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Jesse Thorn: *Bullseye* listeners, it's MaxFunDrive time. That means this is the time of year when we ask you to support the production of our show by going to MaximumFun.org/join and becoming a member of MaxFun. That's the worker-owned cooperative that produces *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. We have a really, really cool interview with Tom Green that you're about to hear. But if you're a *Bullseye* lover—if you're somebody that listens to every episode, who waits for it to show up in your podcast player—I hope that you are also a *Bullseye* supporter at MaximumFun.org/join.

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.

Imagine you're a pizza guy. You show up at someone's house with the pizza they ordered. You ring the doorbell. But just as that customer opens the door, there's this wild-eyed guy coming up behind you. He's yelling to your customer that he'll sell them the same pizza for half price. And to prove it, he brings out a plain pizza and a toolbox full of pizza toppings—like a literal toolbox of pepperonis and anchovies. And maybe that's when you realize you're being pranked.

It's the kind of surreal stunt that we've seen on a lot of TV shows over the past 25 years or so. I'm thinking of *Jackass* and *Practical Jokers*, *Eric Andre*, *Nathan For You*. But before all of those, there was *The Tom Green Show* hosted by my first guest this week: Tom Green. And that pizza thing? Tom Green really did it.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Tom Green: (*Singing in an upbeat tune.*) Ba-ba-baba-baba, Undercutters!

Get down, get down. There he is, there he is. That's our pizza guy. Stay back *Simon & Simon* style. You know? There he is, right there. Okay. Oh, okay. Pull in. Right—pull up.

(*Whistles idly.*)

You guys ordered a pizza?

Customer: Yeah.

Tom Green: What toppings did you guys want on your pizza?

Customer: Extra cheese.

Tom Green: Extra cheese. Okay.

Pizza Delivery Guy: Where's Michael's pizza?

Tom Green: *(Talking over the customer.)* Here we go. This is it here. No, no. We're from Undercutters. Yeah.

Customer: *(Handing Tom the pizza back.)* Take this pizza.

Tom Green: No, no, how much is it? How much is yours?

Customer: Get the hell away from me.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Tom Green also painted his mom and dad's house plaid... and then white again after they said they didn't like it. *The Tom Green Show* started as a public access show in Ottawa, then as a real-deal cable comedy show on Canada's comedy network. Then starting in 1999, it moved to the states and MTV where it was a sensation.

Music: "The Tom Green Show – Theme Song" by Tom Green.

This is The Tom Green Show

It's not The Green Tom Show

This is my favorite show

Because it is my show

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: *The Tom Green Show's* run was cut short in the year 2000 after Tom was diagnosed with testicular cancer. Once he was cleared, he did some acting. He rebooted his show a couple times. And he wrote, directed, and starred in a movie: *Freddy Got Fingered*. It was an insane provocation that Roger Ebert called—this is a direct quote—“a vomitorium”. After that, Tom Green kind of took a break. He started doing standup, started an internet-only interview show, and eventually left Los Angeles and moved back to Canada.

These days, he lives on a farm in Ontario with his fiancé, a dog, and a mule. There's a documentary out now called *This is the Tom Green Documentary*—which was directed by Tom Green—and a new standup special called *Tom Green: I Got a Mule*. In this chunk of the special, Tom talks about the show and the unlikely smash hit single that he recorded right around the same time.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Tom Green: It goes to number one. Number one song in America. Okay? It knocked Britney Spears off *Total Request Live* on MTV. She was like, “What the (*cancel beep*)?” You know?

(The audience laughs.)

Then Eminem does a parody of “The Bum Bum Song”. Okay? My bum bum song is—I still have—I still claim ownership over it. Like, I'm proud of it still. My bum bum song! “My bum is on the cheese! Bum is on the cheese! If I get lucky, I'll get a disease!” *(Chuckles sardonically.)* Yeah. Two weeks later I got testicular cancer. Okay, that's called karma. That's what that is.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Tom Green, welcome to *Bullseye*. I am so happy to have you here and have you on the show.

Tom Green: Thanks! Great to be here.

Jesse Thorn: I'm so glad that you brought your dog as well. Your dog is the costar of your standup special.

Tom Green: Mm-hm. Absolutely. The star.

Jesse Thorn: I can't—like, I can't begin to tell you the extent to which you were living my dream, performing comedy with your dog on stage.

Tom Green: Oh, okay. Well that's good. Yeah. You have a dog, I guess?

Jesse Thorn: I think— Yeah, and every time I'm on stage, I wish my dog was there.
(Laughs.)

Tom Green: Yeah, yeah, it's—

Jesse Thorn: I like my dog. I don't know!

Tom Green: Absolutely. Yeah.

