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(ADVERTISEMENT)

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

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

Jesse Thorn: I'm Jesse Thorn. Look, the holidays can be a chilly time of year. But what about those of us who prefer things warm? Folks who wear hoodies in June? Jennifer Hudson knows the feeling, and she has a message: the holidays are perfect for you too.

Jennifer Hudson: I go in the house, and I turn the heat on “hell”, and I'm warmed up. And I look at the snow frosted on the windows and the cold outside. That don't mean I'm going to go like be in the middle of it.

Jesse Thorn: From MaximumFun.org and NPR, it's *Bullseye*.

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: This week, it's the *Bullseye* Holiday Spectacular. We got Jennifer Hudson, Judy Greer, Zach Cherry, Tower of Power, and indeed! My mom. It's so much holiday cheer, you will flip out.

Music: “Jingle Bells” played at a slow tempo on the piano.

Jesse Thorn: (*Sings wordlessly along with the melody.*)

(*Fireplace sounds.*)

Oh! Hi, I didn't see you. No, no, no! Stay. Sit down. Can I offer you some cocoa? How about some hot cider? It's mulled.

(*Cider pouring sounds.*)

I'm Jesse. Welcome to my show, *Bullseye*. We're celebrating the holidays this week in a very big way. We've got a bunch of great interviews and fun segments lined up. First of which is a chat with Jennifer Hudson, the one and only J Hud. She is an actor, a talk show host, an EGOT winner. And of course, a singer—one of the greatest ever to appear on American Idol, and a chart-topping solo artist. And for the last decade, we've had to wait for new music from one of our greatest. Until now.

Music: “My Favorite Things” from the album *The Gift of Love* by Jennifer Hudson.

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens

Bright copper kettles and warm, woolen mittens

Brown paper tied up with strings

These are a few of my favorite things

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: *The Gift of Love* is Jennifer Hudson's first Christmas album. It's got everything you want from the genre: lush strings, gospel choirs, even a spoken word track with Common.

Music: "Almost Christmas" from the album *The Gift of Love* by Jennifer Hudson.

As we step into love

From upstairs, the man blessed us

Yes, us

Let's remain here

Through the sun and the rain, dear

Always

You're the reason I came here

It's almost Christmas

Baby, tell me what you got for me.

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: And of course, timeless holiday classics.

Music: "The Christmas Song" from the album *The Gift of Love* by Jennifer Hudson.

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire

Jack Frost nipping at your nose

Yuletide carols being sung by your choir

And fools dressed up like Eskimos

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: Jennifer Hudson, welcome to *Bullseye*! And happy holidays as well.

Jennifer Hudson: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Jesse Thorn: I'm excited, because our ordinarily largely-featureless studio, for the holidays is featuring extensive tinsel.

Jennifer Hudson: It's amazing! *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Lots of tinsel in here as we record, as well as what I understand are largely our producer—Richard Robey's—grandma's Christmas ornaments.

Jennifer Hudson: That's how it's supposed to be!

(Jesse laughs.)

That's where the tradition of the holidays come from, from your grandmother's house or your mom's house.

Jesse Thorn: When you decided to make a Christmas record, were there Christmas records that you were thinking of?

Jennifer Hudson: Woof! Well, that was the toughest thing about what to sing on the Christmas album, or to make one, is because I couldn't figure out what songs I wanted to do!

Jesse Thorn: Well, it's a hard job, right? Like, there's like the Jackson's Christmas record, and there's *A Christmas Gift For You*, the Phil Spector Christmas record. There's a lot of Christmas records that are just another version of “Rockin’ Around the Christmas Tree” that or might not play in a Target somewhere. So. *(Laughs.)*

Jennifer Hudson: Yes. But you know, that's the beautiful thing about the holidays is everybody has to, one, go through the holidays, and everyone has their interpretation of it. And that's how I wanted to approach this holiday album, is to have perspective on it. Like, where's the song for my brothers?

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Like, the guys who don't really care about Christmas songs? Well, I want to do a hip hop "Jingle Bells" for them, so they'll have something to listen to. Or the mourners, who have lost loved ones, you know? Who don't want to go through the holiday season. There's a song for them, you know. Or just classics that you just love, like "The Christmas Song", which was dedicated to my grandmother. So, I took the personal route, obviously, to pick the songs. You know, so it's like a bunch of variation on the commercial records. You know, kind of like what MC, Mariah, gives. You know, and it's like, well, what's my version of those songs?

Jesse Thorn: What kind of holiday did you have with your family when you were a kid?

Jennifer Hudson: Oooh! That's—you know what, it's interesting you played "The Christmas Song" first, because I relate that to my grandmother. That was her favorite Christmas song. She used to say, "Nat King Cole, the man with the satin voice," and she would love this song. And so, I was like I gotta have this on my album, because it represents that. And then it reminds me of her cooking the holiday dinner in the kitchen, me trying to set the table for all the guests and things like that, and just seeing family come together in the cold in Chicago. The cold represents the holidays to me, because I'm a Chicago girl.

Jesse Thorn: I like the way that you sold Chicago, by the way.

(She laughs.)

You gave me a full like dreamscape of Chicago.

Jennifer Hudson: Yes! That's what comes to mind.

Jesse Thorn: It's way too cold in Chicago!

Jennifer Hudson: But it's supposed to be during the holidays! You know. So, like now, since I've been like all over the place, we call it flying back into the holiday season—when it's cold and crispy and all of those things and a reason to sit by the fireplace.

(Jesse laughs.)

You see, I imagined a fireplace right there. It's right here.

Jesse Thorn: You gave me the international hand symbol for fireplace.

(Jennifer laughs.)

I support it. I'll tell you; I went to Chicago once. My sibling lived in Chicago for some time. And I went—I had a show at the Second City in Chicago once in February.

Jennifer Hudson: That's a cold time.

Jesse Thorn: And I had always been to Chicago in like September and thought, “Why doesn't everyone live in Chicago? The city's beautiful, it's affordable. Like, what a wonderful place!” I went in February, I said to myself, “How can a human being live here?!”

Jennifer Hudson: (*Laughs.*) You got the true essence of Chicago. Everyone thinks that in the fall and the summer, “It's so beautiful!”

And then I always warn people like, “Don't go when the winter kicks in, because you won't come back.”

Jesse Thorn: Now I understand you to be, though—I have read—an always cold person. Like, always—you were wearing fuzzy socks when you came in. You're still wearing fuzzy socks, good to confirm.

Jennifer Hudson: And I have my sweater over my legs right now, yes, because I'm cold. But! I go in the house, and I turn the heat on “hell”, and I'm warmed up, and I look at the snow frosted on the windows and the cold outside. That don't mean I'm going to go like be in the middle of it. (*Laughs.*) I stay indoors from it and stay mushed up. Which is—that's what the holidays represent: being in the house around your family and all the things you love, you know, and staying cozy from the storm and all of this stuff. That's what I love. And then to look at the cold.

Jesse Thorn: Did you go to Christmas church services?

Jennifer Hudson: Oh my god, yes! Oh! I remember being a little girl and us marching in with our little candles down the aisle for the Christmas musical or something, you know, growing up. And—

Jesse Thorn: I was gonna say, was there like a nativity, or a—?

Jennifer Hudson: Oh yes, yes. We would have—you know, and we would sing gospel Christmas songs growing up, like “Go Tell It On The Mountain”, which is also on the Christmas album as well, things like that. And then going home for that family dinner, we would have—well, that would be New Year's where we do the watch service, but we would have the Christmas program, and then somehow it was always Christmas Eve night. Some type of way. And then we would get gifts from church first. Being a little kid getting extra gifts?

Jesse Thorn: You got gifts at church?

Jennifer Hudson: Oh my god, yes. For the youth, the young kids, we would get little gifts. And then—

Jesse Thorn: Were they religious themed? Was it frankincense and myrrh?

Jennifer Hudson: Nnnno, it was whatever they felt was fitting. Like, my cousin used to give me a little—oddly, a piggy bank, but I used to look so forward to this little piggy bank that she would get me, you know? So, like, I guess like one adult was assigned to one of the kids or the youth, and they would give us gifts.

Jesse Thorn: How many days a week were you singing in church?

Jennifer Hudson: Uh, well, see—okay. Well, I always sang in the choir, and I had my first solo at seven.

Jesse Thorn: Was the choir just on Sundays?

Jennifer Hudson: Mmm, if we had a musical outside of that—like, you may have a certain musical, but maybe not. So, like Mondays would be adult choir rehearsal—well, no, prayer service. Tuesday, adult choir rehearsal, Wednesday, youth choir rehearsal. That's where the kids came in. But then eventually I was in both youth choir and adult choir. So, I had two nights of rehearsal, you know. And then Sunday, you got to sing in morning service, sometimes evening service, and don't have a solo, then you're really on program. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: Do you remember the first solo that you got?

Jennifer Hudson: It was actually an Easter song, “Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone”.

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And I was seven years old. I used to beg for a solo.

Jesse Thorn: You were seven.

Jennifer Hudson: I was seven. But I had stage fright. So, once I got up there—like, I begged the—so, we had the organist and the pianist, and they were the choir directors. And I'm like, “Can I please sing a song?” And they kept giving me a run around.

“You go to the organist.”

Then I go to the organist. “You go to the pianist.”

Then you go to the choir director. And I'm like, “Can I sing a song?”

So, they finally gave me a solo, and it was “Must Jesus Bare the Cross Alone”. And I was seven years old, and I got up and sang. And I forgot the words. And the congregation had to help me out with my song. So, that was the start of my career. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: Did you have other singing in your family? I know that you have a sister who was not a singer.

