

[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 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. (*Stiltedly.*) How are you doing? Did you have a good summer? See any of the top movies lately?

These, of course, are examples of small talk. Chances are you already knew that. Maybe in the last few days you've made some small talk yourself—a quick back and forth with the cashier at the grocery store, a friendly hello to someone on the elevator, a laugh shared with a taxi driver. Some of us live for small talk. Others dread even the thought.

For folks who are in either of those camps—and for those who are in between—I offer you my guests, Jessica St. Clair and Casey Wilson. They're self-appointed experts on the topic of small talk. Jessica is a returning guest on the show. She is a comedy writer and actor who has starred in programs like *Playing House*, *Veep*, and *Avenue 5*. Casey Wilson is also a comedy writer and actor. She's been on *Saturday Night Live*, *Happy Endings*, *The Righteous Gemstones*, and *Black Monday*. Both of them are very funny, very talented, and—this is important—extremely good at small talk.

Earlier this year, Casey and Jessica put together an audiobook called *The Art of Small Talk*. Think of it as a guide to those brief conversations with strangers. Not creepy strangers that you should avoid, but folks you might meet in passing: bank tellers, food servers, folks at the snack table after church. Jessica and Casey argue that small talk is something to embrace, not avoid. That it brings us, human beings living our lives, closer together. The book is charming and hilarious, just like my guests. I'm thrilled to have Jessica and Casey here to talk to me about it. Let's get right into the conversation.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Casey, Jessica, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm happy to have you on the show. Happy to have you back on the show, Jessica.

Jessica St. Clair: Thank you so much, Jesse.

Casey Wilson: So happy to be here!

Jesse Thorn: What's the difference between small talk and big talk?

(*They both “ooh”.*)

Jessica St. Clair: Well, they're—in many ways—a gateway drug.

Jesse Thorn: (*Giggling.*) Really?

Casey Wilson: Small talk will lead to big.

Jessica St. Clair: If you're doing it right. If you want it! There's a lot of consent that needs to happen too, you know. But we—it was actually Casey who coined the phrase—

Casey Wilson: Go shallow to go deep.

Jessica St. Clair: Go shallow to go deep!

Casey Wilson: Jessica and I are professionals, so we can go from “hot out there” to, you know, “my aunt died today” within two lines, you know?

Jessica St. Clair: And then take it to, “You could communicate with her through signs and symbols!”

Casey Wilson: Yeah, on the other side. And then we're back to—you know—where to get a Le Creuset pot, you know?

(*Jesse laughs.*)

But for everyone else, you know, I urge you to start small. And just try to take it one more step. And sometimes people will give you the obvious signal that they don't want to. So, that's why we advocate even a “hi”, even a look is considered small talk to us. Even if you stay on the surface, it's just about the connection. And if you want to go deeper, that's great. But you know, you don't have to!

Jessica St. Clair: Right. But here's the thing. If you don't try—and we found out that the majority of people are actually terrified of small talk.

Casey Wilson: And they hate it.

Jessica St. Clair: And they hate it, which is why we wrote this audiobook. Because we really felt like people are missing out on a huge hit of dopamine, actually, that can end up—small talk can end up making you live longer. So, every time I small talk with someone, I don't just get a dopamine hit, they do too. So, it's one of the very few things in life that you get a selfish thing—you're giving, but you're getting!

Jesse Thorn: You're not just giving people a rush of terror because they have to talk to a stranger?

Jessica St. Clair: They think that!

Casey Wilson: So, they'll think that. But when it goes well, they walk away enjoying it, with a little skip in their step. You know, when you connect with someone—even with the smallest of things—you know, you say hi to your mail person. “Hey, how are you?” That's it. “I'm great!” You just feel a connection to something greater or just a community.

Like, even if it's—again—there's nothing beyond it, it just feels good to connect with someone. So, I would say, if you hate small talk, try a wave, try a nod. If you're into a nod, try a hi. You know, if you like hi, ask about their beliefs in the afterlife.

(Jesse chortles.)

You know, and that's what you can do, you know.

Jessica St. Clair: During the pandemic, there were these orangutans in a Belgian zoo. And normally they were quite interactive. So, orangutans, I think they share something like 97% of our DNA—okay?—as humans.

[00:05:00]

So, they love to interact with people who would come in. They'd show their babies. They make funny faces. They love to interact with people coming to the zoo. And then during COVID, they started to experience failure to thrive. So, they stopped eating. They stopped sleeping. They wouldn't come out of their cave. And everybody was freaking out. And they thought, oh, okay, they're lonely. So, the zookeepers came in, and they started spending more time in the thing. Nothing changed. And then they decided to introduce a family of otters into their enclosure.

(They laugh.)

Casey Wilson: So unexpected.

