

The West Wing Weekly
7.02: "The Mommy Problem"

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. And today we're talking about episode 2 from season 7, it's called "The Mommy Problem."

JOSH: It was written by Eli Attie, it was directed by Alex Graves, and it first aired on October 2nd, 2005.

HRISHI: In this episode, the astronauts who are stuck in the Space Station have been rescued, but the investigation into the leak about the secret military space shuttle gets ratcheted up as a grand jury gets convened. So, nobody is going to emergency, but somebody is going to jail.

JOSH: Exactly.

HRISHI: It's all bad news for the Santos/McGarry campaign. We're also having trouble getting their message out and projecting an image of Santos that is substantial. So Josh hires a Communications Director, and together they try to deal with the good luck or bad luck of Santos getting called up for Marine Reserve duty.

JOSH: Very nice. Substantos.

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly. We may have covered this a little bit before. I think Richard Schiff mentioned that he was not a fan of the second half of season six and season seven, and I feel like you can hear it in his voice just when he says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

TOBY: Previously on *The West Wing*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] That's funny.

HRISHI: What did you think of this episode?

JOSH: I liked this episode. Overall I definitely like it, and I like the way it's written and directed and that there's incredible amount of movement, especially early on. Like, I felt caught up in the blur of a presidential campaign. [cross talk] It moved very quickly, the characters were physically themselves on the move much of the time and I got caught up in all that. I enjoy it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, Alex Graves directed this episode. It's the first time Alex Graves and Eli Attie have been paired together even though they've both been part of *The West Wing* forever. [cross talk] It was an interesting combination. Alex Graves I thought really let it all rip in this episode in a way that just takes everything that he has done. We've seen him do all kinds of kinetic things in the show before, but I feel like he turned it up to eleven here.

JOSH: [cross talk] Sure.

JOSH: I agree. And it was also interesting watching knowing that the per episode budget had been slashed, as too strong certainly downgraded or lessened. I don't think you see it the episode.

HRISHI: Not in this episode, definitely not. I mean we've got actual jet fighters in the episode.

JOSH: Right, exactly. There's a little bit of a U.S. Military advertisement at the end of the episode. I mean appropriate in context, but I was impressed with the hardware.

HRISHI: Yeah, so it didn't feel like budgets had been cut at all.

JOSH: Yeah, I was happy to know that the money they saved by not having me in the episode, that that money really went to, that they really put it on the screen.

HRISHI: [laughing] They did, they did. Actually I was going to get to this later but since you mentioned it, we've talked a little but about your diminishing screen time in the opening credits. In this episode, they have been diminished altogether.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: This is first time since you have been in the opening credits that suddenly you aren't there at all. You, Dulé Hill, and Janel Moloney are only in the title credits when you are actually in the episode. You get the Stockard Channing deal.

JOSH: Right, personally speaking, couldn't care less.

HRISHI: Yeah. Did you know that this was going to happen?

JOSH: I have no memory of it because it's so unimportant to me. I know I've addressed it before. Whenever I'm discussing with my agents credit and the negotiations surrounding credits, I always say for an extra dollar per episode, I'd be happy to have no credit whatsoever, so I don't really care about my credits. I don't remember it being an issue at all, and I think it must have just been, I don't know, it's interesting, I would have thought it would have been pre-

negotiated but I guess it was their prerogative, and you know. I think it feels appropriate to me, if I'm not in the episode.

HRISHI: Right, and they told you in advance that you weren't going to be in all the episodes?

JOSH: Right, exactly. As I mentioned live episode knew I was getting half a season which was disappointing on one level, but on another level I thought it was nice that they kept me on the show. I could very easily have not been part of this season at all.

HRISHI: Right. Ok so back to Alex Graves directing for a second, I feel a little ambivalent about it to be honest I think that he does so much stylistically that sometimes it doesn't feel *The West Wing* anymore.

JOSH: Hmm

HRISHI: You know, you've got the characters and the dialogue and the storyline. So obviously it is, but it really feels like he is stretching what the show can be. And I'm not sure that that's a bad thing or a good thing, but I definitely felt how different it was. You know I felt like Alex Graves at this point he directed shows like *Ally McBeal*, and *Sports Night*, and *West Wing*. You know shows that were like people talking in offices, but this episode gives you a glimpse of how much power he has as a director and makes you understand that this is a person who will eventually direct three of the best episodes of *Game of Thrones*.

