

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

[00:00:1] **Promo:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:20] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're having rap month, here on our show. All September, we have been bringing you nothing but interviews with rappers. And this week, we're starting the show with Master P. If you heard one Master P song, it is probably this one, “Make ‘em Say Uhh”.

[00:00:40] **Music:** “Make ‘em Say Uhh” from the album *Ghetto D* by Master P.

Uhh, uhh, nana-nana, nana-nana

Make ‘em say uuh, uhh, nana-nana, nana-nana

Make ‘em uhh, uhh, nana-nana, nana-nana

(Music fades out.)

[00:00:55] **Jesse Thorn:** That was a monumental hit single. Easily Master P's biggest. It sold over 1,000,000 copies in 1998. It's also a posse cut. P shares verses on that track with his label mates Mystikal, Mia X, and Silkk the Shocker. And it's pretty unusual for a rapper's biggest hit to be a posse cut. But it's fitting for Master P. He was always more mogul than MC: an inspired businessman and talent spotter, someone with a reputation for building good rappers into great ones. His label was called No Limit Records. He founded it in 1991 when he was living in the Bay Area, but it blossomed when he moved back home to Louisiana.

No Limit was home to a phalanx of stars. They were called the No Limit Soldiers. Among them were P's brothers, C-Murder and Silkk the Shocker, P's son, Romeo Miller, some of New Orleans biggest stars, like Mia X and Mystikal, And even for a little while, Snoop Dogg.

[00:01:58] **Music:** “Lay Low” from the album *The Last Meal* by Snoop Dogg.

... some of y'all call it chocolate

Return of the Top Dogg, and ain't no stopping this

Whatever the case, I ain't trying to catch it

Lay low, blow big dope, and slang records

Unseen but well heard, do not disturb

The only reason you alive 'cause I ain't sent the word

I flip faster than birds, Snoop Dogg will emerge

From the smoke...

(Music fades out.)

[00:02:14] **Jesse Thorn:** In the story of Master P, there's plenty of success—careers launch, millions of records sold. But there's also a lot of loss. Before he started rapping, he played hoops at a division I school until an injury ended his career before it really began. Then, when he was just 20, P's brother was killed during a robbery. Just last year, his daughter died suddenly.

As you'll hear in our conversation, these tragedies have challenged Master P and made him stronger. He's now a vocal advocate for mental wellness and speaks often about the power he finds in his faith. We'll talk about all that today, but before we do, let's hear another banger. This is from True, Master P's group with C-Murder and Silkk the Shocker. It's called "Hooty Hoo".

[00:03:02] **Music:** "Hoody Hoo" from the album *Da Crime Family* by TRU.

I represent the 3rd ward

You a rookie, I'm a vet, you the captain, I'm the crunch

You got that dinner, I got the lunch, hit the weed, pass the blunts

Your eyes red, you got the munch

How you like me now, gold teeth when I smile

Try to take me out the ghetto, but I'm still buck wild

So, buckle up, knuckle up

(Hoody Hoo!) That's the code for them killers

(Hoody Hoo!) Buckle up, knuckle up (What you wanna do?)

(Hoody Hoo!) Buckle up, knuckle up (What you wanna do?)

(Hoody Hoo!) Buckle up, knuckle up (What you wanna do?)

(Music fades out.)

[00:03:27] **Jesse Thorn:** Master P, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

[00:03:29] **Master P:** I'm glad to be here.

[00:03:31] **Jesse Thorn:** And thank you for bringing cereal, by the way.

[00:03:32] **Master P:** Yeah, yeah, we got the Snoop cereal.

[00:03:35] **Jesse Thorn:** You're the first guest, I think, in public radio history to show up with cereal in hand.

[00:03:41] **Master P:** Well, you know what? We gotta market and promote our brands. This is the first black owned cereal company. We definitely making history, me and Snoop. And man, it's a blessing. Because we look at breakfast food, we never got an opportunity. We always ate cereal. And growing up in poverty, to be able to own our own cereal company, to be able to sell to national distributions, is incredible. And me and Snoop grew up on WIC, so we used to get the free cereal. And now, to be able to have cereal that we could have kids from WIC eat our products, and it's cool, it tastes good, and salute to Post to giving us national distribution. So.

[00:04:29] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm feeling it. I like it.

[00:04:30] **Master P:** Yeah, appreciate it.

[00:04:32] **Jesse Thorn:** So, you grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana.

(Master P confirms.)

Your mom lived in the Bay Area.

(He confirms.)

How much did you go back and forth?

