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(ADVERTISEMENT)

**Jesse Thorn:** Hey *Bullseye* listeners, it's Jesse. And we have an amazing interview coming up in just a moment with George Lopez. But I wanna let you know that this is the one time a year when we come to you and ask you to support our program directly by becoming a member of Maximum Fun at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

I'm gonna talk later on in this episode with a couple of the producers of the show. You'll get to know them and what they do on the show. And you'll find out a little bit more about becoming a member of Maximum Fun. But in the meantime, I'll just say [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join) is the place to go. And now is the time to do it.

Let's get into George Lopez.

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

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

**Music:** “Low Rider” by the band War, theme song for the *George Lopez* show. Music continues under the dialogue.

**Jesse Thorn:** It is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My first guest this week is George Lopez.

**Music:** “Low Rider”

*All my friends know the low rider*

(*Music fades out.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** He's George Lopez, a standup comic who's been at it just about as long as I have been alive. Since the '90s, he's been a sitcom fixture. First is the goofy, lovable, classic sitcom dad on *George Lopez*, which ran for six seasons on ABC. Then in *Lopez*, where he played a standup comic who also happened to be a goofy, lovable sitcom dad. Now on *Lopez vs Lopez*, alongside his real-life daughter, Mayan Lopez. Mayan co-created the show with George.

On *Lopez vs Lopez*, George plays another dad this time—the owner of a moving company. And he is funny and goofy and lovable on the show, but he's not just funny and goofy and lovable. Just like in real life, Mayan and George's characters are named Mayan and George.

Just like in real life, they play father and daughter on the show. And just like in real life, Mayan and George were estranged for a long time. *Lopez vs Lopez* faces those very real, very heavy problems head-on while also keeping things light and breezy enough to fit in on NBC's Friday night lineup.

The show comes at a reflective time in George Lopez's life. Along with reconciling with his daughter, Lopez has been thinking a lot about his health, his legacy, and his difficult—and at times traumatic—childhood. We'll get into all of that in our conversation.

But again, we are talking about a network sitcom—a funny network sitcom. So, take a listen to this scene. George is out on a date. He and his girlfriend, Lisa, were supposed to be at a jazz club, but there's a change of plans. Instead, he and Lisa drop in on a family dinner that Mayan is hosting at her place.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**George Lopez:** Bueno salutations family!

*(Studio laughter.)*

**Lisa:** Hi, I hope we're not interrupting!

**Mayan:** Dad! What are you doing here? You're supposed to be at a jazz concert.

**George Lopez:** Mayan, you're such a pill.

*(Studio laughter.)*

We were on our way, and then I realized that I hate jazz.

*(Laughter.)*

Family... and Josue.

*(Laughter.)*

I want you to meet someone who's very important to me.

Lisa—*(stops suddenly)*.

(*Laughter.*)

What's your last name, baby?

**Liza:** (*Chuckles.*) Perry. Enchanté.

**George Lopez:** Yes! Lisa Perry-Enchanté!

(*Laughter.*)

That's right! She's Italian.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome to *Bullseye*, George. It's really nice to have you here on the show.

**George Lopez:** Thank you. I appreciate it. It's nice to be here.

**Jesse Thorn:** You've played sort of versions of yourself in television sitcoms for so long now, and this one has many of the tones and qualities of a traditional family sitcom. Right? You're in front of an audience. You're selling jokes about misunderstandings in the family. It is also very intense.

**George Lopez:** It became, yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** In a way that the *George Lopez* show, for example, was not really. (*Chuckles.*)

**George Lopez:** No. Although at that time we thought that that was pretty intense, but not anywhere near. I think most of the stuff from the first show that was emotional for either Balita or myself was just the mother and the son relationship.

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Never really with a friend or with the wife, you know. But—'cause she was a very well-rounded, you know, actress and acting coach and things like that. Like, I remember—you know, once the show was like four years in, you would get a knock on my door. You open the door, it's Helena Christensen.

And she's like, “Am I close to Belita’s dressing room?”

“Yeah, she's two do doors down.”

And there would be these famous actors coming to take an acting class with her. You know, we were done pretty early, and then you'd see these actors come in.

**Jesse Thorn:** You must have known when you signed up for this show with your daughter that it was going to be different from the average TGIF show.

**George Lopez:** You know, there's not a lot of shows on network TV that go there. And I think one of the primary issues is, you know—you could stay out of the water, you know, but if you go in, will it be believable? When you create whatever a writer would create.

But fortunately and unfortunately, that Mayan was so, you know, forthcoming about her trauma—generational trauma—and my part in it. And you know, I didn't mind having it be about that, even though I know that it's a very, very tough thing to navigate between the two senses of humor and of something that's actually very real. I cry a lot on that show. I take time where I didn't before and—you know. All of it is real. I think it's—I can't say if it's been as helpful to me, because I don't know. I mean, you know, it's pretty deep wounds. But I think from my end it's been really a great experience for her.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you and your daughter first started talking about pitching this show, did the two of you talk about how far or where you would go?

**George Lopez:** Yeah. And I said, “Hey, you know, if you don't feel comfortable with anything, and you aren't able to really tell them—because these are new people that you're gonna meet—tell me, and I'll tell 'em.”

