

The West Wing Weekly
4:11 “Holy Night”
Guest: The Whiffenpoofs, Robert Malina

HRISHI: Hey *West Wing Weekly* listeners, for anyone who might have missed out on merch in our last round of sales, we are unveiling a brand new West Wing Weekly store thanks to our friends at Cotton Bureau.

JOSH: Yes, it looks great, it feels great, and everything is once again available.

HRISHI: That’s right. You can get the What’s Next Hat, as well as all the t-shirts, the newest addition—Single Cell Paramecium— plus all the old favorites: The Signal, Ok, Ok, What’s Next, and the University Sweatshirt.

JOSH: You’ve got your hat, I think there are still a few signed posters, you’ve got the lapel pin, you’ve got the challenge coin, Bartlet’s Army, you’ve got it all. And remember when you buy *West Wing Weekly* merchandise you support the podcast, the entire endeavor, and you make it clear to the rest of the world that you are a person of integrity.

HRISHI: And taste!

JOSH: And taste, sure! And I love seeing Weeks-ling, as we call you, out in the world. I love seeing somebody with just a little, subtle lapel pin or the full on Single Cell Paramecium shirt.

HRISHI: Go to thewestwingweekly.com/merch to check out all of the stuff we’ve got. Or, if you just want to look at the brand new fancy pretty store.

JOSH: And know that new products are being developed in the creative lab even as we speak.

[Ad Break]

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You’re listening to *The West Wing Weekly*, I’m Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I’m Joshua Malina.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

CJ: This is like something you’d get on the internet.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Haha, awesome. It’s 2018.

HRISHI: It is. You know what else it is, Josh?

JOSH: No, don't say it. It won't be until the end.

HRISHI: Ah, okay, alright, alright. [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] I blew this once, I'm not going to do it again.

HRISHI: Today, we're talking about the midway point of *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Which is what we will reach when we're done with this episode.

HRISHI: Today, we're talking about the episode *Holy Night*. It's season 4, episode 11— it's the Christmas episode. And I watched this over the holidays, which was nice.

JOSH: It first aired on December 11, 2002; it was written by fan favorite Aaron Sorkin, directed by fan favorite Tommy Schlamme. It's one of those episodes.

HRISHI: They're a good team.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: In this episode, we get a special appearance from the Yale Whiffenpoofs, and later on in this episode, we're going to be joined by a couple of the Whiffenpoofs who were in the episode.

JOSH: Boula, boula, very exciting.

HRISHI: From the class of 2003. Plus, we'll get a visit from Josh's father, the charming and funny Mr. Bob Malina.

JOSH: Wool!

[musical interlude]

Mr. Bob Malina, Mr. Bob Bob Malina.

[end musical interlude]

JOSH: This is a special episode. For a variety of reasons I remember this episode better than most. You get your cold open in Yiddish.

HRISHI: I mean, that's just badass.

JOSH: It is badass.

HRISHI: At this point in the series, I was watching the show on TV every week. I had caught up on DVDs and I was excited every Wednesday to watch and I remember when this episode aired I remember watching it in L.A. and my mind was blown. *This whole thing is Yiddish!* That seemed very ballsy.

JOSH: Yeah, a very bold choice by Aaron that pays off very well. And I think Tommy does a great job also taking us back to the, do we get a year, a specific year?

HRISHI: 1954.

JOSH: [cross talk] I know it's the '50s. '54! Gotcha. The reason I asked the year is because I thought the, I thought Murder, Inc. was done by the '50s.

HRISHI: The group was exposed in the 1940s.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: According to Wikipedia.

JOSH: I thought so. I wonder why they said '50s. It's probably a question of what cars they had lying around on the lot. [laughs]

HRISH: [laughs] Well I think also because Toby had to have just been born.

JOSH: Oh, that's what it was. Of course, right. Although you know I think Richard could play older. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Just kidding. They could have done 30s. You're exactly right that's why it is— they kind of fudged the true era a little bit to make a plausible Toby. Little Tobias.

HRISHI: Which is funny because having the dates correct and knowing the history is part of the episode later.

JOSH: I also learned, I'm not sure how I, "Jew-y Jew" that I am, that I didn't know this but that Yankel, which one of the characters calls the other. I didn't realize that Yankel was a diminutive for Jacob, which I should have known just being who I am but also I'm a Jacob. My Hebrew name is Yaakov (יאקוב), but through this episode, I discovered not only am I a Yaakov (יאקוב), well I knew that, I'm a Yankel. You could legitimately call me Yankel and I encourage you to do so.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yankel, what is my Hebrew name?

JOSH: Yours, let's see, Hrishi, Hrishi could be a Hoshuah (הושועה), I mean, sound-wise.

HRISHI: Mmhmm.

JOSH: *Hrrrshoah*. [laughs]

HRISHI: How about Hrishikesh, if you take the full thing.

JOSH: Can't be done.

HRISHI: Can't be done? There's no Hebrew equivalent of Hrishikesh?

JOSH: [laughs]. Let's crowdsource this, let us know what you think.

HRISHI: Ok. That would be cool. And then when we get our West Wing Weekly jerseys, I can have my Hebrew name on the back.

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

HRISHI: While we're on the subject of words that I don't understand, the beginning of the episode, as we're doing this crane shot getting down to the car where Jules Ziegler is sitting, the first few lines in Yiddish are not translated. The first one we get with subtitles is "You hear what I said?" I was like *No, I didn't*.

JOSH: [cross talk] No. Well I heard it. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs] I heard it, I guess. So can you translate?

JOSH: Oh, I'm sure I cannot and I probably should have. This is probably a good opportunity to get my dad on the horn.

HRISHI: For all the *goys* will you explain the difference between Yiddish and Hebrew and how they relate?

JOSH: Well, Yiddish, I guess, and I'm no expert in Linguistics, or anything else. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: But Yiddish is, I think, a high Germanic language used by central and Eastern Europeans before the Holocaust, and less and less after, that combines elements of Hebrew, uses the Hebrew alphabet and I think also incorporates elements of other languages. There's probably a better Wikipedia explanation than that. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs] At this point, if you didn't know that and you've been listening to this podcast and watching *The West Wing*, I mean, you've been doing a *fakakte* job.

JOSH: This is actually a good phrase, a better way to put it. It's the historical language of the Ashkenazic, the Ashkenazic Jews who are the Eastern and Central European Jews.

HRISHI: Ok. As to the actual plot within the—

JOSH: [cross talk] I was actually just going to go with the production design and directing and lighting, I think it looks great.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I can also imagine it being part of the Warner Bros. backlot—

HRISHI: [cross talk] For sure.

JOSH: But they dressed it beautifully. The snow works, the lighting is gorgeous. It still works for me, almost there's a little, if they had a movie budget and much more time could they have made it more photorealistic to the time, I'm sure, but it works almost for me in the sense that it also feels a little like an idealized memory of the time.

HRISHI: Hmm. Yeah.

JOSH: I think they did a very good job. And also I sometimes criticize the way things look, usually in the Oval through the windows. For some reason, the snow all works for me so well this episode. It really looks like it's snowing! We get the portico, I think, and the exterior of the White House and then we get through the windows. It all really works.

HRISHI: Oh the shot at the end where the President's just got his back to the camera and he's looking out of the window.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, that's a great shot.

JOSH: [cross talk] Lovely.

HRISHI: So, we have in the cold open, Toby's father, Jules Ziegler in 1954 he's played by Danny Jacobs, he's played by Jerry Adler in the present day. But before we get to the present day, I was wondering, I didn't totally understand why Zev—

JOSH: Took one to the back of the head?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] yeah.

HRISHI: So we have Yaakov/Yankel, and Zev and Jules and, for some reason, they're supposed to meet a guy, Zev has set up this meet, and he says he's gonna be there and then they go in and Zev never comes back out, and I didn't know, did he get killed because he screwed up? Or was the plan for him to be, this was how they were setting up killing one of their own.

JOSH: Very interesting to me. I have no answers to any of these things, I was intrigued by all of it as well and, I mean, certainly we're not provided with enough information to really know. It also sort of undercuts, a little bit, the adult—

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

JOSH: —Jules's contention that they were killing, that when people were knocked off they were bad people, evil people that were—

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly.

JOSH: —heroin dealers and things like that because here in the cold open we see them knock off one of their own.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Yeah, I know. I watched that and I thought, *Aww, Aaron, not good for the Jews. You've gotta show us killing one of our own?*

HRISHI: What's the English cognate for "knockoff"?