[00:04:40] **Master P:** All the time. All the time, just back and forth.

[00:04:45] **Jesse Thorn:** Were you like school year with your grandmother in Louisiana and summers in the Bay, or?

[00:04:51] **Master P:** Yeah, it was like living with my grandparents, and then growing up, and then my mom moving to Dubai. You know, it was like having the best of both worlds. When you go back home or you're in Richmond, you know, my mom there. Go back to New

Orleans, my grandmother there—which is like my mom. So, it was just a blessing, man, to be able to have like two moms.

[00:05:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Your house was very, very full in New Orleans.

(Master P confirms.)

It was your grandparents and how many other people in your family?

[00:05:26] **Master P:** Well, my grandparents, two. They had 12 kids. That's 14. And me and my brother made 16 people in a three-bedroom project.

[00:05:36] **Jesse Thorn:** Where did you sleep?

[00:05:37] **Master P:** On the floor.

[00:05:38] **Jesse Thorn:** Was there a fight for the bed or had you already guaranteed loss of all the beds?

[00:05:42] **Master P:** Nah, my uncles was too big. They was too big. So, you know, I was happy with being on the floor. They was older. So, I just—you know, I want any kids that's listening to this—I made the best out of what I had. I had a roof over my head. There's always somebody with a worse situation than you. There's a lot of people that's homeless, sleeping outside, sleeping in the streets—which the same thing, we're still dealing with that today. But I was thankful to be able to live in a project, an apartment. Even though I didn't have a bed, it motivated me to work and go out and do what I need to do. And I said, you know what? I always thought like I'm living in a mansion. I never thought that I was living in poverty. I've always said, you know, one day I will be in a mansion. And so, you got to have those type of dreams and goals and beliefs. So, I feel like God has something bigger for me. I always tell people; God see what he could trust you with a little before he could trust you with a lot. So.

[00:06:49] **Jesse Thorn:** Had you seen other things when you were a kid? I mean, like did you go over to somebody's house that was your friend from school when you were in fourth grade, and you saw they had a two-car garage or whatever?

[00:07:01] **Master P:** Yeah, well, I played basketball at AAU. AAU took me on the road. I was able to see a lot of stuff. And they had this one kid. I mean, he had—he lived in a house, and he had video games—arcades in his house. I've never seen nothing like that. So, I was like, wow, this family has to be rolling. Like, if they could do it, one day I could do it.

[00:07:29] **Jesse Thorn:** I have a very vivid memory of when I went to—and I didn't grow up in circumstances nearly as difficult as yours, but I grew up in the inner city, and I went to middle school in the suburbs. And I remember so vividly the feeling of being at a friend's house. And like, it wasn't that they had a pool. Like, I was impressed that they had a pool; there's no pools at my house, but it was that they had this little refrigerator with lots of different kinds of little drinks in it. Like, half sized cans of 7Up. Like, you could have as many 7Ups as you wanted. *(Laughs.)* And that was the part that blew my mind.

[00:08:08] **Master P:** No, but you know what? It be the small things. It's a blessing. That's what I tell people all the time. And so, I mean, we all blessed. You know, we just got to be able to live in the situations and the conditions that we are dealt with. And that's how I look at life. I say, you know what? This is gonna—this pain is gonna go away. I'm gonna make it go away. I need to do something about it. I need to have faith, but I need to work. I need to put the work in. And that's when my life started changing, when I started realizing that.

[00:08:35] **Jesse Thorn:** How old are we talking about?

[00:08:37] **Master P:** I mean, I was young. Maybe like seven or eight years old, I started cutting grass, carrying the elderly groceries home, and they started giving me a little money. So, I felt like I was like a little boss back in the day, and even though it wasn't a lot of money, it was a lot for me. In New Orleans, I used to carry the torch during Mardi Gras, making like \$250. So, I was doing things to better myself, and I'd take money and give it to my grandmother. That made me feel good, knowing that she didn't have to work that hard. So, that's what my whole life was built on, like I'ma get my grandmother a house. It never was about me. I'm going to keep working hard. One day, you know, we could have nice things. So, like those was goals that I had set as a kid, as a five-year-old kid.

[00:09:34] **Jesse Thorn:** How is it different with your mom in Richmond than with your grandparents in New Orleans?

[00:09:39] **Master P:** It's no different. I went from one hood to another. (*Chuckles.*) So.

[00:09:44] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, people who don't know the Bay area—

[00:09:46] **Master P:** Man, Richmond is one of the most—at the time when I was there, it probably was one of the most dangerous places, probably still is.

