

[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. My next guest, Rachel Bloom, created and starred in one of the funniest and—I'll say—probably one of the silliest TV shows to ever run on a major television network.

Here is a great example of that. Among the many, many musical sequences on the program. This one is Bloom doing a dead-on “Golden Age of musicals” style number. But it isn't about, you know, New York, New York; or *Singing in the Rain*; or whatever. The subject instead is a Los Angeles suburb perhaps most famous for being just west of a different LA suburb that has an In N' Out that's right next to an Ikea.

Music: “West Covina” from the TV show *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

West Covina, California

West Covina, California!

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn:

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend ran for four seasons on the CW. It won a bunch of Emmys, topped a bunch of lists. It's not only hilarious and silly; it was also deeply emotionally moving. A really remarkable achievement. Many of the songs on the show were co-written by Bloom with Adam Schlesinger, who was also the founder of the rock band Fountains of Wayne. The last episode of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* aired in April of 2019. A year later, Schlesinger died of COVID-19.

Bloom faced cataclysmic events in both her personal and professional life. She'd lost a songwriting partner, she'd just become a parent, she had no idea what she was going to do next in her career. And I mean, everywhere else, it is the spring of 2020. I mean, how can you even think about jokey musicals at a time like that? It took her a few years to process all of those cataclysms. Now we have the result: *Death, Let Me Do My Special* is streaming now on Netflix. It features Bloom's signature musical style, and all the songs are great, but she pairs them with a very dark and grounded—and as you are about to hear, very funny—take on loss and grieving.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Rachel Bloom (*Death, Let Me Do My Special*): I don't know! I don't know. What do you say about—what do you say about death? Death is awful. It's awful. And it's sad, and... it's horrifying. And frankly? It's un-American.

(Audience laughter.)

Death is un-American, because in America we are all taught from a very young age to forget the bad and focus on the good. We have this blind optimism that's everywhere in our culture, starting with our national anthem, of course. And I quote, “I put my hands up; they're playing my song, and I know I'm gonna be okay.”

(Laughter.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Rachel Bloom, welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you here.

Rachel Bloom: I'm so happy to be here.

Jesse Thorn: Did you aspire to write a show about cute, fun things initially?

Rachel Bloom: It was gonna be—the show that I was writing was gonna be just like standup going into raunchy songs. And then 2020 happened.

Jesse Thorn: Where were you at when things went sideways?

Rachel Bloom: Well, I guess it depends when you count things going sideways. I would say—the sideways, I would say like March 13th, 2020—when NBA shut down, Tom Hanks got COVID, which is when I was like, “Oh, this pandemic is real,” if you were in Los Angeles.

Jesse Thorn: I remember very vividly I had been invited to speak or appear at a public radio fundraising event in—I want to say Iowa. And I was looking forward to it. I thought it would seem nice, seem like it would be fun. It had been postponed two weeks. And I remember saying to the CEO of our company, Bikram like, “Eh, come on. I would just go. It's not a—you know, this is like bird flu or something. *(Chuckles.)* You know, I'd just go.”

Rachel Bloom: *(Chuckling.)* It's funny, bird flu is quite serious. Isn't it?

Jesse Thorn: It's just very serious for people with bird flu.

Rachel Bloom: Well, I said the same thing. I was confused. I was like, “Isn't it the flu?” Yeah, totally. And then they shut that down. I was nine-and-a-half months pregnant. And right before then—maybe it was right after the NBA shut down. I went to my doctor, and she was like, “I think we want to get you in and out of the hospital as quick as we can. This COVID thing is looking bad. So, we’re going to induce you.”

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And so, I was induced at 39 weeks. Which was fine with me, because I knew I was going to have an epidural anyway. Because if you're induced, they flood your body with Pitocin, which is—I believe it's a chemical oxytocin. And anyway, you go into this intense labor. And so, I was kind of thinking about the pandemic, but I kind of wasn't, because I had other things going on.

And then—I mean, it started with the second my daughter came out, she was purple. And I'd had a normal pregnancy, and no one had told me the NICU was even a possibility. And she went to the NICU. And then that night I found out that Adam, my songwriting partner, not only had COVID—which I didn't know—but he was in a hospital in New York on a ventilator from COVID. So, that was kind of the change from March 13th where I was like, “Oh, the NBA's shutting down” to the night I gave birth was like, “Oh boy.”

