

[00:00:00]

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

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

**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.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. How many jokes are in the movie *Airplane!?* One movie blog says 223. Another says 178. How many minutes are in the movie *Airplane!?* Well, that one's easier to find out. 88, according to the back of the VHS box in my cabin. In any case, that's over two jokes per minute. So many jokes! But it isn't just about volume. For one thing, those jokes are basically all perfect. I mean, they are profoundly dumb in almost every case, but perfect. And so's the tone. The cast is full of serious actors, folks from B movie dramas and TV police procedurals. Every bit of silly nonsense is delivered like it was the address of a crime scene on *Dragnet*.

Nobody else has ever been able to replicate that combination of unhinged silliness and dead, dry sincerity. It's a Zucker, Abrahams, Zucker original. Those three guys wrote and directed *Airplane!*, among many other films and TV shows—*Police Squad*, *Top Secret*, several of the *Scary Movies*. They started in a homemade theater in Wisconsin, a theater that they actually literally built themselves. Then they took it apart, they put it in a U-Haul, and they rebuilt it in Los Angeles, inside an abandoned halfway house. They were a phenomenon, and their stage shows became a tiny film—*Kentucky Fried Movie*—then a huge film—*Airplane!*—and ultimately a cultural phenomenon that endures today.

David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker recently wrote a book. It's called *Surely You Can't Be Serious: The True Story of Airplane!*, and it's not strictly a book about *Airplane!*. It's a book about a collaboration that's lasted almost half a century. It's a book about ZAZ's triumphs and disappointments. And it's a book about how to make something funny. There's even a list of comedy rules. We'll get into the list later. In the meantime, we won't delay any further my conversation with David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker.

**Transition:** Playful, chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** David, Jim, Jerry, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so, so happy to get to talk to you.

**David Zucker:** We're happy to go anywhere.

**Jesse Thorn:** David and Jerry, I'm pretty sure I know how the two of you met. But how did Jim enter your lives?

**David Zucker:** Well, our fathers were business partners. Our mothers were friends, and our sisters were college roommates. And we'd see Jim walking in the halls of the high school. And so, we kind of got to know each other that way.

**Jerry Zucker:** The families have a long history.

**Jesse Thorn:** Jim, what did you think of them?

**Jim Abrahams:** We were kids when we met, and I was—and I'm still—three years older than David and six years older than Jerry. So, you know, as kids, that's kind of a big difference. So, our families were good friends, and we'd get together, and everything was fine. But we really didn't get together as—like to play around together until several years—many years later. And I ran into David one time in Milwaukee. I was a private investigator, and he was a construction expeditor. And he said he had this stuff called videotape equipment, and he wanted to know if I wanted to come over. Because we all knew each other and had similar senses of humor, and wanted to know if I wanted to come over and look at/play with this videotape equipment, which I knew nothing about.

So, we did! We got together in David and Jerry's basement. I think Jerry was just finishing college. And we'd get together on the weekends and just mess around with videotape equipment and, you know, do spoofs of contemporary TV ads or movies. Just for the fun of it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Where'd you guys get video equipment?

**Jerry Zucker:** My dad had a friend—our dad had a friend who ran a sick room service thing, and they used—they had a videotape machine to do demonstrations of things. And he told my dad that he could—you know, David could borrow it. 'Cause I was still in school, and dad thought it would be great for David to make industrial videos, you know.

[00:05:00]

And David had no interest in that whatsoever, but then he saw this show in Chicago, which was inspired by Kenny Shapiro's *Groove Tube*—you know, the shows where a whole bunch of people be in a room and watch a TV. And in those days, you know, there were three channels, and to do R-rated stuff, you had to—you know, you have to either do it yourself or a movie. And David just thought is what we should do. And he drove back to Madison, where I was, and started going on and on about, you know, doing a show. And so, you know, our dad got this equipment then. And it was great, because you could film something and erase it, do something else, film it a different way. You could save stuff and edit it pretty easily all together.

So, for us, a videotape machine—and it was this huge machine, and the quality was not anywhere near what your cell phone can achieve. But it was the greatest play tool, and it was really the reason why we got into this business.

**Jesse Thorn:** It was also kind of a continuing obsession for the three of you to video record. Like, not just your own—make your own stuff, but like for years you were recording the TV overnights so that you could watch them and enjoy the worst of American culture.

**Jerry Zucker:** Well, we used them when we had the show, *Kentucky Fried Theatre*. We would sometimes just use the video and put it on our own audio, or use the audio and put it on our own video. And so, we were always—or sometimes we would just redo the whole thing. But for us, it was always great to look at the real thing that we were spoofing and say, “Stop the tape. Wait a minute. What if he did this or said that?” And that really just continued on through all our satires.

**Jesse Thorn:** Was it always spoofs and ideas? Or was there a time when you were doing characters and farces? You know what I mean?

**Jerry Zucker:** No, always spoofs and satire. I mean, not that one didn't creep in occasionally or a skit in the show or something, but a lot of it—the thing we enjoyed the most was making fun of something that was done seriously.

**David Zucker:** But occasionally, we'd do something that was just completely silly. One of the early tapes I remember we did in the basement—Jim and I did this—you know, we played some very serious music, and Jim was smoking a pipe. And the camera came around, and Jim looked in the camera and just spit out a ping pong ball.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

And yeah, and that was just like—yeah. I just happened to come across that the other day, because I've been putting some of these things on a reel.

**Jerry Zucker:** I actually don't know how you do it—how you did it, Jim. Because the other day I thought—I came across a ping pong ball. I said this would be great. The next time I'm on a Zoom, you know, I'll put this in my mouth and just listen and then spit it out.

*(David laughs.)*

And I couldn't! My mouth was all *(makes straining noises)*.

**David Zucker:** Did you really try that?

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah! It was really hard!

**David Zucker:** You mean 50 years ago when you saw Jim do that?

**Jerry Zucker:** No, no, I tried it like six months ago, yeah.

*(They laugh.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** You were on a Zoom 50 years ago?

*(They laugh.)*

**David Zucker:** Hey, that's a great idea. I'm going to try to do that.

**Jerry Zucker:** See if you could do that. Yeah, maybe someone makes smaller ping pong balls. I don't know.

**David Zucker:** The introduction and everything just—and then just start talking.

**Jesse Thorn:** Was there sketch stuff that you loved? Had you watched *Monty Python* on PBS when it was on TV and that kind of thing?