[00:09:52] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, like I grew up next to projects called Valencia Gardens in San Francisco that was—could be pretty intense. And you know, I was able to skate past it on account of, you know, no one thought I was—

[00:10:03] **Master P:** Well, you know, North Richmond.

[00:10:05] **Jesse Thorn:** But yeah, but I remember like as a teenager in Richmond being like, “Oh.” You know what I mean? Like, “Oh, okay.”

[00:10:12] **Master P:** Yeah. No, it's real. To be honest with you. And then, by me going to Merritt College, catching a boat going to school and being from Richmond and have to come back. So, you know, once you get on that boat every day. it's a fight. It's something. It's like—so, going back and forth from Oakland to Richmond.

[00:10:36] **Jesse Thorn:** And you're talking about six subway stops or seven subway—

(*Master P confirms.*)

So, you're not talking about—you know, you're not talking about—you're not talking about taking a commuter train to—you know, 40 miles.

[00:10:47] **Master P:** Nah. You don't know who gonna get on, who gonna be angry, who gonna be mad. It's like—but you have to deal with it, because you're trying to make it. So, for me, it always has been a journey.

[00:10:58] **Jesse Thorn:** You must have thought basketball was—

[00:11:00] **Master P:** Yeah, basketball was—I thought that was the way out for me. So.

[00:11:05] **Jesse Thorn:** Were you the kind of kid that just—I mean, like I can imagine with 12 or 15 people in the house that there wasn't much to do inside your house besides bump into people, right?

(He confirms.)

So, I'm imagining you as a 12-year-old just on the court all the time.

[00:11:23] **Master P:** Yeah, I stayed out. I stayed on the court 24/7, learned how to shoot the basketball. I was a good shooter, and that's what got me a scholarship. Then, I got hurt, then had to go—went back.

[00:11:35] **Jesse Thorn:** So, as you mentioned, you played AAU. You were a very serious player. You got a scholarship to the University of Houston, right?

(Master P confirms.)

And you hurt yourself like almost immediately, right?

[00:11:47] **Master P:** Yeah, yeah, it was bad. Like, imagine you know you're about to make it now, and then you get hurt. And you feel like you failed everybody.

[00:11:56] **Jesse Thorn:** You blew an ACL, was that what it was?

[00:11:58] **Master P:** Yeah, so I went back to the projects.

[00:12:00] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, that is—just leaving aside what happened next, what was it like at the moment that that happened? Did you know?

[00:12:10] **Master P:** I was just down. And my grandfather told me like, “You need to get out and go do something.” And I just thought—I thought—

[00:12:21] **Jesse Thorn:** For one thing, it like hurts more than anything, right? Like, it's like, from what I've heard described from people who have—

[00:12:26] **Master P:** Well, I mean, think about it, right? You know, when people talk about mental illness, right? It's like, imagine you never talk to anybody, but you know you're on this high. You don't have no counseling or nothing; it's just like now your whole world is taken away from you. Now you're in this dark spot. And so, then you don't know if you're going to be able to play again.

[00:12:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you lose your scholarship right away?

(He confirms.)

How did they tell you?

[00:12:55] **Master P:** I mean, they had to give it to somebody else. We didn't have those rules that the kids have now. Like, you automatically have four years. So, had to start over, had to go back. And then, I went to the Bay, and once I rehabilitated myself, I went to junior college. But I felt like a failure, and I had to figure out how to get better.

[00:13:21] **Jesse Thorn:** We're taking a break. We'll be back in just a second. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:13:29] **Transition:** Relaxed, thumpy synth.

[00:13:33] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Master P. He's the rapper responsible for the smash hit "Make 'Em Say Uhh", among many, many others. Lately, he has been working with the National Alliance on Mental Illness to raise awareness for mental health. Oh, and he also has a line of breakfast cereals with Snoop Dogg. Let's get back into my conversation with Master P.

Did you rap as a kid or as a teenager?

[00:14:02] **Master P:** You know, I grew up listening to like Run-DMC and all those, you know, artists that came before me.

[00:14:10] **Jesse Thorn:** You're of the generation where you can remember when rap hit the radio.

(Master P confirms.)

Like, you were just old enough to be paying attention.

[00:14:17] **Master P:** And that's what it was for me. You know, you say little stuff, but you don't know that one day you're going to be into this. So, when you talk about 50 years of hip-hop—I mean, it came a long way. I didn't think hip-hop would even be around this long. You know, they always say like, "It's going to be about three/five years and hip-hop going to be over." And you know, that was my song, the Run-DMC, my Adidas, and I mean, that's what I really remember from hip-hop like was my way, my journey. But now I really wasn't—I

wasn't into it like that. I'm more like a DJ for my grandmother when they have suppers. You know, we do the little \$15 suppers. My grandmother fried fish and stuff for the people in the community. That's how she made her money.

