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(ADVERTISEMENT)

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

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

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

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*, I'm Jesse Thorn. Bob Edwards died last month, in 76. He was a radio legend, a pioneer of public radio, the original host of *Morning Edition*. And when I say the original host, I mean back when it launched—1979. I could go on and on just listing accomplishments. This is a man (*chuckling*) who not only had a Peabody, he was also in multiple halls of fame.

But look, you're a public radio listener. You've probably already heard some tributes to him. So, I am going to keep mine personal. Before this show was called *Bullseye*, it was called *The Sound of Young America*. And before I recorded it here in Los Angeles, I taped it at KZSC—a community college/radio station hybrid in the woods in Santa Cruz, where I went to college.

Now, when you're making a radio show in Santa Cruz, and you're doing events with personages of national profile, not a lot of them are in person. Because, you know, not that many people roll through Santa Cruz. But Bob Edwards did. He came to the station; he smoked a Newport on our porch, and then he came in and did an interview with me. It was so kind and—he could not have been more kind and gracious to me, a dumb 22-year-old who—you know, what did I know about Walter Cronkite, that he had just written a book about? It was absolutely one of the highlights of my career. Just a really wonderful thing that I got to do. And it was so kind of Bob to be so generous with me.

So, Anyway, in tribute to Bob Edwards—a true legend—my interview with him from the studios of KZSC, the Heavyweight 88, in Santa Cruz, California. And this is from—wow, I am flipping back some calendar pages here, and—whew. October 2007. They had just invented the iPhone. Let's listen.

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm 24 years old, and so my world of listening to public radio starts with NPR being something very similar to what it is today. I mean, not as well listened to. I mean, the listenership for NPR has been going up for quite a long time very consistently. But the public radio world to me—I listen to KQED in San Francisco, which is a big NPR station that carries all the big NPR programming. When you started in public radio in 1974—right?—this was very much not the case. What was it like when you first started?

**Bob Edwards:** They had not done a lot of market research. It was very freeform. A lot of volunteers did programs at public radio stations across the land, brought their own records in. But some great shows came out of that. Fiona Ritchie started (*accidentally lisping through the word and laughing at himself*) the *Thistle*—the Thistle, the Thistle, and the *Shamrock*.

**Jesse Thorn:** *Thistle* and *Shamrock*. Ladies and gentlemen, public radio host, Bob Edwards!

**Bob Edwards:** (*Chuckles.*) It's easy for me to say.

Um, with the records, with the vinyl she brought from her own home. And now, of course, there isn't a mandolin player in the world that doesn't know that show and is dying to get a CD on there. But that's the way it was. Very freeform. People would bring in—

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Chuckling.*) That should be—we should change the slogan of public radio to “for mandolin players everywhere”.

**Bob Edwards:** People played country and western; people played polka—whatever they wanted to play. And it was a lot more fun.

**Jesse Thorn:** This is a lot like what KZSC—this is the radio station where I broadcast from right now—is like. It's a kind of a freeform operation.

**Bob Edwards:** Yeah, it didn't have an audience, but the people doing it had a great time doing it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, but don't—! What's nice is—what's nice about doing this show is I know that no one is listening, so we can really talk about—we could really just read the grain prices right now, and we would have about the same impact on the world as we're having right now actually talking about public radio. What was NPR, the institution, like when you first joined it? You were first a newsreader on NPR, a newsman on NPR. What was the operation like? How many people were working there?

**Bob Edwards:** About 80/85, and you knew the first names of everyone's children. It was a very close-knit outfit.

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Everything revolved around *All Things Considered*, which was the only real program. I mean, we had other programs. We did a lot of hearings. We did documentaries on a series called *Options*, and anybody working there could put an hour on of anything he was working on.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

Which was great! It was bold. It was experimental.

