

[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.

[00:00:15] **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.

[00:00:17] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My first guest this week is Nick Kroll. He's a comedian, actor, and writer. He starred on the FX show *The League* for years. He created the sketch comedy series *Kroll Show*. If you watched VH1 in the early 2000s, you probably saw him making jokes about pop culture on *Best Week Ever*. Nick also created the Broadway show, *Oh, Hello*, where he and John Mulaney play Gil Faizon and George St. Geegland, two men who embody a very specific kind of New Yorker—the kind you might find in a cotton baseball cap and ill-fitting khakis frowning at a folded-up copy of the *New York Times*. Or maybe if we're being less generous, the kind who might be going through coat pockets at a house party or hosting a \$900 acting seminar, despite not really being an actor.

The inspiration was two real guys in a bookstore who were arguing about Alan Alda's autobiography.

[00:01:18] **Sound Effect:** Music swells and fades.

[00:01:19] **Clip:**

George (*Oh, Hello*): Who are we, really? You know? What is our essence? How to describe?

(The audience laughs.)

Gil: You know when you get to the bottom of a tub of hummus? And you can't fit your carrot in there, so you gotta use your fingies to scoop it out? BAM! That's us, babyyyy!

(The audience cheers.)

[00:01:38] **Sound Effect:** Music swells and fades.

[00:01:39] **Jesse Thorn:** Lately, Nick Kroll has been focused more on the world of animation. In 2017, he co-created the show *Big Mouth*, which is on Netflix. It's a hit comedy that's basically about puberty. There's a group of teens in upstate New York. They're really going through it. There are hormone monsters. They're the ones who cause puberty. Then, friends and family who have to live with pubescent teens. It's a little bit like *Inside Out* if, um—I don't know, I guess if Nick Kroll made *Inside Out*.

[00:02:13] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:02:15] **Clip:**

Nick (*Big Mouth*): Oh! (*Hurriedly.*) Hey, Olivia. You wanna get a drink or something? I think they have La Croix. It's only the coconut kind, which is a little gross, but it's still kind of—

Olivia: (*Interrupting.*) Nnnno. Sorry. Dylan.

Nick: Oh, who? I thought we were going to this dance like together?

Olivia: No?! No. (*Pityingly.*) Nooooo.

Dylan: Sorry, bro. She wants a real man. Ninth grade. Top of the food chain.

[00:02:34] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:02:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Last year, I talked with Nick about his new show in the same universe as *Big Mouth*. It's called *Human Resources*. That show is about the same monsters and their workplace, along with the adult feelings that they represent. The show just released its second season on Netflix. It features the voice talents of folks like Aidy Bryant, Rosie Perez, Thandie Newton, Maria Bamford, and many, many others.

And *Human Resources*, like *Big Mouth*, is very, very weird and more than a little bit crass.

[00:03:09] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:03:10] **Clip:**

Tyler (*Human Resources*): Guys! Break room for birthday caaake!

(*Door creaks.*)

Shhh! He's coming!

Connie: C'mon, Maury! The meeting I told you about, which is very real, is happening here! In the break room!

Maury: I don't know why we'd be having a meeting in the break room, but I do believe you.

Everyone: (*Overlapping and out of key.*) Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday—

Maury: (*Screaming.*) No, no, no! Shut the [censored] up! I don't want a birthday cake!

Tyler: But Maury, it's a cookie cake! Not a regular cake! It's cookie cake! I'll explain. It's basically cookies, just mushied into a cake shape!

Maury: (*Growls.*) Tyler, if you say the words "cookie" or "cake" one more time, I'll mushie you into a dead shape! Ugh!

Connie: (*Censor beep*), Maury, what the hell?!

Tyler: You think that's gonna stop me from eating cookie cake?!

[00:03:52] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:03:53] **Jesse Thorn:** Nick Kroll, welcome back to *Bullseye*. It's nice to see you.

[00:03:56] **Nick Kroll:** Nice to see you as well.

[00:03:57] **Jesse Thorn:** I see that you've expanded your—you've expanded your empire of our most disgusting and horrible feelings and bodily functions beyond puberty, here. (*Chuckling.*) You're like—

[00:04:12] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah, it's a—yeah, my empire of dirt, I guess we could call it, to quote, Nine Inch Nails. I don't know if that is the line. Is it that song? I don't know. I know weirdly the Johnny Cash version of it better than I know the—anyway. Yes, I am—there are so many more disgusting emotions for us to explore, that it felt necessary to do so.

