

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

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

[00:00:14] **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.

[00:00:17] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. George Wallace has been doing standup comedy for almost 50 years. He's a veteran of couches on both *The Tonight Show* and *The Late Show*. He's been in dozens of movies and even more television shows. He is basically royalty in Las Vegas, where he has done so many residencies that he's lost count.

Wallace came up in New York alongside a well-known roommate, Mr. Jerry Seinfeld. And Wallace's humor, like Seinfeld's, is observational. The stakes are usually pretty low, the punchlines and wordplay frequent. It's broad, in the best sense of the word. A George Wallace joke from 1979 can still kill.

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

[00:01:02] **Clip:**

George Wallace: I'm getting scared to fly now. I was in New York at the airport three weeks ago when the plane run right off the runway into the water. And I'm thinking, first of all, anybody stupid enough to get on an airplane with the flight number 50-50...

(The audience laughs.)

Who ever heard of flight 50-50? It's always flight 103-216, right? 50-50!? They're telling you before you leave the gate. 50-50! Nah, that's right.

(Laughter and applause.)

50-50. 50-50. Go on out there on runway 13, and give it your best shot, huh?

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

[00:01:39] **Jesse Thorn:** The man is a legend. And he's my next guest on *Bullseye*. Doesn't need much more introduction than that. Let's get into it. My conversation with the great George Wallace.

[00:01:48] **Transition:** Playful, funky synth.

[00:01:56] **Jesse Thorn:** George Wallace, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

[00:01:59] **George Wallace:** Well, thank you so much, Jesse. It's a pleasure to be here.

[00:02:03] **Jesse Thorn:** I was reading before we got on the line, a remembrance you had of Dick Gregory. And it occurred to me that probably when Dick Gregory hit television, you were at exactly the age for it to be life changing.

[00:02:23] **George Wallace:** Well, I'm not sure, because I wanted to be a comedian since I was six years old. And you know, I would listen to guys like Redd Foxx and Moms Mabley and a guy named George Pigeat Markham. I mean, what's the guy—? I can't even (*inaudible*). You know what I'm saying? Rodney Dangerfield, all of these guys, I was listening to them at six years old. And I would take their jokes back to school and make kids laugh. And since then, if you're making people happy, what more could you ask for? And I got the greatest job in the world.

[00:02:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Dick Gregory was the first one on the couch at *The Tonight Show*. He was the first one integrating White clubs. He was a big deal.

[00:02:57] **George Wallace:** Yes. He was big! Because at the time—they asked him to do *The Tonight Show* many years as you know, but they wouldn't let him sit on the sofa, because they didn't let a Black man sit on the sofa back in the day. And that's just the way it was. He said, "I'll do it if you let me sit on the sofa." And sure enough, he sat on the sofa. So yes, he paved the way for me, and Redd Foxx paved the way for me. Sammy Davis Jr. And I thank God every night at my show in Las Vegas. I thank God for Sammy Davis Jr. and Redd Foxx. Because especially Sammy Davis Jr., being the greatest entertainer even to this day of all time in Las Vegas, couldn't go to the front door to work the very stage that I'm working today. Couldn't go through the front door, and always had to add a little joke. If they were alive today, they'd be surprised, wouldn't they? To know that we're still going through that same damn kitchen. Everybody go through the back door.

[00:03:42] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckles.*) Did you, when you were a kid, want to be Sammy Davis Jr.? Or did you want to be Redd Foxx? There's a big gap in between those two.

[00:03:48] **George Wallace:** More of a Judge Pigeat Markham and a Redd Foxx. Redd Foxx was telling those jokes in the—they called it the party records when I was a kid. They were blue jokes. Not as blue as kids are today, but in the time we thought he was dirty, and the parents didn't let us listen to them. The parents would go away to church or go downtown. They must have been stupid to think that we did not know how to operate the—we called it a phonograph back in the day, the record player. And we put those—just like you did. Whatever you're not supposed to do when the parents are away, you do it!

[00:04:21] **Jesse Thorn:** My dad one time told me—my dad was born in 1942, I think. And you know, he was always suspicious of me when I was a teenager. And I wasn't up to anything, you know.

[00:04:35] **George Wallace:** Really?

[00:04:36] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, nothing consequential. And my dad went to Berkeley; he was a valedictorian of his high school. And he said he was so suspicious of me, because when he was a teenager, he was doing speed and stealing his parents' car.

