

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

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

[00:00:14] **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.

[00:00:29] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*, I'm Jesse Thorn. The public radio show *This American Life* has—well, I'm just going to take a sip of water here before I get into this. (*Beat.*) And a deep breath. *This American Life* has been on the air for almost 30 years. It has won nine Peabody's, an Edward R. Murrow award, and a Pulitzer. It was a TV show on Showtime. It has literally millions of podcast listeners. Its spinoff, *Serial*, basically made podcasts a thing. And this year, *This American Life* passed 800 episodes. As of this recording, they are at 812. And here's maybe the most amazing thing of all: it is still really, really great for all the reasons it always has been. It's engrossing, and funny, and moving. And for new ones, too.

As its resources have grown, so have its ambitions. And these days, it's often the show telling the most compelling stories about the most important issues in our world. Of course, behind all that, all this time: Ira Glass. He created the show way back when. He's still steering the ship now, at 64. There is, of course, a brilliant staff, but the buck still stops with Ira. To celebrate *This American Life* hitting 800, we talked with the man himself. And, um, I do want to mention that toward the end, for reasons too complicated to explain, he and I each use a somewhat vulgar word for tush. Tushies.

Anyway, here he is. Public radio legend and one of my personal heroes, I'll be honest. Ira Glass.

[00:02:17] **Transition:** Cheerful synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:02:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Hi, Ira! Welcome back to the show! Congratulations on this incredible anniversary.

[00:02:29] **Ira Glass:** Well, thank you so much.

[00:02:31] **Jesse Thorn:** Ira, how much do you work?

[00:02:35] **Ira Glass:** A lot, still. Like, there's a lot of days that begin at 8AM, (*chuckles*) and work continues to 7AM or later, still.

[00:02:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, in the same day?

[00:02:49] **Ira Glass:** I mean, sorry, 7AM—I mean 7PM. Sorry, sorry, sorry, yeah, yeah. So, that would be a lot! No, no, sorry, 7PM. Yeah, yeah. So, no, there's a lot of—I mean, you know, some weeks are easier than others.

[00:03:04] **Jesse Thorn:** How much of it is in making the show—like, you know, the stuff that goes on the air—and how much of it is you being in charge of things and like being a businessperson or whatever?

[00:03:19] **Ira Glass:** Depends on the week. I would say, overall, it's probably 75% actually making things. Being in on edits, writing things, doing interviews. A lot of it, like in many weeks, will be just like editing other people's stuff, you know. And then occasionally there's—you know, there'll be two days where for six hours each day or five hours each day, I'm listening to drafts of a *Serial*—you know, the new *Serial* show, 'cause I listen on edits of those shows. So, thankfully most of it is actually making stuff.

[00:03:58] **Jesse Thorn:** But the reason that I ask you that is that I think relative to other people who make stuff—and especially in public radio—you are the person who is most kind of sanguine and sometimes even excited about business operations. That like you're willing to admit that you are making a thing that has to be paid for, and so on and so forth, in a way that when I go to a public radio conference and there's people who are on air are talking, like I get the impression that they feel like they deserve it. And so, they shouldn't have to worry about it. (*Chuckles.*) The business stuff.

[00:04:45] **Ira Glass:** No, that's true. And I do, but the fact is I enjoy the business part of it. Like, the business part of it is so much easier in a way than the editorial part of it. Like, making a show—so many things can go wrong and so many ideas have to be discarded on the way to the good ideas. And you just go through so many drafts of things that aren't quite right. And even figuring out kind of what you want to do and even looking for a story, you know, even that early phase where you're like calling around figuring out “is this worth doing?”, like all that stuff is so—like, it's so imprecise. And, you know, we're a show where we still kill a ton of stuff, like a fourth to a third of everything we start we kill. And you know, you just kind of run at so much stuff.

Whereas running a business—I mean a business like this, which is pretty simple. There aren't that many inputs and outputs. Like, it's just—it's like doing a recipe or something instead. It's like going into the kitchen with like, “Oh, I've got a couple of ingredients. I know if I'd put this in the oven at this temperature, it's going to be fine.” And so, I like that. And then the business also, you can just invent stuff in the business. You know, like I spent a fair amount of time today writing pledge drive promos and pitching Neil Patrick Harris to do an event for the pledge drive, which I don't know if we'll do. Like, and if he doesn't, like I'm sure—(*chuckles*) you know, I hope he'll be okay with me saying that we reached out to him, but you know what I mean?

