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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](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. My guest, Paul Scheer, is in his late 40s. He's an actor. You've seen him on *The League*, *Black Monday*, *Fresh Off the Boat*. He's a founding member of the sketch comedy group Human Giant, who had their own show on MTV. He also hosts the monstrously huge podcast *How Did This Get Made*, and *Unspooled*. And as I said, in his late 40s—prime book writing age for established comedy performers. So, that's what he did. But he didn't write the kind of book you might expect. Are there bonkers stories about celebrities in this book? Yes, there are bonkers stories about celebrities in this book, including Barbara Streisand, Eddie Murphy, and Christopher Walken. But that's not really what the book is about.

Paul Scheer spent his childhood on Long Island in New York. His parents split when he was young. His mom eventually remarried. Paul's stepfather abused and neglected him. The home he grew up in was often chaotic, frightening, and sometimes violent. Scheer became a successful performer despite those circumstances. He became a husband and a parent. He started seeing a therapist. And for a long time he didn't really talk about his childhood with friends and family. Not the traumatic parts, anyway.

But when he started writing the book, those memories came out and ended up on the page. The memoir is called *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. We're going to talk about the book in this interview and—a warning—that does mean we will discuss child abuse. If you or someone you know is sensitive to that, we thought we'd let you know. I was lucky enough to get to talk to Paul in front of a live audience at LAist, our hometown public radio station here in Los Angeles.

Let's get right into it. My conversation with Paul Scheer.

*(Scene change. Audience applause.)*

Paul, I was gonna bring my computer out with my notes, and then when I was backstage, I looked at my notes. There were two things on my notes.

*(Paul laughs.)*

One was—I read your book. Like, I wanna be clear. I have thought about this. But the two things that were in my notes—these are like the “don't forget them” things—are: how and why are you so into the Clippers?

(Laughter.)

And just in quotes, “*Meet Dave*”.

**Paul Scheer:** Oh! (Cackles.)

**Jesse Thorn:** Which is a movie that stars Eddie Murphy as a human spaceship.

**Paul Scheer:** Yes. And it is operated by a miniature Eddie Murphy. So—

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay. So, which one of those do you want to take first? ‘Cause we’re getting into the serious stuff right up top.

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah, let’s get into *Meet Dave*. Because I feel like—I don’t want to alienate people with my love of the Clippers.

(Laughter.)

So, *Meet Dave*. I grew up loving Eddie Murphy. I mean, Eddie Murphy, to me—there was no better. It was just—he felt electric to me. So, my entire life, whatever he did, I was first in line. I loved it. I had an Eddie Murphy standee in my room as a kid—like a little miniature, like cardboard cutout of him. And one of the first like gigs I had gotten when I was doing *Human Giant* with Aziz Ansari and Rob Hubel was to be in an Eddie Murphy movie.

And it was—I was like, “I’ve made it. I’m going to be in an Eddie Murphy movie.” And I got the script for *Meet Dave*, the Eddie Murphy movie. And I’m reading it. And I’m like this is going to be great! You know?

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, *Meet Dave*—wasn’t *Meet Dave* written by Bill Corbitt from *Mystery Science Theater 3000* originally?

**Paul Scheer:** Yes! It had actually a lot of different elements in it. It was originally called *Starship Dave*. And you know—and in reading it, it was like this is a fun idea. You know. (Chuckles.) What it turned into is something maybe different.

(Laughter.)

But you know, it was this idea that these aliens are traveling to Earth. And the way that they’re fitting in is they’ve designed a spaceship that looks like a huma. And there’s a lot of fun physical comedy and stuff like that.

Anyway, I auditioned for it. I get it. I fly out to LA to shoot it, because I’m in New York at this point shooting *Human Giant*. And the role I’m shooting is Lieutenant Buttocks. Now, Lieutenant Buttocks works in the butt and—

(Laughter.)

**Jesse Thorn:** Of the man spaceship, of the Eddie Murphy spaceship.

**Paul Scheer:** Of the man spaceship. Right. And my line, the way you meet my character is, he—*(laughs)* it sounds so silly to talk about it!

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The spaceship, Eddie Murphy, crashes into the planet. And we're doing a systems check, and they're like, "Lieutenant Buttocks, report."

And I say, "Sir, we had a gas leak. It was silent. It was silent, but not deadly." Right?

*(Scattered laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Great line.

**Paul Scheer:** Great line. And you know—and so, I was like, great, got it. How can I mess that up? You know, I'm not even—

**Jesse Thorn:** That was from when Whit Stillman rewrote the script.

*(Laughter.)*

**Paul Scheer:** *(Laughing.)* So, you know, I get to set. I don't know. I've never done this before. I'm in a costume. I'm getting on the stage. And you know whenever they're doing like renovations on like a building, they have like a little small scaffold with like a small piece of cardboard—not cardboard, but like a plank. A wood plank on it. So, I get into like a little cherry picker. They put me up on this plank, and there I am. And there's nothing there. There's nothing futuristic there. There's nothing space there. It's just me and my costume standing on an elevated plank.

You get on this plank. And then the director comes over. The director is Brian Robbins, who is now the head of Paramount. And you know, and I say to him, I go, "Hey, so is there anything here? Should I be aware of anything?"

And he goes, "Yeah, it's a spaceship."

