

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

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

[00:00:08] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Five years ago, the Chicago rapper Saba released an album called *Care for Me*.

[00:00:16] **Music:** “Busy/Sirens” from the album *Care for Me* by Saba.

*I'm bogus, left my girl for some Shawty, surely deserving of all this lonely*

*"You sad? Tell me, how are you sad? You got all of these friends*

*You got all of these fans",*

*I ain't trust nobody new since 2012, I ain't let nobody in*

*Jesus got killed for our sins, Walter got killed for a coat*

*I'm trying to cope, but it's a part of me gone—in a packed room, I'm alone*

*I'm having a busy day, I'll hit you back right away*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:00:41] **Jesse Thorn:** That's a song called “Busy/Sirens”. It's the opening track on the record. He's raw and frenzied. He talks about depression and anxiety, meaningless sex, immense loss. Saba wrote and recorded *Care for Me* in the wake of losing his cousin, Walter. He and Walt were close. They were both members of Saba's crew, Pivot Gang. Each song is a different story about Walter or about what Saba dealt with after losing him. The rapper tells me he didn't even realize he'd written an entire album about his cousin until he was halfway through recording it.

Before *Care for Me*, Saba was probably best known as a SoundCloud rapper or maybe for his work with other Chicagoans like Chance the Rapper and NoName. But after *Care for Me*, he was a breakthrough star. He says that he wanted to follow *Care for Me* with another hit a few months later. He'd written that first record quick, so why not? But you know, that isn't how work works. Inspiration happens when it happens. And his life had changed more than he could have possibly processed.

He eventually followed up with *Few Good Things*, another great record that came out last year, and lately he has been collaborating with another Chicagoan, No I.D.—the legendary producer and DJ. Here's the latest single from that project, “hue\_man nature”.

[00:02:13] **Music:** “hue\_man nature” from the album *Saba & No I.D.* by Saba and No I.D..

*Drop flows, rap capo, the H.N.I.C*

*They hoped I'd never blow like I'm HIV*

*My girl on, she ball like her name Taurasi*

*Hotel with the big couch, this ain't the lobby*

*The mics I've touched, they might leave dust*

*'Cause after me ain't nobody gonna wanna speak up*

*I need green like I'm Don Juan Bishop*

*For all the time that the blue and reds try kill us, yeah*

*Resisting, I'm Phil Jack with the crack system*

*Cast in, switch banks like Aunt Vivian*

*I was young and told myself...*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:02:44] **Jesse Thorn:** Saba, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

[00:02:46] **Saba:** Hey, man. Thanks for having me.

[00:02:48] **Jesse Thorn:** No I.D. produced these two new singles that you have. And I'm just like—how does that man—how's that man like so heavy in the game? Because I'm like—when were those common records? Those are 30 years ago.

[00:03:05] **Saba:** 30 years, yeah.

[00:03:06] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, I was 12 when those songs came out. That's gotta be a heavy call to get. Or to make! I don't know.

[00:03:16] **Saba:** A little bit of both. A little bit of both, man. But I'll say this much. Being around him, it makes it really easy to understand why somebody like him would be, you know, in it for 30 years and it still be fresh and new still. You know? It's like he's constantly like—he's constantly in conversation, so I feel like he's almost like dedicated his life to learning, and it just keeps you current. You know?

[00:03:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, in hip-hop, producers—you know, that's often just the word for somebody that made a beat, you know. Especially now, where you don't even have to get in the same studio together. Somebody can email you a beat they made and, you know, maybe they send an engineer the stems so that it can get mastered, but they might not even be there when you're recording a vocal. I get the impression that No I.D. is a producer-producer. Like, he is engaged thematically, personally.

[00:04:27] **Saba:** Uh, that's a really funny—like, it's just really funny to hear that, because to me it's like anything else. Like, yes. And also, no, not when he doesn't have to be. You know, like the songs that we've released so far from—you know, out of all the music we've worked on—that was like a really simple transaction where I had the beats, and I went to the studio, and I just recorded a bunch of songs and sent them to him. You know? It wasn't so much us being in the studio together, really leading to that chemistry. It was more so just like I know what to do here; you know what to do here. Like, you know, and it's just really simple, and we kind of developed—like, we kind of developed that way.