Jennifer Hudson: Julia is not a singer, no.

Jesse Thorn: Was your mother a singer?

Jennifer Hudson: My mother was a singer. My grandmother was the singer of the church. So, she led over 100 solos in the church choir. So, I grew up—as they say—a lap baby in the choir, staying on her lap or my godmother's lap or my mother's lap, listening to them sing. And I remember my grandmother used to sing this song, “What Kind of Man Is This?”, and she used to be real dramatic and make all these faces.

And as kids, we would sit and laugh. Like, “Ha-ha! Look at Grandma's face while she's singing!”

So—and then she would take my brother, my sister, and I and rehearse us on weekdays and teach us songs. And after a while, she's like, “Okay, Jason and Julia, you sit down. Jennifer, you come here.” And then that's when she took me under her wing and, you know, started teaching me more songs. And then I started to, I guess, step into singing solos in a church choir.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have a favorite song to sing when you were a kid, in church?

Jennifer Hudson: My favorite Christmas song was “O, Holy Night”.

Music: “O, Holy Night” from the album *The Gift of Love* by Jennifer Hudson.

O, holy night

The stars are brightly shining

It is the night of our dear Savior's birth

Lonely the world, in sin and error pining

(Music fades out.)

Jennifer Hudson: I used to love hearing that, during the holidays. And then—I mean, there was so many.

“His Eye is on the Sparrow”, “Because He Lives”, “Precious Lord”. “Amazing Grace” was super long back then for a kid. We used to be like, “How long is this song?” (*Laughs.*)

I've grown to have a bigger appreciation for it.

Jesse Thorn: You forget that it has additional verses.

Jennifer Hudson: It does! And we used to sing every single verse, long and drawn out. The kids, we didn't love that part. Like, “(Sighing.) Oh god, how long is ‘Amazing Grace’ gonna last?”

Jesse Thorn: What was the Christmas celebration like at your home, in your family? Who was there?

Jennifer Hudson: Everyone, it felt like. You know, let's see. We live on the south side, and some of my family live on the north side. And we would interchange the years. So, they come to us Thanksgiving to the south side, and we'll go to them for Christmas Eve on the north side.

Jesse Thorn: And how many people lived at your house full time?

Jennifer Hudson: At our house, it was my mom, my brother, my sister—that's three of us—and then myself, my grandmother, and my grandfather. So, we were all together. And my mother and my grandmother would do all the good cooking. Just the smell of the cooking is a sign of the holidays, you know? And then setting up the China that only came out for the special guests or the special occasions, which I assigned myself to do that job. And seeing—you know, getting ready for all the family to come from the north side to come to the house, things like that. And we would swap years. So, sometimes it was our Christmas for them to come and for us to host, you know.

To hear my grandmother sing those songs in the kitchen, it was a service all by itself. I mean, she would have a whole program in the kitchen alone. And then she used to have the heat hole, where the heat would come up out of the floor, you know, through the vents, right? Which I used to love to sit in her rocking chair by the fireplace, and then the Christmas tree would be lit. We would get to decorate it, you know, all of those things.

Jesse Thorn: You had family that lived at home, and I read—and if there hadn't been follow up questions in the interview that I read, I would have thought it was a goof or hyperbole that your father, who didn't live with you when you were a child, had 27 children, including you.

(Jennifer laughs and confirms.)

So, how, A) did you know that when you were a kid?

Jennifer Hudson: I knew we had other siblings, but I didn't—well, no, 'cause I'm like if not the baby, one of the babies of at 27.

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But I knew I had older siblings, and he would bring some of them on before us to meet. And I remember them being really tall. Like, cause I was a little, little kid. And it was like, “Who are these tall people?”

And it's like, "These are some of your siblings."

And that was in passing every now and then, I would see a few of them. And it wasn't until I was 16 where I was like, "I gonna to go find all my siblings, because I love family." And I was like—my dream was to go find all my siblings and then have the biggest holiday table where we all could sit around it and have a holiday dinner.

Jesse Thorn: My wife's family is, or was, Catholic. And just culturally, just big families, especially on my wife's mother's side. And they would have an annual Christmas party at my wife's grandparents' house with all of my wife's cousins and her aunts and uncles. And just that wide of people would be like 50. And to me, as an—I was my mother's only child, and I had two much younger half-siblings on my father's side, and my cousins didn't live in the same place I lived. So, to me, when I was 18 and went over to my wife's grandparents' house, completely overwhelming.

And you could do that just with your siblings! You don't have to go to cousins.

Jennifer Hudson: But see, on my mom's side—

Jesse Thorn: You have a full-scale family reunion with name tags, just for your siblings.

Jennifer Hudson: Yeah! (*Laughs.*) Yeah, we could. But the thing is, on my mother's side of the family, we have a huuuge family as well. My mom only had three kids, of course. But like my grandmother and my grandfather, they had like 11 siblings amongst them each, right? And we—as big as our family is, we're all still very close. So, like that side alone is huge. On my mother's side of the family.

So, I'm used to a lot of family.

Jesse Thorn: Now, on my notes, there was a time—I keep notes for things I might forget to ask about. Like, I know I'm gonna remember to ask you about what your Christmases were like as a child. You have a Christmas record out; that's not a problem. But I put things on here that I might forget. And for a while, it just said, "26 siblings" and "goat named Prancer", because I absolutely didn't want to leave this room—

Jennifer Hudson: You have interesting, random notes!

Jesse Thorn: I didn't want to leave this room without addressing your late goat, Prancer. So, what were the circumstances of you—first of all, you had a goat named Prancer.

Jennifer Hudson: Yes, I did.

Jesse Thorn: How did you acquire this goat?

Jennifer Hudson: Well, I worked on the TV show called *The Voice*. And I had—

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) That's right. That was a crew gift one year, right? Everybody got a goat.

Jennifer Hudson: It was! It really was!

Jesse Thorn: With *The Voice* logo on the side.

Jennifer Hudson: You know what, might as well. But listen, I was going to work one day, and I had my son and my great nephew—who comes from my father's side of the family—Yeye, with me. And we were on our way to the show, and they said, “How much does it cost to buy a goat?”

And I was like, “I don't know!” I was like, “This is a random question.”

Jesse Thorn: You're like, “Grownups know a lot of things, honey. But...” (*Laughs.*)

Jennifer Hudson: How random is that? So, then I was like, “You know what? I know somebody who will know. When we get to work, why don't you ask Blake?” (*Chuckles.*)

So, they apparently gets there, with no knowledge of mine—

Jesse Thorn: Because he's a country singer, he would know?

Jennifer Hudson: Well, he has a farm. He has all of those things. You know, he would talk about it a lot. And so, I was like, “Blake would know.” So, they go have a full conversation with Blake.

Next thing you know, I'm in the middle of shooting and Blake is like, “You like a goat? What about a pygmy goat?”

And I'm like, “Yeah, okay, whatever. Like, whatever.”

Anyway, turns out him and the boys came up with the big, bright idea that he was going to send them a goat. So, it's Christmas time. We're in Chicago. Blake sends them a goat on a private jet with a little bow on his head. And I get home, and I'm like, “Here's your goat!” We now have a goat, and the goat does this—you know how they prance up? Which is how he got the name Prancer. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: So, it's a pygmy goat?

Jennifer Hudson: It's a pygmy goat, yes. Ohhh, he was—oh my god, the best. I used to sit at the bus stop with Prancer and wait for my kid to get off the bus. He loved Frito chips.

Jesse Thorn: Wait, did he have like a leash?

Jennifer Hudson: Oh no, Prancer pranced around. Like, he was very smart. Very smart. Like, he would open the drawer, pick out his favorite chips—which was Frito chips. We would sit on the bus stop, and the kids would pull up on the bus like, “There’s the goat, there’s the goat!” And he would sit there and eat his chips.

Jesse Thorn: He would like a corn chip, not a potato chip.

Jennifer Hudson: Yeah, a little corn chip. He loved corn chips. Then I would let him outside to use the bathroom with the dogs. But to a goat, grass is food, not somewhere to use it.

Jesse Thorn: So, wait—so the other, wait—(*struggling for words*) okay...

[00:20:00]

Jennifer Hudson: (*Cackling.*) Welcome to my life.

Jesse Thorn: I’m really excited about this, Jennifer Hudson. I’m so excited to be talking to you about this goat.

So, the pygmy goat, which is—what are we talking about? 40/50 pounds?

Jennifer Hudson: Yes, about. Mm-hm.

Jesse Thorn: He’d be in—Prancer, he’d be in your house.

Jennifer Hudson: Yes, and Blake said, “You’re more hillbilly than me that you have this goat in the house.” Prancer was my buddy. That was—oh my goodness, we had—that was—oh my god, I love Prancer.

Jesse Thorn: You’ve been doing daytime television for the last few years. What have you had to learn to do the show effectively and successfully? Because there’s a—look, a lot of very charismatic celebrities have hosted daytime talk shows unsuccessfully. So, what have you had to get right? What have you had to add to your toolbox to do this?

Jennifer Hudson: That is a great question and a great observation. That is so true. I’m still learning. It is the newest thing to me ever. Like, with singing, I’m used to singing. Acting was new as well, but like to walk in this space with no context, no anything? You know? But the biggest thing was like be yourself. You know what I mean?

And when I get to sit with other hosts, I always ask, “Give me some advice.” Or I’m always—I’m observing you and learning from you as we go along. You know what I mean?

