

[00:00:00] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:01] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:12] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn.

(Music stinger.)

In the history of rock music, has a song ever opened stronger than this?

[00:00:22] **Music:** “War Pigs” from the album *Paranoid* by Black Sabbath.

Generals gathered in their masses

Just like witches at black masses

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.)

[00:00:33] **Jesse Thorn:** It's “War Pigs”, the first track on *Paranoid*, Black Sabbath's Breakthrough album.

[00:00:38] **Music:** “War Pigs” by Black Sabbath.

Sorcerer of death's construction

In the fields, the bodies burning

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue.)

[00:00:46] **Jesse Thorn:** What makes it great? I mean, Ozzy Osbourne's voice—which sounds like it's coming from some strange, surreal past. Tony Iommi's guitar sounds like, I don't know, the skeleton of a freight train? Bill Ward's drums, which just hit you like a ton of bricks.

Of course, on bass: my guest, Geezer Butler, patient zero for heavy metal bass riffs. Subtle, deep, and pounding. But here's the thing, Butler isn't just holding down the low end on “War Pigs”. He also helped write the song. He wrote or co-wrote so many of Sabbath's greatest tunes: “Iron Man”, “Paranoid”, “The Wizard,” “After Forever”. Now, Butler has a memoir. It's called *Into the Void: From Birth to Black Sabbath and Beyond*. It's about his childhood in Birmingham and about, of course, the story of Sabbath. It's also one of those books where you can basically open to any page and something completely crazy is happening that you can't wait to turn over your shoulder and tell somebody about.

Before we get into my interview with Geezer Butler, let's hear a bit of another Sabbath classic, “Paranoid”.

[00:02:15] **Music:** “Paranoid” from the album *Paranoid* by Black Sabbath.

Finished with my woman

‘Cause she couldn’t help me with my mind

People think I’m insane

Because I am frowning all the time

(Volume decreases and continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

[00:02:28] **Jesse Thorn:** Geezer Butler, welcome to *Bullseye*. I’m so happy to have you on the show.

[00:02:31] **Geezer Butler:** Thank you very much. Nice to be here.

[00:02:34] **Jesse Thorn:** I got the impression from reading your book that in your—let’s call it adolescence, young adulthood—everyone was wearing a different kind of outfit and beating each other up. Like, that is the—like your older brother was a teddy boy who kept razors in his coat lapel. Can you tell me a little bit about what was going on when you were a kid?

[00:03:03] **Geezer Butler:** Well, it wasn’t long after the war, and where my family was from, it was like there was still lots of bombed out buildings and stuff. Food was still rationed. And I had three brothers, two of them were in the army on national service, and the other one, as you say, was a teddy boy who used to terrorize everyone with his razor blades in his lapels and flick knives and coshes and all that kind of stuff. So, it was quite—and there was a lot of weaponry left over from World War II, ‘cause people were afraid of being invaded by Germany. So, each house had like lots of air rifles. We even had a revolver in our house and lots of weapons and bayonets and stuff like that. So, a lot of nice things for a kid to play with.

[00:03:59] **Jesse Thorn:** You are kind of the star student of your family. What did that mean practically?

[00:04:05] **Geezer Butler:** I was the first one to pass all the exams at school, and I was training to be an accountant, funnily enough. I had the qualifications. And when I was 16, it was—I had the—the choice was either to stay on at school for an extra two years to get your A levels, which meant you could go to university. Or you could leave and get a job. So, I left and got a job when I was 16, ‘cause I needed the money. Nobody had any money, so I needed the money. So, rather than wait a couple of years and go to university, I went out and got a job, which I hated. And it was custom works accounting.

It was like one of the worst jobs and worst times of my life. ‘Cause rather than teaching me how to be an accountant, they were sending me to get the newspapers and down the shop to get the cigarettes and all that kind of stuff. So, I didn’t really learn anything.

