has
00:45:51 Jesse Host led you to like be ready to like—you know, make a—
Be a serial killer?
Make a—yeah, I was gonna say make a show about being addicted
to pills, for Showtime.

[Mandy agrees.]

00:45:57 Mandy Guest Starz is on the phone. They want you to—
For sure! I wanna do something wildly different, if possible. Yes. No
more network ensemble family dramas. I feel like I've checked that
box. And it can't get any better, so I gotta look elsewhere.

[They chuckle.]

00:46:11 Jesse Host Do you have a dream thing that you would kill to do? I would like to
be Professor Harold Hill in *The Music Man*.

00:46:16 Mandy Guest Ooooh!

00:46:17 Jesse Host I'm willing to do any major regional theatre. I'm putting it out there
on NPR right now. I can't afford to do like a community theatre, but
regional theatre—I'll go to Portland. I'll go to Boise. If you got a—if
you got a 600-seat theatre or something like that, I'm in. Professor
Harold Hill. Let's go. What's yours?

00:46:37 Mandy Guest You're their guy. You're putting the bat signal out there. I don't
really...

00:46:41 Jesse Host We're manifesting, here! Let's do this!

00:46:43 Mandy Guest I mean, if we're talking musicals, one day I would love to be Mama
Rose in *Gypsy*. I don't know if I could ever pull that off, but man. I
mean, just—you've got my brain thinking about Bette Midler and her
sort of seminal roles. Yeah! That would be so much fun. But—or
Adelaide in *Guys and Dolls*. That was always like my big, big, big
fantasy. But I don't know! I don't know. I'm open.

[Music fades in.]

00:47:08 Jesse Host Thank you very much, Mandy, for taking the time to be on *Bullseye*.
It was very nice to get to talk to you.

00:47:12 Mandy Guest It was nice to talk to you, too. Thanks for the thoughtful
conversation.

00:47:15 Music Music "Four Moons" from the album *Real Life* by Mandy Moore.

I can see four moons all at once

One in the sky

One in your eye

And two more in our cups

[Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.]

00:47:31 Jesse Host Mandy Moore. Her new album is called *Real Life*. It's out now. The
song you're hearing behind me is from that record. It's called "Four
Moons". As we said before, she's also the star of the NBC drama
This is Us. You can stream all six seasons on Hulu.

00:47:47 Music Music *[Volume increases.]*

Where do the days go?

When did the clock start ticking?

Picking up tempo

There ain't a step I'm skipping

I'm in a free flow (free flow)

*Looking at you and thinking
I can see four moons all at once*

[Music fades out.]

00:48:20 Music Transition
00:48:22 Jesse Host

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations. That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Today at my house, I fixed my toilet after my five-year-old got angry, *[trying not to laugh]* said she was gonna pull the pipe out of the wall and did. Oh boy.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Tabatha Myers.

It is a small pipe! But she really—wow.

We get booking help on this show from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music's by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme music is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team for sharing it with us, along with their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us in those places and follow us, and we will share our interviews with you there, as well. 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 and is distributed by NPR.

00:49:31 Jesse Promo

[Music fades out.]

Thanks for listening to *Bullseye*. NPR is doing its annual survey to better understand how listeners like you spend time with podcasts. Please help us out by completing a short, anonymous survey at NPR.org/podcastsurvey. All one word. That's NPR.org/podcastsurvey, all one word. Thanks