

[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](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:13] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:20] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Chris Estrada quit his day job a few years ago. He was working in a warehouse in Los Angeles, the town where he was born and raised. He'd been doing standup at clubs for a little while. He even got a spot on a Comedy Central showcase. He kept working at the warehouse when that set aired. He kept working at the warehouse when he started getting calls from Fred Armisen, who was interested in developing a TV show with him. He'd take meetings during his lunch break, wearing a sweaty back brace. He even kept working at the warehouse after he sold the show to Hulu, because he says, “Well, the pandemic had just started and why give up a stable gig?”

So, he took a few months to, you know, make sure show business was real. That show is why he came on *Bullseye* last year. It's called *This Fool*. Its second season kicks off next week. You can watch it on Hulu. You should, 'cause it's great. It is both deeply regular and deeply weird. It's surprisingly sweet and super funny. Chris Estrada co-created the show. He's also the star. His character, Julio, lives in South Central LA, where Chris grew up. He wears punk band, t-shirts, Levi's and Chuck Taylor's, just as Chris does. But Julio doesn't have a warehouse job, and he doesn't want to get into show business. He works at a nonprofit that helps former gang members adjust to life on the outside. And that's perfect, because Julio's cousin, Luis, is a little bit maladjusted.

Luis has just finished up some time in prison and—well, things have changed since he went in. A lot of his friends are dead or in jail or have just moved on. All of his comedy references are sort of frozen in the late '90s. Like, there is a lot of *Austin Powers* talk in *This Fool*. Before we get into my interview with Chris, let's hear a clip from the show. This is from the pilot. Julio is picking up Luis from prison. He's late and he doesn't have his car.

[00:02:37] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:02:38] **Clip:**

**Luis** (*This Fool*): Where's your ride at, Primo?

**Julio:** (*Out of breath.*) I let my homegirl borrow it. But don't worry. I got you! I'll call us an Uber. Uber is like the taxi of the future.

**Luis:** (*Mockingly.*) Uber is like the taxi of the future. I know what Uber is, [censored]. Damn, talking to me like that. Actually, they have Uber in prison. Yeah. His name is Thumper, and if you give him a pack of cigarettes, he'll carry you around like, eeey. It's pretty convenient. Yeah.

(*Julio laughs.*)

Damn, my boy, I haven't seen you in forever! Hey, for real though, why does your body still look 19, but your face looks 56, fool? (*Laughs.*)

**Julio:** (*Flatly.*) Yup.

**Luis:** You got Edward Jeeves's uncle's face! (*Laughs.*)

[00:03:14] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:03:16] **Jesse Thorn:** Chris, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm happy to have you on the show. Your show's super good.

[00:03:21] **Chris Estrada:** Oh, thanks, Jesse. That really means a lot.

[00:03:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Are you wearing this *Love and Rockets* t-shirt that you wore in the show?

[00:03:27] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, I am. I am. Big *Love and Rockets* fan, and I wanted to wear shirts that I wear in real life on this show.

[00:03:34] **Jesse Thorn:** That's like a classic Latino nerd text, like you could hardly go more classic than that.

[00:03:40] **Chris Estrada:** Yep. Yeah, that was totally the aim. I said—I go, “A lot of people might not know what it is, but for those that do, it'll mean something.”

[00:03:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Was there a comic book store in your neighborhood when you were a kid?

[00:03:51] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. There actually was. When I was growing up, there was a—there was a comic book store on West Boulevard, on the corner of West Boulevard and Hyde Park. It's the border between Inglewood and South Central Los Angeles. And it was a comic book called *The CBC*—the comic book club. There's—a older Black dude named Earl used to own it. And that's where I would go get comic books. And one time, I was there with my friend, Hector. We were like an elementary school, and it got held up at gunpoint.

[00:04:19] **Jesse Thorn:** That's messed up.

[00:04:21] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, yeah. (*Laughs.*) Just some hood comic book store.

[00:04:26] **Jesse Thorn:** I was present for a couple of things like that when I was that age, and it's just—it just never stops. Like, when I think about it right now, I'm still kind of terrified.

[00:04:36] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. Yeah. (*Chuckles.*) Yeah, it was such a—such a crazy situation. I think we were probably in like sixth grade or something. We were there like looking at comic books, buying some, and some guy comes in and holds the store up at gunpoint. And you know, I mean, being from where I grew up, it's not that you're—you've seen things like that before, and so—it still freaks you out though. And we were kids, but yeah. I can now really laugh at it, 'cause I think a guy went in there, and he went in there to rob the place for money. But I think he put two and two together, and he saw that these comic books that are pinned to the wall are valuable. So, it was just really funny to hear some dude be like, “Gimme that *Incredible Hulk*.”

(*They laugh.*)

[00:05:17] **Jesse Thorn:** He's like picking them out?

[00:05:19] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. Picking them out.

[00:05:20] **Jesse Thorn:** “Mm, let me—gimme that one.” (*Laugh.*) He's like, “I'm not really a DC guy, so let's—”

[00:05:26] **Chris Estrada:** yeah. He was like, “Gimme, I'm a—Vertigo guy. Gimme that Vertigo.”