I was like, "What?!"

[00:04:54] **George Wallace:** Really?! (*Laughs.*)

[00:04:55] **Jesse Thorn:** I was like, "Wow, 1958 was way wilder than I expected!"

[00:05:00] **George Wallace:** Well, I was still in school at that time in '58. My goodness, what was I doing? I must have been in the sixth grade or something like that. Those are some great days then. I thought my days were crazy! I grew up in the '70s and the '80s. And man, you're talking about the greatest time to live! '70s, '80s, and '90s. That's probably when you were born. Is that right, Jesse?

[00:05:21] **Jesse Thorn:** 1981, I was born.

[00:05:23] **George Wallace:** 1981! Boy, you're a young kid. You have no idea the fun we had—the nightclubs, and the disco, and the nude beaches in Ibiza, Spain. And oh, and just people coming together. And that's when we had the—we had a war, and all of that, and we were stopping the war. And the people were loving each other, and "Come on, people. Now, let's get together, love one another, and love each other." And we were coming together, and every 30 years something will happen that will break us up again. Like right now. It's a terrible time, you know. And it was all about love, and now the country's divided in some way. We've got to come back together and have fun.

And you know what does that? Laughter is healing for the soul. Laughter is the greatest medicine in the world. And just think if all comedians were in Congress. I know this sounds like a joke, but just think if we were all in Congress. Because, you know, basically comedians are the smartest people in the world. We know the social ills. We know what people need. Give it to them! Give it to them, and let's just laugh it off. And as far as Congress, we could get bills done. Because, you know, comedians are gonna be out of there, because we got a show at eight. We ain't gonna miss that show no matter what. We'll pass a bill. It would be great just to have comedians in charge of the world!

[00:06:35] **Jesse Thorn:** 20 years ago on this show, I got the answer that I probably think about the most to a question in the whole history of this show, which was—Dave Attell was still hosting the show *Insomniac* on Comedy Central. A little like a late night, overnight, documentary party show, where he'd go around and do different stuff that happened late at night. And my colleague at the time asked him, "If you could do *Insomniac* in any time period, what time would you do it in?" And we're thinking he's gonna say, why, you'd get to go meet dinosaurs or whatever. Or knights of the round table. And he goes, "The '70s."

And we're like, "Really? The '70s? Not... dinosaur times?"

And he says, “Yeah, well, you could smoke anywhere, and you didn't have to wear a seatbelt.” (*Laughs.*)

[00:07:25] **George Wallace:** Dude! Dude! The '70s. If you were to come to Atlanta, there's a street here called Peachtree Street. And by the way, you'll see no peaches. I don't know. When I grew up here, we had peaches, but not any longer. And there's 27 Peachtree streets. But you could actually walk down the street, the nightclubs, smoking. In Georgia, in Atlanta, in the '70s! And it was amazing. Yes, you could smoke. And people were coming together and just having fun. It was the disco era, and then—what happened? I was living in New York at the time, what happened? Studio 54 opened, and basically it was just an alternative bar and more or less gay bar. It was so much fun that all the straight people said, “Oh, hell no, you're not going to do this by yourself! We're coming in here.”

And it became popular all over America. San Francisco had the big clubs. And it was just—the '70s were great, man. The '70s were great. I was still working as vice president of the world's largest advertising agency in New York City at the time. You probably don't know this about me, but all the billboards and spectacles at Times Square in New York City, I was a vice president of that company. And the '70s was just great, man. I just wish I could explain it to you, the freedom people had to just enjoy life. Yeah, yeah, let's go back to the '70s, '70s and '80s. Whoo!

[00:08:38] **Jesse Thorn:** You were a salesman, right?

[00:08:40] **George Wallace:** Yes, I was a salesman. That's what I do now. I'm a salesperson now. And so are you! Everything in life revolves around sales. When I walk out on that stage, I gotta sell some jokes. Sometimes people buy them, sometimes they don't.

[00:08:53] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you think you were gonna stay a salesman, or were you scheming?

[00:08:57] **George Wallace:** Oh no, I wanted to be a comedian since six years old. I just heard some of the older guys in Vaudeville saying sometimes they were hungry. You know, on *The Tonight Show*, all the guys—all the older guys were saying sometimes they were hungry; they didn't know where they were going to get food from. I said to hell with that. So, I decided to go to college and get a degree. My first degree was in transportation, and then I went to marketing and advertising. And so, I wanted to make a lot of money to get a financial cushion, so I could become a comedian. And it worked out pretty—let's put it like this. I've lived my dream. I'm the most successful person you've ever met. It's not how much money you make; it's how you enjoy your life while you're living it. And I did everything I wanted to do.