Jessica St. Clair: Now, otters are a good time! They're very funny. They're always up to something. And suddenly, the orangutans came back to life. And what actually researchers realized is that as human beings—and orangutans—we don't need small talk with our families, our close-knit circle. We need it with strangers. And if we don't have it, we start to experience failure to thrive. That's what happened to us during COVID. We were trapped inside with the people we want to small talk the least with, and that's our loved ones.

And people didn't realize—

Casey Wilson: Our husbands, our children.

Jessica St. Clair: Right! We don't need that to feel happy. We want it with the barista. We want it with the mailman. We want it with the—

Casey Wilson: Baristo, Jessica! Please.

Jessica St. Clair: Bariste. We want it with the bariste.

Jesse Thorn: Baristé.

Casey Wilson: Baristies. Yeah.

Jessica St. Clair: So, again, that's the last piece of research you're going to hear from us. But that's enough for me.

Jesse Thorn: I feel like having a relatively suburban lifestyle in Los Angeles—you know, I live in an urban part of Los Angeles, but just the heat and cars and all these reasons that you're not interacting with the world when it's hot out.

Jessica St. Clair: Right? It's very hard.

Casey Wilson: You blame a lot on the heat. When I arrived late, you were like, "I'm sure it's the heat." No! I'm wearing a sweater!

Jesse Thorn: It's fine. It's hot outside.

Casey Wilson: I was just late! I was just late.

Jesse Thorn: That makes it worse, Casey. But I think one of the things that I found the most difficult to adjust to, coming from my hometown of San Francisco, was the that lack of the very smallest interactions with other people. And not just like small town USA saying "hello" kind of stuff. Like, I don't mean to be stereotypical, but just like saying hi to a guy in the corner store or whatever that I'm know a little—like enough to say hi to, but maybe I don't even know their name.

And I've found that going to the flea market every weekend, I'm so grateful—mostly for saying hi to a ton of people that I know, whose names I don't know. And a bunch of people who I have never seen before in my life.

Jessica St. Clair: You're getting a hit.

Casey Wilson: I find that more comfortable than being at a cocktail party with people I know one step further, but not anymore. You know?

Jessica St. Clair: 100%. Casey and I were just at a wedding. And I gotta tell you—now listen—

Casey Wilson: 220 comedy people. That's a scary prospect!

(Jesse "oof"s.)

Jessica St. Clair: And I was very anxious on the way there!

Casey Wilson: Everyone was.

Jessica St. Clair: And we have a whole chapter on—that we go very deep into parties, because that's actually where people feel the most anxiety. And listen, I should have brushed up on our own rules. Because something that happened to me—and this is because of my codependent nature—is I lock into someone and then I don't pivot. So, I spend 45 minutes of the cocktail circle with one person.

Casey Wilson: I spent it with an engineer from San Francisco. Too long.

Jessica St. Clair: Exactly! That's too long. And we had a lot of gems to get to. Including!

Casey Wilson: That's right. I had all my friends around.

Jessica St. Clair: Our own best friends!

Jesse Thorn: I feel like you blamed me for that. I'm going to be honest with you. *(Laughs.)*

Casey Wilson: I did. I did.

Jesse Thorn: It's not the 415's fault!

Jessica St. Clair: I don't know, isn't it?

Casey Wilson: Let's just say she was not a ball of laughs. *(Chuckles.)*

Jessica St. Clair: Let's say after we got to the first bridge she built, I'd like to pivot. I'd like to pivot! But that's something—

Casey Wilson: It's an artful—

Jesse Thorn: “I'd rather swim!” Says Jessica St. Clair.

Jessica St. Clair: 100%!

Casey Wilson: We need artful pivots.

Jessica St. Clair: You need artful pivots and exits. And exits that don't hurt people's feelings.

Casey Wilson: Because if you have an exit, you're less likely—I think—to be scared to start. Because you don't want to be trapped with someone, you know?

Jessica St. Clair: And one of Casey's great tips that obviously she or me did not use is you can always say, "Hey, I'm going to go get a drink. You want to come with?"

Casey Wilson: So, you invite them. Because most people go, "I'm going to get a drink." And then that you're left feeling kind of bad, like clearly they want to get away. So, you always keep an empty glass. And that's great too, if you like to drink! And you keep an empty glass, and you go, "I'm going to get another drink, and come with me!" And then you lose them on the way to the bar.

Jesse Thorn: Ohh!

Casey Wilson: It's not a like bob-and-weaving. It's just like things get so crazy. Now, you still might point to them across the bar like, "What can I get you?" But you're saying, "I'm leaving, but I'm bringing you with me, but I am leaving." But it's less stark than like, "I'm out of here." Just one idea. Prop work helps.

[00:10:00]

Jesse Thorn: Okay. With whom have each of you small talked today? It's just past lunchtime as we record.

Casey Wilson: I mean, everyone in your office.