[00:05:00]

Charlie's four-and-a-half years old, and I got her at the beginning of the pandemic. And I had two huskies before, for 15/16 years. And it had been a few years since I had had a dog. And when the pandemic happened, I found Charlie. She's a rescue from The Bahamas. And I got her from a rescue in San Diego, and I was living in Los Angeles. And I just decided that I didn't want to be apart from her. You know? Like, when I used to tour doing standup, I couldn't bring two Siberian huskies with me. But—so, I've been doing a lot of my touring traveling by vehicle now and not flying as much. And she comes to all my shows on stage with me, and we're always together, and she's the probably the hardest working standup comedy dog in the business. I mean, the only one too, but—

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Top 10 anyway.

(Tom agrees with a laugh.)

You've been back to standup for quite a while now. Do you still deal with people's expectations of what it means to have Tom Green onstage in front of them?

Tom Green: I guess so. Yeah. I mean, I assume they expect that it's going to be hilarious.

(They laugh.)

And it always is. So, I deliver that for them.

Jesse Thorn: How long do you feel like it took for you to find your voice as a standup?

Tom Green: Well, it's an ongoing thing, you know. It always evolves and changes. But I will say that I started doing standup when I was 16 years old. And I did not find my voice when I was 16 years old. I mean, it's hard doing standup when you're 16 years old. I did it 'til I was around maybe 20—maybe 19 or 20—just for a few years. I was really into it though. I was really very, very focused on doing standup.

Jesse Thorn: How many nights a week were you doing when you were a teenager?

Tom Green: One or two, one or two. 'Cause I was in high school, you know. In the summers, maybe a bit more. But that only takes you so far, you know, and then you have to kind of develop—certainly an act, but you have to develop a style and a confidence and a point of view. And that comes quicker when you're touring, you know. Because when you start really throwing yourself into standup—and I was fortunate enough to be able to start touring pretty much right away. So, I was doing 5, 6, 10 shows a week for year after year. You start to kind of really get into a groove pretty quick.

So, it's been good. But then you say—you never really feel like you're no longer evolving. Because first of all, you have to cycle through in material, so you can— That's the hardest part, I'd say. So, you work really hard on a piece of material and a joke, an idea, a whole set, and it just gets to the point where it's really just perfect, you know? Like, as perfect as you could ever imagine it being. And you know, every little pause, every little nuance, every choice of word is very intricately crafted. And then you put out a special, and you go, “Well, I guess I have to write a whole new one.” And I've been working that material out for a couple of years now. Maybe sometimes more, you know.

Jesse Thorn: When you were a teenager, was your vision to get on *Star Search*, like Norm MacDonald?

Tom Green: You know, *Star Search* was not something that I'd thought about. But to me, the dream was to get on *Letterman*. You know, that was the dream. So, I got to be a guest on *Letterman*, and I got to be on the show a few times. So. But—

Jesse Thorn: Did that show air at a regular time in Canada?

Tom Green: Yeah, it was—you know, we were watching it on NBC. So, the same time, same place, and the same show. Yeah. Yeah. It was—started out watching it as, you know, *Late Night with David Letterman* on NBC at 12:30 and, you know, sneaking down to the basement to watch it. 'Cause I was too young to be up that late. But yeah, it was definitely one of the big inspirations for wanting to do comedy for sure, was *Letterman*.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, the thing that's special about that program, culturally, is that it was a weird show, and millions of people were watching it, because network television was dominant. Like, there weren't other shows—like, it was that or Tom Snyder or whatever. (*Chuckles.*) You know?

Tom Green: Yeah, yeah and it was—but it was also—he was also an incredibly astute broadcaster. Right? He understood the medium, and he understood just how to create a great interview, even in a serious way. So, I don't think—if that foundation wasn't there, I don't think it would've worked. It would've just been sort of, you know, weird for weird's sake.

[00:10:00]

But it was the fact that it was all floating within this, you know, very well-crafted— You know, he was a student of television. He loved *Johnny Carson*, and he famously would go down to the Museum of Television and Radio with his writers in the beginning years and watch old Steve Allen shows and, you know, somewhat kind of find inspiration in that. So, that's—and you know, I've tried to kind of learn from that. I spent a lot of time going down the Museum of Television and reading lots of old books about talk show hosts and Jack Paar and Ernie Kovacs and Steve Allen and all of these great shows from the '50s and '60s. And I found that very sort of inspirational to read about the shows that were being made in the early days of television, because it kind of is when they were inventing it all.

And that's a unique thing. 'Cause when you're inventing something, you're not sort of burdened with this sort of choice of having to try to recreate something that already exists. You know? You're not trying to remake something or do something that is supposed to be done a certain way. “So, let's try to fit it into—” You know, you're just kind of creating it from your mind. You know? And Steve Allen was the first guy to go out on the street with the—you know, walk out of the studio onto the street, right here in Los Angeles. I think that was down on Melrose or something like that. But—so, that was like shockingly weird. You know? 'Cause, what? He walked out onto the street, out of the studio!