And you know, months and months of doing it like that led to us eventually being in a studio and eventually, you know, producing-producing as you call it. But yeah, it's a little bit of both, you know? It's like both things are true.

[00:05:37] **Jesse Thorn:** I read somewhere that when you were a kid—and I'm talking about like a kid-kid—you were recording yourself rapping, but because you love Bone Thug so much, the rapping that you were doing was basically just making noises that sounded like rapping, because that's what Bone Thug sounded like to you.

[00:05:55] **Saba:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, it was—and you know, I would do it—(*laughs*) I would do a take. We had a little four-track cassette recorder. I would do a take, and I would just literally mumble rap like, “Uh, (*babbles in rhythm*).” And I would just—and then, I would do another take on top of it, where I'd just mumble something completely different. And it was like the chaos of it—it made no sense. There was like maybe one every ten syllables was actually a word. Like, it was like—it was really chaotic. But those were the first things that I probably ever created.

[00:06:29] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm gonna play “Come My Way”, which is the song that you made with Krayzie Bone. Can you tell me about it?

[00:06:36] **Saba:** Man, “Come My Way” is something I worked on for a really long time. I got inspired thinking that I could get Krayzie Bone on it. You know? And like, just for reference point at the time of making this record, it's probably 2018, I believe. So, it's not like I have access to, (*laughing*) you know, Krayzie Bone or anything like that. But it was a lot of—you know, to this day, I don't even really remember what, you know, the management-management, like how we eventually set it up. But that record just existing is obviously—it's like a huge dream come true for me just talking about like how much I was influenced by them.

And then, you know, he was just—he was real—he was real cool. He was like exactly the person that I imagined him to be. Like, I'm like, “Damn, like this is (*inaudible*) just in the studio or like at the video shoot.” And you know, like I'm like, “Wow, this is, this is really

like a beautiful moment.” But yeah, that song took a lot of—it just took a lot of work and just manifesting to really make it happen. You know? (*Chuckles.*)

[00:07:49] **Jesse Thorn:** What did you imagine him to be?

[00:07:52] **Saba:** To be honest, he always seemed like he was real to himself. Like, I think like growing up, that's how I was. So, you know. I mean, I don't—you know, I don't have like a super personal close relationship with him or anything. Like, he probably don't know me from a can of paint. But when I was kicking it with him, I was just like, “Man, he's the exact—(*laughs*) you know, this dude, man. I'll just like fan out right now, like in my head.” Just like, bro, so much of my rap influence came from just listening to them be themselves. You know? Like, it was dope to just—I don't know, to just be embraced and feel like, you know, somebody who helped me do what I do liked the job that I was doing. You know, that's how it felt to me. Yeah.

[00:08:44] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's hear “Come My Way” from I guest Saba's album, *Few Good Things*.

[00:08:46] **Music:** “Come My Way” from the album *Few Good Things* by Saba and No I.D..

*This sound like tube socks on Madison Ave*

*Students actin' bad up in the class*

*Drop out, but family'll ask*

*Lie like you plan on going back*

*Ay, we ain't got no time to relax*

*Work the only priority intact*

*I wish that the guys had shields*

*Stoplights, cleaning windshields*

*Fiends will do it free for a feel*

*Had the same friends since I was little*

*Used to hoop with Poppy and Jaleel*

*Spooky bent the block and dropped a tape*

*Talked to Walt and watched him fly away*

*Multiply my problems by the day*

*West Side chilling with a faithful*

*Knock it out the park, it's like the base loaded*

*I'ma get it booming like I'm Metro*

*Me, I'm getting to it how I'm meant to*

*Blood, I mean a vessel*

*I'ma tell him to be careful, 'cause a copper wanna kill him*

*And the family in the ghetto*

*From the bottom of the barrel, I'ma run it like a pharaoh*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:09:22] **Jesse Thorn:** It's such a lovely song. There's some nostalgia in it, but it also feels like—it feels like the kind of nostalgia that's also about the future. It's not like we lost everything that we had when we were kids, which is a common theme in hip-hop. You know what I mean? There's a lot of hip-hop records—some really great ones—that are about like, well, when we were kids we were innocent and now we're not. Right? And this is about sort of trying to capture that feeling, it feels like, and bring it into the future.

