

[00:00:00] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. It's *Bullseye*. Paul Reubens died last week. He had an incredible life and an amazing career. He was on *The Gong Show* literally dozens of times. He was a legend in the comedy troupe, the Groundlings. He was a gifted actor. But if you know Paul Reubens, it's probably because you know his greatest creation: Pee-Wee Herman.

[00:00:25] **Clip:**

Speaker: Paging Mr. Herman. Mr. Herman, you have a telephone call at the front desk.

(Pee-Wee giggles.)

[00:00:36] **Jesse Thorn:** From MaximumFun.org and NPR, it's *Bullseye*.

[00:00:40] **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.

[00:00:48] **Jesse Thorn:** This week, from the archives, my conversation with Paul Reubens, plus Pee-Wee Herman's conversation with his close personal friend, Charo. That's all coming up on *Bullseye*.

(Music ends.)

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. So, right up top, I just want to say this: Pee-Wee Herman was everything to me. I grew up with divorced parents. They split custody almost exactly 50/50, except that every Friday night I was with my mom. And so, that meant every Saturday morning I was with her too. And every Saturday morning I got up, turned on the tv, and like almost every other kid, I watched the cartoons. And for the most part, Saturday morning cartoons in the late 1980s—we're not talking about art. We're talking about *US Acres*, which I think was a farm where a talking egg lived? Honestly, that's about all I remember about *US Acres*.

While I was watching TV, my mom would be in another room reading or weaving. The Saturday morning stuff, it meant nothing to her. It's not that she was above it, it just didn't mean anything to her. And so, she'd do her own thing... until *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* came on, and then she'd come in, and she'd sit with me. And when somebody on the show said the secret word, she'd scream real loud. We both would. That was for us. That was our thing. Those other shows that I watched on Saturday morning, some of them were awful. Some of them were fine. Probably there were a few that were even kind of good. I mean, maybe *Muppet Babies*? I can't remember. But the playhouse was special.

Look, it's easy to say that Paul Reubens built a world around Pee-Wee Herman, because I mean, he literally did. It's pretty close to a one-set show. Paul Reubens and his friends built it in a warehouse in New York City. But you know, other shows have their own world. *Captain Kangaroo* had its own world. *Sesame Street* has its own world. *Denver the Last Dinosaur* had its own world. But I mean, really, seriously, have you seen *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*? I mean, right now I'm on Wikipedia. I'm looking at the Saturday morning TV lineup from 1990, and

it's the *Smurfs* and *Karate Kid*, the cartoon show, and something called *Captain N: The Game Master*. No disrespect to *ALF Tales* or *ALF: The Animated Series*, which apparently were two different shows, but Pee-Wee Herman was the one who fell from space. When Pee-Wee landed on HBO, he was trying to look up Miss Yvonne's skirt with a mirror on his shoe. It was weird. And by the time he made it to CBS on Saturday mornings, he was almost exactly the same. Completely out of control.

Let me put it this way, my friend's mom told him that he was not allowed to watch *Pee-Wee*. And this is a quote from her: because it was “too weird”. And you know what? I get it! More than anything else I have ever seen, Pee-Wee Herman expressed the extraordinary possibilities of childhood, the absolute madness of childhood joy, the monstrous feelings, the capricious cruelty, the yelling. What I remember from my childhood is identifying with Pee-Wee, laughing with Pee-Wee, sharing secrets with him, making parfaits, but being terrified of Pee-Wee too. Pee-Wee is weird! He's a jerk. He's your friend. He's mad, he's malicious, he's sweet. He's lonely and sad and angry and thrilling and delightful. He's everything all at once, (*chuckling*) or at least in distressingly quick succession.

Wherever Pee-Wee was, there was a wild rumpus. And there I was with him, me and my mom. Of course, now I'm grown up. I'm a parent. Now, I can read the tapestry of camp and irony and satire and sincerity that I could only—that I could only sort of feel as a kid. But those texts that Pee-Wee made, they're no less vivid to me now. I watched *Big Top Pee-Wee* the other day, hadn't seen it since I was a kid. And honestly, I was worried it would—it would be no good with me as a grownup, that it might lose some of the sheen that it had gained in my memory. But nope, it rules. I mean, put on *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* right now. I have seen it 100 times. And on viewing 101, I will laugh out loud a bunch of times.

Besides just being great, how did Pee-Wee shape me? I think it's something about his shamelessness. Not just giving permission to be weird or even encouragement. Not just the feeling that you could make your own way or be different, but the feeling that you should just make your own world, your own crazy world. No permission, no hesitation, just run through the glass. That the greatest feeling in the world was raw, scary joy. I was in this recording studio when my friend Julia texted me. She used to be the producer of this show. She said, Paul Reubens, the creator of Pee-Wee Herman, had died of cancer. So, this show is a tribute to him. Actually, (*chuckles softly*) everything I've done in my career is a tribute to him, but this hour of *Bullseye* is, in particular.

(*Music fades in.*)

Later on, we'll hear a bit of a Pee-Wee Herman radio show that Julia and I produced with Paul a few years ago. It turned out to be the last time he ever performed the character. But first an interview with Paul Reubens from our archives.

[00:07:52] **Transition:** Bouncy, cheerful keyboard.

[00:08:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Paul, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so great to have you on the show.

[00:08:05] **Paul Reubens:** Oh, thank you so much.

[00:08:06] **Jesse Thorn:** You spent your teenage years in Sarasota, Florida. Which besides being like a—you know, a nice, you know, retirement community type place is also the off-season home of Ringling Brothers.

[00:08:25] **Paul Reubens:** It was at the time I lived there. Yes.

[00:08:29] **Jesse Thorn:** So, where was that like part of your life as a kid and as a teenager, that there was just circus stuff around?

[00:08:38] **Paul Reubens:** Yeah, there was circus stuff everywhere. There was circus stuff—my high school had a circus. I think it's the only high school in the world with a full circus program. And kids that you would have classes with, you know, for all year long that—you wouldn't have any idea that they would be these circus stars. And then you'd go to the Sailor Circus—that's the name of the Sarasota High School Circus, the Sailor Circus—and you'd go to the circus and see like a girl that sat in front of you or a guy who sat off to the side, and they'd be wearing tights, and they'd climb a web and do a full-on flying act or walk a tightrope. It was absolutely incredible.

And when we first moved to Florida, there were circus people everywhere. We were walking around our block in the house we rented when we first moved there. And we, for weeks, had been hearing these explosions all day long and never knew what they were. And we walked by—my whole family was walking a around the block one day, and we heard the explosion, and we saw a man shooting through the sky in between two houses.

(Jesse laughs.)