[00:04:38] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, you keep expanding the palette of *Big Mouth* with like new characters and new sort of big subjects (*laughing*) of horrible, adolescent discomfort. And just at a certain point you're like, "Oh, let's, let's get involved in adult shame here."

[00:04:56] **Nick Kroll:** Yes. (*Chuckles.*) Yeah. I think, you know, we—you know, in *Big Mouth* it was—it's always been through the lens of puberty. And each season just about, there's a new character or a creature that is anthropomorphizing—whether it's the Shame Wizard in season two or Tito the Anxiety Mosquito in season—I think in season four. And in season five of *Big Mouth*, we introduced love bugs and hate worms, which are two halves—heads of the same coin.

And in doing so—in addition to the other—you know, the hormone monsters have been there since the beginning, we realized at the end of season two we did this episode where the kids go up into the—what we call—where the hormone monsters work, and we see their workplace. And that's where we got a glimpse at the ambition gremlins and DNApes and all these other characters. And as we continued to develop the show, I think we realized that that world was super rich. And as we build stories for *Big Mouth* and it's—you know, it's a show about kids going through puberty, and unless the story really has a focus on adolescents or

puberty—there are great stories that we wanted to tell, stories that are interesting to us that we wanted to tell, that just didn't fit inside that space.

So, we created *Human Resources*, which is in the workplace of the monsters and creatures, and it allows us to talk about all the other—the myriad of human experiences and tell a lot of different kinds of stories that you just can't tell through the lens of 13-year-old kids going through puberty.

[00:06:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you already talk to other people about the discomforts of puberty before you started making *Big Mouth*?

[00:06:44] **Nick Kroll:** I'm trying to think. You know, I think when my partners Andrew Goldberg and Mark Levin and Jen Flackett, they approached me with this idea. Andrew Goldberg and I have been friends since childhood, and they approached me with a show about kids going through puberty. And specifically, Andrew and I's experience in that. It felt immediately like, “Oh, yep. That—this makes sense.” I mean, I had done—the first thing I ever did was a book called *Bar Mitzvah Disco*, with Roger Bennett and Jules Shell. I think I may have spoken to you about that many, many years ago.

[00:07:15] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I think I interviewed you on that show, and I had forgotten completely until this second! But I think I interviewed you about that on my college radio show.

[00:07:24] **Nick Kroll:** I believe so! And so—so, that was, you know—that was the first thing I kind of did almost that—official like thing that got made. So, I've been sort of looking at that period of time of adolescence and the awkwardness of that time I guess the majority of my professional career. And that time was, I think as for all of us, very formative. It's foundational going through puberty, and we carry so much of what happened to us in that myriad of time to the rest of our lives. So, it became incredibly important to—it was a very important time in my—the formation of who I am.

And yet, now doing *Human Resources*, there are just—I mean, it's just like—the first episode is about a woman giving birth and not immediately falling in love with her child. Our co-creator—so, it's me and Andrew and Mark and Jen. And then, we brought Kelly Galuska, who's one of the senior writers on *Big Mouth* in to write the show. And she just had a baby. She didn't have the feeling of our character in the show—of not—but it's not an uncommon thing. You're have this baby and then it's thrust on you. And whether you're the mother or the father, it's like you're—it's assumed that you're gonna be madly in love with this child that you've never laid eyes on before. Oftentimes you are, but oftentimes there's a lot of other factors that go into birth that make it hard to immediately be like, “Oh my God, I've never loved anything more.”

And so, it felt like an interesting experience to be the first episode of what that experience is. Now, the other difference between *Human Resources* and *Big Mouth* is our—*Big Mouth* is always told from the perspective of the kids. And it's then—and then, these creatures come in as adding perspective for the kids. Our show, *Human Resources* now, really told from the perspective of the creatures, and the humans are supporting the stories of whatever the creatures are going through.

And so, in this first episode, you have Emmy, who's a love bug voice by Aidy Bryant. And Emmy is being promoted. So, it's like, what's—it's really a story about someone who's got a job who's going—basically, transitioning from an assistant to a non-assistant role. And it's about her learning how to be better at her job. And then, we use this story of a woman giving birth and what's it like for a love bug to try to convince this person you need to love this child right away.

