

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.
00:00:14	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:21	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. I guess the thing about <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> , the hit, long-running, animated TV sitcom created by my guest, Loren Bouchard. The thing about <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> is it is maybe hard to articulate why <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> is animated. It is a grounded show, for one. I mean, it’s about a family that owns a burger shop near a dilapidated theme park. There’s no talking dogs. There are relatively few trippy sequences where everyone turns into butterflies or whatever. All the characters are humans. They’re not even—you know—grotesque looking like <i>The Simpsons</i> or whatever.
			I mean, you could almost make <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> live action and not much would change. The writing would still be great. The plot wouldn’t have to change much. The characters—Bob Belcher, his wife Linda, their kids Tina, Gene, and Louise. All of them would still be funny, weird, a little unhinged. Maybe there would be a few musical sequences. But there’s something about the animation that makes the show magical. Maybe it’s the pace of the dialogue, those musical sequences, or maybe it’s just that deranged, almost feral look Tina gets when she’s thinking about butts. It’s what made <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> so beloved by its fans, adored by critics, and what has gotten it now 11 Emmy nominations and a feature film.
			<i>The Bob’s Burgers Movie</i> hit theaters in May. It’s streaming now on Hulu and HBO Max. It is absolutely delightful, a great movie for kids and adults, great for fans of the show, great for people who’ve never heard of it. I took my eight-year-old, we had a blast. Before we get into my interview with Loren Bouchard, the creator of <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> , let’s hear a little bit from the movie. In the movie, the family burger shop’s in trouble. It always is. A sinkhole has formed in front of it. The kids are investigating what I will describe as a submarine murder mystery, which is somehow also threatening the shop. And perhaps worst of all, the family is short on cash.
			In this scene, the Belchers are gathered in the dining area of their family restaurant. It’s early in the morning, and Bob—who’s played by H. Jon Benjamin—is cooking in the kitchen. The rest of the family has a lot of questions.
00:02:41	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:42	Clip	Clip	Linda (<i>The Bob’s Burgers Movie</i>): How’s the burger, Bob?
			Bob: It’s okay. I put an egg on it.
			Louise: Why is Dad making a burger at eight AM?
			Gene: Is he on British time?

Linda: He's making it to bring to Mr. Dowling at the bank. We have a meeting this morning, and we're gonna ask for an extension on our loan payment.

Louise: Ooh. Fuuun.

Bob: And we really, really need to get that extension. All the restaurant equipment is wrapped up in that loan.

Tina: So, you're giving him a burger?

Bob: Well, I mean, we can't give him money, Tina.

Louise: 'Cause we don't have any.

Bob: Pretty much.

Gene: How 'bout you play him some of this?

[A sudden, metallic rattling.]

Louise: Ugh! What, to scare him?!

Gene: No! To enchant him!

Linda: Bob, you know I love this bring him a burger idea, but isn't it a little early to be making it? I mean, our appointment isn't a for a while.

Bob: *[Whispering.]* This is a practice burger.

Linda: *[Stage whispering.]* Why are you whispering?

Bob: *[Softer.]* I don't want it to hear and feel bad.

Linda: *[Softer.]* Okaaay.
Music swells and fades.

00:03:22 Sound Effect Transition

00:03:23 Jesse Host

[Chuckles.] Loren Bouchard, welcome to *Bullseye*.

[Loren thanks him.]

00:03:28 Loren Bouchard Guest

I'm happy to have you on the show.
Pleasure to be here.

00:03:29 Jesse Host

And I really enjoyed the movie. I have to say that when I started seeing posters for the movie around town, you know, wheat pasted onto those plywood walls of construction sites, I had a feeling that I usually have when like a friend tells me that they wrote a book. Which is I get really scared that it's gonna be bad, and then I'm gonna feel bad that I don't like it, because I like them so much.