*(Jesse laughs.)*

And I go, "Oh, got it. Cool. Alright." You know, now I felt a little stupid, but I'm like, yeah, of course. Yeah, got it. So, the camera, you know, pans into me, goes right up. And you know, the director yells, "Report!"

"Sir, we had a gas leak. It was silent, but not deadly."

And then he looks at me. “Cut. What are you doing, man?”

*(Laughter.)*

And I'm like, “Oh, I'm sorry.”

He's like, “What are you doing?”

And I'm like—you know, I don't know how to answer that. I'm doing my line. And he goes, “Yeah, you got to like interact with your environment. You've got like computer screens and everything around you.”

And I'm like, “Oh, I didn't know that.” I was like—that's what I was saying.

He's like, “Yeah, yeah. You're like—that's a computer screen. That's a computer screen. This is a computer screen.” But there's nothing there. And this is the question that I did ask in the beginning. Like, is there anything for me to be aware of? And he said, no.

So, now I'm like—again, you know, you're listening to this or you're watching me here and you—there's nothing there, but I'm going to look like I'm touching things. We do it again. “Sir, we had a gas leak. Silent, not deadly.”

“More military.”

I'm like, okay. *(With clipped authority.)* “Sir. We had a gas leak. Silent, not deadly.”

And he gives me again, “More intense.”

“Sir! We had a gas leak. Silent, but not deadly.”

Then he walks away. Now I know that's a bad sign. I'm on this raised platform, and I can't get down. No one's around me. Director's walked off, but doesn't seem happy. And like the AD comes over and says, “Hey, we're going to get you down from there. Is that okay with you?”

And I'm like, “Yeah, it's great.” And you know, they get me down.

He's like, “Alright, why don't you go back to your trailer for a bit?”

I'm like, “Okay. Was it okay?” You know, now I'm nervous. I'm like, “Was it okay?”

He's like, “It was great. It was—great. We're really happy.”

**Jesse Thorn:** He like tells you that there's a camera problem or something, and that's why—

**Paul Scheer:** Right. Yes, you're right! I'm sorry. I forgot about that! Yeah, he's like, "We have an issue with the camera. Go back to your trailer." Alright. I go back to my trailer. Now—

**Jesse Thorn:** You're like, "I'm aware there's no issue with the camera." (*Laughs.*)

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah, the cameras were working great. And also we did it 25 times. Like, was it a camera problem the first 25 times? (*Laughs.*) And how many more times will we do it? I go back to my trailer and I'm feeling the flop sweat. I'm just like walking back and forth, calling my wife. I don't know what's going on. 'Cause now I'm waiting. I know something is wrong. I've had enough experience to know something is wrong. And I get this knock on my trailer door. Knock, knock, knock.

Now, "trailer" is a ridiculous word to use. It was like an extended—not an extended urinal, an extended bathroom stall. Right?

(*Laughter.*)

So—and it was a bathroom stall. On one end of my trailer was a toilet with saloon doors. And on the other end was the door to the outside world. And in the middle was where I was supposed to relax, which was no bigger than like two chairs put together. You know.

**Jesse Thorn:** This is like a place to make pruno. This is a prison that you're describing.

**Paul Scheer:** And you know, I'm just like pacing the thing. And so, all of a sudden this producer comes in. And now they're in, and now two people in this small space. It's really cramped. And then a third person comes in. And now three of us are standing in this place next to a toilet, so much so that I'm now over the toilet, you know, having this conversation. And the producer is like, "You know, this is always the hardest part of the job, but we're going to let you go."

And I'm like, "Oh! Oh." And then—you know, then it becomes this moment of, "Uh, I'm okay with that! As a matter of fact, great. You know, I think that's good."

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"I think we should let me go. You know, I don't know what to do. I don't want to feel like—I'm professional; you are firing me. I didn't know that this is something that could happen. And I go, okay, yeah.

He's like, "Yeah, just, you know, we want to go a different way with it." Okay.

So you know, I'm standing there, and they leave and, "You cool?"

"Yeah, man, you're great. So happy. Oh, so psyched to have you." Well, not that psyched because you just fired me. And he goes, "Oh, and by the way, let's get your smock." I'm

wearing like a smock that has like a butt on it. And so, they're going to take off my smock. I give it to them.

**Jesse Thorn:** Aw, I was gonna wear that to the Oscars.

**Paul Scheer:** And so, I walk out. As I'm walking by the stage that I was just shooting in, I peer through the door, and I see that smock on this guy. I'm like that guy looks familiar. Then I see, oh, I think that's the sound man. Why would the sound man be wearing my smock? I don't know. Anyway. And now I'm trying to keep a stiff upper lip. I'm signing out, you know, from being fired. You know, I'm like, "Alright, so here I'm signing out," and you know, I'm walking back to my car just now depressed. Now I can let myself—you know, I feel like Bill Bixby leaving like the *Hulk* town, you know. I've made a mistake, and now I have to deal with it.

And this guy comes running up to me. "Hey, whoa, whoa! Hey man, where are you going?"

"Where am I going? I was fired."

"Oh no man, you weren't fired! We wrote you a brand-new part!"

I was like, "Oh, you did?"

He's like, "Yeah, come back in here, come back in here. Lieutenant Buttocks, here's the thing. It wasn't right for you. We knew it wasn't right for you. We got something better for you."

And I go, "Uh okay, well, what is it?"

And they go, "Lieutenant Kneecap." Okay? Now, this is getting into the movie lore a little bit more than you probably care to. But—

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** No, these guys are all watching YouTube videos of *Meet Dave* lore.