And we were later to find out it was the Zacchini family, and they were shooting each other out of cannons in the backyard. *(Chuckles.)* And we had heard that for a couple of months and didn't know what it was. My sister and I, our first Halloween, rang a doorbell, and it was the Doll family from the circus—a whole family of little people. And they said, “Come in, come in!” And we went in their house, and everything in their house was miniature and tiny. And it was a weird thing to see as a kid. I'd never seen a little person before. I didn't even know—I mean, I knew it was—I knew it was somebody who was the same size as me, but they were old.

That was—it was a—you could walk down the street or go into a market in Sarasota and go, “Regular person, regular person, circus, regular person, circus.” You could just tell, you know? And so, it was an incredibly exciting place at the time and a cool place to grow up.

[00:10:55] **Jesse Thorn:** You know, for a lot of folks that I talk to for this show, one of the big challenges of their childhood was finding—you know, there was some turning point where they realized that becoming an artist or an entertainer was a real thing that real human beings did. And I imagine that growing up in a place where, you know, there was a shot-out-of-cannons family down the block sort of blows that up. I mean, it's just sort of expected that entertaining is a thing that regular human beings get involved in, even if it's something as weird as that.

[00:11:42] **Paul Reubens:** Kind of. I never thought of it like that. I always thought of it more like there were—I mean, it did—there did seem to be a distinction between people who didn't perform. You know, the circus people, you could tell who they were, but all the rest of the people weren't performers. So, it didn't really—it didn't seem like that to me. It didn't occur to me the way you just put it. I knew I wanted to be an actor from before we moved to Florida. And it was mostly from watching a couple of kid actors that I was obsessed—obsessively jealous of and watching children's TV and *I Love Lucy*. For some reason, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball were like—yeah, that's what I want to do.

[00:12:29] **Jesse Thorn:** What kid actors were you obsessively jealous of?

[00:12:33] **Paul Reubens:** Moochie, who was also known as Kevin Corcoran, who was one of the big Disney stars. He was Toby Tyler, and he was—he co-starred with Hayley Mills in *Pollyanna*, and he was in *Swiss Family Robinson*. I mean, you know, he was the big boy star of my youth and of Disney. And then Ron Howard was the other big one. The two of them just—I would watch those shows or those movies, and I would just be thinking, “Yeah, I could do—you know, I'm just as good as that. I could be as good as that.”

I even wrote Walt Disney a letter when I was a kid (*chuckles*) and said, “You know, I'm just as good if not better than your current kid star, Kevin Corcoran.”

(*They laugh.*)

And waited by the mailbox for a response which never came.

[00:13:26] **Jesse Thorn:** It's funny because one of the storylines in *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* is Pee-Wee essentially stealing the spotlight from a kid actor on the movie lot.

[00:13:42] **Paul Reubens:** ... Yeah.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

I'm not sure what you mean. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:13:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Oh, I just wondered if that ended up in the film partly because of—partly because of that childhood dream of taking the place—taking someone's place in the *Swiss Family Robinson*.

[00:14:02] **Paul Reubens:** You know what, if we got into that, I might have to lay down to like tell you the rest of this stuff.

[00:14:09] **Jesse Thorn:** You trained in the Groundlings in the '70s. And while you were training, one of the first big things that you did in show business was go on *The Gong Show*. And not just go on *The Gong Show* once but go on *The Gong Show* a whole bunch of times. What was the first act that you brought to *The Gong Show*? Do you remember?

[00:14:29] **Paul Reubens:** Oh, absolutely. I was on *The Gong Show* I think 15 times, and you could go on *The Gong Show* more than once if you were in a disguise. Like, you know, it was a game show, and it wasn't rigged or anything, but they did allow some people—like there were—there was sort of a small stable of comedian people who—I mean, I partially was supported by Chuck Barris in *The Gong Show* for a couple of years.

And the first—I'd gone to Boston University for a year before I went to California Institute of the Arts. A few of the people from Boston University I kept in touch with when I moved to California. And then, there was kind of a trickle of those people. They all moved to California. Most of them—a lot of them—you know, if you're an actor and you get out of college, out of acting school, you're pretty much moving to New York or Los Angeles. So, half the people moved to Los Angeles and the other half stayed—went to New York. And I got a call from a girl that I knew very well, one of my friends in Boston, and she said, “One of my best friends who came in the year after you just moved to California, and she wanted to get your number.”

So, I gave her my number, and this girl called me. And she said, “I just was on *The Gong Show*, and I joined the union. And I almost won. And if I'd won, I would've made \$500.” And it was I think \$238 to appear on the show, a union scale wage. And she said, “I want to do another act. And I was thinking maybe we could do some kind of a duo act.” So, her name was Charlotte McGinnis, and she and I became a duo act called Betty and Eddie. And we wrote an act specifically for *The Gong Show*. And we went on, and we did it, and we won. And I joined AFTRA—the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. And that allowed me, a year later, to join the Screen Actors Guild. It was a way in on something that was very difficult to do. A lot of people didn't have those opportunities, and I made money. We won money, and then I got all kinds of booby prizes. There were all kinds of things that they would send you—and when the shows would rerun, they would send you a residual check and another prize.

So, I would—once in a while, I'd get like a—one time I got a shrimp. I got a—what was it? It was some kind of cooker that came with a certificate for shrimp burgers.

(Jesse laughs.)

And I got a bowling ball. The Groundlings green room, which didn't exist at a certain point, but one day we decided we were gonna have a green room. And we cleared a bunch of space backstage to make it. And then I had two giant containers of green textured paint that I won on *The Gong Show*. And for many years, the green room in the Groundlings was courtesy of *The Gong Show*.

[00:17:50] **Jesse Thorn:** I wanna play a clip of you on *The Gong Show*, and this is you in a doubles Act with John Paragon, who ended up becoming one of your collaborators on the *Pee-Wee Herman Show* and on *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*. He played Jambi and also Terry and I think co-wrote the *Pee-Wee Herman Show* with you, if I'm remembering correctly. And this doubles act is called Suave and Debonair. Let's take a listen.

[00:18:15] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:18:16] **Clip:**

(Thunderous applause.)

Chuck Barris: Alright, okay. Ladies and gentlemen, here we go. Let us welcome please, Suave and Debonair! Do it!

(The audience cheers.)

Music: Upbeat, slightly chaotic piano. Paul Reubens and John Paragon sing along.

John & Paul:

When we go out, people stop and stare

Because we're such a groovy pair

We're really suave and debonair

John:

We'll put our coats across a puddle so you can cross it

Paul:

We'll cut our hair for you to look like Farrah Fawcett

John:

We can make you laugh just like a hyena

Paul:

We hook our own caviar down at the marina

John & Paul:

We're the kind of guys you'd like to take home to your mother

When you try one of us, you'll have to try the other

Watch the toes!

John:

We'll give you the top billing

Paul:

Our baked Alaska's chilling

John:

We'll take you if you're willing

Paul:

Oh, just the thought is thrilling!

John & Paul:

We're really, we're really

We're really suave and debonair!

