

The West Wing Weekly
2.12: The Drop In
Guest: Kim Webster

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Hi, you're listening to The West Wing Weekly. Isn't that how we start?

HRISHI: [laughs] I love how you say 'hi' at the beginning.

JOSH: I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about The Drop In. It's season 2, episode 12.

JOSH: The teleplay, by one Aaron Sorkin. The story by Mr. Lawrence O'Donnell Junior. The direction by Lou Antonio. I looked him up. Lou was an actor in addition to being a director, he was in *Cool Hand Luke*, and *Gun Smoke*, and a lot of other old classic type things.

HRISHI: A few listeners have written in to us recently, we've talked about this in the past I think, asking about the difference between 'story by' and 'teleplay by'

JOSH: Ok. 'Teleplay by' - the actual script, dialogue, descriptions, everything written. 'Story' - plotting

HRISHI: The ideas.

JOSH: The ideas, sure. Does it ever say 'written by'? I think sometimes I say 'written by' rather than 'teleplay by' but those are identical. I think in the credits they say teleplay.

HRISHI: I think the real question is, like, what is the difference between story and the writing, and it is, really it's the actual words are written by Aaron, but sometimes he will collect ideas from different people in the writers' room and people who've contributed most materially get the 'story by' credit.

JOSH: I think also on a lot of shows the credits can be misleading, this would not be *The West Wing* but in a lot of shows things are written by the whole staff and they kind of take turns getting the credit and getting more money. They kind of pass it around and so sometimes it can be misleading when it seems like it was written by one person but it was really a group effort.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: That being said, on *The West Wing*, I think even when other people are writing things, everything eventually, you know, went through Aaron and Aaron would write a full script, that's my sense.

HRISHI: Here's my synopsis of the episode from *TV Guide*. Lord John Marbury, a friend of the President's and a royal pain in Leo's neck, is appointed Britain's Ambassador to the US. Toby and Sam wrangle over an address the President is to give an environmental group. Leo tries with no success to get the President interested in a missile defence system and CJ is enlisted to ask a controversial comedian to decline an invitation to perform at a dinner the President is to attend.

JOSH: By the way, every time we have a Lord John Marbury episode, or an episode in which he appears, a lot of people write comments about the naming of Lord John.

HRISHI: This is exactly what I was gonna bring up too

JOSH: Ok, because apparently he would never be referred to as Lord John... I can't even follow the explanation of it, although I'm just assuming from the volume of response, that these watchers and listeners are correct – that it would be Lord John but it wouldn't be Lord Marbury. I can't quite follow it, but those who follow these things are quite convinced

HRISHI: He would be John, Lord Marbury. They wouldn't throw his first name in there. He's not Lord John Marbury, he's Lord Marbury

JOSH: Ok, so that's been acknowledged, by us. Now we can go on with our lives.

HRISHI: I was gonna read a little bit from... We've gotten several comments, here's an excerpt from the longest one, from our listener Edward

JOSH: Oh, bring it

HRISHI: Edward says, "I wanted to get in touch about something that really wound me up as a pedantic Brit I expect I'm the only person it did wind up" but he's wrong, there are many people.

JOSH: Not so

HRISHI: "The British peerage system is very bizarre but there's a specific way to refer to hereditary peers like John. The name Lord John Marbury would never be used. His highest ranking title is Marquess of Needham. Duke is the highest, then Marquess, Earl, Viscount and Baron, not his Earldom. So he would be referred to as The Marquess of Needham and Dolby, or alternatively, Lord Needham and Dolby. He would rarely be referred to with his actual surname Marbury." It goes on for another few paragraphs, but in any case this is an issue of accuracy in this episode of *The West Wing*, and many other episodes.

JOSH: So what does this mean for Little Lord Fontleroy? His name is Little Fontleroy?

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Somebody figure that out. I don't even know what I'm talking about. He's not Lord Little Fontleroy, he's Little Lord Fontleroy.

HRISHI: Well, speaking of British royalty, there are several heads of state who are named in this episode. Non-fictional heads of state.

JOSH: Oh wow

HRISHI: You know, like Queen Elizabeth II

JOSH: True, yes

HRISHI: And King Carl Gustav of Sweden. And King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand. These are all real monarchs.

JOSH: And in what context are they mentioned?

HRISHI: The little spiel that Tom gives in the moment when the President is signing their credentials he says

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt] *BARTLET: Tom?*

TOM: Mr President, it is with pleasure that I present His Excellency Tata Sumatra of Thailand, and by request of the Secretary of State, ask that you accept his credentials from King Bhumibol Adulyadej as Thailand's Ambassador to the United States.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. And then Bartlet's modus operandi is to then make fun of the person. [laughs] That seems to be part of the official pomp and circumstance of the moment is he then insults you

HRISHI: Gives you a little trivia about your own country

JOSH: Yeah or pisses on your love of golf, and then he's like, "ok now you can be an ambassador"

HRISHI: Yeah. Welcome to the US. This is how we do it

JOSH: Right. We welcome you with insult comedy

HRISHI: I think that Tom says the King of Thailand's name, which is not easy to say, but I don't think that he says it correctly

JOSH: No, I'm impressed. How long did you work on that? Cos you tossed that off very suavely with great elan.

HRISHI: When we were watching the episode I went back and was like, I don't know that that's right. It's a hard name, but he says "Bumipom" instead of "Pumipom" I think the B is more like a P. I don't know if I'm for sure right on that

JOSH: Wow. You know, I think you are

[Laughter]

HRISHI: I love when Leo runs to go get the President in the beginning of the episode in the cold open, and the President comes out after the induction of the Thai ambassador and before Leo even speaks, the President gives this like very quick glance to Mrs Landingham, like he already knows, they've already got a private joke at the expense of Leo. He's like 'this guy'

JOSH: Right. As he waits, Leo and Mrs Landingham get into it

HRISHI: [laughs] yeah

JOSH: In rather barbed fashion

HRISHI: I know

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

MRS LANDINGHAM: In my day, we knew how to protect ourselves

LEO: Well, in your day you could pretty much turn back the Indians with a Daniel Boone musket couldn't you?