JOSH: That's absolutely right. Yeah, I like it. I think you're right that it feels like, you know, the DNA of the show has changed a bit or is in the process of changing. But I kind of like it. It feels appropriate to me. It feels appropriate to the storyline. We're now full on presidential campaign. We're now three years into John Wells' tenure as the showrunner and I can also feel the show, I think, a little bit trying to morph into something that can last, although we know it will not, beyond seven seasons, you know possibly turning into a television series that's going to track another administration.

HRISHI: So one of the things that really stood out especially was this montage that happens early on, when they're showing the campaign and there's "Jet Airliner" by Steve Miller Band playing.

[The Steve Miller Band song "Jet Airliner" excerpt]

[sung] Oh, oh big ol' jet airliner
Don't carry me too far away

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, I was wondering as I watched and listened how The Steve Miller Band hits you. I'm so much older than you that it puts me exactly in a specific place.

HRISHI: What place is that?

JOSH: Summer of '79 or '80, junior counselor at Camp Greylock. Becket, Massachusetts. We would go to this bar after, so maybe it was even '81. But I all I know, Maybe they were a little bit behind the times, cause I think Jet Airliner is '78, but there was a jukebox in this bar that would play Steve Miller Band and so I go right there when I hear that music.

HRISHI: [laughing] This is actually, because of this episode and you know looking things up, I actually found out what this song really was. I mean it's been in the background of my life for, my entire life, but I never paid attention to it. It was just sort of like wallpaper to me.

JOSH: It's a cover.

HRISHI: This version is a cover.

[The Steve Miller Band song "Jet Airliner" excerpt]

[sung] Oh, oh big ol' jet airliner
Don't carry me too far away

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right, which I had never known. I had known that this is the cover of a Paul Pena song.

HRISHI: Isn't it funny when that happens, when you find out a song that you've loved, there's a version that predates that.

JOSH: You know actually I had that twice during this episode. Because later in the episode, I think we're subtly informed that Matt Santos had his partying days.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

SANTOS: What are they smoking in that White House of yours, Josh. First they Bogart my education plan for some low tar Congressional compromise.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I was like, "Wow!" Lots of smoke and tokin' references in the space of a couple of sentences. And it reminded me immediately of a song by, well I thought by, turns out to be a cover version by Little Feet, of the song "Don't Bogart That Joint My Friend." Of course the reference of Bogarting something, refers back to Humphrey Bogart, and the sort of loosh way he would dangle a cigarette from the corner of his mouth. And the idea of Bogarting a joint is,

you've got it in your mouth instead of passing it to the next person. And, Little Feet has a song called "Don't Bogart That Joint My Friend."

[Little Feet song "Don't Bogart that Joint, My Friend" excerpt]

[sung] You've been holding onto it, and I sure would like a hit. Don't Bogart that joint my friend.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: But it turns out, that is a song by I guess a band called Fraternity of Men. They put out that song in '68. It was used in the film *Easy Rider* in '69, and then in '78, Little Feet covered it on a live album. And that's the version I know and I thought to be the original.

HIRSHI: Before we get back to the songs, let me digress on your digression here.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: This line from Santos, the metaphor there, is so smoky, like I get lost in it a little bit. Because, at first it sounds like he is talking about pot. He says, "What are they smoking, they Bogart my education plan." But then he says, "For some low tar Congressional compromise." So now it's a cigarette?

JOSH: We move into cigarettes.

HRISHI: And then he goes, "And then they serve up a big fat pitch for switch hitter Venick," and then suddenly we're in baseball. Unless, Eli means pitch as in pitch tar, and we're still talking about tar. [laughing]

JOSH: I like your thinking, yeah he's free forming. That's stream of consciousness we're getting, and clearly he was desperate to get high.

HRISHI: [laughing] Eli was so stoned when he wrote this.

JOSH: Possibly, we may have to pick up the "At phone" and ask him.

HRISHI: He's demonstrating classic stoner behavior of mixing his metaphors. Okay, back to "Jet Airliner." I never knew what the lyrics where. I thought they were singing something about North or South Carolina.

JOSH: I thought Carolina too!

HRISHI: You did?!

JOSH: I was embarrassed to admit that this song resonated with me so much, but I always thought it Carolina too.

HRISHI: I thought it was “They go down Carolina” or something like that.

JOSH: [humming/singing] Carolina

HRISHI: Don’t carry me away to Carolina, I don’t know?

