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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](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

**Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Have you seen *Somebody Somewhere*? It's a comedy. It just wrapped its third and final season on HBO. It takes place in Manhattan. Manhattan, Kansas. It centers around two people—Sam, played by Bridget Everett, and her best friend, Joel, played by my guest Jeff Hiller.

Sam and Joel have both lived in Manhattan basically their whole lives, and they also don't feel perfectly at home there. Like, it is their home, but Sam dreams of singing for a living. And Joel runs—well, basically a sort of queer cabaret out of the multipurpose room at the church. And on *Somebody Somewhere*, they—well, they just kind of work through that stuff.

It is a quiet show, a grounded show, and a very beautiful show. It is also a very, very funny show with (*chuckles*) multiple diarrhea jokes, as in this clip from the show's pilot. Sam starts the show working for a standardized testing company, sort of like grading SATs. She's reading prompts and answers, and one of the answers reminds her of her sister who died just before the show begins.

Sam gets worked up and walks off with tears in her eyes. Joel, who she doesn't really know, follows her outside, introduces himself, and offers some comfort.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Joel (*Somebody Somewhere*):** She was a few years ahead of us, right? (*Beat.*) Oh god, I'm sorry.

(*Sam sniffles.*)

I didn't—I didn't realize that we went to high school together. We were in show choir together.

**Sam:** (*Struggling to speak through tears.*) No, I knew I recognized you.

**Joel:** (*Warmly.*) No, you didn't.

**Sam:** I didn't.

**Joel:** It's all good. A lot of people don't remember me. (*Beat.*) Hey, if you want to take off for the rest of the day, I'll tell Irma you got diarrhea or something.

**Sam:** (*Sniffing.*) Yeah? And it made me cry.

(*They chuckle quietly.*)

**Joel:** I guess that is kind of weird. I'll think of something.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Jeff, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show, and I love *Somebody Somewhere* so much. So, I'm really glad to have you here.

**Jeff Hiller:** I am genuinely honored to be here. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** It is probably the sweetest television show that I've ever watched that also has a lot of diarrhea.

**Jeff Hiller:** (*Laughs.*) Yes. Well, what can I tell ya? There's the high, there's the low.

(*They chuckle.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** You're originally from Texas. Tell me a little bit about how you found Kansas when you got there to shoot the show or talk to Bridget Everett about her youth and childhood.

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah. Well, we talked a lot about what the Midwest is sort of as a whole. And Bridget is sort of on what she calls Kansas police, (*chuckles*) where she wants everything to be specifically Kansas—specifically Manhattan, Kansas. But really, there's not a huge difference between Texas and the Midwest, other than—I don't know; Texas has more guns, I think.

But the big thing was we want to be authentic, but we also don't want to be condescending or ever make the location a joke or anything. Because so many people live in the Midwest. And I think it's just a little too easy to be like, “Oh, Kansas. You know, Dorothy,” or whatever. And we also really loved this idea of places where people are not—where it's not expected to be able to find people like you, but you still search it out.

And I feel like that's something that, being from Texas, I really identified with was—yeah, sort of the mainstream culture of Texas is not necessarily very accepting of me, but I was able to find my people. And that's what this show is about too.

**Jesse Thorn:** My grandparents—my father's parents were Kansans. My father grew up in Kansas City, in Missouri. And the thing that I most vividly remember about both of them is that even though my grandmother was kind of a diva in her own way—

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*(Jeff chuckles.)*

There was—I mean, she was super smart and was a nurse and, you know, went to college when a lot of her peers didn't and so forth. But both of them could have this kind of flatness that I really associated with just being from somewhere where there's a lot of horizon compared to the amount of people.

**Jeff Hiller:** *(Laughs.)* Yeah. Yeah! Maybe that's the thing that makes that. I think it's also—yeah, there's just this culture of, you know, you don't want to brag; you don't want to show too much emotion; you don't want to get too soft and gooey.