Jesse Thorn: Performances happened on stages. Everybody else was trying to create a vaudeville show within the confines of that little television screen.

Tom Green: Yeah, it was sort of—radio became TV, and then all of a sudden it's—he's out on the street with real people?! That was pretty amazing at the time. So, it's kind of cool to think that there was a time not that long ago where having real people on TV was just kind of completely befuddling to everybody. You know? And I took a lot of inspiration from that as well with my show over the years—you know, with wanting to just essentially only be out on the street. (*Chuckles.*) You know? So, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, the thing that impressed me about the beginning of your story that I hadn't thought about was the extent to which your gift was as an organizer. Here you are in Ottawa. You need to talk a lot of people into getting onboard in order to make a television show in the 1990s in Ottawa.

Tom Green: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, on public access, where nobody's getting paid. You know, I went to—I studied broadcasting at Algonquin College in Ottawa, which has always had a great television and radio program. And so, I had some friends from school—Darcy De Tony and Trevor Kavanaugh. They were, you know, interested in getting into the television business. And other people from our class and then my friend, Glenn Humplik, who I met at college radio—at University of Ottawa Radio. And my friend Phil DeRue, who was a skateboarder and friend of mine who was always extremely funny and inspired a lot of hilarious things over the years. So, I think we all kind of had a sort of a desire to just go down and make this show.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, part of what makes that kind of success, in my experience, is: can you find other people who will also show up when they say they're going to?

Tom Green: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. There's no way to make a television show by yourself. So. And I've always had great, supportive friends and people that have worked with me over the years. And yeah, it's extremely true what you're saying.

Jesse Thorn: We're taking a break. We'll be back in just a second. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Promo:

Jesse Thorn: Man, that Tom Green's really something else.

(They laugh.)

Richard Robey: He really is.

Jesse Thorn: It's Jesse Thorn. I am joined by two of the producers of *Bullseye*, Richard Robey and Jesus Ambrosio. Hey, guys. How's it going?

Richard Robey: Good. How about yourself?

Jesse Thorn: Oh, you know, I'm doing okay. You know, world's on fire, but—

(They laugh.)

Richard Robey: Hey, what can you do, right?

[00:15:00]

Jesse Thorn: I mean, the good news is it's springtime, and we're taking advantage of it for a spring break MaxFunDrive.

(They agree.)

Who cut this Tom Green interview?

Jesus Ambrosio: I did.

Jesse Thorn: What did you think?

Jesus Ambrosio: Oh man. Tom Green is—what a guy! *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) He's really—

Jesus Ambrosio: What an interesting guy and life he's led.

Jesse Thorn: He brought such Tom Green energy into our office the moment he crossed our threshold.

Richard Robey: Oh, totally.

Jesus Ambrosio: I was not here in person, but I heard he— I mean, it comes up in the interview. He brought his dog?!

Jesse Thorn: His dog was with him; his wife was with him. He was immediately talking about his farm in Canada.

Richard Robey: Oh yeah.

Jesse Thorn: He was so sweet, just like the sweetest guy in the world. Immediately had a thousand questions about the—like, the first thing that he did was he came in; he locked eyes with Daniel—our video producer—and started asking him specific questions about lens filters.

(*Jesus laughs.*)

Richard Robey: Yes, he just gravitated to the camera.

Jesse Thorn: And what that highlighted for me is like Tom Green has always been a DIY media guy. And Maximum Fun has always been a DIY media company. Right?

(*They agree.*)

I started MaxFun, because I was doing this show initially on college radio, then on community radio, then on local public radio. And for a long time, I did it literally by myself while I had another job. And MaxFun is essentially the organization that I built over many years to support the production of this show and the production of other shows that I really loved and make them into a viable way to build a life for creators.

We have always been dependent directly on our audience, and that's folks who go to MaximumFun.org/join and become members of Maximum Fun.

Jesus Ambrosio: Yeah, and if you go to MaximumFun.org/join, we have some gifts. For \$5 a month, we've got some bonus content there for you that we created specifically for *Bullseye*.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, if you wanna know what the worst job Ken Burns ever had was, that's where you want to go.

Jesus Ambrosio: *(Laughs.)* 10 bucks a month, we got a pin—an enamel pin in the shape of a tote bag.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, we couldn't leave tote bags on the table just 'cause pins were the gift.

Jesus Ambrosio: *(Laughs.)* And for 20 bucks a month, we got a really, really rad beach towel—or a bucket hat, depending on what your flavor is. But gotta check out that beach towel.

Jesse Thorn: We're rocketing our way towards our dream goal of 1,000 new and upgrading members. And at each step along the way, you people have crafted a nightmare for me.

(They laugh.)

Richard Robey: Yes. Yes. So, this year we put together some fun stretch goals. We have different tiers. So, at 250 new or upgrading members, we will release a blooper episode.

