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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. What is it like to be an actor on a TV show so big it changes the trajectory of the medium completely? I mean, (*chuckles*) I guess it's cool. That's my imagination anyway. If any big Hollywood agents are out there, I'd be glad to take such a role. But it also means, most likely, that the show will completely define you. When the *New York Times* writes your obituary, the first line will be about you on that show.

My guest, Christina Hendricks, was on one of those shows. She played Joan Harris, the office manager turned ad executive on *Mad Men*. For her work on the show, Hendricks received two SAG awards, two Critic's Choice Awards, and six Emmy nominations. Amazing show. She was amazing on it. But *Mad Men* was so defined by its aesthetics that, when she would do an interview, she was more likely to be asked about her pantyhose or her lipstick than her acting choices. So, brilliant show, brilliant performance, career-defining, but ultimately a little bit of a mixed legacy.

So, what comes next? How do you get out from under all that? Christina Hendricks thought about it a lot. She was super picky about her parts. She did some bobbing and weaving. Now she's found her groove. She started alongside the great Michael K. Williams on the TV drama *Hap and Leonard*. Under appreciated show. Had a great run on NBC's *Good Girls* with Retta and Mae Whitman. And now you can catch her in *Good American Family*, which is streaming now on Hulu. It's a ripped from the headlines miniseries that's based on a story that would be absolutely unbelievable if it weren't true.

A Ukrainian girl named Natalia gets adopted by an American family. She's seven and she has dwarfism. She's having problems with her new family. You can imagine why; she's dealing with this disability, she's in a new country, she grew up in an orphanage. And somehow, her parents take a look at all this, and they come to believe that she isn't actually a kid. They get obsessed with the idea that she's a grown adult. They even get a court to change her legal birth date. And then they get this kid an apartment and leave her to fend for herself at eight years old. The story only gets wilder from there. A second family, the Manns family, get her out of the apartment, end up adopting her. But then they're accused of extorting her. Now she's a young adult, and she lives with a third family, the DePauls. Oh, and by the way, DNA testing has confirmed what Natalia always said. When she came from Ukraine, she was a little kid.

So, you can see why *Good American Family* takes an unusual approach telling the story from the perspectives of the various characters, never settling squarely on a representation of a definitive truth. My guest, Christina Hendricks, plays Cynthia Manns—that's the second

mother to adopt Natalia, the one who got her out of the apartment. In this scene, Manns has just brought Natalia home to meet her other adoptive children.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Cynthia Manns (*Good American Family*): Alright! Groceries in the car. Let's go! Oh, and this is my friend Natalia Grace. Say hi.

Natalia: (*Shyly.*)

(*A chorus of hellos.*)

Young Child: Welcome to my favorite house!

Cynthia: You know what? We're gonna do high fives tonight, everybody. Not hugs.

Zachy: Is it because she smell?

Cynthia: (*Playfully.*) No, Zachy. It's because you smell.

Zachy: You like that my feet smell like coorn chips.

Cynthia: Let's get some hustle. Last one to the car is a rotten egg.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Christina Hendricks, welcome to *Bullseye*. So, happy to have you on the show.

Christina Hendricks: Thank you for having me!

Jesse Thorn: The tone of this program is very intense. Did it read in the script? Like, what did the script seem like to you when you read it at first?

Christina Hendricks: Yes, you're absolutely correct. It's incredibly intense. And I was unfamiliar with the real-life story, so to me it was presented as a script. So, I just thought—I mean, it's a page turner. I mean, it's a real-life story, but you can't believe it when it's on the page.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. And it's also... a very different sort of torn from the headlines miniseries, in that the story is unsettled. (*Chuckles.*) Like, it is both unsettling and unsettled. And it's must have been that same way on the page. Like, the conceit is that it's a very subjective point of view that the camera has.

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Christina Hendricks: Absolutely. I think that's one thing that we're doing a little different from the ID series that's out there that some people might be familiar with, is we're gonna show it all in one block, but we're gonna show it from different perspectives. So, you're gonna start out from the Barnetts, the couple that originally adopted Natalia. And then halfway through the series we shift, and we see it from Natalia's point of view. That's a little bit how this story is sort of played out in the press and in the news. We thought we knew this story, and it was all coming from one side.

So, I think this will be interesting for the audience to sort of make their own call about how we got to this place in this real-life story. It sort of explains all the mishaps and all the weird things that could have happened in order to get to where we are now.

Jesse Thorn: Were you hesitant to get involved in something torn from the headlines?