And I think that's why it's interesting that this show, you would say, is the sweetest show. Because I think—you know, Bridget is not necessarily known as the sweetest person. Not that she's a mean person, *(laughs)* but you know, she's not going for the like sweet. She's going for the authentic.

**Jesse Thorn:** What were the things that she Kansas-policed about?

**Jeff Hiller:** Well, the university there. The colors are purple, so she always wants purple sprinkled through. You wouldn't have—I don't know... if somebody has a lot of plastic surgery, they probably wouldn't fit into that town. Or—I mean, she's not like sending anybody home, but—

About the look too, like if there are clothes that don't read Kansas, she might say, “Can wardrobe give them a KU sweatshirt or something.” *(Chuckles.)* And it's true—like, our costume designer, Tasha Goldthwait, she only shops at stores that are available in Manhattan, Kansas. So, lots of Kohl's, lots of things like that. Because we want to represent, you know, that authenticity, that reality.

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the interesting things about the world of this show is that your character is gay, and he is the one who is most at home in this world. That, you know, Bridget Everett's character is also from the town in which the show is set, but she's sort of coming back and has never figured out how to belong there. And in a lot of ways, your character has.

Did you feel like, before you skipped town growing up, that you were able to find that kind of belonging?

**Jeff Hiller:** No. And that is—you know, people always say like, “Are you like Joel? Are you like Joel?” And you know, yeah, I giggle, and I’m a really good listener. But he has this sense of self that is beautiful and disarming. And it sort of doesn’t matter what he’s put through. He still knows his true self, and he can stand up for himself. And he can say to Sam, who Bridget plays—in episode two, they have sort of a tiff, and he’s very clear about saying what his boundaries are that were, you know, crossed and just knows himself in a way that—

I think we all know those people, and those are the people who are most disarming in the world. Because they, they are rock steady. They’re not going to be moved by fads or what have you, (*chuckles*) or trying to be liked. They like themselves. And that’s one of my favorite things about that character, too.

**Jesse Thorn:** We actually have a really good scene from the show that, I think, illustrates the complexity of their relationship. And in this scene, your character has partnered up—which is really tough, because in many ways Joel and Sam are the team, right? Like, they’re peas in a pod. And your character has a serious boyfriend named Brad. You’re planning to move in together. And it’s just a little bit intense for that reason.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Joel:** So!

**Sam:** So?

**Joel:** I have some big news.

**Sam:** What?! Don’t tell me you’re pregnant.

**Joel:** Oh, no.

*(They laugh.)*

Um. I got an offer on my house.

**Sam:** Wow! Didn’t you just list it?

**Joel:** Yeah. Last week.

**Sam:** Well, that’s promising, right? First offer already in! Exciting.

**Joel:** Well, I'm going to take it. Because it's a really good deal. That's what my real estate agent said. Because it's an all-cash offer, so that means it's a quick closing. It's these rich people from Kansas City. They're buying it for their kid who's going to go to school. It's, I guess, the one perk of living next to campus. (*Chuckles.*)

**Sam:** Yeah. Well, you know, that's—that's great. We've got to celebrate.

**Joel:** Yeah, we'll do 'tinis (*martinis*) or something.

**Sam:** Yeah, load them up!

(*They laugh.*)

**Joel:** And you're cool with it, right? Like, you're happy for it?

**Sam:** Of course I'm cool with it. I'm happy for you. It's great.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

[00:10:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** There's that feeling that like Joel is constantly on guard for slipping into codependency.

(*They chuckle.*)

You know what I mean?

**Jeff Hiller:** I know. Here I just said like, “He always knows. He's always rock steady!” (*Laughs.*) And that's so true. And that part I really identify with, because he does sort of worship Sam. And he is always basking in her glow. And he's one of the few people who can actually see her glow and wants to, you know, feel it. (*Chuckles.*) And he's also a nice person. And he knows that she—in season two, she had this whole thing about NNP—No New People. And Brad, his boyfriend, is an NP.

And so, I think he's always just sort of treading just very lightly, because he doesn't want her to feel cast away, cast off. Because she is still incredibly special in his life.

