

(ADVERTISEMENT.)

[00:00:19] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:20] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:32] **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.

[00:00:39] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest this week is Patrick Stewart. He's an actor who's been performing for well over 50 years. A star of stage, screen, and film with countless awards and nominations under his belt. But Sir Stewart is, of course, best known as Jean Luc Picard, the captain of the Starship Enterprise from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Picard*, and *Star Trek* films. Recently, Patrick Stewart wrote *Making It So*, his memoir. There is, as you might expect, plenty to write about. Behind the scenes *Star Trek* gossip, frenzied international errands to acquire wigs for auditions, stories of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

But *Making It So* also covers Stewart's difficult childhood. He grew up in post-war Yorkshire and if it weren't for a few lucky breaks, might never have taken up acting. Pretty excited to have Patrick Stewart on the show.

So!

[00:01:38] **Sound Effect:** Sci-fi beeping and warbling.

[00:01:41] **Jesse Thorn:** Chuy, ready the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* clip.

[00:01:44] **Jesus Ambrosio:** The clip is prepared, sir.

[00:01:46] **Jesse Thorn:** Prepare the Patrick Stewart interview.

[00:01:49] **Jesus Ambrosio:** The interview is prepared, sir.

[00:01:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Mr. Ferguson?

[00:01:52] **Kevin Ferguson:** The interview is ready to play at your order, sir.

[00:01:54] **Jesse Thorn:** On my mark. Engage.

[00:01:58] **Sound Effect:** Lazer zap!

[00:01:57] **Clip:**

Captain Picard (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*): I think, when one has been angry for a very long time, one gets used to it. And it becomes comfortable like... like old leather. And finally, it becomes so familiar that one can't ever remember feeling any other way. Thank you, Chief.

[00:02:22] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:02:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Patrick Stewart, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm glad to have you on the show.

[00:02:25] **Patrick Stewart:** Thank you, Jesse. Happy to be here.

[00:02:28] **Jesse Thorn:** That clip sets an interesting tone for the rest of our conversation. (*Laughs.*) We'll see how it goes!

[00:02:35] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, happily.

[00:02:37] **Jesse Thorn:** When you set out to write a memoir, you weren't working because of covid. Everything was kind of shut down. Did you take the opportunity to call anyone and ask them what they remembered?

[00:02:55] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes, I did. There were a couple of people that were very generous in giving me names I couldn't remember, or "When did this happen?" I was saying. You know, because my detailed memory is a little hazy at times. But largely what I did—because I had turned down such an invitation I think twice before. And it was only this time when my agent said to me, "Look, you're not going to work, because there is no work. And it's going to be like this for a long time. So, what are you going to do? Do your jigsaw puzzles?" I do jigsaw puzzles.

And he said, "Look, why not give it a shot? And if you don't like it, well, you can dump it, and we'll repay their advance."

And I said, "Okay, but I'm serious. You know, I'll give it a couple of weeks. But if I can't do it, I'm walking." But I spent the first two weeks not writing at all. But I did go for long walks, and I thought about the past—not just the distant past, although that was what I enjoyed most. And I found that as I opened one door a little bit onto my childhood, another door might just suddenly open that I had not been aware of for decades. And unfortunately, a lot of my generation have passed away. And there were people I wanted to say, "Do you remember when—? Well, where did that happen?" You know, but I wasn't able to.

So, I let my recollections develop and grow and—particularly insofar as it concerned my parents. And my relationship with other actors, with other directors, with my English teacher—who was the first man to put a copy of Shakespeare into my hand, Cecil Dormand. He and a wonderful acting teacher, Ruth Wynn Owen, are the two people to whom my memoir is dedicated. Because not only did they teach me valuable things, but they also believed in me. And I—for years, I didn't have much belief in myself. I thought that I was ill-

equipped to be doing what I was doing. And very often I found myself surrounded by university graduates, for example, and some very fancy ones at that.

And so, I often felt I'm out of my depth here. You know, these people know so much more than I do. But still, other people like Ruth and Cecil, my English teacher, they believed in me. And they believed that there was something there, something more than I suspected.

[00:06:21] **Jesse Thorn:** Were you worried to spend time thinking about your childhood and—you know, you had a painful home—or you know, to spend time thinking about your marriages that ended in divorce? Or other things that you wish could have been different about your life?

[00:06:41] **Patrick Stewart:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, thanks to several decades of therapy and working with a brilliant therapist—you know, mental, intellectual therapist—they helped me come to terms with a lot of that, so that by the time I finished writing the memoir and then fixing bits here and there that I didn't like, I found that my attitude to my parents, to the two women that I divorced, began to change. And I found that I was accusing myself a little less than I had done in the past. Even as a child, the violence in our home, the danger, the risk—for a long time I felt that I was responsible for it. (*Whispers.*) But I wasn't.