Jesse Thorn: When your daughter went into the NICU, could you be there with her?

Rachel Bloom: Yes. My husband was there with her at that point. Only one of us could sit with her at a time, just because of the room in the NICU. But yes. I gave birth early enough in the pandemic that I was never banned from the NICU. It was just that you had to wait in line. ‘Cause as days went by, only one parent was allowed in at a time. And then I could only go once a day after I went home, and she was still in the NICU, which was very jarring and weird. But I could see her, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Had you ever had a disjuncture in your life at that scale?

Rachel Bloom: At that scale, no. No, it was such a, no. I was fortunate enough to never have a shock like that, or a life change is sudden like that. And I would say her being in the NICU and then Adam, a negative life change. I mean, the only life change I could compare it to was when *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* suddenly got ordered to series. But that's—the only thing those two things have in common is suddenness. There's nothing else really in common. *(Chuckles.)*

Jesse Thorn: How long was you ready to be in the hospital?

Rachel Bloom: Five days. So, look, compared to some people? Like, five days is nothing.

Jesse Thorn: That's plenty.

Rachel Bloom: Oh, it's awful. It's awful. Yeah. It's terrible.

Jesse Thorn: How old was your baby when you realized that your songwriting partner Adam Schlesinger was very seriously ill?

Rachel Bloom: Well, I knew the night I gave birth he was ill, which was about a week before he died. So, his health was going up and down. I remember the day before he died, which was like right when my daughter came home from the hospital, there were a couple things happening simultaneously. There was news that he was doing better, because they'd given him—I think it was ivermectin or something—so they thought maybe he was doing better. And then news somehow leaked publicly that he was in a coma and on a ventilator.

Which, he wasn't in a coma. He was—you know, when you're on a ventilator, they intubate you. Which means you're unconscious. So, the thing that was upsetting about that is he was simultaneously, I thought, maybe getting better. But tributes were pouring in like he was dead. So, that was very weird. And then the day after when he died, he'd been—probably had died in the very, very early morning. I found out from our other songwriting partner, Jack, finding out from—I think—*Variety*. Just because it happened so fast, and they hadn't called everyone yet.

And so, Jack told Aline Brosh McKenna, who told my husband. And I've seen the text exchange between them; it's bizarre, where—I talk about it in the special. I was asleep, and my daughter was on the bed, you know, in like her little baby cot thing, and my husband was awake. Because they say like, “Don't let the baby sleep in the baby—!” But I was like, “Just watch her; make sure she doesn't suffocate.” (*Chuckles.*)

And he gets this text saying, “We need to wake Rachel up right now.”

And he was like, “Why?”

And she's like, “Adam died. You need to wake her.” And so, he—you know—wakes me up and tells me.

Jesse Thorn: We've got even more still to come with Rachel Bloom. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

(A phone ringing.)

Music: A cheerful, jaunty tune.

(Indistinct speech from the other line.)

Alex Schmidt: Hey, is this Meredith?

Meredith: This is!

Alex: This is Alex Schmidt from *Secretly Incredibly Fascinating*. I'm calling because you have been named the Maximum Fun member of the month for the month of December.

[00:10:00]

Meredith: Hooray!

Alex: Yeah! As the member of the month, you are gonna get a \$25 gift card to the Maximum Fun store. You get a special member of the month bumper sticker, and you get to use a special parking spot at the Maximum Fun headquarters in Los Angeles, California.

Meredith: (*Chuckles.*) Definitely getting plenty of return on my investment. I have not worked through all the bonus content yet.

Speaker: If you're a Max Fun member, you can become the next Max Fun member of the month. Support us at MaximumFun.org/join.

(*Music fades out.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with comedian, songwriter, singer, television creator Rachel Bloom.

You know, you mentioned the idea of someone finding out about his death from *Variety*. What was it like to have someone so close to you in your life die so publicly?

Rachel Bloom: It was weird.

Jesse Thorn: He was a—I should explain, like he was a—in addition to being your songwriting partner, was famous for being in the band Fountains of Wayne and for writing famous songs for movies.

Rachel Bloom: And he was and remains one of the most high-profile COVID deaths. I mean, he just got (*sensor beeped*). I mean, like he—just like so many people, especially in New York. I mean, it happened all over the world, but like... I mean, I still don't really understand it. But it was weird. I mean, I think the public mourning of him was painful. Before he died, right? 'Cause it was like this is very private; this is a very private medical matter. There were—most people on *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* didn't know he was sick. I wasn't telling everyone. I told Aline and Jack. But I wasn't broadcasting, because it's not my medical business. Right? And then suddenly, his medical business is online.