My ultimate goal was to work Las Vegas. And I went there. And then, next thing you know, they called me the new Mr. Vegas. I didn't work for the hotels. I owned the show in Las Vegas. I've done more shows in Las Vegas than most entertainers and definitely more shows than any African American entertainer. And like I said, I went there for 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, turned it into 15 years, and I just love what I do. So, strategizing and doing what I want to do and just being blessed to have the best friends in the world. I do. I wish everybody had my life. That's all I can say.

[00:10:14] **Jesse Thorn:** So much more to get into with the legend George Wallace. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:10:21] **Transition:** Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:10:27] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with George Wallace. He's a standup comic who's been in the game for almost 50 years. Five-zero. He's been on *The Tonight Show*, *The Late Show*, *Conan*, *Oprah*, pretty much everywhere. He's a regular in Vegas, easily one of the most hardworking and, frankly, legendary comics in the game. Let's get back into our conversation.

How old were you when you first got on a standup stage?

[00:10:58] **George Wallace:** Ooh, I think it was doing some college shows, pretty much, you know. I was in college at the time of the Kent State situation, which was like 1969. The kids got shot on camera, so we came together. And I was a dorm counselor. I pretty much ran the University of Akron, and they called me governor, because I was running things. Of course, we also had the governor in Alabama, George Wallace. But at the University of Akron campus in high school, I pretty much always ran everything with laughter, with a smile, never hurting anybody. Never doing—kind of like your dad. He would think I'm suspicious. “He doesn't get in any trouble. He's always good.” That's what it's all about.

[00:11:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Was your name always George Wallace? It wasn't your given name, right?

[00:11:37] **George Wallace:** No! Given name was Henry!

[00:11:40] **Jesse Thorn:** Was it George Wallace when you were in school?

[00:11:42] **George Wallace:** No, Henry Wallace is my name, Henry Wallace. And when I got to California, and I wanted to join the union, there was already a Henry Wallace. I said, “Oh, dog, man! Damn! So, I'm gonna use my dad's name, George Wallace.” And there's nine George Wallaces in my family. So—and then the governor. I said, I'll make it a good name, George Wallace. But the real name is Henry Wallace. Some people just—

[00:12:02] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) So, like it's one thing for you to have always been named George Wallace, the same name as probably the most legendary segregationist in American history.

[00:12:11] **George Wallace:** (*Imitating Governor George Wallace.*) “I say segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”

[00:12:16] **Jesse Thorn:** It's a stunning impression, George.

(*George laughs.*)

So, it's one thing if that's—look, if your dad's name is George Wallace, he names you George Jr., you say, “There's nothing I can do about it. I'm up on a standup comedy stage, and my name is George Wallace. I gotta convince people that it's okay that my name is George Wallace.” (*Chuckles.*) You chose to be named George Wallace!

[00:12:38] **George Wallace:** Yeah, because it was a—you know, back in the day, we were just having fun. I took George Wallace, and like I said, people had called me Governor Wallace all through my life, in college and high school. Governor. And I answered to it. I was pretty much running everything. Yeah, George Wallace always—and my dad was a good guy, George Wallace. My older brother, George Wallace Jr., he's one of the first Black professional golfers in America. When I was a kid, I did not know they were making history. Lee Elder and Charlie Sifford, they all stayed at my house when I was a kid. We didn't know they were making history at the time.

And so, George Wallace is a good name. And today it's a lot of fun.

[00:13:18] **Jesse Thorn:** When did you start working as a comic for money?

[00:13:21] **George Wallace:** For money? Boy, 1976, I walked into a club called Catch a Rising Star. And that's where I met my best friend, a little Jew boy sitting at the end of the bar. I was a little Black boy, and back in the day there may have been only five working Black comedians, only 50 working any comedians—all comedians back in 1976. So, I start making money, mm, Probably in '77. Made money too soon, actually. I was in the business for six months, and I was telling jokes—some stock jokes—but I was good enough to control a crowd, and I got a little money. But big money—I made money all my life, you know.

[00:14:06] **Jesse Thorn:** You mentioned that one of your heroes as a kid was Pigmeat Markham, who of course is famous for “Here Comes the Judge”.