[00:05:07] **Jesse Thorn:** You were already like a long-haired dude by then, right?

[00:05:11] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, they used to call me Tarzan at school.

[00:05:17] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) Why did you choose to grow out your hair? Given that you probably knew it would lead to you getting called Tarzan.

[00:05:24] **Geezer Butler:** Well, it was when the Beatles came along, that. 'Cause before that, everybody was like a rock—like Elvis kind of hairstyles, you know. Swept back with a quiff and a DA back. It was just my generation when the—

[00:05:40] **Jesse Thorn:** DA is a duck's rear?

[00:05:42] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, that's right. Yeah. When the Beatles came along, they combed the hair forward rather than have it back in a quiff. And so, of course, I rushed out and had my hair done like the Beatles, and then the Stones came along. They had even longer hair. So, then I started doing that, and then, it's just like a thing then to have the longest hair of anybody, like of all me friends and stuff. It was like who had the longest hair wins kind of thing.

[00:06:13] **Jesse Thorn:** How long did you play a guitar that had two strings?

[00:06:19] **Geezer Butler:** (*Laughs.*) Uh, the first one. It—

[00:06:22] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) First of all, let's just acknowledge there were multiple—there was a guitar and a bass guitar with two strings.

[00:06:29] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah. Yeah. The first acoustic guitar I got for—me brother bought it for me for 50 pence, which is like about 75 cents. And it had two strings, and of course, I couldn't afford the rest of the strings. But it took me about a year until I discovered that if you put your finger on the string, on the fretboard, it changed the note! (*Laughs.*) And it was like, “Oooh, this is—now I know how people make music!” And so, I used to play all the Beatles melodies on these two strings, and then I got quite good at doing that. And me other brother said—he realized that I was really into it, and he gave me enough money to go and buy a guitar with six strings on it so I could play rhythm guitar. After that, I used to play all the Beatles' stuff.

[00:07:21] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, that's triple the strings! That's 200% more strings. A lot of possibilities there.

[00:07:26] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah! And then I run out. And everybody used to learn guitar by this—*Bert Weedon's Play in a Day* book. And it was like a couple of shillings, even Eric Clapton learned from this book. Anybody that wanted to play guitar. 'Cause you couldn't afford tutors or anything like that. So, you had to teach yourself from this book, and it just showed you all the chord positions and stuff like that. And of course, I was determined to learn guitar at the time, and I used to study this book—well, every day.

[00:08:02] **Jesse Thorn:** I don't think that I could imagine, as a person born in 1981, what the Beatles showing up meant. Like, if you were a kid or a teenager when the Beatles showed up on television, like how transformative that must have been for your idea of what pop music could be.

[00:08:28] **Geezer Butler:** Well, up until the Beatles, all the music was sort of coming over from America. Elvis and Buddy Holly and Eddie Cochran and all that kind of stuff. And the only English music was people copying the American stuff. And they used to do like cover versions of American singles and all that kind of thing. And it wasn't—it wasn't played on the radio. You'd have to get this like bootleg radio station, called Radio Luxembourg, which is based in Europe. That used to—if you could find it on your radio, that's what you'd listen to. And, um—

[00:09:06] **Jesse Thorn:** Because the BBC was playing corny music for parents.

[00:09:09] **Geezer Butler:** BBC was horrible, depressing music. No rock and roll or anything like that. Just—I think they played rock and roll on a Saturday morning once a week. The rest of the time is like polka music and accordion stuff and Scottish dances and all that kind of stuff, which is totally depressing. And then, this one night I was listening to Luxembourg, and this song came on. It was the Beatles.

And it just like—it was like being struck by lightning. It was an incredible, totally different. And from that moment on, I used to listen to the radio every night, just waiting for the Beatles to come on.

[00:09:49] **Jesse Thorn:** One of the things that you described in the book is that you had heard the Beatles on the radio, but you had to wait to figure out what they were. I mean, like, as you say, you had to wait until there was a newspaper article about them to have any idea what this lightning bolt was.