**Paul Scheer:** And so, in the movie, they need to fuel their planet. And fuel for their planet is salt. At the end of the movie, they find hot dogs, which have plenty of salt. And that's what they're going to bring back to their home world. Hot dogs. And I think one hot dog could fuel their entire planet, because they're very small people, as a normal human fits thousands of them, because it's a starship. And so, he goes, "You know, at the end of the movie, you get the hot dog. And we're going to cut to a giant hot dog on your lap. You eat meat, right?"

And I'm like, "Yyyeah!" I'll say anything. "Yes."

And he's like, "Oh, great. We're going to get you a lot of jerky. You're gonna have a lot of jerky in your mouth. You're going to have the hot dog on your lap, and you're going to pull the hot dog off your lap. And you're going to say, 'Sure beats protein squares.'"

You know, we shoot the scene. I do get to meet Eddie Murphy. It was a lovely experience. All that was really fun. And I do say, you know, “Sure beats protein squares.” And I feel like, okay, it works. Whatever. You know, it's not that big of a part, but it's—in my mind, I'm like it'll be a memorable moment. You know.

*(Laughter.)*

And a week later, I'm back in LA. The *Human Giant* marathon has gone off to a great success. And my friend who's also in the movie, he texts me. He's like, “Hey, are you here?”

And I'm like, “No, where?”

And he's like, “On set.” I'm like no. He goes, “Oh, yeah, we're reshooting the ending.”

And I go, “Oh, I didn't know that.”

He's like, “Yeah, we're reshooting the whole ending. And—oh, maybe they didn't call you.”

I was like, “No, they didn't call me.” I did watch the movie, just the end scene. And they just reshot the ending. So, I am not in it. But in one wide shot, there is a picture of a man with a hot dog on his lap whose face is obstructed. And that's me.

*(Laughter.)*

And when the credits do roll, Lieutenant Kneecap is there. But you can—there's no proof that I am in this movie.

**Jesse Thorn:** We've got so much more to get into with Paul Scheer. After the break, did you know that as a child, Paul had his own video store? I mean, not like he was like paying rent on a storefront, but he had in his room a huge collection of bootleg VHS tapes that he made himself and then sold and rented to friends and classmates and even teachers.

It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:15:00]

**Promo:**

**Music:** Gentle, quiet acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** *(Softly.)* Hello, sleepy heads. *Sleeping with Celebrities* is your podcast pillow pal. We talk to remarkable people about unremarkable topics, all to help you slow down your brain and drift off to sleep. For instance, we have the remarkable Alan Tudyk.

**Alan Tudyk:** You hand somebody a yardstick after they've shopped at your general store; the store's name is constantly in your heart, because yardsticks become part of the family.

**John Moe:** *Sleeping With Celebrities*, hosted by me—John Moe—on [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get your podcasts. Night, night.

*(Music fades out.)*

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Paul Scheer. He's a comedian and actor. He's also the host of the podcasts *How Did This Get Made* and *Unspooled*. He just wrote a memoir. It's called *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. He and I talked about it before a live audience at LAist 89.3 in Pasadena, California. Let's get back into our conversation.

I could pick 12 things to set you up to tell fun five-minute stories about your career in show business. And that's not what your book is about.

*(Paul confirms.)*

So, why isn't that what your book is about? Why isn't that your book *Twelve Funny Things That Happened to Me on Sets with Famous People* by Paul Scheer?

**Paul Scheer:** Well, I think that's what the book was intended to be in a weird way. Like, I sat down to write this book because after doing *How Did This Get Made* with June Diane Raphael, my wife, and Jason Mantzoukas—for 14 years I've been telling stories like that. Very organically these stories come up. But I'd be telling stories from my childhood, and they'd always be shocked. You know, I'd tell them a story about how my grandmother told me, "Don't open the door to strangers, because there's a rogue butcher in town." And I'm like really!? And she's like, "Oh yeah, they caught him, because one of the mothers came home. The kid wasn't in his bed, and she started making dinner. And she looked down at the chopped meat, and the chopped meat looked back up at her and said, 'Mommy?'" You know.

And Jason and June are like, "Whoa, whoa, wait, what?!"

I'm like, "Yeah, the butcher who killed kids. You didn't hear that story? The lovable story?"

And they're like, "No, that's so crazy."

And what happened is over the course of 14 years, those stories have been cataloged by listeners of the show. There's YouTube mashups. There were these Reddit threads of the most harrowing stories of Paul's life.



*(Laughter.)*

And they're like, "You should write a book, you should write a book."

And at one point I was like maybe I will write this book. Yeah, I'll write it. And I sit down, and I start writing it. And what I realized in writing was like these anecdotes are fun to tell. And they are—and I can tell them on a podcast. I can tell them at a restaurant, at wherever, with friends. But the truth is like they're only one part of the story. And I think for a long time, I had been holding this part of my life very much a secret. You know, to this point that, you know, there are stories that my wife didn't really know about my childhood. There's stories that my best friend didn't know about my childhood.

And as I started writing these stories, I was starting off with this idea like, oh, I'll tell the story about the butcher. Oh, I'll tell the story about, you know, this. Another part started to come out, because I started to tell the other side of it. And then I looked at it, and I was like, oh, wow. Okay, this is a little bit different. And then I gave it to my agent at the time. And he was like, "Go deeper."