[00:06:23] **Jesse Thorn:** He doesn't. That's the headline of this interview. “Neil Patrick Harris Spurns Ira Glass”—“I'm too big for you,” says Harris.

[00:06:33] **Ira Glass:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, exactly. I mean, but you know what I mean? Like, I'm just saying like—but I mean, he's just somebody who we're pitching a thing, like, oh, maybe this would be fun to do for the pledge drive and do an event. And then like—and so, there was like a good hour of my day today that's just thinking of like what do we want to say to Neil, and what would actually be fun to do with him? And what would he like to do? And when writing some.

And then because we have to record the pledge drive show this week, writing what it is that we would do on the air if in fact this would happen, so we can do this properly. And like that was like a—you know. That was an amount of time, and there'll be more time spent on that before the day's out.

And I feel like that's—I don't know, it's an interesting challenge. It's interesting to think of something fun for the pledge drive. You know what I mean? Like, it's hard to think of something that'll be good for the pledge drive, actually. (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean? And like—and so, that's—you know, that's a thing to do. It's—I will say like, just to speak to kind of the bigger thing I think you're gesturing at, like I do have the feeling often that I created a life for myself where it's like... I get to do things that I really like to do, but it's like a meal I like that I'm never allowed to stand up from the table and walk away.

(*Jesse chuckles softly.*)

And so, there's a downside to that. (*Laughs.*) You know?

[00:07:51] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, have you ever considered, in the 25 to 30 years that you've been making *This American Life* or the—whatever it is—40 years now that you've been making public radio stuff, like what your goal is beyond this week?

[00:08:11] **Ira Glass:** I mean... yes, of course.

[00:08:16] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you say of course; I'm not sure that I have! (*Laughs.*)

[00:08:19] **Ira Glass:** Why? Can I ask the same of you? Do you know what your goal is beyond this week?

[00:08:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Not really. No, I never have. (*Beat.*) I think the only reason I'm able to make a show at all is that I have to do it every week. People say like, “Where are you going to be in five years?” I have no clue at all.

[00:08:36] **Ira Glass:** Is there something that you would like to do in your creative life or your work life that you've never gotten a chance to do?

[00:08:44] **Jesse Thorn:** I don't know, dude! But this—I'm interviewing you, dude! I'm interviewing you, Ira. And so, the question that I'm asking you is: what is it for you? Because it's not self-evident that someone who makes a weekly radio show would have medium to long term goals, because part of the point making a weekly radio show—to me at least—is that it gets you over the hump of feeling like everything has to be the thing that you imagined it to be five years from now. Like, it doesn't have to be perfect and beautiful the way that you imagine it might be. Because you just gotta put it on the air.

[00:09:21] **Ira Glass:** Well, the answer is yes. I have thought about what I want to be doing. And honestly, like I had two goals that are partly realized. And one of the goals is that just the show would run better. And by better I mean we wouldn't be in a rhythm where we would do two really good shows and then we would just have nothing and have to scramble for a

week or two and just throw together a couple things. Which we can do, and we've done since 1995. But it's very unpleasant.

And somehow in this year, you know, partly thanks—I have to say—to our managing editor, Sarah Abdurrahman, and our executive editor, Emanuele Berry, and our senior editor, David Kestenbaum, like somehow we've come into a rhythm of like we actually know what shows we're making for the next two months at any given point. And they're pretty good! Like, you know, we have stuff in the works all the time, and the rest of the staff is so experienced. And there's so many of them that like at any given point we actually have anchor stories for shows going two months out, and so we're not scrambling like that for the first time in the 20 something year history of the show. So, our lives are all a lot saner.

[00:10:43] **Jesse Thorn:** So much more to get into with Ira Glass. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:10:51] **Transition:** Cheerful, chiming synth.

[00:10:56] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guest is Ira Glass. He is, of course, the host of *This American Life*, the co-creator of *Serial* and *S Town*, and—you know—the guy without whose example I never would have gone into public radio. *This American Life* recently celebrated 800 episodes. Eight, zero, zero. An astounding feat. Let's get back into my conversation with Ira Glass.

For a long time, Ira, you were famous for finishing edits—I don't even know (*chuckles*)—like, you're finishing the edits on the second act of the show while the first act was going up to the satellite or whatever.