[00:10:11] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, the first time was my sister was on holiday in Blackpool, uh, a couple of days. She went up to Blackpool, which is a seaside place in England. And she sent me this postcard of the Beatles, and that was the first time I'd seen them. I think “Please, Please Me”, had just come out, the Beatles song. And of course, that went into—got to number one. Of course, the Beatles were all over the newspapers then, and then started getting on TV shows and stuff. It was like, not only was the music incredible, but the way they dressed and the way they looked was totally revolutionary at the time.

[00:10:56] **Jesse Thorn:** Was there a point where you found yourself thinking “maybe I could be a professional musician”?

[00:11:03] **Geezer Butler:** As soon as I saw the Beatles, that's what I wanted to be. I just didn't want to go to a factory or an office or anything like that for the rest of me life. And I just knew that there was something I had to do in life, and it wasn't going to—in a normal job. As soon as I got a six-string guitar, (*chuckles*) that was it. It was like I had to be good enough to make music for my career.

[00:11:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Did that seem like a real possibility? Like, did you know people who were professional entertainers at all? Or—?

[00:11:41] **Geezer Butler:** No, not at all. It was just one of those things where sort of you have it in your sights and you—it's like tunnel vision. That's what you wanna do, and until you've done it, nothing else matters. And that's all I could think of was like I wanted to be a musician, and that's where I'm gonna be.

[00:12:04] **Jesse Thorn:** When did you switch to bass?

[00:12:09] **Geezer Butler:** When I was in a band with Ozzy, called The Rare Breed, and I was still playing rhythm guitar. And the lead guitarist and the drummer and the bass player in The Rare Breed all had like really good jobs with futures.

(They chuckle.)

And I'd just been fired from my job, and I just didn't want to go back to that kind of life. And me and Ozzy one day just says to the others, “We wanna go do this full time.”

And they said, “Well, we are not gonna give up our jobs.”

So, me and Ozzy formed a band ourselves and—with a—there was another bass player and another guitarist. And the bass player sort of dropped out. So, Ozzy said, “I know—” We needed a drummer at the time, because we had a guitarist, a bass player, me on rhythm guitar, Ozzy singing. And Ozzy said, “Well, I know a drummer. And he lives just around the corner from where you live.” So, we went round to Tony Iommi's house to see this drummer, 'cause it was Tony Iommi's drummer. And he was at the house at the time, and he came. He asked us what kind of music we were playing.

We says, you know, “Blues and Soul and that kind of stuff.”

And he says, “Well, I'll give it a go, but Tony's gotta come with us.” And so, Tony came with us, which meant that there was three guitarists then.

So, I said, “Okay, I'm just gonna play bass.” And that's how it came about.

[00:13:47] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, who knew that your two-string guitar playing experience would come so distinctly in handy when you switched instruments?

[00:13:56] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, especially when the first base that I had only had two strings.

(They laugh.)

Because we were playing 12 bar blues, it was like—it didn't really matter. 'Cause you only really need two strings anyway to play 12 bar blues. And then after our first gigs, I finally swapped my rhythm guitar for a bass guitar with four strings.

[00:14:23] **Jesse Thorn:** We've got more to get into with Geezer Butler. When we come back, he will talk about what it was like writing lyrics for Ozzy Osborne to sing. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:14:36] **Music:** “Children of the Grave” from the album *Master of Reality* by Black Sabbath.

Children of tomorrow live in the tears that fall today

Will the sun rise up tomorrow bring in peace in any way?

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:14:52] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Geezer Butler of Black Sabbath.

[00:14:57] **Music:** “Children of the Grave” by Black Sabbath.

Can they win the fight for peace?

Or will they disappear? Yeah!