(Cheers and applause.)

[00:19:26] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:19:27] **Jesse Thorn:** I'll tell you what's really interesting to me about the relationship between *Pee-Wee Herman* and *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* and *The Gong Show* and some of the stuff that you did on *The Gong Show*—it's that it's this kind of '50s and '60s culture that—you know, in the '70s and '80s was often being sent up. And what you're doing there and what you did with *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* isn't really a sendup. It's more like a what if we did that thing that was so, so straight in its time and just bent it around the corner a little bit—like made it a tribute but a really weird tribute. I mean, I wonder if that was your intent or something that you were aware of.

[00:20:21] **Paul Reubens:** No. You know what? I was with you right up until the very, very last thing you said. Like, I never, like—I mean, I wouldn't try to like get into a debate with you about whether it's weird or not. Like I've certainly heard the word weird applied to both the show and me and lots of other uses of that. But I never look at it like that. I never—we never tried to be, you know, a kid show but weird. You know? It just—it's funny, I was just talking to some people who have a lounge—a fake lounge act—and they were saying, you know, “We're starting to become what we parodied.” And I had just seen their act, and I didn't feel like that at all! I feel like it's really about the commitment. You know?

Like, I always feel like my commitment to *Pee-Wee Herman*—I don't mean that the way it came out. I mean, the way—the concentration and the commitment required to be that character and to sort of stay in that character just makes it real to me. I guess I do agree it was an homage in many ways. I mean, I loved all these kid shows that influenced me, and I tried

to sort of mix ingredients from all of them into what I wound up doing. So, it's kind of a throwback, and it has lots of homage sort of elements to it. But I always considered it a full-on real kids' show, even though it had all this innuendo and adult humor in it. We did the same show in matinees for kids. So, I always felt like—I took a lot of pride in being able to kind of figure out ways to do stuff that could be seen by kids and grownups and two different audiences might pull two different things out of it, but it could be seen by the same group.

[00:22:20] **Jesse Thorn:** I think it makes perfect sense. I mean, it seems like in order to be arch or to parody, you have to have a certain amount of remove from what you're doing. And it sounds like you wanted Pee-Wee to be something that you could invest your whole—you know, you whole heart into.

[00:22:39] **Paul Reubens:** Yeah. It's interesting to hear you say that. 'Cause I—the hair on the back of my neck just stood up when you said that a little bit, although it's very short. It was just because I don't—yeah, I never viewed it like that. I always viewed it as, you know, I'm just in it, in the moment. And I love what I'm doing. So, I don't know. I don't know. It's hard to describe it, I'm realizing.

[00:23:04] **Jesse Thorn:** We've gotta go to a quick break. When we come back, we'll continue our tribute to the late Paul Reubens. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:23:15] **Promo:**

Music: Orchestral music.

Benjamin Partridge: You, there. Have you considered listening to the *Beef and Dairy Network*, an award-winning comedy show in the form of a newsletter podcast for the beef and dairy industries? Well, maybe you should. And why don't you try our most recent episode, episode 99, which features American man, Paul F. Tompkins, playing Queen Elizabeth II's former personal beef sommelier.

Paul F. Tompkins: Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, and I laying on the floor of her bedroom, just helplessly laughing 'til tears run down our faces, as corgis are jumping on us, over us, licking us. That is a day that I will treasure forever until I'm executed.

Benjamin Partridge: Find the show at MaximumFun.org.

Paul F. Tompkins: I hope there's beef in heaven.

(Music fades out.)

[00:23:52] **Transition:** Chiming, bouncy synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:23:57] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're paying tribute to Paul Reubens. He was the creator and star of *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*, *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, and a monumental influence to countless artists, creators, and comedians. Paul

Reubens died July 31st of this year. He was 70 years old. In 2014, I was lucky enough to get to talk to Reubens about his life and about the development of Pee-Wee Herman. Let's get back into the rest of our conversation.

I wanna play a clip from the *Pee-Wee Herman Show*. This is from the film version that ended up on home box office. Um, yeah. It was a filmed version of the show that you had done in various theaters in LA. In this scene, a character named Mail Man Mike has given you, as Pee-Wee, a package to bring to Jambi. And Jambi, for those folks who don't remember, by way of explanation is a floating head inside of a box, which is important to the scene.

[00:25:01] **Paul Reubens:** And also, to know he's a genie.

[00:25:02] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah.

[00:25:02] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:25:04] **Clip:**

(The audience laughs with scattered applause.)

Mail Man Mike (*The Pee-Wee Herman Show*): Oh! What do you know! Jambi's hands finally got here.

(Two thumps.)

Jambi: Hands!? Did somebody say haaands?

Mike: Sure did, Jambi.

Jambi: Well, hand 'em over!

(The audience and Mike laugh.)

Mike: Oh, gee, Pee-Wee, I'm a little late for my break. Would you mind delivering these for me?

Pee-Wee: *(Excited.)* Would I?! WOULD I?!

Pee-Wee & Mike: *(Singing in unison.)* Hair lip, hair lip!

Mike: Hey, Jambi, enjoy those hands, buddy.

Jambi: Hey, thanks, blondie!

Pee-Wee: Bye, Mail Man Mike!

Mike: Bye-bye!

Pee-Wee: Hey, look, Jambi! Here's your hands! I better open them for you 'cause you don't have them yet! (*Giggles.*)

Jambi: Right. Heeey, coooool! Caucasian. I sure hope they work, Pee-Wee. The picture in the catalogue was so small.

Pee-Wee: Well, check 'em out, Jambi!

Jambi: Yeah, I will. I've had something I've wanted to do for a long time.

(*The audience titters.*)

[00:25:49] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:25:51] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) When did you—when did you decide that Pee-Wee, the character, would live outside of the world of the performances and that Paul Reubens, the actor, would become—you know—pretty much invisible?

[00:26:12] **Paul Reubens:** Kind of right around the time I really started to focus on Pee-Wee I think was when that happened. I don't have a really strong recollection to the answer, but I'm gonna guess that that that happened around the time I did not get on *Saturday Night Live*, and I panicked. 'Cause I, at that point, was sort of getting written about and treated as an up-and-comer. You know, I was in like little blurbs of, you know, a little box in the lower righthand corner of a magazine page or something, you know. An up-and-comer person or a spotlight on or somebody to keep your eye on. And then, I was kind of a shoo-in, according to some people, to be on the first season of *SNL* that was an all-new cast, and the only season Lorne Michaels was not involved in. It was the season of Joe Piscopo and Eddie Murphy. And I was flown to New York, and there were 22 finalists. And I walked into the room.