00:04:02 Loren Guest

[Chuckling.] Were you worried that you were gonna mess this up? Yeah. Of course. It's—you know. It's terrifying. By the time it was hitting theaters, I felt that we did—that we did leave all on the field. That there wasn't a better movie that we could've made. There

00:04:31 Jesse Host might be a better movie, but it wasn't one that we could've made. We really gave it our all. And so, by that point, by the time it was out, if I had run into you on the street, I could've wholehearted recommended it and looked you in the eye at the same time. I guess the central challenge of making a movie out of *Bob's Burgers* is that *Bob's Burgers* is—while there's crazy stuff that happens because it's animation and crazy stuff can happen, it's fundamentally a very modest show. Which is usually the opposite of what happens when somebody turns something into a movie. Usually, it's like, "Let's blow it up!" You know? "They're going to the moon!" So, when you decided to make a movie or got the offer to make a movie or sold the pitch to make the movie, how did you think about what the scale of the story could be in a 90-minute movie rather than a 22-minute television show?

00:05:15 Loren Guest One thing we always knew about *Bob's*—and we've explored it a little bit on the series, but when we think about this little restaurant, this family that runs the restaurant that's barely hanging on, at the same time, we have—in the writers' room—talked about it as if it is, perhaps even unbeknownst to the family, one of the most important places in this little town. And we've talked about how this town in a way has a—seems to have a soul and that, like any place, its soul is fragile and could be in peril. And how even though they're a struggling restaurant, and even though they may or may not ever succeed in the timescale that we're exploring, they could still kind of sort of save the soul of the town.

And we've basically always had this amusement park at the end of the street that, for all intents and purposes, is the soul of the town, or an expression of it I guess I should say. And it's right there! You know? You can see it from the restaurant. You can see it in a lot of the images that we give the audience, even just routinely. Just as an establishing shot, you see the Ferris wheel at the end of the street. I grew up in towns in New England that had little amusement parks. I visited some of those places growing up. And you sort of take them for granted. They aren't necessarily the kinds of places that—back when I was a kid especially, they didn't get historical preservation status. They—you know, they came and went, you know, according to the whims of the people who would, you know, either go or not go and ride that Ferris wheel and eat cotton candy.

Somehow, though—at least in my mind—they do take on a kind of higher level of importance when you realize they could go away. Something else could come in its place, whether it's condos—you know, parking lots, or whether it's a newfangled amusement park with parking garages and—I don't know, giftshops that seem sort of mercenary. And the whole thing kind of loses its spirit. If that was the stakes, and Bob's restaurant, and there was a murder, we figured we could tell a story that was both grounded and big enough to fill the screen at the same time. And then we through in, you know, music and dancing.

00:07:40 Jesse Host There is really something about having an amusement park, especially like a slightly decrepit one, just out of frame. Like, I went to UC Santa Cruz, and my senior year, I lived in a neighborhood in Santa Cruz called The Beach Flats. Which is like the neighborhood that's right next to the Santa Cruz beach boardwalk—the amusement park that is the kind of tourist destination of Santa Cruz.

And you could hear the people in our living room on the old, wooden rollercoaster at the boardwalk. You know, going uuh—woah—waaaaah! You know, like some kind of weird musique concrète.

00:08:50 Loren Guest

And like the combination of that happening and also the *[laughs]* the like—like the Santa Cruz beach boardwalk's in great shape as far I know financially. But the way that a place like that with a wooden rollercoaster always seems like it is 90 seconds from burning to the ground or someone falling through the boardwalk to their death. Yeah. They are! They are all 90 seconds from burning to the ground. We did a little research as part of writing the movie, and those piers, those amusement piers—I mean, they're constantly burning or getting washed away in a storm. It's their fate. And yet, they keep—you know, getting rebuilt and springing up. And they're sort of—and especially, I don't know, maybe in the last century, right? It's like a bit of a bygone effort now, I guess, to build one of these things. But it's sort of romantic that people keep making them.

It's—you know, as we said in the movie, it's—you know, it's totally impractical to build it on the water. Or at least, an early draft of the movie had the villain proclaiming loudly that it makes no sense to build these things on spindly little piers that stick out over the water. Put them on land where you can have parking and giftshops and, you know, indoor motion simulator rides. And that's a more practical business. And so, we loved the impracticality of it. We loved the ricketiness of a wooden rollercoaster. And you know, I think a lot of people do too.