Jesus Ambrosio: This was brought up last year during the drive when we were planning. I'm like, "I'm just gonna make a folder of things that Jesse has said during tracking sessions." So, yeah, just a lot of bloopers.

(Jesse laughs.)

There will be other things that will be very fun and that you are gonna wanna listen to.

Jesse Thorn: The 500 goal—Richard, this one is sort of your baby.

Richard Robey: Yeah, this one, it actually came to mind after you commented on my cross colors hoodie I wore in the office one day.

Jesse Thorn: You were wearing a cross colors hoodie. It reminded me of the cross colors shorts that were my proudest possession in the mid-1990s.

Richard Robey: And so, once you told me that, I was like, "Wouldn't it be great if Jesse did an interview in some '90s garb?" So, you know, we're thinking some parachute pants, the Kangol hat. Who knows what he's gonna wear, but we'd love to make that happen.

Jesse Thorn: At 750—this one is pretty intense. So, apparently you guys know some open mics that would allow me to conduct interviews at them. *(Chuckles.)*

Richard Robey: Yeah, we got an idea for a couple of spots we could do a, you know, live open mic for *Bullseye*.

Jesse Thorn: And at 1,000 new and upgrading members is perhaps the darkest timeline of them all. (*Shudders.*) Some *Bullseye* listeners may have, at some point, possibly heard me mention that I'm from San Francisco. (*Chuckles.*)

Richard Robey: (*Playfully sarcastic.*) Really?!

Jesse Thorn: And I'm a huge San Francisco Giants fan. And I've also lived in Los Angeles, where everyone else that works on this stupid show is a Dodgers fan.

(*They laugh.*)

If we get to 1,000 new and upgrading members... I am going to... renounce the San Francisco Giants.

Richard Robey: What?!

Jesse Thorn: Don head-to-toe Los Angeles Dodgers gear.

Richard Robey: What?!

Jesse Thorn: Which I will acquire simply by putting a box in the middle of our office.

(*Jesus laughs.*)

And everyone will fill it with all their Dodgers gear they already wear to taunt me. I will put on all that Dodgers gear.

Richard Robey: Oh man.

Jesse Thorn: And then I will wear it to a Giants/Dodgers game here in Los Angeles.

Jesus Ambrosio: Good luck, my friend.

Richard Robey: I really want this to happen.

Jesse Thorn: So, all of those are really fun. I hope that those get you excited about joining your fellow listeners in becoming a member. But ultimately, what it's about is every time you listen to this show, you can hear the work and craft that these brilliant professionals put into it.

[00:20:00]

And it is your membership that pays them to do that work. It's not something that I could do by myself. It's not about paying me. It's about these incredible people who work on our program and all the hard work that they do. So, join us at MaximumFun.org/join. Support the work we do on *Bullseye* and the work that they do on all of the Maximum Fun shows that you listen to. It's MaximumFun.org/join.

And the time to do it is not tomorrow, or this evening, or the day after tomorrow, or next week. Please just go ahead and do it now, 'cause you will feel great about it. It's MaximumFun.org/join.

Transition: Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is comedian Tom Green. He's the subject of the new documentary *This is the Tom Green Documentary*. He is also its director. He stars in a new standup special called *Tom Green: I Got a Mule*.

Was the skateboard world part of what made you think that you could make stuff and put stuff on video?

Tom Green: For sure. Yeah. Before skateboard videos got huge the way they got in the '90s, there was Stacy Peralta and *The Bones Brigade*. And they would make— The first one I saw was—you know, I think it was *Future Primitive*, which was their second big movie they put out, and then *Animal Chin*. And on *Future Primitive* and *Animal Chin*—I mean, they would go shredding through the streets of San Francisco in *Animal Chin* and kind of get in funny little interactions with pedestrians on the street.

And it became kind of a part of skateboarding as well—was, hey, you know like when we cruise down the street and power slide and make a lot of noise, and then the security guard comes out and tries to kick you out, and you have to kind of cleverly negotiate an exit without getting arrested but also try to get a few laughs from your friends at the same time? That was sort of, you know, what skateboarding brought to it.

And then the video itself, you know, Stacy Peralta—I've never met Stacy Peralta, but I've got to be friends with Tony Hawk and talk to him probably ad nauseum about those days. But—'cause that was sort of— You know, you weren't watching it on the internet. You'd have to go to the skate shop and buy a VHS tape of it. You felt like you were watching something that was authentic and real. It wasn't some sort of corporate manufactured show that was made at a big television network and, you know, run through 300 sort of different censors and writers and producers. It was some skaters out making a crazy movie.

And that was the beginning of sort of that desire to wanna get a video camera. I wanted to get a video camera so we could go film some skateboarding and go film some funny stuff.

Jesse Thorn: What was the first time that you talked someone into pointing a camera at you in public while you did something dumb?