And then she'll tell me, "Baby, go put the music on for my friends. Be the DJ for the night." So, I'll go, you know, putting AlGreen on, putting all this stuff on, Marvin Gaye. And I think that's what really got me into the music, where I had an ear for like just good music,

[00:15:28] **Jesse Thorn:** When you were, you know, 20 years old or whatever, did you have the confidence to walk up to somebody and say like, "Yeah, I'm a rapper"?

[00:15:37] **Master P:** You know, I did, 'cause I believed in who I turned out to be. And... I wasn't that good. Think about it. I live in the Bay. I'm from the South, so I sound country, but I'm in a Bay Area with all this lingo, E-40, Too Short, Spice 1, Tupac. It was just a different game. You had Rappin' 4-Tay, RBL Posse, JT the Bigga Figga. These guys was mega stores then, and I'm, you know. E-A-Ski probably was one of the biggest producers. I was doing music with K-Lou in Richmond, but that was going good for me, but it was still country. I'll go to KMEL.

[00:16:33] **Jesse Thorn:** The People Station.

[00:16:34] **Master P:** And try to get my records played, but it was like, "Eeeh, this ain't it." So, you got to fail sometimes. So, anybody listening to this, No Limit just didn't take off. Master P didn't just take off. I was like the oddball like, "Nah, this don't work."

[00:16:50] **Jesse Thorn:** I want to take it a couple years earlier. When was the first time that you heard records that you identified with in the sense that like this is somebody from a place like where I'm from—whether it's people from the Bay, people from the South?

[00:17:06] **Master P:** I think it was Ice-T, *Colors*. So, I grew up listening to that, riding in the hood. And—that record, *Colors*, you know, and being able to see that on the movie and hear that, that was through every hood, *Colors*.

[00:17:25] **Jesse Thorn:** But that's such an LA record.

[00:17:27] **Master P:** I know, but it was big in the South.

[00:17:30] **Jesse Thorn:** What made you think that you could do it from New Orleans or even from—or even from Richmond?

[00:17:33] **Master P:** Because when I started looking at—when I started looking at it, I started saying that Ice-T a guy from the streets, and you could sense back then that the music was real. You could sense that he was living like that. Like, you just felt it. And yeah, I'm like, man, if this guy could make it, you know, he got to be from some gang or from some hood or whatever. I'm like, man, I'll be able to tell my story. And then I start getting into, as I got—you know, time moved by, you start really listening to like NWA, Eazy-E, Ice Cube.

Yeah, I start realizing like, man, these guys, you know, been through some tough situations. And then listening to everything from Houston, from the Geto Boys to the “Mind Playing Tricks On You”. And it's like, man, these guys going through it, and they living, and they able to, you know, make something better for themselves and be from the South. Uncle Luke—listening to Uncle Luke and, man, the 2 Live Crew back then, it was a lot of energy. So, now you're hearing all this different type of music, and it started being inspiring that these guys made it, then I could make it.

[00:18:53] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, it seems fortuitous, lucky that you happened to hit the Bay at a time where, A) there were some huge national artists, right? You mentioned Tupac, who got his start in Digital Underground. Of course, Hammer was really huge. But also, an exploding scene of independent hip-hop. And like, you know, I have a friend who moved from—he's from New Jersey; he moved to the Bay Area. I asked him one time, “What do you think about the Bay and living there?”

And he's like, “Man, everybody's got a t-shirt company.” And it's like what he means is that there was this like long standing spirit of just do it yourself. Just do it yourself.

[00:19:37] **Master P:** Yeah. No, I don't sit around and wait. I learned it from St. Charles, E-40, Uncle. So, St. Charles was the GOAT, man. He—

[00:19:47] **Jesse Thorn:** He had been a gospel singer, but he really knew the record business.

[00:19:51] **Master P:** He knew the record business, and he knew—I went from St. Charles, and we took our records to walk that city hall. Man, don't be afraid to learn from other people that has the experience and the wisdom. Because, you know... that's where I got my game from. I got my game from the OGs, so—listening, not being afraid to listen and not be a know it all. I think a lot of people in this generation, they feel like they have to know everything. You don't. You have to take advice from the right people. You have to take it in and make the right decisions and choices. And I think that's what I was able to do.