00:09:53 Jesse Host

When you started working on *Bob's Burgers*, did you have an idea of a kind of family that you wanted to see on TV?

00:10:03 Loren Guest

Yes, actually. We cast these voices very early, so in a lot of ways, I knew what they sounded like. And one of the really common threads between all of these—you know, these actors that loaned us their voices, they can't help but be buoyant. You know? This is maybe not exactly true of Benjamin, who plays Bob, but everybody else—you know, Louise and Gene and Linda especially have a sort of buoyancy and I kind of irrepressible childlike joy that they express even when they're mad. You know? Even they're grumpy. It just comes through. And that was—I was interested in that. I was attracted to that. I'm attracted to that in people. I'm attracted to that in those actors and their standup routines.

Dan Mintz's Tina is a little bit different, but complimentary in a lot of ways. Not unlike that, just a little more deadpan. And then there's poor Bob who's sort of our straight man. You know, even though Benjamin's incredibly funny and can do much more than be the straight man. But he has to sort of manage the other side of it, the—you know, fear of failure, the irritation, the grumpiness. He can express that perhaps a little bit more. But even he—and this I got from him—can make a joke that doesn't sound like a joke. It's—you know, perhaps teasing, a little harsh maybe if you just saw it on paper or if you didn't know him. But behind it, somehow when Benjamin teases you in real life and when Bob kind of grumps to his kids, you don't really believe it. You know it's almost an expression of love. And I wanted that.

00:11:49 Jesse Host Even more with Loren Bouchard after the break. Stick around. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:11:56 Music Transition Chiming synth with a steady beat.

00:12:01 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with Loren Bouchard. He's an animator and writer. He's worked on the shows *Central Park*, *Home Movies*, and *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*, among others. Loren also created the hit show *Bob's Burgers*, which has run now for 12 seasons! There's also a *Bob's Burgers* movie. *The Bob's Burgers Movie* is streaming right now on HBO Max and Hulu. Let's get back into my conversation with Loren.

I wanna play a clip with Bob and Linda from the movie. And this is sort of early on in the movie, and the—you know, the challenge is, as is often the case, they're trying to keep the restaurant open. They're behind on their rent. There's a—I think at this point in the movie, there's a giant sinkhole in front of the restaurant. A literal giant sinkhole. And so, Linda and Bob are lying in bed, and Linda is doing what she does, which is a sort of blinkered optimism/cheerleading.

00:13:02 Sound Effect Transition Music swells and fades.

00:13:03 Clip Clip **Bob:** [*Anxiously.*] Oooh no.

Linda: How you doing there, big guy?

Bob: Ugh, I don't know. I mean, I held it together in front of the kids during dinner, but I'm really worried.

Linda: Oh yeah? I couldn't tell.

Bob: It's just our landlord's gonna go to prison. The bank's gonna call in our loan, and then they'll take our restaurant stuff, and we will live in a box on the street. This is what's gonna happen.

Linda: Oh, Bob. I need you! The kids need you!

Bob: What do you mean? You and the kids need me to not go out of business!

Linda: No! Going out of business down there is not as bad as going out of business in there.

Bob: My... soft back?

[*Gentle music fades in.*]

Linda: No, your heart! Look, I know you're Droopy Bob right now. But you know who else is in there? Dreamy Bob. The guy who wanted to open a restaurant in the first place! Slap his name on it! Make cuckoo crazy burgers with wild ingredients. A new one every day.

Bob: I did not say cuckoo crazy burgers. I would not say that.

Linda: You know what I mean. Super funky burgers?