Jessica St. Clair: Well, we just saw everyone in your office. We've made connections. You know, we've complimented. If you haven't noticed, I complimented—

Jesse Thorn: You said something kind about my shoes. They are nice shoes.

Jessica St. Clair: They're beautiful shoes. And I meant that compliment, but we're going to get to a very tricky, tricky rule.

Jesse Thorn: Okay, are we getting into lies now? Because I was saving that for two thirds of the way through.

Jessica St. Clair: No, we might as well get into it now. Because honestly, if you're not on board for this rule, maybe this book isn't for you.

Jesse Thorn: Okay, what's the rule?

Casey Wilson: Lying is your friend with small talk. Obviously, you know, we're not advocating for it in every aspect of your life. But typically, like you said, a person in the corner store, if you say, "Wait, where are you from?"

And they say, "Kansas City."

You go, “Oh my gosh, I have a friend from there.” Or “My dad's sister's thinking about moving there.” Who cares?!

Jessica St. Clair: Or “I've always wanted to go.”

Casey Wilson: No one's tracing that. Or “Oh my god, the Braves!” Is that—? Atlanta Braves?

Jesse Thorn: The Royals.

Casey Wilson: And then I go off that. I go, “Oh my god, I don't know baseball. Do you?” We can go anywhere with that lie. And I mean, I happen to love Kansas City. But you know, just lie! It'll get the ball going.

Jessica St. Clair: That's right. So, I said to you, “Oh, Jesse, I love these shoes.” Now I could tell these are a special shoe. I said—

Casey Wilson: Maybe from the flea market.

Jessica St. Clair: Right. And I said, “These are a shoe from yesteryear.” ‘Cause they really are. I feel like my dad maybe had that shoe or my grandfather. Now I actually like these shoes—

Jesse Thorn: Depends how cool your dad and grandfather were.

Jessica St. Clair: Exactly! But even if I didn't like your shoes, I probably would have said, “I love those shoes.” Because that's an in. I've disarmed you now.

Casey Wilson: And clearly, you've worn a slightly different shoe because you love it!

Jessica St. Clair: Right. It's unique.

Casey Wilson: So, we're pointing out the thing that you probably put on. And we can get to the pants later, your pants.

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: Again, I feel attacked.

Casey Wilson: No! And this is so warm.

Jessica St. Clair: We're showing you how the sausage is made, Jesse. We wouldn't do this out—

Casey Wilson: Those are great shoes, but I bet—I feel like you do like them. I like them too. So, that's actually not a lie. That's like a genuine one. But I might go, “Where did you get those pants?!”

Jesse Thorn: (*Beat.*) Just for funsies.

Casey Wilson: Sort of! Because they are—

Jesse Thorn: Even though you do actually like the pants.

Jessica St. Clair: Yes, sir, we don't. I mean, we don't know, Jesse!

Casey Wilson: We don't know. You'll never know.

Jessica St. Clair: You'll never know, Jesse. I'm going to tell you right now. You're never going to know.

Casey Wilson: I'll say they're growing on me.

Jesse Thorn: Much more to get into with Casey Wilson and Jessica St. Clair. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guests are Casey Wilson and Jessica St. Clair. Both of them are comedy writers and actors. They're also world-class charmers. Earlier this year, Casey and Jessica released an audiobook called *The Art of Small Talk*. Let's get back into my conversation.

Let's start with parties. Because you cover a lot of kinds of situations in the book and how to handle them. So, let's start with parties. I don't think—it's possible that there are people who feel entirely comfortable when they wander into a cocktail party, but I think they are vanishingly few. So—

Jessica St. Clair: We don't.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, and you two are genuine extroverts.

Jessica St. Clair: Pros. And we don't. We get very nervous.

Jesse Thorn: So, what do you arm yourself with going in? What are the things—what are the touchstones in your mind when you enter a cocktail party full of maybe some people you have met before, but you can't remember when, and one or two people that you know, but they're busy? A classic cocktail party situation.

Casey Wilson: I like to arm myself with knowing I'm going to do a lot of shoulder touching. I think that's sort of a lost thing, and it can also like really make people feel good even if you are kind of moving on. You know? And Amy Poehler talks about this in the book, of like, you can actually get a joke off or try to circle back to something that was said a minute ago, but you are backing away, but you're making someone feel good on the back away. Just like, "Let me know how that goes!" You know, with whatever you talked about. And a shoulder touch to me is a more elegant, graceful exit from people. So, I try to touch shoulders a lot and get—to go past just a, "Hi, how are you? Great to see you." You know, and I'll keep one on there for a bit.

Jessica St. Clair: Yeah, and just like a shark needs to keep swimming to survive, sometimes you need to keep some movement when you first get to it. Getting stuck is not great. Because if you don't have anybody to talk to, you're stuck there, you're feeling anxious. Always have a destination in mind. You can always be going to the buffet.