**Jesse Thorn:** I like “a lot of hearings”.

**Bob Edwards:** Well, that was before *C-SPAN*. So, nobody else was doing hearings. Congress loved us for that, because we were—you know, we would go cover their hearings. No one else did. Now, they're crazy about *C-SPAN*. They all wear blue shirts, and they actually have tailors. And they've cleaned up a lot in television. (*Laughs.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Many of them? You turn on *C-SPAN*, and it's nice to see the one guy that clearly does not have a tailor. And you think, “Man! If that guy can be in Congress.”

**Bob Edwards:** Yeah, there's a couple of those. But, you know, it was a lot of fun. A lot of fun in the beginning. We didn't care about an audience too much in those days. It was only after we became a real news organization—NPR was very artsy at the beginning. Only when we found this niche in the broadcast world, because commercial radio stopped doing news, and public radio, you know, filled that gap. That's when we started taking ourselves seriously. And then audience building became a big deal. And then the local stations figured out the bigger their audience, the more contributors they had! (*Laughs.*)

So, yes! We started, you know, worrying about audience and appealing to audience. And it lost, frankly. I mean, it became a wonderful institution. I'm not, you know, quibbling about that. It's a fabulous news organization. But a lot of the fun was gone.

**Jesse Thorn:** When did that change happen?

**Bob Edwards:** Late '70s, early '80s. About the time *Morning Edition* went on the air.

**Jesse Thorn:** What precipitated it? What allowed that big cultural change to happen?

**Bob Edwards:** One by one, news people came aboard, and we were less artsy. You know. Cokie came in, Scott Simon came in, David Malpass, Robert Krulwich, and we just kind of took it over and made it into a news organization. And then Frank Mankiewicz was our president. He was a very news-oriented guy. And he wanted a morning program to match *All Things Considered* and have that presence in morning drive that we had in afternoon drive. And he hatched *Morning Edition*. And the rest—well, the rest is history. We became, you know, the last word for news in all of radio.

**Jesse Thorn:** And at this point—this is, what? 30 years later, 35 years later. These two programs are two of the most listened to programs, not just in public radio, but in radio-radio.

**Bob Edwards:** Well, in case of *Morning Edition*, there's nothing on TV or radio that tops it for audience. Not the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America*. I mean, it is tops in the morning in all of broadcasting.

**Jesse Thorn:** We're going to take a quick break when we return, even more still to come with the late, great Bob Edwards. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're listening to my conversation with public radio legend, Bob Edwards, who died last month. Edwards was the original host of *Morning Edition*, a position he held for 25 years. In that time, he won a Peabody Award and was inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame. He and I talked in 2007. He was kind enough to drive out to the studio where I recorded the show at the time, on the campus of UC Santa Cruz. Let's get into the rest of our conversation.

[00:10:00]

Shortly after I graduated from college, I took an internship with a commercial radio station in San Francisco with their morning show. And three days a week of going on the radio in the morning, and I wasn't even going on the radio—but going to the radio station in the morning totally clocked me. I mean, I was gone. I was a total mess. I was a total disaster. And you not only had to go in early enough to get everybody donuts, you had to go in early enough to get a radio show together! At what time did you have to go to work when you were working on *Morning Edition*?

**Bob Edwards:** (*Clears his throat.*) Oh, excuse me. I was up at one and in the office by two.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) You know, one is nighttime! That's not morning time.

**Bob Edwards:** Tell me about it. Lived that way for 24 and a half years.

**Jesse Thorn:** How does that affect just living, being in the world? How do you relate to other people?

**Bob Edwards:** Umm—yeah, I don't know where those children came from. I don't know when I had time for that.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

I would go to bed at six, and that was more urgent than getting up at one. Because everything that I did in the course of a day had to stop at six o'clock to make sure I had enough sleep to get up at one.

**Jesse Thorn:** Because one o'clock is a crazy time to wake up! That's not an actual time that someone actually would wake up.

**Bob Edwards:** Well, the commute is easy.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Giggles.*) I hear that!

**Bob Edwards:** Except I'm going in, or I was going in, at the time the bars were closing. So, that was interesting. Every night I saw something, you know. Somebody coming the wrong way on a one-way street, somebody without his lights on, chases.