[00:14:14] **George Wallace:** “Here Comes the—” Oh, Jesse, you know this now. You know, when it got on TV some years ago, I think it was *Laugh Off*, and you had—I think it was *Laugh Off* when you had Simon Davis Jr. saying, “Here comes the judge,” but that actually came from Judge Pigmeat Markham. The judge is, (*with a bright Georgia accent*) “How's the Georgia pine this morning? Gonna lock everybody going to jail this morning. I might do some time myself. Judge, pick me!”

(*They chuckle.*)

He was so funny.

[00:14:39] **Jesse Thorn:** I read that when you went on stage, you went on stage in character as the—it was like the Reverend Dr. George Wallace or something like that.

[00:14:48] **George Wallace:** (*Chuckles.*) I grew up in Atlanta, and being a Southern kid, you're going to church no matter what. Like I said. And we used to go to church every Sunday, all through the week. We'd go to church on Sunday, and we didn't get out until like Tuesday, man. So, as a little bad boy in church, I'm listening to everything that the preacher

says. And that's why I even use it in my act today, how the preacher at a Black church, a preacher will come up in the pulpit with the Bible in his hands and tell everybody, "I won't be long."

It's just a flat out lie! He's going to be up here at least 45 minutes minimum. So, I said, "Ma—" And I said to my parents, I said, "Did you see such as the lady do such and such in church today? She fell. She was in the spirit."

And my parents would say, "Shut up, boy!"

I said, "You know you saw that!" And they would start laughing. And I would make fun about everything. They had a phrase in the church about joining the church. And it says, "The doors of the church are open." And I would turn around and look back. Door's not open. I didn't understand the phrase, but I—just, anything different. You can't say anything around me today where I won't make it into a joke.

[00:15:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you think that going on stage with your gimmick being the Reverend Doctor—right? Like, you're preaching on stage; you still preach on stage. Not so much about God, but I'm talking about in your style.

[00:16:02] **George Wallace:** I never preached about God, but I would—you know, I went on stage with—first of all, my Bible was *The Yellow Pages*. You probably don't remember, it used to be a thick, yellow book for AT&T every year. "Whatever you want, look it up in the book! The Good Book of Bell!" And I started that way and just having fun, as that character's a reverend. And then I got out to Los Angeles, and I said, "I can't be this character the entire show." And so, I started—I lost the character, which I should bring back. Reverend Uh-Huh. That was my name. "Uh-huh." And the audience would always repeat after me. "Uh-huh. Uh-huh." And so, I should bring it back. You know, I had the big robe on with the lights on the robe, like Liberace, and that was a good character. Just had a lot of fun.

[00:16:47] **Jesse Thorn:** You mentioned meeting your best friend at Catch a Rising Star. I presume you're referring to Jerry Seinfeld.

[00:16:53] **George Wallace:** Eh. Could be, could be not.

[00:16:55] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Playfully.*) Uh-huh. Depends on the day?

[00:16:58] **George Wallace:** Depends on the day. I've been—47 years I've been trying to get rid of this guy, can you believe that? Now I'm the actual guy, as you—you probably know this. I'm the actual guy that was his roommate for 13 years.

[00:17:10] **Jesse Thorn:** I did know that.

[00:17:11] **George Wallace:** So, I'm actually the real George. I am the best man at his wedding. And I'm always throwing the joke, "I'm the father of his kids." But we're so tight. I'm so blessed to have—he being my best friend for 47 years to this day, but we still talk to each other at least five times a day. And just being around him.

If you're gonna have a friend, Jesse, you might as well have the richest friend in comedy. Right? Why not? And I take advantage of that, Jesse. I mean, he says some stupid stuff too. We were flying out to Los Angeles two weeks ago and he said to me—maybe in June it was. He says to me, “You need to get your own plane.”

(Jesse chuckles.)

And I'm going, “What the hell is wrong with this plane? What the hell I need another plane for? We got this one.” So, I take advantage. You know, he's got a yacht. I got a yacht. He says stupid stuff all the time. I could just go on and on about him. People just don't know what an idiot he is.

[00:18:06] **Jesse Thorn:** It makes sense to me, this rich friend in comedy thing. And I'm just gonna put it out there: Ray Romano, call me.

[00:18:14] **Music:** Is that right?