Casey Wilson: That's what I like to do when I approach someone. I go, "I cannot find—where is that buffet?" Now I've set my intention. So, anything that happens next is wonderful, but they know I'm already headed there. It's not—you know, no one's feeling like, "Wow, she's just—" You know, it's like I'm actually—you're stopping me from going there, and I'm loving this, but I do have a destination in mind.

Jessica St. Clair: An end point, which makes everybody feel good. The other thing—

Jesse Thorn: I love that for you, Casey, setting your intention means planning—establishing that you're going somewhere else.

[00:15:00]

Like, what's on your vision board is leaving this interaction.

Casey Wilson: Can I say something? It's not for me. A lot of times it's for them. And that sounds—you know, there's people that they—I think people are nervous. And I think sometimes—and then I get more nervous if they're nervous. So, I sort of think sometimes there's a really nice interaction that comes to a close at a cocktail party, and I'd rather have that than us like struggling then— You know, then everyone's getting in their head. "They don't like me." And I feel that too.

Jesse Thorn: It's in part a matter of making sure no one feel trapped.

Casey Wilson: Feels bad. Yes, or badly. Like, "Oh, they didn't like me."

Another thing Tony Hale says, an actor—which I love this—is "When all else fails," and I use this a lot, "I say the truth." And I said it at the wedding. I'm like, "I feel nervous. I'm seeing people I don't even know." Confiding in your insecurity. The truth. That's a truthful one.

Jessica St. Clair: Yeah, that's the thing. There's going to be a lot of contradictions in our book. Okay? So, if you're here to like *New York Times* fact check it, like be on your way. So, yes, lie in some scenarios. But also don't be afraid to reveal your vulnerability. And it can be as simple as, "God, since COVID, I haven't been to many of these! I haven't been to a wedding in god knows how long. I don't even remember how to talk or walk!"

Casey Wilson: "I'm sorry you got stuck with me." Take it on yourself.

Jessica St. Clair: Yeah, exactly. And the great Mike St. Clair, my father—who's one of the dominant interviews in the book.

(They laugh.)

You would have thought we could get some real experts on, but he was available.

Jesse Thorn: And he's a salesman, so he's spent his life ingratiating himself to others, making them feel good and comfortable.

Jessica St. Clair: He's a salesman from the '80s. He had a full mustache.

(Jesse laughs.)

Makes people feel very at home. And yes, he knows how to press the flesh. Now. You would think my father could just roll into a cocktail party blind, but he always asks my mother. He takes out—he lives in a very small community, but he takes out the directory. And he says, "Now, who's this person, and who's their daughter, and they live where?"

So, he has a little Rolodex of information. So, like as we were going to the wedding, I said to my husband, "Now, here's who's going to be at the table. Here's one thing about this person, one thing about this—" Just in case he got stuck.

Casey Wilson: I like to grease the wheels sometimes and email in advance or text people that maybe I haven't seen in a while and just say, "Looking forward to seeing you. It's been so long." Which takes the edge off awkwardness, if maybe we were supposed to get something.

And I do feel that it's seeming like our small talk techniques are to not small talk. But what I do want to add is that a lot of times—and this just also happened to me at the wedding; I fell into such funny conversations with people I don't know very well. One guy's telling me, "I got this new shower system where I can get it going on my phone."

And I was like, "Sorry, so you can't just turn it?"

And he goes, "Well, no," but he was so proud of it. And we started laughing. And he's like, "My wife's pretty annoyed."

(Jesse laughs.)

He goes, “Because a lot of times the system goes down.”

And I'm like, “But you're really holding on to your pride over the shower!”

And he goes, “I guess I am.” You know, and I don't know him very well. And we had such a laugh! And that was so fun. You know, and so there's fun to be had. But you gotta, you know, know when to exit. Know when to hold ‘em, and when to fold ‘em.

Jessica St. Clair: And when to fold ‘em.

Jesse Thorn: Let’s talk for a moment about testing boundaries, outrageousness, zaniness. Both of you are from a comedy world where often—especially in comic-on-comic interactions—all of those things are currency. Like, saying something that makes another comedy person uncomfortable but also lands, is solid platinum in comedy world. But in kid drop-off...

Casey Wilson: Yeah, it might not fly.

Jesse Thorn: It might not be. So, what are your expectations or techniques around pushing the envelope a little bit? In terms of intimacy, or in terms of sort of subject matter and its extremity.

Casey Wilson: Yeah, I like to say to someone—maybe a parent at drop-off, for instance—you know, a lot of times if a mom's having a hard time with their kid or—you know, sometimes kids will embarrass their parents by yelling or like—and you want to— You know, I'll say something like, “I get it.” A lot of just like, “I get that.” And I'll say like, “My son's like living with an alcoholic.” You know, or just try that. You know, to put yourself in someone else's shoes, you know? And then that's—but that's like a step further than they would maybe say.