JOSH: It’s kind of disappointing. “Big ol’ Jet Airliner” is just a weird phrase for a song. It’s just a thing.

HRISHI: [laughing] But that song is such a big move, to play a really recognizable song. To have a montage set to a song. That alone is just very uncommon in *The West Wing*. I mean when we’ve had it it’s felt very different there, there hasn’t been this sort of the flashy, high speed, kinda cutting that goes along with it. It’s not something that feels foreign, because we see it in movies and TV, but just not this show. And one thing that I will say, all the freakin’ flash bulbs and camera clicks through the montage did get on my nerves. That was one thing that I was like, “Oh, am I watching *Scandal*?”

JOSH: [laughing] Hey! Wait a minute, by the transitive law, you were suggesting that *Scandal* got on your nerves.

HRISHI: No, just that there were a lot of flash bulbs and camera clicks.

JOSH: We didn’t get the sound effect though. And that would be accompanied by that sound effect and the series of quick photographs, we would call “jazzy snaps.” And that became the nickname of Mitch Haddad, the photographer for *Scandal* who is responsible for that entire aesthetic that was used on *Scandal* so often. Jazzy Snaps.

HRISHI: Ok, so one thing that I liked about this montage, despite not liking it sort of in itself. I really liked what it does for the episode overall. Because we’re still in the cold open technically. The credits have not rolled yet. And the first time I watched this, I remember thinking how surprising it was that they would roll out this big montage so early in the episode and I was like, “Wow, pace yourself everybody!” But it’s exactly the pacing that sort of gets commented on, because you have all of this energy and then for the rest of the episode, it feels like they are crunching through molasses.

JOSH: Yeah, there is a contrast, I agree. But I liked that early on I felt wrapped up and almost overtaken by the momentum of the campaign and just the sheer volume of visual information being fed to us in some of these walks and talk, are incredible and the choreography is pretty stunning.

HRISHI: Yeah, it does feel like they have momentum, it feels like they are moving and things are going, and then the rest of the episode is about how things get derailed and what an uphill battle Josh has to face to try and get them back into some kind of momentum and feel like they are moving again. So I thought that was really smart to have that huge kinetic moment early on and then have it dissipate. Actually, my favorite piece of direction comes right after the montage ends. During the montage it feels like Alex Graves is Mario, who has just gotten the star power up and is invincible. You know? Busting through the level, but then things settle down. And that first shot after the montage is so beautiful. I don't know if you remember this, but the camera is moving through the Santos/McGarry campaign offices and we see Edie and Otto, there in the distance, and they are walking into a conference room to meet with Josh. The camera angle is low, and it's moving with them from a distance and we see the light from the windows is blown out, we get a little J.J. Abrams lens flare from a desk lamp, and the whole thing feels super cinematic and beautiful. There's a walk and talk. It feels like *The West Wing* in a very closely connected way, but it also feels cinematic in a way that's also new. And so that I was like, "Wow! ok, so this is where Alex Graves is sort of like both ratcheting things up, but also incredibly relaxed in his confidence."

JOSH: I agree, they're damn good, Alex Graves and Michael Mayer, we should say.

HRISHI: For sure. There's a neat thing that they've done with the color too. You know, in the early Santos campaign episodes in New Hampshire, everything was very, very blue. We notice the look of it changing a lot. And here they keep that as a way to contrast the shots in the White House. You can see there's a phone call between Josh and Toby where it goes from the blueish tones of the Santos/McGarry headquarters and then the sort of warmer tones that we're more used to with *The West Wing* where Toby is. But in a few of these shots there's interesting, I don't know how they do it, there are interesting color temperatures happening where the main part is blue, but then stuff in the background has this like, purpleish quality. It's really beautiful is what I'm trying to say, and complicated. It doesn't look like they just turned up the blue filter.

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: So there's a joke in here that I feel like we've heard before.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

TOBY: Respect for the paw?

C.J.: Law, respect for the law.

TOBY: Looks like respect for the paw.

C.J. You try writing long hand at 50 miles an hour.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ah, I kind of bumped on that, but I didn't realize that I had heard it before.

HRISHI: We've had a handwriting misspelling joke before on the show. You might remember it.

[West Wing Episode 1.18 excerpt]

JOSH: What's this message about I need to talk to Mandy about a banana bar. Is that what this says?

DONNA: Panda bear.

JOSH: Panda bear?

DONNA: Yes.

JOSH: That's a D?

DONNA: Yeah.