JOSH: [laughs] very good. *Nanke!*, I guess. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, no, it's a disturbing little scenario, even given the fact that we're seeing Murder, Inc. *What did Zev do? What did Zev do?*

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, what did Zev do? Exactly. I wish we could get D'Angelo Barksdale in here to say *Where's Zev, String?* [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] That's good. Yeah, no, the truth is, this is one of those things where it incorporates—Murder Incorporates—into the show very nicely and smoothly but it's also the cold open could be the first scene in a completely other television series that I would like to watch.

HRISHI: I would like to watch that.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. And then we discover that this is Toby's father and he was born in December of 1954, and so then when we come back to the present day, we are in the White House and the Whiffenpoofs are singing. The Whiffenpoofs, as we find out in this episode, are a singing group from Yale, but before we go any further, maybe we should introduce a couple of the Whiffenpoofs.

JOSH: Let's do.

HRISHI: Joining us now are Vikram Swamy and Stephen Elliott from the Whiffenpoofs to tell us about their experience filming this episode.

VIKRAM: My name is Vikram Swamy, I go by Vik for short, I was the business manager of the Whiffs of 2003.

STEPHEN: And my name is Stephen Elliott. I was world tour manager and [laughs] Vik's roommate in the Whiffs that year.

JOSH: Right on. What parts did you guys sing.

VIKRAM: I was a baritone.

STEPHEN: And I was a first tenor.

HRISHI: So tell us how this all came about. You guys were in this episode, *Holy Night*, how did that happen?

VIKRAM: I'd had a message from the assistant to Aaron Sorkin saying that he wanted to have us on the show, and wanted to speak with the manager so of course I was floored, so I called him back and I think I spoke with Aaron directly on the phone for a few minutes, and they said they'd like to have us on for an episode they're working on, and that it was going to involve Toby's father's character. We managed to work it out where they would fly us down to L.A. for the filming over our Thanksgiving break. I told him that I needed to check with the rest of the group to make sure that they were willing to give up a big chunk of their break 'cause I wasn't sure if people had plans they couldn't cancel or things like that.

STEPHEN: A couple funny things here, but did he say or am I just imagining this but if we didn't accept the offer, he would give it to the Harvard Krokodiloes?

JOSH: [laughs]

VIKRAM: I don't know, maybe. I can't remember that.

STEPHEN: [cross talk] [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] A group of which I should mention my cousin Stewart was the pitch. America's second best a cappella group.

STEPHEN: Right second best and my potentially fake understanding was he was going to offer it to the Harvard Krokodiloes as a backup but they would have to perform as the Whiffenpoofs.

[all laugh]

VIKRAM: Right yeah.

JOSH: Yeah you guys shouldn't have shown up, you should have let them do that.

VIKRAM: Yeah, right, right exactly. We sang at Maury's which is this restaurant/pub that has a storied history at Yale and is part of the Whiffenpoofs song and as the Whiffs we sang there every Monday night and I thought that would be a good time to speak with the whole group about it and to make sure everybody was on board so over our dinner I kind of explained, with as much theatricality as possible, the events that had unfolded and of course everybody was super excited and there wasn't much of a problem in terms of asking people to give up the first half of their Thanksgiving break to fly out to Warner Bros. to do the filming so that was that.

HRISHI: Is it an all or nothing kind of thing? If a couple of members couldn't make it, would you have had to give up the opportunity?

VIKRAM: Probably not. I mean I think as long as we had 10-12 guys that were willing to do it. I remember Stephen I think you were going to fly to Japan or something and—

STEPHEN: [cross talk] Yeah, I made it for a lot of the scenes except the closing *Oh, Holy Night* scene where they zoomed in on everyone [laughs] so I didn't get to wear a frumpy sweater at the end of that show and get filmed.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs]

VIKRAM: Yeah and it's really funny, I remember another kind of interesting fact is that *Holy Night* arrangement, we didn't have an arrangement for *Holy Night* ready so I remember Courtney, our pitch pipe, working on the arrangement on our flight over to L.A. kind of with Rob—

STEPHEN: [cross talk] Yeah.

VIKRAM: So that arrangement was put together on the fly and then we got there and they were like *okay, you need to record this* and we just recorded in kind of an empty spot in one of the rooms on the lot. It was really ugly the acoustics, and it was just part of the set or something that they just pulled us inside and were like *okay here's the mic and you guys record this now* and we were like ok.

JOSH: Ha! Still sounded really good I thought.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's one of my favorite musical moments on the series.

JOSH: [cross talk] Goosebumps!

VIKRAM: Well, yeah, thank you. I mean, we weren't sure how it was going to sound because the room was really not resonant and we didn't have much—just acoustically it was not a good room to record in but you know we did the best we could, and it turned out to be a really awesome moment.

[*Holy Night* episode musical excerpt] (13:28)

Short excerpt of the Whiffenpoofs singing a choral piece in Latin.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did you get to keep the recording that you made? We'd love to make the song available for download.

VIKRAM: Yeah, I'll search my albums I think we put a version of it on our album.

STEPHEN: [cross talk] Oh, definitely, um, I mean I have the... (trails off)

HRISHI: How about the other songs that appear in the show? You sing *Bye, Bye Blackbird* and *Girl from Ipanema*. How did you figure out what else you were going to sing?

VIKRAM: Yeah, those are two traditional Whiff songs that we sang all the time. I don't remember exactly the point, how we arrived at that. I think, do you remember, Stephen?

STEPHEN: My memory is faulty so I just remember the final explanation which was Dave Mountain was one of the better looking members of the group.

JOSH: [laughs] Put him out front.

STEPHEN: He was like a ridiculously good looking All-American guy, so if that was one of the deciding criteria I wouldn't have been surprised.

VIKRAM: Yeah.

HRISHI: Because that's a song where he could solo.

STEPHEN: Right. Because there were two solos and that was the one where Allison Janney was like "I'd like to take them home with me." And it kind of made sense.

[Josh and Hrishu laugh]

VIKRAM: Right.

STEPHEN: I forgot if one of the *West Wing* staff put in a request for a specific song or just wanted us to come up with a couple of suitable songs. And the cool thing there is insider baseball they do what they do with a lot of other music in TV shows, they kind of cut it and looped it in a way that if you're just listening and watching the show you might not realize they looped it in a couple of places to repeat verses, but yeah, I think it's longer in the show than it's actually arranged.

VIKRAM: Yeah, yeah. It was definitely, it was the background for a lot of dialogue in the end of that episode I remember.

JOSH: What was the process like for you guys shooting and being on *The West Wing* set?

STEPHEN: That was a lot of fun.

VIKRAM: Yeah, it was a lot of fun. It was really eye-opening, too. I remember we had to get up really early in the mornings and then go get some makeup and stuff done. It was just amazing to me that you would spend all day on what was maybe a few minutes of the episode or even less than a few minutes. We spent what, Stephen, do you remember? Three or four full days there for just the spots we were in?

STEPHEN: Yeah, it felt like a long time.

VIKRAM: Yeah, I mean, I was just shocked. We were in the episode maybe for just a few minutes total and it was just amazing to me that all the work, the lighting, and just everything that it took to put those few scenes together, it was pretty amazing. It was really cool just getting to meet everybody and the staff. You could just tell everybody loved working on the show and that everybody felt that they were part of something very special.

STEPHEN: Yeah. Martin Sheen was particularly friendly and generous and I think he and Dulé Hill, or one of the other cast members got in a fake brawl behind a doorway so we'd see them kind of look like a headlock, and I think either Martin was in a headlock or Dulé Hill was in a headlock and they were kind of running back and forth behind a doorway just totally goofing off.

JOSH: That sounds about right.

HRISHI: That's adorable.

VIKRAM: I remember we didn't get to meet Bradley Whitford because I think his wife had just had a baby or something.

JOSH: You dodged a bullet.

[Vikram, Stephen, and Hrishu laugh]

VIKRAM: And I think you were on the show by then, but we didn't get to meet you either.

JOSH: I know, I was very disappointed, particularly let the record reflect, I was not a Whiffenpoof, I knew better even then to audition for the Whiffenpoofs, but I was a member of the Yale Spizzwinks, of which both Vik and Stephen were members.