[00:05:29] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckling.*) He is only into art comics. He's like, “This is for grownups. I'm not into that.”

[00:05:34] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. “I'm a grown (*sensor beep*) dude.” (*Laughs.*)

[00:05:36] **Jesse Thorn:** The comic book store guy by my house when I was a kid—shout out to Al from Al's Comics—he was like a classic comic book store dude. I mean, god bless him. You know, he was across the street from the Boys and Girls Club, so—you know, he dealt with doofuses all—you know, doofy 12-year-olds all day long. So, you know. And he was always gracious about it to the extent he was capable.

[00:06:00] **Chris Estrada:** That's great.

[00:06:01] **Jesse Thorn:** But like (*laughs*) now you're going to a comic book store, you know, it's like some like 20-year-old women with mermaid hair and gauges and whatnot. And like Al was just like a guy in a dirty t-shirt with a ponytail who was a little mad you were there.

[00:06:19] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, that's how it was for me. Now it feels like it's a little counterculture-ish, you know? Or like, you know, that kind of comic book culture is pretty mainstream or alternative mainstream I guess, or whatnot. But you know, back then it was like older dudes who were like, “I just love this, and this is the business I run, and I'm kind of an—you know, I'm kind of a (*sensor beep*).

(They laugh.)

[00:06:44] **Jesse Thorn:** You have a bit in your standup act about holding the world record for most times losing a fight.

[00:06:52] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. Yeah, that kind of came from—I always talk about how, in the bit, I talk about like I'm not a physical fighter; I'm an emotional fighter. And that like I don't win fights physically. I win them mentally. So, the idea is that kind of like if—I may get my (*cancel beep*) kicked, but when the guy's walking away, I'm gonna say that that's why his little brother makes more money than him, and his wife's incredibly unhappy in their marriage or whatever.

You know, just that idea of just like—I feel like I've always been kind of a smart(*cancel beep*) in that sense. And like, you know, I just like that idea of like, yeah, you might have, you know, messed me up or whatever, but I'm gonna say something really cutting to you that's gonna hurt your feelings, and that's even worse. Because you clearly don't have respect for me, but I said something so cutting to you that it's gonna stay with you.

[00:07:42] **Jesse Thorn:** How many times have you—IRL—gotten yourself beat up?

[00:07:48] **Chris Estrada:** You know, I feel like—truthfully, it's—I mean, it's not even that many. It's just that the idea is that when I did get into fights, I was like yeah, we'll fight, but I'm also gonna say something very mean to you. (*Laughs.*) Yeah.

[00:08:02] **Jesse Thorn:** One time, a dude just punched me walking down the street, but that's the only time I ever—like, I'll run. I'll book it (*snaps*) so fast. So—but a dude, we were just walking opposite directions. He was wearing the same jacket as me, pissed him off. He punched me.

[00:08:16] **Chris Estrada:** See, my problem is that I'll stay there and fight, knowing I might lose. I have just this pride thing of like I'd rather put up a fight, know that I'm probably gonna get my (*cancel beep*) whooped, but I'm gonna say something to you. You know? (*Chuckles.*) Like, I'm still gonna call you a loser. Like, even though I lost.

[00:08:36] **Jesse Thorn:** In the bit, it's your girlfriend says to you, “That's why your mom is going bald.”

[00:08:43] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, I—well, in the bit I say that I always say my fighting technique is similar to that of an angry girlfriend in an argument. I just win the fight by saying the most messed up thing that had nothing to do with argument whatsoever. And I—and that's the example. I go, “One time I was arguing with my girlfriend, and she said, ‘That's why your mom's going bald.’ And we were arguing about rent money.” Like, what did my poor mother's balding scalp have to do with any of this? You know? So, just kind of taking that technique of like yeah, that's where I'm gonna go. (*Chuckles.*) I'm learning from them.

[00:09:17] **Jesse Thorn:** I've seen you describing your character on the show as dealing with an existential crisis. It borders on nihilism. I mean, there's a scene in the pilot where he goes

up to some dudes he's been scared of that are camped out in front of his house and kind of, you know, talked down to him. And he basically asks them to kill him. (*Laughs.*)

[00:09:42] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. Yeah. You know what it is? I think it's also like to just have an existential guy in a working class world. 'Cause they exist. You know? And they exist. And it was just really inspired by like—there's this movie called *Killer of Sheep*, old movie about this Black family in Watts in like the late 1970s. And the husband of that family, he's kind of going through an existential crisis. He works at a meat factory, like a sheep factory or whatever, where they kill sheep. And there's just something so funny. He's trying to describe his depression to his friend, one time. He's telling his friend like how he feels, how life feels existential to him, and the only response his friend has—who doesn't get what he's talking about—he goes, “Well, if you're so sad, why don't you kill yourself?”

(*Laughs.*) Like, it just—it killed me, and it just kills me to—yeah. I don't think existentialism is sort of unique, like in that world. I think you'll find people who are existential in any class bracket or race or ethnic group, but—you'll find them, but what you'll find is that people around them usually don't understand what they're going through.

[00:10:54] **Jesse Thorn:** It would be easy for you to make your character, Julio, a saint.

[00:10:59] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah.