And she was like, “No, that's pretty much the—pretty much the thing, there.”

So, yeah. I mean, I hope that in some—you know, change the world or a person's thinking? I'll take that. I'll take one person's mindset. But you know, Mayan's received a lot of very favorable things with kids her age that are a little bit separated from their fathers and how it has helped, you know, to have something to watch together.

Just like I heard at the first show where a guy says, “You know, my daughter wants me to buy her a car. I don't make enough money to buy her car, so she's really mad at me. And we watch your show, and for that half hour she's my little girl again, and then we go to our mutual corners and stuff.”

So, yeah. I think—I mean, TV raised me. I mean, I was an only child at Mission Hills there, and my grandparents worked all the time. I spent a lot of time alone. And without TV, I'm not even sure what would've happened to me.

**Jesse Thorn:** When your daughter was a kid, did the two of you ever talk about your parents?

**George Lopez:** You know, not very much. I mean, my grandmother didn't talk to me about who my dad could have been or the things that were wrong with my mom. And then Anne would say like, “How could she have not told you?” And you know, in her 80 or in my 40/50

years, it just—that woman was like a— I don't know if she knew anything, but she wasn't going to divulge anything that was—I can't say “not pleasant”, because she was kind of really not pleasant, but I don't even think she really even knew what to say.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, there's an amazing joke in your new special, *Muy Católico*, where you say (*laughs*)—I'm paraphrasing, but you say, “You know, I've been describing my grandmother as mean, because she never told me she loved me. But to be fair, she also never said hello to me.”

(*They laugh.*)

**George Lopez:** Yeah, yeah. That's it. I mean, yeah. I mean, man, it's just—you know, you walk into a room, and nobody says hello, it's really devastating to a kid, man. And you know, everything was “no”. I remember in the *Why You Crying* special, I said, “Everything was ‘no’.”

And I'd say, “Grandma—”

“No!”

I'm like, “You don't even know what it is.”

And she's like, “I know what it isn't!”

(*They chuckle.*)

So, yeah, I think—you know, I'm always about a half of a tick away from crying most of the time, I think. You know, I've been pretty emotional the last couple of weeks, I don't know why. I just—I think, you know, the older I get, maybe these are the things I should have felt when I was in my 20s.

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But I come from a very closed-off background, really closed-off. Which made me, you know, a hell of a pretty (*struggling for the words*)—a comedian that was not afraid. You know, I knew my lane, but also I knew that fear would just debilitate most comedians. And on the level, on the way up—you know—it gets to guys, and they can't handle it. And, you know, I haven't had any trouble with that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Were your grandparents the first generation of your family to live in the United States?

**George Lopez:** My grandmother was, yeah. And my grandfather was not biological. And you know, this is—you know, I think (*sighs*)— On a Sunday, I might have been in 11th grade. And my grandfather comes back out there just working on—I'd just be like, “Why would you even start this?”

He said, “Hey, you better hope that I die first.”

And I'm like, “What?”

And he says, “If she dies first, this is gonna be my house. I'm bringing my family in, and then you're gonna get the hell outta here.”

And I said, “But I grew up here.”

He said “I don't care. Better hope I die first.” And he walks away.

I'm like what?! What's that? What's that about? You know, what was the purpose of that conversation? And he did die first. And it's just like did I need to hear that when I was 17? I don't think I did. It's terrible.

**Jesse Thorn:** Like, his family from out of the country? A side family? What are we talking about? His family, like his parents?

**George Lopez:** His cousins, and his nephews and stuff. He tried to play— You know, again— I mean, it's ripe for comedy that my grandfather would play big man. You know, he worked in construction. He didn't have any money, but he loved when his family would come over on Sundays. And he'd sit there and pontificate. You know, this, “Whatever you want. \$100? Go get my jacket.” You know, he'd give it to them. They wouldn't never pay him back.

And even my grandmother would tell him, “You just wanna be the big shot to your family, and you're giving money away. You're not asking people to pay you back, because you want them to believe you're this guy, but meanwhile you don't have any money!”

And the night in '88, he passed away—Easter was like April 4th. And as soon as the word got out, his family came over, and I had kind of left the room. But those cousins were around my grandmother, and they're asking what were they gonna do with the house?

And my grandma looked at me, and I was like, “What did he say?” So, I said, “Hey, you guys gotta get out.” I said, “Your guy's not around anymore, and you're not welcome in this house anymore. And this lady just lost her husband. You're asking all kinds of questions. Get out.” And we never saw him again.

**Jesse Thorn:** So much more to get into with George Lopez. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is George Lopez. He is, of course, an award-winning standup comic. He was also the star of the *George Lopez* show and *Lopez*. His latest show is *Lopez vs Lopez*. It's a comedy he co-created and stars in with his daughter, Mayan Lopez. You can catch it on NBC and Peacock. Let's get back into our conversation.

I can imagine that the generational gulf between you and your grandparents must have been monumental.

**George Lopez:** Yeah, man. It just drove me more towards isolation, I think. You know, they were never happy to—nobody asked me what my grades were. Nobody asked me, “How was your day?” Nobody asked, you know, “Is there anything you need for school?”