JOSH: And that's and E?

DONNA: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ok, where there you go. I didn't quite remember that we visited this joke structure before. But I bumped on it a little because I felt like they could have done it better. I felt like this is one of the ones where they go in the room, especially now that know if you're going to revisit it, you've got to top it. I felt like it should have been something more like does that say ramparts or airports?

HRISHI: I mean respect for the paw.

JOSH: Not great.

HRISHI: Speaking of potentially not funny lines, I really like the way the episode handles this, I'll be the first one unemployed refrain. The first time we hear Santos say it in a speech, he gets booed and cheered at the same time. And it's great because theoretically it's his campaign rally, people are there for him. They're booing at the idea of him being unemployed and other people are people are like cheering in support of what he's saying. But it does sort of sound like people are just booing him.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

SANTOS: If the country doesn't like it, I'll be the first one unemployed.

[crowd: combination of booing and cheering]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Yeah, it didn't sound like it killed in the room.

HRISHI: [laughing] No, even though I think they are trying to express their support for the sentiment. It's a tricky thing to try and illicit a boo from your crowd because if it's taken out of context, I don't know. Especially when later he gets told, "I don't like the unemployed line." And he says, "That's just a funny line."

JOSH: Is it? Cut to people booing.

HRISHI: The person who says she doesn't like the line is Louise Thornton, introduced for the first time, played by Janeane Garofalo.

JOSH: Hooray, the fabulous Janeane Garofalo.

HRISHI: She shows up and just kills it in this episode.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree, she's pretty great.

HRISHI: She's so great and it just feels like she's been a part of *The West Wing* the whole time. She fits in so well I think.

JOSH: Yeah, I absolutely agree. I always love that when somebody who is known primarily for comedic work and is in fact a stand-up comic, just comes in and just kills a dramatic role.

HRISHI: Yeah, as I've said, I didn't watch seasons five, six, and seven, but a bunch of it had sort of been spoiled and I kind of knew a lot of what had happened. And I did watch a couple of episodes from season seven with my friends Kevin and Claire. So, I knew a little bit about major plot points. But one of the details that I didn't know, until I finished the series in advance of us getting to the end of the series, is that Janeane Garofalo is on *The West Wing*. That was a new discovery for me, you know eight months ago. And I love Janeane Garofalo, and so discovering that she was in *The West Wing* was really, a wonderful surprise.

JOSH: Yeah, maybe we should pick up the app phone and ask how they came up with the idea to cast her? I mean, if Eli's not too stoned to discuss it.

HRISHI: Let's send him a text. Eli, we're recording right now. We'll see if he'll respond. So Janeane Garofalo comes in and she plays Louise Thornton, a.k.a. Lou Thornton, a.k.a. Lou, and even just the way that she's introduced is great.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOSH: What's she doing on there?

RONNA: You said to be sure to invite Louise Thornton. I had to talk her into coming.

JOSH: I said be sure not to invite her.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's a pretty good setup for a character I think.

JOSH: That is true. That said, there is a slight problem I had with this subplot in this episode, which is that we get sort of this, you were set up... she's somebody Josh specifically didn't want in the room, then they have this meeting that he predicts is just everybody wanting to get a slice in the media budget, which in fact it completely proves to be except for her, and then we kind of see him reevaluating, wait a minute, maybe I do need somebody like that, and then she makes it clear she's not even really there to be part of it, and she walks off and he goes after her. Now wait a minute, we need somebody like you. No, I have no interest. There's something a little bit false to me about the back and forth of both of them. That that part of it felt like a TV episode to me.

HRISHI: I think, I'm with you. It felt like it was a little bit quick. I kind of bought Josh's 180 on it, because I think he has been too caught up to really think about it. I take it as him reacting from the gut, when he said don't invite her because he just doesn't like her. But he's also been hearing from Joey Lucas constantly this episode that he needs to hire some heavy weights and there are none around. He says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOEY [KENNY]: There must be 300 people on staff now, surely a few of them are capable

JOSH: Kids! Not a single one of these non shavers would challenge my assumptions, stand up to me in a meeting.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The decision to tell Ronna not to invite Lou Thornton came separately. That, you know was something, or was a decision he made previously, but I think he's being worked on by Joey Lucas and I think he's being convinced and so then Lou shows up and he's like actually maybe

this is the thing. We've kind of seen the crumbs leading up to him changing his mind. The one that throws me is her changing her mind because it seems like all it takes is for him to say

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOSH: I am asking you to meet with the next President of the United States.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then she's like, well when you put it that way. Well that's not a surprise, I mean you know they're running for president.