**Jesse Thorn:** I get the impression that you, yourself, are someone who defaults towards... accommodation of others.

**Jeff Hiller:** (*Laughs.*) Mm-hm! (*Playing up the people pleasing.*) Yes, you're right! You're totally right! Good point!

Yeah. Yeah. I'm a real people pleaser. Yeah. I've talked about that in therapy more than once. Yeah. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, it could be—you know, it can be a cultural thing, right? Like, my wife comes from a big Catholic family where everyone is constantly taking care of everyone else. And I'm like sort of an only child, and as far as I'm concerned, as long as I'm in my room by myself not hurting anyone, I'm being a good person.

But also, I think like—you know, years ago, I had my friend, Dave Holmes, on this show, who's a wonderful now writer, long time television host. And he grew up in the Midwest in St. Louis and wasn't out as gay until he was into his 20s. Not even public—I mean, he hosted on MTV without being out for many years.

And, you know, one of the things that he described to me was that like beyond the cultural values of like looking out for others, there was also, for him, a guy who's—you know, Dave's a Gen X guy; I guess he's 50ish or something. But like, he grew up in a generation, in a place where being good at accommodating others, always needing to read the room, always needing to know what everyone else needed to feel comfortable was something that he had to do to feel—not just emotionally, but also physically safe.

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah! Oh, I completely identify with that. You know, there's that idea of fight, flight, or freeze? And there's a fourth one called fawn, where you flatter (*laughs*), and you accommodate, and you “I'm gonna make you like me by being whatever you want me to be.” And I definitely have that.

I don't think Joel... at least not as bad as me. I think he definitely wants to accommodate and please, but I don't think he would give himself up in the way that I sometimes do just to try and make the rough edges smooth.

**Jesse Thorn:** How has that tendency towards the fawn revealed itself in your writing?

**Jeff Hiller:** Well, I will tell you it's made me a really good guest star on sitcoms.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

It's really come in handy there, because I never make a problem. I never say I won't wear that costume, or I don't like the way my hair is done. I never say... I never say anything! (*Laughs.*) I just sit there and wait 'til they tell me to talk, and then I talk. So, in that sense, it's been actually, I think, helpful for my career.

But I think—I'm married. And my husband—we've been together for 17 years. And it's really (*chuckling*) since the pandemic that I've been like, “This is what I need.” And you know, the pandemic was only about four years ago. So, it took me a long time to really be able to talk to him in a way that was not just, “Yeah, whatever! If you want to do Thai, let's do Thai!” (*Laughs.*)

And you know, sometimes even now I'm like, eh, this isn't a battle I want to pick. But I am—I don't know, growing slightly. I don't know, Jesse. (*Chuckling.*) I might still fawn later tonight.

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** You just have a relapse in front of the refrigerator.

**Jeff Hiller:** Exactly. “Whatever you want!”

**Jesse Thorn:** Even more still to come with Jeff Hiller of *Somebody Somewhere*. Stay with us, it's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:15:00]

(*ADVERTISEMENT*)

**Transition:** Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Jeff Hiller. He is a comedian and actor who stars as Joel on the wonderful TV comedy *Somebody Somewhere*. That show just wrapped up its third and final season on HBO. Let's get back into our conversation.

You're a big person. You're 6'5", right?

(*Jeff confirms.*)

We're not in the same room. Like, people are surprised at how tall I am, and I'm only like 6'4". Right? So—

**Jeff Hiller:** Oh! Well, that's pretty tall!

**Jesse Thorn:** You're very tall.

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah, but we both read really tiny on Zoom, don't we? Weird.

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Indeed. Yeah. But 6'5" is really big. And you're not a... you're a pretty thin guy. You're not like absurdly thin or anything, but you're not like barrel chested. You know what I mean?

(*Jeff confirms.*)

And that means to me—and I know this because I had this experience myself as a teenager before I got a little bigger—it is a weird kind of sticking out that happens when you are that size.