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah.

**David Zucker:** We like *Monty Python*.

**Jerry Zucker:** *Monty Python's* great, yeah.

**David Zucker:** One of my favorite jokes is one of the *Monty Python* things where he's asked three questions and then—and the guy before him says, you know—he's asked, "What's your favorite color?" And the guy says green. And so, they asked the next guy who was Eric Idle or something. And the third question is what's your favorite color? And Eric Idle says green. And then he thinks, no, blue! You know. And then he gets thrown—yeah, it's my favorite joke. One of my favorite jokes of all time.

*(Jesse chuckles.)*

**Jerry Zucker:** I've been watching their TV—the old TV shows—a lot lately. And they're just really funny and also very odd. Which I love.

**Jesse Thorn:** What was your idea of what show business was? The three of you in Milwaukee with a video recorder that maybe you could use to make industrials.

[00:10:00]

**Jim Abrahams:** I think my mom used to go to New York every year for a week and see all the shows. And then she'd come back, and we'd listen to—my sisters and I and she and the family—would listen to the albums over and over. And we'd memorize the story of whatever the show was. You know, like *Pajama Game* and *West Side Story* and, you know, those from way back when. And so, that was always my idea. It was like Broadway. That's what I thought show business was.

**David Zucker:** But we went to the West coast.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you have your eyes set on Chicago or New York first?

**Jerry Zucker:** I think—my memory is that we just, we had—look, at first the show in Madison, it was just fun, and we loved doing it. And then after a while it was, wait a minute, we don't want to stop doing this! It's really—it could be a vocation! Or we wanted it to be.

**David Zucker:** And we were only charging a dollar a ticket at that point. We weren't getting rich.

*(The others agree.)*

And so, you know, obviously, I don't think we really considered Chicago. It was either New York or LA.

**Jerry Zucker:** Well, we—there was some discussion of Milwaukee. That's what Dick Chudnow said. He was our fourth partner at the time. And Dick—and we were talking about, well, we can go to—I think there was a discussion, Milwaukee or Chicago, and Dick says, “No, I'm going to LA. I don't care what you guys are going to do. We're going to LA.” So.

**David Zucker:** I think we thought it would be easier to starve in Los Angeles than in New York.

**Jerry Zucker:** Or Milwaukee.

**David Zucker:** Or Milwaukee, yeah. *(Chuckles.)* No, in Milwaukee we had our parents.

**Jerry Zucker:** And we could live at home.

**Jim Abrahams:** Right. And we had this aspiration. Our ultimate goal was to be on *The Tonight Show*.

**David Zucker:** Yeah.

**Jim Abrahams:** That was really the motivation to move to California. And Johnny Carson had just moved there.

**David Zucker:** Jerry said in the book, “If I could just be on *Johnny Carson*, then I could die.”

**Jerry Zucker:** And have lived a good life. *(Chuckles.)*

**David Zucker:** And have lived a good life. Yeah, that would be satisfying.

**Jerry Zucker:** So, I guess we were hellbent to be famous or something, at least on some scale.

**Jesse Thorn:** Were you guys long-haired free spirits, or were you midwestern squares? Where did you land on that?

**Jerry Zucker:** We were long-haired squares.

*(David agrees.)*

Wait, no—I think I certainly was a long-haired free spirit. You know, maybe—it probably varied.

**David Zucker:** Well, Jim had a straight job. He would have to go back to Milwaukee every—you know, on Sunday night to get to his straight job in the morning.

**Jim Abrahams:** Yeah. I was a private investigator for a law firm in Milwaukee, and they were very straight guys. And so, all week long I'd, you know, wear a suit and tie to work and be a straight guy. And then every Friday afternoon, I'd roll a joint, and put it in the car, and smoke it, and go up to Madison and do the show. And it was a completely different world. And then Monday I'd drive back to Milwaukee.

**David Zucker:** *(Chuckles.)* And then—and that all worked for Jim pretty well until there was a big article in the *Milwaukee Journal* about this wild, crazy show in Madison, you know, partly run by Jim Abrahams of Milwaukee. And so, his whole law firm read it. And I mean, I don't know what the reaction was, but—

**Jim Abrahams:** They were appalled.

**David Zucker:** They were appalled.

**Jim Abrahams:** Yeah, they were appalled.

**Jerry Zucker:** But I think during all those years, especially in Los Angeles, Jim was always the adult in the room. You know, so there are different—David and I—I mean, you know, I'm the youngest. So, I was most kind of, you know, wide eyed and crazy and stuff.

**David Zucker:** And you had never held an actual real job.

**Jerry Zucker:** No.

**David Zucker:** Right from college, yeah.

**Jerry Zucker:** My kids are always amazed that I actually have never had a resume.

*(They chuckle.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** So, what led you to skip town, right? You had a life where you were making this comedy that you loved. You were doing it in a hip town that was a small lake where you were big fish. So, why did you decide to move to this place that you had no idea about, other than, you know, a road map and a U-Haul rental?

**David Zucker:** Well, we thought we were a really great sketch comedy group. And if we could get on *The Tonight Show*, we would just zoom straight to the top. So, you know, we had to go out—that was our goal. So, that's why we left Madison and went to LA.

**Jerry Zucker:** I also think, you know, we wanted to get into showbiz. I mean, you know, we'd (*inaudible*) about *The Tonight Show*, and that was a big deal that we wanted to. And we ended up getting on and not being very good.

[00:15:00]

But the real thing was that we loved what we were doing, and we wanted to do it professionally. And I think we would have considered being a performing group, being on television, film, anything. We really—we're not—we never thought of ourselves as directors, periodically. We barely knew what a director did. And so, it was really a passion for the humor we were doing and making people laugh. And we kind of, you know, assumed that they laugh at the same—the things they laughed at in Madison, they would laugh at—you know, pretty much laugh at in Los Angeles.

**David Zucker:** And we got great reviews in Madison. And the audience—and the show was packed. We didn't have any ad budget. It was just complete word of mouth. And so, we knew we had something. And we had something different. So, and that encouraged us to—you know, I went out to LA a couple of months before we actually moved out, and we saw a couple of the groups that were popular in LA and San Francisco. And I just thought, well, we're a lot—I just really thought we were a lot better than that. So—and each step of the way we would see what was there.