[00:10:59] **Jesse Thorn:** He works at a—you know, a rehab place for reforming criminals, and he is the nerd in the hood, and all this stuff, right? He's kind of a narcissist. Was that a choice?

[00:11:11] **Chris Estrada:** That was a big choice. Yeah. 'Cause I wasn't interested in a good guy in that traditional sense or whatever, where people are looking at him like—I was not interested in making the Ted Lasso of South Central Los Angeles. Like, that's fine if you like that, but that was not anything I was interested in, this sweetness. I was interested in like looking at like codependency and what is the nature of helping someone? And oftentimes, in codependency when you're helping someone, it's not based in altruism. Like, it's to run away from your own problems, and you're kind of patting yourself on the back while doing so, 'cause you feel so awful about yourself, you have to convince yourself that you're a good guy, and you gotta tell other people you're a good guy.

[00:11:54] **Jesse Thorn:** What did your parents do for work?

[00:11:56] **Chris Estrada:** My mom was a janitor—you know, blue collar job. She's an immigrant from Mexico, single mom. My dad, he was a bartender for many years at an El Torito in Marina Del Rey; that's still there. And then, after that he worked at a busboy. He worked in construction. You know, immigrant parents. They didn't have formal education, so they worked blue-collar, working-class jobs.

[00:12:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Did they expect you to go to college or no?

[00:12:25] **Chris Estrada:** I think they wanted me to go, but I went to Cal State Northridge. I failed my freshman year. (*Laughs.*) I didn't come back. And I just, you know, it was mostly my mom, and I think she was just kind of like, “Well, I hope you figure something out.” And I didn't figure out something for quite a long time. I was working like a lot of menial jobs. Up until I started comedy, I had several jobs throughout the years.

[00:12:50] **Jesse Thorn:** More with Chris Estrada after the break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:12:57] **Transition:** Chiming synth with a steady beat.

[00:13:02] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Chris Estrada. Chris is the creator and star of *This Fool*: a new TV comedy streaming now on Hulu. On the show, Chris plays Julio—a 30 something guy who lives in South Central with his family. He stars opposite Frankie Quinones, who plays Luis—an ex-Con and Julio's cousin. *This Fool*'s second season kicks off later this month. Let's get back into our conversation.

A lot of people start doing standup when they're like 19.

[00:13:36] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah.

[00:13:37] **Jesse Thorn:** I don't know a lot of successful comics who started later on in life. My buddy Al Madrigal was like 27 or 28, something.

[00:13:47] **Chris Estrada:** That's right. Yep.

[00:13:48] **Jesse Thorn:** You were even older than that, right? You were like 28 or 29.

[00:13:51] **Chris Estrada:** I was 29. I was 29 when I started.

[00:13:54] **Jesse Thorn:** What made you think you could do it?

[00:13:56] **Chris Estrada:** You know, because I didn't think about it in terms of like, “I'm gonna make a career out of this.” ‘Cause I think that would've—I think I had probably burned a lot of bridges by that time with friends or, you know, ex-girlfriends or what—I was just kind of like, “What am I doing?” And I think I had been let go of a job at that point. And I always say I was the—I was one of those dudes that like, before standup, my personality was dude with three jobs. Like, I was like—I would just go from—work a morning job. I had to work three jobs to get paid like I was having a decent full-time job.

And I was doing that. But then, I just remember my nights started getting free, and I always wanted to do standup. In the last few years of like in my mid-20s, I really got into standup. I always enjoyed it, but I really got into it. And you know, I loved hearing standup. I loved standup albums. I also wanted to write. Like, I wanted to—I liked screenwriting. I didn't know how to do it or anything, but I liked it. And I loved movies. I was really into movies. I

loved the Coen Brothers. You know, I was watching things like *Killer of Sheep* and, you know, watching tons of movies. And you know what's so funny? I remember at 25 telling this woman I was dating at the time, like, "I wanna start standup."

And she goes, "That's embarrassing."

And I go, "You're right." (*Laughs.*) And then I waited four years. And then, finally when I—when I started, I think I just said, "I just wanna try it." I think if I thought about it in the long haul, it would've overwhelmed me. I think when I started standup, I had incremental goals, and having big goals would've really consumed me or freaked me out. But I was just like, "Oh, I wanna try it. I wanna see if I can get onstage and say these jokes that I wrote." And then, it went okay the first time. It didn't go awful. It didn't go great either, just okay. And I said, "That's enough for me to keep going." And then I kept going and—you know, then things—I would have really bad sets.

But then, once I was like—once I knew—I had a bad set and I wanted to keep doing it, I said, "Alright, there's something here if I want to keep doing this." But yeah, I started at 29, and it was pretty intimidating, 'cause most people were actually younger. Like, everybody who I was meeting at the time was like 19, 20, 21, 22. And like, you know, I kind of came from this, like—I thought I knew something, 'cause I was older, even though I had really no accomplishments. Like, I just thought, "I've lived a life for whatever. I should know something." But I knew that that didn't translate into the craft of being funny. Like, I think I knew I was inherently funny or like, I had funny thoughts, but, you know. It's a craft. And I was like—it was really humbling to like be 29 and some—I bomb, but then some 19-year-old goes up on stage and does great.