STEPHEN: We also had this big luncheon, it was really fancy, I don't know if you guys always ate this way but there was this big luncheon, I think it was because it was towards the end of the year or maybe it was a Thanksgiving luncheon.

JOSH: Yeah, probably a holiday thing.

STEPHEN: Yeah, so we got to sit with Allison Janney and some of the other actors, and just kind of talk to them. But I remember what shocked me, and part of what took so long to record these scenes was there were two, I think it was just actually one actor/actress in particular who just could not master the lines. And the lines— they were like five words or something and—

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh, now I want to know who.

STEPHEN: Vik, do you remember?

VIKRAM: [cross talk] It was Dulé. It was totally Dulé Hill.

STEPHEN: [cross talk] Was it Dulé? So she [Allison Janney] also forgot a lot of lines, but Dulé could not say *Girl from Ipanema*, it was always like *Girl from I-pa-no-ne-ma*.

[all laugh]

VIKRAM: Yeah we did multiple takes of that, that's right, I remember we were cracking up.

STEPHEN: Can you guys do *Girl from I-PA-nema*, he kept saying *Girl from I-PA-nema*.

[all laugh]

JOSH: Well she's the eponymous (e-PAH-nymous) girl of the song.

HRISHI: Yeah I don't know who it was, but at one point when Donna's trying to get something other than *Girl from I-PA-nema*, she says, *you know, it's supposed to be the chalet in the mountains*, is there anything like that? Someone has the line:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

WHIFFENPOOF BOY: We'll put our heads together, ma'am.

DONNA: I appreciate it.

[End of excerpt]

HRISHI: How did you decide who gets to say the line?

[Vikram and Stephen laugh]

JOSH: Right.

VIKRAM: That was me. They were like *we have a line*, and by that point I was the only one I think they knew by name just because I had been working with Aaron and his staff to get the whole thing scheduled so I think I just got it by default.

STEPHEN: But you also needed to join a guild to do that?

JOSH: [laughs] Hey, nice.

VIKRAM: No, I think afterwards it made me eligible to join SAG.

JOSH: [laughing] You declined?

VIKRAM: I didn't foresee any major performances in the future so I never ended up joining.
[laughs]

STEPHEN: I think something happened with the mail where I would continue to get your royalty checks for that one line. And then I'd forward them to you. For like five dollars or something.

VIKRAM: [laughs] Yeah, once in a while I'll still get a check in the mail for like a quarter.

JOSH: The gift that keeps on giving. Yeah I love when they, whenever it's less than the postage for a single stamp I'm like *you know what, keep it.*

[Hrishi laughs]

VIKRAM: Yeah. But it's really cool. Every now and then I get a reminder about the cool experience. Like here's a check from Warner Bros. for my 15 seconds of fame.

HRISHI: That's great.

STEPHEN: I hope you're reporting it in your tax returns, properly, Vik.

JOSH: Ha!

VIKRAM: [laughs] I always do.

HRISHI: Thank you guys so much for telling us about your experience on the show. Thanks so much for joining us.

STEPHEN: [cross talk] Yeah, thanks.

VIKRAM: [cross talk] Pleasure.

[Theme music interlude]

JOSH: Alright, very nice. I hope to meet those guys at the next Spizzwink reunion.

HRISHI: Why do all the words have to be so silly? Whiffenpoofs and Spizzwinks.

JOSH: I think it gets you ready for listening to 14 to 18 men sing without music.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: It just eases you into another realm where that's a normal thing to do.

HRISHI: Ok. I do really love that *Holy Night* rendition at the end. It is so beautiful.

JOSH: I agree, it's kind of—

HRISHI: [cross talk] It's my favorite Christmas song, and the fact that they chose that to end with is just perfect and then that arrangement is so great.

JOSH: I love the montage that Tommy has put together at the end. Maybe just because I happened to recently catch on TV a little bit of *Godfather Part II*, and it's kind of an anti-Coppola montage where in a mob movie, 6 people would be murdered during *Holy Night* and here we're actually seeing, again, our heroes at their best and a *rapprochement* of sorts as Toby and his father stand and watch the performance and the older Mr. Ziegler is having almost a *dejà vu*, or a nostalgic memory of the opening scene because of the mention of the Whiffenpoofs.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JULES: [as Whiffenpoofs sing] I'm having the strongest memory.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: And you realize the cold open was the moment that he's remembering.

JOSH: And he says there a brief line in Yiddish.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JULES: [as Whiffenpoofs sing]. ikh gebrakht aundz do (איך געבראכט אונדז דא)

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: Which does translate to "I brought us here."

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: Which is kind of fantastic. Which I double checked to make sure that's what it means. I translated the phrase. So he's actually having that nostalgic moment to a day, or I guess, a night, when he lost a friend in Zev and that whole, whatever, traumatic thing happened, but he's also having this feeling of whatever he did, and we think there's probably a lot of darkness in his past that he's paid some prices for, that's what brought his son here to this moment in the White House.

HRISHI: I had just run it through Google translate, the Google translate version was "I brought myself up." I like yours better, "I brought us here," because it resonates with what Josh says to Toby:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JOSH: Look what he did in two generations. What room did you just walk out of?

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: Well, let's circle back now. So when we are done with the first Whiffenpoof scene, we've got C.J. fawning over them. By the way, I like that in that scene Carol calls C.J. ma'am.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

CAROL: Aren't they great?

C.J.: You just want them to take you to their place and...

CAROL: They're 20 years old, ma'am.

C.J.: Hm.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: Which I had, I think at this point, they had such a natural rapport and comfort with each other and, certainly, we've had a lot of instances where Carol has had some really good sassy comments and stuff, forget about that part of the dynamic that she would call C.J. ma'am.

JOSH: It's funny that you point that out because I love, I'm jumping ahead just a little bit, but in the first scene between Toby and his dad, at one point, his dad says to him "yes, sir" and I love the writing there because there's a little bit of deference in it, calling your son *sir*, but there's also a little bit of snark.

HRISHI: [cross talk] but it's also a little bit of defiance.

JOSH: Yeah. And I thought it was a great combination of writing and performance by Jerry Adler.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

TOBY: You talked to Josh?

JULES: Yes, sir.

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: There's a lot in there, in those two words.

HRISHI: Yeah, taking your very important highfalutin son down a peg with the *sir*.

JOSH: Yeah, I feel like in delivery it walked the line between actually showing him deference and giving a little knife twist making fun of it, *oh mister fancy pants* kind of thing.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Jerry Adler, by the way, yet another fantastic actor who plays a relatively small role and makes a big impression. And you know Jerry Adler probably from a million things, including, currently, he's on *Transparent*. He plays Moshe Pfefferman. But you know him from *The Sopranos* and *Rescue Me* and a million other things, just a terrific character actor. [Dog barks in background] Is that, Watson in the background? Watson has a lot to say.

HRISHI: [to dog Watson], Watson, what's going on man? [into mic] He was hiding under the futon here the entire recording until now, now he's emerged with something to say. He says "I also like Jerry Adler."

JOSH: Aww [laughs]

HRISHI: He's like "my favorite role of Jerry Adler's was in *Manhattan Murder Mystery*."

JOSH: [laughs] Oh!

HRISHI: In which, spoiler alert, he plays the villain.

JOSH: There you go, yeah. Here's what I'm wondering, lest we get taken to task, shall we take C.J. to task for what we would take the men to task for sexualizing college students.

HRISHI: Right, if it were Josh ogling a senior in college saying "don't you just want to have her take you home?" We would be...

JOSH: We would go, "oooh."

HRISHI: Very uncool.

JOSH: Yeah. Oh, C.J.

HRISHI: It's just a horny C. J. this episode.

JOSH: Apparently.

HRISHI: She's got her mind on romance. And then she gets a kiss from Danny.

JOSH: I saw C.J. kissing Santa Claus.

HRISHI: [laughs] My favorite part from C.J. in this episode is when Santa first appears and her reaction, she says:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 Excerpt]

[applause]

C.J.: *Ahh, you see!*

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] She's so happy. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs] Her voice hits a note that I did not know was in her register.

JOSH: It's adorable.

HRISHI: So we leave the West Wing after this first scene and we get the return of Congressman Claypool and Freedom Watch. This is a guy who has been a thorn in the side of the administration in the past. We first came across him in the episode *Lord John Marbury* where he was railing against drug use, I think.

JOSH: That sounds right.