[00:18:15] **Music:** I'm ready to be friends with Ray Romano. Give me a call. Let's do this.

[00:18:19] **George Wallace:** He's a nice guy, too. He might call you, Jesse.

[00:18:21] **Jesse Thorn:** One of the funniest, too. Nothing wrong with Ray Romano, I just want to spend his money.

[00:18:27] **George Wallace:** *(Chuckles.)* You'd be thinking!

[00:18:28] **Jesse Thorn:** He earned it! You know, I just—I don't have a problem with him having it. I just want to spend some of it.

[00:18:32] **George Wallace:** Well, my friend has the money. I don't need any of his money. If I did, I could get it. But I've been working pretty hard and doing well myself, so we both are happy. And he's more famous than I am, but I can do anything he can do. I can retire if I want to. He and Anderson Cooper were talking one day, and we were talking about is it better to be famous or rich? And I'm just thinking, those guys, they're both. But I'm thinking, you know what? I can do anything. I could retire today and do anything I want to do. Travel all over the world. Enough people know me to satisfy my little ego. Bus drivers driving down the street—boop-boop!—waving at me. But the only thing different with me, I can go pee. I can go to the bathroom. They cannot go to the bathroom. Photographers are on them every time they make a move. They don't even know it! Photographers are aaall over the place.

But we're enjoying life no matter what. We are really, really enjoying life.

[00:19:19] **Jesse Thorn:** I've watched a lot of Jerry Seinfeld's Netflix show, and you saying that you are constantly looking around you, looking for a joke, that you'll hear a joke in anything—

(George confirms.)

—is the same thought I had about watching Seinfeld on that show, that even when another one of the comics starts talking about their feelings, Jerry Seinfeld immediately hears a word he thinks is funny and starts talking about which letters in the word make it funny.

(Chuckles.) You know what I mean?

[00:19:57] **George Wallace:** It triggers, and that's what we do. That's what we do today. If we're talking on the phone, we go, "That's funny! Write that down, write that down." Any conversation. "That's funny, write that down, write that down." So, it's great writing new jokes and coming up with premises and just having fun.

[00:20:16] **Jesse Thorn:** But does that get in the way of being—I mean, not to put too fine a point on it, but like being human beings?

[00:20:21] **George Wallace:** We are human beings. That's just what we do. We—our job is to make people happy. When we see happy people, it makes us happier. We love what we do. We're doctors, we're sociologists, we're the best, man. We go to work, and people come to see us, and we don't know these people, and there's people in the audience. You got truck drivers out there, you got doctors, you got psychologists, you got (*sensor beep*)holes. You got all kind of people out there. You got intellectuals, and you got intellectual (*sensor beep*)holes, and it's just so good that we go out there and people give us respect, and we give them respect. They buy us, and we give them what they want, and it's laughter.

When you forget about your marriage problems or financial situation, and you're listening to a comedian—it doesn't matter what's going on in the world, people love to laugh, don't they?

[00:21:11] **Jesse Thorn:** That's true, but I don't think that's every... I think every comedian I know, their goal is to make people laugh. There's no doubt about that, right? If you're on a standup stage, it's binary. They're laughing or they're not laughing, right?

(George confirms.)

But I don't know that every comic I know, their overarching goal is "make people happy". I think laughs and happy are related, but they're not the same thing.

[00:21:35] **George Wallace:** I think you are really, really smart. And you did say the right thing. You're so right. There are some comedians that just go out there and they're frustrated with life, and they're just trying to get a point across, and people do laugh at the situation, but they're not necessarily happy themselves.

[00:21:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Stick around, more *Bullseye* around the corner from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:22:01] **Promo:**

Music: Relaxed, lo-fi synth.

Brea Grant: Oh darling, why won't you accept my love?

Mallory O'Meara: My dear, even though you are a duke, I could never love you. You... you... borrowed a book from me and never returned it!

Brea: (*Gasp!*) Save yourself from this terrible fate by listening to Reading Glasses.

Mallory: We'll help you get those borrowed books back and solve all your other reader problems.

Brea: Reading Glasses, every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(*Music fades out.*)

[00:22:27] **Music:** Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:22:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is the veteran standup comedian George Wallace. He's appeared dozens of times on television, had countless specials, is a beloved fixture in Las Vegas, and is a master of observational comedy. Let's get back into our conversation.

You've done a huge number of shows in Vegas, years long residencies. And on the one hand, the people who are at a show in Las Vegas, you already know they're there to have a good time. So, that's encouraging, right?