Like, we would see, you know, Mel Brooks movies or Woody Allen movies. And we loved those movies, but we thought we could do that. So, I think we were encouraged by just, you know, seeing what was out there.

**Jesse Thorn:** We've got even more to get into with David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker. On the other side of a quick break, we will talk about the movie that changed everything for them—*Airplane!!* with an exclamation mark. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

**Promo:**

**Music:** Playful, quirky music.

**John-Luke Roberts:** *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts* is a real podcast made up of fake podcasts, like *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?*

**Speaker 1:** So, I'm gonna say mugs.

**Speaker 2:** A little yogurt and a spoon.

**Speaker 3:** A small handkerchief that was given to me by my grandmother on her deathbed.

**Speaker 4:** Maybe some spare honey?

**Speaker 5:** (*Seriously.*) I'd keep batteries in it. I'd pretend to be a toy.

**Speaker 6:** If I had a cupboard in my lower back, I'd probably fill it with spines.

**John-Luke Roberts:** *If You Had a Cupboard in Your Lower Back, What Would You Keep in It?* doesn't exist. We made it up for *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, an award-winning comedy podcast from Maximum Fun made up of hundreds of stupid podcasts. Listen and subscribe to *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*, now!

(*Music ends.*)

**Transition:** Thumpy rock music.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking to David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker. Together, they created the classic comedies *Airplane!*, *Police Squad*, *Ruthless People*, and the *Naked Gun* movies. They recently published a book, *Surely You Can't Be Serious: The True Story of Airplane!*. It's out now. Let's get back into my conversation with Zucker, Abrahams, and Zucker.

Was the—let's call it the house style—always intact? Which is to say, were you always contemptuous of the idea of doing social satire, or—? Like, if I was going to characterize the point of view of Zucker, Abrahams, Zucker movies, it would probably be, “Wouldn't it be great if we did 1,000 jokes?” (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean?

**David Zucker:** Yeah. Well, I think it was—you know, we just thought—you know, at the time, you have to remember it was—you know, the '60s had just ended. And everybody—you know, the sketch groups were doing Nixon jokes. And we just thought that's just so easy, and we didn't think they were funny. And so, we wanted to do our own style, which was media. Yes, Jim.

**Jim Abrahams:** Yeah, plus we grew up in an era where things were literally and figuratively black and white. I mean, TV was black and white. And you know, it was like there were good guys, and there were bad guys, and father knows best, and the FBI. And there were no shades of gray. And we—there was always this instinct that life wasn't quite that simplistic.

(*They chuckle.*)

And again, it was an instinct. We didn't like verbalize that, but we had this instinct. And I think lots and lots of kids from back then had that kind of instinct too, but they went on and got real jobs. But we were just there and said wouldn't it be fun just to point out that this stuff



doesn't have to be taken seriously? And again it wasn't an intellectual decision, it was just an instinct.

**Clip:**

**Speaker:** It's 19 minutes after the hour, and now it's time for our daily feature, the astrological report. A quick reminder, these reports are not intended to foster a belief in astrology, but merely to support people who cannot take responsibility for their own lives.

[00:20:00]

Joyce, if you're a Libra, and you've been hesitant about making that big purchase, hold off for another couple of days! Don't forget, your moon is in Sagittarius—not the time for reckless spending. You Virgos can expect an untimely death, or perhaps a tragic dismemberment for someone very close to you. Pisces, it's a good time to pull the plug on that machine that's been keeping your daughter alive for the past six months. If you're a Taurus, see your florist!

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, if I compared the tone of the kind of parallel stuff that came from the *National Lampoon* around the same time, right? This kind of like post hippie generation comedy about overturning the table. They are a reaction to similar things, right? It's a reaction to this idea of like a square, you know, quote/unquote, “all American” whatever, right? And the *National Lampoon* stuff is about—you know, I would use stronger language if we weren't on NPR, but—“to heck with everything”. You know, it is like contemptuous of everything. Like, we're going to tromp through everything, because our point of view is the greatest. And we'll just think of the most intense, ridiculous, assaultive thing we can come up with. It doesn't seem that much like that, you know, 50 years later. But you know, 40 years ago it was like that.

You guys have a very different kind of overturning that table, which is how much can we acknowledge the silliness of this? Right? It's not like—it's not flipping the bird. It's kind of throwing your arm around it and being like, “We love that this is ridiculous.”

**Jerry Zucker:** Well, we also—I have to say, all the things that we satirized, we also had a great deal of affection for. I mean, *Zero Hour* is a great film! We love that movie!

**David Zucker:** And we loved the *Airport* movies. We loved Clint Eastwood movies, you know, and all that stuff.

**Jerry Zucker:** Even though we made fun of them, we were making fun of certain lines and a style of acting, but we never found it detestable or—

**David Zucker:** We had very little contempt, but a lot of “the emperor has no clothes”. That was our attitude.

**Jim Abrahams:** And it was never—as a result, I don't think any of it is mean-spirited. It's all done from a point of affection, not from, you know, axe grinding.

**Jesse Thorn:** How did you guys stop performing?

**Jerry Zucker:** When the check cleared for a *Kentucky Fried Movie*.

**Clip:**

**Music:** Energetic, percussive backing music.

**Announcer:** New from Barker Brothers, a game for the entire family! *Scott Free!* Your team has just assassinated the president. Can you get away scott free? Shake the dice and see! Great, you found a Patsy! Go again.

Bonus cards! You get Jack Ruby to kill your Patsy! That's good, because dead men don't talk. Oh no! Abraham Zapruder films the assassination. Tough break! But now you go again. And a stroke of luck! 22 material witnesses die of unnatural causes. Now your opponent shakes again.

Uh-oh! Lookout! *Life Magazine* buys the Zapruder film! But you buy *Life Magazine* and show the frames out of sequence! You're almost home. Now you must spin the Public Opinion Board. You've done it! The public believes it! You're scott free! Available from Barker Brothers.

**Jesse Thorn:** So, you had been performing this sketch show for quite some time. It was like a combination of stuff from—of the stuff that you had done in the Midwest.