I think I actually did quite well with that. And it's a great opportunity to be invited to investigate your own life.

[00:08:08] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Patrick Stewart. He just wrote a new memoir. It's called *Making It So*.

Your father was a very commanding person who was a veteran, a distinguished veteran of the second World War—had been mostly absent from your life, because he was in the service until you were like five.

[00:08:31] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes, he did come home on leave. Because he wasn't actually at Dunkirk, he was in Cherbourg. But he was part of the British Expeditionary Force that had invaded France. And of course, they got met with so much weighted fire from the Nazis that they had to run for it. And my father, who was further south than Dunkirk, when he got back to the UK, and he was safe—although, as I learned from an expert on these things, that he was, without question, suffering from what he had been told was shell shock, which is the term that they used, and is now called PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. And when I learned that—and this was only about 20 years ago—I began to feel so differently about him.

That he had had five or six years—when he was de-mobbed and he left the army, he had been a founding member of the Parachute Regiment. And his status when he left the army was Regimental Sergeant Major. He was the most senior non-officer in the parachute regiment, and he had had a spectacular military career. And he was a very impressive. Because I have met one or two people who served with him. The most wonderful and astonishing thing that I learned about my father was when a man I met in the street who said, “Come into the pub, I want to buy you a drink in your father's name.” And he said, “You know, the most memorable thing about your father was when he marched onto the parade ground, the birds in the trees stopped singing.”

[00:10:43] **Jesse Thorn:** My father was a vet, a Navy vet. And you know, your father was what you call a weekend alcoholic, which is to say that he was white-knuckled during the week and, or was dry during the week, and then drank very heavily on the weekends.

And I used to go to AA meetings with my dad when I was little, when he was a single dad. And we went to vets' AA meetings, and I'd color in the back, you know what I mean? But I heard enough stories when I was five and six and seven and eight years old from that about that experience and lived with my father's PTSD. And one of the things that is so scary about being a kid with a parent with combat PTSD—at least was for me, and I think maybe it's something that you might relate to—is the feeling of powerlessness when your parent is in an unreasonable place, right?

That like part of PTSD is, you know, a flooding amygdala, right? Like an overactive fight or flight. And when somebody's like that, you can't tell them anything. You know what I mean? You can't convince them of anything. And that's a really scary thing to experience when you're a kid.

[00:12:14] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes. I do remember one bad night. A weekend night—Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, when my father drank—when he had hit my mother very hard, and she was lying on the floor bleeding. And an ambulance had been called by a neighbor and the police too. And I remember hearing that a policeman turned to my mother, who was—of course—in pain and distressed and upset, and I think especially so that I had witnessed it. And the policeman said, “Mrs. Stewart, what you have to understand is that it takes two people to make an argument.”

And I was so outraged that it was one of the first moments in my life when I wanted to hit somebody. Because what he was saying was so incorrect and unfair and punishing to my mother. She wasn't responsible for any of that. She was trying to protect her children and myself and my brother, who was five years older than me. But those were—they were challenging times. I've recently been thinking a lot more about my childhood. I actually, two days ago, came across a schoolboy's diary. It stated 1954, when I was 13 and 14. My birthday's in the middle of the year. And I'd had this book in my hand once or twice before, and I'd just flick through it. But two nights ago, I just started reading it, turning over every page and reading what I was doing with my life then. And again, doors began to open.

It's made me think, you know, the first draft of my book was 750 words—sorry, 750 pages! Yes. And that book you have at your side there is about 445. So, there's a big chunk that I have that never made it into the book. And it was perfectly correct. The advice and the support that I was getting about a little bit of self-editing and also the whole tiresome legal aspect of memoirs, which they took very, very seriously. Because—

[00:15:11] **Jesse Thorn:** Right, you can't get in libel trouble or whatever.

[00:15:12] **Patrick Stewart:** No, and it's so easy for that to happen. Because you might say something that you think is funny, but it's not. It's offensive. You know. And so, I've been very careful about that. But I wonder if in those 300 pages that are sitting in a cupboard, there isn't something else. An addendum or a—I wouldn't say a volume two, because I would be going back over the ground I've already covered. But if I thought there was something that

would be interesting enough to reassess what is in that book now, printed, published, it might have some value.

[00:15:56] **Jesse Thorn:** We've got so much more to get into with Patrick Stewart, including his audition for the role of Jean Luc Picard and how it was almost derailed by a hairpiece. Keep it locked. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR. If you're

[00:16:11] **Promo:**

Sequoia Holmes: If you're Black, you probably love you some Paramore, huh? Or what about the TV show *Golden Girls*? Ginger Ale? Daytime television? Don't lie, I know you love at least one of them.