And they always say, “Yake sure you’re you.” You know? And I’ve been able to learn as I go along. I feel far more comfortable at this point, but it takes a lot of just being, to me, bare. And I always tell my audience, “You will always see me try.” I don’t mind being open or vulnerable or people seeing you figure it out. But I feel those things are relatable. And I feel

like the most important thing in this is to be human. And why it's so crucial to be yourself is because then how else would you relate to people? And then if you're looking at other people, then you're not being you. You know what I mean?

So, it's like—that's probably the start of the process of learning this space. But again, I'm still learning as I go.

Jesse Thorn: Your show features a lot of, you know, quote/unquote “regular people”—kids, non-celebrities as well as celebrities.

Jennifer Hudson: Human interest, uh-huh.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, human interest. And I wonder how it's different talking to a person who has some sort of unusual talent or life experience but isn't a celebrity, or is a child and not a celebrity, versus when it's—you know—Jennifer Lopez or whatever sitting across the table from you.

Jennifer Hudson: Well, first of all, when anyone sits in that chair, all I see is the human. That is the most fascinating thing. Like, the energy you're met with once whoever sits in that chair, it's like, wow. You could imagine them to be one way or think—be briefed for them to be another way, but once they sit in that chair, it's an interesting thing that's happening, a connection. But the number one thing I'm looking for is your person and your human, and whatever the experience they're having, I want to make sure it's a pleasant one. I like to call it the happy place at the show.

You know, and everyone walks away like, “Man, this was a great experience! I had a good time.” You know what I mean? Where they feel okay to be however they are. What they are. If they're happy, if they're—whatever they're feeling. Like, I said, I've experienced the highs of the highs, the lowest of the lows, and everything in between. So, I can pretty much understand, no matter what sits beside me, I can ride with you, you know? If you lost someone, if you are succeeding in something—I mean, all types of things. It's like, if no one else is cheering you on, I'm here, you know? Or, if you feel bad yourself, I understand.

Jesse Thorn: What was the hardest thing when you started hosting a TV show?

(Jennifer “oof”s.)

And it could be even something concrete, you know? It could be getting a microphone put on you or whatever, you know?

Jennifer Hudson: You know what? Actually, that's a part of it. Knowing the difference of the mics, because I'm a singer first. So, when the handheld is put in my hand, I'm like, “Am I supposed to be singing? Or wait—” That that still confuses me.

Jesse Thorn: Do you have the instinct to adjust the distance from your mouth of the microphone like you would if you were singing?

Jennifer Hudson: Yeah! All of that is odd. Yeah. It's different. Because it triggers me to say, "I want to sing. Okay. What do I do with this? Wait, how do I use this?" That was confusing.

And then another thing is learning the communication with the audience as a talk show host versus a singer. If I'm singing, and I hit a note, people clap. Or if you're talking, I'm like, "Why are they so quiet? This is odd. Oh, they're listening!" You know, it's a different type of communication, which made it awkward for me, you know?

And I have never—I love talking to people just every day, but public speaking was one of my biggest fears.

Jesse Thorn: Did you call someone? I mean, did you call Oprah or Tamron Hall or Ellen DeGeneres or David Letterman?

[00:25:00]

Jennifer Hudson: (*Laughs.*) No, I didn't. But you know, to me, they are there. Yes, Oprah is present and somewhat in my life, and different ones. But it's like when it comes to them, I kind of look at it like a character, because I'm an actress too. So, it's like, okay, hmm. If I was playing Oprah... or what is it like to be a host, if I was portraying this as a role?

So, in that way, I would look to them as well. But the most important reason and thing in this whole thing is be yourself. That's why I wanted to do it, because I feel like people's gonna—you've had the chance to know me as a singer and as an actress, but what about the person? So, it was important to me to just simply be me.

Jesse Thorn: When you have a gift as extraordinary as your singing gift is—

Jennifer Hudson: Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: You're welcome. And I mean it, of course. When you have a gift that extraordinary, is it hard to do other stuff at which you might not be that extraordinary? Was it hard for you to put yourself forward as an actor or as a television host or in any of these other jobs when you know there's no way that you can be the Jennifer Hudson of television hosting, even if you are a great television host. (*Chuckles.*)

Jennifer Hudson: Well, that's where the saying "you will always see me try" come from. You know, it's just like—just because I tried it, I'm three seasons in! You see what I'm saying? Or it kind of frees you of the pressures, you know, to be like, "Okay, don't expect it to be singing." And it's like, well, I'm a singer first. Or even in talk show space.

And it's like, when I started out, I'm like, "I'm not a host. I'm a human." You know what I mean? That's what I came here to be and to relate to yours. So, it's like, when you know your own personal goal with it, whatever it is, that's what I focus on.

Jesse Thorn: I want to ask you almost like the opposite question of that. Which is: you have such an extraordinary musical gift, like your instrument is so extraordinary.

Jennifer Hudson: Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have to learn not to use all of it when you are singing? Like, did you have to learn that just because you can sing anything doesn't mean you should sing everything? You know what I mean?

Jennifer Hudson: I don't think I've learned that.

(They laugh.)

I'm still learning that! But I love music. I'm a music lover first before an artist. So, you're going to see me try all types of things. And the skill that is on, everybody's watching. So, it's like there's going to be some people that's like, "Uh, uh. You shouldn't do that." You know what I mean? Or "Mm, I don't think that's for you," in every form.

But it ain't about them! It's about my journey and what I want to do and grow in. And so, I don't base it off of those standards of like what I should and shouldn't be doing, because I don't believe in limits at all.

Jesse Thorn: What about leaving aside like the question of repertoire—right?—like, I've seen you sing classical as extraordinarily as I've seen you sing pop music, as R& B and gospel, right? But leaving that question aside, you've got this virtuosity that is at the top level of virtuosity with—you know, in pop music, your Mariah Careys and Whitney Houstons. You got all of the virtuosity, right?

Jennifer Hudson: Love them.

Jesse Thorn: So, could sing any—you know, the grandest, most ridiculous run you ever wanted at the end of every line of every song, right? So, how do you remind yourself that you're making choices rather than just going to the end of the line, going to 12 out of 10 every time?

Jennifer Hudson: Well, respecting the base, the premise of whatever I'm singing. That's most important. Like, okay, if you learn the base of it, then you could take your liberties here and there. But always respect the base. If it's gospel, respect the base of it. If it's classical, respect the base of it.

Which brings me back to the holiday album, because that's what it represents. All the different styles within me.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Jennifer Hudson, I'm so grateful for your time. And thank you so much for making the time to come in and talk to me.

Jennifer Hudson: Thank you for having me!

Music: “Make it to Christmas” from the album *The Gift of Love* by Jennifer Hudson.

For the ones that love

What I really need is that season to come

Bring all our problems back home and unpack it

Like, pulling old boxes down out of the attic

It ain't always perfect, we know

That's just the way that it goes

I know the year's been rough

And we need this break so much.

From a world so cold we live in

Well, there's a light at the end

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Jesse Thorn: Jennifer Hudson. Her new holiday album, *The Gift of Love*, is out now.

[00:30:00]

Also, did you know that you can catch her on a very special Christmas tour? She has dates on both coasts in Las Vegas and beyond. We'll have links to all of those on the *Bullseye* page at MaximumFun.org. And did you know there is video of this interview? You can watch it on our YouTube page. Just search for *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn. And note the fact that Daniel Speer, our video producer, added holiday decor to our sad little studio.

Music:

... in our matching pajamas

It ain't always perfect, you know

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: We'll continue with more of the *Bullseye* Holiday Spectacular after a quick break, including *Severance*'s Zach Cherry on his favorite holiday special of all time, which is an episode of *Monk* with Tony Shalhoub! Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Promo:

Music: Playful, exciting synth.

Ellen Weatherford: People say not to judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree.

Christian Weatherford: Which is why here on *Just the Zoo of Us*, we judge them by so much more.

Ellen: We rate animals out of 10 in the categories of effectiveness, ingenuity, and aesthetics, taking into consideration each animal's true strengths—like a pigeon's ability to tell a Monet from a Picasso or a polar bear's ability to play basketball.

Christian: Guest experts like biologists, ecologists, and more join us to share their unique insight into the animal's world.

Ellen: Listen with friends and family of all ages on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get podcasts.

(*Music ends.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations and festive jingle bells.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*, I'm Jesse Thorn. We're celebrating the holidays this week with a bunch of guests doing a bunch of holiday stuff. Next up, we asked Zach Cherry to tell us about the holiday special that he wishes he made. You know Zach Cherry. You might have seen him in *Fallout* or on *Severance*; he's great in those shows. He also had maybe one of the best monologues in all of *Succession*.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Brian (*Succession*): I'm an enigma. You can't pigeonhole me. I'm there, and then I'm gone. I'm intellectually promiscuous but culturally conservative. I work hard, but I do not play hard. I play easy. Why would you play hard?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: But did you know that he is also a host of one of the most beloved reality cooking shows ever? Alongside Casey Wilson, he hosts *The Great American Baking Show*, where—just as they do in the UK—Paul Hollywood and Prue Leith judge various masterfully made cakes, biscuits, and pies. And also, just like in the UK, they bring in celebrities for a round of—well, let's say, less masterful baking.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: Playful, festive holiday music.

Casey Wilson: Bakers, welcome back to the tent for the Big Showstopper Challenge.

Zach Cherry: Now, please just close your eyes for a minute, and try to picture the most iconic holiday scene that you can imagine.

(A fantastical musical stinger.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Anyway. As I said before, we asked Zack Cherry if he had any holiday shows that he loved so much he wishes he'd made them. And he didn't disappoint. Let's get into it.