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And I think one of probably the most painful things is that me and my grandfather, we weren't always at odds, you know. But maybe when I was 12 or 13, you know, I realized that nobody—no one had graduated from high school in my family. Like, they all had dropped out. And I said, “Well, you know, I'm gonna be the first one that's gonna graduate from high school at least.”

And he would always tell me, you know, “You gotta go to school.” He wasn't an educated guy. He was a ditch digger, construction. And he would say to me, “You know, you gotta go to school. You gotta get an education. You gotta do this.”

And I remember one time, one summer— I was always after him for me to go to work with him, you know. And he takes me in the morning. My grandmother makes my little lunch and his. And then this guy's got me putting dirt into a wheelbarrow and taking the wheelbarrow and then dumping it over there and coming back and filling it up again. And literally by eight o'clock in the morning, every finger on the underside has a blister that's ripped. They're just in terrible shape, my hands, you know. And he said, “Don't do anything; just stay off to the side.”

So, I think at the end of the day I was just doing stuff around there. And then we were in the truck driving home, and he said, “Okay, this is what you have to decide. You know, I had no options, but you have options. So, you have to decide whether you're gonna work with your hands or you're gonna work with your head. Because when you work with your hands, this is what happens. Every day. There's no—no day is different than the other day. Except when it rains, you might not work.”

And I was like, “Well, I'm gonna work with my head then.” You know, and that may be—out of all the advice he was trying to give me and trying to get me to follow—I think that one, visually, was what was the best move I think I made. And he didn't go to my graduation when I graduated from high school. He didn't go. And I didn't know he wasn't going until my grandmother got there, and I said, you know, “Where is he?”

She said, “He's at home listening to the Dodgers.”

And man, that was tough. It would've meant a lot to me if he had been there. I still think—even now, I think what a heartbreaking thing, man. And he didn't say anything, like it was nothing. Terrible.

**Jesse Thorn:** Were you angry then?

**George Lopez:** Yeah, I think I was. Yeah, I think I was, and didn't know how—I mean, you know, back then you just acted out. You throw a rock, broke a window, you know, take something that's not yours or whatever. But I was pretty much a case—man, like a really bad case, I think, of what could a kid have and still get up and go to school and come home. You know, really. So, I just lost myself in TV. And I was already writing jokes I think by the time I was 11. I was writing stuff in those little Mead tablets. You know, like a detective would pull it out and he'd say like, “What happened here?” And he'd flip that thing over.

So, I was doing that. I was writing stuff like that at 11. And then, you know, even before I knew what manifesting was, I wrote this thing to myself in one of those things that said, “I know at times I feel I can't make it, but I will hit the American people like a hammer. I'll be the best.” And that was from 8/6/1979.

**Jesse Thorn:** That was a time when standup was just absolutely culturally explosive. Like, especially in Los Angeles, where you grew up.

**George Lopez:** Oh yeah. Yeah, it's really kind of wild. I mean, you know, not really a lot of people came out of the valley there and wanted to be a comedian. I mean, that's— And you're right. I mean, there was, culturally—you know. My grandmother worked at this place called RCA or Sperry. It was on Balboa. Richard Pryor lived right down past Parthenia and Balboa. And I worked nights, and every night I would drive by his house. I mean, I don't know why, but I'd just drive by his house.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you just want to get a little bit of juice. You just—somethin'.

**George Lopez:** I did. I did. I just wanted to just see something, you know? And I actually did a eulogy at his funeral. We became—I wouldn't say close friends, 'cause he was sick, but I was around him a little bit. And I think that meant so much to me to be able to know him at any point in either of our lives. 'Cause I just spent so much time idolizing that guy, you know. And his grandmother ran a brothel and he, you know, had issues with his grandmother who raised him and stuff. And I just found myself like—you know, really just like I would follow him anywhere. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Freddie Prinze must have been like that for you, because he had— Like, he was one of the stars who exploded out of standup at the time when standup was exploding as a form. And he was Latino; he was Puerto Rican, but Latino.

[00:20:00]

**George Lopez:** You know, the first summer of '73, I think it started to show *Chico and The Man*, you know, coming this fall. *Chico and The Man*.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm just gonna say, it sounded like I was suggesting Puerto Ricans are less Latino. I only mean that you're a Chicano, and he was Puerto Rican. And you shared—yeah.

**George Lopez:** And Hungarian. Hungarian and—yeah. Yes, that's right. But a bit Hungarian is, you know, Puerto Rican playing Chicano. And even back then, he took some flak for that. I didn't matter to me. I would say—I mean, if you look at representation and what came from me seeing him as a Chicano—and he was not playing Chicano, but if they had—if in any way that show had have not been on the air because of its, you know, ethnicity or they didn't want a guy like that playing like that, I'm not sure where I would've found my motivation. Because that—seeing him was really just that one thing I needed to see to get the idea that—I didn't even really think about a standup having a television show. But he did that stuff. He had a show, and then he hosted *The Tonight Show*, and he was doing dates in Vegas.

And I mean, I had no idea he was on as many drugs or, you know, suicide attempts and stuff like that. But in January of '77 when he died, I turned on the radio at 6:15 in the morning, and it said that he had shot himself as of Friday. And I sat on that bed for maybe 25 minutes with my mouth open. I don't think I've ever done that before. Just in a total shock of what had happened to him.