HRISHI: The same actor and the same entity, Freedom Watch, comes up and he is the person who's taken the bait that Andrea Wyatt has set in terms of the fight that she was hoping to provoke about her pregnancy.

JOSH: Right. And Toby is being deposed on the subject.

HRISHI: Yeah. And handling it *really* well I think.

JOSH: [laughs]. Yeah actually he does handle himself well. He certainly is great.

HRISHI: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

TOBY: As I understand, pregnancy, it's a binary state, you either are or you aren't.

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: It's all simmering anger and disgust but measured answers.

HRISHI: And it reminds me of *The Social Network*. I think Aaron is really strong at writing a deposition scene.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Or entire movie that's a deposition. But this kind of low key adversarial relationship in terms of, you know, it's just 2 people sitting across from each other, but then you really just have to underplay the emotion and just the contempt that Toby feels comes through and my favorite is after they wrap and he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

TOBY: I'm told that on my sunniest of days, I'm not that fun to be around. I wonder what's going to happen when you make my children a part of your life.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a great threat.

JOSH: It is good.

HRISHI: So, we get to C.J. in the press briefing room and we get the return of Danny in very dramatic form, in disguise then he pulls off his beard and hat but the joy if it is kind of short lived and true to form for *The West Wing* because it turns out he has figured out what's happened with Sharif and he's going to write about it.

JOSH: Yeah, and again, Tommy's direction I think is terrific as we get the reveal in a slow push in on Danny. We start way out of the office, or out of C.J.'s office, where she's sitting with Danny and he's starting to tell this story about Cricket which sounds like it's going to be kind of funny and maybe of little importance and as we get closer and closer we get into the office finally and see Danny's face and realize this is of the greatest importance and relevance to the White House staff and as soon as it's revealed, C.J. has to get up and she kind of can't even really sit there and make eye contact. She gets up and kind of dismisses it and she knows trouble is brewing.

HRISHI: Right, and of course she doesn't reveal this to Danny, but later she says to Josh:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

C.J.: Thing is...

JOSH: Yeah.

C.J.: I'm absolutely certain that's what happened.

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: She completely buys the story.

JOSH: Also setting up the greater sort of overall “twin themes” of the episode where we’ve got Toby’s father dealing with dark things he’s done in the past and then Bartlet and Leo are also dealing with something dark that they’ve done in the more *recent* past.

HRISHI: Mmm very nice. Yeah. Leo and the President are trying to find some kind of way of atoning for it while Jules is also try to atone by reentering Toby’s life.

JOSH: Yeah I have a minor regret about that, I think that’s kind of a brilliant playing out of the character’s psychologies, I wish they themselves didn’t call it out explicitly.

HRISHI: Like saying “Airplane!” in a Freudian...

JOSH: Right, well that’s when, no, but it’s even less subtle than that:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

BARTLET: I’ve been exercising my guilt not having Josh crowbar infant mortality money into the HHS budget on December 23rd at 8 o’clock.

LEO: For me, it’s trying to get Arabs and Israelis to like each other.

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. And I think actually those would have been two elements to the episode better left without the characters bringing a spotlight onto them.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: Some people wouldn’t have gotten it if it would have been more subtle but I think that’s the kind of thing you better be allowed to breathe and for us to kind of feel it or sense it and some people unconsciously grasp it rather than just tell us what it is.

HRISHI: I don’t know, you know, I think the thing that we get from them making it explicit is you realize that they are self aware. If they didn’t say it, maybe we wouldn’t understand that they know, that they wouldn’t have that layer of self consciousness about what they’re doing.

JOSH: Fair point, but I still think it could have maybe been more subtly woven in.

HRISHI: Maybe, yeah.

JOSH: Also I get a kick out of, it’s always a delight to see Adam Arkin back and I get a kick out of the fact that Stanley’s kind of got Stanley on his mind. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah.

JOSH: There are a couple of very funny moments:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

STANLEY: I did very well in math and science. I don't know why.

BARTLET: And we'll want to get to the bottom of that.

[end of excerpt]

[Josh and Hrishu laugh]

JOSH: Right. It's very funny. It's funny to see Stanley get caught up.

HRISHU: Stanley returns for another Christmas episode. We first met him in a Christmas episode in *Noel*, in season 2, both of those Christmas episodes with Stanley feature our heroes making Freudian slips that reveal something psychological that's troubling them which is a *little* bit of a silly device, I think.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

BARTLET: I ought to be able to do something about the airplane.

STANLEY: Uh oh.

BARTLET: Wait, what did I just say?

STANLEY: It's hard to figure, sir, but you've introduced a new word into the conversation.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHU: Josh was doing things like this in *Noel* as well, which led people to understand he has PTSD. I feel like it worked a little better in *Noel* because Josh's sort of harried state and the PTSD, I bought it a little more that he might make those kind of mistakes but here in this kind of conversation it felt a little device-y.

JOSH: Yeah, fair enough. To me, that gimmicky nature of it was allayed by the fact that there's a good joke right after which is that Stanley is not entirely sure what an airplane represents in dreams and that leads to Bartlet with another great line:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

BARTLET: Stanley, I never thought to ask, but you're a doctor, right?

STANLEY: Me?

BARTLET: Yeah.

STANLEY: How do you mean?

[end of excerpt]

[Josh and Hrishu laugh]

JOSH: So, it's a good little smoke in mirrors with humor, but I see what you're saying.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's true.

JOSH: And sometimes I do bump on these things and other times I think *wow that was really well done*. Like the mention of the Whiffenpoofs in the beginning in Yiddish and then the fact that they're there and how it sends him into a little fantasia of memory really worked for me and I thought *wow that's a lot of ground to cover in a way that doesn't feel super clunky or sappy*.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: In one television episode.

HRISHI: Mhm. I thought Stanley, his answer, though, about what airplanes signify being death, again, just because it was a Christmas episode and because we've got Stanley there, I was thinking about *Noel* and if airplanes signify death, you know, the inciting incident for Josh was a pilot flying his plane into the side of a mountain/

JOSH: And President Bartlet has arranged for a plane to fly Sharif to his death.

HRISHI: Right. So whether or not it signifies death in dreams—

JOSH: [cross talk] In reality—

HRISHI: [cross talk] It signifies death in *The West Wing* at least.

JOSH: Also touched and moved by a president concerned with his own mental stability and health.

HRISHI: Awww.

JOSH: [cross talk] Which led me to a bit of a Trump-ai-yi-yi moment as today it's been announced that the President's Year One physical won't even include a mental evaluation.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes. Mhm. It's a physical, Josh, it's a *physical*. It's in the words.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: I wrote in my notes, "Aww no one liked the President's Agatha Christie joke".

JOSH: No, he bombed. [laughs]

HRISHI: [cross talk] [laughing] He really did.

JOSH: I liked it, he even did a voice and everything.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

BARTLET: [gravely] Where nobody, be going nowhere, the bridge is washed out.

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: The funny thing, so much so, that he kind of explains it on the way out.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I know.

JOSH: He gets no reaction he's thinking *maybe they didn't get it, I was doing the guy from...*

HRISHI: I felt so much sympathy for him. This is a position I find myself in all the time. Like *I made this joke guys and nobody laughed at it, did you know it was this?*

JOSH: [cross talk] Let's revisit it and I'll walk you through it, I think you'll find it funny.

[both laugh]

HRISHI: At that point, you're only playing to lose.

JOSH: That's right. This episode is awash in 2018 Golden Globe winners, what with Elisabeth Moss and Allison Janney, congratulations to them both.

HRISHI: Yeah. As well as former guest star Tabatha Fortis, played by Laura Dern, she also won. She's not in this episode but—

JOSH: [cross talk] No, but good to point it out. The distaff cast of *The West Wing* doing very well awards-wise. Men, you've got some catching up to do. Elisabeth Moss, by the way.

HRISHI: Yeah, we get Elisabeth Moss comes [sic] back.

JOSH: She also for me, it was fun to watch her. I'm kind of trying to reverse engineer her career and see whether I can see. I always thought she was wonderful on the show. I now think she's doing some of the best work on television of any actor alive as I'm a fan of *Top of the Lake* and *Handmaid's Tale*. And she is so good in both of those projects. She's really something else and it's fun to sort of watch, *okay let me see, can I see it in her*, you never know who's going to go where with their career.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's the first time she's been in an episode in quite a while and it's a surprise to us as well as to Charlie the way she casually says "Hey, Charlie" he says, "Hey, Zoey" and has to stop and do a double take.