MRS LANDINGHAM: Ah, sarcasm, the grumpy man's wit

LEO: Sharpen a pencil, would you?

[excerpt ends]

[Laughter]

JOSH: Very funny

HRISHI: And then after he does his whole spiel, the President gives an even longer and more pointed look at Mrs Landingham. It's funny, I feel like this is a new dynamic for Leo, and anybody. Anybody being like 'oh, silly Leo'

JOSH: Yeah

HRISHI: I also like that throughout this whole episode, Tackleberry – David Graf

JOSH: Yes. Tackleberry...

HRISHI: [laughs] is just unperturbed, totally immune to any kind of sarcasm or joking that happens

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

Colonel, could you walk the President through?

COLONEL: Yes sir. Mr President, approximately three minutes ago, a missile was launched with a simulated nuclear warhead from the Quasiline Atoll in the South Pacific

BARTLET: And it's gonna hit my garage in New Hampshire exactly when?

COLONEL: Well sir, once the missile cleared cloud cover it was detected by the early warning satellites which launched an interceptor or kill vehicle

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: Like, any stray color commentary – it's like it didn't happen

JOSH: That's true. He's a military guy. Let me just say, may he rest in peace. I just want to correctly point out an actor who is dead. With apologies to Paxton Whitehead who's very much alive.

HRISHI: Yeah, David Graf passed away shortly after this episode filmed.

JOSH: That's right

HRISHI: Oh, you know who else passed away recently?

JOSH: Who's that?

HRISHI: King Bhumibol Adulyadej

JOSH: The actual king

HRISHI: The actual king. He passed away this fall. Here's a thing. Since I've now said King Bhumibol Adulyadej three or four times

JOSH: I do like when you say it

HRISHI: Do you like it when CJ says

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

CJ: Sir Christoper Neilingroach

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: She likes when she says it

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly and she says it several times. And she says that she likes to say it

JOSH: Yes

HRISHI: And there is like the parody version of Aaron Sorkin's writing is... I saw you do that by the way. I saw you just make a face at your cat, I'm assuming? [laughs]

JOSH: I did. Well, as I acknowledged to you before we started, I remembered for the first time in several episodes to turn off my cat's fountain – I have an electric fountain that I've been leaving on much to the dismay of our crack sound mixer and editor Zach McNees, because it's been gurgling water in the background, so I turned it off. And now my cat's just walked in and looked at me, like what the [expletive deleted] I'm thirsty. Can you wrap it up?

HRISHI: [laughs] I wish our listeners could see what you actually did which is – I don't even know how to describe it, you kind of looked down at what I could only see as off-screen but I'm assuming is a cat, and then you kind of gave an affectionate wag of your tongue at the cat?

JOSH: Yeah, I think I might have been a little bit kind of rubbing her face in the fact that she can't have a drink right now. I mean she can, it's just still water that apparently turns her off. I did kind of do a little lapping face. I think I forgot that you can see me.

[laughter]

HRISHI: It was worth the interruption for sure. Thinking about maybe we could just modify the format of the show. I can just be behind the scenes and it's you and your cat making faces at each other

JOSH: Yeah, that might get old quickly. In fact, I think we might already be there. There's already somebody writing a nasty comment.

HRISHI: No, people love cats on the internet

JOSH: Oh yeah that's right. Even if they're implied.

HRISHI: So, the implied parody of Aaron's writing might be how he has his characters repeat a phrase over and over again. One person will say it, another person will say it. You know, just there are these little motifs. I think it's always really striking because the actual language that they are using is very specific and so then when it's something like Sir Christopher Neilingroach, it's a little thing that repeats. The language is not arbitrary, it's very very specific and so when it becomes this repeated thing it feel very significant

JOSH: Yes, that is true

HRISHI: That happens a lot in this episode. There's Sir Christopher Neilingroach. There's the scene between Toby and Leo when Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

TOBY: Here's what I think

LEO: Screw the environmental lobby?

TOBY: Did I say that? Did I say screw the environmental lobby?

LEO: You didn't say anything

TOBY: That's right. And before I even open my mouth you decide I'm gonna say screw the environmental lobby?

LEO: [cross talk] I apologize

TOBY: There's an extent to which we've gotta to screw the environmental lobby.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: But then there are two instances of this phenomenon, this very like Sorkin phenomenon, that aren't just style in this episode, they are like substantial plot points

JOSH: And they are?

HRISHI: One is with CJ and Toby, both saying

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

TOBY: ..the environmental lobby, friends are honest with each other. Here's what you say, friends are honest with each other

CJ: ...with the environmental lobby, friends are honest with each other

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: They repeat that phrase verbatim as Sorkin characters are wont to do, but here's it's an indication to Sam that like something has gone on behind the scenes. And I thought that was interesting, that like we've got all these examples of this repeated phrase but here's one that's like

JOSH: It's a significant plot point

HRISHI: Yeah. And then the other one that I think is even more significant is this line, he didn't laugh at the joke.

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

JOSH: He didn't laugh at the joke

CJ: He didn't laugh at the joke, how many more ways are there for me to say that? He didn't laugh at the joke

CORY: But what you said was, he didn't laugh at the joke.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: There's another very like Sorkin thing of, we never actually know exactly what the joke is. Later we find out what the joke was about but we don't hear the actual joke. But it takes several minutes before we even get to that scene, but still we're introduced to this phrase, he didn't laugh at the joke. And just like 'friends are honest with each other' it's sort of like this talking point and then it gets revealed that Cory Sykes made this joke and then the President didn't laugh at it, and then finally in the like ultimate reveal, he did laugh at the joke but you've got people not involved in the conversation with Cory Sykes repeating this same phrase he didn't laugh at the joke, he didn't laugh at the joke.