But you know, it's a tragic end. But in a sense that, you know, I would not be where I am if it weren't for him, even as a tragic figure. However, the figure was—that was his life. But he'd given me enough, good and bad, to go forward and to not—I don't know if I was gonna do the drugs, but also that is possible, that somebody can come out of someplace and make something of themselves.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you have showbusiness or comedy already in mind?

**George Lopez:** Um, no. I think I had—maybe I would've had comedy on my mind. The guy that I grew up with, Ernie Ariano, my best friend—my first friend—he died the night before we did the *Lopez vs Lopez* pilot. And it was really— We weren't speaking, at that time of his passing. 'Cause we had a lot of issues from way back, you know. Just the same things that—you know, someone was unreliable. And I didn't realize until he was gone that everything that I did or still do was because of him. So, in a way, a bit of a muse, you know.

He had brothers that were older. So, you know, they would go to concerts. And I started going to concerts with him, and then I started to golf Christmas of '81 with him. And guitars. We bought guitars when we were 15. And then, you know, doing standup. So, all of the four things that I still pretty much spend my time doing were all because of him. So, I thank him, you know. And I paid for his funeral. And you know—man, I think the thing that really sticks out to me is that (*choking up*)...

(*Beat.*)

(*Voice tight.*) That you could have a friend like that, that had his own family but didn't forget me, you know? Sorry. (*Starting over several times.*) When it would've been easy to—I got it. I got it. When it would've been easy to move on from somebody, because either their parents said—or whatever was said—that, you know. He was, at that time, with me and stuff. And I was the guy a lot. Yeah. Mm. Man. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Who got you on stage the first time you got on stage?

**George Lopez:** He did. Yeah. He said— There was a guy that was at Kennedy High School there in 1979. And he was like a kid comic, you know. He was going to Westwood Comedy Store and signing up, and he brought the school paper to my house. And he's like, “Hey, man, we oughta do this. We gotta go over there and you do this.”

I'm like, “Yeah.”

So, we sit around and, you know, started writing jokes and stuff. And we went there.

[00:25:00]

And the comedians were on strike in like '79. And then when they went back, we went. But you know, I don't know the answer to this question. I wish I did. But whatever made a kid like me, who is so afraid of everything, do one of the things that might be the hardest thing to do in life—and especially when someone is so shy and introverted, so few skills, you know, so few behavioral— I just kind of raised myself. And to keep going back when you're not very good, and it takes years to get good? I have no idea what made me continue to go back when you're taking, you know, beatings. Or even when you do good, it's really not that good. But I don't. I wish— I don't know the answer to that.

**Jesse Thorn:** I watched your set on Carson. 1991. The very end of Carson's run. Let's hear a little bit of it.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**George Lopez:** Thank you very much. Muchas gracias.

*(An audience member shouts “Jorge”.)*

I'm sorry for people who don't speak Spanish. Fajita!

I don't think my grandfather understood the whole concept of car insurance. He thought AAA was for people with serious drinking problems.

*(Laughter.)*

But you know, we had a Pontiac that he would drive, and he would hit stuff and keep going. They don't make cars like they used to! I just bought a Geo Metro. Well, actually I got it in a Happy Meal.

*(Laughter and applause.)*

I thought it was dinosaur week. Have you been to McDonald's lately? They have breakfast burritos. They have Mexican food. It's like this big! It's very scary. They should call it McDoodoo.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** You got a full-on applause break for McDoodoo.

**George Lopez:** I did. It was supposed to be McKaka, but they wouldn't let me say kaka.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

You know? Yeah, man. I haven't heard that—I don't know. That's—thank you for that. Thank you for that. But it's—I'm happy to hear that.

**Jesse Thorn:** There's a couple things, or a few things, I noticed about it when I was watching it. One is—

**George Lopez:** My hand was shaking?

**Jesse Thorn:** I didn't see that. Was it?

**George Lopez:** Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** The things I saw were when you step up to the microphone, someone in the audience yells, "Jorge!" Did you hear that?

**George Lopez:** No.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I just thought somebody in the audience at *Johnny Carson* felt so comfortable that they thought, "I'm just gonna yell out Jorge at this Latino guy."

**George Lopez:** Crazy!

**Jesse Thorn:** In the audience of a TV show.

**George Lopez:** Yeah! What's the reason for that?

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, racist, I think!

**George Lopez:** Huh! Yeah, I didn't hear that. But you know, '91. And what else did you notice?

**Jesse Thorn:** I noticed that you smiled and laughed after every one of your jokes, which worked for that audience. But when I saw you do it, I thought maybe this is partly inexperience, but also partly this is a guy who knows he has to do some extra work to make the audience comfortable.

**George Lopez:** I believe that. A bit of a camp counselor, “*(Pleasantly.)* Everybody this way!” You know? Yeah, I think so. Yeah, and I was a bit inexperienced. I mean, '91, I'd really—what, '79? I think it was '84. 7 years, yeah. Yeah, yeah. That's true. I would say yes.

**Jesse Thorn:** Seven years is often what standups say it takes; seven years a regular thing before you are yourself on stage.