(Rock music fades in.)

I'm Sequoia Holmes, pop culturist and host of *Black People Love Paramore*. Contrary to the title, it is not a podcast about the band Paramore. Each episode, I—along with the special guest cohost—dissect one pop culture topic that mainstream media doesn't necessarily associate with Black people but we know we like. Tune in every other Thursday to the podcast that's dedicated to helping Black people feel more seen.

(Music fades out.)

Speaker: *Black People Love Paramore* is now on the Maximum Fun network. Check out the most recent episode, featuring Shar Jossell, today!

[00:16:51] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:16:55] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with Patrick Stewart. Stewart is, of course, an award-winning actor. For decades, he has played Jean Luc Picard in the *Star Trek* films and television shows. He has a memoir called *Making It So*. It's out now. Let's get back into our conversation.

I was listening to an interview that you did when your show *Picard* was new, and you were talking about when you started in amateur theatre as a kid. And one of the things that you said was that you had never felt more safe. But another thing that you said was that you loved working with adults. And I think *(chuckles)* if there is any marker of either gifted kid or kid with troubled parents, it is a desire to work with adults. *(Laughs.)* Because you're like, *(authoritatively)* “Don't worry, I'm already an adult!”

[00:18:01] **Patrick Stewart:** That's very interesting. I shall certainly give that quite a lot of thought. I was always a little uncomfortable with children of my age. And I never felt uncomfortable with adults. Oh, I've met people who, oh, I've been stressed about. Because they were so famous or, you know, that they'd been heroes of mine for so many years. That's happened quite a lot. Or people with important jobs. And I never felt vulnerable when I was with adults, especially my English teacher. Because he had a sense of humor too, and he

would tease me at times and make me laugh. And that made encouraged me to trust him, that he was happy to be something more than an educator.

He was happy to be entertaining and amusing. And of course, he was actually an amateur actor. I came from a community that was thick with us. And every church, every chapel, every institution had an acting group. So, you were not thought weird or odd or affected.

[00:19:25] **Jesse Thorn:** It was just a club to belong to. It was a fun thing to do.

[00:19:26] **Patrick Stewart:** Exactly. It was. But! A serious club. People were expected to give of their best and not to make fun of what we were doing. I think my respect for the work and my respect for others—because I've worked with some brilliant people—made me more reassured when I was around them than I otherwise might have been.

[00:19:59] **Jesse Thorn:** How close or far did you feel to acting for a living rather than as a—you know, as a thing that you did on evenings and weekends?

[00:20:11] **Patrick Stewart:** It was never a consideration of mine. And I had no ambitions in that direction even though I loved the movies, and I went—in fact I found in my diary, I saw five movies in one week. And that must have been my pocket money, gone. I spent it all on cinema. And luckily I've always looked older than I was, although people now tell me it's the other way around. (*Chuckles.*) Which is very charming.

[00:20:42] **Jesse Thorn:** I think you have a quality of perpetual 45 to 50ish-ness.

[00:20:46] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Surprised and delighted.*) Oh, thank you so much! Good, good. I shall take that home with me! (*Chuckles.*)

[00:20:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Look, maybe I'm buttering you up. Maybe it's 55 now, but you look pretty great. I'm looking at your arm right now. I think you could arm wrestle me and win.

[00:21:02] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Laughs.*) Yeah, I've always taken care of my body.

[00:21:07] **Jesse Thorn:** But acting seemed far away.

(*He confirms.*)

I mean, like acting for money, like acting as a life rather than a thing you did.

[00:21:12] **Patrick Stewart:** Oh, absurd. Ridiculous. I didn't go to the theatre much—because we had a lot of theatre all around us. But I did do little things occasionally. And at school, I did quite a bit of acting, because my English teacher was a director of actors and was an actor himself. I mean, an actor teacher, not a professional. But it was him, it was Cecil Dormand, who said to me when I was 14, “Patrick, have you ever thought about being a professional actor?”

And I laughed! I said, “No! Of course not! I don't know anybody who's a professional actor, but I love doing it. It's great.”

And he said, “Well, you should think about it sometime.”

And when I got fired from my first job—because I left school at 15 years and two days old; my education was over. I got a job on my local newspaper. Strings were pulled by my headmaster. You know, that's the benefit of rotary clubs, where all these important people—the headmaster of a school, the editor of a newspaper. They're all a part of this social milieu. And they were very good to me on the newspaper.

