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Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

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

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Norman Lear died last month. He was a writer and creator of some of the biggest and most influential sitcoms of all time. In fact, *Variety* published a Top 100 TV Shows of All Time, and three of Norman Lear's shows were in there. It was just the other day. Indeed, Lear redefined what sitcoms could be. With *Sanford and Son*, Lear created a show that would give rise to literally dozens of African American sitcoms. And on *All in the Family*, characters took on huge topics like war, race, feminism, abortion, in a way that was empathetic to both sides of every issue. Archie Bunker, for all his flaws and all the despicable things he said, became one of the most nuanced and beloved sitcom characters of all time.

Lear also created *The Jeffersons*, *Maude*, *Archie Bunker's Place*, and many, many, many more. In 1981, he founded the progressive group People for the American Way. When I talked with Lear back in 2016, he was the subject of a PBS American Masters film called *Norman Lear: Another Version of You*. When he and I talked, he was in his 90s. He was still working. In the years since, he rebooted *One Day at a Time*. The new version was great, by the way. He made a documentary with Lin-Manuel Miranda about Rita Moreno. And he was still developing TV shows, right up until his passing at 101.

Before I replay my conversation with Lear, I want to play a clip from *All in the Family*, the sitcom that changed everything.

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Clip:

(*The studio audience laughs regularly throughout the conversation.*)

Speaker (*All in the Family*): What, you sure it was Sammy Davis Jr?!

Archie Bunker: No, meathead, it was some Zulu jockey. I know the man! Besides, who'd give me a five-buck tip for a buck-and-a-quarter haul anyway? And as fine a gentleman as ever you want to meet. Sat there in the back of the cab, talking to me about the weather, all kinds of things, just like a regular person. In fact, if it wasn't for the rear-view mirror there, I'd have thought he was a White guy.

Speaker: Arch, what do you gotta say things like that for?!

Archie: What do you mean what do I gotta say things like that for?! What did I say, anyhow?! Would you listen to these two! You can't say nothing around here. They twist around everything you say!

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Jesse Thorn: Norman Lear, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's great to have you on the show.

Norman Lear: I like being here, thank you.

Jesse Thorn: Well, we'll see how it goes.

(They laugh.)

So far.

Norman Lear: Yeah, I'll get back to you.

Jesse Thorn: Okay, great. I read that there were multiple pilots turned down for *All in the Family*. Is that true?

Norman Lear: No, it was three years before 1968. I made the pilot originally for ABC, and they caused me to make it again. The same script, same two leads, Carroll O'Connor and Jean Stapleton. And so, I made it twice for them with two different sets of young kids. Turns out to be a blessing, because it took a couple of more years before a new president of CBS heard about the show, saw it, and asked me to do it again, but this time promised to put it on the air.

So, by that time, Rob Reiner and Sally Struthers were available to me or knowledgeable to me—I knew about them. And it made all the difference in the world. They were great shows before, and I think they would have worked, but the chemistry between the four people when Rob and Sally became part of it—just... it's miracle talent.

Jesse Thorn: Were you still working the show? Like, were you passing out giant 1974 videocassettes to studio heads? Or was it something that you'd given up on?

Norman Lear: No, no. Well, did I give up? I went off and made a film called *Cold Turkey* between the ABC two shows, two pilots, and the CBS order. And actually, you know, people think I was brave as hell (*chuckles*) to stand up to the network when they didn't want this or that. But I had—as a result of *Cold Turkey*, I had a three-picture offer from United Artists to write, produce, and direct. I was just emotionally married to *All in the Family* and those characters. And I couldn't think, so long as the network wanted it, of doing anything else. But I did have backup, should they have made it impossible for me to do it.

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Jesse Thorn: It's an incredible commitment to work on a sitcom, because you have to make it every week. Like, you're making it 25+ times a year. And if you're successful, you're doing that for years on end. Why did you want to do that and not, you know, take a movie deal and make a movie a year?

Norman Lear: Well, all of it—either effort—all starts with needing to make a living for a growing family.

(They chuckle.)

Everything that came out of all of that came out of all of that. It wasn't anticipated. It wasn't—you know, it wasn't done with knowledge or forethought as to where we were going to get with it. And we were working too hard to be thinking about anything else but the next script.

Jesse Thorn: Did you believe that *All in the Family* was going to be—I mean, I'm sure you believed in *All in the Family* artistically. You can tell me if you didn't believe in *All in the Family* artistically, please let me know.

(Norman laughs.)