**George Lopez:** Seven years. Yeah. I'm not sure if I was myself there. I don't think I was—you know, I don't think I was unhappy with it, but I think I did as good as I could do for where I was at that particular time. I wasn't one of the best, so I was just happy to get a spot. But also I couldn't make myself something I wasn't, so maybe I did have to punch the gas a little bit there at the end. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, as I'm watching it, I'm thinking this is high-quality, generic comedy from a guy who has to acknowledge on stage every 90 seconds that he's Latino, or else he's gonna lose the audience.

[00:30:00]

**George Lopez:** Yeah. Yeah, I agree. Yeah. I mean, it was so early in that time, you know. And I would say it's a bit of a jungle, because there wasn't, you know, chocolate Sundays or, you know, Latino Tuesday or anything like that. Like, we had to all come up in the same place. So, I would say, yeah. As a matter of fact, you know, Johnny Carson left in May of '92, and I remember being in Las Vegas the summer of—maybe June of '91. And in the lifestyle section, there was a comedian named Ron Shock, who's passed away. But in that story about Ron Shock, they said, you know, “There's six more openings for young comedians before Johnny leaves.”

And I thought—you know, it's like Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory. There's six tickets out there. Wonder who's gonna get 'em? And I got one. I didn't imagine myself getting one. I'm not sure whatever roads led to me getting one, but I'm happy that I got one.

**Jesse Thorn:** The last thing I noticed about your Carson set is that it was not personal. It was personal in the sense that you're talking about being Latino, and there was not other Latino comics on TV, barely. But it wasn't about you-you.

**George Lopez:** It was mundane, I think. Right? It was a bit... yeah, no, I hadn't started digging into myself yet. But yeah, it's interesting you would say that. So, when I was, in—or maybe few years later, I was in Caroline, New York and struggling through the week. And

Dave Becky, who was now at 3 Arts, a manager. He ran the—he was Chris Rock's kind of part-time manager. He worked at 3 Arts. And he came backstage, and he said, “Hey, can give you some constructive criticism?”

And I said, “Yeah, yeah.”

He said, “You know, when you see Chris, you know what he likes. You know what he doesn't like. You know what his politics are. And when I see you, I don't see any of that. I don't see what you like. Are you married? Do you have a kid? What are your political views? You know, I don't get anything. There has to be somebody in your family that is funny or somebody you spend time with, you know?” And he said, “You gotta make it more personal, man.”

And I walked back to the hotel that night, and I found my grandmother there amongst all of my thoughts, and that changed the direction of my career. I stopped by my grandmother.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I can understand why you would've been hesitant before to talk about her, even if it had occurred to you.

**George Lopez:** (*Chuckling.*) Yeah, yeah. Yeah, man. Ah, man. You know, (*clicks teeth*) God, it just... man, it's hard to believe I'm this old, and I still can see all the doors close in my mind. You know? That a lady—I don't think she was a bad lady. I just think she might've lived a bad life and didn't know what to do with me or how to handle me or anything.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I think you know that trauma is a son of a gun.

**George Lopez:** It's a bad thing. I still have a lot of it too. And you know, one of the things that—I think, you know, coming from the era that I come from is where— You know, I didn't go to *National Lampoon* and then, you know, start writing at Yale and then, you know, create a comedy troupe and then I became a comedian. I mean, it's almost like when somebody's a boxer. You're just throwing punches, just trying to get out. So, I think it was a lot of that. And it was very isolated. So, I thrived in isolation, and I think once I decided to kind of—with Dave Becky's advice—to change the way I thought about my act and stuff, that I found the humor and found the—you know, as if a bike is pedaling, and you're trying to catch the pedals. I caught the pedals pretty fast.

And there in the 1990s, you know, when Sandra Bullock saw me, and we started to put the idea together for the sitcom.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you could be forgiven for saying to Dave Becky, “Talk about myself? My grandma didn't even tell me anything about my mom.”

**George Lopez:** Yeah. Right! Yeah. Right. Mm. Yeah. I mean, god, man. I mean... I mean, my grandma didn't tell me anything about my mom. I mean, I have no pictures of me as a baby or as a child. There's nothing. There's nothing to— And then the joke was, I'd say, “How come—” Talking to my grandma, “How come there's no pictures of me?”

“I still got a few more pictures on the roll.”

I thought that was a good one. (*Chuckles.*) But we weren't those kind of people, man. We weren't picture people. We weren't huggy people. We—no. Wow. I haven't thought about these things in a long time. So, thank you for that. I appreciate it.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm glad to talk to you about them.

**George Lopez:** I see a little bit of—I feel a little bit of light coming through my chest, actually.

[00:35:00]

You know, it's been a long time. I know you really get it, man. You understand it. And I just would think that I'm just gonna work harder than everybody else. I'm gonna work while everybody's sleeping. And I get up—I still get up pretty early and work like that. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** We've got more to get into with George Lopez, including the time he got to the set and found out that he was gonna be beating up a pinata of his own face, and it got really, really real. It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

(*ADVERTISEMENT*)

**Promo:**

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Hey, *Bullseye* listeners! It's Jesse cutting in here, joined by two of *Bullseye*'s producers: Richard Robey and Daniel Speer. Daniel, what's your job on *Bullseye*?