**Jesse Thorn:** This is in the district too; this is not a this is not an unexciting place late at night!

**Bob Edwards:** No, no. I'd see wrecks. Some guy in the middle of the road one day. I called that one in. That's it, just lying in the middle.

**Jesse Thorn:** You just call it in.

What—I mentioned, you know, National Public Radio being based in Washington, DC. And I always thought that was kind of interesting. XM is based in Washington, DC, as well. What is the perspective on the country that you get from Washington, DC? Because it's a very odd city in a lot of ways.

**Bob Edwards:** It's about policy. It's about power. The social status of people in the District of Columbia is directly proportional to one's position in the government. The rest of us are either journalists or lobbyists or have some business with the government. It's a one-industry town, basically. And what we turn out is paper. (*Chuckles.*) Policy. And so, you know, if a young woman is seeing a Senator, as opposed to a Commissioner—well, you know. But that's how it works. And the people you invite to parties, and the parties you go to.

**Jesse Thorn:** Who gets to hang out with Barney Frank.

**Bob Edwards:** And that bores most people in the land, but in Washington, that's where it's at. It's not money. It's not how much you have; it's what degree of power you have.

**Jesse Thorn:** In that perspective—I mean, you were creating a national news program that was intended to be incredibly broad in its coverage. I mean, this is a show that includes everything from, you know, international news, domestic news, to all different kinds of features, including kind of traditional light features, serious arts features. How did you think about how you were representing the country on your show? Or how did you think about what kind of content you chose to put on the show?

**Bob Edwards:** Well, the programs are long-form programs, so there's a lot of time to fill. And you can do a lot of things in that time period.

**Jesse Thorn:** Let's talk about that—a lot of time to fill. I mean, I think for someone who's sitting at home listening to *Morning Edition*—and certainly like me, if I sit at home listening to *Morning Edition* or *All Things Considered* or another one of the NPR news programs, every so often I have to check myself in my head and think about, oh, that two-minute piece that I just listened to—the huge number of production hours that went into producing that little piece of content. And that's something that you hear on NPR programs because of their kind of vast reach and correspondingly large budget that you really couldn't hear anywhere

else on the radio. This is something where you've gotta have huge numbers of people involved in this operation to generate that much time.

**Bob Edwards:** Uh-huh, hundreds. Literally hundreds are involved in those programs each day. I mean, it's an army.

**Jesse Thorn:** I don't know if you've met my producer, Jesse Thorn.

*(They laugh.)*

Or my engineer, Jesse.

**Bob Edwards:** I believe it. Yeah, but the great thing about a longform program is you could do the complete job on the news and all the background on a certain policy and what went into it and what compromises were made and which lobby groups were putting the pressure on which members of Congress.

[00:15:00]

And do all of that and still have time at the back of that hour to sit down with Rodney Crowell and talk about how he makes music and how he writes those fabulous country hits. Or, you know—I love doing the music features too, and certainly everyone on the staff loved producing them.

**Jesse Thorn:** Does NPR have a cultural perspective, do you think? As an institution?

**Bob Edwards:** As broad as possible. Because they want them all. *(Chuckles.)* They want, you know, classical music fans, country music fans. They want the—you know, NASCAR listeners. They want them all. I mean, the aim is no less than the broadest audience possible. However, it won't do a commercial—

**Jesse Thorn:** No less than total world domination.

**Bob Edwards:** *(Chuckling.)* That's right, exactly. But it won't do what commercial radio does. And commercial radio feels that to appeal to the broadest number of people, you have to kind of dumb it down and insult them intellectually, I think. NPR knows that it has a very quality audience, and it has bright people. I mean, who's going to listen to a program with that much depth of news but somebody who's concerned about the world? Somebody with—I always said, somebody with a pulse. *(Chuckles.)* You know, not someone sitting on a couch saying, *(nasally)* “Alright, entertain me. Come on, what do you got?”

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the voice of dumb America there, from Bob Edwards. I like that.