I'm like, "Go deeper? I already went so deep! What do you mean, go deeper?"

He's like, "Go deeper."

And it was in this process of like writing—because I didn't have a book deal. I just wanted to write to see if there's anything there—that I realized like writing a book I think needs to have... it needs to be more than just an anecdote. It needs to have some weight. I also felt like I didn't want to write a book about, for lack of a better term, showbiz. You know, save that for Barbara Streisand. She's had an amazing career. It's an amazing book, 40-hour audio book. Get into it.

*(Laughter.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** You do casually mention that she once left you an answering machine—

**Paul Scheer:** She did. Yeah, she did. I did have Mikhail Baryshnikov's New York City phone number. That was my New York apartment number. And I have all these Russian people calling me at all hours of the night. And one time it was Barbara Streisand. "Mikhail! Call me. It's Barbara. I want to talk to you about a project."

And it was like, oh my god, that's Barbara Streisand! The unrecognized—you know, a very recognizable voice. And it started to feel to me like this book kind of started to—it sounds silly to say, but write itself. Like, it just started to come out. And I think that it's a reflection of a lot of work that I've done on myself. Like, you know, I said to a lot of people like this book isn't a therapy session. It's not trauma dumping. It's the reflection of years of therapy and work on myself and kind of analyzing things that I've dealt with. And I really came to this—I don't think I could have written this until I had kids. Because that actually had me look at my childhood in a very different way.

So, I wish I could say right from the get-go I knew I was going to write this book. I was going to talk about trauma and the aftereffects that it has on my life. But it would be a lie. It really was like—I respect the process of a memoir; I respect the process of kind of giving people a little bit more. ‘Cause that's what I learned from the most.

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And it just kind of organically shaped itself from sitting down and telling these stories and then kind of asking, “Well, why am I attracted to telling that story? What is it about this?” ‘Cause this is not linear. It's very much—thematically, it tells a story, but it's not like— You can't say, “Well, this section is about my childhood. This section is about this.” It kind of is all over the place.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'll tell you, like one of the first times that I saw my current therapist, she goes, “I'm probably not supposed to tell you this.”

And I'm like, oh, this is going to be good.

And, she says, “You know, whenever you're telling me something really awful from your childhood, you're usually—” I actually find myself doing it right now. She's like, “You're usually smiling and laughing.”

*(Paul laughs.)*

She's like, “We see that a lot in schizophrenia. It's called incongruous affect.” And I thought like, as I was reading some of the stories in this book, I thought of you—one of the most sort of charming and often outwardly affable people that I know sort of smiling your way through these really dark things.

**Paul Scheer:** Well, you know, the book deals with abuse on a major level. You know, my mom had remarried this man. My mom had gotten a divorce from my dad, remarried to this man who was incredibly abusive—verbally, physically, all these things. But it was a chunk of time. It was a bunch of years. And it was so commonplace, right? Like, so that—you know, abuse is mixed in with trips to Disneyland. That's mixed in with, you know, graduations. That's mixed in with life.

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, it wasn't like an incident. It was just your day-to-day life involved that kind of stuff going down.

**Paul Scheer:** Right. And as a child, and especially a child that grew up in a time where there were—you know, no access to the internet. If I wanted to learn something, I'd go to the library. And because of my attention span, I would forget what I needed to learn at the library when I got to the library. So, I'm not even getting that book to learn. You know, you don't know what abuse is. You don't know. It's like, “Oh, my dad is different than my stepdad. My dad doesn't yell. My stepdad definitely does. My stepdad can, you know, choke me out. My stepdad will, you know, throw a pitchfork at me.” Like, these are—but it didn't—the severity of that didn't really connect on some level. Because it was just like that's what it was.

It's still hard to handle. I think where I feel it the most sometimes is looking at my kids, seeing my children and seeing how delicate they are, how young they are, how impressionable they are. And there's moments that are shocking, because oh my gosh, I was that age when this is going on. That boggles my mind. And I think that kind of takes my breath away more than anything else. I'm through it. I got through it. You know, I was lucky enough to get out.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think that one of the things that was going on in your family, particularly with your parents—your biological parents—was there was no mechanism to stop and take stock in their arsenal. There was no—or at least none that they shared with you.

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah. I have a lot of empathy for my parents as a parent, now. You know, and I loved them then. You know, the one thing that I will say that my parents always had an abundance of love. I don't know if they had an abundance of tools to maybe put things in the right perspective or like—you know, I think I'm much more in touch with my own feelings, and I can talk to certain things. You know, my mom was also living the same life of being abused, right? So, you know, when I'm coming to her for protection, she can only do so much to protect me besides putting her body between me and this man. But she's never going to yell at this man, because she's got to protect herself on a certain thing.

My dad, you know—I talk about this in the book too. My dad, you know, is like, “Oh, I think you're exaggerating. Or I don't believe this.” You know, not that I don't believe it, but like it was hard for him to face that. And I think it was hard for him to figure out, “Well, what do I do?” It was a lot of asking for help and no one knowing how to give help.

And I can look at my parents and say, well, they didn't step in. Or people say, “Well, your mom should have done this. Or you—” And everyone could. It's very easy to look back and say, “Everyone could have done something different.” But we asked family. Family ignored it. Right? Or did what was safe for them, which was not get involved. We went to a therapist.

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And the therapist was like, “I'll be here, and I'll protect you.” And then, you know, after two sessions of that, she's like, “Well, next time I'll protect you. If it happens again, I'll protect you.”