But I bet that you loved the show and believed in it in that sense.

Norman Lear: Oh, I did! And as soon as it was cast—you know, I'm a permanent member of the audience. I've lived my life sitting down to see something and with the attitude, “Take me.” And I want to be had. I want you to take me. And as an audience member—you know, the performance of those four people, the chemistry in every direction as between the four of them—I worked hard to help it, to get it. But I also never stopped adoring the laughter. You know, my own laughter. And early on, thinking it's adding time to my life.

Jesse Thorn: That's interesting. Did you think that it was going to be a hit show? Because it wasn't a huge hit show initially. It was an acclaimed show initially but not a smash hit show.

Norman Lear: No, no. No. And in some ways it was frowned on. I mean, it was majorly frowned on by some very poor reviews at the beginning. But then they started to get better. Everybody didn't realize what we were trying to do. You know, if it hadn't gone on in January, it might never have happened. Because what occurred was bad ratings until maybe May or something. When the other two network's shows—there were only three networks; that's hard to believe. *(Chuckles.)* When their shows were going into reruns, we still had a couple to go. So, the audience that was there for the other two networks came to us, because they'd heard about this new show. And the ratings started to tick up in the last couple of episodes of the initial 13. And that's when the network decided to pick it up.

Jesse Thorn: For a while, the show ran with a disclaimer that's shown in the American Masters documentary.

(Norman confirms.)

And I was looking at that disclaimer. And it's so... it's so sincere and so—(*sighs*) like, it is the lamest thing I've ever seen in my—you know, it goes—I don't have the text in front of me, but it's like, “Oh, it's an attempt to shed light on, you know, social conditions in our great nation and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah—” that ran before this show that was fresh and new on the air.

Norman Lear: But there might be something to offend you, so know that—you know, go with caution.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, exactly. And it's not like—there's 0% defiance in it. It is completely conciliatory. And as I said, like absurdly sincere. You'd think that you were about to watch like an after school special or something like that, not a sitcom about a family. And I wonder if there was like a discussion about whether that was going to run and what it was going to say before the show premiered or whether that just appeared.

Norman Lear: Well, if you remember the first episode, Archie and Edith were at church. It was a Sunday morning. It was their 25th wedding anniversary. The kids, Mike and Gloria, were preparing a brunch, surprise brunch, while they were at church. And so, they had—whatever was cooking was cooking, and the balloons were hung, and everything was ready. And they wouldn't be—they, Archie and Edith, wouldn't be back for another half hour or so. So, Mike thought they would run upstairs, and he coaxed Gloria to run up there with him. They no sooner got upstairs when the front door opened.

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Archie needed to go home early, (*chuckling*) because he hated the sermon, he hated the minister, and he was fuming. And they came in early from church. And the kids upstairs heard that, came running down buttoning a shirt or something. And Archie sees them, and he says, “11 o'clock on a Sunday morning.” That line had to come out. Now we had gone through all the arguments about spick and spade and heeb and this and, you know, Archie's language. This now was the last moment, and they wanted that line out. And the reason they wanted that line out was it caused the audience to imagine, to picture what he was talking about happening at 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning.

I said, “Well, that occurred when they ran upstairs!”

Jesse Thorn: It's, uh—by the way, if the audience hasn't picked up on it, it's mommy and daddy stuff that they were doing upstairs. Grownup activities.

Norman Lear: Yes. I mean, it was—and they were married on top of that. (*Chuckles.*) It wasn't like they weren't. This knocked me out that CBS thought it would cause people to actually see the picture of what might be happening there.

Jesse Thorn: Well, and also that they would see the picture, imagine that picture happening at that time when God was probably watching. (*Chuckles.*)

Norman Lear: Yes, 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning. (*Laughs.*) So right. Anyway, it was the day the show was on the air. It had been—it was going on three hours earlier, of course, in New York. And I got a call a half hour before it went on in New York to say they were not cutting the line. Because they had the ability to cut the line. And I had said, “Cut the line and I'm out of here.” And I'm back to my—I would be at United Artists with three pictures.

Jesse Thorn: We have to go to a quick break. When we return even more with the late, great Norman Lear. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, we're replaying my 2016 conversation with the great Norman Lear. The creator of *All in the Family*, *Sanford and Son*, and more died this past December. He was 101. Let's get back into the rest of our conversation.