00:13:56	Sound Effect	Transition	Bob: Well, no matter what I said, I think that maybe Dreamy Bob is dumb and Droopy Bob just kind of sees things the way they are. Music swells and fades.
00:13:57	Jesse	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> One of the things I like about Bob is there's so many dumb and jerky dads in television. Some of them brilliant—I don't think anyone has a bad word to say about Homer Simpson. Some of them less so. And Bob is something very different, which is—and something very near and dear to my heart, which is a sad dad. <i>[Chuckling.]</i> He is—he's locked in this perpetual struggle, surrounded by people who seem to think everything's gonna be okay, despite all evidence.
00:14:37	Loren	Guest	Yeah. We always said he's Job. I'm no biblical scholar, but I know that story and I think about that character a lot. And when we were writing Bob, it was just a little touchstone for us. He's Job, and he's lucky too. We also—you know, he's married to an optimist who's such an optimist. You know? She's an engine of optimism. And so, in the movie in particular, we wanted to explore that as much as we could to unpack this marriage and see how it works when the chips are <u>really</u> down. When a guy who runs a business is quite sure this is the end. There's no pulling out. They're not gonna make it. He sees them as days away from being shuttered.
			And she refuses to go there with him. She will not let him get down in the dumps. And we really wanted to go there and get them both to the point where they were talking about it. And not to give too much away, but they finally do! He expresses it and he realizes it, and he says, "I've gotta be able to do that for you. What you do for me." Which of course is in the show, too. It's in the marriage and it's in a lot of real marriages, where you don't have one role all the time. You trade places. So, Bob—who is Job most of the time—can also, when the chips are down, find his inner strength and help her when she finally runs out of gas.
00:16:10	Jesse	Host	It occurs to me that you have worked on some of the most lowkey television comedies of the last 25 years or so. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> But while it is not the most lowkey of the shows that you have worked on, <i>Bob's Burgers</i> is a much quieter, gentler show than most of the network television animated comedy of the last 30 years or so. I think <i>The Simpsons</i> is perfect and a lot of people thought it's gotta be as intense and zany as <i>The Simpsons</i> is. When you had the opportunity to make a show for network television, make a show that was gonna run with <i>The Simpsons</i> and <i>Family Guy</i> and the various other <i>Family Guy</i> shows, were you worried that if you made a slightly quiet show—you know, interspersed with the occasional musical number—that it couldn't hang, tonally?
00:17:09	Loren	Guest	Yeah. I was worried. Naturalism is, you know, what I think you're describing. That's—I don't think of it as lowkey or my interests don't necessarily align where we're trying to kind of go quiet or go lowkey, but often the goal is naturalism. A naturalistic dialogue, people hemming and hawing the way they do in real life. You know, at least somewhat. And interrupting each other at least somewhat. And my passion for that—and those of us that work on the show—does sometimes read as a little less in your face or less, perhaps, kind of on the loud side. And I think of it as dynamic! Where you can—you <u>can</u> get loud. Bob can yell at Teddy across the counter, but then you know, pull it back and say, "Sorry. Sorry." And it gets

real small, and it's just something that an actor's doing in the bottom of their throat that we love and we—you know—turn up the volume on.

I guess, you know, what I thought and what I think all of us felt when we started on, you know, delivering the show for Fox was, "We'll see." We knew we were, to some extent, going against the grain. We knew it was—that *Simpsons*, as great as it is, and the other shows on Sunday night, as confident as they are and as established and, you know, as beloved as they are by their audience, they're—you know, it's fair to say they're broad. The way the voices are delivered, you know. It's a little more broad. They're a little more heightened in their performances. And I did always know that we would live or die by whether people liked our characters.

I think with a show kind of big, bold delivery and also big, bold jokes, on some level, it's joke-driven less than it is character driven. The characters are still incredibly well-defined, and people love them and they're gonna, you know, be on t-shirts and they might say we're character driven. But I would say yeah, but when the joke is the coin of the realm and that's the ultimate measure of a scene or—you know, of the writing, then I would say it's probably first joke-driven and secondarily character-driven. Whereas we, on *Bob's*, flip it. And we'll ignore the best jokes if they're not in character. And we'll drive towards expressions that feel funny only if you believe that they're coming from a real person.