[00:09:58] **Saba:** *(Beat.)* That's kind of crazy that you got that from that record. It's like worded kind of beautifully, though. I like that. Um... Yeah, I think I would agree with it too. I think part of why I loved Bone Thugs-N-Harmony so much is because of the nostalgic like kind of feeling that you get listening to their beat selection matched with their melodies, you know. And when I was working on this, that's what it felt like to me. It felt like, you know—it's kind of how you said it. It's like—it's looking toward the future, but it's like there is the experience of the past still in so much of the lyrics and just the perspective of the—at least my verse on the songs. It's like perspective is still, you know, like—*(chuckles)* you know, you talk to your homie. You know? You also watch your homie pass, you know.

Like, it's not said out of sadness in this case, it just feels more like this is what happened. It is what it is, and you know, you're not trying to make sense of it. But it's like, but we will get—but we will be good. The thing that I think is able to—has always been able to keep me going is just that element of hope. Like, it's a hard thing to take away from somebody, but based on the experiences that some of us have had, in hip-hop especially, it's easy to feel hopeless. So, I think that's the feeling. And that's why it feels nostalgic, I think, outside of the melody. It's just—it's hopeful, but it's hopeful with the known experience of what it took to become hopeful. Yeah.

[00:11:53] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you have to talk yourself into that hopefulness?

[00:11:59] **Saba:** I never knew myself without it, you know, to be honest. Like, you know, growing up it wasn't like my experience was so different than what it became. So, it was always a sense of feeling kind of drowned by your circumstance and this idea of hopefulness as motivation to go that much harder or be that much more attentive or, you know, be that much more on point. And I think it kind of created an obsession with me. Like, based on my circumstance, I devoted and just dedicated everything I had towards this. *(Chuckles.)* And yeah, I don't know. I would just say I never knew myself to not be hopeful, given any circumstance. You know, I'll find it. Sometimes it might take months, but I've always come out hopeful.

[00:13:09] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you're talking about making music when you were a kid-kid.

*(They chuckle.)*

Did you think, “This is what I'm doing with my life,” when you were eight years old and 11 years old?

[00:13:29] **Saba:** Yes. *(Laughs.)* I was already doing it with my life. So, there was no really talking me out of it, because I was already willing to give everything that I had, and I didn't have much. I'm 8. I'm 9, you know? But what I did have was the time, and that's just really what I spent all my time doing. Between that and PlayStation 2, like.

*(They laugh.)*

You know, it's like I am still 8, you know. I started playing PlayStation 2 again a few weeks ago, I got one in my crib now. And it's—he games back then were just better than what we have now, man. *(Laughing.)* Like, oh my god. They're so much better!

[00:14:16] **Jesse Thorn:** I think this is toxic nostalgia, here.

[00:14:20] **Saba:** Is it? Nah! Nah, man.

[00:14:21] **Jesse Thorn:** ‘Cause I'm pretty sure the best games ever made were for the NES. Am I mistaken? And the Sega Genesis. Is that not—?

[00:14:29] **Saba:** *(Laughs.)* I don't think it's—I don't think it's toxic. I think—

[00:14:31] **Jesse Thorn:** I think all the best games were from my mom's 386 PC. I think! I think.

[00:14:37] **Saba:** *(Laughs.)* You ain't played PlayStation 2, yet. That's all that mean.

*(They laugh.)*

‘Cause if you think that's better than that?

[00:14:48] **Jesse Thorn:** We have so much more to get into. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:14:56] **Transition:** Chiming synth.

[00:15:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with Saba. He's a Chicago rapper from a scene that also birthed Chance and NoName, among others. His albums *Care for Me* and *Few Good Things* were both beloved by critics and fans. Lately, he's been working with another Chicago heavyweight, No I.D., on a series of new songs. Here's a track from that collaboration, “Back in Office.”

[00:15:28] **Music:** “Back in Office” from the album *Saba & No I.D.* by No I.D. and Saba.

*My granny working hard, the main person I call upon*

*Gold chain hang from my collarbone*

*I was the same guy in her college dorm*

*And I ain't never had a college dorm*

*Body like a bottle, and her skin tone terracotta*

*I'm from Chicago, we invented mobsters*

*Some call me "Saba," others call me "Saba"*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:15:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Your dad is a musician. He—I know he moved to New York to make music. How old were you when that happened?