How confident were you, especially when you started making the show, that presenting Archie Bunker in this family and having him, you know, have the kind of retrograde views that he had and the kind of language that he used on network television when there were only three networks was a good idea? Were you absolutely confident? Or did you feel like you were kind of rolling the dice and had an 80/20 chance that it was the right decision?

Norman Lear: Well, I thought—I was very confident that it would be no big deal with the American people, because there was nothing we were doing that they couldn't hear in any schoolyard or up the street, down the street, across the street from each other. We didn't—none of the problems we dealt with were anything. All the illnesses or social problems or economic problems or—you know, up to and including abortion.

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That was on *Maude*. You know, that was common in every family in America, those problems. Nobody—we weren't educating anybody so much as discussing it. I mean, we weren't introducing new subjects. And Archie himself—you know, I'd like the nickel for everybody who said their dad, their uncle, their grandfather, their—you know, their neighbor. Everybody recognized the character.

Jesse Thorn: Sitcoms aren't often about actual problems. I mean, you need a problem to have—you know, to turn a plot. You know, there's no plot without a conflict. But you know, usually a sitcom is a comforting, recognizable set of friends on television that you have, and their problems are silly nonsense, misunderstandings—the boss is coming over and we have to make a casserole, whatever. Why did you feel so strongly that the problems on a sitcom should be what you called real problems?

Norman Lear: I don't know that there was any decision to go in that direction. I just dealt with what I knew. And as I started to say, invited other writers to—it wasn't new to them. We

were sharing what we were living. We all read a couple of newspapers. That was kind of an instruction to everybody. Read a couple of newspapers, pay attention to your family, your wives' problems, your kids' problems in school. You know, their problems as opposed to the social order and the culture generally. And we came in and started to talk about what we were all reading. Somebody said, "Did you see this? Hypertension in Black males has risen." Well, wouldn't that be a great subject for *Good Times* and John Evans? And so, we did it.

And by the way, when we did that specific episode, that's exactly when we learned there were tens of thousands of phone calls to local stations around the country from African American families that wanted more information. That hadn't happened before. By the time it was in reruns—this was, let's say, October or December. By the time it was in rerun in May, I don't know whether they had taken some of the content out or whether they gave up a commercial, but they did have an advisory at the end of the show instructing anybody that was interested to call this and that number.

Jesse Thorn: You know, sometimes I think about—you know, you and I are sitting in this studio. It's just the two of us in the studio. There's two or three people sitting outside the studio. And once in a while, I kind of flashed to the fact that, oh, we're talking to each other in real life here, one to one. But listening to this are like football stadiums worth of people. Like, this is, you know, one of NPR's least successful shows, and it's still a few football stadiums, you know what I mean? Like, college football stadiums, big football stadiums. And sometimes I'm kind of cowed by that, just a little.

Norman Lear: You know what it causes me to think?

Jesse Thorn: What?

Norman Lear: Every single one of those people filling those stadiums—this is... it took all of their lives, every hour and minute of their lives to get to the moment where they're sitting in the stadium, listening to us. It took me 94 years, some months, some weeks, some days, some hours, some minutes, to get here, to say what I've just said. Every split second. There's no contest about it. It's altogether correct.

Jesse Thorn: What was it like for you in the '70s when—you know, at one point you had six of the top ten TV shows on television in a world where there were only three television networks. So, literally dozens of millions of people were watching each one of the shows that you were in charge of. And you know, to some extent you're just trying to make—you're just trying to make a fun family sitcom. You know what I mean? (*Chuckles.*)

Norman Lear: That's right. Well, but that's absolutely right. No more than that. We were serious people. All of them. My mind is scanning the faces and memories of the people I worked with. Large, great collaboration.

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But we were all people who took life seriously and happened to see and understand the foolishness of the human condition. There's no situation where there isn't something to laugh at.

Jesse Thorn: I want to talk a little bit about your childhood and the time that you spent before you were the most successful television producer in America. Your dad was a salesman. Was he out of the house a lot?

Norman Lear: I don't remember him as a traveler. He was a salesman and a hustler, and he did a lot of naughty things. But I don't remember him traveling, except for the one— (*chuckles*) he was taking a trip to Oklahoma. And some other guys were involved with it. I remember my mother saying, “I don't like those men, Herman. I don't want you dealing with those men.”

And that's when I heard, “Stifle, Jeanette.” And he would be—and he went. But on this particular trip with those particular guys, when he came back, he was arrested for trying to sell—having tried to sell some fake bonds. And he went to—they took him for three years. So, that had, I would say, an enormous influence on this nine-year-old at the time.