(*George confirms.*)

I would think that the challenge of doing a show in Vegas is this is truly a random group of people, right? Like, you cannot depend on any part of the demographics or psychographics of the people who show up in Las Vegas. Some of these people are in from Portugal, and they don't speak English. You know what I mean? Like, it is every kind of person from all over the country, from all over the world. And you have to figure out how to put your act over to people who are anyone. You know what I mean?

[00:23:47] **George Wallace:** That's what you call mastering the stage, because you never know what's gonna happen. Many a night in Las Vegas at Flamingo, I'm having people come in late, and I stop the show. "Where you from, man?" From India. "Whereabouts in India?" New Delhi. You just—"Oh, you know, they just open up a new deli around the corner. People come in from in from—Why? Stop the show! Why is this side of the room not laughing?" And then they were from Japan. Then you try to do some Japanese and have a little fun with them, and at least they appreciate you if you acknowledge them.

So, you're right, you never know who's out there in that audience. Some people come because they got free passes from the hotel, the high rollers. And so, it's the toughest job in the world to try to go out there and make the vast majority laugh and have fun and enjoy themselves, but that's what I like doing. That's what life is all about. If you can connect with people you have no idea—and the greatest compliment you could ever get, it's not always about the money. When you walk out—and I tend to greet people as they leave my show in Las Vegas, and they walk out and say, “Mr. Wallace, you have no idea. I haven't laughed in three years. My husband died.” Another person said, “I had brain surgery. I just want to thank you.” That's what it's all about, getting compliments like that, better than money.

[00:24:59] **Jesse Thorn:** I saw you on—my friends Baron Vaughn and Mike Eagle had a show called *The New Negroes* on Comedy Central.

(George laughs and affirms.)

I saw you do a set on that show. A fantastic set on that show.

(George thanks him.)

[00:25:14] **Sound Effect:** Music swells and fades.

[00:25:16] **Clip:**

George Wallace: Listen, I'm here on *The New Negroes*. I'm one of the old Negroes, but I'm new tonight.

(The audience laughs and applauds.)

But I'm here, and I love the weather in Los Angeles. This is such beautiful—and you know what? If you can't laugh in Los Angeles, you can't laugh nowhere.

(Cheers and applause.)

Don't be so proud. I'm talking about some negative (*cancel beep*) y'all do. People in Los Angeles driving around in their smart car, drinking smart water, talking on their smart phone. Sitting in traffic looking like a dumb(*cancel beep*). It's crazy!

Listen, if you can't laugh in Los Angeles—you're just driving down the street, just stupid (*cancel beep*) they got here. They got a place called a 24-hour fitness center with a sign underneath it, “Open 6AM to midnight.” Why y'all do stupid (*cancel beep*) like that?!

(Laughter.)

[00:26:08] **Sound Effect:** Music swells then fades.

[00:26:09] **Jesse Thorn:** And I thought, well, here's Mike and Baron trying to create a space for Black comics and musicians to do something that is different from the norm while still doing it for a mostly Black audience—like doing it sort of a “for us not them” situation, right? Or for us and them in their case.

[00:26:36] **George Wallace:** For us and them, that's good, yeah.

[00:26:38] **Jesse Thorn:** And I saw you go on this stage, and I thought, well, George Wallace has made his entire career out of being welcoming to everyone, right? Like, you can't do decades in Las Vegas without doing that. And I thought, I wonder what this experience is like for George Wallace. Is this, well, I can put something over in any crowd, it doesn't matter? Or is this what a relief it is to be in a different kind of place and be able to do a different kind of thing?

[00:27:05] **George Wallace:** Say the first part of your question.

[00:27:07] **Jesse Thorn:** The first one is, well, I'm good at what I do. I can put this act over on anybody.

[00:27:10] **George Wallace:** Say that again. I love it. I love what you just said.

[00:27:13] **Jesse Thorn:** You're good at what you do, and you can put it over with anybody. You can! It's the truth!

[00:27:17] **George Wallace:** You know why, Jesse? Everybody loves to laugh! I don't give a damn. You know, like if you come to my show, I love everybody. I got White, Black, Jews. Just everybody, hip-hoppers. Oh, I love it. That's what's good about the George Wallace audience. Just anybody and everybody come in and let's just have a plate of food, and let's just—ooh, we got every flavor of laughter you want. Isn't that wonderful? Yeah, I can do this with anybody. That's my challenge.