[00:16:00] **Saba:** I was five. I was five when my dad moved. That's like the moment of my life where it's like—I'm a kid, but it's like the first, like, “Oh, it could get real.” Like, everything that you know to be regular can just change. That was the first time that happened for me. But I tell my dad all the time, I'm like that also I feel like was the first time I ever seen somebody follow their dream. And I think that was way more important for me, ‘cause it gave me that element—like, a part of my character became fearless as it pertained to my work.

But I'm eight, nine years old, but I'm still like very confident, like this is what I'll spend my time doing. This is gonna work. This is gonna pay off. And that was the first time I'd seen somebody do it, and you know, as much as it hurt, it also was very inspiring and became like a huge part of the person that I became. And you know, I still have a really—like, really

great, really beautiful relationship with my dad, so I don't feel like I could imagine it differently, you know? As much as when I was a kid, I would have loved to change it. As an adult, I'm like it is what it is, you know? (*Laughs.*)

[00:17:32] **Jesse Thorn:** How old were you when you skipped grades in school?

[00:17:39] **Saba:** (*Laughs.*) Uh, man, that was back when I was a genius, man.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

I used to be a genius! (*Chuckles.*) I just—

[00:17:45] **Jesse Thorn:** Tell me about it, dude!

[00:17:47] **Saba:** Now everybody's a genius, you know. This is back in the day. This is when there were a few geniuses.

[00:17:53] **Jesse Thorn:** I was a genius in the NES days, so.

[00:17:56] **Saba:** Right, right. So, these are my PS2 days. Uh, I'm trying to think of what grade I skipped. I believe I skipped the third grade. So, how old are you in third grade?

[00:18:07] **Jesse Thorn:** Eight. Eight and nine.

[00:18:08] **Saba:** Eight, nine, something like that. But yeah, I just tested really high on this like state test we had to do. And yeah, my third-grade teachers was like, “Beat it.” And I'm like, alright, I guess I'm in fourth grade now. (*Laughs.*) Like—

[00:18:27] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, the thing about skipping grades is I don't think they skip people grades that much anymore. And I think the main reason is that as much as a kid who does really good on a test is kicking the butt of the academic work in that class, that doesn't mean that that kid is ready for all of the other not-academic work of being in the next class.

[00:18:55] **Saba:** Right. It's a lot of social aspects of existence. It's a lot of just everything else that is so much of a kid's development. For me, you know, what's funny? I have no idea why I skipped other than God, like—(*chuckling*) I don't know. Like, I'm like—this is just like—it had to be just God like trying to like accelerate, get me done a little quicker, get me in high school. Like, because I skipped that one grade, I was able to be in high school at the same time as like so many people that I became so close to and still work with to this day. Because when I was a freshman, they were all seniors. But had I been with my correct like age, like that would have just never happened. Like, and it's crazy. Like, I'm like, wow, such a small micro-decision.

Like, I remember my mom like balancing that like in her head—like, if she was gonna let me do it or not, you know. And such a like small decision affects—that's like butterfly effect!



Like, I just—I don't know, I be going down a rabbit hole sometimes, like, “Wow, man, I'm really grateful for everything happening the way it did.”

[00:20:15] **Jesse Thorn:** That's a great rabbit hole! I wish one time I could go down the things I'm grateful for rabbit hole and not the things I messed up rabbit hole!

*(They laugh.)*

[00:20:24] **Saba:** Yeah, you should. You should, man. It's beautiful. It's beautiful. It changes perspective a lot, man. And I think—I don't know, man. Like, I just had a lot of—I had a lot of I feel like really—I had the type of life experiences where it's like you're forced to be grateful. You know? It's like in order to hold on to something to be—because you got to stay hopeful, remember? So, in order to be hopeful, it's like you grasp onto something. So, what are you grasping onto? It's like, oh, well, I'm grateful for so much. And I feel like this is what I gained from my life in the last like year. So, this wasn't always my perspective, but it's new. I'm new here. This is my first interview since being here, I feel like. *(Laughs.)*

[00:21:21] **Jesse Thorn:** When I was reading about your childhood and adolescence and read about your dad moving to New York, about skipping ahead in school, about making music in your grandparents' basement, what it sounded to me like—and this is presumptuous—but it sounded a little lonely to me.