And then when he dies, it was so much, I gave my phone to my husband the rest of the day. I was getting—look, I was getting so many texts from people, and it was loving. But the

energy it takes to respond to texts—I mean, that's what I've learned about grief is I didn't have the energy to really respond to texts. I know a lot of other people really appreciate it. Whenever someone passes away and I send a text, I always say, “No need to respond, just sending love.” That's all I say.

It made it weird; it made it worse. Well, no. It made it worse in some ways, because everyone knew it once. But because it was COVID, we couldn't be together. Like, the day Adam died, I saw Jack and Aline, holding my daughter up from 20 feet away in my front yard. Because we'd just been in a hospital, so—and there were no at home COVID tests yet. And so, I couldn't—there was no mourning with people. And so, we had like a *Crazy Ex Zoom* thing a couple days later. But Aline, Jack, and I did a couple of interviews. I mean, this is the day after Adam died. We did a couple interviews, and it was hard to do interviews, but also it was kind of the only thing we had? Because we weren't going to a funeral. So, it was nice to talk about him in some way.

Although I, there was this interview I want to say we did for the *AV Club* with this journalist, this wonderful journalist, Allison Shoemaker. And I ran into her; she came to my show in Chicago, and I went, “Oh, whatever happened to that interview?” Because it was the day after Adam died.

And she goes, “Oh, we never printed it.”

I said, “Why?”

She goes, “Yeah, I don't know if you remember, but you were sobbing the whole time. It was just too sad. We didn't—we just—” (*Laughing.*) It was like unprintably sad. Which makes sense! Our friend had just died. And I couldn't stop weeping.

Jesse Thorn: Not just your friend had just—like, you're saying you're exhausted from the grief.

(*Rachel agrees.*)

But you know, I have three children. I remember the state that I was in—and particularly the state that my wife was in, who had also gone through, you know, a monumental health and athletic endeavor in giving birth.

Rachel Bloom: Yes. It was everything. Because also I had some neonatal anxiety. Like, I had anxiety while I was pregnant. My hormones are going crazy, and I'm predisposed to anxiety already. I have a very sensitive hormonal system. I'm on an estrogen patch now, which is a whole other thing. I've been on a hormone journey. But when he died, so much was happening. To this day, I cannot tell you what was—I was also having a bout of my OCD, which was kind of separate from everything but like definitely informing everything.

[00:15:00]

I can't separate—if people say, “Did you have postpartum depression, postpartum anxiety?” I'm like (*stammering*) I don't know. I don't know what I would have been like had it not been COVID, had she not been in the NICU, and had my friend not died a week after she was born. I don't know!

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that I remember, myself, about that time is—I didn't lose anyone to COVID, but I lost a few people very important to me immediately before COVID, whose memorials and stuff were postponed and postponed and my travel for their memorials was postponed and postponed until they were canceled. And eventually, my father died, and my—I couldn't visit him in the hospice, and he never had a service or anything.

Rachel Bloom: Oh, I'm so sorry.

Jesse Thorn: And the thing that I remember about that is you are already so—I was—so lost in all the stuff that was going on in my life that the fact that the world was lost just left me spinning. Like, I wanted to have—and there's other things going on in my life, but like you realize what a ceremony is for. (*Laughs.*) You know what I mean?

Rachel Bloom: (*Stammering.*) That was the thing we felt. You realize why there's a shiva. And look, I don't know if Adam even would have had a shiva. I mean, he was Jewish, but you know. But you start to understand grieving in isolation—it was my—Adam died April 1st; it was my birthday two days later. I had my husband make me a Shabbat dinner and like do the prayers. He was raised more Jewish than I was. I was raised very secular and very not really up on the traditions at all. But because I wanted to almost approximate the feeling of some sort of Shiva for Adam—iit didn't really help, because we were still isolated. But—and also, I'm—you know, I'm an atheist, so. If you're doing these things and not taking God into your heart, I don't—it's a whole other question I have.

But you get it. You get why people are going to come into your house with food and why they're going to help you through this, because the doing it in isolation is like (*sensor beep*) horrible.

Jesse Thorn: The funniest person in my family is my stepmother. And she grew up amidst horrific trauma. She grew up in Belfast, in Northern Ireland.