JOSH: Right, well that's interesting. I guess one of the minor themes of the episode is language, and political language and how things are framed and that they've decided to frame that little story as 'he didn't laugh at the joke' and they decided to frame the drop in as 'friends are honest with each other.' And then there's extra irony to 'friends are honest with each other' because it's that very phrase that tips off Sam to the fact that, if not dishonest, they've certainly been keeping from him the fact that they were already on the same page and they'd discussed the drop in and not shared it with him.

HRISHI: Yeah, excellent point. And in both these cases they are repeating this phrase. I mean, CJ's repeating it without knowing what the back story is, but Toby's certainly saying it and look, where they've bought into the language of the talking point, like Josh has bought into the talking point of he didn't laugh at the joke so much that he's presenting it as like a defence, and it's not til we get like halfway through the episode that it turns out that it's a lie.

JOSH: What did you make of that whole subplot with Cory Sykes?

HRISHI: I loved it. I think that Rocky Carroll kills his scene. Like he's a guy who, I felt like he was able to take on Sorkin's dialogue and just knock it out of the park.

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

CORY: I expected that when I was called in any number of places a Hollywood sleaze, that you might have said a few words maybe on my behalf. But what you said was, he didn't laugh at the joke.

CJ: Cory...

CORY: *He did laugh at the joke.*

CJ: *Yeah*

CORY: *He laughed at the joke CJ. I've been doing this for twenty years, you don't think I know if I had him? I killed that night.*

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: Yeah, he's a great actor. I saw him at the Yale Rep in *The Piano Lesson*, a great August Wilson play in 1987 – he was terrific in it. And I remember at the time multiple people saying to me, I've seen the African-American Josh Malina. I'm not sure what it is, but I've had people tell me that, he and I, or I'm maybe the white Rocky Carroll but I'm not sure what the similarity is, but people think we look like each other.

HRISHI: Wow, I'm not sure I would have made that connection

JOSH: I'm not sure I see it either

HRISHI: Yeah. I do like that game though of the cross-ethnicity doppelganger?

JOSH: Yes

HRISHI: But no I didn't see that one. But you do both handle Aaron Sorkin's writing very well

JOSH: You're nice to say. Well I've always been flattered by it just because he's a great stage actor and I loved him when I saw him – the guy's a great actor. But I agree with you that he killed the scene. I felt like this was an example though of a subplot I would rather have seen dramatized. Hearing the story of this performance and the reaction and the political fallout, felt to me like the seed of a more interesting episode in which you saw the performance. Like last episode I was saying how great Karen Cahill, that how well that whole subplot worked, even though you never see her and it's all off-camera anecdotes being described. I felt like this one I would have liked to see it dramatized. As much as I like the scene between Rocky Carroll and Allison Janney.

HRISHI: Right right. So it's not so much that the scene in the episode is bad, it's just that you would have like to have seen more actually fleshed out

JOSH: Yeah, I think there was greater promise there. I would have loved to have seen the comedy routine. That's the other thing too actually, a little bit. This is maybe why *Studio 60* didn't work as well as *The West Wing*, which is that the incredibly serious take on comedy – I felt like it was a little bit much, this parsing of this single joke, that they're not even telling us about. But this whole thing, and how important this performance was, I kind of just felt a little bit that this was a very somber look at comedy.

HRISHI: Yeah. But it doesn't feel wrong to me here, thinking about like Larry Wilmore, when he was hosting the Correspondents Dinner

[Correspondents Dinner excerpt]

LARRY WILMORE: When I was a kid, a black man was thought by his mere colour not good enough to lead a football team. And now to live in your time Mr President, when a black man can lead the entire free world. Words alone do me no justice. So Mr President, I'm gonna keep it a hundred: Yo Barry, you did it my nigger. You did it."

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: You know, there was a lot of seriousness put on that. On what was a joke.

JOSH: Yeah I guess so. I guess actually maybe that speaks to what I'm trying to say here, or what I was trying to say earlier, which is I think that without explicitly dramatizing it, and just having two people talking about this joke that happened... We don't know what the joke is, we don't get to have our own take on whether the President found it funny or not. I don't know, in story version it didn't knock me out

HRISHI: I was knocked out I think just because of the repartee between them. Cory Sykes has these lines, it feels like a tennis match a little bit where they are going back and forth, back and forth, and then where I was thinking like a boxing match they are sparring, sparring, sparring and then there are a couple of moments where he kind of landed a punch. Maybe not a knock-out punch, because in the end he acquiesces, but still he's got a couple of great lines. I love when he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

CORY: I'm supposed to feel good about that? That he didn't disavow me? That I wasn't disavowed?

CJ: We were courting law enforcement Cory, don't be naïve.

CORY: You were also courting the black vote CJ. I'm not naïve.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: Ohh... Sorry CJ, you tried to get one in there but he like deflected

JOSH: He parried and thrusted.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then the one that is one of my favourite lines from the West Wing. Even though this is kind of a minor episode there are a couple of really significant lines for me. One is that line where he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

CJ: That's not

CORY: It takes a special kind of arrogance not to think that's disrespectful.

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: Right, yeah that was a good line

HRISHI: That's so good. And again , he like, CJ has to kind of just sit there for a second and like absorb that before they can move on.

JOSH: I guess I wanted it to be, I really think there was more potential to the situation. You could have hung more of an episode on it. We could've seen it happen and seen it play out. This was supposed to have happened so far in the past that I didn't in a way buy that they had never had this conversation before until now. Why is it still so fraught? Why did they have to work their way through at this point about whether or not the president laughed. I don't know why she had to dance around it. Why didn't she sit down and say, 'Look, yeah the president found it funny but we're in a situation, you understand the politics of it.' I don't know, I didn't get that it was still this fraught thing that had happened so long ago.