[00:22:44] **Jesse Thorn:** Especially given that you were making up a fair amount of the news that you were reporting.

[00:22:50] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes, you have read the book.

(Jesse laughs.)

I did! Because there came a point when I was about 14/15, when I was working with three or four, maybe more, amateur dramatic groups. And of course, we rehearsed in the evening when everybody had day jobs. And one of the problems of being a newspaper reporter—or rather, a journalist, I like to say—was that a lot of the work is nighttime work. But I always managed to cover it. I would get somebody to stand in for me, or I would get somebody I could call on the phone the next morning early and ask what happened and make notes and so forth, and then write something up.

And then one day, there was a huge fire in a mill in downtown Muirfield where I was living, which was my little hometown. And the editor called the subeditor, whose name was Charlie Pickles, which always seems to amuse people. And it makes him sound like a TV character. And he said, “Charlie, we've got to get somebody there. We've got to get one of our people there.”

And Charlie said, “Oh, not a problem, because Patrick Stewart's next door in the council house, in the council chamber, because he's at a meeting.”

Well, of course, I wasn't. And it all came out the next morning. And I was called into the editor's office, and he said, “Look, Patrick, I'm proud of the work that you've done. I think you could make a good journalist. But you've got to commit yourself to it. And that would mean, I'm sorry, but you're having to give up your amateur acting. And if you can't give it up, you're going to have to go.”

And I said, “I'll go right now, Mr. Wilson.” That was my editor's name, Henry Wilson. And I went upstairs and packed up my typewriter, which had been given me by my ex-headmaster. It was a very old typewriter. And I had a friend who was also working with me on the paper, a few years older than me and a grammar schoolboy.

And he said, “Patrick, what are you doing?! You can't give up this job! You're so lucky to have it in the first place! And you're never gonna get another chance like this one! This is a career you're turning down!”

And I said, “I don't care. Acting's too important to me.”

And so, whether I was just saying that to be surly and aggressive—

[00:25:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Which you were.

[00:25:34] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Chuckles.*) Which I probably was!—was also proving to be true. And I then got a job in a furniture shop for a year. And during that time, I was working in the furniture store, I got a place in drama school—the wonderful Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, probably the best in England at the time. And I also got a grant from my county council.

[00:26:04] **Jesse Thorn:** To pay your way.

[00:26:05] **Patrick Stewart:** Oh, yes. When I came back from auditioning at Bristol, and Duncan Ross, the head of the school who auditioned me—it was just the two of us in a room alone. And he didn't let me finish my audition. I'd done three pieces. I'd prepared three pieces. And he said, “No, no, no, you don't have to do that, Patrick. Thanks so much for coming in anyway. And we'll see you in September.” He was offering me a place, right there and then on the spot. And I went home, and I told my parents. My mother was dazzled.

My father, though, frowned and said, (*in a Northern English accent*) “But who the bloody hell's gonna pay for this? We haven't got the money, Patrick.”

And he was right, and it was Ruth Wynn Owen who said, “I think you should apply for a grant. And not just a little one, but a big one. Because who knows? You might just get lucky.” And I did. I got very lucky, and I got what was called a County Major Scholarship.

[00:27:09] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Patrick Stewart of *Star Trek*, *Blunt Talk*, *X-Men*, and more.

I want to read to you this quote from a thing that Robert Justman wrote about casting you in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. This is like—I don't know, this is maybe 20 years ago or 25 years ago that he wrote this thing. This is like remembrance of this process. And he said—this is before they cast you. He said, “We knew it was a man, and we knew he was French, and he was very hairy. Hopefully he was a handsome leading man. French, in fact.” (*Laughs.*)

[00:27:54] **Patrick Stewart:** Oh my. Oh, Robert. And you know, he's the one who got me the job.

[00:28:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, it sounds like Gene Roddenberry was difficult to convince on that front. And understandably, I mean, he really wanted him to be a French guy. You're not—you're neither hairy nor French!

[00:28:14] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Laughing.*) No, that's right! Appearance and background was nonexistent, but Robert was the reason in the first place I got involved. I was assisting a dear friend, David Rhodes, a professor of English at UCLA. And he had asked me if I would illustrate a public lecture he was giving about Shakespeare by speaking some of the lines. And he'd invited an actress to come along so we could play scenes together as well.

[00:28:49] **Jesse Thorn:** And you're in your mid-40s. You're a successful actor in the sense that you had worked consistently throughout your career and had done some great roles in theatre, but you weren't—you know, you weren't a name actor, even necessarily in the context of theatre in the UK. More of a working actor.