And then of course, then sometimes that gets into—you know, just little performance things. Tina has this groan that's barely above audible. It's fair to say it's quiet. But it became incredibly funny to us. We wrote to it and tried to find new ways to include this little thing that's just—my god, I can't even do it. It's just like *[groans]*. Music swells and fades.

00:19:51 Sound Effect Transition

00:19:52 Clip

Tina: Uuuuuh... *[Tina continues groaning without pause while they talk about her.]*

[The bell rings as the door to the shop opens.]

Gene: Some news. Tina's completely broken.

Louise: Says you! I like new Tina. You know what you're getting. You know? It's consistent.

[The bell rings.]

Linda: Tina. Tina, honey, what's wrong?

Tina: Uuuuuh...

Bob: Tina? O-okay, we're gonna have to figure this out later. Kids, take your sister upstairs and do something. Music swells and fades.

00:20:13 Sound Effect Transition

00:20:14 Loren Guest And so, yeah. We were taking a chance, 'cause you know, it does—you know, you run the risk of getting lost on network television with loud commercials. And you know, even your own loud musical numbers. But we had enough confidence that, well, if we like it maybe somebody else might like it. You know, we were a cable show they had kind of stuck onto broadcast is the way it felt to us at the time. And to some extent, it still does.

00:20:37 Jesse Host Loren, you got into animation because you were an artist and you know, you grew up in an art house. Your dad was an artist and an art teacher. But when I hear you talking about this show and your other work, I almost always hear you talking about sounds. And I think that in animation, that is very unusual. I think animators I have met are excited about, you know, what happens if you make a character bigger when he gets kicked. How he deformed when he gets kicked or something. You know? Like these visual, motion things. So, is that true? Do you think that you're more interested in sound than other animation people? And what do you think that actually means?

00:21:32 Loren Guest I absolutely am more interested in sound than I am in the visuals. Usually. I have an asterisk on the end of this, but I'll come back to that. I can't speak for everyone in animation, but I know that for many people, they came to it from the drawing side, from the animating side, from the visual side. And I didn't. I was perhaps rare—certainly not unique, but perhaps rare in that I always listened carefully to animation. I enjoyed the medium and the storytelling. I enjoyed it when I was a kid. I enjoyed Bugs Bunny. I enjoyed Disney. I enjoyed, you know, all of that stuff. But I did listen really carefully, and I have a theory that it's because—partly because, anyway, my parents played me the records to Disney movies before I saw most of those movies.

I was raised in the '70s and you know, especially when I was a younger kid, and we did—you know, I had a TV, of course. But this was long before we had cable. And the records were a big source of entertainment. And also, I think how I went to sleep at night, my sister and I. So, we were listening to *The Jungle Book* and *Robin Hood* and *Pinocchio* and *Peter Pan* many, many, many, many times before I ever saw those movies. So, I think perhaps that played into my particular focus. And then, as a teenager, I got interested in music. I did a lot of garage recording. I was very much kind of a home-recordist. Again, myself and my sister fooling around with, you know, four-track tapes and drum machines and synthesizers and guitars.

And then! When I got into this, when I fell into this, my first job was editing the audio, was editing the actors. And so, it was a throughline that I can see clearly now brought me to a sound-first approach to all of this. And it wasn't that I—you know—came from radio or—you know, I'm not seeing impaired. You know, I love the animation. I really do. I love looking at it. I love the aspect that a great animator can bring to a character, to a scene, to a story. I'm always appreciating it and aspiring to be better at it. But my focus is on what you're hearing.

00:23:53 Jesse Host Your first TV job was on *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*, which was a great show that ran for years on Comedy Central. And it combined standup comics doing chunks of their act as a, you know,

a patient of Dr. Katz. And a very *[chuckles]*—a very slow, quiet, intimate personal narrative of mostly Jon Benjamin and Dr. Katz talking to each other as father and son. And having *[chuckles]* low-scale disagreements, modest disagreements.

[Loren agrees.]

00:24:33 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:24:35 Clip Clip

Music: Upbeat music that fades out after a few moments.

Ben (*Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist*): Dad, the problem is there's just no work right now in my chosen field.