**Bob Edwards:** But no, NPR has a much higher opinion of its listeners. And deservedly so. I mean, I used to get out for 30 years each month and go to a different member station and

meet those listeners. And it was a challenge to work for them. They were smarter than me on most subjects if they were involved in that area of, you know, the world.

**Jesse Thorn:** How do you think—how, in public radio, do you think people should be thinking about their relationship to commercial radio? I mean, do you think—I hear a lot of people that say, “You know, I love public radio, because I get from public radio what I don't get from other commercial broad—” Do you think that the role of public media should be complementary to commercial media? In other words, should a station like KZSC here, for example—one of the standards of whether you get on the radio is “is it available anywhere else?” And if the answer is yes, then you don't get on the radio.

**Bob Edwards:** I think that's a great standard. It's an absolutely fabulous standard. What's the reason for our being if we're not an alternative to what's out there already?

**Jesse Thorn:** Now, let me—but let me ask you this. How does that affect the future of public media if you're targeting on this naturally kind of broad-based medium, like radio? If you're targeting very small groups, you can alienate listeners by the same token.

**Bob Edwards:** I don't think so. I mean, look at NPR—and local stations too. What they're doing is filling a gap that commercial radio is not—commercial radio stopped serving listeners long ago. They serve stockholders. They serve, you know, the home office in Fort Worth, in the case of Clear Channel. They don't care about listeners anymore. They care about making money. Commercial radio stations now, 20, 25, even 30 minutes per hour of commercials. That's not radio. That's a cash register. Public radio slipped in there with no commercials and is doing news—what commercial radio is not doing. Satellite radio, where I work now, is doing the same job in music, because you can't hear any diversity of music on radio anymore. The commercial stations have playlists of 20 or 30 songs. Again and again, you hear the same songs—the songs by performers who appear at the venues owned by the same radio stations playing those records. So, there's this synergy of business interests in commercial radio that just is the death of creativity and imagination.

But in Satellite Radio, in our case at XM, 80 commercial-free music channels. Every conceivable kind of music is there, introducing you to new artists that nobody ever heard of before, in addition to playing people that you no longer hear on the radio anymore. Like, we have a channel called Hank's Place.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's a classic country channel, if I recall correctly.

**Bob Edwards:** That's right. And Hank's Place has the feeling of a honkytonk in Texas and plays music that you don't hear on the radio anymore. George Jones. Nobody plays George Jones anymore, or Merle Haggard. You know, country stations are playing Brooks and Dunn and whoever has, you know, the new hat act. Gotta have a hat.

**Jesse Thorn:** Where's that kind of stuff in public radio? Because I don't—I mean, honestly, when I hear public radio—and like you, I love public radio.

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And I think NPR produces the most amazing radio programming in the world. I mean, I think it's just stunningly, wonderfully brilliant and amazing to me, and I maybe could never do it. But there's definitely a quality. And I mean, you mentioned I can't imagine George Jones being represented on public radio, and I can't imagine, you know, there's—you know, there's hip-hop and rock that's not represented in commercial radio that is also not represented in public radio.

**Bob Edwards:** But it's on satellite!

**Jesse Thorn:** That's true, it is on satellite!

**Bob Edwards:** We have a channel called Unsigned. These are acts with—these are garage bands. These are acts without a deal, without a record deal. So, they have homemade CDs, I guess, they send in. Six or seven of these groups screwed up, and people heard them on Unsigned and signed them. (*Chuckles.*) So, they can't be on Unsigned anymore.

No, public radio is—

**Jesse Thorn:** But I mean, you have to pay for—I mean, I have satellite radio. Or I don't have satellite radio, but my mother has satellite radio in her car, which I drive to Santa Cruz once a week. And you know, I was an intern at XM. And I have a lot of positive opinions about satellite radio, but you have to pay for satellite radio, I mean, satellite radio is not free.