Christina Hendricks: I wasn't really— You know, Hulu had done *The Act*, which I really, really enjoyed. So, I trusted that they were gonna be doing their research and that they knew what they were doing and that I knew that they did it well. So, I felt like I was in good hands.

Jesse Thorn: You started your career as a dancer and model. Did you have the idea—? I mean, you started modeling professionally as a young teenager. Right? 14 or something like that?

Christina Hendricks: No, I was 18. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: 18. Did you have ambitions to be a showbusiness star?

Christina Hendricks: (*Chuckles.*) No. I grew up doing community theatre and ballet and jazz and tap and dance—mostly ballet. And it was very much a part of my community when I lived in southern Idaho, to be involved in community theater, to be a dancer. But we didn't know people who did it as a profession. To me, it was a very passionate hobby of mine that I hoped to continue throughout my life. And then I got an opportunity to start modeling around the age of 18, when I graduated high school, and I moved to New York and then to London. And I modeled in Japan and Italy a little bit. And it just seemed closer to what I might want to do in my life going to Virginia Commonwealth and continuing to study theatre.

I didn't really know what I was gonna do with all that. I just knew I was having a really good time, and it was something that I always wanted to be involved in. So, no, I didn't even know it could be a profession. And it took me moving to Los Angeles for other reasons, just simply because my mom wanted to move here, and it was sunny and warm. And it seemed like a good move.

Jesse Thorn: You're talking about as an adult now, right?

Christina Hendricks: Yeah. I mean—well, you know, to me, 18 is when you become an adult, really. You know, move of the house and move to New York City. So, it wasn't until I lived in Los Angeles—I moved here when I was 22—that I realized people were acting all over the place. I would see these groups of people standing on corners, and I'm like, “What are those people doing? They seem so upset!” And I realized they were running scenes with one another. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: The main thought that I remember having is, “Do these people have a job?” (*Laughs.*)

Christina Hendricks: Yeah, what are all these people doing out in the daytime? Yeah, why are they outside? I remember thinking that too.

Jesse Thorn: This café is so full at two o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon.

Christina Hendricks: Exactly. (*Laughs.*) So, I always just thought I would act after work—whatever I chose to do eventually, that it would be my hobby, and it would be something I would do on the weekends and in the evening. And then when I found out that you could actually make a living doing what you absolutely loved, then that sort of changed my plan.

Jesse Thorn: You moved a few times as a kid, right?

Christina Hendricks: I moved around a little bit. My father was with the US Forest Service, and my mother was a therapist. So, she was able to move that profession wherever we went. So, we were in Tennessee, Georgia, Oregon, Idaho, Virginia. And then I took off to New York.

Jesse Thorn: What was that like for you?

Christina Hendricks: Very difficult! Very, very difficult to sort of make friends and settled in a place and then uprooted and go and start again and try to fit in and learn what the kids were into. And you know, it was difficult.

Jesse Thorn: Did you learn skills to ingratiate yourself to others from moving?

Christina Hendricks: Yeah, I think probably a lot of actors will say that they did move around a lot. And I think there's something to that—becoming a people watcher and noticing different people's behaviors. Because you kind of have to fit in quickly. And so, I think you become quite an observer. And then my mom would also—

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You know, like that's how we got involved in theatre in the beginning is my mom, when we moved to Idaho, she thought, “Well, I don't want my kids to only make friends at school.”

Because she knew how cliquey schools can be and stuff. So, she got us involved in community theatre, which had a different age range of kids and parents coming and helping—coming and going. So, it was just a more open-minded—just a different way to bring children into— Like, for my mom, she was like, “How can I get friends for my kids?” And so, that was her idea, which was a great idea.

Jesse Thorn: I imagine part of the appeal of dance and theatre in particular are that they draw people close very quickly, relative to almost anything else.

Christina Hendricks: That’s true too! I mean, dance and theatre are incredibly intimate, and you're really putting yourself out there. I mean, it's very vulnerable to be using your body in such a demonstrative way and using your mind in such a demonstrative way. You're really opening yourself up. So, the fact that other kids are there doing it too I think is a real bonding experience. You've gotta really trust each other.

Jesse Thorn: It's not just vulnerable to the people who are on the other side of the proscenium, but you have to make yourself vulnerable to all these other people who you are depending on to do their best, so that you are not shamed in front of an audience.

Christina Hendricks: Yeah! You gotta have each other’s back up there. But also—you know, I think it's sometimes why people are fascinated with people in the arts, because to certain people, it could feel humiliating to just sing out loud in front of someone, or to just move your body with abandon and just pour your heart out. That could be very humiliating to someone. So, I think, you know, opening yourself up like that, you're just... you need that team of people around you. Because if you don't, you're just up there sort of feeling like a clown. So, it's your support system. And you know, that's why I've always loved ensemble casts and things like that where you're all really like working together and helping each other sort of become better.