Zach Cherry: I'm Zach Cherry, and the thing I wish I made is an episode of the show *Monk*, called "Mr. Monk and the Man Who Shot Santa Claus".

Clip:

Music: Ominous backing music.

Speaker: Mr. Monk, what did you do?! *(Beat.)* You shot Santa Claus.

Music: "It's a Jungle Out There" by Randy Newman.

It's a jungle out there

Disorder and confusion everywhere

Zach Cherry: So, if you don't know what *Monk* is, *Monk* is a television show about a detective, Adrian Monk. Monk is played by Tony Shalhoub.

Clip:

Music: Jaunty, mischievous backing music.

Santa: Merry Christmas!

Monk: EXCUSE ME! Mr. Kringle! There are city ordinances against this kind of thing. Littering, trespassing.

Zach Cherry: So, *Monk* is a procedural show in the sense that almost every episode is a crime-of-the-week type thing. There's usually a crime that the police department can't solve. They call in Monk for backup, because he's this brilliant detective. He struggles with compulsions and phobias. Both because of and in spite of his various issues, he's able to see things in a different way. But he's the best detective in the world. He's sort of a Sherlock Holmes type. He works in San Francisco and solves murders.

Clip:

Monk: (*Shuddering.*) I hate Christmas.

Speaker: How can you not like Christmas?

Monk: Yeah, you wouldn't like it either if you hated it as much as I do.

Speaker: But it's so joyful!

Monk: Don't... get me started on joy. When you're older you'll understand. Joy is a trick, a diversion. It doesn't last forever. It breaks your heart every time.

(*A car honking.*)

Damn joy!

[00:35:00]

Speaker: We really gotta get you to Dr. Kroger's.

Zach Cherry: Spoiler alert, the man who shot Santa Claus is Detective Adrian Monk.

Clip:

Speaker: The facts are these: Mr. Kenworthy, in the spirit of Christmas, bought some toys to give away to the neighborhood children. He was on that roof, tossing candy

canes and stuffed animals down to the street. When this man, Adrian Monk—a disgruntled former homicide detective who was kicked off the force on a psychiatric discharge—ran up to the roof and shot Mr. Kenworthy for no apparent reason.

(A door closes.)

Monk: I'm the Grinch. That's what they're calling me.

Zach Cherry: I would say in most episodes of *Monk*, you do know who did the crime, and the fun is kind of figuring out what happened. This one's a little different in that, you as a viewer, by season six, you know Monk in the right. You know Monk didn't have a moment where he just shot Santa Claus for no good reason. *(Chuckles.)* So, it's more about watching him kind of prove that to the rest of the world, then figuring out why this Santa Claus attacked him in the beginning.

Clip:

Child: Why'd you do it, mister? Why'd you shoot Santa Claus?

Speaker: Oh, no, no, no, sweetie. It wasn't like that. Uh...

Monk: The grand jury is about to convene. Do you know what a grand jury is?

Zach Cherry: One thing that's great about *Monk* is it is like actually really, really funny. Tony Shalhoub gives one of the best comedic performances I've ever seen throughout the seasons of the show. And it's this really special blend of truly hilarious comedy and then also genuine, dark pathos and dealing with his various traumas and his grief and his struggle to just exist in a world that terrifies him.

Clip:

(Restless crowd sounds.)

Santa: Oh, I'm just trying to spread a little joy, a little Christmas cheer! This guy's nuts! You're nuts!

Speaker: Shut this guy up! Take him away!

Zach Cherry: So, Santa Claus, he's alive. You see him wheeled out, so you're not worried if he's dead. The suspense comes from why did Monk do this? Because part of the tension is, yeah, seeing how he's going to explain it. And part of the fun of it is, Monk is—he's really good at solving crimes, but he's really bad at interacting with people. And so, now he has to basically do like a PR push to explain like, “Hey, I'm not this guy you think I am. I'm not the Grinch. I'm a detective, and I was trying to do something correct here.”

And so, in this episode, he has to go on the news and basically try to pretend to like Christmas, because there's this PR push happening that's painting him as the Grinch.

Clip:

Monk: Merry Christmas.

Speaker: You can stop saying that now. Mr. Kenworthy said you went up to that roof and just started shooting.

Monk: That's not what happened.

Speaker: Why don't you tell us your side of the story?

Monk: Thank you. Well, first off, I want to say to any children watching, I did not shoot Santa Claus. That man was not Santa Claus. There's no such thing as Santa Claus.

Speaker 2: Oh no, that can't be good.

Zach Cherry: How the mystery resolves is you sort of—and this is very common of *Monk*—there's a separate crime where a woman is killed. They end up realizing that she worked at a museum where the most expensive diamond in the world was on display. And this is typical of many, many detective shows. I think Sherlock Holmes kind of operates like this. They'll hear something, and they'll go, “Ah.”

When Monk was up on the roof, they found a bunch of toys, and they found a single walkie talkie. Later on in a therapy session—which is another thing I love about *Monk*; he's in therapy. It's a wonderful thing to see a fella like Monk be vulnerable enough to admit that he needs some help. He's in therapy almost every episode. He's in therapy, and he's talking about why he hates Christmas so much.

Clip:

Monk: (*Dejectedly.*) Pick a year.

Therapist: Oh, 1964.

Monk: '64, good choice. 1964. Mom was sick. Dad was... Dad was Dad. Ambrose locked himself in the basement. He's no fool. Christmas morning, I got one gift. A walkie talkie.

Therapist: Oh, well, those can be fun. I had a pair of those.

Monk: Not a pair. Dad said I only needed one, because I didn't have any friends.

Zach Cherry: It's kind of heartbreaking. It's also hilarious. It's that perfect blend of *Monk*, of sadness and humor. So, then in present day, Monk realizes, oh, why would anyone have one walkie talkie? That's not a good gift. That's only a gift my terrible father would give.

So, he realizes the guy was a lookout, and it was all a distraction.

Clip:

Children's Choir: *On a cold winter's night that was so deep...*

Monk: Stop that man! Stop him! That guy's not really Santa Claus!

Speaker: Well, of course he isn't, how old are you?

(A commotion as Monk slams into the Santa while the choir keeps singing.)

[00:40:00]

Zach Cherry: As you might expect, it ends with a rollicking fistfight between Monk and Santa Claus, in front of numerous children in a little Christmas village.

Clip:

(Punching sounds.)

Speaker 1: Should we do something?

Speaker 2: If you stop this fight, you're fired.

(More fighting.)

Zach Cherry: In the episode, his assistant—Natalie—and her daughter, they've sort of become his surrogate family. There's a moment in the episode where they put up all these decorations and Christmas trees, because Monk is going to be interviewed on the news. At the end of the episode, he's ready to pack it all up.

Clip:

Music: Orchestral Christmas music.

Monk: The boxes are empty.

Natalie: I know!

Monk: The stockings are empty. It's all pretend, remember? We just put it up for that stupid TV interview.

Natalie: But it looks real.

Julie: And it feels real. And if you're feeling something, then it's real!

Monk: I don't feel anything.

Natalie: I know, because you're not relaxing. Let's just stop sitting out—

Monk: No. (*Stammering.*)

Natalie: Here.

Monk: What are you doing?

Natalie: Taking off your shoes. Don't be scared. It's Christmas Eve. Come on.

Zach Cherry: He still doesn't really like joy. But then he relaxes into it a little bit, and he is able to have a pleasant moment, just sort of closing his eyes with his new kind of loved ones. And that is another thing that I do appreciate about *Monk*, which is—you know, he has a tough life; he's scared of so many things. It's really hard for him to even like leave his apartment when the series starts. He struggles.

But you do get to see these little moments of growth from him. You get to see him sort of expand his world. And I think that is something that I relate to and aspire to. To push the curmudgeon borders slightly, inch by inch, each year. And so, you get to see that in this episode.

Clip:

Music: Relaxed synth.

Natalie: How does it feel being a hero?

Monk: He's a very bad Santa. Very, bad—bad, bad, bad Santa.

Natalie: Yes, we know that now.

Monk: Bad, bad. Bad, bad.

Natalie: We're home now. We don't have anything left to say.

Monk: Bad...

Natalie: There he goes. Jerry, get a shot of him. That's a real American hero. That's the man that saved Christmas.

Zach Cherry: I really love *Monk*. It's like my—it's my favorite comfort food show. I really mean it. When I say I wish I made it, I mean I wish I made any of it or all of it. I would inject *Monk* into my veins if I could.

Clip:

Music: Orchestral Christmas music.

Natalie: Merry Christmas, Mr. Monk.

(A camera shutter.)

Jesse Thorn: Zack Cherry on the holiday thing he wishes he made, “Mr. Monk and the Man Who Shot Santa”. You can catch Zach hosting *The Great American Baking Show* on the Roku channel, including their holiday special. And if you want to watch *Monk*—well, you should! It's a great show. You can stream all of it on both Netflix and Peacock right now.

Transition: Thumpy synth with festive jingle bells.

Jesse Thorn: I'm Jesse Thorn. Every now and then on *Bullseye*, we talk to musicians and artists about the song that changed their life. It's a segment called, “The Song That Changed

My Life". And this week, it's a very special holiday edition, featuring one of the greatest R&B bands of all time: Tower of Power.

Music: "What is Hip?" by Tower of Power fades in.

Jesse Thorn: Band leader and saxophone player, Emilio Castillo, formed Tower of Power in 1968. They made hit after hit after hit, always with that legendary horn section.