Prior to walking in the room, people were pulling me aside and saying, “You should get an apartment. They never tell you till the last minute.” And I walked in the room, and someone pulled me aside of the room and said, “That guy over there is the producer's best friend.” And I looked at the guy, and it was Gilbert Godfried, and I thought, “There's no way it's gonna be me and Gilbert Godfried. We're the two like nerd guys in this room. It's me or him.” And I just had this strong feeling I wasn't gonna get it. I got on a plane and flew back to Los Angeles, and on the way to Los Angeles, I had kind of an epiphany. And I just thought I better make something happen for myself, or I'm gonna go directly from this up-and-comer category to, you know, “Hey, remember me? The up-and-comer guy that never happened?”

So, I felt like I needed to take some kind of control, and I decided I was gonna produce a stage show. And what I called at the time a live pilot, 'cause I didn't have any way at all in the universe to get a pilot deal to make a television pilot. But I had, you know, a desire to work on television. So, I landed in LAX and got on a payphone at the curb and called my parents and borrowed \$5,000. And probably six or eight days later, I had 15 or 20 people working on the beginning of the *Pee-Wee Herman Show*. Phil Hartman and I—Phil was one of my closest

friends in the Groundlings. And Phil and I met and talked about a kids' show format and him coming up with a salty sea captain character. I had had a salty sea captain local show in Florida growing up, and I think that may have been the beginning of where that character came from, Captain Carl.

And we, probably the second night of a meeting, wrote a complete—wrote the scene between Pee-Wee and Captain Carl that remained in through the development of the *Pee-Wee Herman Show*. And then, we wrote the show.

[00:29:53] **Jesse Thorn:** I imagine that part of appearing in public and doing interviews and stuff as Pee-Wee was because it made Pee-Wee, you know, real and gave a kind of frisson to Pee-Wee as a character.

[00:30:09] **Paul Reubens:** Oh, you know, you asked me that a minute ago, and I didn't really answer that. You're asking me the same thing in a different way, I think. Which is I was very influenced by conceptual and performance art, and I always felt like Pee-Wee Herman had some strong elements of that. And what made it even more interesting to me is that no one knew that except me. I always felt like it was conceptual art, but no one knew it, because I went out of my way to make people feel like Pee-Wee was a real person. So, when you're talking about doing interviews, it was—I don't know where I came up with this or why I did it. It was just something that just was a gut feeling, I think, that Pee-Wee Herman just worked way better as a real person. That if you were going, (*cynically*) “Oh, that's an actor,” it was very different than going, “Wow, that—you know, who in the heck is that?”

One of my earliest things I did with Pee-Wee Herman is I went on a cattle call audition for *The Dating Game*.

[00:31:11] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:31:12] **Clip:**

Speaker: Bachelor number two, I can't stand it when a guy's too easy. How are you gonna make things tough for me?

Pee-Wee: Well, for one thing, I'm gonna wear a body suit underneath my clothes.

(*Laughter.*)

[00:31:22] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:31:23] **Paul Reuben:** I think that's probably had something to do with the idea of staying in character all the time. Because to go out and go to an audition and walk in with that suit and bow tie and my hair slicked back and white shoes and talk in that voice. And, you know, they said, “Sit down over here, and please fill out this form.” And the form was a, you know, “What are your hobbies?” That kind of thing. And I would write down, “I enjoy cleaning my room and going to the library,” and all this, you know, nerdy, dorky stuff. And I could just

tell that the people thought I was real and were, you know, acting one way to me but thinking something else inside. And I knew I was gonna get on the show before I got home.

[00:32:08] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:32:10] **Clip:**

(Applause.)

Speaker: Bachelor number two, what's your best-used line for your come-on to any girl in a bar?

(The audience giggles.)

Pee-Wee: Hi, baby, you know I—I might not be old enough to drink, but you look like you're old enough to drink—

Speaker: *(Interrupting.)* Boy, I'm running away right now!

(Laughter.)

[00:32:29] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:32:30] **Paul Reubens:** That was a very powerful day on a lot of levels, because I realized kind of how powerful Pee-Wee Herman could be. And conceptually I just felt like that sort of cinched me staying in character, I think. Because I spent a whole day doing it. Many, many years ago, I got the dreaded phone call that most actors would not wanna get, which is, "Would you like to be on *The Surreal Life*?" And I got—I'm gonna, in full disclosure, tell you I got that phone call three years in a row. *(Chuckles.)* And I always said no immediately, because to me it was always kind of an acknowledgement of somewhere you were in your career that I didn't wanna acknowledge. But the third year that I got that call, I knew somehow part of the cast had already been announced. And I actually said to the producers of the show, "If you guys would let me do it as Pee-Wee Herman and stay in character the entire time and guarantee that my roommate would be Jose Canseco—"

(Jesse chortles.)

Who was already announced on the show. "I'll do it." Because I felt like I knew I could really score big like that. I knew I could be really funny. I knew I could stay in character for six or eight weeks, you know, while the cameras were rolling. And I knew if I was rooming with Jose Canseco, there'd be some comedy. And that was actually—they said no. And so, I never did it. But that was the very beginning of me thinking about a reality show with Pee-Wee Herman, which I almost did a couple years ago. And I still love that idea, because we have so much reality television now that to do a reality television show starring a character that's not real seems very interesting. Because over the years, Pee-Wee Herman's become real in a kind of unreal way.

And I—there were two incidents that shaped what I'm talking about. One is what I just told you about *The Surreal Life*. And the other is four years ago, when I went to New York to do my show on Broadway, I did a full day of running around New York in my Pee-Wee outfit on Foursquare. Which anyone who isn't familiar with Foursquare is a social media platform where you—it's similar to Facebook and Twitter. You check in, and you can see if you go into a restaurant, you could see who else is there and know things about people. And I went all over. I went to 40 locations all over Manhattan, from Spanish Harlem, I rode on the subway. I was downtown. I played basketball on the lower west side. I was everywhere.

And I checked in and told people where I was gonna be, and people met me there and followed me around. And everywhere I went in New York City, people were so—not only warm and supportive and interested and nice, but everyone treated me like I was really Pee-Wee Herman. And I was walking down the street up in Harlem by the Apollo Theater, not to namedrop, and a woman walked up to me on the sidewalk and went, “Pee-Wee, baby, how are you doing? What are you doing here, honey?”

And I turned around. I heard people screaming my name. I looked—I turned around from this woman and there was a—behind me was a construction site, and there were about 40 construction workers on the third floor all screaming down at me. I made friends on the subway. I mean, everywhere I went, people were so nice and told me such interesting things and would say things to me like, “Pee-Wee, this is my wife. She's an incredible Italian cook. Would you ever consider coming over for dinner to our house?” And I kept thinking—and I had a camera crew with me all day, and I kept thinking, “Boy, this is great footage we're getting of people.” And I started to think, you know, if I took a camera crew and accepted some of these invitations I get—like go to dinner, go to this wedding, go to my reunion, come visit us out on this dude ranch—that I had a reality series. And I was very excited about it. And then, I couldn't get anyone else to be as excited as I was. So, it didn't really happen.