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 rock music.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Christina Hendricks. She's an actor as well as a former model and ballet dancer. She earned six Emmy nominations for her role as Joan Harris on the TV show *Mad Men*. These days, you can catch her on Hulu in the new miniseries *Good American Family*. It tells the real-life story of Natalia Grace, an adoptee from Ukraine who was falsely accused of lying about her age.

And hey! This interview and all of our interviews are now available in video on YouTube, as well as on social media. So, if you're enjoying this and you wanna share it with a friend or you just want to gaze upon my or Christina Hendricks's lovely face, go search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* on YouTube. Alright, let's get back into our conversation.

Did you ever hurt yourself dancing?

Christina Hendricks: I did! Did you research that, or did you just guess? I broke my arm!

Jesse Thorn: I presumed.

(They laugh.)

Christina Hendricks: It's a dangerous sport!

Jesse Thorn: Look, I went to arts high school. I knew dancers, and they were always hurt.

Christina Hendricks: Yeah, no, I actually broke my arm at a young age. I was about to do a big solo number the local college, and I was so excited. And we were actually just blocking it through. And the college said it would be very nice to give us a nice, clean, polished floor—not knowing that ballerinas use resin and try to make it not slick. So, we were just walking through it, and I just simply turned to the right, and down I went. And I—

Jesse Thorn: Not even dancing, just—

Christina Hendricks: Not even dancing! Just walking it through. And I never got to do my big solo number. But as I've aged, I've definitely noticed some hip and knee stuff that I think was probably from dancing on floors that weren't properly prepared for actual dancers and things like that. I've noticed things throughout the years. And my feet—*(laughing)* they're not a vision of beauty, let's just say.

Jesse Thorn: How did you become a model? Did someone walk up to you at the mall? That's how I imagine it always happens. In my mind, that's the only way.

Christina Hendricks: Yeah, that's how it usually happens. Yeah. No, I was a bit of a—sort of a punk goth at the time, so not a lot of people were coming up and being like, “Hey, lady! You should be in pictures!”

Jesse Thorn: But you looked really awesome in a black leather jacket. I saw a picture of you as a teen.

Christina Hendricks: Aw, thanks! I mean, I thought—you know, I stand by the look; I stand by the look.

Jesse Thorn: In a biker jacket with like ear-length black hair.

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Christina Hendricks: Yeah! Little shaved up the back.

Jesse Thorn: Mid-ear.

Christina Hendricks: Mid-ear. Shaved up the back, a little asymmetrical. Listen, I went through a lot of looks. There were a lot of looks in there.

Jesse Thorn: Okay, so let's put pause on how did you become a model; what were the other looks?

Christina Hendricks: Well, there was a series of hair color— There's a brand called Manic Panic, and you could just go and like comb them in. So, I had bright purple and bright orange and bright, bright red—oftentimes trying to emulate, you know, singers in bands that I wanted to be.

Jesse Thorn: Who did you most wanna be?

Christina Hendricks: Definitely was interested in looking like the lead singer of Lush or maybe Wendy James from Transvision Vamp, Tracy from the Primitives. You know, lots of bobs with red hair that I was trying copy.

Jesse Thorn: I can understand that!

Christina Hendricks: Yeah! All cool girls.

Jesse Thorn: So, if you're a cool goth babe, how does modeling happen?

(They chuckle.)

Christina Hendricks: Goth Babe is a cool band. So, I started working at a hair salon in the mall in Virginia. And there were a few kind adults that every once in a while would say, "Have you ever tried modeling?" Somehow they were less intimidated by my look than some of the more conservative adults that came in. And enough people said it that I would sort of mention it when I went home. And my mom had seen a contest to be on the cover of *Seventeen Magazine*. And she was like, "I think you should enter this contest."

And so, you had to send in pictures of yourself, and I had no professional photos. But I used to hang out with my boyfriend at the record and tape exchange; it was very high fidelity. And there was this photographer who used to come in all the time and buy albums. And my boyfriend was like, "You should call this guy. I think he's like an actual, professional photographer." So, the pictures came back kind of amazing, and I remember showing them to my mom, and she cried. 'Cause she was like, *(emotionally)* "My goth girl's actually pretty under all of that."

And so, we decided to turn in the pictures.

Jesse Thorn: What was that like for you?

Christina Hendricks: Seeing the images?

Jesse Thorn: Seeing the images and having your mom cry over them, imagining what it would be like if she had a different child?