Dr. Katz: But you still—let me—let me see if I have this right. You wanna be a daredevil.

Ben: Yeah! Yeah, I wanna be a daredevil! And I don't think it's—

Dr. Katz: Do you read the wanted ads, Ben? Do you read them?

Ben: Yeah. Of course, I read the wanted ads, Dad. I read them every day.

Dr. Katz: And?

Ben: And what exactly is a Gal Friday?

Dr. Katz: That's not for you. What do you look under exactly when you read the ads? What category do you look—? Just under daredevil?

Ben: Yeah, okay, Dad.

Dr. Katz: Ben. Where are you going?

Ben: I'm going back to bed. *[Mumbles.]*

Dr. Katz: And what about—what about—remember we had this talk about the masterplan?

Ben: Yeah.

Dr. Katz: I knew when I was—when I was ten years old that I wanted to be a psychiatrist. Ten years old, but when I was 20—when I finished college—I took work as a pimp. I had to. There was nothing out there.

[Ben chuckles.]

00:25:20 Sound Effect Transition

No, when I was 20 years old, I went to work in my father's factory. Music swells and fades.

00:25:22 Jesse Host

I've talked to both Jonathan Katz and Jon Benjamin about the process of making that, and both of them—you know, guys who—especially Jon Benjamin had not worked much in TV at that point, were still pretty shocked at the like *[laughing]* going into work and

it's just—it's a pantry in Boston. It's like a literal microphone hanging in a kitchen. But how much—I know that you were in charge of hanging up that microphone in the kitchen. But how much tape was being recorded before it started getting hacked away at to make into a television show?

00:26:01 Loren Guest

Oh, a lot. We rolled a lot. We loved their improv. We loved it. We set the whole thing up so that it—you know, to generate the maximum number of minutes of them just talking before they ran out of oxygen in that booth. It was basically we would go until they were faint. And it was partly just our pure appreciation for the sound of them riffing and you know, adlibbing with each other. And also, a hunger for editing it to bring it back to editing. I mean, I don't think—if you don't wanna sit with a audio track for four weeks, don't do it that way. That's not efficient in any production anywhere.

But! We set ourselves up with this—I would say we would record probably roughly three hours of just the doctor, his son, and the secretary. Jonathan, Benjamin, and Laura Silverman. Another maybe hour of Dr. Katz going to the bar. And then, easily an hour each of the standup comic. And all of this—you know, so, what are we up to? About five hours?—would be edited down to a 22-minute show.

00:27:25 Jesse Host

Did you feel like you learned something in the course of doing that? Were there things that you were applying five years in that you had figured out over the preceding four years?

00:27:38 Loren Guest

Oh yeah! We were—I mean, I was absolutely in a mentorship, and I was learning as much as I possibly could, drinking it up. And when we got to *Home Movies*, we applied everything. The only thing we added was just a little more of that traditional animation storytelling concept. You know, take a character and let's see what he looks like when his little legs—you know—run and he tries to go after the soccer ball. Let's actually try to do, you know, quote/unquote “do animation”, but we still brought that love of audio and improv that we had—you know, had learned on—I had learned on *Dr. Katz*. And also, we had sort of made it up.

You know, Tom Snyder and Jonathan Katz really made that up. They weren't doing that job prior to that. Jonathan was a standup. Tom Snyder was a—was doing educational software and had written lots of stuff and was a great writer, but they weren't working in LA at any point. And they weren't—you know, making TV. This was the first thing for them, and they stayed in Boston, and they invented their own system. So, in a way—you know, we started from zero. All of us working on that show. And slowly invented our own form of animation that works for us and at that budget and for us at that time.

00:28:54 Jesse Host

I mean, Loren, you said you were in a mentorship. Like, we're talking about a situation where, from what I understand, Tom Snyder—who had been your teacher in high school—stopped you on the street and said, “Do you still like to draw?” You had dropped out of that high school. [*Chuckles.*] And you were like literally just wandering around and someone grabbed you. Like, it could not be more of a—you know—learn by doing, someone will teach you while that person is also trying to learn.