[00:37:06] **Jesse Thorn:** I gotta tell you that I—you know, I went to see the *Pee-Wee Herman Show* in Los Angeles in 2010 or something. And because I was among the group of people who had bought tickets for it before it was moved into a larger theater, you were nice enough to come out—

[00:37:25] **Paul Reubens:** (*Laughs.*) I know what you're gonna say.

[00:37:26] **Jesse Thorn:** You were nice enough to come out and do a Q&A after the show. And you know, watching that show, I—you know, I love the show and laughed and just had a great time. And I also was moved to tears by my connection with this character. And I get the impression that when you sort of started to take steps to bring Pee-Wee back into public and to come back into the public eye yourself, you know, about—I guess about 10 years ago now, maybe a little bit more than that—that maybe you didn't already know about how much that character changed people's lives and how much it meant to people emotionally, above and beyond just being something fun like—you know, uh, whatever—Mr. T or something like that.

[00:38:39] **Paul Reubens:** Well. Now, you're gonna make—you're gonna make me emotional! Um, yeah, you're right. I didn't know that. So, that was a really interesting thing to learn. And you could have way worse problems than that. That was a cool—that was a really

cool thing to find out. It was something that people told me once in a while, back in the day, as we like to say now. It was something I heard, you know, occasionally. But I was so busy doing it all and writing and that kind of stuff that I did. I wasn't really out and about much. So, I never met kids. I never met grownups, parents. I never got all that feedback until way later. And you're right, when it start—when I started to—when I decided to put that suit back on, I did really start to hear a lot of people talking about this—what you just said, and how it affected them, and people have talked to me about their relationship with their parents. And that's always—that's been a really incredible, interesting, very moving, satisfying thing for me.

I had one kid—one guy came up to me a couple years ago, and said to me, “My parents were divorced, and I was with my father on the weekends. And the only thing we really had in common, the only time we ever connected at all—and we connected in a really big way once a week—was watching your show and talking about it afterwards.” And that like made me feel great! I have to say, what you're talking—this subject is—I don't know if you can hear my voice quivering. It does make me kind of emotional, but in a really great way. You know, I mean, it's—I mean, god, how lucky can somebody be to have that kind of effect on anybody! You know, much less more than one person. And I'm somebody, when I do go places, I quite often have people come up to me and say, “I'm an artist because of you.” Or you know, something like staggering. Something that, you know, I feel proud about and do and do feel emotional about in a great way.

[00:41:09] **Jesse Thorn:** I think one of the special things about Pee-Wee as a character, especially for kids or for people who feel connected to their childhoods, is that Pee-Wee—*(chuckles)* you know, Pee-Wee is kind of a self-interested jerk a lot of the times.

[00:41:26] **Paul Reuben:** Click.

[00:41:27] **Jesse Thorn:** And he's also sort of a—you know, an open-hearted, wonder-eyed dreamer of the absolute best kind. And that is kind of an essential quality of childhood that rarely gets recognized in children's entertainment. You know, if you're lucky, you might get the wonder.

[00:41:46] **Paul Reubens:** *(Interrupting.)* I'm sorry to—I have to interrupt you and just say one thing, 'cause I think you just clarified something for me that's never been really clear before. Which people always go, “What do you think is the attraction of Pee-Wee Herman? Why do people like Pee-Wee Herman?”

And I always say I have no idea, which is true. And I always go, “I don't wanna think about that, 'cause it's not fun for me.” That takes all the fun out of what I do if I've gotta sort of dissect it very much. And in a kind way, I usually try to say to a journalist like, “That's your job. Like, not my job. If that becomes my job, then I don't want to do it anymore. I don't like picking it apart or trying to figure it out.” But I think you just came up with something very interesting that I never really thought about, is that I think most people have the same qualities you just discussed. Most people are dichotomies. Most people are like really nice, good-hearted and snarky at the same time, I think.

I think if we're really honest with ourselves that we all have those capacities, and I—you're absolutely right. I can't argue at all that Pee-Wee Herman has like this, you know, wonderful heart and is also like totally snarky and selfish. And I wouldn't disagree with you that those are—that those are kid things that we can attribute to kids.

(Chuckling.) But I would also certainly argue—and I don't think you'd argue or anyone listening would. Everyone listening would probably agree that, you know, we don't really grow out of that when we get older—when we become adults and even older adults, we still have all that. I mean, maybe I'm not a good example, 'cause I'm Pee-Wee Herman also. But I find myself all the time as—as myself, as my adult, older self—feeling really righteous and great and sweet. And then, you know, on a dime I am a nightmare and feel snarky and angry and fed up with stuff. So, I think that that's—that may be what people like about Pee-Wee Herman is that that's sort of, you know, worn on the sleeve.

[00:44:02] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Paul, I don't want to take up any more of your time, but I'm so grateful that you took the time to come on *Bullseye*. It was really great to get to talk to you.

[00:44:10] **Paul Reubens:** Oh, thank you so much! I really, really appreciate it, and I appreciate everybody listening to me drone on about myself all this time.

[00:44:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, I appreciate the work that you've done. I certainly wouldn't be the—I certainly wouldn't be the person that I am today if it weren't for your work. So, I thank you for that.

[00:44:32] **Paul Reubens:** Well, I don't know you well enough to know if that's a compliment or not.

(Jesse bursts into laughter.)

But I'm gonna take it that way. *(Laughs.)*

[00:44:38] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I mean like a mixed bag at best. Let's be honest.

[00:44:42] **Transition:** Playful circus music.

[00:44:45] **Jesse Thorn:** My conversation with Paul Reubens from 2014. I honestly could not believe it when Julia Smith emailed me and told me that after years and years and years and years—I mean, at that point, 15?—12/15 years of trying that we had finally booked Paul Reubens, Pee-Wee Herman. And as I remember it, he was—*(chuckling)* he was in a hotel room somewhere. And we had sent a recordist to record his side of the conversation. And the interview kept getting pushed back in five-minute chunks as the recordist tried to get Paul to agree to let him hold the microphone up in his face. He would keep hitting record and putting the mic up, and then Paul would be like, “Aah, get it out of my face! Get it away from me.” *(Laughs.)*

Until finally, he had to record it from behind a mountain of pillows like—I don't know—10 feet away or something. And I don't know, did it matter? We had to do a lot of post-

processing on it to make it sound right, but that's just what Paul's deal was. He was persnickety about that kind of thing, because he had earned it. And it was the persnickety-ness that had made him able to be Pee-Wee Herman, create Pee-Wee Herman—and not just that, but own Pee-Wee Herman through his entire career. And of course, as grumpy and persnickety as he was about having that microphone in his face, he was also extraordinarily patient and graceful and gracious with me in conversation. It was one of those times on this show when I got to do just the very thing that I dreamed of.