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you're underselling that. Like, that anecdote in the book really took my breath away.

**Paul Scheer:** Well, yeah, we went to this therapist. And she's like, you know, a family therapist. There was something going on in the house, obviously. And she's like, “Tell us—you know, tell me what's wrong.” And I gave her a laundry list. He did this, he did that. He did this, he did this. And so much so that she stopped me. She's like, “I have enough.”

Child Protective Services was called to my house, because I was running around in my underwear with no shoes on in the middle of winter, because I was locked out of my house, and no one would let me in. And they didn't interview me. They interviewed my mom and

my stepdad together, which is a crazy way of doing it, because there's no safety in that. And they didn't do anything. And you know—and that also I think gives you this idea that—you know, it gives you a real lack of trust in people. But it also is one of the reasons I think I had a hard time ever saying the word abuse, because it was justified by professional people.

Well, it's not abuse. They didn't call the cops. The CPS didn't say it was any problem. And I think that's a tricky thing, to get over that.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is Paul Scheer. He and I spoke before a live audience at LAist in Pasadena, California.

This comes up like once a month on the show. So, I'm sorry to people that listen at home and are tired of me bringing up the Werner Herzog movie, *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*.

*(Laughter.)*

Have you ever seen *Little Dieter Needs to Fly*?

**Paul Scheer:** No, I haven't. No, I didn't even hear this title. So, it's new to me.

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay. So, it's this Werner Herzog documentary about this German American guy who was a POW in Laos. And it's a very harrowing film. It's an amazing film. I'm not sure it's a moral film. He sort of leads him through his traumas. It's really intense and Werner Herzog-y. When he was a POW, he went hungry, this guy. And there's a scene where he's in his kitchen in Mount Tam in Marin County. Like, the most comfortable, bougiest place in all of Northern California. Just a nice, beautiful, natural world. And he lifts up the floor of his kitchen, and underneath are just like 40-pound bags of sugar and flour. Right? And like dozens of them.

And he's basically just like, "I cannot sleep through the night unless this is here." And I honestly—like, I was thinking of your—like, one of the big themes in this book is your collecting, right? And I was like, Paul Scheer as a kid and teenager building his own video store inside of his bedroom is like Paul Scheer's equivalent to having 40 pounds of sugar under the floor. It's like to have a thing that is under control and exhaustive, belongs to you.

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah. I think it's—you know, I think it was a chance to have control. Like, as a kid, it was just like—it was collecting things like—you know, I was going through some of it as I was writing this book. You know, I have like tickets to, you know, *Happy Gilmore* and *Return of the Jedi* and every concert that I went to. Like, just these things which I think—in a weird way, when I think about it—are all these good times. There's a lot of good memories in there, and I'm holding those close. And when I grew up, I was an only child. But I did have a friend, and that friend was television. And I wanted to be in that TV; I wanted to be in those movies.

So, to have a video store in my house, which is—I just thought the videos—like, again, I'm dating myself, but I came up at a time where video stores were rare, right? It was like who even had a VHS player? It was like, oh, I was one of the families that had a VHS player. You

know, my dad had one, and we would go rent a movie. I just felt like I could control these things that I liked, that I loved. Like, so I could have this collection of movies that made me feel good. Being in a video store made me feel good, right? Those were—you know, and look—and I think some people turn to drugs. I think some people turn to—you know, it's all vice. I mean, thankfully my vice was collecting, you know, *Beverly Hills Cop*, you know, and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and every cup that you could ever get from McDonald's.

But that made me safe. Like, it was a cocoon. And I think that those are these things that I often think about. And in my moments of stress—yeah, I joke about this. It's not in the book. I was trying to figure out how to put it in the book, but it's just too small. But when I'm stressed out, and I'm at home—

[00:30:00]

—when I'm in any sort of familial situation, even in my wife's family or whatever, I will run to Target. It's my cigarette break. It's my drink. It's my thing. You know, it's just like there's a comfort. There's a—I guess it's the reason why there's a million Olive Gardens and not a—you know, there's a lot of Italian restaurants, but there's a chain restaurant. There's just a safety and familiarity to it. I get that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Can you describe for the audience the video store in your bedroom?

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah, absolutely. Video stores were new. And it wasn't Blockbuster. It wasn't—you know, it was mom and pop video stores. And going in there, it felt like you were shopping for a diamond. At least the one that I went to. Like, every videotape was behind a piece of glass. You'd have to write down a number, give it to the counter. Like, “Nope, we don't have *Neverending Story*.” Try again, go back out. Okay, what do I want to rent? And it just felt like there was this power, this person. And you know, on some level, I wanted to be in movies and TV not because I wanted to be an actor, it's just like I just wanted to be on that other side.

And early on in this process, I felt like I was brought in. Like, the guy that ran this video store liked me. And he's the one who gave me that Eddie Murphy cardboard cutout. He gave it to me, and I had it. And it was like, “Take home.” It was an ad for a video store. I still have it in my office. It's like, “Take home 1987's blockbuster hit!” You know, and then on the back, there was like a thing. It was like, you know, “\$99.99 for this much. And here's a discount.” I was like, “I'm getting the inside scoop! These tapes are expensive!”