Jessica St. Clair: Right. You “yes, and.” But I would say that you need to know your audience. Because like when I go to visit one of my very best friends in the Midwest, she will remind me, she'll say, “Listen, I want you to not curse.” And she's like, “And I want you to take your volume down. And I want you to be as normal as possible.”

And for me, she knows that means that's not that normal.

[00:20:00]

So—but she has to tell me to take it down a notch. And she's right, because a lot of these moms would be absolutely shocked and offended by some of the things I say.

Casey Wilson: If I go to the South, I like to take—you know, if I realize maybe I'm talking to someone of a wildly different political persuasion, instead of like, “I'm going to get myself—” I go, “Well, I've just come from Holly-weird, as I'm sure you call it.” Or I'll go, “Let me just talk to you about climate change for an hour!” You know, just joke, but kind of break the

ice of like, oh, we're very different people. You know, and I go, "And then I'll let you talk to me about your orange-faced leader that you follow," or whatever. Just cutting through those kinds of lines with humor.

Jessica St. Clair: Yeah. Or I like to say about LA, I go, "Well, you know, I live in LA. So, legally we all have to have a psychic on speed dial."

Casey Wilson: That's great.

Jessica St. Clair: You know, or something like that. But then I'll say, "But have you heard from your dead mom? And here's how I think you should go about doing that."

Casey Wilson: If you're in a weird area, "Do you think anyone was murdered here?" Then that'll get you into true crime.

Jessica St. Clair: True crime! True crime!

Jesse Thorn: You know what? Jessica, you pulled that one on me as we were stepping into the studio.

Casey Wilson: Wow!

Jesse Thorn: You asked if there had been any dead bodies found.

Casey Wilson: You did?!

Jessica St. Clair: I did. I said, how many—because we're right on the corner of MacArthur Park, and I said, "How many dead bodies have you seen dredged from this lake?"

Casey Wilson: Jessica! (*Laughs.*) That's a tough one.

Jesse Thorn: And the answer was—and like, the answer is we've been here 12 years, and it's only one. Which is—one every 12 years is...

Casey Wilson: Well, that's good. That's good.

Jessica St. Clair: But then, Jesse—

Jesse Thorn: And I didn't see it. I knew that it had.

Casey Wilson: And obviously, I'm sorry for that person.

Jessica St. Clair: Of course, but then you followed it up with a wild story about how every couple months, a truck backs into the lake with a tank and then shoots a fire hose full of live fish into the lake!

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, that's true.

Casey Wilson: See? That's very interesting!

Jesse Thorn: And then everyone in the office yells, "Fish truck! Fish truck! Fish truck!" so that we can all come see.

Jessica St. Clair: And then that leads to the fact that there are fishermen who go around to these urban areas in LA and try to catch the biggest carp they can. Here's a way that small talk is like Johnny Appleseed. You just gave me—okay, stay with me. You gave me that nugget—okay?—of the fact that they shoot fish like that. *(Laughs.)* Okay?

I now have that in my little satchel, and I might bring that out at a cocktail party. Because that's something weird.

Jesse Thorn: When the two of you are engaging in small talk, what are your goals?

Jessica St. Clair: Connection.

Casey Wilson: To make the other person feel good. To have a laugh, have a smile.

Jessica St. Clair: Make their day a little bit brighter.

Casey Wilson: Yeah. Raise their vibrations, if you see someone's lower.

Jessica St. Clair: Right. And to feel as you both go on your way—the wonderful thing about being people is that we can show each other love, even if we're strangers.

Casey Wilson: Yeah. Like, leave a little sprinkle of magic. It could be two seconds. It could be longer. And then you go, "I liked that person. That was fun. And you know, maybe I'll never see them again, but that was nice."

Jesse Thorn: My concern here is that I'm—what if I'm not magical?

Jessica St. Clair: Oh, everybody—

Casey Wilson: You know, it's not magical about what you're saying, it's that the interaction—it's magical to interact with someone that you don't even know. There's something really—it raises everyone's vibration to be seen, I think, in a grocery store. Jessica and I—we're so psychotic that we will outwardly look in someone's grocery cart and go, "What do you think of that?" I don't know why I'm saying that! I'm not asking for anything.

Jessica St. Clair: Right. "You like that flavor?"

Casey Wilson: I'm simply asking to connect.

Jesse Thorn: The people at Trader Joe's are asked to do that as part of their job.

Casey Wilson: And guess what? It feels great, even though I know that! I'm great with it. I'm great with it.

Jesse Thorn: That's a good point! I love it when they complement something that I'm buying at the Trader Joe's!

Jessica St. Clair: I love it, because also it's like, yeah, I'm going to be buying my food anyway. Do I want to go somewhere where I can also have this dopamine hit? Great! TJ Maxx, Marshall's, wonderful place to try out small talk. So, if you're a lady, and—or you know, you want to go in and put your hands on some merchandise, people love to compare, “Where'd you get that? Ooh, that's a good deal.” Often the checkout people have thoughts about your purchases. So, that's a great place to just, you know, see what you can drum up.