HRISHI: Hm. Well, I mean, I guess it's not necessarily that it was still such a fraught thing but now it's coming up because of this Will Rogers dinner. Like it had been mostly forgotten but then this would be a reason to have it spring back up, because it had been swept under the rug, but now if they're at the same dinner and he's hosting then everyone is going to talk about that story again?

JOSH: I guess. To me it didn't earn the stakes that the scene seemed to be playing out at. Again even though I liked the scene it was a little, I kind of felt like, well I don't know. I don't know that I bought in to the high stakes of it.

HRISHI: Oh I liked it so much. I just think he's, everything he says is so good. And it's so nice to hear this masterful take on these words, coming again from a voice you know that we haven't heard before, a character that we haven't seen before. When she says, 'What did you expect us to do?' and he has this whole line of like:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

CORY: We believe he's a world-class humorist and millions of Americans agree. And those who are making noise right now are feigning their concern in an effort to frighten white men.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: It's just all so good. It's just so juicy.

JOSH: I guess it's good and juicy, but it's also out of nowhere so, I'm mean, I'm not immediately just on board with it. I don't know, I felt I could have been brought to really caring about this meeting of these two people but because of the way it's framed and done, and we haven't seen any thing and it's just been alluded to but we don't really know. That's something Aaron likes to do a lot, is to be a couple of steps ahead of us but then that leaves me sometimes feeling like okay, now I'm just realising what it is. I wasn't brought to this meeting of these two people fraught with this level of tension or whatever.

HRISHI: Yeah. This is not in anyway to justify one position or another, but is this an episode you have not seen since it originally aired?

JOSH: Oh yeah. I have not. I haven't seen any of these episodes since they originally aired.

HRISHI: Okay. But you've seen this one when it first aired. This is not your first time seeing it?

JOSH: Honestly couldn't tell you. I mean I assume so, I watched the show originally, but I mean, but no, I didn't remember.

HRISHI: The idea of not feeling lived in or something enough – I wonder if I have a different take on that because I've seen this episode so many times that like, that the memory of the memory that they are describing is so familiar to me that I'm like, 'I don't need the flashback.'

JOSH: I feel that's right! I feel like you have something that I didn't have going into it, and that's what I was missing.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think that that might be

JOSH: [cross talk] Also, I can't imagine ever watching this episode again. [laughter] I'm fascinated by your watching and rewatching and rewatching – like to me, again, we've shown that I don't remember what I watched two episodes ago, but if I had better recall I'd remember this episode and I'd go, 'I can skip that one.' [laughter] Why would you rewatch this episode?

HRISHI: Well I love the 'it takes a special kind of arrogance not to think that's disrespectful' line.

JOSH: Well okay, make a gif.

HRISHI: My other favorite line, and I think I've talked about this one maybe:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

BARTLET: Sweden has a 100% literacy rate, Leo. 100%. How do they do that?

LEO: Well maybe they don't and they also can't count.

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: That's classic Aaron.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's so good. It's so sophisticated. I'd watch it just for that.

JOSH: You know, it's almost a little bit, just to touch on it one last little time, it's a little bit of *Celestial Navigation* for me. It's like I wanted to be..

HRISHI: You want them to go into the flashback

JOSH: Yeah, I wish I'd seen, I wish I'd seen the performance and maybe I had a question, ooh I thought it was funny, or I didn't think it was funny. Maybe that was really pushing it too far, or that was a bit controversial, oh but Bartlet did seem like he was laughing, why do they have to sell this guy. You know, rather than just being told it all I kinda wanted to live it a little bit.

HRISHI: Yeah. For me it goes a little bit with the joke you know, in *P ost Hoc ergo Procter Hoc*. The joke about the hats. We don't actually hear the joke there either.

JOSH: Right. But that's a little comic subplot. That's not asking you to really give a [expletive deleted] during this scene between CJ and the comic.

HRISHI: Right. And it's not enough for you to know that it's a joke about cops killing black men. You want to know what the actual joke is.

JOSH: I guess here's what it is. I had no investment in their situation because I had no idea what it was about. And then finding out what it was about and having it paid off in the same scene – it was all unsatisfying for me. I would like to have been invested going into this meeting between CJ and this comic, whose performance I had seen. I just think there was a way... given how little happens in this episode, this was really a lesser episode to me.

HRISHI: Sure

JOSH: It not bad, and I like it and I enjoyed watching it. I think they could have shined a little bit more of a light on this plot and made something more out of it and I would've cared more.

HRISHI: From a more macro perspective I think this is another nice moment of showing where the administration has to, the way that Sam puts it, attack their friends for political cover. I mean, they aren't attacking him here in public, but it's taking somebody who's been an ally for them, and not being able to embrace them in the way that they might have embraced the administration - in a way that feels a little bit hypocritical, or a little bit false. And they are doing it both with the environmental lobby as well as with Cory Sykes.

JOSH: Yeah, the pussyfooting around it kind of bugged me both with Sam and with this comic. Why don't they just be more upfront? This is politics. I don't know why they did an endrun around Sam – it made for an interesting little subplot but I mean he works for them, he works for Toby. Why didn't they just say to him, 'Hey we're gonna do this drop-in. I know you're not gonna

be happy about it, I know you're not gonna get your standing ovation in this speech, but this is what it's gotta be and here is the political calculus of it. And if you don't agree with that, that's fine too but you work for me so this is how it's gonna be.' Sometimes it's too precious like everyone's worried about everyone's feelings but you know – here's the decision we made.

HRISHI: Yeah you think? I felt like Toby wasn't worried enough about Sam's feelings. He says to Leo:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

TOBY: I don't want Sam and his fourteen objections. It should just be a drop-in.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: Like he doesn't want to have the conversation about it. He's just like making an executive decision. He works for me and this is the thing that I've decided. It feels a little bit like Toby's just taken offence about the idea that the decision has been made without him. He didn't get to have a conversation about whether or not the president was going to do it, so he's skipping the conversation about what the president should say when he does do the speech.