[00:11:38] **Ira Glass:** Yes, absolutely. Yeah, yeah, that happened for sure. And the truth is like many weeks we are like bringing it right down to the deadline. But that's just compulsiveness. You know. But then other weeks we're not, you know, as a staff. Like, this week we're putting out—this week we're going to finish next week's show by Friday of this week, you know.

[00:12:03] **Jesse Thorn:** So, does not being in a sprint to the finish line constantly change the way that you relate to your work?

[00:12:12] **Ira Glass:** On the pieces that I'm involved in, it doesn't change it at all. So, for example, a few weeks ago, I and one of the producers—Valerie Kipnis—we produced this hour-long episode with Masha Gessen, the *New Yorker* writer, who's just an incredible writer, and then turns out an incredible interviewer on tape. And this was a story that I was in from the beginning and I stayed in—like, I'm the one who directed them in the studio, and then I'm the one who brought them back for retakes of like—you know, like—you know, a line could be maybe a little better here or there and, you know, fact check. Well, we got to change this word here or there.

And then I'm the one who edited the retakes. Like, in other words, the most minute kind of down to the wire. I'm the one who did the mix notes on the entire episode. And it was a

grueling week (*laughing*) that I really wondered like, “Why am I doing this?” But I really wanted it to be just the way I wanted it. And that's that. You know, I wanted it to be as perfect as I know how to make it. And then—so, for those stories that it's one that I'm producing, and certainly everything that—all the stories that I do myself that I'm reporting are that way, where, you know, I still am giving the mixed notes and micromanaging every part of it and doing all the reporting. Or doing some of the reporting, actually. People—like, other people will often do like some of the early reporting on the little things. But on the big things, I'll do the reporting.

And—but then there's a whole class of stories that I just get out of, you know, where I'll hear a draft of it and give my notes, and then other people will do all of it. I won't hear the mixes. I won't hear anything, because everybody's so good at their jobs. So, like I don't have to. And so, that's really different. So, there's a volume of work that I used to do where I was hearing every story down to the final mixes and giving notes on every single thing in, you know, what I'm just not involved in and where I would be editing in so many more edits of every story. And so, this goal of like working differently—like, I do work differently now than I did five years ago for sure. And can pick and choose other things to do.

The problem is, then I get interested in other things. Like, I wrote a book with somebody in the last in the last few months. (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean? Like, and it's somebody who's in England. So, basically I would get up, and we would meet from 6 to 8AM every day and work on the book. And I went over there for a month and a week, and we worked on the book. And so now we have a book. (*Laughs.*) You know what I mean? Like, so then other things fill the time.

[00:15:08] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckles.*) I mean, there was that point where it was like Ira's going full dilettante. Like, Ira's out here. He got bored of doing talks in the style of *This American Life* and decided to add dancing. (*Laughs.*)

[00:15:21] **Ira Glass:** That's true. There was—I toured in a dance show. That's true! Yeah, I know. I know! It was really fun! I really recommend it! Yeah. Yeah.

[00:15:29] **Jesse Thorn:** But do you think about your career in the medium to long term in a way that you didn't, now that you some room from that headlong rush? Or your life! I mean, you could also—like, you could totally retire, you know what I mean?

[00:15:49] **Ira Glass:** I don't think—I've never thought of having a career. All I've thought about is like what do I want to do? What do I want to make? Like, what would be fun to do? So, I've never been somebody who's used the word career. (*Chuckles.*) So, I don't think about that, but I do think about like just wanting more time off. And I absolutely don't. I have not achieved that very well.

[00:16:11] **Jesse Thorn:** Why not?

[00:16:12] **Ira Glass:** I mean, I guess—I don't know, like there's a practical answer, and there's a deeper, psychological answer. The practical answer is just somehow I haven't figured out a way to organize that. And then the deeper, psychological answer is probably like I just must not want it that badly. I don't know. I was with somebody for a few years,

after I was married, who had a little boy. And so, I very much was like trying to get home every day, leave the office every day at six to be home for dinner and to be with him and her. And that enforced a kind of discipline and making space for a private life that I never had before. And I liked that. So—and they're still in my life, but we're not all together. You know, like tonight, I'm going over there in an hour. You know what I mean? Like, after we finish this interview. And we have stuff planned to hang out and do.