[00:16:46] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckles.*) I can understand that.

[00:16:47] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah,

[00:16:48] **Jesse Thorn:** There's a great moment in your act, when you start talking about bits that work at your job that you couldn't bring on stage. (*Laughs.*)

[00:16:59] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. I always say that like I'm considered a comedic genius at my old warehouse job. And then, I—you know, it's just that idea of that like I may not be—I don't know what you're gonna think about me here, but I'll tell you this: there's a warehouse I used to work at, and everybody thinks I'm a comedic genius there. And it's just the idea of differentiating. 'Cause I kind of wanted to find a way of like how can I talk about these things I'm living or—yeah, I was working at a warehouse at the time and—while I was still doing standup, and I was just like—it just made me laugh, the humor of what was funny at work. Like, you know, so much of what's funny at work only works at work.

[00:17:36] **Sound Effect:** Music swells and fades.

[00:17:37] **Clip:**

**Chris Estrada:** You know, as a comedian, you work really hard to be smart, funny, and clever. But what's great about being funny at my warehouse job is you don't have to be any of those things.

*(Laughter.)*

And I know that, because a few weeks ago I saw my coworker, Armando. He was covered in sweat from unloading trucks all day. And I walked up to him, and I said, “Damn, fool, you look cold. Put a sweater on.” And they've been laughing about that (*sensor beep*) for two weeks now!

*(Laughter.)*

Oh, they can't get enough of it. They can't get enough of it. The other day, Jose came up to me. He was like, “Hey, fool, what was that joke you told Armando a few weeks ago?”

I go, “Well, check this out. He was covered in sweat, right? So, I told him that he looked cold, and he should put a sweater on.”

And Jose said, “How do you come up with this (*sensor beep*)?! You should be a comedian.”

[00:18:19] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:18:20] **Chris Estrada:** You know, so just the idea of that I can really crack these guys up with like softball pitches of the worst type of job humor, but it just wouldn't work anywhere else. And the thing is, when they find out that you're funny or that you're doing standup, they go, “Do the stuff you do here, at work.” You know? Like, I used to go up to some of my coworkers at this warehouse, and I used to say, “Hey, don't tell anyone, but I'm with *Undercover Boss*. I actually own this warehouse. Like, we're filming something.” Like, you know. And it would kill them, but I go, “I can't—”

They would say, “Do that on stage when you do standup.”

I go, “It doesn't work, guys. Like, believe me.” *(Laughs.)*

[00:18:57] **Jesse Thorn:** What was the comedy that you got really into when you were in your 20s?

[00:19:02] **Chris Estrada:** You know, comedians like Greg Giraldo, who passed away. He was a really smart comedian that I just thought—like so, so sharp and funny, wrote really funny jokes. I just felt like him and comics like Colin Quinn, Patrice O'Neill, even comics like Maria Bamford that I really enjoyed. I think I was listening to like Mitch Hedberg or D.L. Hughley, I really liked at the time. But I remember it was really Greg Giraldo that I just thought, “This guy's like not underestimating the audience.” I just like when you can make a mechanic, working class guy laugh, but also make some pretentious snob laugh at the same time.



I really enjoy that, because I don't think you're underestimating anyone. And I thought like comics like Greg Giraldo were doing that. Like, it was really great to see. Like, he would have just really great jokes, really smart jokes. Like—yeah, he was one of those kind of like—I wouldn't say he was necessarily political, but you know, he was, kind of topical but had interesting takes on things.

But also, the same thing—like, I just remember being like—I remember listening to like someone like Maria Bamford, and it just killing me and thinking, “Well, there's something to this, because I'm a dude who's working regular jobs and—you know, I'm from LA. I'm not from where Maria Bamford's from, where her humor informed her from.” Like, I think she's from Minneapolis or that area. Maybe Wisconsin or something.

[00:20:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Duluth, I think she's from, yeah.

[00:20:38] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, Duluth. Yeah. But I just remember thinking, “Woah, she found a way to make that funny. And you know, I think we've probably have lived different lives, and it's still making me laugh.” So, I just always loved somebody that was like—yeah, those kind of comics really informed me a lot.

[00:20:57] **Jesse Thorn:** *This Fool* is set in South LA.

[00:21:00] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah.

[00:21:01] **Jesse Thorn:** I think there are a lot more depictions of Latino culture in LA that are set in East LA.

[00:21:08] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, that's right.

[00:21:10] **Jesse Thorn:** Why did you wanna set it in South LA?

[00:21:12] **Chris Estrada:** ‘Cause I grew up there, and I was living there at the time. And you know, I just—I think I have a tremendous amount of respect for East LA and communities like Boyle Heights and whatnot. I think there's a rich history there. And you know, Latinos—specifically Mexican Americans—have been there for a long time, and you know, activism and movements have come out of there. But that wasn't my life. You know, I didn't grow up there. You know, it's kind of a homogenous neighborhood. Like, you know, it's 90-something percent Latino, and I grew up in Inglewood. And then, as an adult, I lived in South Central Los Angeles. So, they're right next to each other, and like I had family and—you know, I had an uncle that lived in Compton. I had family that lived in South Central. I had family that lived in Inglewood.