JOSH: Yeah, I guess you're right. It's not really being overly, being overly sensitive to Sam's feelings – it's maybe the opposite but I guess I just wanted him to be a better manager.

HRISHI: Right, yeah that I think is for sure

JOSH: Be a better boss. Just tell him what the story is, and I don't want to hear back and because you work for me, I'm not gonna hear back – here's what we're gonna do. He's sort of, just do it the right way.

HRISHI: Especially because in the last episode he already pulled the same kind of move with CJ to her face where she says:

[West Wing Episode 2.11 excerpt]

CJ: Are you ordering me to move it to the hill?

TOBY: I don't like doing that.

CJ: You're gonna have to

TOBY: Do it

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: Right. Yeah I guess we're getting a little insight into Toby and his managerial style and

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah

JOSH: You know, he's sort of gruff and a maverick but he doesn't like those moments where one might have to assert seniority.

HRISHI: Would you answer the question, 'tell me about yourself' with the words:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

MARBURY: Well my mother was a descendent of the third of the nine children of Queen Victoria. Victoria was the granddaughter of George the third, who was the great-grandson of George the first. George the first was the great-nephew of Charles the first, who was the son of James the first, and James' mother was Mary Queen of Scots.

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: [laughs] But that's what she wants from him

HRISHI: I guess so but it's still such a weird set up and question, 'tell me about yourself' 'ok here you go'

JOSH: Here's a question. Does it bother you at all that he being sort of,

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes

JOSH: It does?

HRISHI: Whatever the question is, the answer is yes

JOSH: That, so he's kind of this. Well not kind of. He's a drinker, a little bit of a lush, a leech, a pompous sort of, you know, cartoon of British royalty or

HRISHI: Aristocracy

JOSH: It's kind of a bummer that the women love him so much

HRISHI: Yeah, absolutely

JOSH: I kind of wanted them to be like, oh god that ass

HRISHI: I know

JOSH: But instead all the men are like that and the women are swooning over him

HRISHI: Yeah. One moment that I loved is when Margaret says 'thank you' off screen when he gives the that awkward compliment slash sexual harassment:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

MARBURY: Your assistant Margaret is looking positively buxom LEO: Thank you I'll tell her

MARGARET: Thank you

MARBURY: Yes! Well done.

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: It's a hilarious moment, yeah

HRISHI: Like she can hear him and she's says thank you but yeah, that's sexual harassment. And apparently a little mild sexual harassment just makes a guy colourful.

JOSH: Apparently

HRISHI: Ugh. It was pretty gross, all that stuff. Like when he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

MARBURY: I'll need some amusement

DONNA: Good evening your Lordship.

MARBURY: Excellent

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: EURGH. So gross.

JOSH: Eurgh. Yeah

HRISHI: Again, this is an episode where I feel bad for Sam professionally, I feel bad for Donna as a character.

JOSH: Yes, she's just reduced to kind of plying him for potential aristocratic boyfriends or something. It's just weird, it's really weird.

HRISHI: And that she's gonna correspond with Edward Earl of Ulster until he grows, that's how desperate she is. Ugh. I know it's supposed to be a joke. But it's just, it's sad because Donna doesn't really get to do much in this episode except for that.

JOSH: That is true. It's one thing, where in the earlier scene it seems as if maybe she's just trying to make Josh jealous by sort of saying what she's saying about Lord John, but then she completely means it because she spends what looks like to be a good deal of time working him

HRISHI: Yeah. And I think it's also when that happens it like changes my reading of other lines that might otherwise pass by unnoticed

JOSH: Such as?

HRISHI: Like at the end when John Lord Marbury and Leo and...

JOSH: Look at you. Like that listeners? See what you've done to him?

HRISHI: Exactly. And Josiah President Bartlet

[Laughter]

HRISHI: When they're having their discussion, their détente as Josh puts it, about the missile shield, Leo and the ambassador are making their comments and the president says:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

BARTLET: Well, it's a discussion for serious men

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: Oh. I had the same thing too

HRISHI: Whereas at one point I might say, 'okay, he means humans' but in the wake of the Donna plot of like 'I'm here to talk about who's gonna get married,' it felt like Donna was basically trying to set herself up with a season of *Royal Bachelor*

JOSH: [Laughs] Yeah. It did feel that way

HRISHI: Or is it bachelorette? I don't know how those shows work. Which one would it be? It would be *The Bachelorette* because she'd be the bachelorette and all those other...

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: That's all I've got! That's all I've got for this episode, Josh

JOSH: Well I was having if not 'Trump-ai-yi-yi' moments, I do now watch the show and keep thinking, I don't have this overall thing a lot people tweet at us 'oh if only it were Bartlet.' and all that stuff. I'm not having this huge things, but the show reminds me of the huge macro important decisions that are just made by the people in an administration, and so while even from the get-go in this episode with President Bartlet sort of drawing out the *Peanuts* analogy with Leo and his missile defence system – which made me laugh, I thought it was very funny Charlie Brown and the football

HRISHI: I also loved Leo not being "conversant" in *Peanuts*: [West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

BARTLET: You know what you are? You are the Charlie Brown of missile defence. The Pentagon is Lucy.

LEO: *I'm not familiar with the reference, Sir*

BARTLET: *Peanuts. Charlie Brown.*

LEO: *I've heard of them, I'm just not conversant in them.*

BARTLET: *Leo, where you born at the age of 55?*

LEO: *I know that there's a dog.*

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: Yes [laughs.] It keep reminding me, that yeah there's a new set of people who are going to be making these decisions and the rest of the world has to live with them.

HRISHI: Yeah. Can you imagine President Trump wrestling with the pronunciation of the King of Thailand's name?