(Music continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

[00:15:05] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's talk about Ozzy—Ozzy Osborne—for a second, because you describe meeting him through a newspaper ad. And from your description—and I can only take this literally, but you can clarify if you'd like—he was a skinhead walking a shoe on a leash like it was a dog.

[00:15:30] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah.

[00:15:32] **Jesse Thorn:** That's actually—that's just literal description of what he looked like when you met him?

[00:15:37] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, with the chimney brush over his shoulder and his dad's working gown on, and no shoes

[00:15:45] **Jesse Thorn:** Right! No shoes, even in the winter.

[00:15:47] **Geezer Butler:** No, he couldn't afford them. And he only lived like literally three streets away from me. So, he walked—came around to the house, and he knocked on the door. And me brother—me brother, said to me, “There's something at the door for you.”

And I said, “What do you mean something?”

And he says, “Go, you'll see.”

And I opened the front door, and there was Ozzy with his mental stuff on.

[00:16:15] **Jesse Thorn:** What did you think of it? Like, did you think, “Well, no one else wants to be in a band with me right now,” or did you think, “Oh yeah, this is wild. I'm in for this”?

[00:16:26] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, he was—after I'd stopped laughing, he asked what kind of music, and I told him what we were doing, what I'd wanted to do. And he says, “Yeah, I'll give it a go.” But the main thing that sold me on him, he had his own PA system. Which was like gold dust back then.

[00:16:45] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you didn't even have all your guitar strings, so somebody having something to plug into a wall was a big deal.

[00:16:50] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, absolutely. And that sealed the deal that he had his own PA.

[00:16:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you figure out with time what was going on with this man you had met who had a chimney brush and no shoes on?

[00:17:12] **Geezer Butler:** (*Laughs.*) I don't think anybody's ever figured Ozzy out. But um—

[00:17:16] **Jesse Thorn:** He seems to have a winning attitude about it.

[00:17:18] **Geezer Butler:** He does. Yeah. He'll do anything to make you laugh. So, you know. And just his attitude is just like—made me—it just really makes you laugh. And it was—he said, “Whatever songs you do, I'll learn them, and I'll grow me hair.” And that was it.

[00:17:41] **Jesse Thorn:** I like that the one qualification that was non-negotiable, besides must bring own speakers, was yeah, the skinhead thing's not gonna work.

[00:17:56] **Geezer Butler:** No, and when I mentioned it, he says, “Well, I can easily grow me hair.” And what I didn't know at the time is he'd just come out of prison. So, you know, I think that was—he had to shave his head anyway to get into prison.

[00:18:10] **Jesse Thorn:** There was a lot—there was a lot of blues rock going around England in various forms when that band and its successor, Earth, were getting started. None of that blues rock really sounds like Black Sabbath particularly. So, at what point do you think the idea of “we are going to play R&B covers, or maybe, you know, sound like Eric Clapton” changed into something that was weirder and heavier and more like Black Sabbath?

[00:19:00] **Geezer Butler:** Well, at that particular time, there was hundreds of bands going around, and they were either playing soul music or they were playing blues. And Tony got a job with Jethro Tull, Ian Anderson. We did a gig with Jethro Tull, Ian Anderson, sort of—we saw him coming out into the audience and he was mesmerized with Tony Iommi. And I thought, “Uh, that's a bit strange. He's like not looking at the rest of the band. Just looking at Tony Iommi.”—Ian Anderson. And—

[00:19:37] **Jesse Thorn:** And they were already—I mean, they already had hit records, so it was not nothing to get a job in that band.

[00:19:41] **Geezer Butler:** Oh, absolutely. And they were like on the verge of their first American tour, which is like the holy grail for a band in England at the time. And then, after the show, Ian Anderson asked Tony if he could have a word with him, and he spoke to him. And then, on the way back home, Tony says, “Jethro Tull have—I mean, Ian Anderson has asked me to join Jethro Tull.” So, he went and did his—he went down to London, and for some reason he didn't want—he didn't like people telling him what to play, Tony, 'cause he's—you know, he is very a man of his own—he's very set in his ways. So, he came back and says, “Okay, we can't—we've gotta start writing our own music. That's the only way we're going to get anywhere.”