Music:

So you wanna jump out your trick bag

Ease on into a hip bag

But you ain't just exactly sure what's hip

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: And today, over 55 years later, the band is still going strong. Emilio and the gang just released *It's Christmas*. It's an album of Christmas classics arranged as only Tower of Power can do it.

Music: "Silver Bell" from the album *It's Christmas* by Tower of Power.

City sidewalks, busy sidewalks

Dressed in holiday style

In the air, there's a feeling of Christmas

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: When we asked Emilio for a Christmas song that changed his life, he had an easy time naming one. It's one of the best ever recorded.

Here's Emilio Castillo.

Emilio Castillo: Alright. My name is Emilio Castillo. I'm the bandleader for a group called Tower of Power. We're a rhythm and blues soul band, been together since 1968. So, I'm in my 57th year.

Music: "This Time It's Real" from the album *Tower of Power* by Tower of Power fades in.

[00:45:00]

Emilio Castillo: I play the tenor saxophone in the band, but I'm a second tenor player. Not a great player. I just play parts. I sing background in the band, but I write the songs and produce the records.

Music:

She was the one who could calm my heart

I know someday that it could happen in a special way

(Music fades out.)

Emilio Castillo: When the crowd comes to see Tower of Power, they know what they're gonna get. A lot of them have been there many times. A lot of them, they're bringing people that have never seen us but have heard us. So, they know the music. They know the feel of the music. They know it's an exciting live show. But when they come for the Christmas show, all of the sudden we're playing all this other stuff. It's very musical. It's very different. It's exciting, you know? And so, we get a really good reception from it.

Music: Bright, foot-tapping brass music.

Emilio Castillo: I was playing a gig in Los Angeles with a background singer that I sort of brought in the business. Her name is Marilyn Scott, and we were doing Christmas shows. Every year we would do a Christmas show. And one year she brings in this song, "This Christmas" by Donny Hathaway.

Music: "This Christmas" as performed by Marilyn Scott.

How much fun it's gonna be together

This Christmas

The fireside is blazing bright.

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Emilio Castillo: And I had heard it on the radio, and I liked it. But I never really was getting that much into it. But when we did it live with her in the nightclub in Pasadena, I was like, "Wow! This song is really cool!" You know?

Music:

For me, yeah

(Music fades out.)

Emilio Castillo: For me, Christmas music just sets the mood for the holidays. So, we start right after Thanksgiving. We play a playlist of Christmas music—Nat King Cole, one of our favorites, you know.

Music: “This Christmas” from the album *Someday We’ll Be Free* by Donny Hathaway.

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire

(Music fades out.)

Emilio Castillo: But the Christmas song that really changed my life is Donny Hathaway's “This Christmas”.

Music:

This Christmas

And as we trim the tree

How much fun it's gonna be

Together

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Emilio Castillo: And in particular, there was this low horn line that came in after the chorus. And being a musician, that caught my ear.

Music:

We're caroling through the night

And this Christmas

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Emilio Castillo: There it is. That’s that low horn line. *(Chuckles.)*

And this part, this horn part—

(The volume increases to highlight the bouncy brass section.)

Ba-da-da, ba-da. I never really liked the way they did that. I know they did it to sound Christmassy, and I get that. What he did was he just dropped the beat. It’s a two-bar phrase.

Da-da-da, da-da, da da-da, da-da-da. And that was always kind of weird to me, but I get it. You know, he was just trying to mess with the time. And far be it from me to criticize him for that, 'cause he had a solid hit there.

But you know, that might be why I didn't pay as much attention to it until I played it live at that club.

Music:

Caroling the night

And this Christmas

Will be

A very special Christmas

For me, yeah

Shake a hand, shake a hand now

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Emilio Castillo: And of course, his voice. It's just so soulful. Before I heard that song and really got into it, I never thought of Christmas songs as soulful. You know, R&B. And I believe once he did that song, many people released other Christmas music that is soulful. And I believe Donny Hathaway started that. And what really just sort of got my attention.

Music:

The fireside is blazing bright

We're caroling through the night

And this Christmas

(Music continues und the dialogue.)

Emilio Castillo: Before that, it was like—you know, yeah, there's a lot of Christmas songs. And I like them, because it's holiday music, and I enjoy that. But when I did it live, and I was doing soul music, and it had that low horn lick, (*chuckling.*) you know. I was like, yeah, this is really cool.

Music:

Shake a hand, shake a hand now

Wish your brother Merry Christmas

(Music continues under the dialogue.)

Emilio Castillo: And so, I just really attach myself to that song, and every holiday I listen to it a lot.

Just a soulful Christmas song, and I love it.

[00:50:00]

Jesse Thorn: Tower of Power's Emilio Castillo on the holiday song that changed his life, "This Christmas", by Donny Hathaway. It is a good choice, because that is the best Christmas song ever.

More of the *Bullseye* Holiday Spectacular is still to come. Don't put those sleigh bells away just yet. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(Music fades out.)

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Promo:

Ella Hubber: Alright, we're over 70 episodes into our show, *Let's Learn Everything*. So, let's do a quick progress check. Have we learned about quantum physics?

Tom Lum: Yes, episode 59.

(Pencil scratching.)

Ella: We haven't learned about the history of gossip yet, have we?

Caroline Roper: Yes, we have! Same episode, actually.

Ella: Have we talked to Tom Scott about his love of roller coasters?

Caroline & Tom: *(In unison.)* Episode 64.

Ella: So, how close are we to learning everything?

Caroline: Bad news. We still haven't learned everything yet.

Ella: Awww!

Tom: WE'RE RUINED!

Music: Playful synth fades in.

Ella: No, no, no! It's good news as well. There is still a lot to learn!

(They cheer.)

I'm Dr. Ella Hubber.

Tom: I'm Regular Tom Lum.

Caroline: I'm Caroline Roper, and on *Let's Learn Everything*, we learn about science and a bit of everything else, too.

Ella: And although we haven't learned everything yet, I've got a pretty good feeling about this next episode.

Tom: Join us every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with festive jingle bells.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We've got one more guest on the *Bullseye* Holiday Spectacular. It is a guest who never disappoints: Judy Greer. Judy is, of course, one of our most beloved character actors. She has appeared in hundreds of movies and television shows. *Halloween*, *The Descendants*, *Arrested Development*, and probably my favorite: *Archer*.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Speaker 1(Archer): Get your freaking hands up.

Cheryl: You're not my supervisorrrr!

(Slamming sound.)

Speaker 2: Shut up. We're gonna go to prison!

Cheryl: No, we're not! Say the right stuff, and they just send you to a mental hospital for ten months.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Now she's starring in a brand-new holiday movie called *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, based on the hit book of the same name. Now, we're going to talk about this movie; we're going to hear some of it. But first I want to let you in on some exciting news. Joining me for this interview is another Judy, Judith Thorn. She's a retired professor at Santa Rosa Junior College, specializing in the humanities. She is an antique collector and dealer, and she is—you may have guessed it—my mom. The holidays are, after all, all about family.

This is her first time on the radio. I think you're going to enjoy it. Anyway, back to the movie.

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever is set in a small, idyllic American town, where each year the church puts on a big, fat Christmas pageant with kids reenacting the birth of Jesus and the three wise men and all of that stuff. This year is set to be the 75th, and there have been some changes. The actors are what a haughty church lady, like the pageant director Mrs. Armstrong, would call ruffians—six siblings from the wrong side of the track.

And the pageant director, Mrs. Armstrong, broke both her legs in a freak accident. So, she's been replaced by Grace Bradley, played by my guest, Judy Greer. Grace decides she's up for the challenge and will take the job as director. In this clip, Grace breaks the news to her family.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Grace (*The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*): I bet you all think this is really funny, but the Christmas pageant is a tradition, and it's important, and I can manage it just fine. In fact! I told Mrs. Armstrong it's going to be the best Christmas pageant ever.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Judy Greer, welcome to *Bullseye*.

Judy Greer: Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: And allow me to introduce, in Oakland, California: my mom, Judy Thorn.

Judy Greer: Two Judes! (*Giggles.*)

Judith Thorn: Yup, two Judes.

Jesse Thorn: Indeed! Thank you, by the way. We can't see this on our YouTube camera, but thank you for wearing celebration shoes to this.

Judy Greer: Oh yeah! Now can I take them off, and—?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, sure.

Judy Greer: Okay. These are my celebration shoes.

Judith Thorn: Let's have a closeup.

Judy Greer: They are sparkly. And I don't know what I was thinking. I should have worn a sparkly top, but sometimes that gets to be a little bit too much.

Jesse Thorn: I found myself wondering if you knitted the top that you are wearing.

Judy Greer: No, but I could.

Jesse Thorn: You could, okay.

Judy Greer: That's fair.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) What is the last thing that you knitted, Judy?

Judy Greer: I'm working on—I have several things going at once right now. But currently I'm knitting—furiously knitting, I would like to add—a hat that is going to be auctioned off at a fundraiser on Saturday. When this airs, it'll have been a long time ago. (*Laughs.*) A fundraiser for a dog rescue I work with.

Jesse Thorn: Aww. Is it a human hat or a dog hat?

Judy Greer: It's a human hat. Judy Thorn, I'm a knitter—clearly; now you know. I'm coming out here as a knitter.

[00:55:00]

Judith Thorn: I can't say that.

Judy Greer: (*Laughs.*) You can't stand knitting?

Judith Thorn: I can knit, but I wouldn't count it.

Judy Greer: (*Laughs.*) I started so long ago, and I feel like if I was to learn it today, I don't think it would stick.

Judith Thorn: So, talk about the hat, please.