Tom Green: A camera—the very first time with a camera... it was probably for a school project. I would rent—I would sign out the video camera at school. And yeah, I did a history project about the pyramids. I built some pyramids out of some cardboard boxes, and then— You know, it was just kind of something that I filmed for my history assignment. There was a rap video. We did a sort of a skate video that was a rap video version of Run-DMC’s “You Be Illin’” I think was the song. And that was like way early on. That didn't even make the documentary. I don't know where that footage is or anything.

But I remember you'd sign out the video camera, and then you'd have it for a day. And it seemed like you were never gonna get the video camera again, so you'd go shoot something, and it would end up on a VHS tape, and for the next several years you would be popping that tape in every once in a while just to look at it and go, “Oh my god, look at that. I'm on my skateboard.” You know, it was this sort of incredible thing. It wasn't probably until a few years later that I really actually had access to a video camera on a regular basis.

So, it was—I think the fact that you couldn't just have a camera whenever you wanted made it so much more appealing. It was like enticing. Oh my gosh. It's like, “If I could just have a camera, the things we would do with this thing.”

Jesse Thorn: When you had a community TV show, what was the first time you brought a camera out of the studio?

Tom Green: Well, pretty much right away when we had the community show. Yeah. Pretty much right away. Like, it—

Jesse Thorn: Was it meat taped to your head? Was that the first?

[00:25:00]

Tom Green: Yeah. Before we even actually went into the studio, we sort of went out in the street and shot a bunch of stuff on the street. Yeah. The first video for *The Tom Green Show* was I taped meat to my head.

Jesse Thorn: A variety of cuts.

Tom Green: Yeah. Pork chops to my head with duct tape. And went around the ByWard Market in Ottawa with a handheld microphone and just asked people, you know, “How are you doing today? What are you doing today?” And just sort of had some sort of mundane type of interviews with people in a very deadpan way without acknowledging that I had rotting meat—by now, rotting meat on my head. And of course, people would notice the rotting meat on my head, and it was I guess kind of weird.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Tom Green: Hello. How are you today? What are you doing out in the ByWard Market?

Speaker 1: (*Laughing.*) That's so gross!

Tom Green: Are you shopping today?

Speaker 1: Yes, I am!

Tom Green: What are you shopping for specifically?

Speaker 1: Uh, fruits and vegetables. (*Laughing.*) Oh my god.

Tom Green: I'm having a hard time seeing out of my right eye!

Have you ever had a beaver tail before?

Speaker 2: No, I never have.

Tom Green: Quite the exotic treat, aren't they?

Speaker 2: Yes, they are. Very good.

Tom Green: What did you think when you saw that?

Speaker 2: It's different.

Tom Green: Hello? Hello! Hello? Hello?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Tom Green: That was a pretty aggressive first video, as far as—conceptually—that was pretty strange, now that you mention it.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

You know, I wasn't just going around with a microphone and talking to people and asking silly questions. I did have meat taped on my head. I think there's something interesting—first of all, it started because we didn't have a very big budget for props. So, we would go to the

grocery store, and we found, oh, you can buy stuff at the grocery store that is, you know, not particularly supposed to be used in a television bit, like bread or meat or—

Jesse Thorn: I think like one of the signs that it was a low budget Canadian television program is how much bag of milk related material there was.

Tom Green: Definitely a clue to that it was a Canadian low budget, for sure. 'Cause we have our milk in bags. It comes in these plastic bags up there that are sealed, and then everyone has a sort of a milk jug that these plastic bags slip into perfectly, and you clip the little end off of it—a little corner off of it. And that's how you deliver milk to people. But I thought it was pretty—

Jesse Thorn: Put a hole in one of those bags, you got a real milk fountain.

Tom Green: Yeah, a fountain spring. They were quite big, these bags. It was like—you remember you have the Pacsun juice drinks that you would just pop a straw into?

Jesse Thorn: Sure. Yeah, like a Caprisun. Yeah.

Tom Green: A Capri—yeah, it was like that, but huge. It was like a huge, you know, couple of liters of milk in a plastic bag. If you cut a hole in that, you can spray it all over your friend, and it makes a big mess. Lots of fun to do on TV.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think that you were doing crazy stuff on television because you had an artistic vision to do crazy stuff, or because the fear in your heart was so big that you could only get past it by doing something really big and crazy?

Tom Green: No, it was definitely started from the point of... The fear was that I wasn't going to be able to do some artistic—if you wanna use the word artistic—or comedic stuff. You know, that was—'cause I always—you know, even as a little kid, I liked drawing. And I liked, you know, getting laughs from my classmates. And I knew this was kind of something that I had this sort of desire to kind of create.

Jesse Thorn: There's a moment in the documentary right at the beginning where you ask your mom when she knew that you were weird. And she says, “Well, when you were a teenager, we realized you were somewhat artistic.”