JOSH: Yeah. And am I forgetting or is it not new information to us as viewers that they've even broken up? I mean time has passed but did we know explicitly that it was over between them?

HRISHI: I don't think that it was explicit up until this point.

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: She hasn't been around since the episode *The Midterms* so for most of season 2 and all of season 3 she hasn't been around. So it certainly didn't feel like she and Charlie were dating even though that had not been made explicit.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But now it turns out she's with this guy, Jean-Paul.

JOSH: Right. I guess it's gotta be rough when your ex starts to date royalty.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's a funny mistake in the subtitles when Jean-Paul starts speaking, he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JEAN-PAUL: [in a slight French accent] Ah, Zoey talks about you all the time. She talks about you so much I think sometimes I want to kill you.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: But in the subtitles they wrote "kill her."

JOSH: Oh!

HRISHI: Which is very different. I instantly don't like this guys.

JOSH: Yeah, I think we're probably meant not to.

HRISHI: Yeah. I don't like this guy, and I don't like the effect that he's had on Zoey. I'm not as huge of a fan of Zoey in this episode, the way, pretentiously, she talks about Jean-Paul.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

ZOEY: He's very casual about it. This average passerby would never know he's French royalty. Unless, you know, they looked at him.

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I'm with you. I'm Team Charlie.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: She's also, I think, parading him in front of Charlie—

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly, yes.

JOSH: She's definitely, there's a little passive-aggressive, *ooching* to enact.

HRISHI: Yeah. I had dinner with a friend last night who had recently broken up with his girlfriend who has moved away. They're now separated by a lot of distance and she moved out all of her stuff but she left all of her underwear in the drawer.

JOSH: [cross talk] Wow, what a move.

HRISHI: And I thought wow, that is deeply passive-aggressive.

JOSH: Indeed it is. Wow. [laughs] And as we're just talking about it I guess Meghan Markle will run into an ex at some point and he'll have to be like "Well what are you up to?" "Oh, yeah, I'm seeing someone."

HRISHI: [laughs] I was wondering, will Meghan Markle play herself in *The Crown*? When they get to...

JOSH: [laughs] That's a good point.

HRISHI: [cross talk] She could conceivably play...

JOSH: [cross talk] Well, she'll read for it anyway. She read for it and she auditioned under a different name and she got the role. They didn't know.

HRISHI: [laughs] Oh, I wanted to mention this one part, we talked about this, the date around the death around Anastasia [tests different pronunciations] What do you say?

JOSH: Yes. Toby himself goes Anastasia (AnastAHsia) *and* Anastasia (AnastAYsia).

HRISHI: [cross talk] And Anastasia (AnastAYsia), yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] To me, Jews say Anastasia (AnastAYsia).

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Brooklyn Jews. Although my family gives me grief all the time for saying vase (vAHze) instead of vase (vAYse).

HRISHI: I was going to give you some grief for saying montage (montAHge).

JOSH: Instead of...?

HRISHI: Montage (MONTage).

JOSH: Oh, my emphasis. I do say montage (montAHge). I think it's the French montage.

HRISHI: Oh, you prefer to use the French Kanyé.

JOSH: [laughs] Nice. Apparently. Apparently, I do.

HRISHI: [cross talk] [laughs]

JOSH: I get a lot of grief for a lot of things I say. I don't know what it is. We've been playing a lot of Nintendo Switch at my house and I say Mario (MARE-io).

HRISHI: Hohoho.

JOSH: Yeah, Mario (MARE-io) and Luigi. I'm a New York Jew! Mario (MAHrio) so now I'm always trying to, oh I'm sorry did I say Mario (MARE-io) Kart? Mario Kart (with a German accent: MAHrio KAht). You want to play Mario Kart (with a German accent again)? Is that better?

HRISHI: [cross talk] [laughs throughout] Definitely better.

JOSH: Anyway, I interrupted you.

HRISHI: I was just going to say the way that the date of Anastasia's death is brought up is with this line, from Ginger:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

GINGER: Hey Toby, Lisa Lily's on the phone, the Justice Department is having some kind of thing tonight with skits and she wants to know when Albert Anastasia was killed.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: And all I could think was, what kind of skit are you writing, Justice Department? That sounds terrible.

JOSH: I had a similar thought, too. I was like maybe they should have just been playing Trivial Pursuit. Hey, you know... Because yeah that was a reach. I really want to go to that party.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah. If you're writing a skit about Anastasia, then I feel like to make that choice you should also know enough about Anastasia that you don't need to call the assistant of Toby Ziegler. You know? Like just imagine you're in the Justice Department, you're writing a thing, a terrible skit, about the death of the head of Murder Inc., and you think *ah when did he die, I know, let me call the West Wing bullpen and get Ginger on the phone.*

JOSH: Right. Very odd. Also the skit's not going to work unless you know what year? The whole thing is hard.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I just realized we've rushed past something very very important to me. Did you, when you rewatched this episode, twice, so I'm told, did you watch the credit sequence?

HRISHI: The credit sequence at the end?

JOSH: At the beginning. The titles, that's the word I'm looking for, for I am in it for the first time.

HRISHI: [gasps] I skipped past it.

JOSH: Yeah. Actually, as did I, and something, I don't know something or someone alerted me to it: *this is the first episode when Josh Malina...* so I went back and watched and that was a huge, huge moment for me. It's one of the reasons I think why I remember this episode altogether particularly well.

HRISHI: Because you watched it a million times when you got the tape?

JOSH: Yeah, well the sweet thing is that Aaron, before this episode even aired, he probably just wanted to let me know... I just remember Aaron calling and saying *I have the opening titles with you in them, can I messenger it to you?* Which is just so, I understand why it meant so much to me, it's sweet to remember how much it meant to Aaron knowing how much it would mean to me and he had it messengered to me and it was a VHS tape and I put it in and so I couldn't immediately get back, I had to go [Josh makes a high-pitched buzzing noise to replicate the sound of a VHS tape being rewind] rewind over and over and over just to hear that music swell to see my name and my image. So I went back and rewatched it and I felt everything I felt the first time I watched it. It was a big deal to me.

HRISHI: Aw, you're having the strongest memory. [laughs]

JOSH: There you go, exactly.

HRISHI: That's so nice, it's a Merry Christmas.

JOSH: [laughs] Thank you.

HRISHI: Sorry, Christmas (with flem on the CH).

JOSH: Very nice. And I, no doubt, have a box somewhere in my garage with that tape in it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh that's awesome.

JOSH: I would never get rid of it.

HRISHI: That's really sweet, that's awesome. Because of the Julie Ziegler segment and the return of Zoey Bartlet and Josh's reasons for arranging the visit as he describes to Toby, I just wrote down Father Christmas. Is that a phrase?

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, absolutely.

HRISHI: That's a thing people, people call Santa Claus *Father Christmas* right?

JOSH: Père Noël, you know, I like French, montage (montAHge), [in exaggerated French accent] Père Noël, yes. That's very good!

HRISHI: You and Jean-Paul should get along just well. You and the [also in exaggerated accent] *Bourbons*.

[both laughing]

JOSH: That's right. Yeah. If Zoey does it, why can't I? Very good, very Father Christmas. It actually is a huge friendship overstep. Now that you mention it. Josh, the conversation that he has subsequent to having arranged the visit is really what he should have had before he decided to arrange the visit. He should have made his pitch maybe to Toby why this would be a good thing to do rather than just gone ahead and done it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I wonder

JOSH: [cross talk] Or maybe not. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe the best friends know that you have to, that he's never going to agree to it and you have to just do it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly.

JOSH: So I'm going to catch myself even as I'm saying it.

HRISHI: Better to ask forgiveness than permission.

JOSH: Ah, there you go.

HRISHI: I think I can see why that would work with Toby, especially in matters of feelings and family.

JOSH: It's cute, too, when the first sort of vulnerability shows of the first brick he takes out of the wall that's up between them is:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JULES: I should stay tonight with you?

TOBY: You should stay tonight with me.

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, it's a cute little coupling.

HRISHI: It is. One thing I thought was a nice touch, I don't know if they were thinking about this consciously but I don't know if you remember, Zoey took French at Georgetown. There were those scenes at the end of season 1 where she's with her girlfriends and they're practicing their French.

JOSH: Indeed, very good.