Like, so yeah; that's what I knew, and that's where my life was at. And I also like, you know, I wanted it to have a show that like—you know, most of these shows, when it's about Latinos, it's usually set in East LA. But I just wanted to have a show where the neighbors are Black, because my neighbors were Black. You know? Or I wanted a show that sometimes they get along, and sometimes they don't. You know? And being comedically honest about that.

‘Cause that that's always been my version of LA, like up until quarantine I didn't live anywhere else. Like I always lived in a part of LA that was both Latino and Black. So, that just felt natural to me. And it also felt interesting. Like, you know, sometimes we had great relationships with Black neighbors, or I had great relationships with some of my Black neighbors, but I also went to a high school that had race riots. Like, you know, where it was Latinos against Black people. Like there would be race riots twice a year. Or sometimes gangs in the neighborhood—a Latino gang and a Black gang might not get along. Sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. And that was kind of like—I don't know. I always just think those relationships are interesting. And I just thought, “Oh, you never see that.” It's always kind of homogenous, you know? And I'd like to see a little bit of that.

[00:23:23] **Jesse Thorn:** One of the things that I like about the slightly scary dudes hanging out outside your house, racing remote control cars is—well, first of all, racing remote control cars, just classic activity.

[00:23:35] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. (*Laughs.*)

[00:23:36] **Jesse Thorn:** But also—right? It's two Latino dudes and two Black guys, and there's a moment where one of the Latino guys says, “Last time around, it was Blacks versus Mexicans. Now, it's Mexicans versus Blacks.”

And then, his buddy goes, “I'm Salvadorian. You know I'm Salvadorian. I said I'm Salvadorian.”

[00:23:56] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. Yeah. That was just really like a funny joke to me, but also a way to acknowledge like, yeah, there's a lot of Salvadorians in this city. (*Laughs.*) Like, you know, a lot of my friends are. Like, I grew up—some of my closest friends are from Central America, you know. So, I just thought it was really funny, because, you know, sometimes the—there's such a—I don't know, because I'm Mexican American, but I would imagine if you're from Guatemala or El Salvador, you know, Mexican kind of encompasses the culture or whatever.

So, you know, it was just funny for me to sort of touch on this like Black versus Mexican, and the guy being like, “Hey dude, I'm—we're on the same side. I'm just—I'm Salvadorian.” Like, I thought it was really—it was a really funny moment to do that.

[00:24:44] **Jesse Thorn:** I think when I first moved to LA, I was not used to people calling all Latinos Mexican. I wasn't even used to people calling Mexican Americans Mexican.

[00:24:55] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah.

[00:24:56] **Jesse Thorn:** But I think it's a byproduct of, as you said, the kind of hegemony of Mexican American culture in LA is like almost nowhere else in the United States.

[00:25:09] **Chris Estrada:** That's right. I think there's a lot of that. I mean, because we're just—it's a lot of us here, but you know, growing up where I grew up, there was a lot of Salvadorian kids around or Guatemalan kids. So, it was like in a way we kind of grew up

like—I always kind of say this: in a way, I didn't grow up viewing myself as a Chicano, you know, because my parents were immigrants. And you know, they didn't have formal education. So, they didn't have, you know, that's a term that was, I think, invented here. And you know, was sort of like—came through like counterculture and civil rights and politics and whatnot. So, you know, my parents were immigrants, and they came out here, and they had like blue collar jobs.

So, to them they were just like, “You're Mexican.” You know? And then, I sort of just viewed myself that way. And then, as I got older and my friends were other things, like other types of Latino, this term just “Latino” took over, you know? And I was like, “Yeah, I'm just a Latino dude from LA.” You know? Now that I'm older, I understand the context of what being a Chicano is, and I have an understanding of like, yeah, I guess I am that. But I didn't grow up with it. It wasn't prevalent in my life, you know. I even tell people like, you know, “When I was growing up, my mom didn't even know what that meant. Like, my mom thought that meant gangsters with low riders.” (*Laughs.*) Like, you know.

[00:26:27] **Jesse Thorn:** She was confused between Chicanos and Cholos? They both start with “ch”.

[00:26:30] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. She just thought—yeah. Yeah, you know? There you go.

[00:26:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. I mean, another thing about LA Latino culture is—this remains a city of immigrants, right? There are many, many first- and second-generation Americans in Los Angeles, from all over the world but certainly from Mexican and Central America.

[00:26:51] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah.

[00:26:51] **Jesse Thorn:** There's also a huge community of Mexican Americans in LA whose families have been in LA for six generations, eight generations. And in—you know, there are certainly people who have ancestors who have been in California since before California was part of the United States.

[00:27:13] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. That trips me out, ‘cause that wasn't my—like, I never knew anyone like that. I think, you know, where I grew up and where I lived as an adult, everybody was kind of—their parents got here in the late '70s and '80s. (*Chuckles.*) Like, you know, I didn't—to me the idea of somebody's parents speaking English and if they were Latino, I'd be like, “Yo, that's insane.” You know? Like, or I remember one time I met this girl from East LA—or she was like from Boyle Heights—and she told me that her grandfather fought in world War II. And I said, “What?” Like that's is like—I was like, “He's been here since then?!” It just blew my mind.