JOSH: [laughs] No.

HRISHI: I was thinking about this earlier when you were talking about the device of having Cory Sykes and CJ talk about this thing that has happened, you know, previously in the history of the show but without showing it to us. Besides the telladonna that we have detailed so much, that there's a version of it that exists with CJ explaining stuff to the press corps. And in some ways it stands in for the very common and what often feels, to me, like the cheap trope of the newscaster catching you up on what's going on

JOSH: Right. Exposition guy.

HRISHI: Yeah. There was a movie where all that was happening via a radio that was on in the car, and the anchor on the radio would be like catching you up on whatever was happening in like the world at large, and we started calling that character DJ Exposition.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, that's very good.

HRISHI: And now, that's what I, every time that guy, the newscaster, whoever comes up, I'm like "DJ Exposition"

JOSH: [cross talk] DJ Exposition

HRISHI: And I'd like to introduce that to you and to *The West Wing* listenership

JOSH: Let's use that. We will use it. I like that – I don't know what the hell we call him now so we'll just call him Roger Rees, that his tie is, – Roger Lord Rees – that his tie is permanently askew. It's always. I also want call Lyn Paulo and say like did you, were you using like TopStick or something? It's clearly like you made it. It's just never straight.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right

JOSH: It's actually - it's a funny visual. He just, he always looks just a little bit drunk.

HRISHI: There's a reference in this episode to Joey Bishop when Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

TOBY: Also he's the President of the United States, he's nobody's understudy – you've got him going out there like Joey Bishop.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: Did you catch that reference?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: I didn't, I had to look it up.

JOSH: You mean,,who Joey Bishop is?

HRISHI: Yeah, and why he, why the president is not Joey Bishop.

JOSH: I guess they were just, he's referring to him as kind of a second string, kind of a B-list, right? Whether, I can't remember

HRISHI: It turns out he was the guest host on The Tonight Show filling in for Carson a record 177 times.

[*The Tonight Show* excerpt]

CARSON: Ok, my first guest is a close friend, a very very funny man. I've been a fan of Joey's for many many years. I want to thank Joey Bishop for doing a great job on the show, on what was the name?

BISHOP: Wait a minute. I wasn't pinch-hitting for you, I was pinch-hitting for somebody who was pinch-hitting for you

CARSON: Ah. I wanna thank Joey who was substituting for the guest host who was reco on March 1st, 1979. How are you anyway?

[excerpt ends]

JOSH: Ah, interesting. I just thought of him as a minor ratpacker, but yeah I guess that's specifically the reference. Good.

HRISHI: It was one that I never caught, never even thought to think about until doing this podcast and being like, 'oh that's a line that I don't understand'. Let me actually put in the effort to look that up

JOSH: I didn't really get it then. I didn't realize that it was a Tonight Show reference. It's kind of depressing all the talk about climate change in this episode. I think that I forgot we were that aware of it that long ago. Sixteen years later and we're looking at potentially a president who doesn't acknowledge its existence, I mean it's not funny.

HRISHI: Yeah no exactly. When Sam says:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

SAM: As of today it shall be the unequivocal position of the United States government that global warming constitutes a clear and present danger to the health and future wellbeing of this planet and all its inhabitants.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: I didn't write it down but all I could think was, Trump-ai-yi-yi.

JOSH: Absolutely. Ai-yi-yi. Indeed, you would think that is not a statement you could get our president elect to sign off on. Sixteen years later.

HRISHI: It was really the 'unequivocal', the word unequivocal in that – that I was like, I felt just so, as bad for the climate as I did for Donna.

JOSH: Hear, hear. Now we're gonna talk for a few minutes with Kim Webster, who played Ginger. Hey Kim!

KIM: Hi!

HRISHI: Hello.

JOSH: Ginger, get the popcorn, Kim Webster's in the house.

KIM: [laughs] Ugh! I'm always being asked to get the popcorn.

JOSH: I'm glad we finally got you, we've been talking about having you for a while.

KIM: I know, thank you so much for having me.

HRISHI: Thanks for coming and talking to us.

KIM: Absolutely.

JOSH: So, let's start at the very beginning. What is Ginger's origin story – how did you get the part?

KIM: I actually was hired as a one-day stand-in on the pilot.

JOSH: A stand-in?

KIM: Yeah. So, a stand-in for those who don't know is somebody that's standing in place of the actor while they're off to do better things, more important things.

JOSH: While they light a scene. While they like prepare the lighting and the technical aspect of the scene so the actor can go sit in their trailer and watch tv.

KIM: Exactly. So I was standing in, and it was a scene with Josh and Mandy at The Pantry in the pilot episode and I was standing in for one of the college girls that fan-girls out.

[West Wing Episode 1.01 excerpt]

FAN GIRL 1: Excuse me, we're sorry to interrupt your lunch

FAN GIRL 2: We're juniors at Florida state

FAN GIRL 1: We're with this poli-sci group

BOTH: Anyway

FAN GIRL 2: We just wanted to say we think you're excellent and can we have your autograph?

JOSH: Sure

[excerpt ends]

KIM: And Aaron Sorkin thanked me for doing a good job, and I thought 'Wow' I'm just standing here or I'm just sitting here and being quiet, and I was confused about how that could be a good job, but I was really grateful. And so then they just kept calling me back in to stand in and be an extra behind the scenes, which I was thrilled to do. I had just joined SAG two weeks before this, so this was like my first professional job and I didn't really want to pursue a career as an extra or stand-in but this kind of just fell in my lap and, you know, I just felt I immediately knew that I was just like meant to be there. And so then episode three came along and I had been standing in and I left the sound stage because it was a scene with Toby and Josh and so I thought my part was over, so I left and I got rushed back in and I overheard Aaron saying, 'and this is the part where Kim will come in and say "estimated BDA."' and I thought 'What?'