Tom Green: Yeah. Artistic or autistic?

Jesse Thorn: She says artistic.

Tom Green: Okay, good. I like that she put that R in there. Might have mispronounced it. No, yeah, yeah, it was a—

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I'm not a psychologist, Tom.

Tom Green: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, no, it was— I think she said a teenager. I think she probably thought it was weird before that, but yeah. No, it was—yeah. No, they were very supportive of the weirdness though.

Jesse Thorn: When you were at the real apex of your MTV career, you found out you had testicular cancer and had to have surgery. And you sort of worked your way through it. But it also ended up being the end of the television show, the end of the production of the show.

(Tom confirms.)

Do you think that you were tired because you had been through treatment for a deadly disease, or—?

Tom Green: I definitely was. But what was the other element?

Jesse Thorn: I was gonna say—

Tom Green: I was probably tired for a few reasons, but...

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I was gonna say: or do you think you were tired because you had just been going so full-steam for so long?

[00:30:00]

And then you were surrounded by madness when it worked? The natural—like, the good kind, mostly, of madness, but still.

Tom Green: Yeah. I mean, there's a lot of aspects to what was going on in my life at that time when I got sick. You know, the show was one of the top shows on MTV. We just moved to Los Angeles. A lot of my crew and team who produced the show with us had come from New York to Los Angeles. And you know, months after we got here, I got sick and sort of determined that if we filmed, it would be a good way to keep the crew going and everybody working. But there was also an awareness that this was gonna have a dramatic physical impact on my body.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Tom Green: I pretty much realized at that point that I had to tell my family and my friends that I had cancer. They all flew down from Canada. I also decided that if I was gonna die, it would be fun to kind of go out man on the moon style.

(Acoustic guitar fades in.)

And we should make a documentary about this whole cancer experience, because it was hilarious.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Tom Green: It turned out to be an extremely, extremely painful, extremely—in many ways—life-altering surgery. If I knew now what I didn't know before, I probably would not have done it. Right? If I knew then what I know now. Like, it was— You know, it did affect me for years to come. You know, there's nerve damage and pain, and it really was something that really was sort of the kind of thing that was, you know, debilitating for quite a while.

But you know, it also was the kind of thing where I didn't really—I knew I didn't really wanna be running around on the street, getting chased by people with hammers and security guards while I was in this kind of pain. But also, you know—I mean, if we're gonna be completely honest with you, like there was a lot of opportunities outside of MTV that were presenting themselves at this point. And you know, having the ability to stop doing the show right at that moment was not the worst thing in the world for me from a business standpoint. And I went and signed on to do like four or five movies and—or you know, three or four movies or something like that. And I'd been doing the show for a long time.

And we were also—you know. I don't like to go on and on about this, but there was a very sort of intense creative process at MTV to make the show. I'd been doing the show for years in Canada, and now all of a sudden there was, you know, a couple of producers and executives there that were very, very intense with the way that they produced these shows. I don't like to make it so much about that, because I do really think that MTV gave me this incredible opportunity. As an adult, now I look back and I think, “Okay, yeah, maybe some of these people were—they were going through the same thing I was going through.”

You know? You're a television executive. I was in my 20s; they were in their mid-30s. Right? They're operating under fear too. They gotta make sure that this works too, for their job. Right? So, I can see why they would be, you know, also intense with the way that they kind of direct some kid from Canada who wants to go out and strap meat to his head or whatever. So. But it was a good time to take a break from the show for sure.

Jesse Thorn: We got a lot more to talk to Tom Green about. As we mentioned earlier, he directed one of the worst reviewed movies of all time. We will talk about what that was like and how he got the courage to direct again. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Transition: Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Tom Green. He's, of course, the star and host of the beloved *Tom Green Show*, which aired on Canada Public Access and MTV in the 1990s and early 2000s. These days, he's both the subject and director of a documentary called *This is the Tom Green Documentary*. He has a new standup special

called *Tom Green: I Got a Mule*. Both are streaming now on Amazon Prime. Let's get back into our conversation.

You made a movie that you co-wrote and directed, called *Freddy Got Fingered*.

(Tom confirms.)

That was, at the time and since, one of the most critically reviled films ever released.

Tom Green: I mean, that's my way of describing it. Yeah. I've described it as that in my standup special. "The most critically reviled film in history," but—

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Jesse Thorn: It's also a film with a lot of fans and defenders. It's not just that.

Tom Green: I'd say it's more so that now. Like, let's put it this way. Like, I rarely have somebody come up to me in the street and say they hate that movie. But every single day for the last 20 years, I've had—you know—a half-dozen people a day come up to me with x-ray cat tattoos on their legs, or yelling, "Daddy, would you like some sausage?" out of their cars. And it just got put in the Criterion Collection.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Gord: Is there a problem?