[00:21:54] **Saba:** *(Chuckles.)* It's so funny how like casually vulnerable artist interviews are. Because it's really casual to even like reference so many things like from my life and my experience, you know—outside of my artistry. You know, 'cause it's not like we're really talking about Saba as a—you know, as a musician or brand or anything that I've built. It's like we're really talking about my life, and I'll go there. I'll go there solely because I feel like I haven't. You know, and it's cool to go new places in interviews. So, yeah, let's do it. Let's buckle up. Let's go in. *(Laughs.)* Let's go in.

Uh, yeah, man. Like, I'm also like outside of just the circumstance, I'm very introverted. So, it was really—it was really isolating. It was really isolating, but that's the same isolation that allowed me the time to develop, you know, to really work and really challenge myself to believe in something. But yeah, lonely is definitely a word that you can use to describe it, you know. Yeah.

[00:23:40] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, forget skipping grades. Even just, you know, a couple of teachers telling your parents that you're a genius is enough to make you feel like a weird space alien.

*(They laugh.)*

You know what I mean?

*(Saba confirms.)*

Not that you're like, “I wish I wasn't,” but like—

[00:24:07] **Saba:** No, you know, I had—I feel like the thing that is—as lonely as I feel like maybe that feeling was, I never really experienced that alone, because I knew other (*stammering*) like weird space aliens. Like, when I skipped a grade, there was a girl in my class who was smarter than me. And you know, so we skipped the grade together. And I think part of—(*laughs*) what's so funny is part of why I was so smart when I was that age was just competitive. Just competitive. Just 'cause, “Nah, she not about to keep getting better grades than me. I'm gonna keep up. I'm gonna do better. I'm gonna keep—” You know? That's funny.

Yeah. I'm a real competitive person. So, shout out to Marin for being a genius, because without you, I probably wouldn't have did it! (*Laughs.*)

[00:25:06] **Jesse Thorn:** How do you think your dad's music career shaped yours?

[00:25:11] **Saba:** I don't know. I really don't. I used to just really—like, man, I'm such a big fan of my dad's music. So, I used to just like—I studied it a lot. You know? Some of his chord shapes, some of the progressions, some of his drum programming, because he was also a really amazing producer. His harmony. You know, I thought—(*laughing*) I mean, I got a lot of sauce from my dad, I'm not gonna lie. I'm not gonna lie. But I don't know, like I said, the most important thing I got from my dad was that fearlessness. That fearlessness. Like, I watched him go do it, and you know, it was just like, “Oh! I can just go do it.” You know, like there's nobody that can say like no.

You know, like that was kind of my like attitude towards it, because I watched my pops have—you know, when he would come visit Chicago, I watched him pull up with hundreds of his CDs with his face on it and his booklet and his record label on the back of it. You know, I watched him do that. So, I'm like, “Oh.” Like, you know, I kind of grew up with a mentality like there's no person that you need to do what you want to do. You can just do it. And the results look different for everybody, but the fact that that was an option felt like finding out a cheat code to life or something.

Like, I'm like—'cause I felt like that about anything. Like, I didn't necessarily have to pursue music. I could have—my first dream was to be a cartoon animator. I used to love cartoons. I still do, but I thought I would draw. But I still have the mindset that if I want to do this, like I'll simply do it. And it won't be simple at all! But the actual act of deciding it, you know.

[00:27:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Did your dad ever get you gigs?

[00:27:16] **Saba:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, for sure. For sure, man. I had a summer, man. It was hell.

(*They laugh.*)

It was hell because it was always embarrassing.

[00:27:25] **Jesse Thorn:** You're talking about you're out of school, and you're staying with your dad in New York?

[00:27:28] **Saba:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. We would go out there for sometimes like a few weeks over the summer, usually.

[00:27:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Your older brother is a musician too. He's a rapper.

[00:27:38] **Saba:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Me and Joseph, me and Joseph—Joseph Chilliams. Shout out to my brother. So, me and Joe are in New York, and my dad was gigging like a lot—like every—pretty much every day. (*Laughs.*) So, he would just bring us with him. First of all, this is probably like—I'm probably like 15/16. And my dad—I mean, he's my dad, but he was like—and not to say he's not, but he's a very young-looking man. So, we 15, and we're walking into these clubs, and my dad's just like, “Hold your head high, be confident, walk past.”