Just give it a shot. Because, you know, we didn't actually know why we loved small talk before we started writing this book. When we heard that you do actually—when they test people that you get this shot of dopamine and serotonin, we were—it made a lot of sense. Because even though we're there to make another person's day, that really is our intention. It's nice to know you get something in return.

Jesse Thorn: Now you two are genuine extroverts. Is that also true for people who aren't extroverts?

Casey Wilson: It is very true. Very true. So, it's true for everyone, but some people are—they have the story in their head of like, “I don't want to. I don't—you know, I'm going to put my headphones on. I'm going to do everything I can to signal with my body that I don't want.”

[00:25:00]

But we do believe that's because maybe you just—not in a bad way haven't tried enough, but you do have to take down a wall. But introverts get the exact same hit as extroverts. They just might not be as likely to.

Jessica St. Clair: Right. And they also, Jen explained to us, Jen Granneman—who has an online community of introverts—she said, “I sometimes get annoyed—” Because when people will talk about the weather to her, she'll be like, “Ugh, why do I have to talk about something so stupid?” And that's another reason small talk gets a bad rap is like, well, it's just dumb. It's fluff. And what we said to her is you may start with the weather, but you can go deeper—

Casey Wilson: And introverts tend to go deeper sometimes.

Jessica St. Clair: They prefer a deep one-on-one.

Casey Wilson: A one-on-one. Yeah.

Jessica St. Clair: Yeah. A deep one-on-one. It may start shallow, but trust and believe that you can get deep if you want!

Jesse Thorn: Give me an example of how weather gets deep.

Casey Wilson: I don't think—it can get deep to go back and forth, you know? I mean, should we try one?

Jessica St. Clair: Sure, sure, sure. Oh, well, there is actually a really good one coming up—in a day or two, it's going to be like 100 degrees here. Okay, I go—

Casey Wilson: Why do I always wear the wrong thing in the weather? Why am I wearing a sweater?

Jessica St. Clair: (*Chuckling.*) You know, I love those girls who have like “my winter wardrobe, and then I swap it out for my summer.” Like, I just have a bunch of things at the bottom of my floor, and I just grabbed this!

Casey Wilson: I tried to do that. I put everything in my garage only to find that rats had just eaten through. But you know, what was also sad though, is they—I put all my cards from my mom in the garage, who's passed.

(*Jessica offers a sympathetic “oh my gosh”.*)

So, all of her—I know—all her cards.

Jessica St. Clair: I'm so sorry. Was it recent?

Casey Wilson: No, 15 years ago. But you want to look at those cards.

Jessica St. Clair: Of course, to hang on to that stuff. Oh my god.

Casey Wilson: So, the wardrobe was funny, but then as I dug deeper, I was so mad at myself. Like, why would I keep that there?

Jessica St. Clair: That just reminded me, in college, there was a couch we had in our horrible—you know, those horrible like derelict buildings you all live in at college? And we lifted up the seat cushions, and one mouse had carried an entire box of wagon wheel pasta and transferred it under the seat!

Casey Wilson: What?!

(*Jesse laughs.*)

Jessica St. Clair: Imagine how long that took him!

Casey Wilson: Do you know—and this is, I'm sorry to say, but I was sitting in a very thin robe at my home, and I stood up and saw there was a dead mouse under me.

(*Jessica shrieks.*)

And I don't know if my large butt snuffed out its life, or was it already dead and I sat? And that's something I have to sit with, much like letting my mom's cards be eaten by rats, you know? Okay, nice to meet you. I've told you way too much. Way too much.

Jessica St. Clair: I know, I know. You gave me a laugh. Thank you. Hey, listen—stay safe out there, 'cause it's gonna get hot. Stay hydrated.

Casey Wilson: (*Chuckling.*) Yes. And look for dead mice.

Jessica St. Clair: Yeah! Yeah, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: We've got more of my interview with Jessica St. Clair and Casey Wilson. After the break, Jessica and Casey helped me figure out how to best engage in small talk at the dog park. I'm sure I'm not the only one that needs help with that one, right? It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

Music: Surreal, drone-y synth.

Doug Duguay: My name's Doug Duguay, and I'm here to talk about my podcast in the middle of the one you're listening to. It's called *Valley Heat*, and it's about my neighborhood—the Burbank Rancho Equestrian District: the center of the world when it comes to foosball, frisbee golf, and high-speed freeway roller skating.

And there's been a Jaguar parked outside on my curb for 10 months. I have no idea who owns it. I have a feeling it's related to the drug drop that was happening in my garbage can a little over a year ago.

And if this has been a boring commercial, imagine 45 minutes of it. Okay. *Valley Heat*, it's on every month on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get podcasts. Check it out. But honestly, skip it.