I felt like I just was in the world of movies, and it kept on kind of growing. And I wanted to make my own video store. And I would tape movies and have them off of pay-per-view, and I would start to deal them out in school. Teachers would come up to me. “Do you have *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*”? Yeah, I do. You know, I gave it to my teacher. And you know, it's like—and then my teacher would be like, “You could pick any movie for movie day.” Okay, great. I had the—

**Jesse Thorn:** Paul, you weren't just taping movies off TV. You were taping movies off TV while sitting close enough to the VCR that you could smash the pause button when you could feel they were about to go to commercial.

**Paul Scheer:** Oh, 100%! That's the way you had to do it. I mean, any other way is disrespectful.

*(Laughter.)*

You know, I'm not going to sit there and even watch a smidgen of—you knew when it started to go to black, bam, pause. It was exacting. It felt so good. It's like making a great mixtape, you know? And you know, I mean, talking about Eddie Murphy again: I had tapes of—I would sit down with the TV guide and a yellow highlighter. And I would go through the TV guide and be like, okay. Well, I'm going to watch that, going to watch this, going to tape this, and watch these late-night shows. And so much so that I would tape late-night appearances. I taped every Eddie Murphy late-night appearance. Which was not many, but there was enough. And then I would—I had a two-VCR system. This is as I got a little bit older. And I would like sit there and just cut the Eddie Murphy pieces out. So, I'd just have a tape of just interview segments of Eddie Murphy. You know, like that was there.

So, I was very—I did all this stuff.

**Jesse Thorn:** This is how hip-hop was born.

*(Laughter.)*

**Paul Scheer:** I mean, truly, I wish I had more—it was a more of a discernible skill, like real-to-real, but I was literally like—you know, I was like, oh, *Superman 2* on TV has extra scenes that the *Superman* movie that I rented doesn't. I'm going to splice in the scenes that I saw from the TV edit of *Superman*. I did it all. I loved it. You know, and it like—it was a sad day when TiVo came, although I loved the TiVo. It was like that tactile sense of pause, record—like, that was so fun to me. I mean, I made my own radio shows where I'd put in commercials. I'd tape commercials to put into a radio show that I would play for no one!

*(Laughter.)*

You know? But just to do a radio show.

**Jesse Thorn:** We're gonna take a quick break. When we come back: the story of the time that as a child, Paul Scheer met Christopher Walken, and Walken put his hands on Paul's shoulders, looked deep into his eyes and told him this... Dot, dot, dot! We'll get into it. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

**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](http://MaximumFun.org).

[00:35:00]

**Transition:** Chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest this week is Paul Scheer. He's an actor and a comedian. You might have seen him on *Veep*, *Parks and Recreation*, *The League*. Earlier this year, he wrote a book, *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. It's a memoir about his childhood, the abuse he suffered at the hands of his stepfather, and mixed in with all that: a bunch of funny stuff. I promise. He and I talked in front of a live audience at NPR member station LAist 89.3.

You started doing improv as a teenager. You and your dad had been going from Long Island, where you grew up, into the city to go see short form improv. And your dad took you to an improv class that turned out to be like a regular adult improv class.

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah, because we got obsessed with improv. It was so fun. It was unlike anything I have ever seen. And I wanted to take this class, and my dad was like, "Yeah, we'll go take it." And, you know, it's funny. Again, as a young—I'm 14 years old at this point, and I'm like, "I'm taking a class." Like, I've never taken a class where there's not just a bunch of 14-year-olds in it. You know, and I walk into this class, and it's all people in their late 20s

and early 30s. And like, the shock of that—being in a class full of adults and then feeling young—was so daunting that I lied. And they said, “Well, how old are you?”

And I'm like, “Oh, I'm 18.” It's only four years more at that point. I thought I could pull that off. “I just started college at NYU.” No, I just started high school in Long Island, you know.

*(Laughter.)*

You know, and I'm like, okay. And you know, and they're like, “Oh, what are you doing?”

And I'm just like, “I live on Long Island, because it's cheaper. *(Hamming it up.)* Oh, city rents!” You know, and I don't even know what I'm saying. You know, I'm doing these scenes, and it's like, okay, you're in a therapist's office. I don't know what that is, ultimately. Like, yeah, I went to therapy like once or twice when I was a kid like I told you, but not like this. It was like, oh, you're driving in a car. I've never driven a car. You know, I'm doing all these adult scenes! You know, and it's like, oh, my husband wants to divorce me. I'm like, “Hey!”

You know, like I am play-acting as an adult, and I'm learning. And you know, when I don't—you know, when I make a mistake, they're like, “Oh, that's a funny choice!” I'm like, yes, it was definitely a choice, not my lack of knowledge of what adults say and do.

So much so that like I would go out after class. I begged my dad. I was like, “Can you not pick me up after class? Can you let me wait a little while? We'll go out to lunch with these people and then hang out with them?” And one time, one of the people I was in class with like pulled out a joint as we were walking in Central Park. And I was very, you know, a kid that really wasn't around drugs, wasn't really around like a lot of alcohol. And he pulled out a joint. I freaked out. I was like, “This is a drug? Whoa, drug addict. What the hell? What's going on? This guy's addicted.” I'm like, “Did you see that he—?” I was like, shocked at a the slightest joint that you had ever seen.

And I remember, because I had given out my number to people in that class and they would call me during the week like, “Hey, what's up? You want to come get a drink?”

“No, I'm—uh, exams!” You know, and I remember I was talking to one of the women on the phone that was in my class, and we're talking. And I was like, “Can you believe that guy had a joint? He had a joint.”