Christina Hendricks: (*Laughing.*) Exactly. I was surprised! I didn't know that I was pretty, so I was surprised by the photos and excited by them. And my mom on occasion would take photos of me in high school, and I'd go, "Oh, my mom's taking a picture of me."

And then she'd go get them developed and go, "See, look at this picture! Look how ugly you look! I took this picture so you can see how ugly you look!" (*Laughs.*) Mind you, my mother is wonderful. She's a wonderful, loving mother. She just wasn't a huge fan of that fashion time in my—

Jesse Thorn: She just didn't like asymmetrical haircuts?

Christina Hendricks: Well, I think it was just the black lipstick and the combat boots. Or—I mean, they were Doc Martins. Every kid wears them now. I mean, it would be nothing now. If you saw it, you know, it'd be just any normal teenager.

Jesse Thorn: Was your mom supportive of the idea of you becoming a model?

Christina Hendricks: It was her idea, yeah. She was super, super supportive. The one thing was—is when, all of a sudden, it was working, we decided to go to New York City and find a modeling agency. And so, then the next big step was to move to New York, and that meant that I wasn't gonna go to college. Which was not pleasing to my father by any means. And so, my dad just said, "Alright, if you're gonna go, you don't get a penny that we saved for you to go to college. You're on your own." And so, I was on my own.

Jesse Thorn: What was it like to be on your own doing a job that is that hard, emotionally, in the hardest place to be new to and on your own?

Christina Hendricks: Yeah. New York was terrifying for me. You know, I had been in Virginia, a suburb of DC. So, I was in DC but not living there. Closer to a big city, but really I felt like an Idaho girl. So, Manhattan to me was like big time. Just fast paced and scary and constantly moving and stressful. And so, I would take the train back down—train or the bus back down to Virginia a lot of the weekends when I first moved there, 'cause I was scared. And I got my first job within a month, and I was able to pay my rent. And I just knew I had to pay my rent. As long as I could, you know, keep going and paying my rent. So.

And one thing my parents really did instill in me—and also this lovely couple that started shooting me, this photography couple, they taught me a lot of things. And one was to really treat it like a business. So, I was that girl who was always saving my receipts in a little envelope, and making notes, and making sure I had tax write-offs, and really took it very seriously and treated it like a business.

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Because listen, I was lucky. My family would've taken me back in if I couldn't pay the rent. They would've put me back in my bedroom in Virginia. So, I always knew that, but I also knew that my dad was not joking around, and I had to pay my rent. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: Did that also insulate you to some extent, emotionally, from the part of your job where it was your job to go look a certain way and be judged for that?

Christina Hendricks: Mm. I mean, I had been being judged by the way I looked all through high school. So, it was a different kind of judgment. And to be honest, I really think that ballet gave me a thick skin. Dancers are hardcore. I mean, every day you go in and dance, and you stare at yourself in a mirror, and you try to reach perfection—something that is almost humanly impossible. Especially doing things that humans aren't—you're not supposed to be on your toes. That's not supposed to happen. And you're not supposed to be turned out in all these different ways. So, I was already so used to being a perfectionist and sort of beating myself up to be perfect that I don't think walking in a room and someone going, "Oh, you know, your thigh should be a little thinner here, or it'd be a little great if your nose was a little straight or a little—" It was par for the course for me. I was pretty used to that kind of stuff. So, I don't remember being emotionally torn down by it.

Jesse Thorn: For reals?

Christina Hendricks: I remember a couple times walking in a room and going, "Woo, that was brutal. Wow. I didn't know that was a problem that I had, apparently, that someone just pointed out to me. I thought I was doing alright." So, yeah, there were things here and there, but I think that I was used to it to a certain degree.

Jesse Thorn: Was the rejection that's inherent in being an actor different in character from the rejection that's inherent in being a model or dancer?

Christina Hendricks: It's different. Because now you're really putting your personality out there. Ballet, it's about strength and form and technique. Modeling, I might just remind someone of their ex-girlfriend. They're like, "Mm-mm. It's not gonna be her. I just don't like—I just don't like how she looks." Now when you're acting, it's how you look, how you act, your talent, your dedication, your hard work, and all these different things. So, it starts to get more personal. But you know, I'd had like a nice amount of rejection and judgment already for quite a few years. So, by the time I'd gotten to that next level, I was like, "Come at me! Come on, I'll take it."

Jesse Thorn: I think one of the big experiences that people have when they start acting and going to auditions is they get a weird form of direct feedback about how other people see them. Was that something that you already knew from modeling, or was it something that you learned from getting sides for the same kind of character every time you went on an audition?