Music: Buzzy sci-fi music.

Narrator: (*Voice echoing.*) These are the chronicles of the Rancho Equestrian District in Burbank, California. These are the events taking place in my house and around my—

(*Audio fades out.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guests are Jessica St. Clair and Casey Wilson.

I have a young dog who's full of beans.

Jessica St. Clair: Great area! Great small talk area.

Jesse Thorn: This dog is full of beans.

Casey Wilson: What does that mean? Full of beans?

Jesse Thorn: He's just always a busy boy. He's always getting into things.

Jessica St. Clair: He's a maniac.

Casey Wilson: Oh, I thought you meant full of actual beans. Okay.

Jessica St. Clair: He's a maniac.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, if I gave him the opportunity, there's no question he'd take it.

Casey Wilson: Okay. Got it. Got it.

Jesse Thorn: But so, I have to take him to the dog park every day, or else he's going to destroy my house. He's a very sweet guy. Jesse Jr is his name.

Jessica St. Clair: That's so strange, and I want to talk about that later.

Casey Wilson: Yeah. (*Chuckles.*)

Jessica St. Clair: My grandfather named cat after himself. And I thought what a crazy act of narcissism.

(*Overlapping with Jesse.*)

That's insane. No, that's crazy.

Jesse Thorn: Wonderful. Just so wonderful. Your grandfather sounds wonderful. What a lovely man.

Jessica St. Clair: That's absolutely crazy. You are a psychopath, sir.

Jesse Thorn: My wife named the dog. Because she respects me? Question mark?

Jessica St. Clair: That's insane.

Casey Wilson: No, that's very cute, I think!

Jessica St. Clair: You should be locked up.

Jesse Thorn: But when I take Junior to the dog park, I find myself—

[00:30:00]

It is the most small-talk-intensive part of my life by a wide margin. You know, maybe—

Jessica St. Clair: It's like going to the gym.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, like I don't go to church. It's like church cocktail hour every day. Snack hour? The time after the services when you eat the little foods. I, of course, ask everyone what breed and the age of their dog.

Jessica St. Clair: Great. Great area.

Jesse Thorn: Is there anything else I should be saying to anyone? (*Chuckles.*)

Casey Wilson: Not even necessarily. And I would also say like meet people where they are. You know, if you're getting the sense someone's like, "I've been here a million times; I don't want to." That's also okay to go, okay, that's not my person. And I will say it controversially—and I know the phone is such a prohibitor of small talk, but that's also okay if you're just like I don't want to.

But after breed of dog, I think you have a great story that you just told us, which is like, "I have to come here every day. Because, you know—is your dog okay to come once a week?"

Jessica St. Clair: And I don't—right, if I don't, this one's going to rip up the house.

You could get into what things that the dog has eaten.

Casey Wilson: What's your dog's name? "Charlie." So, is your name Charlie? Because my wife named our dog after me.

Jessica St. Clair: My dog, after hours, how insane is that? Or they say, “What's your dog—?” You know—a lot of times at places like dog parks, you're never going to exchange your name. Right? You're going to know that's Waffles, but you're not going to know the owner of Waffles. But you've seen them, and that's enough. Sometimes people want to have some anonymity, in terms of what they do for a living, what their name is. But they're okay with your dogs playing.

Now, this is a hard one for Casey. She actually hates dogs, but she's keeping that to herself.

Casey Wilson: I don't hate them.

Jesse Thorn: So, this comes up in the book that you don't like any animals.

Casey Wilson: (*Laughing bashfully.*) I like them!

Jesse Thorn: It sounded like—I mean, I'm inferring this, but it sounded like you might not even like otters.

Casey Wilson: (*Laughing.*) I definitely don't like hearing about otters. I've had a dog. I like dogs. I'm just—what I don't like is people don't stop when their dog like jumps, puts its like front paws on your shoulders and starts like dancing with you and licking your face. And people are like, (*nasally*) “Does that bother you?” And they do nothing to remove a dog that's just like jumping all over you. So, I really don't like dog owners.

Jessica St. Clair: I see. Gosh, it's interesting, but—

Jesse Thorn: Present company—?

Jessica St. Clair: Excluded?

Casey Wilson: Included.

Jessica St. Clair: But one thing—I do like to go a step further is I'll say, “Now, what was the King Charles Cavalier Spaniel bred for?” Because that, you could always go back. I'll say, “Did you know in Medieval times, they used to—you know, that schnauzers used to be used as children's nannies, you know?” Or pit bulls, you know? “Ugh, pit bulls gets such a bad name. I know of a pit bull that likes to be carried from room to room like a baby.” You know?

Or—oh, here's a good one. There was a—“I saw an Oprah about puppies behind bars, which was like these—”

(*The others chuckle.*)

I mean, I've used this so many times. There's inmates and they would raise—

Casey Wilson: God.