Because I, even today, I'm still trying to find out information. I'm still seeking knowledge and information. It's not just about me. And I think that's the difference with me.

[00:20:42] **Jesse Thorn:** You just picked an anime toy off my colleague's desk and asked me who made it. This is the second thing you said (*chuckling*) when you walked in here.

[00:20:49] **Master P:** Yeah. Yeah, because think about it, right? I'm working on all these projects where I'm creating this world now. So, this world that I'm creating right now, it's the same way *Star Wars* was created. All these things was created. So, you got to, you know, learn from other people, watch what—you want to know what people buy and why they buy this, you know, how these things are made.

[00:21:13] **Jesse Thorn:** And you learned that firsthand in the record business.

(*Master P confirms.*)

Because when you started making—when you started making—well, are we talking about tapes or CDs at this point? Probably some of each.

[00:21:22] **Master P:** Yeah. Both.

[00:21:24] **Jesse Thorn:** You were walking them into record stores.

[00:21:30] **Master P:** Yeah, I'm going to Rainbow Records, getting my product made up. Putting this product in my own store, I created my own store. That's how I was able to meet all these guys coming through. And that's how I was able to meet artists. Then, I learned the business from there. So, I learned the business from a retail perspective. So, then I'm out selling my CDs and cassettes out the trunk of my car. I'm meeting producers, being from Richmond and going to Oakland, meeting E-A-Ski. Now my music game is getting up. So, I just think that people don't realize, like we talked about earlier, that knowledge and information is just like—we don't think we could do it on our own, but in the Bay, we was taught you go out there and hustle, you grind, and make it on your own. Don't sit around and wait for them.

[00:22:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Now, you mentioned being country in the Bay, and I think that's—I think that matters. Because, sure, you spent a lot of your childhood in the Bay Area, because your mom lived there, but nobody was going to mistake you for a guy from—I mean, you're sitting across from me. People can hear you on the radio. They can tell that you're from Louisiana, right?

(He confirms.)

And so, people know that you're not JT the Bigga Figga or Rappin' 4 or whatever, right? You're like a space alien in this scene, because everybody is from—you know, the world stretches from, you know, *(chuckles)* from Hunters Point out to Vallejo to Richmond, you know what I mean? Like, it's stretched beyond that into Northern California and eventually across the country, but like this was a small world, and you were from outside of it.

[00:23:15] **Master P:** Now, it was different because, you know, my girl was from Hunters Point. So, I got to go over there to see her, and they're like, "Oh, tell that Richmond dude not to come over here." I'm like, man, I'm from New Orleans. *(Laughs.)* So, it was like, it was—

[00:23:31] **Jesse Thorn:** I tried that in my neighborhood; they were not having it. Yeah.

(They laugh.)

I gave it a shot, though.

[00:23:35] **Master P:** It was different though. You know, even though I was different—I mean, just thinking about it, I had—back then I had dreads all that. Now everybody in the Bay got dreads. Everybody got gold teeth. I had gold teeth. I just stood out, and now everybody there got gold teeth. So, it goes to show you how it changes. You just got to keep doing what you got to do. And I love my time, because it built my character, even getting

turned down, even when people didn't like me. That made me work harder, so I never took it personal. I just think the Bay pushed me. That's what I love about the Bay, because for me to be from where I come from and the way I sound and was able to eventually sell records in the Bay? That let me know that—it's almost like being an athlete. You done put some serious work in.

So, you have to imagine, I'm on San Pablo, I'm up MacArthur, I'm all in Oakland, East Oakland. I'm going to Vallejo. I'm everywhere. I'm in every hood. When I went to make songs with JT the Bigga Figga, I'm in his hood, in the projects where he was living at. So, it's like I know I had to touch the people. So, one thing people knew that—they knew that I'm in every hood in the Bay. So, that was the difference. They know I'm in every hood, even though I might have a Saint's football jacket on with a black beanie, and they knew I wasn't from there, but I still respected the Bay, and they respected me. And that's—I think that's the difference. I wasn't like trying to be something that I wasn't. I wasn't trying to be like, oh, I'm not from somewhere else. You know, I live in Richmond. I grew up in the Bay. I'm from New Orleans, so they knew my accent was different. I didn't try to be like, oh, I was born here. I think that was the difference, and we just bonded.

[00:25:30] **Jesse Thorn:** And that's—I think like listening back to your records, preparing for this interview, one of the things that I noticed—and you put out a lot of records before you were nationally famous. One of the things that I noticed is that as the records go on, you become more and more different.

(He agrees.)