[00:27:51] **Jesse Thorn:** I had a conversation with Al Madrigal one time—standup comic who's—he's half Mexican American, half Italian American. And he doesn't speak any Spanish at all, I don't think, or his Spanish is terrible. One or the other. And like, he's been in a lot of situations in comedy where there is an expectation that he is either gonna be like an

intensely Mexican American comedian or he's gonna be like a righteous Chicano comedian. He's not either of those things at all.

[00:28:23] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah.

[00:28:24] **Jesse Thorn:** And like, he has to figure out how to deal with that, right? Like when you're a comic, you have to deal with whatever assumptions people make about you right away, or you're never gonna get anywhere on stage.

[00:28:33] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, absolutely. You know, I feel sort of similar in a sense. I mean, like I speak fluent Spanish, 'cause I just grew up speaking it. Like, my mom didn't speak English, you know? So, I never feel that I'm not enough of anything. I just know what I am, like this is what I'm into; this is my point of view. I'm not gonna come up here and give you cultural jokes that you've heard before. You know, I got a point of view on things. Or I have these esoteric thoughts that I think I can make funny. And yeah, so sometimes it takes a minute for them to be like—get a context for you, you know?

[00:29:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Your character on this show wears a lot of punk rock t-shirts in addition to your comic book t-shirt there. Are you a punk rock guy?

[00:29:21] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. I mean, I love it. It really had a profound effect on me. I wanted the show to have a little—have that, you know? 'Cause I always tell people like, “You know, this is not unique. This guy is not unique. There's more dudes like me in these neighborhoods, in these working-class neighborhoods, than there is gang members.” You know? Like, what's gonna make the rounds in the news is the sensationalism of gangs or whatever, but the character of Julio, or me as a person, we're not—I grew up with 20 dudes, men and women who are just like me, you know? So, but I wanted that. I wanted to have that—like, I wanted to wear punk shirts in there, 'cause I love that.

You know, I think I grew up listening to like punk and hardcore, and it still plays a profound effect on my life. Like, I try to sneak little things in there. We had an episode about Ronald Reagan, and I thought to myself, “We should close the episode out with an '80s hardcore song that's an anti-Regan song.” So, we got—we reached out to the band, D.O.A., and we got the song “F'd Up Ronnie” and closed out the episode with that. 'Cause I just thought like yeah, if we're doing a Reagan episode, let's have an anti-Regan anthem by a hardcore band from the '80s. And tried to sneak in stuff. I wear Joe Strummer t-shirts in there, Clash t-shirts in there, little easter eggs.

There's a episode I have that's like a birthday episode. The whole point is my character hates celebrating his birthday and whatnot. And when he looks at his texts, one of the texts he receives is from Joe Strummer that says, “Happy birthday.” And I love when people pick up on that and saw—I saw that you sneaked that in.

[00:30:59] **Jesse Thorn:** I feel like that's a pretty delicate telephone call, calling D.O.A.. Like, you can't just send the regular Hulu music clearance lawyer.

[00:31:08] **Chris Estrada:** No, yeah, you gotta send the letter saying, “Hey, I really love D.O.A..”

(*They laugh.*)

[00:31:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. You're like, “Hi, I'm calling from *Celebrity Family Feud*. And—”

[00:31:18] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. Yeah, “We were wondering.” No, I had to be like, “Just so you know, your album *Hardcore '81*, played a big role in my life.” (*Laughs.*) Like, you gotta let 'em know. But yeah, we were able to just get some music. There was music that we licensed from local Latino punk hardcore bands from the area. We licensed—we used music by this really great band called Generación Suicida. They're from South Central Los Angeles. We used another song by this really great band called Tozcos. They're from Santa Ana, California. It was really cool. I just remember being like, “We should use some of their music. These are bands that I like.” You know, and who—when I was—if I wasn't doing standup, I would go see. And yeah. It was really cool to do that.

[00:32:03] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm the least punk rock dude ever. But you know, I knew punk rock kids growing up, going to arts high school and stuff. And you know, anytime I've ever had anybody on this show who was that way as an adolescent, like the depth of its effect on their life is so extraordinary.

[00:32:29] **Chris Estrada:** Oh yeah, absolutely.

[00:32:31] **Jesse Thorn:** What was it for you?

[00:32:33] **Chris Estrada:** You know, I think for me—when I was growing up, it was like the things that were around me were kind of like—you know, you could hear hip-hop. You know, hip-hop was around, but also my parents' music—you know, Mexican music, Latino music was around. But there was just something about punk and its energy and its like anger that really just got to me, that I just thought, “Ah, this is great, 'cause I already feel different. So, this is perfect for that.” And then, you know, just like some bands were slightly personal and expressed more emotive thoughts, and some bands express more political thoughts or, you know, societal thoughts. And that really intrigued me.

Like both, you know? bands like Fugazi to like the Clash and like—you know, there's another band called Los Crudos (*Las Cruces*). I wear one of their t-shirts. They're like a Chicago band. And you know, that kind of anger really got to me. They were presenting ideas, and I thought that was like really cool. It, you know, was through like—through The Minute Men that I found out about—they had a song called “El Salvador”. And like, you know, reading about like the Civil War then, it really helped inform me a lot. Or even like the Clash having a bang—having an album called *Sandinista*. I was like, “What is that?” And then you find out it's like, oh, there was a Nicaraguan Rebellion—you know, like rebellion at the time. You start digging deeper, you know. And it was through punk rock that that really kind of opened me up.