(*They laugh.*)

Like, he not about to sweet talk nobody, like, “Hey, these are my children. They're underage. They shouldn't be in here.” He just like, “Hold your head high, look confident, and walk right in.”

[00:28:28] **Jesse Thorn:** By the way, I like your dad voice that you just—(*dropping his voice*), “Hold your head high, son.”

[00:28:31] **Saba:** (*Cackles.*) Like, and you know, he's walking in. He'll get on stage. He'll introduce us. He's not giving any disclaimers, you know. He's not like, (*dropping his voice*), “Hey, hey, crowd, these are my children.” Like, you know, it's just like get up there, and we in New York. You know, it's like if you suck, they're going to tell you. (*Laughs.*)

I'm 15 like, (*squeakily*), “Ay yo, ay yo, check it! Yeah!” Like, it was just real funny like to think back on, but that really did shape like me and my brother's like performance career really early, because we had experience. So, when we got back to Chicago and started doing open mics, as nerve wracking as it is—like, I told you, I was like king introvert. Like, as nerve wracking as it was, it was like after having all of those like summers with my dad doing that—and you know, that's way more embarrassing. I'm like—I'm with my dad, you know, at a club. I'm a kid, you know, nobody—you know, what am I doing here?

But it made them open mics and stuff, it made just me more confident. So, it was easier to navigate and just get up there and feel like I had something to say, you know.

[00:29:44] **Jesse Thorn:** We got to go to a quick break. When we come back, Saba recommends gear: a musical instrument, so beautiful and easy to use that he got one for his dad. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:29:58] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:30:02] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is the rapper Saba.

You told me a few times that you are looking at the world in a new way. The time that you put on it was like a year. This year, you said.

*(Saba confirms with a laugh.)*

Did you choose something?

[00:30:24] **Saba:** You know, in the—it's just been interesting. It's been an interesting last year for me. It's been a lot of coming to terms with like my own like life. And like, last year I did a U. S. tour; I did a Europe tour; I did a couple South Africa dates. Like, I did a lot of shows last year. And I think there was so much moving that I was all—like, I spent the whole year, I feel like, in the future, where I wasn't present for some of what are probably some of the best experiences of my life. You know? And I wasn't present for them, because I'm like, “Oh, but tomorrow I have to do this, and the next day I have to do—” You know?

And I feel like the last year of my life has just given me so many opportunities to check myself on that. To where I'm like—I'm just trying to be where I'm at currently. But you know, every day I have an epiphany. I don't know. I can wake up tomorrow a new person, so don't hold me to nothing that I say in this. *(Laughs.)* It's a 24-hour grace period on all information, you know what I'm saying? I wake up tomorrow like, “Yeah, nah, this is—I don't know.” This is where it is now, you know?

[00:32:15] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you had a number of years between *Few Good Things*, the album that came out in 2022, and the previous album. And I assumed that part of that was figuring out who you are as an adult. Because so much of the music you'd made before that was about dealing with these traumas that had happened to you as a—you know, as a young adult. You know, as a 24-year-old or whatever. And that you had to figure out what your new life was that was beyond the reach of that or living with that more comfortably.

[00:33:08] **Saba:** I think that's something that—to be honest, there's so many years in between *Care for Me* and the next project. Not because of that, but more so just because, man, *Care for Me* did really well. *(Chuckles.)* I just became very busy, and I had never really dealt with that in my career to where I knew what to do. My studio schedule was kind of changing. My relationship to home was changing, where when I would normally be at home I'm working every day and you know. But it's like—now, it's like I'm so tired, and I'm so—you know, I'm just going home and being home. Like, I need to chill. It became like years where I work on music in like a week/few weeks span, and then I tour. And then, I go work on music, and then I tour. But I had—man, I had so many—like, man, there's points I almost drove myself into insanity. Like, my plan was to drop *Care for Me*, and then immediately drop another project. *(Chuckles.)*

So, that's what I was—it was I think April *Care for Me* came out. And I was trying to get another project done—I think November I wanted to drop. And we got in the studio, and we just worked and worked and worked and worked and worked. And I'm just like, “What are we doing? Why are we doing it?” *(Laughing.)* Like, we're gonna go crazy! But some great music came from it, and that's why I put out those songs toward the end of 2018—“Papaya”, “Excited”.