00:29:27 Loren Guest

Yep. Absolutely. The only thing—you know, the—I was just talking about this with my wife this morning. The only—you know, in a lot of

ways I was lost. I had this sort of—you know—lost period where I got off the track. You know? Despite having started at a good high school, I wasn't—you know—now going into the creative writing program at NYU. I was suddenly bartending and installing computer cable and just doing odd jobs. And I was a little bit—you know, sort of by my definition now, a little lost. However, I'm also really appreciative of that period. And I actually think that I got lucky in a lot of ways for having gotten lost.

Instead of going to college, I bartended. And during that time, I worked. Like real work. You know? Like going to—you know, do two jobs, work late the night before, get up, go to your day job, hate that job. I mean, I worked with people who hated their jobs. Not always. And the restaurant business is full of people who love it, too. And the bar business can be especially fun. But I'm glad I had the sort of, you know, hard work period before I got lucky, before I ran into Tom in Harvard Square and he pulled me—you know, into this incredible career that I—you know, was always seemingly now, looking back on, I was born to do this.

But I'm so glad that I got off the road and had this side trip for five years, 'cause I think it actually prepared me in some ways more to appreciate that I was getting lucky and appreciate that I had found something that I wanted to do. I worry for kids who go to film school and who are on the track the whole time. And maybe they work, you know, a couple shifts at a bar for some walking around money, but if they don't have fear [*chuckles*] and they don't really have those tough days when—you know, you don't know whether your life is gonna work out and whether you're gonna be stuck in a job you don't love, then I don't know if they're really gonna be ready when they get that great job. You know, either out of college or later.

And so, I do—you know, I'm thankful even for the detour before my stroke of luck, which I wish upon everyone.

00:31:45 Jesse Host

We're taking a break. We'll be back in just a second. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:31:52 Music Transition

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

00:31:56 Jesse Host

I'm Jesse Thorn. It's *Bullseye*. I'm talking with Loren Bouchard. He's the creator of *Bob's Burgers*. Let's get back into my conversation with Loren.

I work on this comedy podcast called *Judge John Hodgman*. And when I created it with my friend, John Hodgman, as a comedy version of a real courtroom show, I always thought like, well, we gotta make this funnier. We gotta raise the stakes, put in more jokes. You know, we gotta make this a tighter, harder hitting comedy thing. And I realized—and it took me a long time as the show grew, that what people liked about the show was not how funny it was. I mean, they thought it was funny. But what they liked about the show was that Hodgman, who's the judge on the show, really strove to represent decency on the show. And that it was funny besides that. You know? It was like the funny was important, 'cause then it wasn't just someone telling somebody how to live. But that it was caring and decent. And you know, a 13-year-old could listen with their parents. Right?

Every time we do a meet and greet after a show, literally 17 people come through the line wearing *Bob's Burgers* t-shirts.

[They chuckle softly.]

00:33:23	Loren	Guest	And—
00:33:24	Jesse	Host	They crossover.
			It always makes me wonder—like, it's obvious to me that the reason these people—the reason that these people who are coming through the line at our show—our dinky show—love your giant, successful show is because it represents some decency in a thing that is actually funny, which is a pretty rare combo. And it always makes me wonder, did you know from the beginning that key to success of this show, the artistic success and maybe the commercial success, was this isn't just a show about how funny we can be. This is a show that makes people feel like they are seeing people try and be good people and that maybe they can be better people by watching it.
00:34:17	Loren	Guest	Yeah. I mean, I think a lot of what you're talking about falls under a huge category that I sometimes loosely just refer to as tone. And tone is everything. Tone is partly your ethics and your morality and, you know, sort of decency like you're describing. Some of it is also just what I would call likeability. There's something in the voice, and there's something in the writing and in the character that gives you this little warm feeling. And you say that character's likeable. And so, a lot of what we did in the early days of crafting <i>Bob's</i> was just to follow our gut on likeability and that tone. And trying to find the avenues that felt "funny, but". And the "funny, but" is like but not too mean. Not sexist. Not creating a character who was irredeemable just so you could have a villain.
			We tried, I think, at all stages to not necessarily lead with an intellectual understanding of moral—you know, decency and goodness and tolerance and all of that that is there, you know, hopefully for all of us on our best days. But again, not to go back to sound, but more of an ear for that likeable quality. And it would guide us to the same place.
00:35:49	Jesse	Host	How long do you feel like you could do this for?
00:35:52	Loren	Guest	Great question. I—you know, a long time if I can figure out ways to keep it fresh. We've remarked to each other lately that the target is smaller and smaller. If you've done 250 some-odd episodes, when you're either pitching a new idea or conceiving of one, crafting an episode, you've done it. Right? You've done the version of that. In fact, you might have even have done two versions of that. I think that was an old line I heard from <i>The Simpsons</i> . They said, "Yeah, we've done it, but have we done it twice?"