**Daniel Speer:** My job is video editing, video producing, setting up cameras, turning on lights, and social media stuff.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's like a new thing at *Bullseye*! This is a new, exciting development on the *Bullseye* front.

**Daniel Speer:** It did not exist before me.

(*They laugh.*)

I invented social media content. I invented YouTube. Yeah. You got me.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) Richard, you've been working with us for a few years now.

**Richard Robey:** Four years.

**Jesse Thorn:** What's your job?

**Richard Robey:** I am a producer on the show. I help book guests. I edit episodes. I work with Speer to create some social content for your viewing pleasure.

**Jesse Thorn:** You get nervous when you're on microphone.

**Richard Robey:** I do, 'cause I turn red.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

And I got told—yeah. It's just a thing. Rosacea just runs in my family. But yes. Yeah. I'm not usually on the microphone, but I'm in the booth today, so here we are.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, I'm really glad to have both of you guys in here, because I think that people think *Bullseye* springs fully formed from somewhere deep inside my brain, when in reality it is a group effort. Like, the reason that we're able to make *Bullseye* is not just because of my work—or even primarily because of my work—but because of my work and Daniel's work and Kevin's work and Richard's work, Jesus's work, Hannah's work. This is a real big group effort that wouldn't happen without all that work and also all the resources that make that work possible.

And that's why we're here. It's because it is the MaxFunDrive. We've been part of Maximum Fun, the organization that produces this show, since it dawned. So, that's—You know, this is the—believe it or not—the 25th year of *Bullseye*'s production. We get some money from being on public radio stations around the country. We get some money from the underwriting spots that you hear in the show. But the majority of the budget of this program comes from direct support: people who are members of Maximum Fun, who listen to *Bullseye*.

Becoming a member is as simple as going to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join) and signing up to just send in five bucks a month. Your money goes to the shows that you listen to, specifically. So, if you're listening to *Bullseye*, that \$5 a month is being apportioned to *Bullseye*. It's not like a discretionary thing on the part of Maximum Fun. And that is the money that pays for our production. Everything that we do—including, among other things, our new initiatives, like Daniel's video work.

**Daniel Speer:** Yeah. I wouldn't be here without member support.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

I just wouldn't have a job. It wouldn't exist. I'd still be doing god knows what on Twitch.

*(They laugh.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Wow! We don't wanna send Daniel back to whatever that career was that he didn't put on his resume.

**Daniel Speer:** No, man. No, it's out there. *(Chuckles.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Richard, let's talk about an interview like this George Lopez interview, right? So, we're in the middle of this George Lopez interview. Obviously, I'm the one that's sitting there on camera and on microphone with George Lopez. But what are the other pieces that go into that production and who's working on them?

**Daniel Speer:** Yeah. So, I mean, to even make that interview happen, we have to book the guests. So, it starts with reaching out to the publicist, locking in that interview. And then when they arrive, I'm getting them set up to have the conversation.

**Jesse Thorn:** And then there is prep. And I'm doing a lot of prep, but I'm doing prep based on prep work that has been done in advance. How does that work?

**Richard Robey:** that works by us, doing a little digging, deep diving into the depths of the internet and gathering articles, funny bits, just different information for you to kind of review and go over before the interview. Just stuff that can help you prepare for the interview.

**Daniel Speer:** Yeah, no. Hannah, Richard, Kevin, Jesus are all out there working like the *Minority Report* with the 3D things—

[00:40:00]

—trying to get all the summation of all the information from these guests. And that's time, and that's money, and that's support that we need.

**Jesse Thorn:** Then once that thing's on tape—I mean, when George Lopez was in here, how long do you think he was sitting in here? 70 minutes?

**Richard Robey:** Yeah. It was like an hour, hour and some change. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Now, the version that is out here on the radio is not using an hour and some change of people's time.

**Richard Robey:** No.

**Jesse Thorn:** So, what happens after it's recorded?

**Richard Robey:** It comes down to us cutting the interview down to run for both radio and podcast. 'Cause as you know, *Bullseye* is on the radio, and you can listen to it online. What we put on the radio has some more time constraints. So, we have to really be decisive about what we're picking out. You know, we wanna make sure you have the best information and content from the interview. And then for podcasts, we have a little bit more flexibility, but it still couldn't be two hours. We, you know, wanna keep you engaged. So, we chop it up. And that one, you know, ends up being around like 45 minutes or so. 30 to 45 minutes.

**Jesse Thorn:** Look, this is one of the smallest hour-long weekly public radio programs that exists. However, it is nonetheless a huge group effort that takes a lot of resources. And those resources come from you who are listening to me right now. So, if you wanna become a member, go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). You'll get access to all kinds of cool stuff, including last year we did an entire series just for members about people with amazing jobs where you will learn all about what it's like to be a professional Buddhist robe maker. If you want to make clothes for Buddhist monks or just know the business backwards and forwards, that's the show for you.

And our new bonus episode only for members, which is called—what's—what do we call it? What's the Worst Job You Ever Had?

**Daniel Speer:** Yeah. The Worst Job I Ever Had.

**Richard Robey:** Yeah. I mean, it was an opportunity to talk to some of the guests we had on the show about the worst jobs they ever had before they made it big in the biz. So, we got some cool stories on there.