You know, without, without something urgent like a child to go home to, you know, it's easy to just be like, “Oh, yeah. I'll take on that story too. That'll be fun.” I don't know. So, the answer is like I don't think I'm handling it quite right, but here I am.

[00:17:38] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you feel like you're just—you'll work until you're dead?

[00:17:41] **Ira Glass:** I don't know! I don't know. I could imagine stopping, for sure. And I can imagine doing something else.

[00:17:47] **Jesse Thorn:** For a long time, the show was just you—like, forever and ever the show was just you, host wise. And it was like—it was a very conscious choice, I think, to have other people host the show and was like jarring for the audience. I think you guys had to like deal with some, “Wait a minute, isn't this Ira's show?” vibes. And now, you know, other people host the show regularly—not just one other person. You know what I mean? You sort of reveal the group of people that make the show more conspicuously.

[00:18:29] **Ira Glass:** Can I ask you, as somebody who's heard the show: is it jarring? Was it jarring to have other people host?

[00:18:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Oh, yeah! Profoundly. Yeah.

[00:18:38] **Ira Glass:** Huh. Can I ask one more question? I've actually never asked anybody this, and I feel like, (*chuckles*) oh, you're in a position where like you've heard the show, and you could actually answer. Like, when Bim, or Chana, or Sean or Nancy or Kestenbaum—David Kestenbaum—when they host the show, I always feel like they're so good! Like, and different from me, that I feel like—like, my hope is like the audience is with me of like, “Oh, that's really good!” You know? Like—

[00:19:10] **Jesse Thorn:** But I think you know, Ira. You know, Ira, that it's not about them not being good at it. (*Beat.*) It's like *Fresh Air* just hired a new host, and she does a great job. Like, I've been listening to her. You know, she's only a month in or two months in now. And she does a killer job. Like, she's so good at it. And *Fresh Air* has had other people host the show for decades. You know, Barbara Bogaev and whatnot.

[00:19:40] **Ira Glass:** Dave Davies.

[00:19:41] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Oh, well, Dave Davies is wonderful! Sure. And like I'm still just like, “Wait a minute. This is Terry's show!”

(*They laugh.*)

[00:19:50] **Ira Glass:** No, no, I understand. Yeah, that makes sense.

[00:19:53] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, is Artie good? Yeah, sure! But if Howard Stern wasn't—if he was hosting *Stern* instead of Stern, you would be annoyed that Stern wasn't there.

[00:20:02] **Ira Glass:** Yeah. See, now you're talking to me where I live. Yeah.

[00:20:08] **Jesse Thorn:** I know! That's why I chose that example!

(*They chuckle.*)

I'm no stone jug, as my stepmother would say.

[00:20:16] **Ira Glass:** Okay. Yeah. Point taken.

[00:20:18] **Jesse Thorn:** And I mean, I think you're aware that *This American Life* in particular is about a perspective that—you know, it's maybe less true now that everyone in half of audio production aspires to make something that's like your show. But like, you know, it was different and of you when you started the show. It was clear that it was—you know, just as *A Prairie Home Companion* was about Garrison Keillor in a way that *Morning Edition* wasn't even about a more just—you know, Bob Edwards, who people were mad when they axed him. You know?

[00:21:08] **Ira Glass:** Yeah. I see that.

[00:21:10] **Jesse Thorn:** And you chose that. Like, that's not—that wasn't an accident! You wanted to make an Ira-style show.

[00:21:17] **Ira Glass:** Yeah, though, honestly, I didn't see it as an Ira-style show. Like, I didn't see—it didn't seem like it was about me, to me. It just felt like, oh, this would work, and it would be fun to listen to. That's all I thought. And this is my taste. You know what I mean? And I feel like so little of it—it's so rare on the show that I ever actually talk about my personal life. You know what I mean? Like, really what you get is just my taste of what would be fun to listen to. And you know, since it's a radio show, (*chuckling*) that's enough. That's enough information, you know?

But I didn't view it as like—it's funny 'cause—you know, like there was a moment really early on in the show when we changed the name of the show from its original name, and then we had to pick another name. Because to get on—basically, like we weren't even in distribution yet. We were just out of Chicago, and we were getting ready to be a national show, but we just—we had to practice for a couple of months making this to see that we can get it out every week. And at the time, the original name of the show was *Your Radio Playhouse*, which was really like a sort of a tribute both to like kind of old-time radio, but mostly a tribute to *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* which I really loved, and thought was just like this just enormously creative, new, fresh seeming thing.