**David Zucker:** Right.

**Jerry Zucker:** And a lot of new stuff that we added along there. Yeah.

**David Zucker:** Yeah, we did two shows in LA. The first one was a combination of the two Madison shows, which we called *Vegetables*. And then the second one was *My Nose* and the third one, after we had written the script to *Airplane!* and it didn't sell, we had to go back, you know, kind of reluctantly to doing the show. And then we called it—that was a combination of everything. *My Nose*, *Vegetables*, you know everything. And we called it *Beating a Dead Horse*.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

(*Chuckling.*) Which kind of reflected our attitude. We didn't want to go to the theatre anymore.

**Jesse Thorn:** Were you guys glad to stop performing? Like, was that not part of your aspiration?

**David Zucker:** No, we were—yeah.

**Jerry Zucker:** We were—at the beginning, maybe we thought it'd be a performing group. But by that time, we were thrilled to stop performing and make a movie.

**Jim Abrahams:** I think part of the charm of *Kentucky Fried Theatre* is that we clearly weren't actors, and we weren't particularly comfortable on stage. And somewhere that sort of factored into this sort of uniqueness of it all.

[00:25:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** I want to play a little bit from *Kentucky Fried Movie*, but there is a part in this book that maybe blew me away more than anything else—other than perhaps the enormous nose that you built for *My Nose* that sneezed on the audience as they went into the theater.

(*They chuckle.*)

Other than that, the thing that blew me away was there's a point in here where John Landis, who directed *Kentucky Fried Movie*, and at the point you met him, had directed like a very small, micro budget horror comedy.

**Jerry Zucker:** Schlock.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. And he had this meeting with you, where—as he described it, and I felt like it was more literally than one might expect. He said, “They did not know what a screenplay was.” (*Laughs.*)

**David Zucker:** Yeah. I think we knew that you needed a script, but we didn't know what one looked like.

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah. We asked John if—you know, how do you write a screenplay? And he said, “Well, I have one in my trunk of my car. I'll give it to you, and you can follow that.” And so, I mean, we just didn't know the format at all.

**David Zucker:** And it was *American Werewolf in London*.

(*Jerry confirms.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** And you didn't know even, you know, like—capital letters, INTERIOR, DOCTOR'S OFFICE?

**Jerry Zucker:** No, nothing. None of that. But you know, you could tell very easily from—you know, from seeing John's script. So, we just followed that. And I mean, we should have probably at some point read, you know, a lot of structure books and things like that.

**David Zucker:** Well, we didn't need to *For Airplane!*.

**Jerry Zucker:** We didn't do it for *Airplane!*. It was fine, but we used it later.

**David Zucker:** Later movies.

**Jesse Thorn:** Let's hear something from *Kentucky Fried Movie*. So, it is a sketch movie that is composed of lots and lots of mostly spoofs of serious stuff—news broadcasts and instructional movies and things like that. And this is a PSA from the United Appeal for the Dead.

*(They chuckle.)*

Who specialize in telling you dos and don'ts regarding death.

**Clip:**

**Henry Gibson:** In the past year, 100,000 Americans have died. Despite millions of dollars of research, death continues to be our nation's number one killer. Hello, I'm Henry Gibson, speaking to you on behalf of the United Appeal for the Dead. Although so far there is no known treatment for death's crippling effects, still, everyone can acquaint himself with the three early warning signs of death. One, rigor mortis. Two, a rotting smell. Three, occasional drowsiness. It is also important to know what to do when you die. One, do not attempt to drive a car. Two, do not operate heavy machinery. Third, do not talk.

**Jesse Thorn:** What I think is really interesting is during this period in your career, you lost one of the guys that had moved out to LA with you. He moved back to Milwaukee with a new wife to sort of start a new life. Ended up founding Comedy Sports, the improv chain, and making a big impact in the comedy world. But you also added a guy to the cast. Because your pianist had not come out to Los Angeles with you.

*(David confirms.)*

And you—the show had always had live accompaniment in it. And you cast this guy named Stephen Stucker. And in a lot of ways, Stephen Stucker was the opposite of the aesthetic that you had cultivated.

*(They agree.)*

Describe—yeah, describe what it was like when he walked in as the, you know, seventh person you had invited to like try playing dramatic music during a serious-things parody.

**David Zucker:** You have to remember; we were just these very straight guys from Milwaukee. And you know, our concept of a member of the troop was another guy like us. And Stucker, I remember the first time I saw him, he drives up in this, you know, pink VW Beetle with two-tone leather hot pants and, you know, a tank top or something. And my heart sank. Because I never—I thought, oh, well, this is not going to work. And then, you know, he came in. You know, we introduced ourselves, and we said hello. And then he sat down to play the piano, which was in the middle of all this construction. We were still building the theater. And he started playing—

**Jim Abrahams:** “Take Me to the Pilot”.

**David Zucker:** Yeah, by Elton John. And wow, he was amazing. And then—

**Jim Abrahams:** It's like the piano levitated. And I don't think—certainly I was 25 or 26 at the time, and I'd never met an outed gay man in my life.

[00:30:00]

Obviously, I'd met many gay guys, but growing up in the Midwest back then, nobody out. And Stucker could not have been any more out or flamboyant and brilliant. He had been a with the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra when he was growing up. So, he's this brilliant pianist and hysterically funny. And you're right, or a hundred and whatever degrees opposite of our brand of humor.

**David Zucker:** And as it turned out—I mean, when we were on stage, we may as well have been invisible. He was just—he got all the attention, and it was great. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** It's funny, 'cause like he is the most Marx Brothers-like of any of the things. Like, he has a Groucho-y quality. Like, obviously, you know, the deep V neck gold lamé is a little different from Groucho Marx. But it is that element of like going around, raising an eyebrow to the audience, flipping a table, saying something outrageous, seeing what happens. Like, a sort of like live-wire quality.

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah. We don't really compare him to the other actors in the way of—you know, people sometimes say, “You have your actors playing it so straight, why?” And see, well, Steve is the joke. In other words, he is the *Airplane!*, “Hey, Joe, where's the forklift?” It's over—you know, the airplane crashes through the thing. He's the—and so, we always saw him not as the cake, but the frosting on the cake, and kind of used him, in a sense, to come in for a punchline. So, his—

**David Zucker:** I mean, he's like a cattle prod.

(*They chuckle.*)

He's just like zap!