Like, at the beginning, you're not that distinct. Like, you know, you're making mob music records, sometimes you sound kind of like Scarface.

(He agrees.)

[00:25:57] **Music:** “I’m Going Big Time” from the album *Mama’s Bad Boy* by Master P.

I'm going big time, big time

‘Cause a brother like, I gots to get mine

Damn, task kicks down my door

They got a warrant

5-0 pull me over, but my registration’s current

Every time they try to get me, I’m legit

I’m never slipping

Got a female I can trust (Hey, where you going?)

But the girl is always tripping

(Music fades out.)

[00:26:13] **Jesse Thorn:** And as the music goes on, as you get closer and closer to that, you know, uh—

[00:26:19] **Master P:** Well, I had to find myself. So, think about it. When I was making mob music, that was the sound. That was the producers. That's what I was telling you. The producers I was around with KLou and the producers that was in Richmond around me, that's what they was making. So, I had to rap on it. And I was rapping with other people. You know, I still wasn't being myself yet.

[00:26:40] **Jesse Thorn:** And mob music was like street rap in the Bay Area in the early to mid-1990s.

[00:26:43] **Master P:** Yeah. I mean the (*inaudible*), all those—like that was the sound. The Delinquents. 415. You know, that was the sound. But you could see once I started getting with E-A-Ski, I started growing. I was able to, you know, make some of the music that was more me. And then, when I started getting some of the guys from the south to come back out to the bay with me, then I was starting to sound more and more like myself.

[00:27:15] **Music:** “The Ghetto’s Tryin’ to Kill Me” from the album *The Ghetto’s Tryin’ to Kill Me* by Master P.

They say I'm going out by the gun smoke

'Cause I refuse to be broke up in this ghetto

See, I be tripping on life, 'cause life's a damn trip

And when I leave the house, you know I'm carrying an extra clip

See in the '90s, things are gon'-gon' change

I never thought I'd grow up to be the dope man

(Music fades out.)

[00:27:33] **Master P:** Like, I didn't have—so, you know, don't be afraid to find who you are. So, that's what I say about the journey. Yeah, I was—I'm more in tune to the journey, not the success or how much I'ma make or how big I'ma be. It was always practicing to get better. So, whatever I'm doing, I'm practicing to get better. And I learned that from sports too, where you could always get better.

[00:27:57] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, not a lot of musicians get the chance to do that past 18.

(He agrees.)

You know what I mean? Like, not that people don't hone their chops, but like especially in hip-hop and especially then, you know, you got a record deal when you were 17 or 19, and you got to make a record. And if that didn't work, that's it.

[00:28:20] **Master P:** It's over. Yeah.

[00:28:22] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end. And I think the fact that you were making your own records—

[00:28:25] **Master P:** Yeah, you could go.

[00:28:26] **Jesse Thorn:** —meant that you got five years, seven years, to find—figure out who you were.

[00:28:32] **Master P:** And it was a blessing, to be honest with you. I tell people preparation is key, because imagine if I had made it then and I wasn't prepared. I would never be who I am today. I just would have had a hit song, came, went away, and back to the hood. Because back then a lot of artists were still in the hood making music that had platinum albums. And I seen it for myself. I'm like, man, if this person selling all these records, why are they still in the hood? That's what I was able to learn in the Bay. It was like, well, you could do it on your own. They're only going to give you 200 or 150 and you wanna sign your life away, we could make that selling CDs out the trunk of our car. And I'm blessed to be able to experience that in the Yay Area, the Bay Area, you know, so.

[00:29:26] **Jesse Thorn:** You also, at that time in your life, lost one of your brothers.

(He confirms.)

How old were you when that happened?

[00:29:37] **Master P:** Man, I was young. I lost my brother at like 19. So.

[00:29:46] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, that must have been an incredibly dark time in your life, because that's also when you got hurt and had to drop out of school.

[00:29:53] **Master P:** Yeah. So, I was going through it. And it's like you just never know. I took that pain, and I think it really got me into the music industry to where I wanted to make his name live on. So, I had to start figuring out how to do something right. You know, so that's when I started really coming up with the mama's bad boys and all that stuff, saying that, you know, "Mama, I don't want to see you cry. I don't want you to feel this pain no more." 'Cause I watched it. Like, that really hurt my mama. As bad as it hurt me, it hurt my mama to watch her go through that, to lose a kid. And I decided I need to change my life, and I'm

really going to start dedicating to this music and do something positive with my life. So, I was replacing the negative with the positive.

[00:30:49] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Beat.*) Did you have people to talk to about it?