And then the woman who ran one of the Los Angeles stations, KCRW, said like she heard a recording of it. She's like, "We'll put this on now. We're not going to wait for you to go into national distribution. But can I tell you, you got to change the name, because there's already an *NPR Playhouse*." Which was a show that was on there. "And it's too close to that. And it's going to be confusing. And it's not that good of a name. So, give it another name. What about *Glasshouse*?" I remember she said, "What about *Glasshouse*?"

And I just was like, "I don't want my name on the show. It's not about me." I remember saying back like, "Well, why don't we just call it *Glasshole*? You know, if we're gonna go that way." (*Chuckling.*) You know, like—or I didn't say that to her, because I needed to be polite. And she was a very smart, wonderful lady too. But anyway. Like, yeah. And so, like yeah, I would—I never—I wouldn't put my name on it, because it wasn't like—I didn't see it as mine in that way. Though in retrospect, I guess I see what you're saying. Like, you know, like when you see like it's *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart—yeah, I just didn't want that. I wanted it to just be—it's a show. I would hate to be hosting a show which had my name on it.

[00:23:44] **Jesse Thorn:** I feel indicted, Ira.

(*They laugh.*)

[00:23:48] **Ira Glass:** Well, that's personal taste. And as you're pointing out, it doesn't matter that my name isn't on it. Like, you're pointing out actually the folly of what I'm doing. Like, it is my show, whether I want it to be or not.

[00:24:00] **Jesse Thorn:** You've always very self-consciously put a lot of the money that the show earns back into the show. I remember one time I learned how much money you were making. And this was a while ago, so hopefully you make more money now. But I was like, "Oh, dude, come on! We gotta figure out how to make more money than that for you! At least get you one of those highly paid executive assistants or something."

But when you're conscious of running a business and you're skilled at it—you know, you've done a good job of figuring out what are the ways to goose the inputs—why don't you keep the money? Not like all of it, but why do you have a staff of three dozen and not a staff of two dozen and some extra houses?

[00:25:01] **Ira Glass:** I mean, it seemed more fun to hire more people, honestly.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

Like, there's so many talented people. You know? It just seemed more fun. And then—I don't have a smarter answer than that. It's like we made the money from making the show, and so the money is to spend on the show, I always thought. And like, I don't know! I—I don't know. I make enough money. That's it. Like, I don't—I don't understand people who are motivated by making more money. I feel like once you make enough money so you have a place that you're living and you can eat at a restaurant when you want to and like, if you have kids, your kids have what they need. I mean, the kid thing really does change it. Like, not



having kids really changes your need for money, you know? And so, like that's just a profound difference.

But you know, I even have money enough to have kids, (*chuckling*) like if I wanted to have a kid. Like, you know? So, I just didn't care that much about it. And honestly, like the money that I'm—I always—I'm still, like now to this day, like I have a salary that's basically the same as, you know, what Dave and Emanuele make. And like, you know, and the most senior people like Nancy. Like, we all kind of basically make the same thing. And that seems fine! We're all running a show together. Like—and what I have that they don't have is like I go around and give speeches, and they pay me money to give speeches.

And honestly, like more of the money that I take home is from going around giving a talk every month or two, like that pays a lot of money. And so, I don't need to take it out of the business. The money in the business can just pay the people in the business.

[00:26:49] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll finish up with Ira Glass after a quick break. When we return, how many anagrams can you make with Ira Glass's name? And how many of them will require us to hit the bleep button? The answer will be yours, but only if you keep listening. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:27:09] **Promo:**

**Music:** Playful, exciting synth.

**Ellen Weatherford:** People say not to judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree.

**Christian Weatherford:** Which is why here on *Just the Zoo of Us*, we judge them by so much more.

**Ellen:** We rate animals out of 10 in the categories of effectiveness, ingenuity, and aesthetics, taking into consideration each animal's true strengths—like a pigeon's ability to tell a Monet from a Picasso or a polar bear's ability to play basketball.

**Christian:** Guest experts like biologists, ecologists, and more join us to share their unique insight into the animal's world.

**Ellen:** Listen with friends and family of all ages on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get podcasts.