And she's like, “Yeah, so?”

And I'm like, “I mean, do we need to call somebody? Is he like a—?” Yeah, we need to call somebody. “Who do we call?”

*(Laughter.)*

I was obsessed that this person was a drug addict. You know, so there's like those things. And you know, I didn't—again, I didn't put this part in the book, but there's this moment where



years later, now I am a freshman—or you know, in college. I am at NYU, going there to be a teacher. And I start going back to Chicago State Limits, which is where I started taking this class. And I'm working the box office. And that woman who had called me came back in. And the person who's running the theatre is like, "Oh, did you know, this is Paul? He's just moved. You know, he's new. He just came—he's a college freshman."

*(Laughter.)*

And she was—and it was like I just saw, pshh. Like, her—you know, like, "Wait, what?"

And then I was like, "Yyyeah." Like, it was this moment where we had this like, "So, you lied to me for like that year and a half." I was like, yeah, I did. I did. And then, you know, there was like this weird moment of—you know, I was caught, and it was just like this nice moment, but also like, yeah, for a long time I was living this lie of being this—you know, I told them all that I did a semester abroad; that's why I couldn't take a level two. It wasn't because it was on a Wednesday. I could take the class with them on Saturdays, 12-3, because that was easy to do. I couldn't take a Wednesday 7 to 10 class. So, I said, oh, I'm doing a semester abroad. And then I was able to get rid of them and never see them again.

*(Laughter.)*

[00:40:00]

But yeah, so I was finally busted years later.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Paul Scheer—comedian, actor, and author of the new book *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*.

I'm sort of like a proxy for the audience here, and I think everybody's probably thinking about the question you avoided answering, which is how did you become a Clippers fan?

*(Laughter.)*

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah. Well, you know what? I was about to bring that back. And I—

**Jesse Thorn:** You're from Long Island.

**Paul Scheer:** I'm from Long Island. I grew up a Knicks fan. I love the New York Knicks, saw all these New York Knicks games. Knicks are a team that is tough to follow. You know, we got close, and we couldn't get it. And I moved out here to LA.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's not a gravy train like the Clippers.

*(Laughter.)*

**Paul Scheer:** Yeah, right. Amen! And—

**Jesse Thorn:** So tired of these front running Clippers fans.

**Paul Scheer:** (*Laughs.*) You know, and I came out here, and I knew that I was going to be in Los Angeles. And probably I was going to have kids at one point. And wouldn't it be fun to have like a team that they could like—I don't love it when I meet kids from LA who're like, "We are Cleveland Cavs fans."

I'm like, well, are you really? Just be the fan of the thing that you are. Like, you're in the town being the thing. I was like, I want to—

**Jesse Thorn:** Paul, my kids are Giants fans. I want to make that clear.

(*Laughter.*)

**Paul Scheer:** My kids are Kansas City Chiefs fans. I don't know why, but that's—we've now, as the whole household, adopted that. But it was—I wanted to have this experience with my kids. I wanted to be like, "This is our team." I'm not going to wait for the two times a year the Knicks come and play the—you know, the Knicks can play the Lakers and the Clippers. We're going to be Clippers fans. It was a fun time to get involved. Doc Rivers was there, CP3, Blake Griffin. It was like, okay, this'll be fun.

And it was cheap, and I didn't have money. I couldn't go from Knicks to Lakers. That felt cheap. That felt like I was cutting ahead, and it felt like I was—I couldn't do that. So, I became a Clippers fan.

**Jesse Thorn:** No disrespect to people born into Lakers fandom.

**Paul Scheer:** Oh, gosh! I love Lakers fans!

**Jesse Thorn:** But if you chose it, you're probably a jerk.

(*Laughter.*)

**Paul Scheer:** Look, here's the thing. I understand that America's basketball team is the Lakers. I understand that for a certain population, Dallas Cowboys are probably—maybe that's changing now, but there are just—those are the teams. When I go to LAX, yes, are there only Clippers jerseys up at the store? Sure. That's weird, but okay. I'm going to—but you know, it's changing. It's slowly changing. And I just think it's been so fun to have this like thing. And I've gotten so into it in multiple ways. I think that there's something really fun about sports. I'm not like a jockey kind of person, but I love the drama of a team. I love the ups and downs. I love—I mean, it sounds silly to say, but the improvised nature of it. They win, they lose. You don't know what the outcome is going to be. It's surprising. New things come in; new things come out.

My son is so into basketball. And it just becomes like—I don't know. I think as a fan, as a collector, as aall these things, I have just really given over to this. And it's been—it's a high

and low thing. I've made a lot of great friends, and I think that there's an underdog status to it that's really fun. "We'll get them next year" is a nice way to be, you know. Like, I think for all of us, especially in this town... "Alright, let's try it again!" You did something. It worked; it didn't work. Here's the thing. This is the joke about this town in a weird way. Like, you do something, and it works. And people are like, "Well, what do you got next?"