[00:09:51] **Jesse Thorn:** The question, Nick, was: do you actually talk to other—did you actually talk to other people about the horrors of adolescence before it was your job?

[00:10:00] **Nick Kroll:** Thank you for keeping me on-message. I did; I talked to a lot of people. We talked about it in the room, obviously, with other writers. We talked about it with kids. We would—we had—we've had a number of, at the time—now it feels weird saying Skypes, now that we live in a, a post-Skype Zoom world. But we would Skype with this woman sex education expert, Shafia Zaloom, up in the Bay Area, and her students, and we would talk to them about stuff around puberty and adolescence. As opposed to just like nostalgically looking back like you and I or with other writers. We were definitely—it was important—

[00:10:41] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckling.*) I have a lot of fond nostalgia for wondering why there were lumps in my breasts?! That happened to me. I was, “What?!”

[00:10:48] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah. Knotty—in your nipples or in your breasts?

[00:10:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Like in my nipples, yeah. What the—?!

[00:10:53] **Nick Kroll:** I was—I had my eyes out. My mom told me that that was a secondary sex characteristic, and I was a late bloomer, and so I was looking for the boys with engorged nipples. ‘Cause I was like, “They’re going through puberty.” And I was like waiting for my nipples to be knotted.

[00:11:11] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) That’s horrible! “Do I have cancer?” I thought to myself. And I had full “your body's changing” education. It just never mention that one!

[00:11:20] **Nick Kroll:** No, it's a weird one they don't really throw out there to you.

[00:11:24] **Jesse Thorn:** So much more to get into with Nick Kroll. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:11:31] **Music:** Thumpy, upbeat synth.

[00:11:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us now, I am talking with Nick Kroll. He's an actor and a comedian. He created the sketch comedy series *Kroll Show*, on Comedy Central. He and his friend, John Mulaney, also created the Broadway show *Oh, Hello*.

Lately, Kroll has been doing a lot of animation work. He co-created the show *Big Mouth* on Netflix, which is about puberty and the literalized monsters who cause it. And he also created a spinoff of that show, called *Human Resources*. That just released its second season on Netflix.

So, the first time I interviewed you was 20 years ago apparently. And—

[00:12:17] **Nick Kroll:** (*Chuckles.*) 2005, I think we put the book out. Something like that.

[00:12:19] **Jesse Thorn:** And in that time, I have seen the kinds of—the kinds of comedy that you have done change a lot. You know, you rose to prominence doing like big, broad characters with silly voices that were often like a guy you saw on the subway and heard him say a sentence and thought like, “Well, what if I talked in that funny voice?”

(*Nick confirms.*)

They were very far from you. They were not always dudes. They were—you were often performing transracially. Like, it was the biggest, furthest things from you you could get a hold of and making them insane.

(*Nick agrees.*)

And you know, *Big Mouth* is a change from that, but it's still very retrospective. And in *Human Resources*, you actually maybe have to engage with the person that you are.

(*Nick laughs and agrees.*)

Is that a little scary?

[00:13:22] **Nick Kroll:** I've had a lot of practice now working on *Big Mouth*, and then now doing a lot more standup, I've been torn—I'm really inspired by the more autobiographical elements of *Big Mouth* and learned to be more personally vulnerable and personally self-revealing that standup—my standup has started to reflect that more than when you started interviewing me and I was much more comfortable on stage.

I mean, I think I had access to being on stage more than I then had access to being—making videos and then making like *Kroll Show* broad characters, which I loved playing. And I don't know—I wanna say that it was more—it's a personal evolution, versus the realities of culture shifting, where there are many characters that I would do 10 years ago that I would never do today, that are—I'm like—that I think, you know, for many reasons.

And I think as culture evolves and where we are with comedy right now—and I think—but I think more of that has been like, as you were, it's more been a reflection of me being like—it was scary to reveal myself for many years. And it's more—it was fun to do these characters, but over time it's been like, “No, I think ultimately I gotta start talking about myself and my experience and try to find what's interesting about that.” And it happens to have coincided

with a thing where it's been—it's more complicated for me as like a straight, cis, hetero, White male to play characters that are very far away from what my experience has been. Animation has been a beautiful, transitional place for me to do that, because—you know, *Big Mouth* has been—is a loosely autobiographical. And then, the characters that I play around that are characters that I can sort of jump into and that aren't—that are not myself, but some extension of myself in some way. And so, that's been a wonderful way to do that. You know? I think it's a personal evolution. I don't know how many comedians work this way or not, but I definitely think it's been very rewarding and valuable for me, personally—just in my own, let's call it artistic journey, to be like, “Oh, I guess I should explore my myself.” (*Laughs.*)

And not just—and hopefully not in a narcissistic way, but in like a way that's like, “Oh, if I'm gonna be able to play this character that's completely different than me, I should be able to talk and make fun of myself in the same way.”