Judy Greer: Well, the hat is going to be, when I finish it—it's teal, because the dog rescue, which is called Wags and Walks; it's a local Los Angeles rescue. Actually, they have one in Nashville too. Anyway, teal is their color on the website. And so, I'm knitting a teal hat for an auction item.

Because I used to allow—I used to do these like Zoom meetings with people. And I have such bad boundaries that I would always give people my phone number and email, and I can't do it anymore. So, until I get better boundaries, and I don't give strangers my contact information, I'm down to just knitting things for auction items at fundraisers.

Jesse Thorn: So, when you say you were giving out your email address and phone number, do you mean to prospective dog adopters?

Judy Greer: Well, to people who've like just auctioned—like, bought an auction item to like meet me.

Jesse Thorn: Ohhh, okay. What is Christmas like at your house?

Judy Greer: It is kind of quiet, because the kids are older. And it's kind of more of like a hangout, chill. Like, I think last year I made lasagna, and we watched movies, and listened to records, and... It's kind of like an evolution Christmas. Like, it's always changing in our house. I feel like. Yeah, it's pretty mellow. But mostly because the kids are older.

Jesse Thorn: Did they—when they were younger or even still—did they alternate between their parents' houses? Was it like somebody gets Christmas Eve, somebody gets Christmas Day? Or?

Judy Greer: It was always that they would spend the night at their mom's house on Christmas Eve and then open presents with her on Christmas morning and then come to our house for like presents and late lunch/early dinner, kind of Christmasy thing, and then hang out all night.

Jesse Thorn: That is kind of the more relaxed part of the Christmas.

Judy Greer: Yeah. It's nice! And it was nice when they were little, 'cause we didn't have to get up at like five in the morning, because they were at their mom's house. So, we would like get them after. I mean, the bad part was that they had already opened a round of presents. So, like our presents were like the second round of presents—which sometimes stressful, because they're like, you know, kids. So, they're like, “Oh, cool, another sweater or whatever...”

And then being like a stepparent, I would really want to make them awesome. But then I learned that, you know, it didn't—it's not really about the gifts, is it?

Jesse Thorn: My mom probably remembers this, but one of my best friends in childhood, Evan Larson—

Judith Thorn: (*Cutting in.*) Socks! Ugh.

(*They laugh.*)

SOCKS!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, every year his mom, Libby, would go to the Gap and buy him a bunch of colorful socks. And poor Evan—(*laughs*).

Judy Greer: Just what every kid wants!

Jesse Thorn: He would come back to school on January 2nd or whatever and just be like, “Socks again.” (*Laughs.*)

Judy Greer: One year, my husband told—or I told his mom, whose name is also Judy; so many Judys!—I told her— She was like, “I don't know what to get him for Christmas.”

And I was like, “You know, he needs socks. He needs like fancy socks.” I should have said like socks to wear to work, but I said like fancy socks. And she thought I was talking about a brand of socks. And poor Judy, she was searching the internet for Fancy Socks, like the brand Fancy Socks. And she was so upset on Christmas morning when he opened socks that were fancy that he could wear to work and he liked very much, but they just were the wrong brand.

And I was like, “Oh no, these are great. This is exactly what I meant.” And that was—I didn't know she was going to be so literal about it.

Jesse Thorn: What was Christmas like when you were a kid?

Judy Greer: Also pretty chill, because I'm an only child. And so, it was just the three of us. And we would go to mass, because I was raised Catholic—mostly—on Christmas Eve. And then we would wake up on Christmas morning, and we would—usually on Christmas Eve, my dad would make a pizza from scratch, and we would watch *Trains, Planes, and Automobiles*, which is technically a Thanksgiving movie, but I don't know. We always watched it on Christmas Eve. And then Christmas morning presents, and probably like pancakes or waffles or something. And then usually for many, many years, we'd have to like pack up all of our crap in the car and drive four hours to Cleveland to visit my grandma and grandpa. And one year I asked my parents, I was like, “Could we just stay home?”

[01:00:00]

“I just—like, I don't want to pack up everything. I don't want to like open presents and then be like, ‘Okay, let's go! Let's get in the car and drive forever! Like, I want to just hang out

and enjoy the Christmas tree and listen to music.” And anyway. So, then we did. We started staying home.

Jesse Thorn: Were your parents religious? I read that your mom lived in a convent for a time.

Judy Greer: Because she was a nun. Yeah.

(Jesse affirms with a chuckle.)

She wasn't just living in the convent. She married Jesus. In fact, she's also like—well, I like to tease her and say that “You know, my dad's like technically your second husband. I mean, I know that like—like, I know you're always like, ‘He's my only love and blah, blah, blah.’” I'm like, “But you did marry Jesus first. I mean, you did.”

Yes, she was a nun. She was in the convent for eight years—four years of high school leading up to her first marriage to Jesus, and then four years as a nun until she “left”, quote/unquote, the convent. She got asked to leave the convent.

Jesse Thorn: Wow. Really?

(Judy confirms.)

I mean, eight years is a long time.

Judith Thorn: What kind of convent?

Judy Greer: I want to say like Franciscan? Is that one?

Judith Thorn: Oh, Franciscans are good people.

Judy Greer: She says the same thing about the—I think it's Franciscan, but she's always like, “They were the best ones.” I don't know.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughs.)* She just means that the annual field day; they would take all the medals.

Judy Greer: I mean, like were those priests not doing what the other priests were doing? *(Chuckles.)* I don't know. She did have really good stories about the convent. She does not regret it. She says she gave her the best years of her life to God.

But then she went to nursing school, which is what she secretly always wanted to do, and became a nurse and met my dad.

Jesse Thorn: Can I ask how you get kicked out of the convent?

Judy Greer: Uh, yes. The stories I have been told are that—and I say it like that because maybe there's reasons that she hasn't shared with me yet. I'm always open to that, because my mom's like, “No, remember I told you this!”

And I'm like, “You never told me that!”

But anyway. Do you do that, Judy Thorn? Do you change your stories too?

Judith Thorn: I try not to, but I often forget.

(Judy giggles.)

Jesse Thorn: I was about 20 when I found out about the time you got arrested for bank robbery.

Judith Thorn: That was great.

Judy Greer: Wait, what?!

(Jesse laughs.)

Judith Thorn: Jonathan Tuller had hijacked—had robbed an Arlington Trust company. And he had an old vehicle, a Land Cruiser. And I was driving with somebody in a '49 pickup truck, and there was a lot of police hysteria. And we went to jail for this alleged bank robbery. But while we were there, Jonathan Tuller hijacked a plane to Cuba with his partner, and they were there for quite a while. And then when he came back—*(laughs)* I mean, of course we were vindicated, but it was a pain in the neck.

(Jesse laughs.)

Judy Greer: *(Totally floored.)* Oh my god! I feel like that's a little bit better than being a nun!

Judith Thorn: Being a nun's pretty cool too.

Judy Greer: *(Laughing.)* I don't know!

Judith Thorn: It's not a job I'd want, but you stay fed and clothed.

Judy Greer: Yeah, she did, she did. Her mother superior felt like would be happier serving the Lord in a more secular environment. That was what the reasoning was behind asking her to leave. She also had—she was always like giving the other nuns perms or cutting their hair. They thought she was vain. They thought she—there was a parishioner, I guess, that had a pool in the summertime. The parishioner was like, “If you guys want to come swimming, you can come swimming in the pool.” And my mom went out and bought a red bathing suit. And I guess that was a big no-no. And there was just like a lot of little things.

Jesse Thorn: It seems like a bad place to wear your habit.

(They agree with chuckles.)

Judy Greer: Yeah. Yeah! I mean, like what are they supposed to wear in the pool? My mom was like, “Well, I had to get a bathing suit. And I like the color red.”

I'm like, okay, okay. *(Laughs.)* Maybe their underwear? I don't know.

Judith Thorn: No, probably like a gray.

Judy Greer: Yeah, a gray or—

Judith Thorn: A mouse-gray bathing suit.

Judy Greer: Shorts and a t-shirt. I don't know. I don't know!

Judith Thorn: A full-body suit.

Judy Greer: Something. I could have knit her something if I would have known.

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that I liked the most about this movie is I think a lot of times something about Christmas is either religious or secular, right? It's either—it either stars Kirk Cameron, or Jesus is never mentioned, right?

(Judy agrees.)

And you know, the point of Christmas for many people is the faith part.

[01:05:00]

But this movie really engages with that in a way that doesn't ignore the kind of thorny bits of it—especially for like a silly family comedy. *(Chuckling.)* You know what I mean?

Judith Thorn: Well, the kids.

Judy Greer: Yeah! I mean, at its heart—yeah. The kids.

Judith Thorn: Yeah, the children, when they come in. I mean, I absolutely loved it. My favorite students were the ones who'd say, “Do you get to cut off Herod's head?”

Jesse Thorn: Oh my gosh. I know.

Judith Thorn: I mean, this whole opening of what really people think about what's going on. The people that already know the plot just roll their eyes and act ridiculous, right?

And then the kids who are just entering into this for the first time—I mean, I thought the library was a little peculiar. “Give me all the books you got on Herod.” But that's the wonderful part, because they get that moment when they get—they see something new that's engaging.

And then I love that when Mary comes home and comes back in a Quaker lace tablecloth from her house, because that's what she really thought Mary would wear—not some blue cloth, which all pictures of Jesus's mother have her in. I love those kids, and I love the little angel.

Judy Greer: Oh my gosh, I know. She's so cute.

Judith Thorn: Reminded me of Jesse's youngest child.

(Jesse chuckles.)