[00:34:03] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, it's funny to think about the wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador from punk rock as an adolescent, when presumably there was like lots of kids around whose parents had come to the States because of those wars—or in some cases, maybe themselves. I don't know exactly how old you are, but.

[00:34:21] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, yeah. No, that's true. Yeah, absolutely. I'm 38, and you know, there was kids who—you know, the thing about it is sometimes they might have not even known why they were here. You know? And their parents probably—you know, there's people who don't understand the depth of why things are started or whatever, you know, so, yeah, that was really interesting. Or like hearing—I just remember hearing like Rage Against the Machine songs and them talking about what was going on in Chiapas at the time.

[00:34:52] **Jesse Thorn:** The other thing about punk rock that like—as a guy that's not that, I have a hard time wrapping my head around—is like the physical part of it, like the way people talk about going to shows is about, first and foremost, sense of community, I hear from people. But also like a physical experience of—

[00:35:16] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, slam dancing, like people slamming and stuff like that. And yeah, I mean, you know, what's so funny? It's something that I—I don't go to shows anymore or like if I do, I'm not interested in doing that. Like I'm 38, and my knees hurt sometimes. But I think when you're young, or even if you're my age or older, like you might have an anger or a frustration or like, you know, that kind of aggressiveness of like slam dancing might work for you. You know? I think when I was young it was really exciting like to be like, “Wow, people slam dance? Like this is cool.” And you fall, they'll pick you up. And it's aggressive, but it's communal, you know? It was pretty—I can totally see how it wouldn't make sense to anyone who's not part of that world.

I remember explaining it to my older cousin who's like not into that, and he'd be like, “So, you guys just beat each other?” Like, it made no sense to him.

[00:36:07] **Jesse Thorn:** That's how I felt when I—I was like, “What are you—?! Sorry, say that again.”

[00:36:11] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, yeah. So funny.

[00:36:15] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll wrap up with Chris Estrada from *This Fool* in just a minute. When we come back from the break, we'll talk about creating the character Luis in the show, and how he kept an ex-con cousin from coming off as a stereotype. It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:36:32] **Promo:**

**Music:** Fun, brassy music.

**Alex Schmidt:** Hi, I'm Alex Schmidt.

**Katie Goldin:** And I'm Katie Goldin.

**Alex:** And we make *Secretly Incredibly Fascinating*, a podcast about why seemingly ordinary stuff is actually the title of the podcast.

**Katie:** Using tons of research, we take a joyful look at history and science and stories—

**Alex:** And jokes.

**Katie:** —about the ordinary stuff in your life, because that's what makes those things amazing.

**Alex:** Also, jokes!

**Katie:** So, get excited about paperclips.

**Alex:** Get thrilled about pigeons.

**Katie:** Get all psyched up and running around the room about the imperial system of weights and measurements!

**Alex:** (*Chuckling.*) For real, there's whole episodes about that stuff. Hear them anytime, and hear new episodes Mondays, at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

(*Music fades out.*)

[00:37:12] **Transition:** Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:37:17] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with comedian Chris Estrada of the TV comedy, *This Fool*.

So, your character on the show has a counterpart—his cousin, Luis.

[00:37:32] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, that's right.

[00:37:33] **Jesse Thorn:** And his cousin, Luis, is fresh outta jail—maybe prison—and living at the house, and they're kind of like pushing on each other, trying to figure out what's what.

[00:37:47] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, that's right.

[00:37:49] **Jesse Thorn:** How do you write that character? How do you write a 35-year-old, semi-retired cholo without being broad, without playing into people's ideas about a—you know—a guy in slides with tube socks pulled up to his knees?

[00:38:09] **Chris Estrada:** Well, you know, by knowing those guys, like having those guys in my family, like knowing that they're scary to some people, but hilarious to me. Or like the

kind of guys that can joke with me, that have a—that I know them, have a sense of humor. It's like, you know, nobody's that one thing. And like, I mean, I always say this in regular life—that I had cousins who were gang members older than me, and I go—you live in such a dichotomy or such a gray area that you understand. “I know they're scary to you or I know they've done things to maybe people who fear them or now fear them. But I know them in a different facet, in that I know them to be scary, but I also know them to be loving or vulnerable or have insecurities or be guys who are immature, you know, who laugh at things.”

And I think that's—finding a way to sort of like humanize a guy like that I think is really—would make the character unique. And having cousins that were like that and, you know, basing it off of my real cousins.

[00:39:14] **Jesse Thorn:** How do you cast it?