Christina Hendricks: That's a great question. 'Cause I actually was a lot less self-aware than I knew. Because I was a goth kid, and I was a little quirky, and I always moved around, and I had to fit in, and I was in local theatre, and I got made fun of. So, all of a sudden I was going out for roles, and I kept getting sort of like the bubbly airhead role or the, you know, ex-

cheerleader role. And I was like, “What about that other—like, what about the quirky friend on the side? What about—?” Like, that's who I feel like I should be reading for. And it was always this sort of like do-do-do. And I just—I didn't realize that my physicality was presenting itself in that way that that's—like, no, that's the role. And I'm like, “But that—”

So, I had to... it was a stretch for me to go after those characters, because I felt so removed from those people. So, I had to start to sort of go, “Oh, wait a minute. Not only do people see me this way, but I can learn how to do this. Like, I can learn how to be those people. But I'm also gonna still really press to play those other characters, because I really think that people aren't seeing it about me. But once they give me a chance, they'll know that I could really bring some depth to these other characters.” So, I would go and read for the sort of airheads and the sort of cutesy roles. But then I would also really push my manager to say, “But can you see if I can get in on this role too?” And it worked. You know, I started to get those auditions as well.

Jesse Thorn: What color was your hair? I'm sorry. That's an odd question, but—

[00:25:00]

Christina Hendricks: (*Laughs.*) I was a redhead, maybe strawberry blonde in the beginning and then got a—yeah. Red. Red.

Jesse Thorn: Was that a choice that you made in part because of your like career?

Christina Hendricks: No! No, I started dying my hair when I was about 10 years old, because I just loved red hair and all of the performers and characters that I loved in my life are redheads strangely. And so, my mom was like, “Let's color your hair,” when I was 10 years old. And so—in fact, when I started modeling, my modeling agency said— Then I had black and purple hair and stuff like that. But when I started modeling, my agency said, “You gotta go back to your natural blonde.”

So, I was blonde for the first couple years of modeling, and then I did a job for Clairol, and they did my hair red again. I remember being like, “It's me!” I finally felt like me again, and I went back into the agency, and I was like, “Here I am!” with my bright red hair. And I remember Pauline—who was the head of the agency—Pauline, she was like, “Ugh, it's a disaster. You've gotta go back blonde.:

And I was like, “Let's just wait and see.” And then I started to get more jobs as a redhead, because there were fewer redheads.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I mean—the reason I asked is not just like idle, but I think for women who act, hair color is both mutable—you can change your hair color—but also so determinative of what lane you get put in.

Christina Hendricks: I agree. And in fact, depending on what hair color I was, then it was—that's who I got compared to. But there were fewer redheads. And so, I noticed my work getting picked up a little bit. And I felt more like myself anyway, so it was a win-win. So, I

just stayed red. A lot of people think I went red for *Mad Men*, but I was red many, many years before that.

Jesse Thorn: It's also like—in terms of its cultural baggage, fits some of the things you do really well, right? Like redheadedness is associated with a kind of spunkiness. You know what I mean?

Christina Hendricks: It is, yeah! I mean, you got your *Anne of Green Gables* and your *Pippy Longstockings* and—yeah. I always felt like that.

Jesse Thorn: When did you feel like you had successfully become an actor? And I don't just mean in terms of making a living, but that you felt like you belonged in that art?

Christina Hendricks: Oh. I—I don't know if I still feel like I belong. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: Not now?

Christina Hendricks: I'm just always trying to belong! I remember the first time I got a series where I had a paycheck and I was going to work every day on a show that was going to actually be on television, I thought, “Well, this is it. I've done it.”

And my father would go, “Well, you're almost there.”

And I'd go, “Almost where?! I've got a paycheck! This is all you could ask for as an actor is to actually do what you love and get a paycheck.” So, anything after that was just a cherry on top or like icing on the cake. To me, if you can do what you love and pay the rent? You've done it, kid.

Jesse Thorn: We've got a lot more to get into with Christina Hendricks. I'm just looking at my notes here. Apparently she was on *Mad Men*! So, maybe we should talk about that! It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

Music: A fun, percussive synth beat.

Jo Firestone: *Dr. Gameshow* is a podcast where we play games submitted by listeners with callers from all around the world, and this is a game to get you to listen.

Name three reasons to listen to *Dr. Gameshow*, Kyla and Lunar from Freedom, Maine.

Lunar: Dishes, folding the laundry, doing cat grooming.

Jo: (*Laughing.*) Okay, thank you. Great.