Before the 2020—what was the last election?

[00:27:51] **Jesse Thorn:** '20 was the last one.

[00:27:53] **George Wallace:** I did a Republican group down in Florida. (*Chuckles.*) And didn't know it. And when I was on stage, you know like about 60 people started, “Okay, Kevin. Okay.” What's his name? Brian. “Okay, Brian. Okay, Brian.” And I'm going, what? Oh, I said, “I was told not to talk about politics. If you want to go there, let's do it.” And I proceeded to shoot their (*censor beep*) out, and we had fun. The show was supposed to be at Mar a Lago. And I said I'm not going to do it there. So, they moved it to another place. And I did it. I actually just took the money, to be honest. But I still had people laughing.

[00:28:28] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckles.*) I feel like that is the place in your public persona where you have made some room for something other than “it's good for everybody to laugh”, other than taking care of everybody. That feels like the spot where you have chosen to make a

difference as a—you know, as a grown up, as a 70-year-old man, you know what I mean? Like, you made that choice.

[00:28:52] **George Wallace:** Thank you. Don't I have the greatest job in the world? I teach young kids, "Make sure you enjoy your life." I tell young kids just because you get a degree in marketing doesn't mean you gotta do statistical analysis the rest of your life. You might enjoy arranging flowers or fixing cars. Look how much money a mechanic makes. Honor your essence, show people what you love to do. Don't worry about the money; the money will come.

I want young people, as soon as you get out of high school, as soon as you get out of college, get on an airplane, go to another country, see how other people live, other cultures. And even charge it to your parents, just go! Because I teach the young kids that life is backwards. Don't you hear old people say, "When I turn 65, I'm going to retire and travel all over the world."

But what? You're too damn old. There's nothing you can do. You got to be in bed by 6:30. I see old people in front of the Eifel Tower just looking up. "Huh. Let's go home." You know, so make sure you enjoy your life. And making people happy, just nothing is better than that. And to the crowds. Oof. And I don't even know how I got into that bit. I mean, that's crazy.

[00:29:51] **Jesse Thorn:** There's this old showbusiness saying that I've heard attributed to 1,000 different people, which is, "I do the shows for free. I get paid to travel." And one of the reasons that a residency in Las Vegas is a good job for an entertainer is that you can have a place to live. You don't have to do two days of traveling for every two days of working that you're doing. And that's a big difference in somebody's life.

[00:30:25] **George Wallace:** Jesse!

(Jesse affirms.)

Glad you brought that up. George Wallace, as I said before, my first degree was in transportation. You're talking to a guy right now that loves airplanes. I'm scheduled to go to Cape Town tomorrow, 15 hours, The longer the flight, the better. Get in that bed and just—I love traveling. I love—people ask me, where do I live? I said, "I live at United and Delta." I love to fly. I love to travel. Oh my god, just meeting different people, and I want my kids to travel. I want everybody to travel and see and meet and greet other people. People ask me, what is my favorite city? The one that has the microphone.

San Francisco used to be a great city. I haven't been here in a while for laughter and comedy, but every city—Madison Square Garden, I was there two weeks ago with Dave Chappelle, on stage with him in Madison Square Garden. Great crowd. People just want to laugh and have fun. I keep going back to laughter, because laughter is my life. And when you stop laughing, you stop living. So, you gotta keep laughter in your life. You can't even fake a smile without feeling better. It's important to laugh. And that's even in the Bible. Laughter is healing for the soul. So, traveling does not bother George Wallace.

[00:31:34] **Jesse Thorn:** How often do you fake a smile?

(George giggles softly until they both laugh.)

Let the record reflect that George Wallace faked a smile in response to that question.

[00:31:43] **George Wallace:** *(Laughing.)* That's stupid! That's stupid. Now, I said stupid. Now, stupid doesn't mean—that's not a bad word. Now, stupid is a compliment. You're stupid, okay? So, it's just certain words have different meanings these days.

[00:31:53] **Jesse Thorn:** That's a sincere question for me, though. Because if you see your job as making everybody around you a happier, more comfortable—which it sounds like you do, something you take seriously.

(George confirms.)

You can't always be—

[00:32:09] **George Wallace:** Yes, you can!

[00:32:11] **Jesse Thorn:** Can you?