[00:16:07] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you think you were worried about how people would receive you-you when you started?

[00:16:16] **Nick Kroll:** No, I think it's a little—at least for me, it was always safer to be like this person that I have a broad sketch of that I saw on the subway or that I listened to on the radio or that I like dealt with at a—you know, in a publicity like junket. It was easier to be like, “Oh. Oh, well this—” Like, you know, like, what was Publicity Liz then becomes Lola. It's like, “Oh, this woman who like sips her smoothies out of a big sippy cup and like, you know, has a partner that—” Whatever, it's like I can draw a very quick and broad sketch about that person and have a quick beat on what I think their perspective on the world is. When it came to myself, it was like, “Well, I don't know what my perspective on the world is,” ‘cause I know every single element to my own personality to make it harder to boil that personality down to a digestible like thumbnail or soundbite like it is when you're playing a broad character. And then, there's also just the feeling of like the fear of revealing your vulnerabilities. And like, what is that? You know, it's a—at least for me.

I mean, I think everyone's different. I think every—but there are plenty of standups who are like, “No, I have my perspective on the world. That's what I wanna share with the world.” For me, I was like I don't think I know if I care about my perspective; I don't know if people will care about my perspective. Or I've wanted to keep that private. I've wanted to keep myself separate. I wanted to keep like a distance between Nick Kroll, the human being, and Nick Kroll, the artist. And I don't wanna let the public, an audience, into my personal—that's—it's protective. It's protective.

[00:17:56] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I think that—I think especially in standup, which you've done tons of, both including and not including character work—there is this thing that you, you know, if you're gonna play clubs especially, you have to kind of identify who you are and what kind of thing you are going to be presenting within 10 seconds of getting on stage. The classic, “I know what you're thinking, so-and-so and such-and-such had a baby,” opening line, right? You need to give the audience a context for them to receive you. And I think when your identity categories include straight, White dude—you're Jewish, but you know, Judaism, a category of Whiteness in the United States.

(*Nick agrees.*)

So, straight, White dude, affluent background. Like, you're walking on stage with something that is indistinctive—unless you're gonna do rich guy jokes—indistinctive to the audience. And also, like completely—you know, completely hegemonic. So, like something that people are, if anything, going to resent a little.

(Nick agrees.)

(Chuckling.) You know what I mean? And so, I think a lot of people who are in that position get really good at doing something that is either universal or something that is abstract. Because it's hard for them to figure out how to put over their own specifics, 'cause maybe they don't even—because they're not so different, they don't think of their own difference. Because they're not so different from power, they don't think of their own difference.

[00:19:38] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah, I mean I don't think I was thinking—for sure was not thinking about that when I started, and I think it's only in the last few years that like the indistinguishableness of like White, straight male vibes—like no straight, White men were thinking about that in comedy five—even five years ago, of being like, “Wait, my—I am indistinguishable, and that is not a win for me.” Like, I just don't think we—nobody was thinking about that. It was—you know, I think I was protecting a little bit of like—coming from privilege, for sure I was not like, “Let me focus on this.” Except, you know, on *Kroll Show*, like there's—one of the main tent poles was like rich (*censor beep*), you know what I mean?

I was like, “I'm not hiding. Do—watch one interview, I'll tell you where I came from.” You know what I mean? But I also was like, “I don't think that's terribly relatable.” So, my standup now has become—but my standup has now become more of like, here's—you know, I'm like interested in birth order. Like, where do you fall in your birth order? I think that's—I had that experience. Everyone has that experience, whether you're straight or trans or Mexican or Jewish or, you know, Persian. It doesn't matter. Everybody has birth order. Everybody's dealing with that. Here's my—here's my way into that. I hope you can join me in that journey.

I had a child. What's—here's my way into that. Like, you were a child, or you were having a child or you're dating someone. Like, I had my heart broken. Like, all that stuff, like I think that's the key as artists is like, “How do we find our way in that is specifically our experience? But hopefully, find—in our specificity, that I'm finding some universality for people to attach their experience to connect to what I'm saying.