**Bob Edwards:** You're supposed to pay for public radio.

(*Jesse agrees with a laugh.*)

But you started in an area there that's interesting, because public radio is a lot less diverse than it used to be, as stations have found that news and talk works very well for them in audience building. And unfortunately, it has resulted in the loss of a lot of classical and jazz stations across the country. And that is a shame. So, those audiences aren't being served very well in some cases.

**Jesse Thorn:** What did you personally—I mean, you gave a really sweet little homily on what the Bob Edwards show was about. But when you started having your own show, what was it that you were like, oh man, now I can get this on my show! I'm—oh man! I'm going straight to Texas to interview Kinky Friedman, or I'm going straight to Minnesota! Me and Kirby Puckett are going to have a little sit down. What was it that you were excited about that you thought might not have fit into NPR but fit into this new world?

**Bob Edwards:** Kinky's been on. (*Chuckles.*) We're not even a year old. I've already had Kinky on. And he's able to say all those things that public radio would have bleeped him for. Like most of his songs. (*Chuckles.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Stammering.*) Do you edit out swearing? Like, so when I worked at XM, there was—obviously, in satellite radio, there's no FCC. So, it's not illegal to swear on satellite radio, but each station made its own decisions about what kind of language was appropriate

on the station. If you were interviewing a musician that had foul language in their music, would you play it, including the foul language?

*(Bob confirms.)*

Did you—was that a tough or an easy decision?

**Bob Edwards:** Pft. No brainer. Got no problem with it at all. It's a different audience. It's a different place. And I got no problem with it. The other day, I said a word I have never said in—how long have I been doing this? 37 years of broadcasting. But it was in the title of the book. The book is called *Your Call is Important to Us*.

**Jesse Thorn:** This is *A Book About Bull*(*censor beep*), right?

**Bob Edwards:** That's right. And that's in the subtitle. *Your Call is Important to Us: The Truth about Bull*(*censor beep*). Now, I never said *bull*(*censor beep*) in 37 years of radio, but I think I said it about 30 times in the course of this interview.

*(They chuckle.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** That must've been kind of fun!

**Bob Edwards:** You know, maybe the 27th time was gratuitous. *(Chuckles.)* But you know.

**Jesse Thorn:** Maybe that little song you wrote where the only lyric was that word.

**Bob Edwards:** No, I mean, we're not abusing that. I mean, we're not Howard Stern. He's going to be in Satellite Radio soon enough, and you'll hear—

**Jesse Thorn:** *(Laughing.)* And he'll do plenty of abusing.

**Bob Edwards:** If those words turn you on, he's there for you.

**Jesse Thorn:** Okay, this of course is all a great digression that hopefully has given you an opportunity to think about what you could and really wanted to do on satellite radio that you couldn't do when other people were the ones in charge, on NPR?

**Bob Edwards:** Well, mostly do an interview that would last more than eight minutes. That was the longest you could have on a segment of *Morning Edition*.

*(Jesse "wow"s.)*

And I would do interviews for half an hour or 40 minutes that would just break my heart to have them cut down to eight minutes. If they were reeeally, really good, you could strip them

over the course of a week and say, you know, part two tomorrow. (*Chuckles.*) And we did that! But there's something about having a longform interview where it can breathe.

[00:25:00]

You know, conversations just develop and take new directions, you know, halfway through, and go off into more interesting territory than what you would imagine, and we all learn from that. And it's more fun. And some topics just require more time. I mean, I did an hour on ending world poverty with Jeffrey Sachs.

**Jesse Thorn:** Good. Well, that's good. I mean, that's good to know that—I mean, that's a real—I'm impressed that you took care of that in an hour.

**Bob Edwards:** Yeah. Yeah, we solved the whole dang situation in the course of an hour. But no, even public radio's not gonna give Jeffrey Sachs an hour. A local station might, but there's no format at NPR for that. *Fresh Air* could do it and probably did. I don't know if Terry did that or not. But you know, I was very pleased that we did that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Is it different for you? I mean, doing 30 years of interviews, and they're the kind of interviews where you think, “This is an interview that has to have six great minutes; it has to have an amazing zenith,” and now you're thinking, “Wow, this is an interview that has to have 30 nine-out-of-10 minutes.”