**Jesse Thorn:** You wanna hear what Denzel Curry's worst job ever, Ken Burns worst job ever, is? You have to become a member of Maximum Fun. The place to go to do it is [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). This is the one time a year when we ask you to do it. I know that we harp on that, but it really is essential to our ability to make this program, and we're so grateful to everyone who's a member. If you're already a member, you can upgrade or boost your membership at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join). But to me, the real difference is between you supporting the show and not.

So, if it is possible in your means, I do ask that you do it. Go right now to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

Let's get back into this conversation with George Lopez.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is comedian George Lopez. His latest sitcom, *Lopez vs Lopez*, is now on NBC and Peacock.

You have had to live your entire public life for at least the last 30ish years of your—25ish years of your public life in parallel with the television version of yourself.

*(George confirms.)*

So, what is it like to walk onto a standup stage or walk down the street and have people understand who you are from having been the star of a TGIF show?

**George Lopez:** I don't think anybody—I don't think they think deep enough to think—I think they think who they see is who I am. You know? And I don't—I believe, especially in this climate, that everything is so negative and so beyond—you know, hate—that the people who hate me, and who are not fond of me or who, you know, send death threats to me, don't believe that wrestling is real and that those guys aren't wrestlers all the time. And there's nothing that I can say to people or nothing that I can do that is gonna change their mind that what they see is who I am. And it's not even close. Not even close.

But hey, you know, in the beginning they would say, “How close is it the George Lopez character or the ABC show” to me?

I said, “Nah, it's an exaggerated version of myself. I'm not like that.” And gradually, you know, they became kind of looking at each other eye to eye. I grew up on that show, and my personality grew up on that show. And now, you know, we go through it again with Mayan that it's—I would say for this particular time in our lives, that what she's going through, I'm going through. Because I'm maybe the person that caused it. So, again, that's a badder version of me, but still nothing to be admired, I would say.

**Jesse Thorn:** How long were you and your daughter, Mayan, estranged?

**George Lopez:** We were probably... I would say maybe seven or eight years. And it was tough, man. I mean, you know, it's my only child, and I was drinking a lot in 2009.

[00:45:00]

My grandmother died in '09. Two years there. And just, you know, me and her mother were not kind to each other. It was just a very, very difficult time, you know? And I was alone a lot. And yeah, if I made it through there— I think I was trying to destroy myself, I think, privately. And not publicly, but privately. And you know, I had a guy that was working with me that turned out to be a bad guy. He died in 2014, but he was a... I would say a psychopath, a sociopath, that he lied all the time, and we had no idea until he passed away.

But I was very disappointed in that I had, you know, bought into this guy being like a brother to me. And then when he died, and I found out he was stealing from me and all the things that he was doing, it broke my heart. You know? And mine's not an easy heart to break, but he—it got me. Yeah, it got me.

**Jesse Thorn:** And I imagine your heart was broken from being estranged from your daughter and your daughter's mother.

**George Lopez:** And he knew that, and he played that against me. Like, he really enjoyed telling people, behind my back, that I wasn't a good father, that my own daughter doesn't talk to me. All under the guise of, when we were together, like, "Hey, I'm like a brother to you." Terrible. Terrible.

**Jesse Thorn:** Was there any time when you actually were able to ask for help in there?

**George Lopez:** Um... Well, you know, I had a therapist guy that I've had since 2000 that has helped me. But also, you know... remember when cars started to check themselves? You know, like you go through the diagnostics; the car would go through its own diagnostics. I think in that time I started to look at myself and what was wrong with me, and then systematically trying to remove those emotions from my life. And I've learned everything by the hard knocks. I mean, you know, just really terrible lessons to learn. But as I started to get a little bit out of there, I turned out to be a little more optimistic and a lot less, you know, hurting myself as much, or giving myself an opportunity to be alive and not feel guilty for success or failure. You know?

And I think it all kind of met when they came to us before the pandemic and decided that they wanted to do this show, this thing. The thing was—I was kind of ready to— You know, we were talking a little bit, but I think nothing like it is now. I mean, she sent me a beautiful message on Thanksgiving about taking the trip with me down this road and how much she loves me and all that stuff. That's just—it's— Man, it's beautiful.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did she reach out to you initially?

**George Lopez:** Yeah, we—yeah. I think she started to see some things in behavior that maybe had not—you know, that opened her eyes a little bit. And we started to talk. I mean, it's crazy when you see guys that were my friends when I was married, and those guys had more of a relationship or saw her more than I did. It was really painful. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Were you scared to work with her?

**George Lopez:** Well, you know, I almost say like failure was not an option. You know, she talked about wanting to do TV and stuff when she was like 12, like when I was—you know, and the same thing as me. And she went and trained and went to Second City and went to college and took classes and sang and acted. She was very good.

**Jesse Thorn:** And her mother was an actor and producer as well.

**George Lopez:** Yeah. Very good, by the way. And so, it would be tough if she had never gotten off the couch. But you know, I would tell her that, you know, I think you know what you're doing. I'm not gonna really kind of give—if you need any advice, you know, ask me. Or otherwise, I'll leave you in the hands of the people that are capable. You know, you're a producer, director. It's like producers in note sessions. And she's come a long way in a short

time. She's got a great coach and friend that works with her. I'd say, you know, I can hear her rehearsing in the morning about an hour before we start, while I am in my room messing around with the guitar. And I just get there early, because I've always gotten to work early.