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah. Well, that's what we wanted. I mean, and we wrote that part for him. We would never have written that part if we had not known Steven. You know, had he not been in the show. So, I don't think of him so much in comparison to like Groucho or even Harpo in any way, because they're your main characters. Whereas Steve is just—you know, comes in for the zinger.

**David Zucker:** And we took some jokes right out of the show, like where Lloyd Bridges comes up to Stucker and says, "Johnny, what can you make out of this?"

And then Stucker says, "I can make a hat or a pin." We did that on stage. And the newspapers, "Passengers certain to die, airline negligence." And then Stucker says, "There's a sale at Penny's!" And that's that we—did that on stage.

**Jerry Zucker:** And lot of the other lines, he wrote all his own lines in it—or almost, I think. We would call him on the phone and read him the setup. And he'd just like instantly come up with—

**David Zucker:** Like the press conference. Yeah.

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah. Yeah, it's—you know, we wrote him—we said, "Well, what kind of plane is it? You know?"

And said, "Oh, it's a big, pretty, white plane."

**David Zucker:** Pretty white plane with red stripes and wheels. It looks like a big Tylenol. He just—word for word, we just wrote it down.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think that's one of my favorite jokes in the whole movie. (*Laughs.*)

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah, it's pure Steve.

**David Zucker:** Well, there were other instances where we did not write the lines. Like, the Black dudes with the jive. Those guys wrote those lines. And then what we did, we put in the stupid White guy subtitles.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you actually got the money to make *Airplane!*, which took years, how did you actually convince all of the Robert Stack and Lloyd Bridges people to be in this movie?

**Jim Abrahams:** Well, we were very fortunate in that Paramount assigned a guy named Howard Koch to us to kind of—a producer. And he was a very—he had been president of the Academy of Motion Pictures and was a very credible, experienced veteran of the movie business. And he had worked with all those guys. So, he gave us like credibility.

**David Zucker:** And it took a—yeah, it took a little convincing with some of them. Like, Peter Graves, when he first read the script, reportedly he just threw it across the room and said, “This is the worst piece of trash I’ve ever read, and in the worst taste imaginable.” And so—

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, not entirely wrong.

**David Zucker:** *(Chuckling.)* Right. So, when his agent called Howard and said, you know, “We’re passing,” Howard said, “Why don’t you come in and—why don’t you have Peter come in and meet the boys?”—as we were known. And he did. And so, you know, I thought he—you know, from reading the script, he probably thought we were, you know, a bunch of drugged out weirdos.

[00:35:00]

But we were just—we were not weird at all. Yes.

**Jerry Zucker:** We were weirdos, just not on drugs.

*(David confirms.)*

**Clip:**

**Dr. Rumack:** Can you fly this plane and land it?

**Ted:** Surely you can't be serious.

**Dr. Rumack:** *(Flatly.)* I am serious. And don't call me Shirley.

**Elaine:** Doctor, I've checked everyone. Mr. Striker's the only one.

**Dr. Rumack:** What flying experience have you had?

**Ted:** Well, I flew single engine fighters in the Air Force, but this plane has four engines! It's an entirely different kind of flying all together.

**Dr. Rumack & Elaine:** *(In unison.)* It's an entirely different kind of flying.

**Ted:** Besides, I haven't touched any kind of plane in six years.

**Dr. Rumack:** Mr. Striker, I know nothing about flying. But there's one thing I do know. You're the only one on this plane who can possibly fly it. You're the only chance we've got.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you have a specific idea of what kind of serious actor was funny to you?

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah, I think definitely we did, yeah.

**David Zucker:** Absolutely And B level actors. Not A list, you know. Leslie had been in an endless series of B movies and television shows and Robert Stack too. And Graves had been, you know, a staple of television. We'd been watching him for decades. And, and Lloyd Bridges was on *Sea Hunt*. They were like perfect. And very, very serious.

**Jim Abrahams:** And there were guys—there were other guys that we—like Charlton Heston, who would have been good too, but he turned us down.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, there's a certain kind of intense sincerity in the context of camp that brings these guys together, right? Like, some of them had certainly done—had worked in really good things as well. But like the idea that someone who was like handsome enough and had enough gravitas to anchor something that maybe was a little bad or certainly a little corny—like, that quality of commitment to that is sort of the quality that allows them to commit to the joke version of that.

**Jim Abrahams:** If *Airplane!* is really about not taking stuff seriously, you have to really applaud those guys. Because they had whole careers that had been established by being serious actors. In a sense, when they took those roles, they were poking fun at themselves. They were having a laugh at their own expense, which is really the essence of what *Airplane!* was about, is not take things too seriously. And they didn't take their own careers even too seriously.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you know you were onto something when you were shooting *Airplane!*? Did it feel right?

**David Zucker:** Oh, 100%. Yeah. We just—yeah, we always knew. I mean, from when we first wrote it back in 1975, we knew. We just thought, oh my, this is going to just blow everybody's mind. And you know, it'd be great.

**Jerry Zucker:** I don't think we ever thought it would last this long, you know.

**David Zucker:** For 50 years. Yeah.

**Jerry Zucker:** For 50 years, but we thought it was—people were gonna—we just couldn't wait for people to see it. You know, to show it in front of an audience.

**Jim Abrahams:** Every once in a while—I told David and Jerry this—like, when I'm not feeling good about myself, I'll go onto YouTube, and they'll show people watching *Airplane!* for the first time. And one thing that comes—you know, people who weren't born back when we made *Airplane!*. And the reaction, the consistent reaction is, “Wow, this is so stupid.”

*(They laugh.)*



And you know, all these years later. And you were touching on stupidity a lot earlier too. And whatever that is, you know, we actually kind of think, well, maybe at some point we raised stupidity to an art form.

**Jesse Thorn:** You must have been having to figure out what's funny on a screen, like what the camera allows you to do while you were doing this. Because this was—you know, you knew little enough about movies that you didn't know how to format a script. And you had been doing stage shows for years, so you knew what was funny. But there are like—there are possibilities available to you when you have a camera that aren't available to you when you're on stage.

**Jerry Zucker:** Except that about 20/25 minutes of the show, the live show was videotaped. And so, we actually did have a lot of experience—I mean, “a lot”, but you know.