[West Wing Episode 1.03 excerpt]

GINGER: Estimated BDA

TOBY: My first bombing

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: Wait, what does that mean?

KIM: Estimated bomb damage assessment. And so I got like rushed into hair and makeup, I felt like I was Miss America and so that was my, my first line. And then down the road a bit, Aaron had come to set one day, I had went back to my extra and stand-in duties, and Aaron came in one day and said 'Did I give your character a name?' and I thought, 'I have a character?'

[Laughter]

KIM: And he was like 'I'll be back' and you know within a couple episodes Ginger had been born. But here's, I guess, the part in-between the meat of the story that I'm leaving out. One day during lunch there was a cast read-through and Elizabeth Moss who had just been cast as the president's daughter couldn't be there – it was the reading of Crackpots and These Women – and Aaron asked if I could come in and read at the cast read-through. And I was like, oh my God I'm gonna throw up. So I tried, I tried to hide in the back of the room as the read-through started, and Aaron saw me and like motioned for me to come over and then I had to sit in between him and Tommy Schlamme and I'm looking across the room at John Wells, Martin Sheen, Rob Lowe, the whole cast, everybody. And I'm like I'm gonna die. Today I'm gonna die of embarrassment. And I didn't cold read anything. I just had the script and I opened it and just had to go. And it was the scene where Elizabeth Moss's character comes in and they're making the chilli. And at this point, you know, I'm twenty-something, I'm not much of a cook, I'm a starving actor. And the line was 'Dad you never put enough cumin in the chilli.' Well, I mean, in my head I read it one way, but by the grace of God, I said it right. And I, I couldn't believe it because that's not what I was reading in my head! So I just, I kept going, I made some choices about what I thought, you know, a 19 year old college kid with a president as a father would act like, and I just went with it. And I didn't play it like Elizabeth Moss ended up playing it, which she played just great. But, I just made a totally different choice because I was on the fly, and afterwards people who had never even spoken to me had come up to me and were like, who, what? That was amazing. They were like who are you? And then, from that day on, I think, Aaron just kept having me come back and reading different characters. And I don't know, it kind of felt, in retrospect like it was an audition process on the DL. And I just ended up – that's pretty much the birth of Ginger.

JOSH: That's a wonderful story. Kim Webster: Game Day Player

KIM: Yeah, I was just thrown into the mix and it was sink or swim. And I could have ruined it for extras for the rest of like, you know, time if I messed that up but I guess I did okay.

JOSH: That's so great. You know, I tell people, I mean you have to have the goods so that when an opportunity comes up you can come through, but in addition to that I'm always saying to young actors, 'Put yourself in situations where an opportunity, however unlikely, might come up.'

So you know, not looking at anything when you're first starting out as below you or too little or too small to do.' So even working as a stand-in you wound up in a situation that gave you an opening to be great, and to shine and to then do, you know. I don't know how many you did, tens of episodes? I don't know, what did you do, fifty episodes of the show? More?

KIM: I think I filmed about seventy something episodes as Ginger, I think only according to like IMDB, 57 made it to air. But you know I had trained as an actor in college, and that was my major. And it was funny when I was arriving to be that stand-in on that pilot, I was thinking I'm gonna turn around, this is beneath me.

JOSH: Yeah, it's easy to think that.

KIM: Yeah, I'm like, I'm a professional now, I've just joined SAG, I'm a professional, and I shouldn't be doing this.

HRISHI: Wow. You never know.

JOSH: Did you know before you actually got to speak on camera and you were just working as a stand-in, could you tell that this was a special endeavour?

KIM: Oh yes. Within two hours of being there that first day, I knew, like, I can't tell you. It makes me emotional still [voice cracks] because I could tell that this was something very special. So I was, you know. Literally within two hours. It was just, it was crazy.

HRISHI: I'm curious about what the story was, because I saw your first credit on the show on IMDB was not as Ginger but was as 'Kim' in *A Proportional Response*.

KIM: Oh really, does it say that?

HRISHI: It says Kim, yeah. The character Ginger isn't credited until *In Excelsis Deo*

JOSH: [cross talk] That's interesting

KIM: Yes. And then what had happened was I think it was Episode 7 *The State Dinner* I think Aaron originally thought that he was gonna have me be Stockard Channing's assistant, the FLOTUS's assistant, and so we filmed this scene, and that scene ended up being on the cutting room floor and I was like devastated thinking I'd totally messed up the whole show. But it ended up working out in my favor because obviously Toby and Sam were there all the time.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean, thinking about the two actors who played the college students, they only did that one pilot, that's it, that was their only involvement in *The West Wing*. You were a stand-in for one of them and you ended up doing over fifty episodes.

JOSH: [cross talk] You win

KIM: And being onstage at the SAG awards, at the Emmys. I mean, what in the heck?

JOSH: It was quite a ride, *The West Wing*.

KIM: *In Excelsis Deo* that was a really fun one for me. I think that was the first one I was Ginger.

HRISHI: Yeah

KIM: And I believe Alex Graves directed that and I believe it was one of the days we were working probably about 18 hours and that was the last scene of the night. And Richard Schiff had the giggles so bad and it was just such a joy. Like any time they hit their mark, he could not stop giggling and it was so contagious everyone was so exhausted but it was just an unbelievably cool moment for me to see Richard break.

JOSH: Right, of all people.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah

KIM: Of all people. And this is one of the first times I'm acting. And I'm like holy crap, he just can't stop giggling. I think we did that scene a few dozen times cos he just couldn't stop.

[laughter]

JOSH: Oh I want that footage, I want that footage.

HRISHI: I love your line in *The Drop-In* too when Sam calls you out:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

SAM: Final draft?

GINGER: Well, it's the twelfth draft. Whether it's the final draft is really up to you.

SAM: Was that sass?

GINGER: Yeah.