Rachel Bloom: Oh my god.

Jesse Thorn: And her funny stories are all these stories of horrific trauma. And then she laughs at them, and you're like, “Oh, okay. (*Sheepish insincere laughter.*)” But she is really funny. And I think that was the example probably that led me into comedy.

And when COVID was happening, things were happening in my house, I had lost these family members, I think it's the first time in my life I realized—I was like, “Oh, I don't feel funny. Like, I think it feels dead. Like, if I push the part of my body where making a joke about something is, nothing comes out! Like, uh-oh, is it over for me?” Not like career-wise, but just like this is the defining element of my life. This is my only interest is making a joke

about something bad happening to me. And when I got to the place where that wasn't working, I was like, "Oh no. This—I don't know what to do with this."

Did you ever get there?

Rachel Bloom: I would say that like this was more of a career thing, and like trying to get back to like career funny stuff, I was like, "Oh boy, this is stupid. Like, let's just support the medical workers. No one needs my stand—no one needs my TV show pitches right now. Just please just bang the pots and pans for nurses."

I really escaped in watching funny TV shows and listening to funny podcasts and rereading funny books. Laughing was a thing—I tried to talk about this in the special, but it never really worked. It never really worked organically, but laughing in the midst of this was the one thing that for a moment made me forget about the profound and made me forget about death, and there was a lightness to it. And my husband and I, we were still making jokes.

And I talk about it in the special, but my daughter gets home from the NICU, and he holds her up to the dog, and he says, "Okay, Wiley, this is your one chance to eat her." That's a very dark joke. We just had a kid in the NICU! But like, it was really funny! And it was really sweet.

[00:20:00]

And so, no. I did find myself still craving comedy on a personal level and needing comedy. And the escapism of... honestly, of like making jokes but also entertainment was really important. That whole NBA—the Chicago Bulls documentary came out, thick of COVID, right?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

Rachel Bloom: I don't really care about basketball. I was so invested! (*Laughs.*) I was so invested in Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen, because it was something else to think about.

Jesse Thorn: Do you remember the first funny thing that you wrote for showbusiness that you were proud of?

Rachel Bloom: For showbusiness? Like, that I got paid for?

Jesse Thorn: Like, I'm talking about post your life turning into an insane nightmare.

Rachel Bloom: Oh, post my—yeah! The joke—there's a joke that opened up the show that's now cut out of the special, but basically it's about having a kid during COVID. And when you have kids during COVID, college essays in like—starting in 10 years are going to be so terrible, because every kid will have gone through the same trauma, and they'll have the same stupid hot takes on that trauma. And then I basically lay out what the college essay will sound like. That was my first joke back. And I told that in May 2021.

Jesse Thorn: You wrote a lot of songs about—and co-wrote a lot of songs about—feelings for *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, but also... often, silly ones.

Music: “I Have Friends” from *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

[REBECCA]

(*Spoken word.*) Objectively, I can say that I have all the friends!

I have friends, I definitely have friends!

Friends, friends, friendly friends

Time to meet my friends!

[PAULA]

I'm Paula!

[DARRYL]

Darryl!

(*Music fades out.*)

Jesse Thorn: Were you tempted, as all this stuff was going down in your life or in the immediate aftermath of all this stuff going on in your life, to just write silly stuff? Or were you moved to just write things about actual stuff that had actually just happened to you?

Rachel Bloom: For *Crazy Ex* or post everything happening?

Jesse Thorn: Post everything happening.

Rachel: Both. I think there's room for the silly. The next show I do I think will err more on the silly, I think. I think that's also what we need right now.

Jesse Thorn: Let the record reflect, for our at-home listeners that you did like a Popeye move.

(Rachel “yar”s enthusiastically.)

Like a “We’re going to get this done!”

Rachel Bloom: I think it's both. In the beginning I was like, “I can't be silly ever again. Anything I have to do has to be commenting on what just happened.” Not like I can't be funny as much as I can't make, you know, jokes about the thing that I opened the special with. And now I'm kind of in a—I think it depends. Because also the silly can be really profound. Because at the end of the day, we don't know why we're here. So, a fart joke, in a way, can be just as important.