HRISHI: Came in handy. On the Father Christmas side of things, the President says to Zoey:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

BARTLET: When you were little, like 2, I really wanted you to like me and I wasn't sure you did. With Liz and Ellie, my act just worked and with you I had to try harder.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: Which I felt like kind of goes a little bit against what I feel like we've learned about his relationship with Ellie in the episode *Ellie*.

JOSH: Mm. They seem to have the toughest time.

HRISHI: Yeah. With the Surgeon General, she says something about "you learned that you're not your father's favorite" and he said "oh that's not true" and she says "oh you're such an intimidating presence" and he's like "oh well Liz and Zoey, they were never intimidated."

JOSH: Yeah. But that also works though I think, being a parent of two children, you say whatever works at the moment, so...

[both laugh]

HRISHI: Got it.

JOSH: You can secretly tell your children they're each your favorite if that's what you need.

HRISHI: Right. Or that you had to try a little harder with them.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right, that also works, sure.

HRISHI: Okay, let's take a quick break and when we come back, we'll be joined by Josh's dad.

[ad interlude music]

[ad]

[ad interlude music]

HRISHI: Joining us now is a very special guest, an expert in so many things, we've asked him here today to enlighten us on—

JOSH: [cross talk] oh for God's sake, he's an expert in everything except how to turn the phone off.

[both laugh]

HRISHI: Today, specifically, we're asking for his help with some expertise in Yiddish. Joining us now is Josh's dad, Mr. Robert Malina. Thanks for joining us, Mr. Malina.

ROBERT: Our pleasure, my pleasure! Nice to see you both.

JOSH: The *our pleasure* implies that my mom is just off microphone.

ROBERT: And that is absolutely correct.

JOSH: [cross talk] Or that my father is king of the Jews.

[all laugh]

JOSH: Could be the plural, the royal plural.

ROBERT: I think we'll go with the former explanation rather than the latter.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: Mr. Malina, have you had a chance to watch this episode, *Holy Night*?

ROBERT: Yes I did. With great delight.

JOSH: My dad is, as is my mom, couldn't be more supportive parents so they of course are watching, or rewatching, every episode so they can listen to our podcast.

ROBERT: Absolutely.

JOSH: Right?

HRISHI: That's good parenting.

JOSH: Let's get your *West Wing bonafides* out of the way. Did you start watching *The West Wing* in season 4, episode 6 or did you watch from the beginning?

ROBERT: Sadly, the answer is that we started watching in season 4, episode 6.

ROBERT: Very well possibly.

JOSH: Let me ask you, dad. So you know a little bit of Yiddish. Grandma and grandpa, may they rest in peace, your parents, spoke Yiddish. I mean, they spoke English, but they spoke Yiddish as well.

ROBERT: They spoke Yiddish fluently because they spoke Yiddish to their parents and of course they spoke Yiddish at home in the traditional way of keeping things from the children. If they wanted something for my brother and me not to know, they would speak in Yiddish. Of course, they also understood that we heard enough Yiddish that it was not all that easy to keep things from us since we had been around our grandparents and listened to them conversing in Yiddish all of our lives.

JOSH: That's funny, that reminds me just recently I was at one of the card clubs, I told you this, and though there is a rule, English only at the table, it's not always so strictly enforced and there were a couple of guys there speaking Hebrew so rather than divulge that I understood a fair amount of Hebrew, I just sat and listened including a hand where it was rather important piece of information. Melach, melach (מלח, מלח) the guy said, so I knew he had a pair of kings. And I played the hand to a success and at a certain point I said, "melach no good, buddy," and they were like oh you speak Hebrew.

ROBERT: That can be a dangerous practice at the poker table.

JOSH: That is true.

HRISHI: So I was wondering if you could share with us some of your memories about the time when Josh joined *The West Wing*. Do you remember the moment when he found out that he was going to be on the show?

ROBERT: The answer is absolutely yes. It was obviously a moment of great excitement for the entire family. Josh had already told us about his exchange of emails with Aaron and then when, in fact, he was invited to the 6-episode engagement, that was obviously very exciting for us. When it turned out that he was going to be made a regular, since we had been watching *The West Wing* at least since he had started on the show and had looked forward to the opportunity to see him in the main titles, it was a very very exciting moment for us. It's the kind of thing, when you have a child who's a professional actor, which can be kind of an up and down experience in life, when you finally get into something that is already an established hit, and you become a regular, it's a very very big moment for everyone.

JOSH: I think also, the moment might have been doubly exciting for you and the rest of the family because my significant job prior to *The West Wing* was *Imagine That* on the strength of which I bought a house. The day I moved in, that show was canceled, and then I borrowed a lot of money from you and my sisters in order to continue living in the house so this also probably meant I could start paying you guys back. It was extra exciting.

ROBERT: I'm sure you're right, I don't think that was, at least at the time, the item that was highest on our agenda but I have no doubt that we were pleased that you'd be earning a regular wage.

HRISHI: At what point did you know that Josh was going to be an actor by profession? I mean, you sent him to the best schools, you sent him to Horace Mann, and to Yale, at some point, he lets you know, *hey I'm going to be an actor full time*.

ROBERT: That became clear in utero.

[all laugh]

ROBERT: No, the fact is Josh started acting I think probably in high school, maybe a little bit before high school in elementary school—

MRS. MALINA: Camp.

ROBERT: He acted in camp. It was wonderful and exciting and cute when he was in camp and it was exciting and cute when he was in elementary school and exciting and cute in high school and exciting to see him on any number of productions at Yale and then when he told us *now this is what I'm gonna do*, it became somewhat less exciting.

[all laugh]

JOSH: And a lot less cute.

ROBERT: Yes, and a lot less cute. Although, the reality is probably from some time, certainly in his early teens, it became very clear that the only thing that Josh seriously was interested in pursuing as a career was a career in acting. I think, I like to believe, that Fran and I were very supportive parents. We certainly did everything we could to help him along the way and it's a combination, obviously of skill, but a certain amount of luck, and I think succeeding also to some fair degree depends upon having a support system around you that permits you to have the freedom to go pursue something that is not always instantly successful, and even when successful, doesn't necessarily provide stable employment.

JOSH: That is very well said and I will add that I was smart to be luckier than talented that you guys gave me an incredible—I know that I have and have had a luxury that a lot of people pursuing this kind of thing do not have which was a tremendous amount of emotional and financial support for a profession that sometimes takes many years in which to start reaping any kind of fruit.

HRISHI: And what was Josh like as a kid.

JOSH: [laughs] [cross talk] We're really going there?

HRISHI: Was he a joker? I'm just wondering how many of the qualities that West Wing Weekly fans have come to know and love about Josh's personality existed when he was a young boy.

ROBERT: I don't know whether this will be a universally accepted point of view. I believe that most of us do not change very much. I think that most of what is both charming about Josh and delightful about him and perhaps on some occasions not charming and delightful was the case when he was 10 and 12 and 18 and in his 20's and 30's, etc. You know, Josh always has been very smart, very witty, somewhat sarcastic, he actually has, contrary to what many people believe, a very very large heart and a—

JOSH: [cross talk] I keep it in a jar by my bed.

ROBERT: No I think that's actually not the case. I think the fact is for anybody that's actually followed Josh's career, even if you follow him on social media, there's a kind of nice balance between arch sarcasm and some very very serious commitment to being the right kind of person in a world in which it's difficult to continue being right all the time.

JOSH: Awww. My dad, folks. That's very very sweet dad. I was just going to recount the following anecdote, to answer Hrishi's question which is that I remember as a kid, first of all, mom and dad are among the funniest people that I've never known. That was the case when I was a kid, that's the case now, and making them laugh was always one of my big motivators, and often I would go for low comedy rather than high, and a recurring pattern would be that I would do something insane to make my dad laugh in which point finally he would shake his head and mutter, "moron!" And then my mom would say, "Bob! Bob, what are you doing? Don't call him a moron." And I always wanted to say no that's when I know I'm done.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's victory.

JOSH: [cross talk] That's what I'm looking for.

HRISHI: What about pranks? Josh has a very well known reputation for pranks he'd pull on *The West Wing* and continues to pull on *Scandal*, were you ever a victim of a Josh prank?

ROBERT: Nothing comes immediately to mind. Josh is probably a better source for remembering things in which he's humiliated me. There are any number of pictures he's taken of me that very much deserve to be put away for posterity.