[excerpt ends]

KIM: Well, it's funny in *The Drop In* . I feel like Ginger is just so eager you know. She's twenty-something, she's really excited to be working in The White House, she's all smiles, and the job will get done. And then by the end, it's the twelfth draft, the characters in the moment are exhausted because it's the same damn speech over and over again with the re-writes

JOSH: Right, minor changes

HRISHI: How much did that feel like a reflection of your experience actually shooting the show?

KIM: You mean the exhaustion part? Honestly not at all. I could not be more excited to be there. Whether it was 18 hours, whether it was two hours, I just was so energised just by everything there. Even though other people were exhausted and rightly so because they had to work much harder than I did, I could not get enough.

HRISHI: One of my favourite scenes in this – there's a scene at the end, speaking of Ginger's eventual deflation in the episode, when Toby comes back:

[West Wing Episode 2.12 excerpt]

GINGER: How was the trip?

TOBY: Fine. I need to see Leo.

GINGER: Yeah.

[excerpt ends]

HRISHI: There's so much that's done in this little exchange – the energy you have greeting Toby, then the way he dismisses you, and the just utter crestfallen quality in your face and voice as he turns away and you're like 'Yeah'

KIM: [laughs] Yeah, that cracks me up too. Toby must have hated having Ginger as an assistant, because I felt like Ginger was this cheerleader and always so excited, and he would just beat her down. He was probably like 'Oh just stop with the pep rally stuff.' You know? But I guess the dynamic worked.

HRISHI: It definitely worked.

JOSH: I think we talked a little bit too – is it Part 2 of *In the Shadow of Two Gunmen*, when all of a sudden this incredible somber situation in this normally hustling, bustling workplace had to deal with. What was it like filming that scene, or those reactions to the shooting?

KIM: Well, interesting. I was actually just listening to Tommy Schlamme's guest star on the podcast, and I heard what he said and I was like 'Wow.' When I got that script, I was like 'Whoa' this is amazing and scary [expletive deleted.]

JOSH: Heavy duty.

KIM: Yeah, and you know, I remember preparing for it, and all the homework that I did for that. And we did some takes where I was in full on tears you know, at the thought of somebody that I knew getting shot. And I remember Tommy giving me direction and it was just so great, and he just pulled me back and reigned me back in. And then there's just this shake that I'm doing, and it's me just trying to hold in all that emotion. And I don't think that the hug was scripted, I think Richard just did that in the moment, which was so so beautiful.

JOSH: Good instinct, yeah

KIM: Being able to work with him, it felt like a masters' class in acting, it was just so incredibly lucky.

JOSH: Have you been revisiting the show? Rewatching?

KIM: I started to, when you guys first started the podcast cos I really wanted to keep up, and then my work just kept me away from it. But when I watch it it's so great to revisit it, and then at the same time it's tough to look back and think what I would have done differently.

JOSH: We hear that from just about every actor.

KIM: Really? Ok good.

JOSH: That's certainly how I feel when I watch

KIM: Oh yeah, I'm like, oh I've evolved so much as an actor, and like, 'really that was the choice that I went with? And then to see how young I was – holy crap, I didn't realize how old I got.

JOSH: Yeah we hear a lot of that too from everyone rewatching

HRISHI: And so what's your work nowadays that's keeping you from watching?

KIM: Currently I've been a producer of a show called *Born This Way* on A&E, which just won an Emmy.

JOSH & HRISHI: Congratulations

JOSH: Awesome

KIM: Thanks, thanks yeah. SO I'm kind of doing behind the scenes now. I still do some acting when it works out, but mostly now my career is producing.

HRISHI: That's awesome.

KIM: Thanks

JOSH: Well thank you so much for taking the time with us

KIM: Oh my god it was a pleasure, it was an absolute pleasure. And I'm so glad that you guys are revisiting the show. It's hard to believe it's been off the air for so many years but it's so great to see that the fans are still just as passionate about it.

JOSH: That's absolutely true and there are a lot of Ginger fans out there. I love that in addition to our appreciation on the podcast, which of course we're dedicated to looking at all aspects of

the show. The appreciation for the entirety of *The West Wing* universe from the viewers is incredible and people enjoy the work of all the actors that created the entire universe. It's really nice the level of depth of feeling about the show.

KIM: Absolutely, and it's surprising that still even after all these years, people appreciate Ginger. I'm really so blown away by it. Thank you guys so much for having me, I really appreciate it.

HRISHI: Alright, let's wrap it up

JOSH: Alright Hrish, Mister Hirway. [Laughter]

JOSH: Let's wrap it up. *The West Wing Weekly* is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, made possible by a grant from the Nike Foundation and by Mailchimp and by listeners like you.

HRISHI: If you want to talk to us about this episode, or about anything really, you can leave a comment for us on our website, thewestwingweekly.com, or on our Facebook page, facebook.com/thewestwingweekly

JOSH: We've also both just signed up for twitter. Hrish's @HrishiHirway, I'm @JoshMalina, the show is @WestWingWeekly. Buy a pin! At westwingweekly.com/pin

HRISHI: It is like the shibboleth of our podcast. Got a tweet the other day that was very exciting. Somebody was in Toronto and somebody saw their lapel pin, they did the signal to them and he wrote 'I've never felt cooler.' You could also have the chance to never feel cooler, as when you are identifying with another West Wing Weekly fan by wearing your lapel pin. So go get one. thewestwingweekly.com/pin

JOSH: I'm seeing them more and more and I get a little jolt, a little thrill every time I see one.

HRISHI: IRL?

JOSH: IRL.

HRISHI: Really?

JOSH: Yeah. Have you not?

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: Oh yeah, I've seen people with them, You've gotta get out more.

HRISHI: I stay indoors mainly. I avoid people

JOSH: That must be what it is.

[Laughter]

HRISHI: Ok

JOSH: Ok

KIM: What's next?

[Outro Music]