(*He confirms.*)

And certainly, you weren't a famous person in the United States. You weren't—I don't know who they were auditioning to be this hairy Frenchman, but you weren't whatever Paramount might have imagined might topline a franchise.

[00:29:25] **Patrick Stewart:** I know that to be true, because of my decades of years of experience in Hollywood now. But I think underneath all of this and things a few minutes ago we were talking about, I think there was an underlying assurance, confidence that my father had given me. When he walked onto the parade ground, the birds in the trees stopped singing. And I think that there were elements of that that I took in and absorbed. So, people were always—to my surprise—often enthusiastic about what I did, when often I thought it wasn't very good, and I wasn't too pleased with myself. But that was what prompted the director to say, “Don't insure against failure. It doesn't help.”

[00:30:30] **Jesse Thorn:** When you went in to audition for *The Next Generation*, did you pretend to be French?

[00:30:41] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Laughs.*) No, I didn't pretend to be French. But I pretended—

[00:30:44] **Jesse Thorn:** In the future, French people could have English accents! Why not?

[00:30:49] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Laughs.*) I didn't, although we had a lot of fun over the years when I would say, (*in a cartoonish French accent*) “Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the—” (*Chuckling.*) And so on and so forth. Just to wake people up in the morning and give them a laugh, you know. But I did have hair, even though I wasn't French.

[00:31:17] **Jesse Thorn:** It wasn't your hair, though.

[00:31:18] **Patrick Stewart:** I owned it.

[00:31:20] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckling.*) Okay, fair enough!

[00:31:22] **Patrick Stewart:** It was a hairpiece. It was a toupee. And I was called back for the final—I think I auditioned at Paramount Pictures. I've driven past the front gates just now, where it all started. And I was told, “There's just two of you now competing for this role.”

I never learned who the other person was. Some of my colleagues said they knew, but they were never going to tell me who it was. But I...

[00:31:53] **Jesse Thorn:** Your hair was—?

[00:31:54] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes, I flew on Friday from London to Los Angeles. When I got there on Friday evening, my agent landed. My agent called me and said, “Listen, listen, there's a problem. Paramount wanted to know if you had a hairpiece or a wig or something that you could—they want to see what you look like with hair.”

And I said, “Well, I do, but it's at home! I left it in London. I didn't know. If you called me two days ago, I could have brought it with me.

And they said, “Is there somebody at your home?”

And I said, “Well, yeah, there is.”

And he said, “Well, can we find it?”

So, I made a call. It was taken to Heathrow, put on an airplane, and they were told why this hairpiece was going. And then I drove over to LAX later that day and had it in my hands. And I wore it for the audition—not to go to the audition, but they had brought in a hairdresser who helped me put on the hair. And it was a beautiful hairpiece. I mean, I don't mean because it made me look beautiful, but it was just so real.

And my audition was actually over very quickly. It was interrupted. I'm in my second piece, and they said, “Thank you. Thank you, Patrick. That's great. That's all for now.” And I went back to my hairdresser, and she began taking it off.

And she said, “I think they liked you.” Of course, she was my hairdresser then for seven years.

And I said, “Oh, I don't know.”

And she said, “Yes, they did.”

Then there was a knock at the door. And it was all the Paramount Picture crew who'd been watching my audition. They were studio people. They weren't agents and, you know, casting directors and things. They were the studio. And they came in and said, “We just wanted to thank you once more, another time for doing this.”

And I said, “Oh, thanks very much for this!”

And as I was talking, I took the hairpiece off and put it down. And then they left, and my hairdresser said, (*whispering excitedly*) “You've got the job! I know you have! They came in to see what you looked like with and without hair! That's why they were here! And you've got the job!”

Well, I was offered it an hour later. I wasn't offered it, my agent was. And there is an interminable anecdote about how I spent the rest of that day, which I will not go into now.

[00:34:24] **Jesse Thorn:** I kind of feel like—the impression I get is that you were still holding your life very tightly at that point. I mean, you're in your late 40s then, mid/late 40s, like 46 or 47 or something.

[00:34:36] **Patrick Stewart:** I was—I'd been 45, I was just 46.

[00:34:42] **Jesse Thorn:** And there's a famous story of you scolding everyone else, all the other actors on set, that they weren't taking things seriously enough, right?

(*He confirms.*)

And you know, your divorce from your wife, who's the mother of your children, came only a few years into *The Next Generation*. You had a period of really serious depression and alcohol abuse and taking sleeping pills, among other things. And all of those things feel to me like holding your life tightly things. Which is not what you project into the world now.