[00:39:15] **Chris Estrada:** You know, we went with Frankie Quinones, who's an amazing actor. Amazing comedian, amazing actor. And you know, in the beginning we weren't thinking of someone like Frankie. We were thinking of someone more stereotypical, some big, buff dude with tattoos all over, you know? And what we found was that oftentimes the jokes or like us picking on each other—him saying things to me—it didn't feel like a comedy. It felt scary. And when we had Frankie audition, he had this like big kid energy to it, where it's like he—you know, what he brought was a Joe Pesci energy to it. He brought a Joe Pesci energy, where it was like, you know, he was—loved to make jokes, loved to be funny, but also would kick your ( *censor beep*.) He'd be the first guy to get a bat out of the car, 'cause he is not the biggest guy in the world. You know, I'm actually taller than him.

And like, we then started looking at that image of like me being taller than him, him being shorter. And we just said, “That's actually funny. That presents better.” ‘Cause you know, the truth of the matter of fact is that also not all gang members are big. (*Laughs.*) Like, not all of them are big. And I started thinking about my cousins, who at some point I was actually taller than them. You know, so—yeah, that was it. And then Frankie just brought a kind of really just vulnerability to the character. And I think a lot of it was also—you know, with these kind of characters, it's easy to make them Homer Simpson buffoon type characters. And I think it was making sure you ride a line where it's like we want this guy to be funny and immature, but we never want him to feel like he won't kick your ( *censor beep*). And not the character Julio's ( *censor beep*), because they fight each—he doesn't fear him; they get each other in headlocks, but he doesn't fear him, 'cause he knows him to be family. And you know, he knows that he's bigger than them.

But you never want him to be too buffoonish or too immature that he's not scared to fight. That you go, “This guy won't get a bat out of his car or pull out a gun,” or something like that. So, you know, it's that thin line.

[00:41:26] **Jesse Thorn:** He also lives very comfortably, right on the line between kind of having gone to seed and not. You know what I mean? Like, your character works in a kind of Homeboy Industries kind of situation, like rehabilitation for convicts and former gang members. And there's just this kind of—one of the big things is this kind of question of what do you do when you're 40 and you have a face tattoo?



[00:41:56] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, absolutely.

[00:41:57] **Jesse Thorn:** And like he—like, he really lives very comfortably in that area between going and getting a bat out of his car and coaching youth football. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:42:08] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Where it's like—you know, it's hard. It's like if you've lived that life or whatever, like—I mean, just from growing up from where I grew up, you have these intentions of your temper will take over. You know? Or sometimes if, whether you're a gang member or you grew up in a working-class neighborhood that had gangs, if you don't—you don't have a lot, but you have pride, and you have a sense of like, “Don't mess with me.” Or even in my sense it's like, “Look, I'd rather pridefully put up a fight and get my (*sensor beep*) kicked than just hand over my money. You know? And I think Luis has that, and I think everybody in that world has that.

[00:42:45] **Jesse Thorn:** Had you quit your job when you sold this show?

[00:42:49] **Chris Estrada:** No, I worked a few more months and then I felt like—we sold it right before covid, and then covid hit. And I remember really thinking to myself, “I should go back. Because I think—I don't know that there's gonna be TV around anymore.” (*Laughs.*) But I will say this, I remember when I thought we were gonna be okay. I was looking—I was like on my computer, looking at the news, and there was this like entertainment news that said, “Disney is developing a live-action *Tarzan* movie,” and I thought to myself, “If Disney thinks we're gonna still have money in three years and society hasn't collapsed, they must know something we don't.” (*Laughs.*) Then I go—if they're still developing stuff, I'm like, “They probably have the vaccine, and you're gonna have to get it with a proof of purchase that you saw the *Tarzan* movie.”

[00:43:34] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckling.*) It's just the headline in *Variety* says, “Disney Hoarding Diamonds”. You're like, “Wait a minute.”

[00:43:40] **Chris Estrada:** “Wait a minute. They know something.”

(*They laugh.*)

But yeah, I—

[00:43:45] **Jesse Thorn:** “Paramount Prexi has Cooking Oil”.

[00:43:48] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, that eventually is what's gonna happen though. (*Laughs.*) But yeah, I did; I quit my job a few months after.

[00:43:56] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, the good news about warehouse work is it's relatively casual, so you could—you could get some if you needed it.

[00:44:03] **Chris Estrada:** Yeah, you could. I mean, all of the—I got—all those warehouse jobs I had throughout the years were through temp jobs. Yeah. If this doesn't work out in the long haul, I always say, I'm gonna go back and get my forklift license.

[00:44:16] **Jesse Thorn:** That's where the real money is?

[00:44:17] **Chris Estrada:** That's where the real money is. Yeah.

[00:44:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Chris, I sure appreciate you taking this time to talk to me and your show's so great.

[00:44:23] **Chris Estrada:** Thanks, Jesse. It really means a lot. Thank you so much.

[00:44:26] **Jesse Thorn:** Chris Estrada from last year. The new season of *This Fool* comes out later this month on Hulu. It is a great show. Chris is great in it. Frankie Quinones is really great in it. Michael Imperioli is in it, the guy from *The Sopranos*. If you haven't seen *This Fool* yet, you've got time to catch up on season one, and you should. This is a great show. I love *This Fool*.

[00:44:51] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:44:54] **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. At my producer, Kevin Ferguson's, house, he and his neighbor are gonna replace the stereo in his car. I support this.

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, the great Dan Wally. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us in those places. Give us a follow. We will share with you all of our interviews, and I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:45:52] **Promo:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*