Speaker: Yeah, moron. I ordered a cheese sandwich and there's hardly any cheese in here.

Gord: That's no good is it? Here, give me your sandwich. I will fix it for you.

(Crinkling sounds.)

We can't have people complaining that there's not enough cheese on the cheese sandwiches, now can we? *(Speeding up.)* I mean, if there's no cheese on a cheese sandwich, it's basically just two slices of bread! If word of that were to get out—well, I could lose my job! I COULD LOSE ALL OF THIS! *(Angrily.)* And we wouldn't want that now, would we?! WOULD WE?! WOULD WE?!

(Screaming and clattering.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Tom Green: So, it's become this thing where it's like—I think there was a sort of a bandwagon type of thing when the movie came out, where a lot of the movie critics thought, “Hey, this will be fun to talk about this movie and say it's a horrible movie.” But you know, it sort of is a pretty, I think—and you know, when I look at it now with basically having spent the last 20 years with only being sort of greeted by so many people who love the film that—you know, if I can even call it a film.

You know, it's like people— It sort of surprises me now, in hindsight, when I look at— You know, when I was making the documentary, and I looked at sort of video of Roger Ebert trashing the movie, and I think to myself, “How are you not able to kind of take a step back and go, ‘Okay, wait. This is—maybe this shouldn't be judged by the same criteria.’” You know, this is a kid from Canada who's making a weird show, and now he got an opportunity to make a movie. He's trying to make a really weird movie. He's not trying to make, you know—

Jesse Thorn: I mean, Roger Ebert had some blind spots about some kinds of stuff. He hated *Wet Hot American Summer* too. He wrote an entire “Hello Mudduh, Hello Fadduh!” parody about *Wet Hot American Summer*, one of the funniest movies the last 25 years, just to express how much he hated it. (*Laughs.*)

Tom Green: Yeah. It was something—sometimes comedy gets that—

Jesse Thorn: Would you have done it differently if you knew then what you know now?

Tom Green: Well, absolutely. I mean—and not necessarily for any big reason other than I'm always adjusting and correcting the way I approach things based on past experience. You know? Like, we had to do a focus group. Take the movie, and then you go to Phoenix, and then you play it for 100 people. And then a guy comes out with a clipboard and hands everyone out clipboards. And he asks them to fill out forms and say, you know, about each scene and rate it. And “Well, what did you like?” And “Is this a good scene or a bad scene?”

Jesse Thorn: “Would you have preferred a different sausage?”

Tom Green: Yeah, exactly. The movie was supposed to be kind of confrontational. So, you know, it doesn't necessarily work with a focus group that's meant to have a mathematical equation to test movies the way they're traditionally made. You know? The attitude was “Let's make a movie that's so weird that half the people are gonna hate it. And then the other half of the people will just be laughing in the aisles, watching the confusion of the other people.” Right?

So, when you say would I do anything differently? Yeah, I think definitely I would've stood up to the studio and said, “Hey, I don't think we should focus group this. I don't think it makes any sense,” for the reasons I just described. I mean, you know. And certainly we

shouldn't take any of the advice of the focus group and then go make changes to the movie, which we ended up having to do. Right? Which then I think affected the fluidity of the way the movie and the story was told, and it did make the movie worse. The focus group made the movie worse.

There was an initial cut of the movie which will never exist. I've talked about this before, and now I get like all these people saying, "We wanna see the director's cut," but the director's cut is impossible. 'Cause I don't think we even have the footage anymore—right?—of the movie. But the initial time I played the director's cut—right?—you know, there was sort of a more ambient music throughout. There was—it was longer, the story. There were entire scenes and characters that are no longer in the movie that, you know, sort of explained more about what was going on in Gord's life. It was just—you know.

[00:40:00]

And Arnon Milchan, who was the head of New Regency—you know, a famous movie producer—just stood up at the end of that screen and did the slow clap and said, "This is the best movie of a first-time filmmaker I've ever seen." He said, "Sure." And then we went off the focus group, and we changed it. Right? So. But you know, I will say that Arnon Milchan and Sanford Panitch and Peter Cramer at New Regency were like—they had the guts to like kind of at least let me try to do this, you know. Which was completely outrageous. And so, there was this sort of feeling that it was like, "Okay, we'll take the kid from MTV, and we will make a movie. But instead of it being this comedian, or that comedian, or this comedian that's made so many other movies in the exact same way, it'll be Tom Green. And we'll make a movie that looks like these other movies."

And so, I kind of wanted to resist that. I didn't want it to be just another comedy movie made the same way, with me in it, you know? And for whatever reason, I had the desire to make the movie I wanted to make more than I wanted to just make a movie. And I said no to all these directors. You know, it was a problem. It was like a big deal. You know, Howard and my agents had to talk to the studio and "What do you mean he doesn't want—? They're the top directors, you know! They direct all the big comedy movies!" You know.