(Music ends.)

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. This week, we're looking back on the life and work of Paul Reubens, the creator of Pee-Wee Herman. Maybe you've seen a few episodes of *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*. Maybe you watched *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* or *Big Top Pee-Wee* when you were a kid. They're all great and weird and unforgettable.

A few years back, for a holiday episode of this show, I recorded a tribute to another indispensable part of the Pee-Wee Herman oeuvre: the *Pee-Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special*.

[00:47:22] **Transition:** Jazzy synth with festive jingle bells.

[00:47:26] **Jesse Thorn:** So, I don't have a lot of holiday traditions, personally. I mean, I love Christmas. I used to do it twice a year, once with dad and once with mom. It was great. Two trees, two sets of presents, two bottles of eggnog from Mitchell's Ice Cream. I just don't have a lot of special things that I do now as a grownup.

(Music fades in.)

There is one though. Every year, I make some time for the *Pee-Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special*.

[00:47:50] **Music:** “Pee-Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special theme song” from the *Pee-Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special*.

Oh, it's Christmas in the playhouse

And our hearts are all aglow

As we welcome you to the playhouse

And to Pee-Wee's Christmas special!

[00:48:07] **Jesse Thorn:** The playhouse was a crazy, postmodern version of mid-century America: cowboys and puppets and hipster jazz bows. The perfect place to have a crazy Christmas, something that celebrates warmth and giving and kindness, but is also completely insane. Like ice skating with Little Richard.

[00:48:25] **Clip:**

Pee-Wee: Hi, Little Richard! How's it going?

Little Richard: Hi, Pee-Wee! Woooo!

(A thump.)

Great gusts of murder!

Pee-Wee: Little Richard, are you all right?

Little Richard: Oh, you know me, Pee-Wee. Always falling down, but I get right back up and try again. If at first you don't succeed, you know what they say. You're trying. You're trying. You're trying!

(A thump and a scream.)

Except ice skating! I give up. I quit! *(Blubbing.)*

[00:48:56] **Jesse Thorn:** And Pee-Wee forcing Frankie and Annette Funicello into holiday decoration-making indentured servitude.

[00:49:02] **Clip:**

(Laughter.)

Pee-Wee: Alright! I'm gonna have to separate you two! Now, get back to work. I need 500 of each of those by sundown! Ha-ha! Ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha!

(Melancholy musical stinger.)

Frankie: 500?!

[00:49:15] **Jesse Thorn:** A call from Oprah.

[00:49:16] **Clip:**

Oprah: Hello?

Pee-Wee: *(Disproportionately intense.)* Hello!

Oprah: *(Calmly.)* Pee-Wee, is this you?

Pee-Wee: (*Yelling.*) Who wants to know?!

Oprah: This is Oprah Winfrey! Hi.

Pee-Wee: Hi!

Oprah: I just wanted to say Merry Christmas to you.

Pee-Wee: Merry Christmas, Oprah! I'm gonna have to call you back. I have Dinah Shore on the other line!

(They laugh back and forth.)

[00:49:36] **Jesse Thorn:** There's even a part where a giant crate gets delivered from the North Pole and inside is Grace Jones.

[00:49:42] **Clip:**

Grace: Okay, Pee-Wee.

(Dramatic, booming orchestral stinger.)

Pee-Wee: It's Grace Jones!

Grace: Wait a minute, you're not the president! You're Pee-Wee Herman.

Pee-Wee: Duh!

[00:49:58] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, come on. It's easy to complain about how ridiculous Christmas is. Too commercial, too phony, too religious, not religious enough. But why not just celebrate? The holidays are great! Right the depths of winter, there's some time where we've all agreed to think about what we're grateful for and do a little something nice for each other. We might as well have a few laughs along the way. So, I say thanks, Pee-Wee, for 25 years of fun and friendship. Feliz Navidad.

[00:50:23] **Music:** "Pee-Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special theme song" from the *Pee-Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special*.

Merry Christmas, everybody!

Merry Christmas, everyone!

(Today, it's Christmas)

(Merry, Merry Christmas!)

(Here, it's Christmas)

(Merry, Merry Christmas!)

(Here's, it's Christmas)

(Merry, Merry Christmas!)

[00:50:44] **Sound Effect:** Pee-Wee giggles.

[00:50:46] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll hear the rest of *Bullseye's* tribute to Paul Reubens and Pee-Wee Herman after a quick break. Be right back. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:50:58] **Promo:**

Music: Chiming synth.

Jarrett Hill: Hey there, beautiful people. I'm Jarrett Hill.

Tre'vell Anderson: And I'm Tre'vell Anderson. And we wanna know: have you ever had mixed feelings about the things that you looove?

Jarrett: Ooh, maybe about the things that you hate?

Tre'vell: Then *FANTI* is the show for you. *FANTI* is the podcast for all those complex and complicado conversations about the grey areas in our lives.

Jarrett: You might have conflicting feelings about Kamala Harris or copaganda or interracial friending.

Tre'vell: Mm-hm, mm-hm. That's alright, 'cause we do too. And we get into it every single Thursday. Catch this slay-worthy audio at MaximumFun.org, that's MaximumFun.org/fanti. That's F-A-N-T-I. Come get all this good-good.

Jarrett: Or this great-great.

(Music ends.)

[00:51:38] **Transition:** Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:51:43] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, we're looking back on the life and work of Paul Reubens. Paul was the creator and star of *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*. He played the character of Pee-Wee Herman for over four decades, capturing the hearts and imaginations of millions of children. He died on July 31st, after a

six-year bout with cancer. He was 70. The last thing Paul ever did as Pee-Wee was the *Pee-Wee Herman Radio Hour*.

So, four or five years ago, I got a text message from my friend Nick White, who used to be the editor of this show. He was working at KCRW in Santa Monica, one of the big public radio stations here in LA. And he said, “Gary, the program director is gonna have a meeting with Pee-Wee Herman. And I’m telling him that if they get anything going, you have to be the producer.” (*Laughs.*) And at the time, I just chose not to believe that it was real. Like, I was like nothing’s gonna—this meeting’s not gonna happen. If it happens, they’re not gonna get something going. If they get something going, I’m not gonna get to be the producer.

And I didn’t believe that it was real until—I was gonna say until I sat down in a cafe with Gary and had a meeting with him and told him my ideas for what the show could be, and he said, yes, that sounds good. But even then, I didn’t think it was real. And it turned out that it did happen. It took years and years. I hooked in my friend Julia Smith, who loves Pee-Wee just as much as I do and who used to be the producer of this show back in the day. And she and I worked on this show with Paul for—I mean, I looked at—something like two or three years. (*Chuckles.*) And we came up with an idea for what it could be. Paul really wanted to be a radio DJ. Like, I think that he would’ve been perfectly willing to just go into KCRW and play his favorite songs. But he also wanted to find a way to be Pee-Wee Herman as a guy in his 60s who just didn’t have it in him anymore to put on the makeup and the costume and try and figure out how to act like a nine-year-old boy when he was 65.