'Cause you know, we were like one of 100,000 blues bands. And so, we said that, yeah, you know, we realized to get anywhere, we've gotta seriously start writing music—our own stuff.

(Music fades in.)

And we wrote—“Wicked World” was the first song that we wrote.

[00:20:56] **Music:** “Wicked World” from the album *Black Sabbath* by Black Sabbath, a high-octane hard rock track with wailing guitar riffs.

(Music continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

[00:21:19] **Geezer Butler:** Followed by the song “Black Sabbath”. Once we had those two in the bag, that gave us the confidence to carry on writing.

[00:21:30] **Jesse Thorn:** Did “Black Sabbath”, when you wrote it, sound like “Black Sabbath” on the record?

[00:21:36] **Geezer Butler:** Absolutely.

(Music fades in.)

Yeah. I think there was an extra verse on the original version that was cut out for the album.

[00:21:44] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's hear a little bit of it.

[00:21:46] **Music:** “Black Sabbath” from the album *Black Sabbath* by the band Black Sabbath.

Find out I'm the chosen one

Oh no!

(Music continues under the dialogue then fades out.)

[00:22:30] **Jesse Thorn:** What was it like when you played those songs in places where people were, you know, being second rate Eric Claptons?

[00:22:49] **Geezer Butler:** Well, the first few gigs, once we'd—people would just like—it was usually in like little clubs and bars, mainly. Pubs and stuff. And always remember when we wrote that song, “Black Sabbath”, we were still a blues band. And that night we had a gig at this Pokey Hole Blues Club, in Staffordshire in England. And we went on, and we played the usual 12 bar stuff. And people didn't—you know, they'd heard us like 10 times before, didn't really take much notice of us. And we said, “Let's play that song that we wrote today and see what happens.” And we played Black Sabbath, and the whole place just stood still and stopped talking, and they were just amazed.

And we were like—we finished the song. We thought, “Why has everybody gone quiet?” And we finished the song, and the whole place just erupted in applause. And we thought, “Yes, here we come!”

(They laugh.)

[00:23:54] **Jesse Thorn:** You went through this kind of crucible, playing at the legendary club, The Star Club, in Hamburg, Germany. Which, you know, had famously been sort of the birthplace of the Beatles in a way. And I really love a Jerry Lee Lewis live album that was recorded there in the '60s. You know what I mean? And you were playing like—what?—six, seven shows a day? Something like that?

[00:24:26] **Geezer Butler:** Seven 45-minute shows.

[00:24:29] **Jesse Thorn:** Was there like a 10AM show? *(Laughs.)* Like, how do you even fit that many in and have time to eat and go to the bathroom?

[00:24:37] **Geezer Butler:** Well, we didn't eat much. I think we started at four in the afternoon.

[00:24:43] **Jesse Thorn:** And just went until two?

[00:24:45] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah. And I mean, by this time T Star Club had like had its like greatest days, and they were well gone. So, we used to get like the odd soldier—sailor would come in, 'cause it was in Hamburg, which is a big port there. And we'd be playing our sets, and you'd get like a couple of drunken sailors would come in and then walk out again, some prostitutes—'cause it was in the red-light district. So, you'd get some prostitutes that'd come in and see if they could pick somebody up. And it was like—it was the perfect place to rehearse, 'cause nobody was taking any notice of us.

They didn't care what we were playing. So, we just thought, “We've gotta fill in seven 45-minute spots, so let's just make stuff up. And I think that's where most of the first and second album ideas came from.

[00:25:39] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you expect, when your first album came out, that it would be celebrated? Or did you know that it was wrong for what the music press was then?