[00:30:51] **Master P:** Nobody. I just had to deal with it, man. That's what I'm saying. Like, we talk about mental illness. A lot of kids from the ghetto go through a lot of things, and that's why I'm an advocate for NAMI now, where I get out here and try to interact, communicate, help other families, help other kids to be able to heal. And you know, we're not just calling them mental illnesses no more. We're calling them mental strength. Because you gotta be strong to get past this. A lot of kids don't get counseling. They don't get medicine. A lot of kids self-medicate, so that's why we're losing so many kids young, because they're dealing with situations, and they self-medicate. And they're using drugs to ease the pain. And so, me being able to tell my story and get out there and touch people, that's what this is about for me.

Where I'm at now as a man, it's not about how much money you make. I feel like my life—God has spared my life to where now the most important job for me is to be a servant, to be able to serve other people. And that's what my life is about.

[00:32:00] **Jesse Thorn:** We've got so much more to get into with Master P. When we come back from a break, we will talk about how he has found peace and strength in prayer. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:32:12] **Promo:**

Music: Upbeat, fun music.

Laurie Kilmartin: Hiiii! This is Laurie Kilmartin.

Jackie Kashian: And I'm Jackie Kashian. And we have a podcast, called *The Jackie and Laurie Show* on MaxFun, and it's very exciting. 'Cause what do we talk about?

Laurie: Comedy!

Jackie: Standup comedy. We both do standup comedy and have since the dawn of Christ.

Laurie: Well, Jackie!

Jackie: Is that offensive?

Laurie: It is offensive. To me. Because you've aged me.

(*Jackie cackles.*)

We started in the late '80s, and we're still here! You can't kill us!

Jackie: So, go to *The Jackie and Laurie Show* on Max Fun, and listen to that.

Narrator: *The Jackie and Laurie Show*. New episodes Monday, only on MaximumFun.org.

Music:

... show, The Jackie and Laurie Show!

(Music ends.)

[00:32:53] **Transition:** Chiming synth.

[00:32:58] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Master P. He's the platinum selling rapper and the founder of No Limit Records.

When did you decide that your music career was going to be in New Orleans and not in the Bay?

[00:33:18] **Master P:** When I started going back to New Orleans with Mia X and KLC and them, I just started feeling like this was the thing for me. It's almost like taking a circle and a square and trying to put it in. It's like this is working a little bit here, but here—this is me. I could be—I could totally be myself. So, when I started really just going back home, listening to the music, to the culture, and getting some of the beats from KLC, I started realizing this worked for me. “Bout It, Bout It” and songs like that. It was just—it was me.

[00:34:02] **Music:** “I’m Bout It, Bout It II” from the album *Ice Cream Man* by Master P.

I represent, its 1990-skrilla

It's Master P, and they labeled me a drug dealer

'Cause I'm bout it, I mean I'm rowdy

I hang with these killers that everybody talk about

We doing this, we doing that (We doing what?)

We in the studio whipping up dope tracks

(Music fades out.)

[00:34:21] **Master P:** It was me. It just—it worked. I didn't have to force it. I didn't have—you know, ‘cause music is a feeling. I don't write; it just comes to me. And everything that I

was getting from KL, it was just—it was working. So, I'm like this is where I need to be at. And Mia X was all, “You need to be—you need to be in New Orleans.” You know, this is—and it's like, it worked. It was—she was right.

[00:34:55] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you immediately think, “My business is not just Master P; my business is something much broader than that”?

[00:35:06] **Master P:** Yeah, I knew this was bigger than me. That's why I named myself Master P. That's why I called my company No Limit. It's gonna be no limit to my success. And I'm a master whatever I do.

[00:35:21] **Jesse Thorn:** ‘Cause, P, like you've made some great records and you're a talented rapper, but you had more talented rappers working with you.

(Master P agrees.)

And like I think your greatest gift was to find ways for other people to succeed.

[00:35:36] **Master P:** Oh yeah, no, I mean, if you gonna be a boss, you gotta find another boss. Imagine if you're talented, but you find more people talented than you. That mean you're not selfish. I think that's the reason God keep blessing me, because I was able to put others on. I had an ear for talent. I had an ear for music and gave other people opportunities to where they could feed their families. They could make it out. I think that's been my greatest strength to be able to say, “Man, look, you know, I'm making millions, but look all these other millionaires I done created.” That's what you call a boss, and now these people can one day feed me or help me or help somebody else. I'm like—but that's how you pay it forward.