[00:21:33] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I was thinking of John Mulaney, with whom you've worked for decades. And when I—the first time I saw Mulaney was in New York at a club called Comix. It doesn't exist anymore.

[00:21:45] **Nick Kroll:** Sure. With an X? Funny.

[00:21:47] **Jesse Thorn:** With an X. Um, in the meat packing district, which booked a lot of great comics for being a club called Comix with an X in the meat packing district, and—maybe why they're not open anymore. But I saw Mulaney do a headlining set, and it was some of the best jokes I had ever seen in my life. He was 24 years old or 25 years old. Some

of the best jokes I'd ever seen in my life, and perhaps the most abstract standup comedy set I'd ever seen. Like, truly just doing jokes. Not like in this sense of—you know, not like Steven Wright. Not like jokes in that form, but like here's some big, diffuse ideas with some really perfect specifics and really like not about him particularly at all.

(Nick agrees.)

And you know, if you watch a special that he put out three/four years ago, it is the same perfect jokes, but it's very much about him and, you know, very much about his—who he is in the world. Which, you know, takes some time to—takes some time to get to.

[00:22:56] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah, some people are great at it right off the bat. Some people—and I don't know if everyone ends up there, but I think people are—and I don't know if it's a function of how culture works now, of whether—you know, with podcasts, with—there's so many forms of personal revelation for people. But I think audiences are—audiences do crave that intimacy.

And I think artists are trying to figure out how to like bring intimacy and relevance to what they're saying. And I think that oftentimes comes with very personalized material in a way that—you know. And I don't know if that's like the natural evolution of a standup or an artist or comedian, or if it's just like—or if that's just like where we are going generally culturally or not. I don't know.

[00:23:54] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll wrap up with Nick Kroll after a quick break. Back in a minute. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:24:04] **Promo:**

Music: Plucky orchestral music.

Mark Gagliardi: What is up, people of the world? Do you have an argument that you keep having with your friends and you just can't seem to settle it, and you're sitting there arguing about whether it's *Star Trek* or *Star Wars*? Or you can't decide what is the best nut! Or can't agree on what is the best cheese.

Hal Lublin: Stop doing that. Listen to *We Got This with Mark and Hal*, only on MaxFun.

Mark: Your topics asked and answered objectively, definitively, for all time.

Hal: So, don't worry, everybody!

Mark & Hal: *(In unison.)* We got this.

Music: *We got this!*

[00:24:35] **Music:** Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:24:40] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Nick Kroll. He's a comic and the co-creator of the Netflix animated shows *Big Mouth* and *Human Resources*.

Do you think that the fact that you grew up with a dad who, you know, founded a private intelligence firm that became a huge, huge thing that eventually sold for one-point-something billion dollars or something made you hyper-aware of the relationship between the like public narrative of your life and the private narrative of your life and the artistic narrative of your life?

[00:25:19] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah, I mean, I think I grew up—I think because my Dad did something very specific that wasn't like he's a lawyer or he's in finance or like—or a doctor. Like I grew up in a, you know, affluent, upper-middle class area. But even from the beginning, my dad always did something that was interesting and different. It was like, you know, I would say like, “My dad is a private investigator. He doesn't wear a trench coat. He doesn't carry a gun.” Like what everyone thought of as a PI.

[00:25:51] **Jesse Thorn:** He's more of an Encyclopedia Brown type.

[00:25:54] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah. (*Laughs.*) And so, I was slightly aware he was known in certain circles, and so I understood that there was—like, it wasn't famous like someone who's like—you know, like Kate Hudson being like—you know, Goldie Hawn being her mother. It wasn't like that at all. But there was—it wasn't just like, “Oh, he's a standard upper-middle class businessman.” Nor did that—when he sold—you know, I was an adult when he sold the company. I think I was very conscious of—I was conscious of like being from a—you know, having a parent—or both my parents were like, in our community, well known.

So, I was aware of that, and I was aware of that like there's things that are public and things that are private. That you can be known in the community, and then you also have your like—the way your family works and the way that things that are discussed in the house that aren't discussed out in the world. And we all have that on various levels, maybe not because of some specificity to like your parents' occupation. So, I was aware of that, and I think early on there was a lot of me being protective of myself and where I came from, because I was either trying to not be caught up in like the narrative of who my family was or who my dad was or is. And also—and I still have that, you know what I mean? It's like—you know, and wanting to be like, “Well, I made this on my own.” You know what I mean? Of course, I—of course, I benefit from the privilege of my family and the benefits that I had, of being like, “I'm gonna do comedy, and if it doesn't work, I'll be okay.”