Jesse Thorn: When you were six, seven, and eight years old what did you think about what your dad did?

Norman Lear: I'm not sure I understood what he did. And it was always something different. You know, I remember he was working for a candy company that made something that was going to put Milky Way out of business. (*Chuckles.*) He always was going to make \$1,000,000 in ten days to two weeks, tops. Tops! Once was with this bar of candy. I remember I was eight years old or something, and I was trying to sell it outside of Ebbets Field. We were living in Brooklyn. It was a couple of years we lived in Brooklyn. And then he ran into a guy who invented a pair of slippers with a light in the toe.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

You know, a little light so you could get out of bed, and you could find your way to the bathroom. And he was gonna make \$1,000,000 with that.

Jesse Thorn: That's like a joke about a thing that a guy would think he's going to get rich off of!

Norman Lear: It is! You know, I did an episode of *All in the Family* where Archie ran into such a guy, and he was going to make \$1,000,000,000.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) I mean your father must have been—to have made any kind of career in that business and in that world, he must have had charm. Did you feel like—

Norman Lear: Oh, he had charm. Yeah, he leaned—this is what I loved about him. He leaned into life. You know, like Arthur Miller's *Salesman*. He went out into the world with a shoeshine and a, you know, fire in his eyes. And he came back feeling the same way. He

always came back bringing something my mother should have picked up at the store. (*Laughs.*) He was so strong but dominated by her.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, one of the things that it seems like to me is it can be really hard to have a parent who is that kind of outwardly fun and charming and like beguiling. Like, you're fascinated by your parents—anyone—and it can be really hard if that person is also someone where, you know, when you get sucked in, you don't know what you're going to get. That can be really scary, especially when you're a kid.

Norman Lear: Well, when you—it's so interesting. There was no way to depend on him. I don't know that I knew that at the time, but it turned out. And yet, he did some grandstand things that were just amazing. One I used—I did an episode on *Maude*, and it won an Emmy.

And the story as it existed with my dad was that—I loved theater from my earliest memories. And my favorite play was *Liliom*, Ferenc Molnár's *Liliom*. It later became a musical called *Carousel*.

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And I get tickets to see it. And I'm taking my best girlfriend, who much later became my first wife. And I'm gonna pick her up in the car that Sid Pasternack and I bought for like \$150, some bottle TRAYe or something for it. And my father says to me the day of the event, "Norman, I'm gonna come early. I want you to take my Hudson Terraplane. You're taking your best girl to Westport." So, he needs to get back at two or three o'clock, let's say in order for me to take his car in time to pick up Charlotte in West Hartford, Connecticut. He's not there in time, and he's not there a half hour later. And 50 minutes later or whenever I get into my Model T, and I drive. I pick up Charlotte in West Hartford and I drive through Middletown and Danbury and this place and up into New Haven. And I hear honk, honk, honk, honk.

My father, having gotten home very late, chased me and found me on the Merritt Parkway. Honked, honked, honked. We changed cars. The grandstand act, you know, of all time.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, there's something about that kind of story where, you know, that parent has made themselves the hero and the center of that story in doing that act, you know? They're the ones who have failed in trying to help their child, and their child is the one who's supposed to be the center of the story. And they managed to make themselves both the hero of the story and the center of it. You know? It's like in some way, it's your—you know, it's your dad pulling the rug out from under you.

Norman Lear: As often as I've told the story over the years, I've never had that thought. Nobody's ever seen it that way. It couldn't be more correct. And it so fits the character, and it so amazes me that I never had that thought. Of course, it wasn't all for me. It was, in a sense, all for him.

I want to repeat my age. I'm 94 years old. I've just had an insight in this conversation that I might have had at 50, but it took me 94 years to get to it. And I think that's life giving, that

the knowledge, that an insight that important can be there waiting for you to pick it up all those years. And that we never stopped growing.

Jesse Thorn: We'll wrap up my conversation with Norman Lear after a break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Promo:

Jesse Thorn: The following are real reenactments of pretend emergency calls.

Music: Dramatic, ominous music settles in.

Operator: 911.

Caller 1: My husband! It's my husband!

Operator: Calm down, please. What about your husband?

Caller 1: (*Sobbing in terror.*) He—he loads the dishwasher wrong! Please help! Oh, please help me!

(*Scene change.*)

Operator: Where are you now, ma'am.

Caller 2: At the kitchen table. I was with my dad. He mispronounces words. Intentionally.