*(Jeff agrees.)*

And I imagine that was doubly the case as a, you know, gay teenager in Texas.

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah, and I wasn't ever the kind of gay where you're like, "Really?!"

*(They laugh.)*

You know, I've never told anyone who was even remotely surprised. They're all like, "Oh, thanks. Thanks for telling me."

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I got a lot of that the other way around as a teenager. But to be fair, I was in an arts high school. So.

**Jeff Hiller:** *(Laughs.)* That's so interesting. Wait, so you mean they, all assumed—?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, until I started very conspicuously dating girls.

**Jeff Hiller:** And so, when you started dating women, were they like—were your peers like, "Oh, whatever! Just own it! Stop being—"

*(Jesse laughs.)*

Because that's what they said to me when I was dating women. And by the way, they were right. *(Laughs.)* Although, I never dated a woman in a way that was like, "I'm dating you as my beard!" It was always like a woman would see I was safe, would sort of ask me to go to—whatever, a dance or a prom or whatever. And I just didn't want to say no and hurt her feelings. So. *(Laughs.)* Once again, I was fawned into a heterosexual relationship.

**Jesse Thorn:** How long into your life did that take place?

**Jeff Hiller:** My sophomore year of college was the last time I dated someone I— She really wanted to continue dating, and I said, "I cannot do it anymore!" And then I left to go study abroad so that I could just get away. *(Laughs.)* And then I told myself you cannot date any more women! And then I started coming out slowly to people then. And again, everyone was like, "Yeah. Yeah, we know."

**Jesse Thorn:** So, like I'm only a few years younger than you, but I grew up in San Francisco. And you know, I went to Episcopalian church, and our bishop was gay, my godfather is gay. It was just—it was endemic. It was like a big part of the culture of going to church where I lived.



(Jeff “wow”s.)

To what extent was that the case in your life as a kid? I mean, even including—I don't know, what you might call unspoken gayness?

**Jeff Hiller:** Oh. I mean, it was all unspoken. No one was out. No one was... (chuckles) certainly no one was proud if they were out-ed.

There was someone in our church who was arrested for—what do you call it? Solicitation or what have you? In a park. So, that was kind of it. And there wasn't a lot of talk of like gay is evil, there was just no talk of gay at all. It was sooo... it was like a whispered thing. It was not discussed. (Chuckles.)

And by the time I got to college, it was discussed a little bit more. But I went to a Christian college, and my professors were very academic and rigorous and left of center. But all of the student body was right, right, right, right, right, right. And being gay was wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong.

So, it feels kind of basic now, but it was this very difficult... very complicated process to admit who I was to myself.

[00:20:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** I think that when I was a kid, one of the things that I admired about the LGBTQ people in my life—including, as I said, my godfather and my aunt—it was how clear it was to me even as a, let's say, 10-year-old the extent to which they had chosen their lives.

And that is this really beautiful thing about choir practice in *Somebody Somewhere*. It's not just that it's—Choir practice is like basically halfway between a cabaret and a church service that is put on in the church basement rec room sort of deal by your character. And like, it's not just that thing of like having a place for us, but also the thing of choosing to create a place like that.

**Jeff Hiller:** Right. Yeah, and finding—yeah, making it yourself when it isn't just given to you. And you know—I mean, I just said that it was such a difficult time coming out, but I am so grateful for it. Because if I hadn't had to come out, I would have just stayed in Texas, and I would have just sort of let life happen to me instead of choosing a life that I wanted. So, it was such a gift in that sense.

Even if I hadn't become a pastor, if I had been born straight, I just do not—all of the boldness and adventure in my life stems from, “Well, you already are not doing the thing that the world expects you to do, so might as well have fun!” (Laughs.) And so... yeah. So, I feel like that's a—it's such a gift in my life.

**Jesse Thorn:** Church, in that kind of situation, I imagine is a... is very much more than one thing. Because on the one hand, you know, it is often... Christian doctrine that leads people

to believe that homosexuality is a sin and thus, you know, against God. So, that's a very, very heavy burden.