JOSH: Well now I'm going to have to put something up on the website. We can negotiate that later. No, in recent years, I have a recurring April Fool's joke that I play on my parents. Not every single year, but often I'll call and say bad news, my agent's dropped me. And they always believe it. And then I get slightly offended, I'm like *you really think at this point in my career my agents are going to drop me?*

ROBERT: In fairness, you come by the April Fool's "prank," if you want to call it that, honestly.

JOSH: I was going to encourage you to tell that story. Now you have to.

ROBERT: When I was, I think, probably about 6 or 7 years old, I came to my mom and told her my aunt had died and needless to say she was horrified, it was her closest sister and when I kept telling her April Fool's it took a while for it to come through.

JOSH: My memory was that you had done it over the phone. I thought you were at her house and did it over the phone and they couldn't get back, and you hung up.

[all laugh]

JOSH: You're whitewashing it for the podcast. So there you go, I've never done anything worse than Aunt Hilda is dead. That's vicious.

HRISHI: Mr. Malina, I have one last question for now, although I'd like to reserve the right to be able to call you back as an expert witness later.

ROBERT: Of course.

HRISHI: Joshua's English name is Joshua, but his Hebrew name is Yaakov.

ROBERT: Yes, Yaakov, he's named after my grandfather, my maternal grandfather.

HRISHI: What was behind that, you have two different names. Did you feel any pressure to have his English name and Hebrew name correspond or did you feel like it was fine, you could pick whatever you want for either language?

ROBERT: Actually, in today's environment, it's much much more common for the Hebrew names and English names to be radically different. When Josh was born—

JOSH: Like Yaakov and Rainstorm

ROBERT: When Josh was born it was much more common for the Hebrew names to be pretty close analogs of the English names as well and I think Fran and I simply really wanted to name him Joshua but we were committed to naming him after my grandfather and my grandfather's name was Yaakov which was close enough to Joshua that we were comfortable with it.

FRAN: He's been a schizophrenic ever since.

JOSH: Wait let me ask you this. Was Jacob the jokester?

ROBERT: Yes, he was the son of the real jokester that you're referring to, my great grandfather, who was one of the great pranksters of our times who periodically did things such as pretending to be a deaf-mute motioning to 2 young women on the Lower East Side that he couldn't talk to them, but kind of explaining that he needed to get home all the way up in the Bronx but that he was a deaf-mute and kind of not really capable of handling things. They would come with him on the subway, they would take him all the way home, up to his door at which point he would turn and say, "thanks."

JOSH: So [laughing] there, that's really where I get it.

HRISHI: Did you ever consider calling Josh "Yankel?"

ROBERT: No.

JOSH: I didn't know until this episode that Yankel was a diminutive for Jacob. Somehow, I don't know how I missed that. Oh, one last thing, I don't know if we can go there, this episode, of course, and the Yiddish, set in the 50's but we realize that's an anachronism as Murder Incorporated kind of dissolved sometime in the 40's is about Toby Ziegler and his discomfort with some of the doings of his father with regard to Murder Incorporated. We have some connection, can you speak obliquely of it?

ROBERT: Well we did have a member of the family who had, what I suppose I will say, were some shady relationships among them and involvement in Murder Incorporated. It is neither in one and the same time the highlight of our family history nor by any means something that we are particularly ashamed of. I think if there was one thing my dad kind of made clear to me early in life was that not all policemen are good people, not all bookmakers are necessarily bad people and that you measure people by what they do and how they act and how they treat other people rather than necessarily in a sense by the way that they earn a living. That's not to say—

JOSH: [cross talk] Interesting. Hitler made a similar argument.

ROBERT: Right. [laughs] No to say one should ignore involvement in things like Murder Incorporated, but—

FRAN: [cross talk]What's in a name?

JOSH: Well I think our relative was in charge of the "charitable" foundation.

[all laughing]

HRISHI: The 501(c)3 arm.

JOSH: Right. Yeah.

HRISHI: "Murder.org".

JOSH: Nothing to be ashamed of there. That's right.

ROBERT: I think it was the 501(c)gimmel if I'm not mistaken.

JOSH: And grandpa, may he rest in peace, had a lot of colorful friends and didn't he have a friend who was an arsonist? And what was his point of pride?

ROBERT: His point of pride was that no one had ever been hurt, he made a very clean fire—

JOSH: Never lost a life.

ROBERT: Only to do with the insurance companies.

FRAN: There's also cousin [inaudible]

ROBERT: As mom mentions, there's, of course, [inaudible]

JOSH: [cross talk] The Greek chorus over there.

ROBERT: But actually it was actually a very productive kind of environment to grow up in because you did see people not only for, in a sense, having earned a living but also how they treated other people and the fact was there were some people who earned what I'll call an ugly living, but in fact were decent human beings and concerned about others and lots of people, as we all know, who theoretically earn a very honest and straight living who have no consideration for the other in our society and there is certainly no great honor in that.

HRISHI: Well said.

JOSH: Hear, hear.

HRISHI: Thank you so much, Mr. Malina. Yankel and I are going to wrap up the episode.

JOSH: Love you guys.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

[interlude music]

HRISHI: Your scenes with Toby are great, let's talk about you a little bit.

JOSH: Alright, let's. That scene also has a favorite, I enjoyed shooting that scene with Martin and Dulé, that first meeting where he's—

HRISHI: [cross talk] [quoting] No, no. No no no no no.

JOSH: Exactly. I really don't want to go in there.

HRISHI: It's really great, and then Charlie says:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 Excerpt]

CHARLIE: You know what, I've seen worse.

WILL: Really?

CHARLIE: Well, no.

[End of Excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I also like the way it was written and it was fun for me to watch. You could see in my face, I know the stupid things I'm saying as I'm saying them.

HRISHI: [cross talk] [laughing] Right.

JOSH: No was that right? And I know he's going to get to isn't that what you hear to discuss. It's just this stricken look on my face *like God this is awful*. I feel like I, Josh, have moments like that where just realize you're [expletive deleted]-ing the bed as you're doing it. You just can't seem to avoid it.

HRISHI: When you see something like that, when you see yourself in that scene as you're thinking *that* thought, the act of acting in that moment, is it something that requires significant effort for you and you can see that scene and say "that was a tough job that I just did" or is it also instinctive that in the moment you're just like "oh this is what I can do, these are the things that I can, I can inhabit this spirit and I can wear it on my face and in my delivery without having to think about it too much."

JOSH: Yeah, no, that was not a difficult scene to do. I think in part because I've just had that feeling before and the one thing I do remember thinking about going into it is that he's a step ahead of everything that's coming out, like that he knows *sas* he's saying something stupid, he's immediately realizing it, and then the thought process was clear to me. In other words, not that Bartlet would point out, "that's why you're here, isn't it" but that Will would have gotten to that right before the President was saying it. So it's not only mortifying, like *oh here it comes over and over, oh, ah oo, ah*, I just remember the feeling of *oh this is just spiraling out of control* and he's seeing it, each humiliation, a nanosecond before it happens. So he has to see it coming, then experience it, *oooh*, see the next thing coming and experience it. It just felt to me like that was the way it was written.

HRISHI: You have this nice exchange that gets kind of squashed after this huge flameout. I love this exchange between Will and Toby when Toby keeps telling him that he'll never know the love of a real woman.

JOSH: Right. I think there's something I caught that I don't know I ever thought about that's sort of revealing about Will's behavior in this episode, which is that he really is beyond humiliation of it all. There's a second layer of humiliation where he's being hazed, and there are posters for Sam Seaborn put up covering his office windows and there are bicycles in there and he just he is an "eye on the prize" kind of guy and this whole thing that happened with the President really could be, obviously Toby's exaggerating, but this could be the kind of thing that would be really tough to get out of your head, I just want to leave, I don't want any part of this place, I can't function in it. But he's all about—

HRISHI: He's all about the work.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: Yeah. He says, “it doesn’t matter about me.” I think this thing is important, which is great, but Toby’s still hanging out in this, he’s just having a great time cracking jokes at Will’s expense, and it’s going pretty well until Will says “oh your dad seems like such a nice guy.”

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

WILL: What did he do?

TOBY: He made ladies’ raincoats and before that he worked for Murder Incorporated.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: And then it’s just your face.

JOSH: Mm. Not quite sure how to respond.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] And that’s the interesting thing, too, there’s also a moment, it turns out when they finally do call Will into the Oval, Leo, Toby, and Will are there and they put him through a little bit of a “trial by fire” and he doesn’t quite do it. He ends up saying “I can speak truth to power,” but he doesn’t do it when the moment is there.