[00:34:52] **Music:** “Papaya” by Saba.

*I wanted you while you were*

*With your guy, but that beside the point*

*The fruits of the labor, papaya*

*One day we'll split the pie up and maybe enjoy (aw)*

*Your brown skin turns blue under the moon*

*You know I don't smoke, but you'd fire the joint*

*Money, that don't mean nothing, nothing*

*Money, that don't mean nothing, nothing*

*(Music fades out.)*

[00:35:26] **Saba:** That whole run was just from this album that I was trying to just kind of (*sensor beep*) out. Oh, sorry. Uh, you know, like—(*laughs*) but some great things still came from it. And then, 2019 was similar, man. I would have loved to put out an album in 2019, but we toured so much. We just toured and toured and toured. And we worked on a Pivot Gang run, where we did that album, released that album, and also did a Pivot Gang tour.

So, it's just like—there's always a story for it. Then in 2020, I had a mixtape done and ready to go, and I was about to start rolling it out, and then the pandemic happens, and it's like everybody's pausing everything. Like, whaaat is happening in the world? You know, it's like every year there's something. In 2021, I had a release date for *Few Good Things*, and when we lost Squeak in Pivot Gang, when Squeak was killed in Chicago, it just—I wasn't comfortable. You know, I'm uncomfortable doing this right now. So, I—you know, I bought myself until 2022, but in none of those years was it for lack of just—you know, it's like something was ready pretty much every year. And it's—you know, life is still life though. You know, so it's always I feel like more to it.

I think now I'm where you're describing where it's like, “Well, what do you sound like as an adult?” ‘Cause now I'm like—yeah, that's what—(*chuckles*) that's kind of what's happening in my life now. I'm like, damn, I'm—you know, I've been doing this for a while now, and I'm still doing it. This is pretty awesome. What does that perspective sound like? (*Laughs.*)

[00:37:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you ever go make music with your dad?

[00:37:24] **Saba:** Yeah, we, uh—man, I just had a—I went to New York a few weeks ago, and I convinced him to buy this keyboard. ‘Cause I got this new keyboard. It's the—

(*chuckles*) I'ma plug it, you know. It's not because I'm getting anything for this, but because I think it's a beautiful piece of gear that producers should have.

[00:37:54] **Jesse Thorn:** Right. No one is more sincere about gear recommendations than studio nerds.

[00:38:01] **Saba:** (*Laughing.*) Right. Right. But there's the MPC keyboard. I waited my whole life for there to be an MPC keyboard. Like the drum machine but a keyboard version. And I called my dad one day and I'm like, "Bro, you need this. Like, go cop this."

Like, so he buys it, but he has no idea, you know, what's really going on with it. Like, he bought it as per my recommendation, but he didn't really, you know, learn it. So, when I was out there, I was like walking him through like what I was doing with it. And he—man, he made a bunch of beats while I was there. And it was just—it's really dope. But he's—you know, he's obviously like a really big inspiration to me. So, it's always dope to cook with, you know. Like, I'm literally making beats with my dad. It's kinda dope, but like it's cool.

[00:38:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Saba, I'm so grateful for your time. Thank you for coming on the show.

[00:38:54] **Saba:** Absolutely, man. Thanks for having me.

[00:38:56] **Jesse Thorn:** Saba. As we mentioned, he has been steadily putting out work with No I.D., a true Chicago legend. Watch out for more of that on the horizon.

[00:39:07] **Transition:** Relaxed synth.

[00:39:12] **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. Although, this week, I went home to San Francisco in the Mission District and my mom's apartment—and specifically her basement—where I found a flyer that I made when my then co-host on this show, Jordan Morris, and I were still in college doing college radio. And for a fundraiser, we did an entire episode of the show from the base of the campus of UC Santa Cruz in our underpants. Tightly-whities, specifically.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers, Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun, Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by the great Dan Wally, aka DJW. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation", written and recorded by the great band The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries.

And hey, guess what? *Bullseye* is now on Instagram! We are going to share interview highlights and looks behind the scenes and cool stuff we think is cool. You can find us there on the Insta, [@BullseyewithJesseThorn](#). And follow us and tell everybody you know to get with it. [@BullseyewithJesseThorn](#) on Instagram. Let's go.

I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:40:45] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*