Judy Greer: She's a gymnast! Yeah, it was still scary when she was standing really high up on that thing at the end. Not to spoil.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. The angel of the Lord does take quite a leap.

Judy Greer: Yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I love that you said that, because when you hear a story over and over and over for your whole life, like the Nativity story—like, it is fun to listen to it through the eyes of these kids, the Herdmans, in the movie. Because you're like, “Oh yeah, it is weird. Like, why would she have a fancy costume? Like, like how—like, what happened to the king?” Like, you're like, “Oh right!” All these questions that you don't think to ask, because it's just burned in your brain.

(Judith agrees.)

And I found it to be really refreshing. And I thought like—there is a movie out there, and I think this is the one, that can be for everyone. It can be for people who love God and go to church and have a real faith. And it's for families that just love Christmas. And it's like silly, and it's beautiful, and it's shot so well. And while it is about people welcoming other new people into the church, it's also about people just welcoming people they don't know into their traditions. And I think there's like always a place for that.

Jesse Thorn: It must have been exciting to be the star of the movie, as a woman with—

Judy Greer: *(Theatrically.)* Finish your thought!

Jesse Thorn: As a woman with a reputation as America's greatest film costar—

(Judy agrees with a laugh.)

I think it must be nice to be in this role where the sweet, supportive, goofy mom is the center of the film, rather than a tertiary or secondary part of the film.

Judy Greer: Yeah! It was funny working with Pete Holmes, who played my husband. He would have like one line in a scene, and I'm like, "Oh! That's usually me!"

(Jesse laughs.)

"Usually I'm the one that's saying the funny line at the end of the scene!" Or like, *(cheesily)* "Are you sure about that?"

Like, wow! *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: I read an interview where you described it as checking scripts for how many conversations you have on a phone in the kitchen.

Judy Greer: Yeeeah. I know. And this one, I was—well, there was like one sort of montage where I'm on the phone, but yeah. Stars of movies get phone montages. Supporting characters are just in a corner that looks like a kitchen on a fake phone for all their scenes.

Jesse Thorn: And they're just explicating.

Judy Greer: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Like, "I thought you were allergic to strawberries!"

(They laugh.)

I don't have to do that anymore! *(Cackles.)*

Well, actually, that's not true. I do now, but I didn't then! I know, it was fun. It was really fun to be the starr.

Jesse Thorn: Can I tell you something completely superficial that I noticed? It is—

Judy Greer: Do I have food in my teeth?

Jesse Thorn: *(Chuckling.)* No. No, but you shouldn't have eaten those strawberries, because you're getting real—

Judy Greer: Ooh, my throat's closin'!

Jesse Thorn: No, it's you're a brunette in this movie.

(Judy confirms with a laugh.)

I would say 70% of the time, you're blonde on screen. And I had this conversation years ago in a van on my way to a comedy festival (inaudible).

Judy Greer: *(Playfully exasperated.)* Brag, much?

Jesse Thorn: *(Chuckling.)* Yeah, that's right. *(Inaudible)* a shared van.

But in this van with me was the wonderful comic actor, Gillian Jacobs.

Judy Greer: Oh, yes!

Jesse Thorn: And she's also usually a blonde, but she had brown hair in this van. And I said, "Gillian, I've never seen you with brown hair before!"

And what she said to me was, "Oh, yeah, I just got cast in a movie, and the lead is blonde."

[01:10:00]

And I thought, "I don't think that when George Clooney gets cast in a movie that Brad Pitt is in, one of them goes blonde because they're both brunettes."

Judy Greer: Yeah! But women, you're actually only allowed to have one hair color per woman in a movie or TV show, *(intentionally patronizing)* 'cause it's very confusing for the audience.

No, I was a redhead for a really long time.

Judith Thorn: I thought you looked good with red hair.

Judy Greer: Thank you. I did too. I like the red, but it was hard to maintain. And then when I first started dating my husband, I was going to get my hair colored. It was like early in our relationship, actually. And I was like making a full joke when I walked out the door. I'm like, "Hey, I'm going to get my hair colored. Any requests? Hahaha."

And he's like, "I have seen pictures of you as a blonde. Would you ever be blonde again?"

And I was like, "Ew! EW!"

(Jesse laughs.)

And then I go, and I'm like driving to the place, and I'm like, "Should I dye my hair blonde? Like, this guy I'm dating like was—?"

Anyway, I think this probably makes him look like a jerk, and he's so not. But I was like, "I don't know, maybe I'll just like put some highlights in."

And so, eventually, I became a blonde again. But then in this one, Dallas Jenkins—our director—was like, "Well, I think that you should have brown hair."

And I was like, "But my hair is blonde, and it looks really nice blonde."

And he was like, "I just think that Grace should have brown hair." And—

Judith Thorn: Yeah, I think the blonde issue—of course, you know, says bombshell, where brown is kind of mousy. And it didn't—

Judy Greer: And serious.

Judith Thorn: Yeah, because when you show up with that chignon and the blue dress, I've never seen a more dowdy outfit.

(They laugh.)

It's such a mom dress.

Judy Greer: I hope that Maria is not listening to this. I was like, "Yeah, okay, I'll be brown, whatever. It'll be fine."

And then, but I always wondered—like, when I met Dallas's wife, Amanda—who I like very much; she has brown hair. And I was like, "I wonder if like he just thinks like—" You know, he likes ladies with brown hair. I don't know.

Jesse Thorn: Can I ask you a non-Christmas but tangentially holiday-related question?

(Judy confirms.)

You were in multiple of the recent *Halloween* films.

(Judy gasps and confirms.)

What preparation did you have to do for the like full-on slasher movie parts of those movies? The screaming, the making horror faces. Like, the demonstrative parts of it. You know, the like almost ritualized parts of it.

Judy Greer: Yeah! Nothing.

Jesse Thorn: Nothing?

Judy Greer: No.

Jesse Thorn: Do you watch those kinds of movies?

Judy Greer: No.

Jesse Thorn: Okay.

Judy Greer: But I want to! But I'm a scaredy cat. So, I don't. Horror movies freak me out. I'm a really good audience for them, because I do like scream, and like I freak out. I cover my face. Even watching the *Halloween* movies, which I was in, I was still just like, "AAAH!"

But no, I didn't do much preparation. I definitely, once I got—like, in the second one—I am careful, because I record, or used to record—RIP that show—*Archer*. And my character in *Archer* would do a lot of screaming, and we would always record all the screaming stuff last. But the guys, like David Gordon Green would always be like, "Don't yell yet, don't yell yet. And then like this is a yell one." You know? And like, I think I'm not gonna yell, but then I do.

(Jesse laughs.)

I just—it's like, I get actually scared. It's scary. It's also really fun. And like, sometimes just like the adrenaline of like having fun and laughing, it can match the adrenaline of the fear. And so, I just sort of use that, but I don't really prepare for it. I did watch the original *Halloween*.

Jesse Thorn: Were you terrified?

Judy Greer: Yes. But also it was like—like, knowing Jamie, and she was like telling us all these like funny things that were going on. So, then it was kind of like now I see these little things. Like, you can see like the cigarette smoke from John Carpenter's cigarette. And when she was like, "Yeah, they were just like throwing leaves, because they wanted it to look like leaves were falling off the trees." So, if you watch it again and you see just like random leaves, just like a chunk of leaves. Like, those little things which people who are big fans of the franchise probably already knew, but I didn't.

Jesse Thorn: Was it fun to add "scream queen" to your list of career descriptions? Like, you've had "best friend" on lock for 20 years.

Judy Greer: Yeah, everyone can just step aside; that's mine.

Jesse Thorn: But now you're—now scream queen is on the list.

Judy Greer: Yeah! Yeah, it was a really—it was a world I had not mastered yet, or like—

[01:15:00]

I did do a Wes Craven movie years ago, called *Cursed*, which didn't end up being a huge hit. Although horror fans will be like, “Dude, *Cursed*!” Like, okay, I hear you, and thank you. But this was like a whole—this was like a big thing.

So. And the fan base of *Halloween* is—it's never ending. So.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, these movies made hundreds of millions—literal hundreds of millions of dollars. They were monumental films.

Judy Greer: Yeah. I know. And they were really good! Like, I was a little sad that I didn't get to keep my final girl status. And I don't mind being a spoiler, because it's been a long time. But there was—let's see. We were about to start shooting—I guess it was *Halloween Kills*, the second one, and we were going to go and begin shooting it. And David Gordon Green called me and was like, “I need to talk to you about something.”

And I immediately was like, “(Censor beep) off. Just no.”

And he's like, “How do you know?!”

Sorry for swearing. And he's like, “How do you know what I'm going to say?”

I'm like, “I know why you're calling. I just know it.”

And he's like, “Well, someone's got to go, and it can't be Jamie. And it can't be your daughter!”

And I'm like, “Damn it!” I was so bummed!

And he was like, “But don't worry, we're going to make it awesome. It's going to be epic. It's going to be so cool.” And then it was funny; we showed up to shoot the second one in Wilmington, and everyone—he gets—like, David Gordon Green gets like all the same crew and everything. And we all showed up in the beginning, and everyone was like, (*disappointedly*.) “Maaan.”

I'm like, “I know!” But it was okay. I had to be sacrificed.

Jesse Thorn: So, Judy and Mom Judy, my producer Kevin Ferguson tells me that he has prepared a three-question Christmas personality quiz. Kevin, do you want to take it away?

Kevin Ferguson: This quiz claims it will reveal your Christmas personality archetype.

Jesse Thorn: Oh, that's nice.