(*Music ends.*)

[00:27:51] **Jesse Thorn:** This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Ira Glass, host and creator of *This American Life*.

I know that you really love the kind of work that *This American Life* does, so I'm going to stipulate that. But don't you ever just like roll your eyes at fake *This American Lifes*? Like, I

know that in your heart, you believe that there should be more things like that in the world. Like, I know that's where—I've seen you talk about it, I can tell you're (*inaudible*).

(*Ira agrees.*)

But it's ebbed a little bit, because there's less speculative money in podcasting, and making *This American Life* type stuff is expensive.

[00:28:33] **Ira Glass:** Well, no, in fact, it's on the wane. I mean, it's so expensive to do. It's so much cheaper to do kind of any other kind of podcast than one where you go out and research for a long time and get a ton of tape and edit it for a long time and rewrite, and you have a team of people. And like, it's so labor intensive. It's so much more expensive than any other kind of podcast, and a lot of the business model for that has gone away. So, it's not like this is a burgeoning part of the podcast ecosystem. What it is is that, you know, there's a couple of places that are doing it. And even some of them are struggling.

Like, it's interesting to me that even Malcolm Gladwell's company, which, you know, produces Malcolm's show and Michael Lewis and a bunch of other shows—Pushkin, it's called. I mean, even they had layoffs at one point. You know, like even they couldn't make a go of it. And they're a pretty like business savvy bunch over there. And so, this style of storytelling on the radio, narrative journalism, like it isn't booming. It's just kind of a thing that's out there among other things.

But to answer your question do I ever hear people do it and roll my eyes? (*Chuckling.*) I definitely like your stuff, and I was just like, “That was not the right choice. No. Not the right choice at all.”

(*They laugh.*)

And then sometimes—and like, and sometimes I really get mad. I absolutely get mad. There was—there was a show, *Shameless Acquisition Target*. Did you hear that one?

[00:30:11] **Jesse Thorn:** No, I didn't.

[00:30:11] **Ira Glass:** It's basically somebody saying like, “I've worked in the podcast business, and like I'm just creating this podcast so somebody can buy it, and I'll be able to buy the house I want.” And then like as part of the stakes of the show, she like walks by the house. And I have to say like It's such a ridiculous premise. And then she tries to dissect the podcast business and what's wrong with the podcast business, which is not something I'm actually interested in, even though I'm in the podcast business. But then like the writing style, she writes it just like she's Jonathan Goldstein or something. She's so funny and just like packing in a million jokes in every paragraph, and she performs it well. And then I was just like, okay, I'm in.

And so, even though I'm like picking a fight with it in my head, I'm just like, “Oh, come on.” Like, I've listened to every episode! And then she asked to interview me for one of them, and I was like, yeah! I'll be on your show. Like I'm enjoying this show. (*Laughs.*) Like, yeah, I'm

in. But like—so, I guess I'm trying to say an answer to your question like, yeah, I hear things that I really—I just feel like, oh. Sometimes they make me mad in the bad choices, and then—and then—and then—I don't know why I'm getting angry, because like what do I care?

*(They chuckle.)*

Like, these people are nothing to me, and then sometimes I think like that is not a choice that I would make, but like—but then they turn out to be really talented! And then you're just like, okay, great! You know, and so, I'm experiencing a lot of feelings. A lot of feelings is what I'm saying.

[00:31:34] **Jesse Thorn:** I read in an old interview that you eat the same thing for breakfast and lunch every day. Do you still eat the same thing for breakfast and lunch every day?

[00:31:41] **Ira Glass:** No.

[00:31:42] **Jesse Thorn:** Was that a choice you made at some point? *(Laughs.)* Like, “I gotta mix this up.”

[00:31:48] **Ira Glass:** It wasn't actually a choice, just something kind of evolved, yeah.

[00:31:51] **Jesse Thorn:** What were you eating every day for breakfast and lunch before?

[00:31:54] **Ira Glass:** Well, for years, every day for lunch, I would eat edamame and a shrimp avocado roll from a sushi place around the corner.

[00:32:06] **Jesse Thorn:** That's pretty good!

[00:32:07] **Ira Glass:** Yeah, it was pretty healthy. And what was I eating for breakfast every day? I don't even remember, honestly. But no, now I eat different stuff.

[00:32:19] **Jesse Thorn:** And you didn't choose that.