Jessica St. Clair: —dogs to give to vets, you know, as their therapy animals. And this one dog was so pampered, it like forgot how to walk, you know? I don't know.

Jesse Thorn: Jessica—Jessica, all I've ever thought about in my life or talked about is this one time when I saw a half hour Oprah documentary about Tom Ford. And it was mostly about how many baths he takes a day, which is 5+.

Jessica St. Clair: That's insane!

Casey Wilson: Oh my god, what a dream! See, I'm a bath person; that's incredible. So, see, we got there from Oprah. Oprah's a great commonality.

Jessica St. Clair: Oprah, for sure.

Casey Wilson: Dogs to Oprah, Tom Ford, baths. Great.

Jesse Thorn: I have a question for you. I'm just going to try this one out. Each of you are wearing clothes that really complement your palettes. Have the two of you done your colors?

Casey Wilson: No, I have, but—it's so funny, I changed like four times. And I thought, “This is the dumb—” I was gonna say to you, “This is such—” I don't know. I think I—

Jessica St. Clair: And I was gonna say, “Where'd you get those jeans?” ‘Cause I really loved them.

Casey Wilson: Mother—!

Jessica St. Clair: I was gonna walk away with the brand. You know, we have gotten our colors—

Casey Wilson: Thank you! And that might be a lie, but thank you so much.

Jessica St. Clair: Thank you so much.

Casey Wilson: Yeah, that emerald looks very beautiful on you, Jess.

Jessica St. Clair: Well, bless you, but you know what? Even if you were lying, like I don't care. I'm going to always assume—even though I know how much I lie, I'm going to assume that every compliment I get is for real. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: Jessica, you're a bright spring maybe?

Casey Wilson: Wow! You know a lot about colors! That's what I wanna know about! How do you know?!

Jessica St. Clair: Well, he's in the fashion business! He's in the fashion business.

Casey Wilson: I know. I'm a winter, but I'm wearing brown.

Jessica St. Clair: There's also something—a new Korean color thing that you can go and get. They don't just do your makeup, but they do like everything—like your clothes, your makeup, your—you know. And so, Kulap, our friend wants to bring us there, but it's booked for like a year.

Jesse Thorn: There's a thing called Color Me Mine, where you paint like plates that you've made and give them as a gift to your mom.

Jessica St. Clair: Oh, we've been there. Believe me.

Casey Wilson: I've spent—I have so many things they call, and they're like, “You have 14,000 pieces to pick up over the years. Can you please get them? Like, we're running out of storage space!”

Jessica St. Clair: Yeah, I can't get a U-Haul down there.

Casey Wilson: And I don't go. I can't get that cupcake jewelry box my son made.

(They laugh.)

[00:35:00]

Jessica St. Clair: That you paid \$800 for.

Jesse Thorn: We've all got our retirement in Color Me Mine loyalty points.

(Jessic agrees and laughs.)

Casey Wilson: For the record, I do really like your pants, and I do really like your shoes.

Jesse Thorn: Thank you, that's very kind of you to say.

Casey Wilson: I do! You have a great style.

Jessica St. Clair: And you have great skin. And then—you know a good one? “You've got great skin. I bet your mother has great skin.”

Casey Wilson: That's a great one.

Jesse Thorn: You know what? I gotta tell you—we're on camera; I'm wearing makeup.

Jessica & Casey: (*In unison.*) No!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, boys wear makeup too.

Jessica St. Clair: God bless! Well, I want to know what that foundation is, because it's dewy.

Casey Wilson: I'd like to know about your tattoos on your fingers. Can I ask about that?

Jesse Thorn: Well, we've got a lot to talk about after the show.

Casey Wilson: Okay, I won't ask that.

Jesse Thorn: Jessica and Casey, it's been really great to get to talk to you. Thank you so much for joining me on *Bullseye*.

Casey Wilson: Thank you for having us!

Jessica St. Clair: Thank you so much for having us. What a blast.

Jesse Thorn: Casey Wilson and Jessica St. Clair, two of the brightest and funniest. Their audio book, *The Art of Small Talk*, is out now. They're also both monumentally successful podcasters. Jessica St. Clair is one of the hosts of *The Deep Dive*, and Casey Wilson, a host of *Bitch Sesh*.

Transition: Bright, chiming synth with a steady beat.

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. Although, I just got back from San Diego, where I went to the world-famous San Diego Zoo. And on the way back, I remembered to sit on the correct side of Amtrak's Pacific Surf Liner—which is the west side. Because then you get to watch the sun go down on the ocean. It's just the best.

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. Our video producer, Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation”, written and recorded by the band The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team, thanks to their label, Memphis Industries Records.

Bullseye is on Instagram. You can find us at [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). And on YouTube, we have full video of our interviews. So, go there, check them out, share them. They're only getting better. Search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. Smash those like and subscribe buttons.

You know how it works. 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.)