On the other hand, for many people, church is the absolute safest place you could be. Because, you know, people are so keen to emphasize the values of Christ.

**Jeff Hiller:** Love?

**Jesse Thorn:** Even if—yeah, even if they, you know, throw in a few extras.

**Jeff Hiller:** (*Laughs.*) There's some extras.

Yeah! And for me growing up, church was a safe space. It wasn't—'cause school was absolutely unsafe. You know, emotionally, physically, all of the ways; it was unsafe. And there were even kids who would bully me at school who had to be nice to me at church. So, I know that a lot of people, a lot of LGBT people, do not have favorable opinions of the church.

But for me, it was really the place where social justice was happening. You know, that's where you went if you didn't have food. That's where you went if you couldn't pay your rent that month. And so... which is not to say that there aren't some really bad things done in the name of the church. I just happened to be at one that was really wanting to do good things for the world. And you know, I'm so grateful for that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Do you think if you were straight, you would have continued on the path to becoming a pastor?

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah. I do. I mean, who knows? But it was the only reason I stopped, or I left that path. Because I am spiritual. I love the community of churches. I love my tradition, which is like the sort of liberal faction of the Lutheran, the ELCA. They feel called to do things for people, to help people, to serve people. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. So, I don't know. Yeah, I think I probably would have been.

**Jesse Thorn:** Was your character on the show religious before you were cast in the part?

**Jeff Hiller:** Yes. And it's so wild. There are so many truly out-there coincidences of—there were so many that— This is like a joke I always say when I'm doing press, and I apologize to repeat it, but it felt like they wrote it for me. And they have explicitly told me they did not, but it does feel like it was for me!

[00:25:00]

And I took this class from the head of ABC casting. And it was like an audition class to test for—to audition for pilots. And she was saying like, if you got a role in a pilot, they're thinking you might be playing this role for seven to ten years. So, they really want to make

sure that you're like the character. And when you get a character that you're really like, that's when you'll book that role.

And I was like, “Oh, no! No, they don't write people like me! They don't write anybody like me.” And so, when that came along, it felt so exciting! Because I grew up in the church. That was clear from the pilot. He wanted a Vitamix in episode two; I made a vision board, and I put a Vitamix on it! In my life!

**Jesse Thorn:** He has a vision board with a Vitamix on it! It's not—

**Jeff Hiller:** I know! They wrote that—

**Jesse Thorn:** It's not just the desire to have a Vitamix. There's two elements here!

**Jeff Hiller:** It's shocking. It's shocking. I drove a Buick LeSabre when I lived in Denver. He drives a Buick LeSabre. I had a stress rash in junior high. He has a stress rash. I didn't tell them any of that. Now they have written some to me. Like, he gets his steps, because I like to get steps and things like that. But so many bizarre coincidences that— You know, falling back into my love of faith, which now sort of branches out into sort of hippy-dippy universal—(*laughs*) you know, whatever. Astrology or whatever.

It feels, to borrow a word from my husband's tradition—it feels like beshert. (*Laughs.*) Meant to be.

**Jesse Thorn:** We gotta go for a minute. On the other side of the break, we will wrap up with Jeff Hiller. Before he played Joel on *Somebody Somewhere*, he taught and performed improv at the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre in New York for years.

We'll talk about what he learned there and what frustrated him most about the experience. It's *Bullseye*, for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

## **Promo:**

**Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, a spirited acoustic guitar number.

**John Moe:** One thing we all have in common: we all have a mind.

**Speaker 1:** It makes me so scared, because I'm like, “When is the bad thing going to happen?”

**John Moe:** And minds can be kind of unpredictable and eccentric.

**Speaker 2:** Everybody wants to hear that they're not alone. Everybody wants to hear that someone else has those same thoughts.

**John Moe:** *Depresh Mode with John Moe* is about how interesting minds intersect with the lives and work of the people who have them: comedians, authors, experts, all sorts of folks trying to make sense of their world.