JOSH: I agree. To me, I don't really buy any of the changes of mind especially because of that scene with Joey, we know as soon as we meet Louise that her, and especially knowing that I didn't want her in the room, it's an inevitability. I feel like Eli maybe gave a little bit too much real estate to something that is such a clear dramatic inevitability in this episode.

HRISHI: Especially when we get the spoiler of special guest star Janeane Garofalo.

JOSH: Well there's also that, you're right. So even explicitly outside of the episode altogether we kind of know what's happening, but then within it, it's a little bit telegraphed. I feel like again it's one of those times where I'm ahead of the show and I'd rather be half a step behind.

HRISHI: Yeah, I hear you, I hear you for sure. I think I was so delighted about the idea of Janeane Garofalo joining the show that I was like alright let's just move it along so we can get there.

JOSH: Well, I agree with you but my argument is that they didn't move it along.

HRISHI: O yeah, I see what you're saying, that it took too long to get there.

JOSH: I'm with you, like let's just get to it because we know that it's happening and we're happy about it. And if you're going to take that much time with it, it has to be something more interesting than I just changed my mind. I agree like, there's not much substance. It's not substantos.

HRISHI: [laughing] One thing that it does, besides the plot point of her joining the campaign, it does give us a chance, and this is my favorite stuff in the episode, it does just give us a chance to have Josh and Lou going back and forth at each other and that's what I like the most in this episode. I like their dynamic, I love listening to Janeane Garofalo speak Eli's dialogue. Like I said she just feels like she could have always been a part of *The West Wing*.

JOSH: It's an easy fit.

HRISHI: While also feeling like something new. And her dynamic with Josh is terrific. So just in terms of the Sorkinian music of the words, I didn't mind it because just listening to the two of them singing to each other was great.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: One thing I won't forgive Eli for is introducing me to the term

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOSH: When voters want a national daddy

[end excerpt]

[Josh laughs]

HRISHI: The national daddy of the titular mommy problem, this is just a terrible, I apologize for everything.

JOSH: You gotta say titular and mommy in the same breath?

HRISHI: I'm so sorry.

JOSH: And the dickular daddy figure.

HRISHI: [laughing] Wow! So where were we, oh yeah, I think we're at seven minutes into the episode at this point. Seven minutes into the episode, the credits actually start. I think this must be, maybe the latest start to the opening credits.

JOSH: Oh, interesting, maybe they sense that the audience or the viewership will be irate that I'm no longer in the sequence. Try to put it off as long as possible.

HRISHI: Instead we get extra crowd shots. We get more generic black and white shots of stuff in the place of you and Dulé and Janel. They did fill the time.

JOSH: I did notice that, and it was the first time that it occurred to that hey, we've got the space and time for them but [expletive] them.

HRISHI: Exactly, why not put you in?

JOSH: Yeah, what the hell? Even just a shot of the three of us, arm in arm.

HRISHI: Sure, not pictured.

JOSH: Right it must have something to do with, then we have to pay you.

HRISHI: For sure, there's no other reason than a money thing. If they show your face at all, then I'm sure you get, your owed something.

JOSH: I guess so.

HRISHI: What's interesting is within those budget constraints, I'm pretty that they also can't include you on a "Previously on..."

JOSH: I bet that's not true, but maybe I could be wrong. I feel like there's a little addendum to all this contract, saying that they use your likeness for promotional purposes.

HRISHI: Oh and you think that that counts as promotional?

JOSH: I think so.

HRISHI: Interesting, I always think that the "Previously on" as part of the episode. So, Exposition News Channel is on and they let us know that NASA has made the repairs.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

NEWSCASTER: Having made the essential repairs to the space station's laboratory module, NASA now expects the astronauts to return home within the next four to five days.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And it's like, ok we can put that to bed. But that just means we can kind of move away from the actual crisis and just get into the political crisis of it. Or just get deeper into the political crisis because the West Wing decides they want to play this completely above board and as we learned in the last episode, Oliver Babish recommends that they not try and investigate it internally, and so the president goes with it, and they announced that that's what they're going to do.

JOSH: And they'll cooperate with Congressional investigations.