You know, the first joke ever documented is a fart joke. It's from, I want to say, Ancient Sumeria, 1,000 years ago? 2,000 years ago? I'm bad with—I don't know when it was. But anyway, first joke ever documented is something like, “Something that has never happened since time memorial, a young bride did not fart on her husband's lap.” That's the first joke ever documented. And it's a fart joke. And it's a woman farting! That's profound!

Jesse Thorn: What's it like to have lived with the—(*chuckling*) what's it like—first of all, this is a very serious show. What's it like to have lived with these changes in your life as you have gone through, now, like four/four-and-a-half years of processing artistically—including writing the show, developing the show on stage, making the show into a video thing, getting the video thing done, cutting it. Now you're here with me, reliving it all on microphone. For which I'm grateful. Like, what is it like to have had to spend this much time with it? Like, actively engaged in it?

Rachel Bloom: It's interesting, because the show that was filmed for Netflix would have been a hair different had we filmed it a year before or the year before that. Like, it does evolve as we get further and further from 2020 and the pandemic. But as the world gets arguably worse—or stays bad—there are certain things you need to structure and acknowledge about that. So, it's been really interesting.

[00:25:00]

And I think it felt like the right time to release it. And I'm used to living with stuff for a while. 'Cause I did a show for four years. So, I think that I'm more used to that—

Jesse Thorn: But you did a show for four years that was on network television—

Rachel Bloom: Yeah, so we had to crank out a lot of new stuff.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, so you were making stuff every dang week. You know what I mean?

Rachel Bloom: Yes. But I didn't have a kid. So, that's the other thing that I'm still feeling out is what is my process now that I don't get home—I used to work a lot at night. Like, my brain would be—which is also kind of an ADHD thing, but I think also just how my brain works. I would get home, and I would have a second wind of working at night. When I get home now,

5-8PM, that's kid time. That's bath, that's dinner. And then I'm exhausted, and I'm not creative. So, I'm still kind of recalibrating what my artistic process is now that I have a kid.

Jesse Thorn: We're going to take a quick break. After that, we will wrap up my interview with Rachel Bloom. We'll talk about why so much of her special—which, again, is about dying—features Rachel talking about her dog, who—as of press time—is alive. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

(Pleasant school announcement chimes.)

Janet Varney: Hello, teachers and faculty. This is Janet Varney. I'm here to remind you that listening to my podcast, *The JV Club with Janet Varney*, is part of the curriculum for the school year. Learning about the teenage years of such guests as Alison Brie, Vicki Peterson, John Hodgman, and so many more is a valuable and enriching experience—one you have no choice but to embrace, because yes, listening is mandatory. *The JV Club with Janet Varney* is available every Thursday on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts. Thank you. And remember, no running in the halls!

(Pleasant chimes.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Rachel Bloom. She is the co-creator of the hit TV musical comedy show *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. She also just released a new special on Netflix. In it, she performs music and talks about loss. It's called *Death, Let Me Do My Special*. So, as you might be guessing, it is harrowing and heavy, but also very, very funny.

And by the way, if you want to watch this conversation or share the video of this conversation, you can find the whole thing on our YouTube channel. We are sharing video from pretty much every one of our new interviews there. It is [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](https://www.youtube.com/@BullseyeWithJesseThorn). We'd love it if you could join us and check out what we're doing. It's [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](https://www.youtube.com/@BullseyeWithJesseThorn) on YouTube. Okay, let's get back into our conversation.

You're working on a television show, developing a television show, with your husband—who's also a comedy writer. How do you think you developed or sustained a partnership creatively when you spent all this time where it was just like everyone locked up in a room? You and your husband and your child.

Rachel Bloom: We have not written the pilot yet. So, I should say we're still in the beginning of this. Um.

Jesse Thorn: Had you—had the two of you written together before?

Rachel Bloom: Yeah. So, he and I have—we have a movie together already; we have a script that we'd previously written; he wrote on *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*; he directed a couple episodes. He and I met doing comedy, so our relationship has always been—we're always each other's unofficial sounding board. We're fortunate to be making a living in our passion.

And so—I mean, I just had a thing where I was stuck on another project I have. And I spent an hour with him... (*sighs*) like I want to say—no, it wasn't in bed; it was in our office. But like, walking through—okay—finally having him read this document that I was writing alone. And just spending an hour being like, “What are your thoughts?” And like that hour with him, just really walking it through with someone else, clarified so many things. So, I think it's—

Look, I'm so grateful for my husband. I don't try to—I don't really give relationship advice to people, because to this day, I kind of just feel like I got really lucky. We just work... and I could—you know, we communicate well, but whatever. But I think that it's a testament to—we don't get sick of each other. And that's a testament to like—we spent a lot of time alone with a baby. And having a baby brings up its own challenges.