**David Zucker:** Directing.

**Jerry Zucker:** But directing comedy on video. So, that was—you know, not that we had any real expertise, but in terms of our humor—

[00:40:00]

—we learned how we needed to set things up.

**David Zucker:** And we—I don't think there's any, you know, grandiose shots in *Airplane!*. We just—you know, we copied *Zero Hour*. It's shot for shot, most of it.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think my favorite joke from your entire oeuvre is—it might be—it's in one of the episodes of *Police Squad*. You know, Leslie Nielsen arrives on the scene and is interrogating someone out in front of a store in the foreground. And from the left of the frame enters someone holding onto a stretcher with like a—you know, a body bag on it. And as he crosses the background, the other side of the stretcher never appears. So, so like the stretcher's longer and longer and longer.

**Jerry Zucker:** Just keeps going and going.

**David Zucker:** It keeps going.

**Jesse Thorn:** Until finally he's off screen, and it's just stretching across the whole frame. And then the back end of the stretcher comes through, like as the stretcher is like 35 feet long. And that kind of joke is something that you clearly really loved.

*(Jerry confirms.)*

Like, there's just great pleasure for you guys in making the camera do something stupid.

**David Zucker:** Right, I think that it's very important to make a joke like that work, that there was something else. There must have been something else going on in the foreground, some dialogue, and it was only a background joke. So, if you put a camera right on it, you're giving it too much attention, and half the joke is lost.

**Jerry Zucker:** We always liked the idea that the audience, no matter how kind of obvious or prominent was, that the audience would discover it. In other words, ostensibly, they're supposed to look—in a normal movie, you're looking at these two guys talking about the case and what they're going to do next. And you're not really paying attention to people walking in and out of the door or a stretcher or whatever it is. And so, the idea that people first would be looking at the two people talking and listening and then realizing that this thing was going out—the audience could find the joke as opposed to us just—

**David Zucker:** Pointing to it.

**Jerry Zucker:** Pointing to it.

**David Zucker:** And in *Airplane!*, sometimes we do it and the joke happens in the foreground, not the background. So, when Leslie Nielsen is talking to the stewardess about the effects of the food poisoning if you ate the fish, Peter Graves is in the foreground experiencing each symptom as he describes it. So—and that made it funnier.

**Jesse Thorn:** Leslie Nielsen has a wonderful supporting role in *Airplane!*. And in Leslie Nielsen, I think you maybe found somebody who was both good at this—like, good at the that was required to make this thing work, but also truly loved the idea of doing it. Like, some of these other people, you're roping them into it, and they were glad at the end that people thought it was funny. But I get the impression that Leslie Nielsen just really loved the idea that people liked this.

**David Zucker:** We heard that he told his manager after he read the script, “Don't tell them that, but I'd pay them to do this movie.” So, he got it.

**Jerry Zucker:** Well, the interesting thing about Leslie is—you know, people asked me, “Were you surprised that he could do comedy so well?” And I always say after working with him, we were surprised that he had been able to do all that drama so well!

**David Zucker:** With a straight face.

**Jerry Zucker:** With a straight face! Because he's really a closet comedian. He's a nut in the best—

**Jesse Thorn:** He's a real—he's a committed fart machine legend. Like, he's never without his fart machine.

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah. And Leslie, more than anyone else in *Airplane!*, relished saying the absurd lines with a straight face. And then with the fart machine, he used to love the idea that he was—you know, he'd be in a suit or a (*inaudible*) or whatever, and he'd walk onto an

elevator, and he'd fart. And then people would kinda start, "Excuse me." You know, he would—and he would just—he knew—I mean, he wanted to get back in at someone in his childhood, I think. He was also an anarchist. He rebelled against authority, you know. But yet he was born with a body that looked like the establishment. So, it was fun for him to use that physicality to make fun of it. And we certainly were happy to give him that opportunity.

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll wrap up with Zucker, Abrahams, and Zucker in just a minute. After the break, ZAZ share one weird trick to write good comedy for TV and movies. Actually, it's many tricks in the form of a list of rules. We'll get into them in just a minute. It's *Bullseye*, for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:45:00]

**Promo:**

**Music:** Playful rock music.

**Dave Holmes:** Oh my gosh. Hi! It's me, Dave Holmes, host of the pop culture game show *Troubled Waters*. On *Troubled Waters*, we play a whole host of games like one where I describe a show using Limerick, and our guests have to figure out what it is. Let's do one right now. What show am I talking about?

This podcast has game after game and brilliant guests who come play 'em! The host is named Dave. It could be your fave! So, try it. Life won't be the same.

**Speaker 1:** Uh, a *Big Business*, starring Bette Midler and Lily Tomlin.

**Dave:** Close! But no.

**Speaker 2:** Oh, is it *Troubled Waters*, the pop culture quiz show with all your favorite comedians?

**Dave:** Yes!

(Ding!)

*Troubled Waters* is the answer.

**Speaker 1:** To this question and all of my life's problems.

**Dave:** Now, legally, we actually can't guarantee that. But! You can find it on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music fades out.)

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guests are Zucker, Abraham, Zucker—David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker. They're the creators of the movie *Airplane!*, among many other hilarious things.

I want to play a clip from *Police Squad*, which is the television show that the three of you and some collaborators made in the early 1980s that was the precedent for the *Naked Gun* movies and is one of, truly, like one of my favorite things. Ever. The show. This is a clip where Leslie Nielsen, who plays a version of the same character he plays in the *Naked Gun* movies—Frank Drebin, a police detective. And he is interrogating a suspect in a courthouse bombing.