That's a massive benefit, which I'm well aware of. But I also think like, you know, that doesn't mean that I was then like—if like—if I couldn't make a group of people in a room laugh, then I wasn't gonna be a comedian. You know? But I found myself protective of—whether protective of it, 'cause I was—my family and my background felt private to me, or 'cause I was like, “This is completely unrelatable to 99% of the people of my audience. Like, this is not gonna be relatable for me to talk about my experience.”

[00:28:11] **Jesse Thorn:** What was something that your—that happened in your family that was like a private narrative and not a public narrative?

[00:28:20] **Nick Kroll:** That you want me to now share publicly? (*Laughs.*)

[00:28:21] **Jesse Thorn:** If there's something—I was about to add if there's something that you would feel comfortable sharing with the—at this time.

[00:28:25] **Nick Kroll:** Oh, (*sighs*) I mean... I mean, the truth is I just didn't—there was very limited amount talked about of what my father did professionally, because it was built around—

[00:28:41] **Jesse Thorn:** Discretion and—yeah.

[00:28:42] **Nick Kroll:** Discretion. So, it was like my—he was hired to investigate—the Kuwaiti government hired him to investigate where Saddam Hussein was hiding his money during the first Gulf War. I was like 13. I don't know. I was 13. So, what do you know about anything that your parents are doing at 13? But it was like that's what we knew. And there was like a cop stationed outside of our house for a while during that period of time. There was not much more discussion beyond that. I wasn't like, "So, Dad, let's talk about the Swiss bank accounts where Saddam's shell company is hiding X, Y, and Z." Or isn't like, you know, "So, you're flying to Kuwait right now?" You know, like there just wasn't a ton of discussion around that. You know. And for everyone's sake. You know?

But I think it also led me to be someone who's like for the—I think for the most part, if you tell me something in confidence, like, yeah, nobody else is gonna hear about it. You know? 'Cause it's like you told me that in confidence.

[00:29:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you ever tag along like Veronica Mars and her dad?

[00:29:51] **Nick Kroll:** (*Chuckles.*) No, I would go on a business trip with him every once in a while. I went—I mean, I remember—but like, it was like to go to Dallas and, you know, it was not very exciting.

[00:30:02] **Jesse Thorn:** It's every boy's dream to go to Dallas.

[00:30:05] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah. (*Chuckles.*) I was a Cowboys fan, so it was—that was fun. Boy, was I crushed when I found out Fort Worth wasn't Dallas.

[00:30:16] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) When you started like having your own television show and stuff, which is—you know, at this point, ten-ish years ago? Something like that.

[00:30:26] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah, literally almost 10 years ago.

[00:30:27] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you think about what it would mean for you to be a celebrity?

[00:30:34] **Nick Kroll:** Um, you know, I've been—I've had such a—

[00:30:37] **Jesse Thorn:** And Nick, I don't want to suggest that you were like, “Wow, I'm Jennifer Aniston now. I'm gonna be—my celebrity narrative is going to be the top one of the world.” But just that you were not going to be somebody that people like recognized because they saw you at Rififi, in New York.

[00:30:56] **Nick Kroll:** Right, right, right, right. My trajectory as a comedian and—

[00:31:02] **Jesse Thorn:** They also love the '90s.

[00:31:04] **Nick Kroll:** They—*(laughs)* yeah, oh my god. I mean, that's the thing is like, you know, my New Year's resolution—I mean, almost to the day right now, my New Year's resolution going into 2002 was to do an open mic. I got the—I got the cajónes to get up and do it I think at the end of January, beginning of February.

So, this is like—I did my first open mic about 20 years ago, to the day. And then, I—within like a year or two was like on *Awesomely Bad '70s Songs* on VH1. And then, I booked commercials, and then I got on, you know, *Best Week Ever* by 2004/2005. And then, I was, you know, popping up in other things and probably was in my first movie in 2006 or '07. And then, was on *Cavemen*. You know, so it's like—it's been such a gradual—my sort of trajectory as a public person has been so incremental and gradual.