[00:30:00]

But at the end of the day, we're not like, “I literally can't look at your face right now, and I don't know why.”

Jesse Thorn: What's a piece of feedback that your husband gave you that was valuable to you, creatively?

Rachel Bloom: In my life?

Jesse Thorn: Sure.

Rachel Bloom: Film what you write. And this was early in my career. He had had very early success in his early 20s, because he and his writing partners wrote a pilot, but then they filmed kind of sizzle reel of the pilot—which a lot of people weren't doing. And it sold to NBC. And he was like, “Executives don't want to read; they want to watch things. Start filming what you write.”

And I was like, “Yep!” (*Chuckling.*) And he was right! He was correct.

Jesse Thorn: What's an example of that for you?

Rachel Bloom: I mean, I first broke out with my first music video. That was an example of film what you write.

Jesse Thorn: That was “Expletive Me, Ray Bradbury”?

Rachel Bloom: Yes.

Music: “F*** Me, Ray Bradbury” by Rachel Bloom.

I've been your number one fan

Kiss me, you illustrated man

I'll feed you grapes and dandelion wine

And we'll read a little Fahrenheit 69

You're a prolific author, Ray Bradbury

Come on, baby

I'm down on one knee

I carved our names...

(Music fades out.)

Rachel Bloom: Continuing to write these songs and put them online was what attracted Aline’s attention and got *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

Music: “Buttload of Cats” from *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*.

It's come to this, like I knew it would

Since I'm now single for good

I know just what I gotta do

I gotta go get myself

A buttload of cats! (a buttload of cats)

A buttload of cats (way too many cats)

When you are a permanent bachelorette

It's mandatory that you go out and get

A buttload of cats

(Music fades out.)

Rachel Bloom: And the thing now—it's funny, because I'm very fortunate to be making a living doing this and acting in things and writing things for TV. But I always come back to live performance—a little bit internet stuff, but more so live, because the live performance always came before the internet stuff, and then you'd film what the live performance was. I always come back to live performance, because there's no gatekeeper. You don't have to pitch it to anyone. You can just get up and do the thing that you came up with that day in front of an audience. And there's a nuanced judgment and connection you have with a live audience that you don't get from posting a thing online.

Jesse Thorn: What's something that the audience taught you about this show?

Rachel Bloom: Oh, I love that question. I love that question.

Jesse Thorn: Thank you, ma'am. I'm a professional. *(Chuckles.)*

Rachel Bloom: That tone of the show can really change depending on where you are. So, it is different doing the show for—when I did it at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, for an audience of people who are coming to the Williamstown Theatre Festival than when I did the show at the Wilbur in Boston, where it's a comedy audience. That it's a—especially standup shows, it's a conversation you're having with the audience. And there are certain almost laugh tastemakers or grown tastemakers or emotional tastemakers that suddenly change the thing.

And there were jokes that worked in the first Off-Broadway run. There was a couple jokes that suddenly didn't work in the second Off-Broadway run. I cannot tell you why. No idea.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Rachel Bloom: I was forced to suddenly look at time on a granular, weekly basis. And I became very aware of time passing. And one day, it hit me, “Oh my god, someday my dog is gonna die.”

(“Aw”s and chuckles from the audience.)

Okay, I'm not an idiot. Of course, I've always known someday my dog will die. But when I thought about it before pregnancy, it always happened in this far-off, hazy future, where by then they'll have found a cure for dog death?

(Laughter.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Your dog is a big part of this show. Yeah. And it was the piece of this show to which I most—with which I most deeply personally resonated. (*Chuckles.*)

Rachel Bloom: And that's so funny, because you also have children.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I have human children for sure. I have three human children, each with their own rich inner and outer lives. (*Chuckling.*) And yet!

What did your dog mean to you during this time?

(*Rachel sighs thoughtfully.*)

Is your dog still with us?

Rachel Bloom: She is! She is.

Jesse Thorn:

Rachel Bloom: She's almost—we don't know exactly how old she is. Because, well, we got a free dog. We rescued her. But she's almost 15. She was really grounding. Because first of all, she was great with the baby. We were really worried we were we going to have a *Lady and the Tramp* jealousy situation, but she was wonderful.