Manolo Moreno: Oh, things you could do while listening, yeah.

Jo: I love that the reason—I'm like, “Why do you listen to this show?”, and Lunar's like, “Dishes.” (*Chuckling.*) Fantastic. Manolo!

Manolo: Number one is that it'll inspire you. You're gonna be like, “Oh, I could do that.”

Jo: That's all we have time for, but you'll just have to find *Dr. Gameshow* and Maximum Fun to find out for yourself.

(*Music fades out.*)

Transition: Chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with actor Christina Hendricks. She's starring in the new miniseries, *Good American Family*.

When you got the script for *Mad Men*, did you understand what it was?

Christina Hendricks: No, no one could understand.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, you couldn't understand that it was gonna be a collection at Banana Republic or whatever.

(*Christina laughs.*)

But did you understand that it was different from other television shows that you had been in?

Christina Hendricks: I definitely knew it was different. The audition was during pilot season, which kind of doesn't exist anymore, but it used to be a couple times a year. Twice a year, you would go out and audition for pilots, and if you didn't get one then you didn't get a job that year to a certain extent.

Jesse Thorn: Everybody's going out at the same time. Everybody's getting ranked in every job that they're auditioning for.

Christina Hendricks: And you're changing in your car, 'cause you've got maybe—sometimes, seven auditions in one day. If you're lucky. But also, it's excruciatingly hard.

Jesse Thorn: If you're lucky, you find out you're in third position for the second lead on a pilot.

[00:30:00]

Christina Hendricks: Exactly. Exactly. And you're trying to look like a scientist in the morning, and you're trying to look like a doctor at night, and you're changing and, you know, trying to convince people and learning all those lines the night before.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have a lab coat of your own?

Christina Hendricks: (*Chuckling.*) No lab coat, but trust me, I have a lot of things in my closet that can make me look like different things, to this day. So, it was a standout script. When you're doing that many auditions a day and you're getting all these things, they all start to blend together. And this one was like, "Wait a minute, what is this? This is unusual." And the first lines I ever got—I didn't have the full script; I just had the lines. So, it wasn't clear that it was a period piece, and so it was just weird. If you read a period piece without knowing it's a period piece, (*chuckles*) it could just seem really strange. Then I figured it out fairly quickly. But yeah, it was the one that actors around town—there was a buzz about it, and people were talking about it like, "Did you get the 1960s script? Did you get that script?" Because it was clearly special and clearly very different.

That being said, so different and so special that no one really thought it would have legs, that it would go very far. And it was on a network that had no original programming.

Jesse Thorn: What was it like when you got the part to step into such an intensely aestheticized world? Like, in terms of putting on the clothes and being on those sets.

Christina Hendricks: Well, we shot the pilot in New York, and we used the whole crew from *The Sopranos*. 'Cause Matt Weiner was still working on *The Sopranos*. So, we went to New York City—which already felt like a big deal. Like, I'm going to New York to shoot a show! And so, they brought over the team. So, it felt like, "Ooh, we get to work with the *Sopranos* people. This is a really big deal." And I remember the costume fitting being exciting and that they were looking at everything very meticulously. Even—I remember going into hair and makeup, and they were—I had one nail that was shorter than the others, so they put like one fake nail on. And I thought, "*(Gasps.)* Oh, they're being so precise! Like, look how they're looking at all these things."

So, I just felt like it was the first time I'd worked on something that wasn't modeling that I felt like I was really being transformed into another person. So, it felt really unique and special to me.

Jesse Thorn: Especially at the beginning, it was very much received first as an aesthetic experience before anything else. Like, obviously one of the most wonderfully written character-driven shows in television history. But what I remember people reacting to was the experience of looking at it.

Christina Hendricks: It was definitely eye candy. I mean, I think that it was a perfect storm, because not only was the writing (*clicks tongue*) chef's kiss—I mean, like truly, what's better? But our set design and our costumes and our hair and makeup, and all of a sudden, men were wearing fedoras and getting excited about suits. When had you seen men get excited about putting on a suit and a skinny tie in a very long time? So, it was infiltrating fashion immediately. People were all of a sudden decorating their homes mid-century. It became—you opened a magazine, and an article would be about anything, but they would somehow steal “It’s a mad, mad world!” And it would just be about furniture, and it had nothing to— And then it became, on eBay, if you wanted a wiggle dress or a pencil skirt, it would be the Joan dress. It was just insane how it did infiltrate, like you said, like people looking at it. They loved what they were seeing.

Jesse Thorn: So, you are not a particular style of desk or, you know, office building layout or a skinny tie or even like pair of pantyhose. So, what was it like for you, a human being, to be received as an aesthetic experience in that way?