[00:35:31] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Beat.*) Thank you. I do feel more confident. I feel more assured. I have some wonderful friends. I have a fabulous, brilliant wife. And I am as happy as I've ever been in my life. And I don't know what lies ahead. I actually don't have an acting job. I've got a couple of offers on the table that might come to something. One of them is a very interesting offer, but I am coming to terms with it might be just—even though it could be gentle but going slightly downhill now. I'm 83. I never expected to be 80, but here I am! And feeling good. But I'm preparing myself by not insuring against failure, but for essentially having to lead a different kind of life.

In time, it will come. And you know what? I find myself curious about what it'll be. Because I have—as you said, I've worked all my life. I've hardly had—you know, taking a holiday, taking my kids on holiday, which became very, very difficult because I was always working. And often it could be in Australia or Canada or wherever, you know. But I am now in a place where I can feel and see gratitude for what I have been given. I don't just mean in terms of talent. I mean in terms of friendships. My wife now, influences whom I could say, “Yes, you've got a big element of what I would like to have.” And it's not about talent. It's about attitude.

[00:37:36] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll finish up with Patrick Stewart after a quick break. When we return, we still haven't talked about one of Stewart's more recent masterpieces, *Blunt Talk*—

the short-lived comedy series in which he played a television news anchor. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:37:56] **Promo:**

Griffin McElroy: Throughout history, sirens have captured men's attention, enticed men with their feminine wiles, and fulfilled men's primal needs. The sirens allure persists—

Travis McElroy: Uh, they have not! Unless the primal need is “I need to be smashed on the rocks”.

Griffin: Yeah, smash me. *(Laughing.)* Smash me, Mama!

Travis: Smash me, Mommy.

Justin McElroy: Smash me, Mommy!

(They cackle.)

Griffin: The siren's a little—*(laughs)*.

Travis: Why do we do this to ourselves?!

Justin: Strand me, baby! Strand me, Mom!

Travis: Strand me, baby!

Music: “My Life is Better with You” by Montaigne, a bright, energetic song.

Justin: So, yeah, listen to *My Brother, My Brother and Me*, from Maximum Fun on Mondays. It's just like... that. *(Laughing.)* It's just like that, but more—it's just like that but more of it. There's—there's just more of that.

(Music fades out.)

[00:38:39] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:38:44] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Patrick Stewart. He plays Jean Luc Picard on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and elsewhere. Professor X in the *X-Men*, and of course, Walter Blunt on *Blunt Talk*. Stewart's memoir is out now. It's called *Making It So*.

There was a quote in the original press kit for *Star Trek: The Next Generation* from you. You know, there's one of those fake interviews in there. And I found this when I was looking

around at things. They ask you like how you feel about taking on this role in *Star Trek*, a classic question. You said, “I choose not to think about it too much.” (*Laughing.*) And I thought, here’s a guy who’s coming to terms with this!

[00:39:35] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes. Well, I had to ask my children what *Star Trek* was. You know, the names of the actors meant something to me, and I was aware of that. But I’d remembered—because when I was working at Stratford-upon-Avon and we had a house there, and I had a matinee and an evening show, I would race out of the theatre—sometimes wearing my makeup after the matinee—and drive home so I could have my kids’ supper with them. And sometimes, when I came in on an early Saturday evening, they would be watching television. And so often they were watching this show with these guys in different colored t-shirts. But I had no idea what it was. (*Chuckling.*) And I had no expectation that I was destined to become part of that.

[00:40:25] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, it’s a lot of different things happening, right? Like, you’re in a different country. You’re making way more money than you had ever made as a—you know, as a 46-year-old man, it’s kind of—you don’t expect your fortunes to change dramatically so quickly. You’re working on something that means everything in the world to some people, and you’re trying to figure out what it means to you. Like, you signed up for six or seven years or whatever your first contract is.

(*He confirms it was six.*)

You’re dealing with that. You’re—you know, you hadn’t even done that much screen work! You know what I mean? Like, you worked on screen but not in the way where you’re in every scene and you’re, you know, working 14-hour days. Like, all this different stuff that you’re just trying to—like, the impression that I get is that you’re trying to kind of hard work and not mess up your way through.

[00:41:26] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes. And that’s, I think, what prompted my outbreak to the—my wonderful, beautiful colleagues on the show, when I called a meeting and lectured them about the fooling around and the fun and games and the improvising that would go on. And I said, “You know, because it’s not fair, because there are crew here. And these crew, they work every day and all day. We get days off! We get late calls. And so, I think we’ve gotta think about them.”

And you know, it was then that one of the cast said, “Oh, come on, Patrick, we’ve got to have some fun.”

And I said, (*furiously*) “We are not here to have fun!” And there was silence. And then they all burst out laughing.

[00:42:17] **Jesse Thorn:** This is *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. My guest is Sir Patrick Stewart.