And so, we came up with this show where Pee-Wee Herman takes over an hour at KCRW, says he’s gonna play his favorite songs, but all kinds of crazy *Pee-Wee’s Playhouse* things happen too. Like I said, (*chuckling*) this is certainly the longest I’ve ever worked on anything, especially one hour. Because Paul was so monumentally careful about everything, about Pee-Wee Herman—this character that he had created and owned and protected from meddlers for decades. It was like pulling a plow through granite, but the whole time not only was I just thinking, “Gosh, there’s Paul Reubens. He created Pee-Wee Herman, the most important thing to me ever.” But Paul was extraordinarily gracious and charming and delightful, even on round 7,342 of the edits, he was gracious and charming and delightful.

He put my friend who edited the show through so much that he finally had to quit, (*laughing*) and they still like texted each other afterwards. I mean, I don’t know what to tell you about the *Pee-Wee Herman Radio Hour*. You can listen to the whole thing at KCRW.com. As far as I’m concerned, I’ve been working on *Bullseye* for 20 years. I’ve been doing my comedy shows for 15-ish years. If I died tomorrow ‘cause I got hit by a train and the death notice said, “Jesse Thorn: worked on a Pee-Wee Herman thing one time”, I’d be perfectly fine with that. So, I’m gonna play a little bit of it.

Just for context, Pee-Wee Herman is hosting his own radio show. He’s just a sort of radio DJ, but the Playhouse gang are all there—Cherry and Miss Yvonne. And Jack White called in—the real Jack White. At one point, Paul Reubens was just like, “I could ask Jack White to call in. Or like then I could do a thing about Jack White and Jack Black.”

And we’re like, okay, yes! Of course, you should call them! Yes! Please! Do! Of course. (*Chuckles.*)

Anyway, basically the premise is that that Pee-Wee's attention span is so short that he just pulls the needle off every record he starts playing, and just moves on to the next thing and the next thing and the next thing. But we have a real music guest in the studio on the show. And she was really in the studio on the show. It is one of the iconic Pee-Wee Herman friends. We couldn't believe that we got her to come in: the legendary Spanish guitarist and singer, Charo.

[00:57:21] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:57:23] **Clip:**

Pee-Wee: My muuusical guest today is a Spanish American actress, comedian, and virtuoso flamenco guitarist. She's known for her uninhibited and exuberant personality and her ostensible lack of fluency in English. Oh! And the catchphrase: cuchi-cuchi! Please welcome my friend and fellow artist, my special guest, Charo! Yay!

(Cheers and babbling.)

Charo & Pee-Wee: *(In unison.)* Hola!

(They laugh.)

Pee-Wee: You owe me a coke! Ha-ha! You know, a lot of people would like to know: is Charo your stage name or is that your given name?

Charo: My full name is longer than a serpiente.

Pee-Wee: Mm! Really?

Charo: My full name is María del Rosario Mercedes Pilar Martínez Molina Baeza.

Pee-Wee: Your passport probably has to fold out. Right?

(She laughs.)

So, you have brothers and sisters, right?

Charo: I have my sister, Carmen, that she love you! More question?

Pee-Wee: Yes. What would you have wanted to be if you didn't become a famous guitarist? Is there something else you might've been?

Charo: Oh yeah, I was in a Catholic convent. I was nun in the morning, nun in the afternoon, nun—

Pee-Wee: (*Giggling.*) I can't picture you as a nun, really. It's hard.

Charo: No, yeah! (*Excitedly.*) Oh, oh, oh, yeah. Can I talk?

Pee-Wee: I don't know. Can you? Ha-ha!

Charo: Are you impressed with my English? It's very good.

Pee-Wee: Oh, absolutely! I didn't realize you were even speaking English. You know, when I first met you, I had a lot of trouble understanding you. Now, I only have a medium amount of trouble understanding.

Charo: Aloha.

Pee-Wee: Yeah. Many people don't really know—in fact, you don't even really know—that we met originally in Hawaii at your restaurant many, many years ago. I walked into your restaurant, 'cause I was such a huge Charo fan.

Charo: Wow!

Pee-Wee: And your restaurant was in such a beautiful place in Hawaii. I couldn't believe it. On Kauai.

Charo: Thank you.

Pee-Wee: At the very, very end, just before you get to the parts you can only get to by helicopter, the Nepali coast—there's your restaurant. Big sign, “Charo's”. I'm like, oh my god. I've gotta go in, meet you. And I met your sister Carmen, and she said, “Yes, Charo's right here.” And you came out! And you were so nice to me, and you said hello and everything! Ha-ha-ha!

Charo: I love that story. Let me tell you what I'm doing lately. Okay? My latest adventure, and an honor to introduce it to you, is fantastical. The day at Capital Studio, when I finish, I cry. Because I will never, ever do something better than that. I learned guitar with the Gypsy. Mm-hm. My grandmother love Gypsy, so we became family.

Pee-Wee: Let's listen to it right now. Everybody! Here is Charo playing “Fantastico”.

Music: “Fantastico” by Charo.

(The song is interrupted by a record scratch.)

Pee-Wee: Just kidding, Char!

Music: *(Resumes.)*

(Record scratch.)

Pee-Wee: Oh! I forgot!

Music: *(Resumes.)*

Fantastico

(Music ends and they cheer and applaud.)

Pee-Wee: That was fantastic! That was fantastico.

Charo: Gracias, gracias, gracias, gracias!

Cherry: Just wonderful, Charo.

Charo: Thank you, Cherry.

Cherry: It was amazing!

Pee-Wee: Cherry, Charo. Charo, Cherry. Cherry, Charo. Charo, Cherry.

(Beeping.)

Oh, the paella is ready!

(They cheer.)

Guess what our snack was? Guess!

Charo: Who? Who?

Pee-Wee: Pae-lla!

(They laugh.)

Charo, try a little bite. Taste a little bit.

(Crunching.)

The paella has only been cooking for 12 minutes in the microwave instead of three hours!

Charo: (*Spits.*) No, Pee-Wee! You killed the paella, Pee-Wee!

Speaker: Hm. It smells okay, but it tastes terrible!

Cherry: I don't feel so good.

(*Everyone "ughs" multiple times.*)

(*A gong followed by sproing noises.*)

Clocky: Hey, Pee-Wee! It's time for the camping trip contest.

Speaker: Oh, that's right, Clocky!

Pee-Wee: Hey everyone! We have an incredible contest! One lucky caller is going to win a camping trip with me, Pee-Wee Herman! For one fabulous weekend, we're gonna go exploring, make smores, and sleep under the stars! In tents provided by whoever wins. We're going to open the phone lines right now and take the 15th caller.