HRISHI: Yeah, which is just killer for the Santos campaign, because, as we've learned from *The West Wing*, you just need to hear subpoena and investigation and grand jury as many times to just cause the impression of impropriety and in a presidential election year, with the former Chief of Staff of that president on the ticket, there's just no way to get away from the connection between those two things.

JOSH: Yeah that's a big problem.

HRISHI: And so Josh is trying to figure out a way to work this out. He's trying to get Toby and C.J. to find a way through the space shuttle stuff that isn't going to hurt the campaign, and they just keep making moves that do the opposite.

JOSH: Yes, and he reaches out to Toby and gets hung up upon.

HRISHI: Yeah, and even though this hadn't happened yet, it did feel a little bit like the end of the Obama Administration and the Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign. I just remember as the events were unfolding there, how much I kind of was surprised by how little the Obama Administration was doing to even just help clear things up. I felt like in an effort to seem objective and like they weren't trying to put their thumb on the scales, they actually ended up creating an imbalance against the Hillary Clinton campaign.

JOSH: Yeah, I see what you're saying. I may have made me this analogy before, but that's a little bit like when my dad was the coach of my Little League team and in an effort to be fair to the other players, would never let me play. I was like dad, it's little league and I'm not bad. I think they won't judge you too harshly if I occasionally play.

HRISHI: [laughs] That, exactly is exactly what it sounds like.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Hey we got a response from Eli.

JOSH: There you go, the "At phone" works again.

HRISHI: In real time. Eli wrote back, he said, "As I recall, we wanted a badass new campaign staffer for Santos, and our casting department presented her. I remember watching some scenes of her dramatic work in some indie movie with David Schwimmer." I looked it up by the way, that movie is *Duane Hopwood*.

JOSH: I don't remember that one.

HRISHI: It also stars Judah Friedlander.

JOSH: How about that?

HRISHI: *30 Rock*. So "I remember watching some scenes of her dramatic work in some indie movie with David Schwimmer to see if she could do drama, not just comedy. Though of course her work on *Larry Sanders* could be counted as both. She was a perfect blend of tough and fun I think and fit right in with the cast. She was very political. I remember the she used to like to argue about lines in the show. She once came over to me before a scene to say I have real problem with the philosophy behind this line. I can't remember the line. And I thought she was objecting to it as an actor and wanted to talk about changing it and I started to say here's why I

think your character would say it. And then she said, 'Oh I don't want to change it.' She just wanted to argue about it."

JOSH: That's great, that's fantastic.

HRISHI: [laughing] That's awesome.

JOSH: I'm curious to know what it was.

HRISHI: Yeah. He said he loves her and she was great to work with and great in the show, that's awesome.

JOSH: Yeah, I have some good memories of working with her that we'll get to when we get up to those episodes.

HRISHI: Did you ever go to the Luna Lounge on the lower east side in New York back when it was there.

JOSH: No, sadly I missed that whole era. I've read about it, but I myself missed it. Well I guess I was in L.A. by then already.

HRISHI: Yes, this was around the time when I wrote to you and said, "Hello, I am a stranger. Should I move to L.A.? And you said, "Yes I think you should", and then I didn't because I was too scared. I was like, "Should I move to New York or L.A.?" And you said, "I think everything that you want to do has to happen in L.A."

JOSH: I don't know if you ever even noticed the original P.S. which said, "Please move out here and come up with an idea that will put my kid through college." That was in the fine print.

HRISHI: [laughing] So you know, it was too scary for me to move to L.A. I moved to New York instead. And I lived there for a little while, not even a full year, but in that time one of the best things that I did, one of the most memorable experiences I had, was I remember going to Luna Lounge. They would have comedy nights on Monday. It was a music club other nights, but on Mondays is comedy night. All I knew was that Colin Quinn was hosting and I like Colin Quinn and I went with my roommates and David Cross showed up and did a surprise set which was incredible and Janeane Garofalo showed up and did a very strange drop in set unexpected that involved doing some kind of weird interpretive dance with flashlights and a child. I don't remember if the child was her child or was like a niece or something like that but they came in and ran around the room and danced with flashlights. And I just remember thinking it was the coolest thing that there was a club where people like that would just show up and do something fun and I just got to be a part of it. It was a tiny place. Like fewer than a hundred people fit in the room.

JOSH: I'm jealous that you had that experience. I know that the denizens of Luna Lounge included Sarah Silverman, Janeane Garofalo, Patton Oswalt, just amazing people, Marc Maron.