Judy Greer: I'm excited! I'm excited.

Kevin Ferguson: So, I'm gonna ask questions of all three of you. We have three different tests going, so we're going to get a response for each person.

First question. What's your go-to Christmas song? "Silent Night", "Jingle Bell Rock", "All I Want for Christmas is You", or "Santa Baby"?

(Judith chortles.)

Jesse Thorn: I mean, my go-to Christmas song has been many times established on this show, is "This Christmas" by Donny Hathaway. Not even close.

Judy Greer: Oh yeah. Mines the one from *Peanuts*. That's the best one.

Kevin Ferguson: Not a choice.

Judy Greer: I know! What was the first one again?

Jesse Thorn: Not one of the choices.

Kevin Ferguson: "Silent Night".

Judy Greer: Dark. It's dark, that song. And then we have the Mariah Carey one.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, the Mariah Carey one.

Judy Greer: And then the other one—oh, "Christmas Rock" is stupid. And "Santa Baby" is stupid.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Honestly, I kinda like "Santa Baby". It's pretty retrograde in its content. Thematically, it's problematic. But I think the classic recording is a real charmer. And as much as I love—like, if you ask me, I would say probably the most—like, the "Silent Night"-iest of all. You know, I'll take the hymnal songs first. But like, I'm going to say, "Santa Baby", because every time I hear "Santa Baby", I think, "Oh, right! I really like 'Santa Baby'."

Judy Greer: I might have to go with like the Mariah Carey one. I do like "Silent Night" though. I just think it's kind of like—if I had to hear it over and over and over, I would wanna die.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

Judy Greer: It's also kind of not in like a good range. Like, one of the good things about Christmas carols is that they should be written so that like everyone can sing them. And “Silent Night” gets so high.

Kevin Ferguson: Judith Thorn, what's your choice?

Judith Thorn: I don't really have one. Do I fail?

Jesse Thorn: You have to pick one of those ones. “Silent Night”, “Santa Baby”...

Kevin Ferguson: “Jingle Bell Rock”.

Jesse Thorn: “Jingle Bell Rock”.

Judith Thorn: I hate that one.

Judy Greer: Did I call it “Christmas Rock”?

Jesse Thorn: You did, but I like the idea that that's a genre that you hate.

Judy Greer: (*Laughing.*) Dang it.

Kevin Ferguson: Or “All I Want for Christmas is You”.

Judith Thorn: I'll go for “All I Want for Christmas Is You”.

Judy Greer: The two dudes choose that one.

Kevin Ferguson: What's your favorite part of the Christmas feast? Mashed potatoes, baked ham, classic bread stuffing, or apple pie?

Judith Thorn: Turkey.

(*They laugh.*)

Jesse Thorn: Again, it's not one of the choices. And Judy's movie has a ham in it.

Judy Greer: I know. I don't eat ham!

Judith Thorn: (*Chuckling.*) That's such a great—

Judy Greer: I know, and she uses the ham as Jesus.

Judith Thorn: (*Inaudible*) like, “Take this ham!” Yeah, I loved it.

Judy Greer: Thank you. It was my idea.

Jesse Thorn: Ohhhh!

Judy Greer: (*Singsong.*) No, it wasn't! That's a lie! I'm lying!

I go apple pie.

Judith Thorn: Stuffing.

Judy Greer: Apple pie, but apple pie if my mom makes it.

Jesse Thorn: Oh! I love apple pie. I was ready to go bread stuffing, because I do love a bread stuffing.

[01:20:00]

But apple pie is one of the greatest American foods. Peppermint bark.

Judy Greer: I was torn between mashed potatoes and apple pie, but I'm going apple pie. Because you can also eat it for breakfast.

Kevin Ferguson: Judith, your answer is stuffing, yes?

Judith Thorn: My answer is stuffing, because turkey's not on the list. (*Laughs.*)

Kevin Ferguson: What's your favorite holiday treat? Hot chocolate with marshmallows, gingerbread house, sugar cookies, or peppermint bark?

Judy Greer: Peppermint bark.

Jesse Thorn: Peppermint bark?

Judith Thorn: I hate peppermint bark.

Jesse Thorn: Is it being made at your house?

Judy Greer: It used to be.

Jesse Thorn: How do you make it?

Judy Greer: It's easy. You just melt the chocolate in a double boiler, and you smash up a million peppermint candy canes. And then I would mix the candy canes with the melted chocolate, and then lay it all out on wax paper and let it dry. And then you just smash it up.

Jesse Thorn: I can't have chocolate, because it's a migraine trigger for me. So, I can't choose that, and I can't choose hot chocolate—even though they're both great, and I love them. Sugar cookies—it has to be a real good sugar cookie before it's any good.

Judy Greer: But with all the frosting? And like the frosting is so good! But you can't really, truly—if you make an actual gingerbread house, you can't eat it! 'Cause you have to like—

Jesse Thorn: That's—! Okay, so that's the—again, it's a trap!

Judy Greer: It's a trap question.

Judith Thorn: It's not a trap for people who answer sugar cookies!

Judy Greer: It's not a trap for that. But when we made gingerbread houses growing up, we had to like spray them with chemicals.

Judith Thorn: No, you can't eat them.

Jesse Thorn: I'm going with gingerbread house, but in my formulation of this—

Judy Greer: You could eat it.

Jesse Thorn: There's gingerbread being made that is not architectural in nature.

(They laugh.)

I'm not eating it from the house, and indeed it's not the kind that you make for the house, because it has high tensile strength or whatever. It's an independent gingerbread. My mom makes some wonderful ginger baked goods, so I'm going to go with that, because I do really love that.

Judith Thorn: I love gingerbread.

Judy Greer: Me too.

Kevin Ferguson: Congratulations, everybody.

Jesse, you're the DIY decorator. You love crafting and creating handmade decorations for your home. Your tree is a masterpiece of homemade ornaments and creativity. You know that everything that's homemade contains a little more love.

Jesse Thorn: Kevin, you're describing my worst nightmare, which is to be asked to make something with my hands. *(Laughs.)*

Kevin Ferguson: This quiz doesn't lie.

Jesse Thorn: What about Judy Greer?

Kevin Ferguson: The Judys got the same result. You are both the Christmas enthusiasts. You are obsessed with the holidays.

Judy Greer: Oh.

Judith Thorn: Double dogs.

Kevin Ferguson: Counting down the days to Christmas in July, and you have decorations up before Thanksgiving.

Judy Greer: Huh.

Kevin Ferguson: There's another sentence, but it's cut off. I think that says plenty.

(They chuckle.)

Judy Greer: Okay! Here's what would make me—and I've never really said this out loud before. Here's what would make—I know, it's exciting. Here's what would make me officially obsessed with Christmas. It would only take one thing. If presents were taken off the table.

I am a Thanksgiving girl, because I think it's kind of the same thing as Christmas, but you don't have to give a million presents to everybody. And I find that the present giving adds stress that takes away from my ability to truly enjoy the entire holiday season.

Jesse Thorn: Wow! Mom, you're a present genius.

Judith Thorn: Yeah, I love presents. Presents are my *homme de métier*, but I'm a Thanksgiving girl.

(Judy cheers.)

I love turkey. But it's my birthday, and it's Winston Churchill's birthday. So, we get together at Jesse's house.

Judy Greer: He was a great statesman.

(Jesse laughs.)

Judith Thorn: And that's my special—I mean, I don't have Christmas anymore, because I don't have any kids at home or anything. So—the thing about presents is that when you give them in absentia, there's the—like, you're hopeful that they remind people that you're there still and thinking of them in odd ways, trying to improve their behavior.

Judy Greer: See, I feel like I would rather focus on people's birthdays, because I could focus more specifically on someone each time the birthday came up, instead of this like huge amount gifting—

Judith Thorn: I can understand that.

Judy Greer: —that has to happen that I feel like is kind of forced.

Jesse Thorn: I'd like to focus on a beautiful prime rib.

Judith Thorn: Yeah, Jesse's down for prime ribs.

Jesse Thorn: Love prime rib.

Judy Greer: (*Laughs.*) Is there ribs that aren't prime?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, lesser ribs! I'm talking about a choice rib?

Judy Greer: Not a carnivore over here! So, I don't understand the different ribs.

Jesse Thorn: Fair enough. Fair enough.

Judith Thorn: Short ribs.

Judy Greer: There's short ones, there's long ones. There's prime ones.

Jesse Thorn: Flankin' Ribs.

[01:25:00]

Judy Greer: There's just plain ribbing.

(*They chuckle.*)

Jesse Thorn: Well, Judy Greer, thank you so much for joining my mother and I on *Bullseye*. And happy holidays to you and to your family.

Judy Greer: Super fun! Thank you.

Judith Thorn: Yeah, happy holidays.

Judy Greer: Happy holidays, Judy Thorn.

Transition: Thumpy synth with festive jingle bells.

Jesse Thorn: Judy Greer, folks. You can watch her in *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. It's playing in theaters right now. Special thanks to my mom, Judy Thorn. If you want to support her, here's a plug: if you know somebody in the San Francisco Bay Area, hit up Stuff East Bay in Albany, California, where you can shop from her selection of vintage and antique goods. Her booth is called Emeritus. You can ask for it. She has great stuff.

Transition: Thumpy synth with festive jingle bells and light vocalizations.

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, as well as at Maximum Fun HQ—overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. And today at my house, we're bringing home a Christmas tree.

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 editor is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our pal, Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWSounds.bandcamp.com](https://www.djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries, for providing it to us.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all of our interviews, including the ones you heard this week. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

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

(Music fades out.)