**Speaker 3:** It's not admitting something bad if you say, "This is scary."

**John Moe:** *Depresh Mode with John Moe*, every Monday at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get podcasts.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is actor Jeff Hiller. He's one of the stars of *Somebody Somewhere*.

I went to see an improv show the other day, and it was a group called Dinosaur that Paul Scheer put together.

**Jeff Hiller:** Oh, yeah, all the old people, yeah. *(Laughs.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, and it was such a wonderful, hilarious show. And it was people that I had watched do improv at the Upright Citizens Brigade when my wife was in college at Sarah Lawrence in, you know, 2000 or something. You know, more than 20 years ago.

And as I was watching it, the first thing was I just was like, "Oh, all these people are so wonderful at what they do." And I know that you—you know, you basically signed up for UCB classes the day you wandered into New York City.

*(Jeff confirms.)*

But something else that I noticed that I probably didn't nearly as much notice 20 years ago was what a straight White dude scene it was.

**Jeff Hiller:** And let me tell you, it really was 20 years ago. *(Chuckles.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Right! I mean, that's like— And I don't mean that to—you know, Paul has incorporated a lot of people that he didn't know 22 years ago in order to help counter that. But it occurred to me that all these Seth Morriszes, who I admired so much as a 19-year-old and still admire today, were all straight White dudes.

And I wonder what it was like for you, who ended up being for a very long time an instructor at the UCB as well, to be in that world. It changed in later years to some extent, but like especially at the beginning, it was very much like that.

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah, it really was. When me, a cisgendered White male, is considered diversity, (*laughs*) it's wonky. It was—in retrospect, I see all of these problems. And no one was overtly homophobic or overtly sexist or overtly racist, but there was just this idea that humor is objective.

[00:30:00]

And so, if you didn't do your improv in the same way that, you know, the artistic director—who was, in my experience until much later, always a straight, White man—if you didn't improvise in the way that he did, then you were considered not funny.

And so, when I started out, I was the only gay person on a Herald team—that's their house teams—for several years. And so, I didn't do my humor; I did their humor. (*Laughs.*) I knew what they thought was funny. And so, I performed that sort of thing instead of doing what I thought was funny.

There's an example that one time I referenced *Wicked*, a hot topic right now as the film is coming out. And my coach said, “You can't do things that are that niche. It's too specific. People don't know what that is.” And *Wicked* had been on Broadway for maybe three or four years at that point. And in that same show, we did repeated scene after scene after scene of *Legend of Zelda* references.

(*They chuckle.*)

Which to my mind is quite niche as well and not something that I am familiar with! But they were all very familiar with that. And so—

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Playfully.*) That's our *Wicked*.

**Jeff Hiller:** (*Chortles.*) Yeah! And you know, I don't want people to not make references to *The Legend of Zelda*, but when you can only make those sorts of references, it does get a little frustrating. And you start to get into your head. Because even though all of the women in the audience laughed at that, he said, “You know, yeah, people laughed, but was it good improv?” (*Laughs.*) And you have to, you know, really wrestle with that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Another thing I was struck by as I watched these brilliant 50-year-olds doing improv at Largo was that—you know, Paul Scheer was on *The League*, which was a long-running FX sitcom that made him into a somewhat improbable sports bro celebrity.

(*Jeff laughs and confirms.*)

And you know, his very, very longtime collaborator, Rob Huebel, was on *Transparent* for years. And you know. And there were other people there who were just as brilliant. And while they've all made careers in entertainment, not all of them are famous people. And you know, all of those people on that show, I'm sure, could cite people that they did things with who became more famous than them.

I mean, I'm sure—you know, Paul and Rob, who were in a sketch comedy group with Aziz Ansari then saw Aziz Ansari become one of the most famous comedians in America.

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah, it's weird.

**Jesse Thorn:** And you know, this is—while you have worked for many, many, many years and had significant successes, I think *Somebody Somewhere* is the first time that you have really had a chance, especially in film and television, to do a real multi-dimensional lead character.