**Clip:**

**Lt. Drebin:** Where were you last night?

**Eddie:** I told you a dozen times; I was at the movies.

**Speaker:** I've got the sandwiches here.

**Ed:** Alright, Eddie, you went to the movies. Now what did you see?

**Eddie:** I told you! I don't remember!

**Speaker:** Who had the egg salad?

**Ed:** (*Echoing Eddie disdainfully.*) I don't remember.

**Speaker:** Somebody ordered it!

**Lt. Drebin:** You can't expect us to buy that.

**Speaker:** But I already paid for it.

**Eddie:** Why don't you give a guy a break?!

**Speaker:** Thanks a lot.

**Eddie:** What's the charge, huh?!

**Speaker:** Uh, \$4.58.

**Ed:** What are you trying to do, insult us?

**Speaker:** Okay, \$3.50! Coffee's on me!

**Eddie:** Okay. I told you; I went to the movies. I fell asleep! I don't remember!

**Lt. Drebin:** You don't expect us to swallow that!

**Speaker:** Alright, I'll eat it! I don't think it's fair that I should have to pay for it.

**Ed:** Alright, Eddie. Let's say you did go to the movies.

**Eddie:** Okay.

**Eddie, Ed, and Lt. Drebin:** (*In unison.*) You did go to the movies.

**Lt. Drebin:** Then let's say that you were nowhere near the Club Flamingo.

**Eddie:** Alright.

**Eddie, Ed, and Lt. Drebin:** (*In unison.*) You were nowhere near the Club Flamingo.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think *Police Squad* is such a beautiful thing. And there are only six episodes of the show. I've probably watched them all three times. The thing that I struggle to imagine is that show on regular network television. (*Laughs.*) Like, that show coming on in one of the like least ambitious times in the history of network television. Right?

**David Zucker:** And there were only three channels at the time, and it still didn't get an audience. So. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, in between—you know, in between the ambitions of Norman Lear shows and the ambitions of, you know, the *Cheers/Seinfeld* lineage of sophisticated—"what if sitcoms were sophisticated?" Not even as ambitious as, you know, the time when all television comedies were dumb, but at least they had crazy ideas, like what if a car could talk or whatever. Like, it was just *Eight is Enough* or whatever on television, and then *Police Squad*. (*Laughs.*)

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah, this was very different. And actually, Tony Thomopoulos, put it well when he canceled the show. He said it didn't work because you had to watch it. And a lot of these other shows, you're doing laundry, or you're eating, or whatever. But our show actually worked best—we heard that on college campuses, kids were going into a big hall and watching it together in the dorm. And it was a hit there, 'cause they could hear each other laugh, and they paid attention.

**Jesse Thorn:** It must have been so hard to adjust though to—from you having just an absolutely extraordinary success with *Airplane!*, and making—continuing to make really great work, and being like, "Oh, I thought when you make something great, it automatically becomes a monstrous success."

**Jim Abrahams:** Well, in fact, there was a great deal of relief when *Police Squad* got cancelled because, you know, we had to be—when you do 23 minutes every week, you have to be so prolific. And we just—that's not the pace at which we worked. So, you know, we were all wiped out, because you're always going to writing sessions and editing and whatever. And so, when it got cancelled, I think, yeah, it was a little bit of a slap in the face. But we were kind of relieved. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah, we were.

[00:50:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** *Top Secret* was the film that ended up following up *Airplane!*. And it is full of really funny stuff, especially in camera stuff. Like, it is twice as inventive, like aesthetically as *Airplane!* was. It's just full of really great jokes about the camera.

**Jerry Zucker:** It was great. We could get away from an airplane and a control tower.

(*They chuckle.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I went to one of those airplanes. One time, Paul Feig was directing a—I can't remember what movie it was. But I visited him, and it had a whole airplane part. And I went to one of those airplane sets—like, there's just, in Los Angeles, just warehouses with half an airplane in them. And I just thought like this is truly the weirdest thing in the world. Like you just go visit this airplane for four days and shoot scenes in it. And like, what can you do inside half an airplane? Not much.

**Jerry Zucker:** Well, it was great for us. Because for our first film, everyone was facing forward, (*chuckling*) and there was no room to—

**David Zucker:** No blocking challenges.

**Jerry Zucker:** No blocking challenges. So, it—I mean, it was a great vehicle for a first film.

**Jesse Thorn:** But *Top Secret* was a lot of different things. It was like an Elvis movie parody, a spy movie parody, a sort of general, you know, 1960 America parody. Like, you know, that comes with the Elvis territory, but sort of jokes about that. There's war movie stuff in there mixed in.

**Clip:**

**Speaker 1:** What did you find out, Latrine?

**Speaker 2:** Where are the others!?

**Latrine:** (*Weakly.*) We never had a chance. It was a slaughter.

**Speaker 3:** We must put a stop to these afternoon football games!

**Jesse Thorn:** And it wasn't a big success. What was it like to go from having this, you know, falling backwards after five years of working very hard into extraordinary success into, oh, I guess that golden touch is not automatic.

**Jerry Zucker:** Are you familiar with the term hara-kiri?

*(They chuckle.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, they play for the Cubs, right? *(Harry Caray)*

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah, we were quite bummed.

**David Zucker:** Surprised, but then you know, when we thought about it later, we weren't as surprised.

**Jesse Thorn:** What did you realize later?

**David Zucker:** Oh, well, that, you know, you can fill a movie with jokes, but that doesn't mean it's going to be successful. What was important about *Airplane!* is that Arthur Hailey wrote this wonderful plot and characters with the guy with PTSD who, you know, had to solve the problem by flying the plane down and rescuing the passengers in the third act, which was—that's all that the audience cared about it. And the Marx Brothers were not successful until they had Allan Jones and Kitty Carlisle in *Night at the Opera*, where the audience cared about them and their plot.

And in *Top Secret*, it was not grounded in reality. And Val Kilmer didn't have any kind of intrinsic emotional problem that he had to solve. So, it ends with the last joke—much like *Duck Soup* ends with the last joke.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you have a different attitude about anarchic spoofing as 45-year-olds or 55-year-olds than you did as 25-year-olds?

**David Zucker:** You know, I don't think we were intellectual enough to think about that we were writing anarchic humor. We just always kind of thought of jokes. And when we realized that, you know, the plot was important too, you know, we were better at it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Was there a point where any of you were like, “Mm, yeah, but I should really be making *Broadcast News*”?

**David Zucker:** No, not for me. No. I mean, Jerry made some actual—

**Jerry Zucker:** There was a—(*laughs*). I mean, there was—after *Broadcast News* came out, I'm sure I said many times, "Boy, I wish I made a movie like that!" (*Laughs.*) No, but I mean, I don't think we ever really—we liked what we were doing.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, Jerry, you directed *Rat Race*, (*chuckling*) which is one of the silliest movies of the last 25 years that's not all three of you.