[00:32:12] **George Wallace:** Yes, you can. You can always be happy. You just keep laughter in the back of your head, no matter what it is. How many times have you gone to a funeral now? Funerals are funny now. You know, you gotta keep laughter in your life, because like I say, it's the medicine. No matter—you can go through your bills, you can go through your marriage, you can go through civic situations around America, social changes, neighborhoods, even hunger. But at the end, you have got to laugh. That's our glue. Laughter is the glue. No matter what you do, you gotta have some laughter.

You show me a speaker on stage, and if he doesn't have a laugh, it's boring as hell. It's kind of like when I did the—my Commencement at the University of Akron. I told the people, “Most speakers up here are up here for 45 minutes and boring.” I said, “I'll tell you what, I am not going to be boring, but I am going to be up here for 45 minutes.” And it goes by just like that. *(Snaps.)* You keep the people—they want more of happiness and the truth, and you can have some fun.

[00:33:04] **Jesse Thorn:** I have to say, you've become quite a social media star in the last 5 or 10 years. And one of the things that I appreciate most about your jokes on Twitter is that I don't know if it's because you are not having to hone them in front of an audience of one representative of every type of person in the world, so they have to work for everybody, but I read one of your tweets today and laughed out loud by myself sitting at my computer—which is the most difficult out loud laugh to achieve, in the world, I think. And the tweet was, “Shout out to beloved cereal mascot, Toucan Sam. Six years sober today, keep it up.”

(They laugh.)

And I just thought, George Wallace goes on Twitter and is borderline surreal. You know what I mean? (*Laughs.*)

[00:33:58] **George Wallace:** I just like doing different things. And sometimes I don't think they're funny. I'm sitting there with them, and I just do them. And it's just like what is the one group I got to start doing again? I'm different. I'm a rebel. I don't play by the rules. You know, I'll eat cupcakes out of a pan and pancakes out of a cup, and I'll do all of this stupid stuff. I'll eat French toast in England and an English muffin in France. I don't give a damn. I just—all of this stuff. I love to do it. I said, I'll drink a half a glass of whole milk and a whole glass of half and a half. I don't give a (*sensor beep*)!

(*Jesse laughs.*)

And somebody told me in Cleveland one night, way in the back of the lawn, he said, “Mr. Wallace, if you drink a half a glass of whole milk and a whole glass of half and half,” she says, “you may not give a (*sensor beep*), but you're going to take one.” And I just love, I love people just doing the tweets.

Sometimes I forget the tweets that I do, because sometimes I do like eight at a time. Then I'll have them released on certain days. And I'm trying to get away from X now and get more into Instagram and TikTok. So, you're gonna see a new George Wallace.

[00:34:53] **Jesse Thorn:** What I like about it is a whole glass of half and half and a half a glass of whole milk is—with all due respect to you, one of America's greatest comedians—a very stupid joke. (*Chuckles.*)

(*George agrees.*)

And I love the passion that you have for having thought of that silly nonsense. Like, I'll laugh and laugh at the excitement conveyed even in a text-only venue at this silly nonsense. I can just see that you were at the grocery store, you saw some whole milk, and your joke brain went into overdrive.

[00:35:30] **George Wallace:** Yes, and you know, now you're talking milk, you got me thinking like—I'm in a grocery store, I'll be thinking—I saw an item that said evaporated milk. And I'm thinking, well, what the hell is in the can?

(*They laugh.*)

[00:35:44] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, George Wallace, I sure appreciate your time. Thank you for talking to me.

[00:35:48] **George Wallace:** Jess, I have to thank you! I have not met you before. I apologize. It's wonderful, and I'm sure a lot of people listen to you, because you're just that damn good!

[00:35:58] **Jesse Thorn:** George Wallace. He tours all the time. If you've never seen him live, you're in for a treat. We'll have a link to his website at the *Bullseye* page on MaximumFun.org.

[00:36:08] **Transition:** Bright, playful synth.

[00:36:12] **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. You won't be surprised to learn that when there was a storm in Los Angeles the other day, a bunch of huge branches fell out of the big old tree outside of my house.

I can see them there like stacked up in the street right now.

The 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 Dan Wally, DJW. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation". It was written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to Memphis Industries, their label, for providing it to us.

Bullseye is on Instagram. We're sharing interview highlights, behind the scenes looks, and more. We're [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](https://twitter.com/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 signoff.

[00:37:17] **Promo:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)