Christina Hendricks: A lot of pressure. Also, I think I probably learned a lot about myself and... one, about fashion and tailoring and what people were responding to. And expectation, also, that—outside of set—that people sort of expected us to still look like that. And that I didn't wanna disappoint people to a certain extent, so I think I sort of took on Joan's aesthetic for a certain amount of time. If we did photo shoots, they wanted us to look like our characters.

[00:35:00]

People wanted us to be our characters, even though our characters could be kind of nasty!
(*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I think people still want John Hamm to be that.

Christina Hendricks: I know, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: You know, like that dude walks around Los Phillis and Silver Lake looking like a dorky comedy guy. And—

Christina Hendricks: Well, he loves—he wants to be that dorky—he is that dorky comedy guy! Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: No, that is very clear. Right? But I think it's 15 years later, and people still want his hair to be rock solid. You know?

Christina Hendricks: I know. I remember going on *Conan O'Brien* for the first time, and he was like, “You're so nice! I don't know why, I just thought maybe you were gonna put a cigarette out on my arm or something.” (*Laughs.*) And people sort of wanted us to be drinking all day and like, you know, “Are those real martinis?!” People wanted it to be real. Which is fun but like, do you expect that of other shows? Do you want the actors to be their characters that much? Maybe people do.

Jesse Thorn: Also, people wanted it to be real. And do you want that to be real? Because that is not a good world.

Christina Hendricks: I know! It's not great behavior! No!

Jesse Thorn: I mean, it is a sad, messed up world.

Christina Hendricks: And you know, by the end of the series we were showing the consequences of all those things. But yeah, people really wanted us to emulate those characters. And we're all quite different. (*Laughs.*)

I'd like to think I'm quite different, although Joan sort of became more and more like me maybe towards the end.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Joan Harris (*Mad Men*): Well, I suppose we don't just lean on stylish creative and market research. We listen to the client.

Speaker: Doesn't everybody do that?

Joan: Despite your modesty, you already know that the way to get invited into people's homes is through their TV sets. Media placement is part science and part courage. Anyone can tell you not to run makeup ads during football. The trick is finding your customers in places you hadn't thought to look. Harry Crane is a wizard. They use a computer the size of this restaurant. (*Chuckles.*)

Speaker: And what is your job there?

Joan: I'm in charge of thinking of things before people know they need them.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: The two female leads on the show, you were—(*stammering*) well, there's three female leads on the show. But the two office women who are the subject of a lot of the show, one of whom is you, because of the intensity of the context in which they are portrayed—right?—like, because of this crazy, sexist, drinking, smoking outfit/world that they're in, everything they do is freighted with gender weight that is not asked of other performances or characters in other things all that often. (*Chuckles.*)

What was it like to have your actual humanity interpreted through the lens of this fictional character's relationship to gender constructs in the world?

Christina Hendricks: I mean, it was cathartic in a certain way, because then people were talking about it. And then you could say, “Yeah, isn't that infuriating? Look at that. Look at that. That wasn't very long ago. You're probably still experiencing that. How does that feel?” And I was really proud of the show in that way that, you know, the water cooler talk very intellectual and very provoking. And I don't know a lot of shows that have done that, that made you break down, generationally, how we were treating each other, how we still are treating each other. Every single interview I did was, “What's the difference between then and now? What's it like to be a feminist? What's it like to be a feminist then?” It's a great conversation.

Jesse Thorn: *Mad Men* was such a cultural phenomenon and also was in the context of a larger cultural phenomenon of the, you know, golden age of prestige television. What was it like to be at the center of that, along with, you know, *Breaking Bad* and *The Sopranos* and all these things? Like, just walking around, holding—I'm imagining you holding eight Emmys in your arms every time you walk down the street.

Christina Hendricks: Yeah, I don't have one of those! Thanks for reminding me. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: Okay. I apologize.

Christina Hendricks: I'm just kidding.

Jesse Thorn: If it makes you feel better, I don't either.

Christina Hendricks: You know, most of us don't. It was exciting. I remember our first SAG awards was *Sopranos* ' last year. So, because Matt had worked on *Sopranos*, and he was really—we went out and partied with *The Sopranos* afterwards. What is cooler than partying with *The Sopranos* when they win all the awards that night, and you get to go hang out with them afterwards? When they're like celebrating, and they're like the originators of this kind of prestige television, and we're the new kids, and they're taking us in under their wing. It was exciting as hell! And then we were at the premier for *Breaking Bad*. We saw that show blow up. We were on a network together.