And then I had to go in for a meeting, and I pitched to Arnon Milchan why I should be director. And he called me up and said I could direct it. So, it was pretty cool that they let me do that. And I got a very nice call from Arnon, after the movie came out and was not, you know, reviewed well by Roger Ebert and others, you know. And he sort of told me, you know, "Tom, the first movie that we made at New Regency—I think it was the first—was *King of Comedy*," and told me the story about how Roger Ebert, you know, revised his review of *The King of Comedy*. And it's funny, it was the only time he'd ever done that.

And then, you know, funnily enough, Roger Ebert did come back and say something about it that was a little bit more positive than what he had said before when *Stealing Harvard* came out. He was like, "You know what?" I can't remember what he said, but he said something like, "You know, maybe it was—you know—something interesting, at least." You know, he didn't give it a glowing review, but he did kind of pull back a little bit on some of his earlier comments. So.

Jesse Thorn: When you went into your storage unit and pulled out thousands of hours of tape to make this documentary—?

Tom Green: Yeah, literally. Yeah. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: What was that like? How did you feel about watching that stuff?

Tom Green: Well, I've known that tape was there, because I put it there. It's my storage space. I've always kept all the tapes.

Jesse Thorn: I'm not saying, "What was the experience of removing it from the storage unit?" I'm not asking how heavy it was. (*Laughs.*)

Tom Green: No, I know what you're asking. Was it daunting to think about how I'm gonna go through all that and find—?

Jesse Thorn: No, I'm asking what it was like for you with your feelings to look back at—

Tom Green: Oh, when I actually started looking at it, huh? Yeah, it's an interesting thing, 'cause I've anticipated having to look at it or make this documentary for years. That's why I kept the tape. There'd been other opportunities over the last 20 years to do the documentary. Funnily enough, it sounds like there's a pattern here, but the production companies that wanted to do it would not let me direct it. They said, "There's no way you can direct a documentary about yourself."

And I said, "Well, okay. Well, I guess I probably won't do it then." Because to me, I don't look at it so much as just like a documentary about myself. It's also an encapsulation of what happened in *The Tom Green Show* and how the comedy was made and what the important elements of that was. You know? And I didn't think that people other than me would be able to go through all of those tapes, those thousands of hours of tapes, and find those needles in the haystack and put them together in the right order to tell the story the way it really should be told.

And nobody knows that more than me, 'cause I've lived it. And I've had people, fans of mine, at my shows for years have talked about their favorite bits. I mean, I knew sort of just in the back of my mind what the story was that I wanted to tell, and I did not want to go in and like—my mom said whitewash it or sugarcoat it. I wanted to tell the story in a way that was, you know, fair but also showed the real journey of the show. So, it was exciting. It was exciting. But yeah. I mean, I'd sometimes joke and say, you know, "Don't ever make a documentary about yourself, 'cause it's not the most pleasant thing you can do. 'Cause you sort of really have to go back and revisit all of your successes, but also all of your failures and all of the things that you wouldn't do again, and how would you do things differently—

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—and then confront that in your mind and try to kind of explain that to an audience, and then think about it, and then overthink it, and then overthink it some more to make sure that

you're, you know, being fair to the story. And you know, that can be kind of quite a heavy process when you're talking about cancer and all these kinds of things. But you know, I'm glad it's finished. I really look at it like completing the documentary was almost like me closing a door on a major chapter of my life, and I can now move forward and not have to feel like I gotta go out and explain myself anymore. You know?

Jesse Thorn: Like, literally.

(Tom confirms.)

You live in Canada on a farm. You just got engaged. *(Chuckles.)*

(Tom confirms.)

It's a really different chapter of your life.

Tom Green: Yeah. It is different in a lot of ways. I'm still doing what I love, so life is good.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Tom, I really appreciate all your time. It was really nice to get to watch the documentary and laugh like an idiot and get to talk to you about it.

Tom Green: Thank you so much.

Transition: Bright synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Tom Green. His new documentary, *This is the Tom Green Documentary*, is streaming now on Amazon Prime, along with his new standup special, *I Got a Mule*. Both are very funny and very charming. And by the way, his dog, Charlie, came to the recording. Very cute.

Transition: Thumpy, fast-tempo synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun as well as at Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. I happened to be at the Warehouse store the other day. And I bought some of that combination grass seed/mulch/fertilizer, whatever. And I spread it on my lawn. We'll see if it does anything. I'm not much of a gardener.

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, 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. He's sending us some new music! You can find his beats at 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 video from just about all our interviews—including the ones you heard this week. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

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

(Music fades out.)

Jesse Thorn: I hope you loved that conversation with Tom Green as much as I did. If you're a regular *Bullseye* listener, please help us produce this program by becoming a member of Maximum Fun. Go to MaximumFun.org/join. That's MaximumFun.org/join.