(*Scene change.*)

John Hodgman: There are plenty of podcasts on the hunt for justice, but only one podcast has the courage to take on the silly crimes. *Judge John Hodgman*, the only true crime podcast that won't leave you feeling sad and bad and scared for once. Only on MaximumFun.org.

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're replaying my conversation with television legend Norman Lear, who died last month.

You wrote for years on the kind of television comedy shows that were popular in the late 1950s through the early 1970s, which were, you know, comedy variety shows that had

sketches and songs in them and, you know, stuff like that. There's a shot in the movie of you in a *Martin and Lewis* TV show.

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Running on stage that you were writing for. Did you like that kind of show?

Norman Lear: I loved that kind of show. I miss that kind of show every day of my life. A variety show. A variety show.

Jesse Thorn: What thing that you worked on in those years were you proudest of?

Norman Lear: I loved the—you know, we wrote the first three years of the *Martin and Lewis Colgate Comedy Hour*. And that's when Jerry was at his—you know, he was a genius. He was so funny. I loved Martha Raye; we did a book musical. We used current songs; we didn't have new songs and so forth and a chorus. But they were book musical stories. A loved doing—I mean, I loved it all. I loved George Gobel, my god, it was just great fun working with George Gobel. We did a Danny Kaye special I'll never forget. Bobby Darin was a dream, a special we did with him, we became great friends. (*Laughs.*) It was all good.

Jesse Thorn: Were you thinking about—during those years, were you thinking about families? I mean, the shows that made you a legendary television producer—

Norman Lear: You know how they began? They began—two things happened in close proximity. Bud Yorkin, my partner, was overseas, and he saw an episode of *Till Death Us Do Part*. And he told me about it on the phone. And I said, “Oh my god, what an idea!”

Jesse Thorn: This is the British show that *All in the Family* was based upon.

Norman Lear: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. And we gotta do this. You know, and Bud said, “Honestly, you're not going to get this done in America.” He says this in the film. But this—I love this. Phil Sharpe was a friend. He was a writer. He was in New York for a couple of days, stayed with me while Bud was over abroad. And he had just gone through a divorce with four kids. I was going through a divorce with one kid. I was having a very difficult time. I said, “How did it go with your divorce?”

He said, “Fine.”

I said, “Fine?!”

He said, “Yeah, it was simple.”

“You had four kids. I have one. I'm going through hell.”

He said, “All she wanted was my *Joan Davis* reruns.” He had written and conceived the *Joan Davis Show*, which was a major show, at a time when reruns, you know, were worth a

fortune. And he just gave her the reruns, and he was free. At which moment I decided I have to do a situation comedy.

(Jesse laughs loudly.)

Now, we did a lot of important television—all the Danny Kayes and Jack Benny and, you know, Bobby Darin, but you own nothing. Phil did a situation comedy and owned something. So, it was weeks or months or days, I don't know, after Bud called my attention to *Till Death Us Do Part*, and the two ideas came together.

Jesse Thorn: When you saw that British sitcom, did you see more than just a great show? I mean, did it have emotional resonance for you?

Norman Lear: I didn't see it until we were already on the air. That's when I saw it. The little piece that you saw in the show, in the documentary, I remember that very well from having seen it. We were like three shows, four shows in.

Jesse Thorn: So, in a way like *All in the Family* was adapted from a verbal description from a friend of that British show?

(Norman confirms.)

And your friend said, "Oh, it's about this." And you were like—*(laughs)*.

Norman Lear: Because the characters came clearly to mind. I have the—I was a brother and sister, and my father and mother. And that's what this was about. Except the sister, in that case, was a wife.

Jesse Thorn: It must have been hard to be doing that, especially when you had—you know, at the point when you were, you know, moving between rehearsal spaces, running six shows at a time, or whatever it was—that you realize that at some point, you like—you couldn't rule by fiat, even though you were the boss purely. And you had to manage all of these really sensitive issues, not just as they turned out on camera, but as they played across this world of dozens of people, dozens of artists that you were working with.

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Norman Lear: Mm-hm. *(Beat.)* Was that a question?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I mean, "uh-huh" was a fair enough answer to it. *(Chuckles.)* I guess it was more of a prompt. It was a—it must have been a—I can phrase it differently. What—how did it feel to be in that position?