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And so, we were sort of like this little family. And you know, it was a certain amount of shows that were all on at the same time. And just like now, there's sort of like a certain—like, a decade and it'll be all the same shows over and over and over. So, you go to all the award shows together, and they become your friends. And you're rooting for, you know, the comedy next to you. And you've seen so and so again. And it was like being a part of a really cool club for a while. And then, you know, when it's the next person's turn, you've gotta graciously back away and let the next team have their turn.

Jesse Thorn: You and John Hamm at the time were sort of the cultural avatars for Ultimate Babe and Ultimate Hunk. What was—

Christina Hendricks: (*Laughs.*) Cultural avatar?

Jesse Thorn: I mean, look, it's true. What was your relationship to that? What was good about it, and what was bad about it?

Christina Hendricks: It's gonna sound strange, because we sat here and talked about dance and modeling, where there's so much focus on your appearance and your movement and what you're doing; it'll seem strange for me to say I didn't realize that I was very different from anyone else. So, all of a sudden everyone was telling me I was, and it was kind of hurting my feelings, and it was kind of making me uncomfortable. And it was such a laser focus that I was forced to have to just sort of take it all in and see what that meant to me. And you know, I was 30 years old, and all of this attention was new.

And I'm sure I've been quoted saying this, but you know, I was so proud of the work I was doing and so excited about this show, and everyone wanted to talk about my undergarments. They just couldn't believe that we were wearing actual, real-life period undergarments. It just was blowing everyone's mind. They couldn't believe it. They couldn't handle it. And so, I felt like I was talking about that more than anything.

But at the same time, I was getting really positive feedback from women out in the world who are saying, “You know, it's really refreshing to see someone that's a little bit more like my body type,” or “There's something relatable about you and your character.” And I had to process that too. It sort of felt like a responsibility represent women in a certain way. And I was scared. I was terrified to let them down. I wanted to make sure that I was true to it and that I lived up to that expectation. And I hope I did. and I hope I do. And I think those women inspired me and taught me about myself. But it was like a lot. It was a lot at once.

Jesse Thorn: When you finished *Mad Men*, you were like, “Well, that's the end of what everyone agrees is one of the greatest television shows ever created.” Did you have to think, “What is the rest of my life gonna be?” To say nothing of the rest of your career?

Christina Hendricks: Sure! Terrifying. A decade of your life spent where—I mean, not huge audiences, oddly, but the people in our business had such great respect for the show. And how do you choose what your next move is after that? And everyone wanted to know what your next move is, and “Oh, does it have to be completely different from Joan? Does it have to—?”

And I said, “Well, everything is completely different from Joan. So, I'm not really concerned about that.” But it was the first time I realized that if you're on something successful, you will be—you could quite well be there for 10 years. So, you really wanna love what you choose next. So, then I got scared. Because before *Mad Men*, it was just sort of, if they wanted me, then sign me up. You know, as an actor, if you get a job, you take that job. And you don't really get to be nitpicky. So, all of a sudden I was in a position to choose. And that was, you know, a big task. It was terrifying. And you kind of just have to sort of go—shake it off and

go, “You know what? I took a chance to get *Mad Men*. I’m just gonna—if I love something, I’m just gonna follow through with it and see where it leads me.”

Jesse Thorn: You're in the middle of your life, in the middle of your career as an artist. Do you feel like you have figured out who you are?

Christina Hendricks: No! No, I'm still figuring it out! (*Laughs.*) I love that you say that I'm in the middle. That's very optimistic. No, you know, hopefully—acting is exploring all of those things. And I think every character you play, you learn a little bit about yourself and what you can reach in and find in there bring it to another character.

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So, hopefully I'll always be learning, and hopefully I'll never quite know who I am, because then there's room for growth.

Jesse Thorn: Christina Hendricks, I am so grateful to you for coming on the show. So nice to talk to you. I’ve so admired your work.

Christina Hendricks: Thank you so much, and for your lovely questions!

Jesse Thorn: Christina Hendricks. Catch her on *Good American Family*. Right now it's on Hulu.

Transition: Relaxed, chiming synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun as well as at Maximum Fun HQ—overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. It is not raining here in Los Angeles. But boy, was there just a giant thunder clap! So, we'll see what the future holds. 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 Spear. We get booking help from Mara Davis.

Our interstitial music comes from our friend Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](https://www.djwsounds.bandcamp.com). 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 will find video from just about all of our interviews—including video of the delightful Bruce Vilanch and Christina Hendricks in full. Why not share one of our interviews with a friend of yours this week? Go to YouTube, search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*. You will find our interviews there. 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.)