I don’t want to miss the opportunity to talk about your show *Blunt Talk*, which was one of my absolute favorites. Now this is a show where—in fact, I’ll play a little bit of a scene from the show. This is a show that was run by the great Jonathan Ames, who is a very funny and

strange man. And it was originally conceived by Seth MacFarlane, who was the creator of *Family Guy*, among other things. And he's famous for loving *Star Trek* and wanted to put you in a comedy, because he knew you could do that. I always thought it was amazing that he decided to hire Ames to do it. Because Ames is such a person of such singular vision.

And your character on *Blunt Talk* is a news anchor named Walter Blunt of Britain who is coming to cable news in America—sort of like, tell-it-like-it-is cable news. And it is such a strange psychosexual bouillabaisse, this program. And in this scene, your character is getting on a plane to Galveston to cover a hurricane but has spent so much time in the bathroom messing with the toilet paper and the toilet seat covers that he has missed the plane.

[00:43:44] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:43:45] **Clip:**

Stewardess: (*Blunt Talk*): I am so sorry. There's no boarding. The plane is closed.

Walter Blunt: That's not possible. You said I could go.

Stewardess: I know, but we boarded very quickly. It's the last flight to Galveston. We need to get it out.

Walter: You must open the gate and let us on board the plane.

Stewardess: I can't do that.

Walter: Yes, you can. You see, I have to be in Galveston tonight. I have a very important broadcast.

Stewardess: Ooh, I'm sorry, Mr. Blunt. It's a federal law.

Walter: But I don't care about (*building into a furious shout*) asinine federal laws!

(*A thump.*)

(*Whispering.*) I must be on that plane.

Stewardess: I'm sorry. Thank you.

Walter: My dear—

Stewardess: I'm sorry. Thank you.

Walter: My dear!

Stewardess: (*With finality.*) I'm sorry. Thank you.

[00:44:20] **Transition:** Music swells then fades.

[00:44:21] **Jesse Thorn:** What I like about the character is this. There's a lot of things I like about the character. I love the show. But what I like about it is—so, if you say like, oh, blunt talk, straight-shooting cable news guy, you think of maybe that clip of Bill O'Reilly where he's saying, "We'll do it live," right? Where he keeps messing it up. (*Angrily.*) "We'll do it live!" Like, you think of just an angry guy. And that scene is a nice distillation of the fact that this character is mostly a weirdly optimistic dreamer. (*Laughing.*) Like, the fact that his anger comes out of his conviction that they can. Like, there's—you could have played that as like, "You can open the door," like pointing a finger kind of you can open the door rather than you truly seem to believe that anything you set your mind to is possible.

(*They chuckle.*)

[00:45:19] **Patrick Stewart:** Yes, yes. Well, I have enough recollection about that scene to know that I was tapping into Patrick Stewart in that scene.

[00:45:30] **Jesse Thorn:** Your character also does a lot of cuddling on a special cuddling mattress in his bedroom—I mean, in his office.

(*They chuckle.*)

Did you know when you agreed—when you agreed to do a comedy, did you know what was funny about you as a performer?

[00:45:52] **Patrick Stewart:** I suspected that I had a good idea. I'd done comedy in the past. In fact, when I began to make my headway with the Royal Shakespeare Company, it was, in fact, playing comic characters. Usually, servants or friends or wacky people, you know. And I enjoyed that so much, finding humor in it, if possible. And I found that I enjoyed it more and more. And in recent years, I've been urging my team to come up with something comedic. Because I enjoy releasing that element of me to come out.

Because I mean, as all of my beloved friends in *Next Generation* will tell you, I could be a very funny guy. I mean, I was the one who came up with this thing halfway through season two—and it was season one when I'd said, (*angrily*) "We're not here to have fun." Halfway through season two, I said, "Okay, listen, I've come up with a plan." I called another meeting, (*laughs*) and I said, "Every single one of us has got to come up with one funny something every day. It doesn't matter what it is, but it's got to be funny, and we've got to have laughs."

(*Laughing.*) And I mean, how did I move from that one to another one in the space of one year? Well, largely I think it's the influence of Brent and Michael and John and Marina and Gates, LeVar.

[00:47:39] **Jesse Thorn:** To be fair, Sir Patrick, what you're describing is the comedy version of the first thing that you said. The second thing is the comedy—(*chuckling*) like, you went from, “We all have to be serious!” to “We all have to be serious about doing a funny thing!”

(*He laughs.*)

So, maybe you had a way to go before full goofing around.

(*He agrees.*)

I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm here with Patrick Stewart. He has a new memoir out called *Making It So*.