Norman Lear: I think I understand—well, I write—I said in the book, and this is what comes to mind now—was it stressful? Exceedingly stressful. But it was—I think there is stress and there is joyful stress. Understand that every single time, on every single problem

show or episode or whatever, the wind-up was a performance in front of a live audience and laughter. So, (*chuckles*) the fact of it all is, every time it ended in laughter. So, I mean, if that isn't joyful stress, I don't—I mean, it's the most unusual demonstration of joyful stress, because it can only happen in this situation. And that's what I lived through—laughing at the end of every problem and all of us clapping each other in the back and hugging each other at the end of a show.

Jesse Thorn: When you walked away from your sitcom business, which you did right around the end of the '70s, beginning of the '80s, did you miss it?

Norman Lear: No. No. I was—you know, everything's a production. Every day is a production. I was traveling around the country pulling people together for what became *People for the American Way*. And I was—it was like another production.

Jesse Thorn: Did you miss the jokes? I mean, like I work in comedy a little bit, too. And the thing that I love the most about it—relative to the, you know, relatively serious stuff that I do here on this show, for example—is I just love the idea that part of going to work is making a bunch of dumb jokes with people who are funny. (*Laughs.*)

Norman Lear: It's the greatest.

Jesse Thorn: What a joy it is!

Norman Lear: It is the greatest. But you know, this is very interesting, because I've done a lot of talking as a result of the book and then the film and so forth. And you've asked me a number of questions that are first timers. (*Chuckles.*)

So, asking me, did I miss the shows? Strangely enough, I haven't been asked that before, and I haven't thought about it. I think it's a fact that if I missed, I would feel something right now thinking about it, and I would have clear memories of missing. And I didn't. I stayed in touch with a lot of it, because my good friends and executives that took over—you know, we would talk. But I don't recall—I was so involved in what I was doing and getting such a kick out of pulling that together, I don't really recall missing it.

Jesse Thorn: I have one last question for you, and I'm sorry that we're very nearly out of time. It's been so much fun to get to talk to you. There is this brief—

Norman Lear: No less fun on this side.

Jesse Thorn: Thank you. There's this brief allusion in the film to one of your first jobs, which was working at Coney Island. I watched this *American Experience* that I think Rick Burns made about Coney Island one time, and I'm just like totally obsessed. And one of the most amazing moments in that is, you know, Al Lewis, who is famous as Grandpa Munster worked at Coney Island for years as a young man. And he offers some of the patter that he had for his various jobs. And I wonder if any of your jobs at Coney Island had patter.

Norman Lear: Oh, yeah! Yeah. One of the jobs was barking with a megaphone. There were two booths where you could have your picture taken, six for a nickel. Six poses for a nickel.

Jesse Thorn: That's a bargain. These things sell themselves!

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Norman Lear: And I, in my megaphone was saying, “Hey, hey! It's six for nickel, five cents! The only place on the island. Hey, little girl, you ought to be in pictures! Come on.” And I remember that part of that rap. I also worked—(*chuckling*) oh, I love this. I also worked for a guy calling people to—you know, a (*inaudible*), he was Indian. And he was cooking corn in a barrel and selling the corn. No, I barked a little for him and then helped. But he stopped me at one point. This has nothing to do with the barking, but he stopped me at one point. And as if he was teaching me the lesson of lessons, he said, “You're putting the butter on first. You put the salt on first. The reason you put the salt on first is the butter is more expensive than the salt. When you put the salt on first, you use less butter. Put the salt on first.”

(*Jesse chuckles.*)

I have never had an ear of corn without thinking of that sentence. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: I gotta tell you, like you're 94 years old. And you know, you do a fair amount of press for various things. Here's a free tip. Anytime anybody asks you what you've learned in your 94 years, give them that corn stuff. And at 94, nobody's gonna get up in your face about it. They're just gonna nod like that's the wisest thing they've ever heard. Like, pretend to write it down.

(*They laugh.*)

That's a keeper, Norman Lear!

Well, thank you so much. Thank you so much for taking all this time to be on *Bullseye*. What an honor to get to talk to you.

Norman Lear: It was the pleasure of pleasures.

Jesse Thorn: Norman Lear from 2016. As we mentioned before, Lear died this past December at 101. The PBS documentary on Norman Lear, *Norman Lear: Just Another Version of You*, is wonderful. You can stream it for free on Kanopy. All you need is a library card. You can also rent it just about anywhere.

Transition: Bright, brassy synth.

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, it's pouring rain, and my outgoing mail got really wet.

The 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 called "Huddle Formation". It was written and recorded by The Go! Team, thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries. *Bullseye* is on Instagram. We share interview highlights, behind the scenes looks, and more there. We are [@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.

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

(Music ends.)

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