[00:35:00]

Also, the way that we would get out in the world is walking. And so, we would—taking her on walks was a natural way, and it's still kind of part of our routine is going on a family walk where we walk Wiley, and we walk the kid. (*Chuckles.*) So, she was very grounding. Also, just it's nice to be around someone, while this pandemic was happening—I mean the baby didn't know anything, because she's a baby. But you know, newborns, that first six weeks, they're miserable. They don't want to be there.

Dog? For all that we were paying attention to the baby, we were home. So, she was pretty psyched! And she would curl—I mean, it's in the actually the credits of my special, but there are so many pictures of the dog and the baby curled up together. She immediately started curling up next to the baby. Now, my daughter calls Wiley her sister. We were all just cuddling as a family last night.

So, my dog—at the end of the day, like my dog doesn't know my name. My dog doesn't know what I do for a living. My dog doesn't really know what's going on in the world. She just wants a treat, and she just wants to bark at a squirrel. And there's something really grounding about that.

Jesse Thorn: I had two dogs during the pandemic who have since passed away.

(*Rachel “aw”s sadly.*)

But the feeling that I remember most vividly in thinking about the older of those two dogs—who I guess maybe she's been gone a year-and-a-half, two years, something like that—was just this extraordinary gratitude that she, who was very old, had like stuck around when we really needed her. You know?

Rachel Bloom: Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: When we really needed her. In a way that I—I love my parents, and I love Kevin Ferguson, who brought me a lot of soup in this time.

Rachel Bloom: Did you have COVID?

Jesse Thorn: No, we didn't. We didn't have COVID, thankfully.

But that like gratitude to a dog that just like loves you.

Rachel Bloom: And they're just being themselves in a kind of way that's just really—they love you for who you are, not for anything else. And then, also they're angry at you if they don't— My dog's also a pain in the ass. I mean, anytime we're in the kitchen and she's not getting a treat, she's a very barky girl. But it's also like nice, because it's like, alright, I could be going through anything that day. And she, at the end of the day, just kind of wants to cuddle and then bark at me for treats.

And that's her life, and she doesn't know about the internet. She doesn't know about world affairs. She's just—she's being herself. I don't know. It's gonna be really hard. It's gonna be really, really hard. And it's weird, because I get home, and she's fine. Her energy's the same. She's a little more tired now, but like it's mostly the same. So, I haven't—some of this show is pre-grieving, but I don't know, there's a part of me like, “What if she lives another six years? What if she's a miracle dog?” And then I think about the oldest dog ever who just died—this dog, Bobby, who died at 31, who was a dog in Portugal. I don't know! What if my dog's Bobby!?

Jesse Thorn: Have you thought about moving to Portugal? They have a lot of nice fish stews, I think.

Rachel Bloom: They do. And I think—well, Bobby never ate dog food, which was the thing with Bobby. My friend went and made a pilgrimage to meet Bobby.

(Jesse “oh”s with surprise.)

And became friends with Bobby's family and went to Bobby's 31st birthday party in Portugal.

Jesse Thorn: I feel like they always—they probably said that Bobby only ate cigars, right?

(Rachel agrees with a chuckle.)

I feel like they always say the secret is cigars. (*Laughs.*)

Rachel Bloom: But I don't know. Maybe she's—I mean, we feed our dogs cigars on a daily basis. So, you know, maybe she has a chance! But it's weird. It's this weird thing of like looming—it's like this looming thing, but also it doesn't feel looming at all. Because she's basically the same. Her energy's great.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Rachel, you also have great energy.

Rachel Bloom: (*Cackles.*) Woof!

Jesse Thorn: I'm so grateful to you for taking the time to come back on the show. It's always really nice to see you.

Rachel Bloom: It's nice to see you, too. You're a great interviewer!

Jesse Thorn: Thank you.

Rachel Bloom. Her special is wonderful. It is, once again, called *Death, Let Me Do My Special*. You can find it streaming now on Netflix.

Transition: Relaxed, jazzy synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*.

[00:40:00]

Bullseye, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun in and around Los Angeles, California—as well as Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. I have to tent my house this weekend because of these clothing moths. (*Muttering.*) Oh, I hate these clothing moths. Anyway, I gotta carry all the food in my house out here into my backyard work shed. Just gonna have a shed full of frozen food.

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://djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It is called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all of our interviews, including the ones that 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 and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)