[Jesse laughs.]

And so, you know. And I don't know if that's true, but I get it. I completely understand. Our longevity and our success is also a curse, because you just—you gotta work much harder to find a fresh take on any given story. And our show is grounded, and it's about a family that runs a restaurant. And as you commented at the beginning, they're not gonna go to space. They're not gonna have a new job. They're not—we're not gonna suddenly see them age. And

so, you know, it leaves—like I said, smaller and smaller targets. Everyone’s better. We’re all—you know, we’ve all—a lot of us have been working on this show since day one. These are really great writers. So, we can hit that target, but it is harder.

So, I say we can do this for a long time. But we have to, I think, adjust the formula of the show slightly as we go. I’m sure we already have without even knowing. I think in season 13, which we’re breaking now, my goal is to push it a little further: keep the thing feeling alive, keep the clay wet in your hands and getting under your nails in a way that, you know, is exciting. You just don’t want it to get mechanical. And I think at that point, if it does feel that way, then that’s the answer to the question. How long can you do it? ‘Cause you don’t wanna just do it to do it. You wanna do it at the same level of excitement and engagement that you were doing it at the beginning and at the middle.

00:37:57	Jesse	Host	Well, Loren Bouchard, I sure am grateful to you for taking the time to be on the show, for employing all these great people. I mean, god bless you for putting, you know, Andy Kindler into my ears every other week. And thanks for the great movie and keep up the good work.
00:38:15	Loren	Guest	Well, thank you. Thank you for saying that. And you know, it’s our pleasure. We’re gonna do it as long as we can.
00:38:21	Jesse	Host	Loren Bouchard. <i>The Bob’s Burgers Movie</i> is delightful. You should absolutely make the time to watch it, whether you have ever seen <i>Bob’s Burgers</i> before or not, whether you are a grownup or a kid. I mean, maybe a kid down to like eight or ten. It’s streaming right now on Hulu and HBO Max. As we mentioned before, Loren also worked on <i>Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist</i> , a weird, delightful, animated show from the ‘90s. It isn’t streaming in many places other than, you know, maybe semi-illegally on YouTube. But yeah, it’s worth hunting down on YouTube.

You know what? Can I just say, there’s a bit with Ray Romano talking about yogurt where he’s lying in bed with his wife at night that is one of my favorite bits of television or standup comedy ever in history. So, uh, yeah. Just—god, Ray Romano was so great on *Dr. Katz*. Just watch a Ray Romano or an Andy Kindler. Oh! *Dr. Katz*. What a joy.

00:39:16	Music	Transition	Bright piano with a steady beat.
00:39:19	Jesse	Host	That’s the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, there is one mango growing on my tiny mango tree, and I swear to god, if any of you mess with that mango, you won’t know what hit you.

Our 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. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme music is by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team and their label, Memphis Industries. The track’s called “Huddle Formation”. Go! Team, they’re great. Special thanks this week to Clark Duty at Checkpoint East Studios, in Cape Cod, Massachusetts, for recording Loren Bouchard.

00:40:28 Promo Promo

You can find *Bullseye* on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us there, follow us. If you wanna share an interview real quick, YouTube's a great place to do it. Everybody knows how to watch YouTube. 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.]