**Jerry Zucker:** Well, that was kind of a different kind of humor, because it wasn't satire. It was sort of a farce, you know. And a lot of, you know, mechanical of things going wrong. So—and yeah, that was really fun, but it wasn't—I mean, it was very clearly not a ZAZ-style movie.

**Jesse Thorn:** You guys have alluded a few times to your rules of comedy. So, number one is joke on a joke, right?

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah, that's just doing two things. We like to do set up, joke, set up, joke. We don't—it's just distracting having—you know, trying to do too many silly things all at once.

[00:55:00

**Jesse Thorn:** The wavelengths of two jokes happening at the same time cancel each other out.

**David Zucker:** Right. Or if a foreground character is trying to be silly and then the background is silly, you've got a joke on a joke.

**Jesse Thorn:** What's number two?

**Jerry Zucker:** Acknowledgement. Some use the word winking. That's kind of what I was talking about before. Just don't let on you know you're in a comedy. You know, actors—or even if there's a way the directors are doing it, it's just like keep them believing that it's a drama.

**Jesse Thorn:** Unless it is like completely glancing. Like, one of your exceptions are if anything happens in the briefest of moments, the audience can probably accept it as long as you ignore that it just happened.

**David Zucker:** That didn't happen. That's rule number whatever.

**Jerry Zucker:** That's rule number 11!

**David Zucker:** Yeah, so you can skip that one.

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay, what's number three?



**Jerry Zucker:** Okay, number three is merely clever. You know, we really—jokes that are kind of just cute or clever, it throws things off. Also, I will say in general, you want to have—you don't want jokes to miss. Because as David always says, it's like spinning plates. You know, if it goes too long between spinning, it's gonna fall. And that's what happens to the movie when it becomes—and that's the problem in a preview is that there are a lot of jokes that don't work, and when you have a—because you don't know yet. So, you have a number of them in a row, and it's too long. It's hard to bring the audience back again. Let's see. Oh, “can you live with it”. That's just like, you know, a license plate can be funny once, but you got it on your car for years. Can you live with it? You know?

**David Zucker:** Or some joke on a t-shirt, you know.

**Jerry Zucker:** Or a joke on a t-shirt that someone is wearing.

**Jesse Thorn:** Now, there is a description in this book of one of you guys having a joke license plate. I want to be very clear.

**David Zucker:** Jim had a license plate that he put on his Chevrolet, and it said BOBS-MG. And so—just so when somebody would pull up next to Jim at a stoplight, they'd say, “That's not an MG.”

And Jim would say, “I'm not Bob.”

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) It's good. Jim, do you feel indicted by your own set of rules here?

**Jim Abrahams:** Yeah, a little bit. But it never got boring.

**Jerry Zucker:** That's what you could live with though.

**Jim Abrahams:** Yeah, yeah. I could—it was always fun. Yeah.

**Jerry Zucker:** Oh, “that didn't happen”. That was like (*inaudible*) instruments. You can do a crazy thing that wouldn't happen if you do it, if it's so short that it's—and then you go right back and it's, “Ope, that never happened.”

**David Zucker:** With *Top Secret*, the whole movie was “that didn't happen”.

**Jerry Zucker:** Right. Oh, unrelated background. Just crazy background on its own is unlikely to work. It has to be in some way related to what's going—like the background that you mentioned of the people carrying the body out, that's related to being in a crime scene. But if we had someone juggling—you know, walking out juggling, it wouldn't have had anything to do with it.

Technical pizzazz, you know. I mean, you could use CGI or whatever technical tools, but you go too far with it, and it becomes just about how cool that technical, that shot was, it's probably not going to be funny. Not going to be funny just for that.

Hanging on is just—you know, is good editing. You have a joke, allow for the laugh, and move on. Don't—

**David Zucker:** Get to the center of the situation and then move on.

**Jerry Zucker:** Keep—yeah. And then there are no rules. There we go.

**David Zucker:** Oh, there we go.

**Jesse Thorn:** 45 or 50 years in, do you guys still enjoy each other's company and creativity as much as you did at the beginning?

*(They all confirm immediately.)*

**David Zucker:** Oh yeah, no, it was fun writing the book. We just—yeah, it was just—and we just went right back into our personalities of all those years ago.

**Jerry Zucker:** Yeah, and Jim and I would visit David in prison every day.

**David Zucker:** That's right. We got the book done, yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you bring commissary? I know that he asked for money for the commissary.

**David Zucker:** They smuggled in bacon. It was a kosher prison.

*(They laugh.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, Jerry Zucker, I sure appreciate your time. And I'm so grateful for both for that and for your work. It means the world to me. So, thank you so much.

**Jerry Zucker:** Thank you, this was good fun.

**David Zucker:** Sure. This was fun.

**Jim Abrahams:** Thank you. It was fun.

**Jesse Thorn:** David Zucker, Jim Abrahams, and Jerry Zucker. Their book is called *Surely You Can't Be Serious: The True Story of Airplane!*.

[01:00:00]

You can buy it at your local bookstore or on [Bookshop.org](http://Bookshop.org), or your old sketch comedy pal Stefan can press it into your hands when you go to visit his house. That's what happened to

me. He also told me (*laughing*) about how the second Zucker, Abrahams, Zucker stage show in Los Angeles was called *My Nose*. And the reason they called it *My Nose* was because they knew that the theatre listing in the *Los Angeles Times* would say, “*My Nose* Runs Continuously”. (*Laughs.*)

**Transition:** Bright, chiming 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, I am thinking of my old pal, Dallas Penn, who passed away this past week. Dallas helped invent hip-hop blogging and hip-hop podcasting. He was also a brilliant force on video with his video group, The Internet's Celebrities. He’s the kind of guy who had an engine that you can't imagine grinding to a halt. He was a really special dude. He talked a lot of mess, and he always led with his heart. And he was just a—just a solid guy. He always showed up. And I'm—I'll really miss him. I'm really sad to have him go. So, thank you for everything, Dallas.

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 Daniel Huecias. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Special thanks this week to MaxFun producer Valerie Moffat for driving out to Jim Abrahams’ apartment to record his part of this week's interview. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation” by the band The Go! Team. Our thanks to them. Our thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). You can also find me on Instagram, [@JesseThornVeryFamous](#). So, follow those and 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 fades out.*)