You have a—what's the story with your Band-Aid on your finger?

[00:48:15] **Patrick Stewart:** Oh, this is embarrassing. We—my wife, Sunny, and I have gone public.

[00:48:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Perfect! We should discuss it on National Public Radio. Go ahead.

[00:48:25] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Laughs.*) That we have a very, very special relationship with a squirrel in our back garden. A squirrel that was known as Cecil the Squirrel at first.

[00:48:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Cecil the Squirtle?

[00:48:36] **Patrick Stewart:** Until she became pregnant, and she became Cheryl instead of Cecil. And my wife has gently, subtly developed this relationship over the past three years, which is when we moved into this house and inherited a squirrel and crows also. We have now four crows, the same crows who come to us every day. As yet, they're not yet eating out of our hand, but it's not far away! But the squirrel is Cheryl—well, certainly for my wife; we'll open the kitchen door and call out her name, and she will come straight into the kitchen. And my wife will kneel down on the floor or sit on the floor, and Cheryl climbs into her lap! And she will let us touch the back of her head once or twice. That's all before she (*mumbles*).

And my wife is connected to her. I know that she is. Anyway, this morning Sunny was out for most of the morning. And I could see that Cheryl was hanging about. And she hadn't had anything. And we keep nuts by the door, walnuts, because she loves them. So, I went out and I picked the biggest walnut. And she immediately came over to me and sat on her hind legs with her paws in the air. And I had it in this hand, between my index finger and my middle finger and my thumb. And I held it out to her, and she put her claws up and went to hold it. And wasn't happy with that, because she suddenly bit me. And she took about an inch of my finger into her mouth and sank her teeth. I mean, she went through my nail—right through my nail into the skin on the other side. And I howled. And of course, she pulled away from that immediately.

So, my relationship with Cheryl is now a little different, because Sunny is convinced that she knows what happened and that she's uncomfortable about it. So, somehow I've got to let her know, (*soothingly*) "It's alright. It's alright. I wasn't angry at you. It was just pain that I couldn't tolerate." (*Chuckles.*) I know it sounds crazy, but the relationship with the crows is a magical process. Because they have just got more and more comfortable with us being around.

[00:51:08] **Jesse Thorn:** You're not gonna die of lockjaw, are you? I'd hate to have the headline in the *New York Times* say, "Muscular 83-year-old celebrity Patrick Stewart Dead from Squirrel".

[00:51:21] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Cackles.*) Well, my wife actually went online when she came back and saw what had happened. Because I got three incisions in my finger, in the end of my finger. And she says, "The chances you have of you having caught something from Cheryl is very remote. The way that squirrels live and are and what they eat and where they reside and so forth, it is very unlikely that they have got anything dangerous in their system that they could pass on to you. So, we're going to look after you when I get home from finishing our chat. We're going to have another inspection of what's going on, but it's—" That had a whole tooth in that one there. That's the one that went down through my nail.

[00:52:10] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, right now I don't see any foam at the corners of your mouth.

[00:52:14] **Patrick Stewart:** (*Laughs.*) And if it comes, I shall blame it on you.

[00:52:17] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, fair enough! I mean, I shouldn't have bit you earlier, to be fair! My plan was to blame it on the squirrel but—

Well, Patrick Stewart, I sure am grateful for your time. It was really nice to get to talk to you.

[00:52:30] **Patrick Stewart:** I've enjoyed it, and I must tell you that NPR have saved me countless times since I came to live here in 1987. So, thank you, NPR, for the good times that you continue to give me daily.

[00:52:50] **Jesse Thorn:** I'll accept that on their behalf.

[00:52:51] **Patrick Stewart:** Thank you. And thank you for the conversation. It's been lovely.

[00:52:57] **Jesse Thorn:** Patrick Stewart. What a treat. His new book is called *Making It So*. You can get it wherever books are sold.

[00:53:05] **Clip:**

Patrick Stewart: (*From a Star Trek: The Next Generation DVD special feature.*) Gene, you're adorable. B, you're so beautiful. C, (*bursting into song*) you're a cutie

full of charm. D, you're a darling. And E, you're exciting. And F, you're a feather in my arms!

[00:53:25] **Transition:** Relaxed, cheerful synth.

[00:53:27] **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. Here at my house, quick update, still thinking about flooring for the shed in my backyard. I went and looked at some linoleum; it was really cool, but I ended up just buying wood flooring. Linoleum was a little bit expensive, to be honest.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation”. It was written and recorded by The Go! Team. Our thanks to The Go! Team. Our thanks to Memphis Industries, their label.

Bullseye is on Instagram! [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

[00:54:29] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](#) and is distributed by NPR.

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