And I think that was my greatest strength, knowing that it's not just about me. And this is bigger than music. The music is what's going to open the doors for us, but whatever we come up with after this, it's going to be bigger. And I feel like the music for me, why I'm into the product stuff now—even though I always say product don't talk back, but I'm into the product stuff because I realized that the music could stop any day. You're going to get older. Your time going to come.

[00:37:02] **Jesse Thorn:** You talked about the way that losing your brother changed your life, and I can only imagine what that was like at age 19. You lost one of your children not that long ago to an overdose.

(He confirms.)

I feel like some great part of your drive in your life came from the idea that you could escape that kind of tragedy, like leave it behind you.

[00:37:29] **Master P:** Yeah. And it's tough, man, as a parent, because the world is so easy now to get whatever you want. And losing a brother ripped my heart out. Losing a child, it tears your soul apart. And, um, knowing that—but it's *(inaudible)* for everybody. Like, and

that's why I advocate for NAMI, to be able to teach other families, be able to see through this mental illness and talk to and communicate. Because things could be happening right in front of you that you don't know, because you think everything is just going to be okay, because it's normally supposed to be. Uh, but when you look at fentanyl, you look at these drugs, it could kill you instantly.

[00:38:14] **Jesse Thorn:** It happened—a childhood friend of mine overdosed about four or five years ago in similar circumstance.

[00:38:18] **Master P:** So—but the thing is, the way I pick it back up is, I can't sleep till I go out and help and save other people. Because you can't do nothing once we gone. And you have to learn how to pray. I learned how to pray more and now pay more attention to these kids and watch. Because, you know, back in our time, you could smell the drugs. Can't smell it now. So, yeah, I mean, that's where I'm going at. And for my daughter, she's my parachute. I've been her parachute. So, now it's what keeps me going. Saying, “You know what? Now I'll go even harder. We're going to even create more products. We're going to help more families, and we're going to be able to tackle mental strength in her name.”

And those are the things that keep me going, man. I can't sit around and just do nothing. I got to do something about this, and that's what I'm doing.

[00:39:19] **Jesse Thorn:** You've had so many traumas in your life. Have you been able to find ways or places to slow down and have peace?

[00:39:30] **Master P:** Yeah, you know what? I mean, peace is what everybody live for and work for, and happiness comes within you. So, knowing God and knowing that everything is a test and knowing that I have God, man, that's what keeps me going. Like, that's my peace. When you put Him first and you don't worry about whatever He put you through. You just gotta keep moving, and you know that everything is a season. And yeah, when you know that word, you know, it's not about you anymore. That's why I told you, you know, my life is being a servant. But you know, everybody's accountable for them. I'm accountable for myself that I find peace, that I do the right thing. Because if I do the wrong thing, I won't be here.

[00:40:26] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I grew up going to AA meetings with my late father. And like, I'm not personally a believer, but one of the things that I find most moving about that is the idea of accepting a higher power. And whether that's—you know, for many people it might be Christian God, but it's really about the—

[00:40:48] **Master P:** Well, me, bro—I'ma just tell you like it is for me. I know it's a God. Might be a reason why we communicating right now. Without God I wouldn't be here. So, without God I couldn't get you none of the stuff that I'm able to just keep going. And I'm definitely a person that will be praying for you, that hopefully one day you'll understand that.

[00:41:13] **Jesse Thorn:** But I certainly understand what prayer could mean, for example. You know, it's an opportunity to accept your place in the world.

(Master P agrees.)

Well, I really appreciate your time, and I very sincerely appreciate your prayers.

(Master P thanks him.)

Thank you.

Master P. As you heard in our interview, Master P came to our office with breakfast cereal in hand. To see a photo of me, Master P, and a bunch of cereal boxes, find us on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#).

[00:41:47] **Transition:** Spirited synth with light vocalizations.

[00:41:50] **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 just made an appointment to get an updated covid shot and a flu shot for this autumn. I hope you will go and do the same and help protect yourself and everyone around you.

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. And hey, if you're in Los Angeles or environs, here's some cool news. We are joining LAist 89.3. We are so thrilled to be back on the air in our hometown of Los Angeles. Thanks, LAist! Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Dan remixed the latest EP from the Baltimore hardcore band Turnstile and has been posting clips on his Instagram of the samples he used for the remix. Check out the instrumentals on his Bandcamp. Just go to Bandcamp and search for DJW Sounds. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation", written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries.

And *Bullseye* is on Instagram. I hope you will take a look for us there. You can see pictures from behind the scenes and clips from upcoming stuff and all kinds of fun stuff. We're on IG [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). You can also find us on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

[00:43:31] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](#) and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)