**Bob Edwards:** Well, I think there's some interviews that I'll be doing that are worth five minutes and no more. And that's what we'll do them for. You know, we're not going to do the sixth minute if they become boring. (*Chuckles.*) So, I'm not wedded to, you know, a long interview. It's just however long it deserves. You know, and there are people who are brilliant for five minutes, and then (*snores loudly*). You know.

**Jesse Thorn:** What I really want to do is ask you the broadest possible question, which is: what is the most fun you've had doing an interview in these 35 years of Bob Edwards's career?

**Bob Edwards:** Probably Randy Newman.

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh, the Newm! I like that answer!

**Bob Edwards:** Because I have the same weird, sick, cynical sense of humor that he does, so I laugh at everything he says. It's difficult to do the interview, (*chuckling*) because I'm not talking, I'm laughing hysterically. And we just have too good a time.

**Jesse Thorn:** One time I saw Randy Newman, and he said a lot of great things. One of them was he said, “Now I'm going to play a medley of my hit,” and then he played “Short People”.

(*They chuckle.*)

And then he had another great line where he said—or he played all of “You’ve Got a Friend in Me”, and then he—at the end, he said, “Of course, it’s all a load of (*beep*).”

(*Cackles.*) He said, “It’s sweet, isn’t it? But it’s all a load of (*beep*).” (*Laughs.*)

**Bob Edwards:** Yeah, I would ask him—you can write these hysterically funny or bitter send ups and satires and then come out with the sweetest love song. He says, “Yeah, I’ll write one of those if Disney pays me enough.”

(*They laugh.*)

But I would have him—we did movie music. He does so many scores now. And I would have him—I was his director. I said, okay, it’s a comedy. Play a comedy. No, no! We’ve changed the plot! It’s now a tragedy. And duh-nuh-nuh-nuhnuh. And the chase scene! Da-da-lada, da-da-lada! Then I said ennuh.

He said, “What, you want me to bore you?”

**Jesse Thorn:** After a break, we’ll wrap up with Bob Edwards. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

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**Promo:**

(A timer ticks down. The speakers take turns laying down chess pieces and stopping their time.)

**Speaker 1:** MaxFunDrive 2024.

**Speaker 2:** MaxFunDrive? What about it?

**Speaker 1:** It’ll be the best time for someone to support the podcasts they love.

**Speaker 2:** Oh yeah, drive exclusive gifts, special events, and of course all the amazing—

**Both:** Bonus content.

**Speaker 1:** Yeah.

**Speaker 2:** So, what’s on your mind? (*Clunk.*) Check.

**Speaker 1:** Well, it starts March 18th and it’s only two weeks long.

**Speaker 2:** And? (*Clunk.*) Check.

**Speaker 1:** Well, what if they miss it?

**Speaker 2:** Well, they should follow MaxFun on social media. Or sign up for the newsletter at [MaximumFun.org/newsletter](https://MaximumFun.org/newsletter), so they don't miss it. Otherwise, (*clunk*) checkmate.

**Transition:** Chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're listening back to my 2007 conversation with the late Bob Edwards.

Do you ever get this feeling when you're doing this interview—(*correcting himself*) doing an interview—

[00:30:00]

**Bob Edwards:** This interview?

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughing.*) Yeah, this interview. Do you ever get this feeling when you're doing this interview, what the heck is this guy doing? No, do you ever get this feeling when you're doing an interview where you're like, "Man, this is awesome. I wish that instead of this being an interview, this was pals palling around." And you have to kind of correct yourself in your mind, thinking, "Oh, wait, I'm not just some guy; I'm a journalist. I have to—I'm supposed to be maintaining some kind of distance from this and, you know, representing some kind of neutral viewpoint or something like that."

**Bob Edwards:** Yeah. When it's a politician, you're talking about public policy, you know, there's some distance there. I think increasingly less every day in my case.

**Jesse Thorn:** As you become more and more friendly with more and more politicians? As you grow drunk with the power that XM Satellite Radio has given you?