[00:50:00]

And that's really something that, through that wall, it just—it fills me up with pride to know that this kid is here early and working on something that not everybody will see. But then eventually, they'll see in success how much better she's gotten in a short amount of time.

**Jesse Thorn:** What about the part where you're on stage with your daughter from whom you were estranged for eight years, and you're enacting for an audience like the hardest parts of your relationship that may or may not even be settled between the two of you in real life?

**George Lopez:** You know, we were doing— That's a good question. You know, we were doing a thing in the—we were doing a thing in the kitchen, and she said, “Do it for me, your only daughter.”

And then I said, “That I know of!”

And she like completely shut down, and I crossed the line there. So, she didn't like that, you know. So, I was like, “Oh, okay. Sorry.” You know, and I think—I don't think I've ever acted as... you know, keep myself in my lane as much as I had on this show, 'cause it's just so volatile, and everything's still kind of laying on the top. Yeah. But you know, in season four when we continue—I'm pretty sure we will—I'm not gonna go to as many deep places.

I told them, I've gone to the deepest places now. And now, the family's gonna start to win a little bit. They're gonna start to come together, and they're gonna start to really get it together and have and suffer wins instead of suffering or celebrating losses. You know?

**Jesse Thorn:** What was it like to be on set and beat up a pinata of yourself?

**George Lopez:** Man, that's pretty real there. I mean, you know, when Mayan—the way her cadence of her voice was dramatic, but also—“And not! Trusting! Men!” You know, just that 1, 2, 3.

And I'm standing there looking at her. And in my mind I said, “God, she did that beautifully.” You know, really beautiful.

And then Selenis is like, “Can I go again? I just thought of some more stuff!” Which I thought was really funny. And then, you know, Tisha Campbell played the therapist. She goes, “Alright, George, time to face yourself.”

But whew, man, I mean, that might've been the only time I've really faced myself. And that pinata wouldn't break. You know? Like, I wasn't supposed to hit it that many times, that hard. So, I'm in there, and I'm hitting it, and I'm hitting it where I thought I should hit it, and it

wasn't going. You know, in my mind, I think flashes by like, "Don't stop. You know, keep going, hit it harder, hit it somewhere else." I'm hitting it lower, and then you're just pretty exhausted at that. And then the thing was for me to collapse, and then that thing all collapsed and, you know, break down at the end.

But whatever made that pinata a little bit tougher that day, and I had to hit it more to get it to break, really was the button on that scene with the whole collapsing of it. And her putting her hand on my shoulder was great.

**Jesse Thorn:** Do you think that if you get 100 episodes of *Lopez vs Lopez* and it wraps up a grand success, you will feel comfortable resting?

**George Lopez:** You know, I'm gonna say yes. I'm gonna say yeah. Because I could... *(sighs)* I mean, you never think of your mortality when you're younger. But I also suffered a lot of loss in the last five years. Lost a lot of people. And I understand myself now, and I like where I've ended up. And I don't need to pump myself up or be seen, 'cause I'd rather not be seen. But also, when I'm not being seen, I'm comfortable with what I'm doing and who I am. So, it's taken a long time, but yeah. I think I'm gonna—it may be the best place.

**Jesse Thorn:** Your daughter, Mayan, introduces you on your new special.

*(George confirms.)*

Was it her idea or did you tell her to introduce you as el mas chingon?

**George Lopez:** Oh no, I think it was her idea.

*(They laugh.)*

Yeah. Mas chingon. It's like king of pop. They said, "What does that mean?"

I said, "It's like you remember how Michael Jackson was like king of pop? Yeah. She said el mas chingon. Yeah." Yeah, man. That was her idea.

**Jesse Thorn:** George Lopez, I'm so grateful for your time. Thanks for talking to me.

**George Lopez:** Oh, man, you're the greatest, esse. Thank you so much. You know, I hit a spot there, then I'm back around being happy, man. Thank you, Jesse.

**Jesse Thorn:** George Lopez. Catch him on NBC's *Lopez vs Lopez*. Now. That interview offered with apologies to our producer, Jesus Ambrosio, since I failed to ask George Lopez about his stunning turn as the villainous Mr. Electric in the 2005 action/adventure film, *The Adventures of Shark Boy and Lava Girl in 3D*.

[00:55:00]

George Lopez, come back on the show; we'll ask you about it.

**Transition:** Relaxed, jazzy synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, as well as at Max Fun HQ overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. It is clear and blue skied outside my window as I record this. It also hailed today.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers, Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Hannah Moroz. Our video producer 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's 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'll find videos from just about all our interviews—including both of the interviews you heard this week. 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://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** I hope you enjoyed that conversation with the great George Lopez. I certainly did. I feel like it was quite a ride with a remarkable artisan, a remarkable human being.

If you wanna support work like this conversation—well, you know what to do. It's the MaxFunDrive. Go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join) and become a member of Maximum Fun. 'Cause your membership directly supports the production of this program—not just my salary, but all our cameras and microphones and the producers who work on this program are paid by members of Maximum Fun. So, go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

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