[00:25:52] **Geezer Butler:** We were just happy to get an album out, because up until then—I mean, my parents and I think most of our parents thought we were just wasting our time. And once we had the album recorded and we had something to take home to show our parents and say, “Oh look, we've actually done something!”

And they sort of, (*unenthusiastically*) “Oh yeah.”

And then when it got in the charts, we didn't think that it was gonna be—we were just happy to have an album done so that we could listen to our own music, because we didn't have tape recorders back then or anything like that. So, we'd never heard ourselves until we'd done the album. And I mean, literally that was the first time we'd heard ourselves. And it was just, you know, a proud moment for us. We just thought it was—we'd done what we set out to do. Now let's see what happens. None of us expected it to go sell millions like it did or sell—we didn't think it would sell thousands, even. I thought a few hundred maybe.

[00:26:56] **Jesse Thorn:** I really enjoyed the parts of your book where you described writing lyrics for the band, and especially writing lyrics for the band sort of with Ozzy Osborne. And you know, you were writing the bulk of the lyrics, but it was a sort of collaboration—it seems like, from reading the book—that involved him singing whatever came to his head in scratch tracks, and you just finding something that meant something to you in that.

[00:27:27] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, Ozzy always came up with—I couldn't write vocal lines. I wouldn't even know how to begin, but—so, Ozzy would come up with the melody, and then it was up to me to write the lyrics for him. And occasionally, he'd come up with like a word that would spark my imagination. Like, “Iron Man” for instance. Even though the song wasn't—doesn't mention iron man, but one of the first lyrics that he came up with was “iron man”. And I just thought, “Well—” And he's not even singing that in the song. And that—so, I thought, “I'll base it—make the song sound like an iron man.”

[00:28:04] **Jesse Thorn:** What did that mean to you at the time?

[00:28:07] **Geezer Butler:** It was just a way of getting all me frustrations, all me depression, everything out in lyrics. You know, there's a lot of anger built up in me from the way I've been treated trying to get a job everywhere and people didn't believe—had absolutely no belief in me. And being able to write lyrics was incredible. It was my release.

[00:28:30] **Music:** “Iron Man” from the album *Paranoid* by Black Sabbath.

Has he lost his mind?

Can he see or is he blind?

Can he walk at all?

Or if he moves, will he fall?

Is he alive or dead?

Has he thoughts within his head?

We'll just pass him there

Why should we even care?

(Music fades out.)

[00:29:19] **Jesse Thorn:** We have to go to a quick break. More with Geezer Butler of Black Sabbath when we return. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:29:30] **Promo:**

(Seagull sounds.)

Carrie Poppy: Oh, Ross! Hey, hey! Oh, I'm glad I found you in line.

Ross Blocher: These clouds are really freaking me out.

Carrie: I hate having to stand in line. And boy, what a line!

Ross: These giraffes do not smell good.

Carrie: No, they do not. And they have such short necks!

Ross: But I'm hearing we need to get on this ark.

Carrie: We gotta get on the arc. It's about to rain. God is about to destroy humanity. Hey! Oh, sorry, sorry, sorry. Are you Noah?

(Sheep bleating.)

Ross: Yeah, I know we look like humans, but we're actually—we're podcasters.

Carrie: Yes, totally. We are podcasters, so it's different!

Ross: Have you heard of *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*?

Carrie: We investigate spirituality, claims of the paranormal, stuff like that.

Ross: And you have a boat and say the world's gonna end, so it seemed like something for us to check out.

Carrie: We would love to be on the boat.

Ross: We came two-by-two!

Carrie: What do you think?

Music: “Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song” by Brian Keith Dalton fades in.

Ross: *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, available on MaximumFun.org.

(Music ends.)

[00:30:15] **Music:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:30:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Geezer Butler. He was the bassist for Black Sabbath—pioneers of heavy metal and one of the greatest rock bands of all time. He has a new memoir; it's called *Into the Void: From Birth to Black Sabbath and Beyond*. Butler also wrote or co-wrote many of Sabbath's biggest hits, like “Paranoid”, “Iron Man”, and this one: “After forever”.