HRISHI: [cross talk] He didn’t do it. Yeah.

JOSH: You can see that he’s got something to say and not going to say it and I like that that wasn’t all so sweetly wrapped up with a bow by Aaron with this one episode where—

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

JOSH: We see the potential in him, but he hasn’t really risen to it yet.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

WILL: I have no difficulty, sir, telling truth to power.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: Like he had a *little* difficulty.

JOSH: Just now.

HRISHI: Generally about the story and Toby’s father being a member of Murder Incorporated, I’d love to play a little bit from our interview with Richard [Schiff]. He joined us to talk about Arctic

Radar in the last episode, but there's a little bit of our conversation that we saved for this episode about the origin of this episode plotline.

RICHARD: *Holy Night* was a pitch that I had given to Aaron. It opens in Yiddish in Brooklyn in 1954, and it's in Yiddish. I went to Aaron and pitched an idea which was that Toby got a visit from his father at the White House and that his father was someone that Toby was very much ashamed of and I had it in my mind that I was thinking more like a Roy Cohen type. Someone that I would be politically ashamed of, and he came back to me a week or so later and said "you once told me the story of your grandfather being a member of Murder Incorporated" and I went "yes" and he says "I would like to use that story as your father." And I said to him "that's cutting really close to the bone, but if you go close to the bone then I'm in," meaning *go for it*. He wrote that episode and I remember being very upset that he didn't really get close to the bone and that what he did was kind of just wrote a story about a guy waiting for me in my office because we never really got to it. And then watching it, because this is the first time I watched that episode, I realized he had used that story as another kind of metaphor or example of the connectedness of people and forgiveness and he was using the story of my fictional father being a member of Murder Inc. who assassinated people and in the cold open, he was in the car waiting while an assassination happened and they were talking about the assassination in that episode. Bartlet and Leo get information, C.J.: gets them information that someone, Danny, comes back and has information about the assassination that they perpetrated and it's connecting my father and my need to forgive with some sense that they need to forgive themselves, and comparing mafia hits with US government hits, which, by the way, comes directly from *The Godfather* with the line from Michael Corleone to Diane Keaton which is:

[The Godfather excerpt]

KAY: *Senators and presidents don't have men killed.*

MICHAEL: *Who's being naive, Kay?*

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: I love the ending montage. I love the way that it is edited, and the way that it fades to black and returns, fades back up from black as it goes through these different moments. I love that for the most part, all the diegetic sound except for the Whiffenpoofs goes away. We don't have any sort of rustling or anything like that and you see Will trying to work on his writing and things like that, and it's something that feels especially like the magic of Christmas getting just this kind of, quietness as they remove all the sound and you just have the song.

JOSH: Yeah, it's a great sequence.

HRISHI: Neither of us are Christians, but I have to say I *love* Christmas. Do you have any feelings about Christmas?

JOSH: I like the TV specials that come on because I watched them as a kid, so that's where I get my sort of Christmas *versant*, just trying to put as much French as possible, sometimes I'll eat an *éclair* during Christmas, so yeah no I like the music, because my people wrote it, I'm

down with Christmas spirit. I also like any time of year where there's an emphasis on giving, and people sort of seem to be a little nicer to each other, if only briefly, so yeah. We also haven't discussed Leo's total read of Josh *vis-à-vis*, *apropos*, *pardonne-moi*—

HRISHI: [cross talk] A certain *je ne sais quois*—

JOSH: [cross talk] Yes. Josh's romantic fixation on Donna. It's the kind of thing where you're like *everybody knows* and—

HRISHI: [cross talk] Well I like how it relates to what you were saying about their guilt. Suddenly, where the previously internal is now being acknowledged externally. Certainly there was energy between Josh and Donna, and they talk about it a little bit here about *it's not how it looks* and just like *what do you mean by that* and so it's coming out there but then, but you know there's always been that kind of energy flowing between the two of them but here he really, he has to be told by Leo to get it together.

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JOSH: [cross talk] *It's the way it should be.*

LEO: [cross talk] *Oh, get it together, would you please?*

JOSH: *I'm trying.*

LEO: *Ok.*

[end of excerpt]

JOSH: It's such a great, it's so John Spencer. It's like I can't imagine anybody performing that line better.

HRISHI: Yeah, Josh is having a little moment of unraveling. I really do love Josh in this episode. I love how people are just throwing these crazy assignments at him between Leo and the President, and he just takes it in stride. He's like *sure, we've got it going and*—

JOSH: [cross talk] That's his job.

HRISHI: [cross talk] And then they let him off the hook, he's like, *yeah, even like Will, he's all about the work.*

JOSH: [cross talk] He's all about the work. Yeah.

HRISHI: But this is really up there with "Oh no, no no no no," Josh says "It's fine, of course it's fine, it's great, I was feeling guilty but now it's" [laughs] but even before that when Leo asks him "are you going to be in town?" He says:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JOSH: Nah, she's meeting Jack Reese at The Washington Inn. How does he get a room at The Washington—I can't get a room at The Washington Inn. [pause, atmospheric office noise] Me? I don't know yet.

[end of excerpt]

[both laughing]

HRISHI: He completely has misheard. It's a much better kind of version of the Freudian slip thing where he's answering a question that has not been asked because Donna is so much on his brain.

JOSH: Yes, you're right.

HRISHI: But yeah Leo takes it in stride in a way that suggests that he's known this whole time. He knows what Josh's feelings are.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. I was thinking one of the funny things about that run of "no no nos" is the specificity of it as written by Aaron in the way that Will has to say it. And then Bartlet quotes it accurately.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. Is it accurate? That would be—

JOSH: I want to go check now looking at the transcript because I think it's right on:

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JOSH: Oh no no, no no no.

BARTLET: You said no, no no, no no no, no.

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: No, he's off. He interpolates a couple.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's what I thought.

JOSH: You're right. Nevermind. We have to do our wrap up and, more importantly, it's time to say, Happy Half-iversary, Hrishi.

HRISHI: Oh [expletive deleted]. I mean what? I mean, "oh, wow!"

[both laugh]

JOSH: It's our half-iversary. That was a real standout gaffe I made calling it as long ago as I did. That was some *primo* obtuseness.

HRISHI: And I just went with it. I have to take my portion of the blame as well.

JOSH: You didn't speak truth to lack of power.

HRISHI: I didn't. [laughing]

JOSH: But this is it, we're actually halfway through. Which, in itself, is an accomplishment, but also, my god, we've been doing this, I'm really enjoying it, I'm feeling good, no question we're going to make it, but we've been doing this for a long time and we're halfway through.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's true. It's hard to remember a time when we weren't doing this podcast.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And now, apparently, it's hard to imagine a time when we won't be doing it.

JOSH: [cross talk] I do that a lot when we're, it takes so long to film a scene on a TV set, anything filmed, and so sometimes we'll be shooting a scene in the Oval Office for *Scandal* and we'll be in hour 6 and I'll say, "you know, early in my career, when I wasn't doing this scene..."

[both laugh]

HRISHI: That's good. And I'm sure everyone there really enjoys that.

JOSH: Oh sure, they enjoy the jokes I've done a thousand times by now. But how are you feeling, looking at the second half of *The West Wing Weekly* podcast up ahead of us?

HRISHI: I'm telling you, [imitating Bartlet's gravelly reference to Christie earlier in the episode] "nobody be going nowhere, the bridge is washed out."

[both laugh]

HRISHI: I'm not going anywhere.

JOSH: Alright.

HRISHI: Well thanks so much for joining us once again for *The West Wing Weekly*.

JOSH: Happy half-iversary to our listeners as well. Thank you for accompanying us on this hay journey, this semi-endavor.

HRISHI: And we'll be back next week.

JOSH: Yeah we will.

HRISH: Until then, you can leave a comment for us on thewestwingweekly.com or on our [Facebook page](#) or on our [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#), and it's nice to be back.

JOSH: Yes it is. *The West Wing Weekly* remains, as ever, part of Radiotopia, an eclectic and electric collection of story-driven podcasts on PRX. You can get more information there and listen to all the various podcasts at radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: Thanks to Margaret Miller and Zach McNees for their help.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And thanks to you, again for listening. Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

ROBERT: vas iz next (וואס איז נעקסט) (Yiddish for "What's next?")

[Outro music]