**Jeff Hiller:** Without a doubt. Without a doubt.

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, there's been a lot of television commercials in which you like picked up an intercom telephone and said something slightly sassy into it and then hung it up. You know what I mean?

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah. That's my niche.

*(They laugh.)*

Yeah!

**Jesse Thorn:** But what was it like to be in the space before that? Like, what was it like to be in that space where you're like, well, hopefully I'll book another television commercial this year, so that I can get health insurance, and I'm—you know, I could always do a few months of temp work or take on an extra UCB class or whatever?

**Jeff Hiller:** Yeah. It was difficult. *(Laughs.)* Because—it's funny that you bring up Paul Scheer and Rob Huebel, because they were in my mind sort of the first two to sort of—to break out. Because Paul was on *Best Week Ever*, and Rob was on—he was this like inconsiderate cell phone man.

**Jesse Thorn:** *(Laughing.)* Oh yeah! I forgot about him being inconsiderate cell phone man!

**Jeff Hiller:** And so, they were really—

**Jesse Thorn:** He was really funny as inconsiderate cell phone man!

**Jeff Hiller:** He was! He was really good.

And so, then you do this thing where you compare yourself. And you think like, well, I got onto this house team, and then I did this commercial, and so when am I going to get my sitcom about the league? You know, when do I get my FX sitcom?

And I really—I think it's probably because I grew up in the church where it was very much like “if you do these things, it'll be fair.”

[00:35:00]

Cali Corey, who I do not know—I do not know her at all. (*Laughs.*) I just read this in an article, but she wrote *Thelma and Louise*. Anyway, she said—whenever anybody asks her advice on showbiz, she always says, “Showbiz isn't fair.”

And it took me such a long time to realize that. That even though I got all these laughs when I performed, it was that person who, you know, isn't as good at improv who everyone is circling around. And you start to be like, “Well, yeah. Well, it's because they're attractive physically, or they can do an impression of the presidential candidate, or whatever.” (*Laughs.*) You know, you rationalize and things like that.

But then I moved to LA. Because I thought, oh, if I just moved to LA, that's where I'll do it. And I had a long-distance relationship with my now husband, and I spent all of this money that I had made doing a series of Snickers commercials. And I spent four years there. And I got a couple guest star roles that I had already—you know, on the same level that I had gotten when I was in New York. And I didn't book a pilot. I didn't book a TV show. I didn't get to a place where I could perform how I knew I could perform and where I could pay my bills.

And so, when I moved back to New York, because I couldn't afford to live there anymore, I also turned 40. And then my mom died right then. And so, I had this like midlife crisis where I was like, “I think I need to quit.”

And then there was something so beautiful about the fact that when I finally got a show where I got to fully express myself, it was about not giving up on yourself. And that's a real gift for me.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, Jeff, I really appreciate your time, and I really appreciate your show and your work elsewhere as well.

**Jeff Hiller:** (*Chuckles.*) Thank you, Jesse. I appreciate you and your show! So, thank you.

**Jesse Thorn:** Jeff Hiller. His show, *Somebody Somewhere*, is really wonderful. I cannot recommend it highly enough. It is so funny and moving. It is about real deep emotions, and it is not unpleasant to watch. It is just such a great show. We also had his costar on the show, Bridget Everett, back in 2023. We will have a link to that interview on the *Bullseye* page at [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org).

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, as well as at Maximum Fun Headquarters—overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. That was the primary distribution point for my holiday gifts for the staff this year. All non-vegetarians received country ham and smoke-cured bacon from Father's Country Hams. If you ever need country ham—this is not a paid endorsement, but man. Father's Country Hams. What a great place.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Daniel Huecias. Our video producer, Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend, Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWSounds.bandcamp.com](https://www.djwsounds.bandcamp.com), where you can download music from this show. 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 our interviews—including the ones that you heard this week. Yes, that's right. If you want to share our interview with Jude Law with a friend, they won't have to suffer through not gazing at his beautiful face.

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.)*

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