HRISHI: Yeah I think Todd Barry did a set that night as well. That was my first introduction to Todd Barry. I've gotten some more from Eli by the way.

JOSH: Of course. The "At phone" is a little bit like Pandora's Box. Once you lift that receiver, you don't know what [expletive deleted] is going to come out of it.

HRISHI: Here we go. Louise Thornton was an interior decorator that someone recommended to Eli. Here's what he wrote, "Louise Thornton was an interior decorator someone recommended that I hire around that time. And she told me she was too busy to even meet with me, but I loved the name.

JOSH: [laughing] That's funny, because my impression is that normally you go out of your way to find a name that is not currently taken.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah, that's what I thought too. Here's a moment from the episode that I found funny. When Joey is trying to urge Josh to make some key hires she says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOEY [KENNY]: You have to hire some heavyweights, Bruno Gianelli.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: How do they not know that Bruno was working for Vinick?

JOSH: I did have that same thought too. I'm like their oppo research is not crack. There's no crack team in place.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean like, between, at one point Josh says give me Vinick's schedule of events for the day, and he can just get that stuff you know and I know that that's public stuff, that's put out by the campaign. But there's a certain level of public disclosure about who works on a campaign that happens. How did they not know this? Ok and so there's public disclosure and then yes, the sort of the spy network that I know must exist between like, "Oh I heard this person" and Bruno who's somebody close to them, or was close to them. Really I was shocked that they didn't know that Bruno wasn't a possibility.

JOSH: As was I, yes.

HRISHI: Ok let us talk now for a little bit about the Santos reserve duty stunt, or not stunt.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: I think I was thrown a little bit as I tried to follow the logic between what the decision was about his reserve duty. Let me see if I can break this down for you, tell me if this sounds right. So they find out there's a letter that's coming to Santos saying that he's being called up for reserve duty and everybody's first instinct is: do it. And it's going to look great and it'll really help with their national security problem where Democrats are always behind Republicans on national security issues. Is it a possibility that it'll look like a stunt? That's okay, he's just doing his duty. Then it turns out, well actually he has sometimes postponed his duty for political and personal convenience and so then they have to cancel it, because it will look like a stunt. And Edie says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

EDIE: What was option one again?

JOSH: Reporting for Reserve duty right after Labor Day looking like a gun-toting, flag-waving phony.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's the reason why he can't do it, right?

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Because the letter will come out. They'll say hey we got this letter, he goes and he does his duty, and he'll look like a phony because of the campaign trail. And I guess because of the timing of it with the election in November, doing that in September seems fake.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: So then Lou suggests that he actually retire the commission altogether. She says you can't show up after Labor Day when you've postponed your service five times in thirteen years. It'll look like the mother of all staged photo ops and it'll get killed in the press. But Santos says for personal reasons, you know he is not going to retire his commission.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

SANTOS: You know I didn't have as much as a high-school diploma in my gene pool. That commission's the reason why I'm on this plane. I'm not giving it up.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which I think is great and a wonderful sentiment and people should know that. And it makes sense that he wants to hold on to it.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And in that moment he's saying that he's going to do his duty right now. This is in the conversation he has with Josh, on the plane. They're actually heading to Fort Worth, so he can get it out of the way, right now if he wants.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And Josh's reaction is before anyone in the press gets a chance to take a shot at us, the whole country sees you in uniform. And so is this the lynchpin of it? Is it that the other way, people get to comment on him doing it or not doing it before he does it and then he does it and then they make more comments? And then we see in the episode, it still gets called a stunt.

JOSH: And even as I said earlier, it even looks a little like a commercial for the military, so it feels a little bit stuntsy. I don't know, it's funny, I liked all that. I liked the sort of lack of a neat bow wrapped around this particular package. Usually you'd go out like knowing this was the right decision or not or how it's going to play. I don't know, I thought it was interesting, there are arguments to be made on all sides, and then ultimately whether or not it's a prudent political move, we see the moment of decision from the candidate himself and it is an ethical moment, it means something to him. He's not going to do what might be the correct move for his campaign, and then Josh sees an upside to it, at least the press isn't going to get out ahead of it and say this is going to be a stunt. Sure, they can make those comments after it's happened already and the pictures are out, but then the pictures are out and maybe those will be more powerful than whatever texts accompanies them anyway. And I don't know the whole thing also just put me in mind of today, like nobody would ever give two thoughts. Given the way Trump comports himself, the idea that the appearance of trying to do something simply for the optics of it. The idea that stopping you from doing anything is unthinkable, so I find it interesting that they were at least having the conversations. I liked watching what went into the ultimate decision.