And there's no guarantee that next thing is going to work. You do something, it doesn't work. And it's like, well, I got to do the next thing! And you just have to keep on going. And there's something about the Clippers in some way. They have been through a racist owner who made them reuse bandages, right? They went through this thing where like—in the middle of the first time they're ever getting any success, a racist tape of that same owner drops that shocks the NBA, and so much so that the players are like, "Should we not play? Because we don't want to play for this racist." You know? And you know, then they get this player, the transformative NBA player, then he gets injured. And he's out for like—first, like gets injured in the playoffs, and then it's out for a year! And it's like, oh, we're—

Like, there's this up and down, but you get back up, and you keep on going. And there's something really interesting about sports, like you can't quit. Long after I'm dead, the Clippers, you know, will be going. In the same way like, you know, there's something about that like that it—I like that energy. It's like keep on going! Here we go! Another season, new thing, let's go. And it's a good memory for me to be, like move on. Next game, move on. Move on. And I think it's an important thing in life and in every—as a parent, as a partner, as a creative, it's like, alright. Learn from that, and you gotta keep on going forward.

[00:45:00]

You can't just keep on watching the tape from the last game. You gotta go to the next game.

**Jesse Thorn:** Paul, when you were a kid, you and your dad made a trip to California. You bought a guide to shooting locations, so that you could stalk celebrities.

**Paul Scheer:** Right. Well, let me tell you, I didn't buy a guide. There is a place in Beverly Hills where you pay \$75, and they give you every shooting location in Los Angeles for that day. And you could just go and show up. It was a stalker's dream.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, just look up "stalker" in the yellow pages and yeah.

**Paul Scheer:** And it was a time when they brought me into sets. Do you want me to tell that?

**Jesse Thorn:** So—okay. So, I'm just—we're running out of time. So, I'm going to give you the setup here. The setup is you've seen some celebrities, very successful day. You go to an interior shoot where Christopher Walken is shooting. You know him as the bad guy in a Bond movie, your favorite Bond movie at the time.

**Paul Scheer:** *A View to a Kill*. The best.

**Jesse Thorn:** And this is going to be the disappointing conclusion of the day. Because when people are shooting in interior, there's no way for an outsider to get in. But a security guard says, "You want to meet Mr. Walken, you have to leave your dad behind and go into this room alone."

**Paul Scheer:** No parents, no cameras.

**Jesse Thorn:** So far that, up to that point, this story—truly horrifying.

**Paul Scheer:** Right, yeah. When people hear "no parents, no cameras", they're like, wait, what's going to go on? I'm led into this warehouse.

*(Laughter.)*

The door closes behind me. Security guard stays outside. The doors open just a little bit, just so enough—like, a slit of light comes in. And out of the darkness appears Christopher Walken, who's shooting a movie called *Communion* where he communes with aliens. And I only bring this up because at this point, he's been captured by aliens. He is in White face to a certain degree. Not (inaudible), but like white and sparkles. He looks like Jacob from—or Edward from *Twilight*. And it freaks me out, because I know him as the James Bond villain. And you know, I have my little autograph book in hand. And I just think it's going to be like, "Can you sign my thing?" And he wants to talk, you know.

*(Laughter.)*

And, you know, he's like, "The light hurts my eyes." And I'm like, okay, great. And he's like—explained why we're in darkness. And he's like, "Do you believe in aliens?" And no one's ever asked me this. I'm like yes. He's like, "Good. We're making a movie about aliens. You know, they bring me to this ship." And I'm like, yeah, I know. I'm listening. And again, I am in the Disney world mode of pen and autograph pad. I'm not ready for this. And he gets down on his hands and knees. He puts his hands on my shoulders. He pulls me in, and he goes, "Don't let anyone tell you what you can or cannot do."

And he releases me, signs my autograph.

*(Laughter.)*

And sends me on my way. And that was me meeting Christopher Walken. And it was an amazing experience. It truly was. Like, again, because I also didn't know him. Like, I didn't really know him. And as years have progressed, I'm like, "You know, I actually met Christopher Walken." You know, and yeah, one of the best.

And a little side note, not in the book. My dad's a pharmacist, and I didn't have an autograph pad, I had a prescription drug pad.

*(Laughter.)*

And it was like one that like wholesalers give out. So, Christopher Walken's signature is on a notepad that is advertising Valium.

(Laughter.)

**Transition:** Funky synth with heady bass.

**Jesse Thorn:** Paul Scheer. As we said, his new book is called *Joyful Recollections of Trauma*. It is hilarious and harrowing. Go grab it at your local bookstore. Thanks so much to the folks at The Crawford at LAist 89.3 for hosting me and Paul. If you're in Los Angeles, want to hear about all the great live events that they're putting on, go to [LAist.com/events](https://www.laist.com/events). And hey, go check out the LAist YouTube page. You can watch a fully professionally produced video of this interview or share it with somebody.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, I just got a refill on my oxygen tank. Yes, that's right, folks. Remember three years ago when Kareem Abdul-Jabbar told me to try an oxygen tank for my migraines? I got one, and it helps.

This show is produced by speaking into microphones.

[00:50:00]

Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Max Fun is Daniel Huecias. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Special thanks this week to the folks at LAist, who hosted my conversation with Paul Scheer. We had such a great time. Thank you to Jon Cohn, Rebecca Stumme, Tony Frederico, Kristen Payne, Kristin Ranger, and Laura Dukes, and Michael Leyva. Big crew over there at LAist. So much love to all the folks in Pasadena. We really appreciate it. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation" by the Go! Team. Thanks to the Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](https://www.instagram.com/BullseyeWithJesseThorn). I am on Instagram, [@JesseThornVeryFamous](https://www.instagram.com/JesseThornVeryFamous). Thanks! Follow me, follow *Bullseye*. We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. YouTube is an easy place to find our interviews and share them. 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](https://www.MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*