I had a point when I was like doing *Kroll Show* and was on *The League* and was dating someone who was like a public personality where I was like, “Oh, this is weird. Like, oh, I now understand the other side of this where you're like, oh, this is—like this thing that I had been—” Because you've interviewed a lot of well-known people, every—any of them who say like, “I got into this 'cause I just wanted to do comedy. I didn't wanna be famous.” They're *(censor beep)* lying to you. A little bit. Maybe 5% of the famous people that you have talked to didn't realize that they were gonna be famous, that that wasn't part of the goal.

I might be weirdly going on a limb here, but they're lying to you.

[00:32:58] **Jesse Thorn:** But I mean, at the very least they're aware that fame is the currency they can gain that will allow them to make the things that they wanna make.

[00:33:07] **Nick Kroll:** Yeah, and I believe many of them, by the time you talk to them, don't want to be famous anymore. They got in. They wanted to do—but like, part of the motivating factor of being a performer, a musician, an actor, comedian, a writer, a podcaster, is for other people to be like, “I know you, and I like what you do.”

There are the occasional people who are like, “I am a true artist who has no sense of my audience. I just want to create things.” And then they become like massively successful, and they're like, “Boy, I had no idea that this was gonna be the end goal of it.” But almost to a person, I guarantee somewhere in them wants to be recognized for their work. Then, it happens.

[00:33:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Or to affect others. I mean—yeah.

[00:33:48] **Nick Kroll:** Yes! Yes, and I mean, I'm saying it in the most cynical version of it, but once you get that, you realize there are incredibly tricky elements to all of that, you know? And it's not a—it's not all fun and games. But it also is! It's wonderful! But it is—I hit a point around then when I was finishing *Kroll Show*—I was on two shows, and it was like—I was like, “Oh, this is—this is not everything it was cracked up to be.”

Which then, like I put everything to bed. I was physically, emotionally exhausted, creatively exhausted. Put everything to bed, and me and John started doing *Oh, Hello* to do—get towards eventually doing the Broadway show. And that's when *Big Mouth* came around, and it was animation. And it was like, “Oh, I'm more than happy to not be on camera shooting a show like nine or ten months of the year. And not be—not have my face on TV much of the time.” I definitely was more than happy to take that.

[00:34:56] **Jesse Thorn:** You have a kid who's about a year old.

(*Nick confirms.*)

How has the experience been different than you expected?

[00:35:06] **Nick Kroll:** Hm. I grew up—I have three siblings. They all have four kids. So, I have 12 nieces and nephews. I'm in my 40s, so are many of my friends. So, I've witnessed and been very close to people who have kids. So, I was aware of everything that was gonna happen for the most part. I think it's that what you can't quite explain or experience until you have your own children is the familiarity. What used to be only internal familiarity, to see that familiarity externalized, where you see another creature, another human being, say something—or not say; I mean he's still one. When you see another creature like smile in a way that you've only understood internally before, to see that external is a real trip, which I guess might be somewhat narcissistic to say and be like, (*dopily*) “I saw someone else do something just like me!” (*Laughs.*) Which is not my point.

I think it's—it's a different kind of love, truthfully. It's like you don't—you know, it's gonna be that. You know it's gonna be that you're gonna experience a new kind of love, and then you have the child and you're like, “Yeah! Yep. I've never—it confirms what I thought, but then I've never felt this way before.” Which is like you love something so different than like when you choose your partner who you love, ‘cause you're like, “Oh, I found my wife, my boyfriend, my girlfriend, whatever.” There's something about having a child where it's just like this, uh... this—it's like a primordial love that I have not experienced before.

[00:36:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Nick, I sure appreciate you taking the time to be on *Bullseye*. It's always great to get to talk to you.

[00:37:02] **Nick Kroll:** Always a pleasure talking to you, Jesse.

[00:37:04] **Jesse Thorn:** Nick Kroll, folks. His animated show *Human Resources* just released its second season on Netflix. Go check it out there.

[00:37:11] **Music:** Playful piano with a steady beat.

[00:37:14] **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. This afternoon here in Los Angeles, it seems to have finally become summer, because it is very hot in my house.

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 them and to their label, Memphis Industries. *Bullseye* is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Follow us in all those places. We share our interviews there.

We hope that you will share our interviews with others. Tell somebody about *Bullseye*. It means a lot to us when you do. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:38:19] **Promo:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)