[00:32:21] **Ira Glass:** I didn't consciously choose that. No, I was like—no, no, no. Uh, no.

[00:32:26] **Jesse Thorn:** Just one day you went into the sushi place drunk and accidentally pointed at the wrong thing on the menu?

[00:32:32] **Ira Glass:** It just occurred to me that you could do more. I don't know. Like, I mean, you know, yeah, yeah.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

It just occurred to me that you could do more. Oh, and the sushi place closed during covid. So, there was no going back to the sushi place anymore. So, that was off, but this—but the change happened even before then.

[00:32:46] **Jesse Thorn:** I like that the impetus behind you eating a different thing for lunch was the same as the impetus between you starting your revolutionary radio show. Which is, “It just occurred to me that you could do more.”

*(They laugh.)*

[00:32:59] **Ira Glass:** Exactly.

[00:33:04] **Jesse Thorn:** Why do you think you still make this show and not a different show?

[00:33:09] **Ira Glass:** I don't have a smart idea for another show, and this show doesn't seem played out to me. Like, I still feel like we come up with stuff that like we never came up with before, you know? And this last year we've been on a run of really good shows in a way that's been really exciting. Like, it's just been a really nice run of shows, and including some really weird stuff too. Like, for the rats episode, I co-hosted the show with rats, you know? Like, there's just been like stuff where you're just like, “Alright!” I was like, “Oh, we haven't done that. Let's do that.”

[00:33:41] **Jesse Thorn:** That was very good, Ira.

[00:33:44] **Ira Glass:** You know, like I don't know. It just—I don't know. I just feel like there's a feeling on the staff of like, “Oh, let's try this.”

[00:33:51] **Jesse Thorn:** So, sometimes when somebody's coming on my show, I'll post on social media “What should I ask them about?” And I don't usually use a question this directly, but my friend Helen Zaltzman asked me, “What is your favorite—?” You're flinching! It's nothing bad.

[00:34:08] **Ira Glass:** I'm just scared.

[00:34:09] **Jesse Thorn:** My friend Helen Zaltzman asked, “What is your favorite anagram of Ira Glass?” I looked at the choices. I looked through the list. Here's some—these are the ones that were the most coherent to me. Salsa Rig, which would be like a machine for making salsa. Gas Liars, Airs Slag. Or Ass Grail.

[00:34:40] **Ira Glass:** *(Laughs.)* Ass Grail just has a kind of gritty realism to it, doesn't it?

*(Jesse laughs.)*

I mean, clearly the winner there is Salsa Rig. Like, that's just cheerful, right? Like, that's just—like makes you feel good.

(*Jesse agrees.*)

Like, when you just think like—because like who doesn't love salsa? (*Chuckling.*) And then the notion that there's like a machine that's going to make it. You know, it's a lot of chopping. And like, it just makes you feel good as a person in a way that Ass Grail does not.

[00:35:06] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Ira, as always, I'm very grateful to you for your time and, you know, for the example you've shown me in the industry in which I work. I really admire your work, and I'm grateful for what you've done. So, thank you.

[00:35:21] **Ira Glass:** Thanks for having me! Nice to chat!

[00:35:24] **Jesse Thorn:** Ira Glass, folks. *This American Life* is a tremendous feat of radio making and reporting. And I don't know what to tell you. You probably already listened to it. If you haven't listened to it in a while, guess what? Still totally rules. Don't know how that's possible, but it's true. You can find the show on this public radio station, probably, and at [ThisLife.org](http://ThisLife.org).

[00:35:51] **Transition:** Upbeat synth with light vocalizations.

[00:35:56] **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 I was actually on tour this past week with Judge John Hodgman, had a great time all over town. Hope everybody will come out along our East Coast Swing that's just about to happen. But I will say, the coolest thing I did was go to the Driehaus Museum in Chicago, which is just a totally incredible aesthetic movement Victorian house that is just absolutely bonkers. And it's right there in downtown Chicago. I had never heard of it. It was so cool.

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. Special thanks to Tony Cavin and the NPR legal team for confirming that we can say “Ass Grail” as an anagram for Ira Glass on NPR. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation” by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](https://www.instagram.com/BullseyeWithJesseThorn). I am on Instagram, [@Put.This.On](https://www.instagram.com/put.this.on). Follow us there. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:37:23] **Promo:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

(*Music fades out.*)