**Bob Edwards:** No, I was thinking more of the opposite. (*Laughs.*) The other extreme.

**Jesse Thorn:** As you interview more and more obscure politicians—dog catchers in small Massachusetts towns.

**Bob Edwards:** But in other types of interviews, I don't separate myself at all. I love being drawn into this world that somebody's talking about. The best interview I've ever done has been very recently. And it was in Los Angeles. There's a Jesuit priest named Father Greg Boyle, who works with gang members trying not to be gang members in East LA, Latinos. And he finds them jobs, and he has volunteer doctors removing their tattoos that mark them as gang members for life if they don't get rid of them.

And he was just—oh, just the work he did and the way he would explain it, and he could tell the stories perfectly. He's probably been interviewed too much that he's got it all down now perfectly, and you just have to roll the—you know, turn on the recorder.

But I was very, very moved by the whole thing. And I couldn't be detached from that, even though I'm—you know, that's not my world and God love him that he does that. But I was just completely drawn into what he does. And you know, people like that you want to be close to. You don't want to be detached from them. So, I have no problem involving myself for that hour into his life.

**Jesse Thorn:** Let me ask you this one last question. It seems like you're wearing this—you're wearing a t-shirt right now. Whatever you want. Is one of the appeals of radio that as long as your brain and your mouth are fully functional, you're good to go.

**Bob Edwards:** Which is more than you have on, buck naked as you are.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. (*Chuckles.*) I'm sorry, we weren't supposed to—I told you not to talk about that, Bob. It's really gross for our audience.

**Bob Edwards:** America's radio sweetheart. Yeah, I like the dress code of the radio, man. (*Chuckles.*) Even the suits at XM don't wear suits. They don't wear t-shirts. Most of the execs have a collar on, but they're, you know, khakis. They're—

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, this is a business where, you know, you're in your mid-50s. I mean, you've got a long way to go before you're old, but getting older just makes you pretty much sound better until you maybe like go nuts or something.

**Bob Edwards:** (*Hesitantly.*) Well, thank you, I just can't wait.

(*Jesse cackles.*)

Something to look forward to.

**Jesse Thorn:** Because it's the only—I mean, in the entertainment industry, you know, you can't even—often it's hard to even go bald.

**Bob Edwards:** I don't think that's true. I used to think that in radio you could go bald and get fat and old, and nobody would care, because you would still be 30 forever on the radio. And I find that's not true. (*Chuckles.*) Because I'm no longer at NPR, am I?

(*Jesse agrees.*)

And that may have had something to do with it, that they just heard me long enough over there.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Stammering.*) You're the kind of guy that has this kind of sonorous voice that I'm sure that, when you were 25 and you picked up the telephone and talked to somebody, they presumed that you were in your mid-50s.

**Bob Edwards:** When I was 12, they used to think I was my dad when I answered the phone at home. Which is great, because you can learn things about your dad that way.

(*Jesse cackles.*)

Because the person on the phone thinks you're your dad.

**Jesse Thorn:** That sounds less great than it does sad. Like, that really sounds like a recipe for some kind of horrible disappointment. "Hi, this is the video store. We've got a late fee on a copy of—"

**Bob Edwards:** (*Chuckling.*) Yeah, well, they didn't have those when I was 12.

(*Jesse agrees.*)

**Transition:** Chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** Bob Edwards from 2007.

[00:35:00]

A highlight of my public radio career. Edwards passed away last month at 76. You will be very well remembered, Bob. And I'm grateful for the time that you took with me.

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

**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, in and around Greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, I've been working on loose-leash walking with my new dog, Junior.

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 Danielle Huecias. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, DJW. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation". It was written and recorded by the great band The Go! Team. Our thanks to The Go! Team. Our thanks to their label Memphis Industries. Go check out their records; they're great.

*Bullseye* is on Instagram, where we share Interview highlights, behind the scenes looks, all sorts of other stuff. We're [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#) there. We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

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

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