[00:30:51] **Music:** “After Forever” from the album *Master of Reality* by Black Sabbath.

When you think about death do you lose your breath?

Or do you keep your cool?

Would you like to see the Pope on the end of a rope?

Do you think he's a fool?

Well, I have seen the truth, yes, I've seen the light

And I've changed my ways

And I'll be prepared when you're lonely and scared

At the end of our days

(Music fades out.)

[00:31:20] **Jesse Thorn:** You mentioned your depression. You had done self-harm as a young person. You gave it up when you got some real blood out of yourself and got creeped out. But you had struggled with really serious depression, and this was at a time when that was not understood as a real medical problem. And I wonder what it was like to be in a band that required you to, you know, plunge forward so intensely and continuously when you struggled with depressions that made it hard to, you know, get out of bed.

[00:32:11] **Geezer Butler:** Well, it wasn't depressed—I wasn't depressed all the time, just the occasional bout would come on me. And I always remember going to the—when it was—at first, when it was getting really bad, and I don't—back then nobody ever said anything about depression or anything like that. And people were terrified to mention that you might be depressed, because you think—'cause you automatically thought you were gonna be taken away to a mental hospital and be locked away forever, so you couldn't talk about it to people in case that happened. But one day, I got a really bad bout of depression, and I went to the doctor. And he said, “Oh, go down the pub and have a couple of pints or take the dog for a walk or something. You'll be all right.”

And it was like no, I'm not gonna be all right. You know, it doesn't work like that. And that kept happening. And it wasn't until I think in the 1990s—I was living in St. Louis at the time. And I went—I was like—I had a break, a bit of a nervous breakdown. And I went to the doc—this doctor, my usual doctor—and I just explained everything to him. And he told me I was clinically depressed, and he put me on Prozac. And after like six weeks, I finally came out of the depression, and I thought, “Oh, yeah. This is what I'm supposed to feel like.” And ever since that, I've been okay.

[00:33:44] **Jesse Thorn:** That must have been an extraordinary experience to have that far into your life.

[00:33:50] **Geezer Butler:** It was—you couldn't talk about it. And when I did get depression, people used to think I was moody and miserable. You know, they'd be going, “Well, what's the murder with you? What's happened to you?” And nothing bad had happened, so they were saying, “You got loads—you know, you got all the money you want. You got your house. You got your cars and everything. What's wrong with you? Cheer up.” And they couldn't understand that it's nothing like that. You know, you can have everything you can possibly want in the world, but if you—when you get into those dark, depressing days,

nothing matters. All you think about is like, “Shall I just end it or what?” And luckily, I used to come out of it.

[00:34:33] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I can imagine that having the experience of treating your depression successfully must have changed the way that you thought about your past. Like, having that understanding of what was going on must have been remarkable.

[00:34:54] **Geezer Butler:** Yeah, it makes you feel like, you know, going back to people and saying, “Oh, sorry, I wasn't miserable at the time. I was going through a bad patch.”

[00:35:01] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, did you feel shame about—had you felt shame about the way that you had felt and behaved when you were depressed?

[00:35:09] **Geezer Butler:** Um, not really shame. I just thought—I wished people could have understand that I wasn't miserable at the time. 'Cause you know, if you're a rock star or whatever—if you're in a band, you're supposed to be this happy person and you're up all the time and everything is available to you. And you can do this; you can do that. And you're not supposed to get depressed if you're a rock star and all that kind of thing. And it was just hard coming to terms with it and admitting that's what it was. And it was just the occasional thing. I wasn't depressed all the time or anything like that. It's just that when I'd get into those black holes, I just couldn't get out of it. And it wasn't until it was diagnosed that I finally found a way out of it.