(*Phones ringing, more and more.*)

The 15th caller. Whoa! Look at this. The switchboard is lighting up. Hello?

Caller #1: Hello?! Did I win?!

Pee-Wee: No. You're caller number one.

(*Hangs up. Dail tone. Phone rings.*)

Hello.

Caller #2: Did I win?

Pee-Wee: Nope. Called too soon.

(*Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.*)

Hello?

Caller #3: I can't believe it!

Pee-Wee: Neither can I! You're caller number three.

(*Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.*)

La-la-la-la! Mm, ooh! Hello?

Caller #4: I've never won anything!

Pee-Wee: Well, your streak is still alive.

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Pee-Wee: Hello?

Caller #5: Oh, I'm so excited!

Pee-Wee: Because you lost? Ha-ha!

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello?

Caller #6: Winner, winner, chicken dinner!

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Caller #7: I'm caller number seven, aren't I?

Pee-Wee: Whoa! How did you know that?

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Pee-Wee: Hello.

Caller #8: Pee-Wee?!

Pee-Wee: That's my name. Don't wear it out.

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello?

Caller #9: Is this really happening?

Pee-Wee: Me hanging up on you? Yes! *(Cackles.)*

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello?

Caller #10: *(Screaming.)* I WON!

Pee-Wee: Uh, how do I break this to you?

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello!

Caller #11: Camping?! With Pee-Wee Herman?!

Pee-Wee: Is something you won't be doing. Ha-ha!

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello?

Caller #12: Am I caller 15?

Pee-Wee: No, caller 12. Bye-bye!

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello?

Caller #13: I'm usually so unlucky!

Pee-Wee: Well, your story checks out. Caller 13.

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello?

Caller #14: Did I win?!

Pee-Wee: You lost!

(Hangs up. Dial tone. Phone rings.)

Hello!

Caller #15: Hello?

(Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding! Sirens wail.)

Pee-Wee: Congratulations! You are caller 15!

(Noise-makers honk.)

Who is calling?

Caller #15: This is Derek Goff.

Pee-Wee: Well, congratulations, Derek Goff! You are caller number 15, which means you have just won a no expenses paid camping trip with me! Pee-Wee Herman!

Derek Goff: You're kidding me! The Pee-Wee Herman?

Pee-Wee: Ha-ha! Why would I make that up? And if I did, wouldn't I pick a way bigger celebrity?

Derek Goff: I freaking love you, Pee-Wee! Dang! This is so exciting. I haven't been camping in years!

Pee-Wee: Well, we are gonna have such a lovely time. It's gonna be really fun, Derek!

Automated Recording: This call is from a federal penitentiary. All calls are recorded.

Pee-Wee: Uh, what was that?

Derek Goff: Sorry. That thing plays on all our calls. I'm in lockup right now.

Pee-Wee: Oh-ho-ho, well, uh, I'm only free to do the camping trip next weekend. And if you're in prison, well! Ha-ha-ha! I guess it just won't work out!

Derek Goff: No, no, no, it will! I'm out in two days. How about that? After nine years. And I'm going camping with you!

Pee-Wee: If you don't mind my asking, what are you in prison for?

Derek Goff: Armed robbery, breaking and entering, kidnapping.

Automated Recording: This call is from a federal penitentiary. All calls are recorded.

Derek Goff: But listen, when I tell you my real name, Pee-Wee, you can look me up and read all about me. I'm super excited I'll be spending my very first night out of the joint with someone I think is so cute!

(Hangs up. Dial tone.)

Pee-Wee: Well, let's get to our next song, shall we? Ha-ha! Sly and the Family Stone. My very first stage production, many of you may remember many, many, many, many, many years ago, included a musical salute to Mr. Sly Stone. That's how much I like him! Also, he created the “aaah!” sound! Ha-ha! And now, Sly and the Family Stone with “Dance to the Music”!

Music: “Dance to the Music” from the album *Dance to the Music* by Sly and the Family Stone.

Say! Get up and dance to the music!

Get on up! And dance to the music!

Dance to the music

Dance to the music

[01:07:15] **Jesse Thorn:** That's a little bit from the *Pee-Wee Herman Radio Hour* from 2021. My friend, Julia Smith, and I produced that for KCRW in Santa Monica. Our thanks to KCRW for letting us play that on this show. You can listen to the whole thing at [KCRW.com](https://www.kcrw.com).

Can I say, I can't tell you how surreal it is to be sitting in a radio studio listening to Charo and listening to, you know, Josh Meyers do the other playhouse—I mean, the actual, Miss Yvonne came in and gave Paul a big hug and sat down in front of me and gave me a big hug. Unbelievable, this experience. But probably the most unbelievable is when Charo came in—and apologies to Charo for doing a horrible impression of her voice. But she came in, and she saw Paul. And she said—*(laughs)* she said, *(pitching his voice very high)* “Hello, Pee-Wee!” *(Laughs.)* And she went, and she gave him a big hug. And then, she turned to give me a hug—a person that she had never met in her life. And she goes, *(voice high)* “Pee-Wee is not his name, but it's okay. I call him that.” *(Laughing.)* And you just saw Paul looking at her like, yes, it's okay for Charo to call me that. *(Laughs.)* Um, I can't believe—I still can't believe I got to work on that.

(Music fades out.)

Look, this is the end of the show. Um, I can't believe that Paul is gone. I can't believe that we don't get to enjoy that anymore. *(Choking up.)* At least we still have the amazing, amazing things that he made. And, um, all I can say to him is not just for making the *Pee-Wee Herman Radio Hour* or whatever, but for everything in my life—my whole career and a big chunk of who I am: thank you, Paul.

[01:09:20] **Transition:** Playful, chiming synth.

[01:09:41] **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. I'm actually headed to my cabin in the Southern Sierras, and I have *Big Top Pee-Wee*, *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, and every episode of the Playhouse on VHS up there. So, um, I think you know what I'll be doing with my kids for the next few days.

[01:10:04] **Transition:** Fun circus music.

[01:10:21] **Jesse Thorn:** 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. Special thanks this week to Alex Cappleman for recording Paul's interview in his hotel room, and for putting up with Paul hitting microphones. Thanks to Nick White for editing that interview and for editing my tribute to the *Pee-Wee's Playhouse Christmas Special*. Also, thank you for getting me that gig, making a radio show with Pee-Wee Herman. Thanks to Julia Smith for producing those shows, and also for producing the *Pee-Wee Herman Radio Hour* with me, along with Casey O'Brien and Dave Shumka and countless others at Maximum Fun. It was a lot of work, and we can all say for the rest of our lives we got to do that.

Bullseye is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us there. Follow us. We will share with you all of our interviews. You can hear the whole *Pee-Wee Herman Radio Hour* at KCRW.com, and I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[01:11:45] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music ends.)