[00:36:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Geezer, there are 20 trillion delightful anecdotes in your book. Like, literally every other page just has an offhand mention of something that we could spend 15 minutes talking about on this show right now. But there's just one that I wrote down, which was that on your first tour of America, you visited the set of *Bonanza*.

(Geezer confirms with a laugh.)

And so, maybe you could share how you came to visit the set of *Bonanza*.

[00:36:36] **Geezer Butler:** Well, *Bonanza* was like massive in England at the time, and my dad absolutely loved westerns. He loved them. And *Bonanza* was like his favorite TV show. So, we all used to watch *Bonanza*, because that's—you know, if me dad was watching it, then you had to watch it kind of thing. And I really liked it. And so, when we got to America, we went to—'cause we were assigned to Warner Brothers, who were the—who did *Bonanza* over here. And we went to—we visited Frank Sinatra's office at Reprise, and they gave us these briefcases full of Warner Brothers albums, and they said to us, “We thought *Bonanza* was being filmed at the moment. Do you wanna come down and watch it being filmed?”

We went, “YES!”

(They laugh.)

And we did. We went down and watched part of it being filmed. And I'll always remember Little Joe. He was supposed to be—I always thought he was like literally little. And he was

like about 6'6"! He towered over us! And I said to them, "God knows how big Hoss must be then."

(They laugh.)

But it was amazing. It was just like—it's like, you know, going to heaven kind of thing, and you'd just come from England. You see—you're actually watching one of your favorite TV shows being filmed. It's like "we are not worthy".

[00:38:10] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Laughs.)* I think it's such a wonderful thing. I would've loved for you guys to have, you know, maybe stolen some outfits from wardrobe and switched up the look a little bit. Something like that.

(They laugh.)

Did you get to tell your parents which episode you saw?

[00:38:27] **Geezer Butler:** I am sure I told me dad. Yeah. Yeah. I can't remember what, 'cause they didn't tell you what—what episode it was. So, I'm not—he probably—he's obviously seen it, but I'm not sure.

[00:38:38] **Jesse Thorn:** It's like the time you brought home a record album, the time that you were first on *Top of the Pops*, and the time you went to the set of *Bonanza* are the things that prove to your parents that this is a real job and a real life.

[00:38:57] **Geezer Butler:** *(Laughs.)* Yeah, I think the Bonanza episode definitely got me dad's 100% approval.

[00:39:06] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, I'm so grateful for your time and your music. And I just, I can't tell you how much I enjoyed reading the book. There's just something delightful on every other page and a lot of fascinating stuff about how this incredible art was made. So, thank you for taking the time to be on the show.

[00:39:24] **Geezer Butler:** Great. Thank you very much. Thanks for having me.

(Music fades in.)

[00:39:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Geezer Butler. His new book is called *Into the Void: From Birth to Black Sabbath and Beyond*. Let's go out on another classic Sabbath track with lyrics by Geezer: "Tomorrow's Dream".

[00:39:45] **Music:** "Tomorrow's Dream" from the album *Vol. 4* by Black Sabbath.

Well, I'm leaving tomorrow at daybreak

Catch the fastest train that I find

Yes, I'm leaving the sorrow and heartaches

Before it takes me away from my mind

Send me love and I may let you see me

Send me hopes I can fit in my hand

But if you really want me to answer...

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

[00:40:29] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. But we're going into the office too! When I was last in the office on Sunday night to record my comedy show, *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*, the Levitt Pavilion in MacArthur Park was jamming and the whole—all the windows, everything. Everything in our office was shaking with tuba sounds from a Banda band. If you're in LA, go watch those fun MacArthur Park, Levitt Pavilion concerts.

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

Bullseye is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us in those places. Follow us. We share our interviews there. I hope that you will share our interviews with somebody you know who's a metalhead or loves crazy TV shows or rap music or just is interested in the world. Please, share our interviews! Okay, I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:41:57] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music ends.)