HRISHI: I agree with you. I think I feel a little bit like what you were feeling about the hiring of Lou, where I just felt like I didn't quite get the last turn. Everybody had made these sort of very persuasive arguments about how badly it was going to play by doing it. And it feels like a minor shift to do it without announcing it, and to do it now as opposed to in September. Maybe I'm wrong maybe it is a dramatic enough change that it makes sense that they were all then be on board with the idea. But I just felt like Lou went as far as to say "like retire the commission". But after they do it, it seems like they're just doing it. I don't know.

JOSH: I don't know in a greater more macro sense I feel like some of this episode is about in part once again, Santos taking control of his own campaign and when he does finally install Lou Thornton at Josh's behest, he does it in a way where she's going to answer directly to him. And again asserting himself or he's reasserting himself and I think he also does so with this decision and so people have come down on the various sides of this issue and then once the candidate himself, Santos makes a decision I guess they sort of you know fall in line and put the best spin on it and support him.

HRISHI: Yeah ok, I buy that. Let Santos be Santos.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Ok great. We can put that to bed.

JOSH: Ok and speaking of bed.

HRISHI: You're sleepy.

JOSH: No, Santos...

HRISHI: You're horny.

JOSH: ...conjugal visit bed. Wait I'm horny? Wait a second, this took a left turn. I would like to withdraw that comment.

HRISHI: [laughing] I'd like to also note that that's also your move when people have left their phone inadvertently in front of you. That you go on Twitter [cross talk] and you log into their account and you'll tweet, "I'm horny."

JOSH: [cross talk] That is true.

JOSH: That's true. I haven't done it in a long time I'll have to say.

HRISHI: It's true, but I think when we were hanging out for the first time a bunch especially you know gosh, seven years ago that was a move that you made with some frequency and I really, I found it very funny.

JOSH: [laughing] Meanwhile on to Santos and their hotel bed. What do you make of that little subplot?

HRISHI: I think it's unfortunate that it was introduced in an episode that already had the phrase "national daddy" in it.

JOSH: Yeah, right.

HRISHI: I thought it was strange a little bit. I mean it was strange how catastrophic it seemed. I get that the issue is that they're trying to present him as more than just a pretty face. It's a tabloid headline, but I guess, I just I don't know, it seems like who's going to take issue with it. Like you have to go one degree further to make it somehow a negative for the campaign. On its surface it's not a big deal, it's only if they're connecting the dots and saying this fills in the picture that he is just, he has no substance. That feels like they are making a leap.

JOSH: Yeah I had trouble understanding how the whole kind of story played out, first of all. So I guess it really did happen.

HRISHI: Okay so Josh, when a man and woman love each other.

JOSH: Yeah, I'm going to let you take me all the way through this cause I would like I would like to hear your take on it. [Hrishi laughs] Go ahead. First, here's my query. Did they not realize that they broke the bed?

HRISHI: They did.

JOSH: And they didn't make things right with the hotel. Is it not possible that a bed just broke. I really kind of wanted to see the picture.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: What happened? I mean can't you just go I was sleeping in bed with my wife and then the bed collapsed or something. Is it clawed to shreds?

HRISHI: I believe the word "splinters" was used.

JOSH: Right, is it like a Tasmanian devil was in the room?

HRISHI: Yeah I don't know. It's bad staff work on somebody's part right, because you just say, "Hey we..."

JOSH: Bad wood work on someone else's part.

HRISHI: And they say, "Hey look, this happened. Let us pay for it. We apologize for the inconvenience." Like does the owner have to even know whose room it is? Like who was staying in what room?

JOSH: Well they probably know which.

HRISHI: They probably do?

JOSH: I guess. Anyway the whole thing seemed like there should be some plausible deniability in there. I agree, it did seem to be super high stakes, but seemed like you could have just put out a cover story that sort of explains it away.

HRISHI: Yeah, and I also feel like there should be some plausible pliability. And then it turns out it actually plays okay with people. I mean obviously.

JOSH: Sure. But there's a little explanation in there that at first before they could establish that it was in fact with his wife, there is some suggestion that he was fooling around, which obviously back in another time would not play as well [cross talk] for a presidential candidate [cross talk]. These days it means literally nothing, so I can see why that would have been dangerous, but I guess once they realized it's all kosher and done in marriage, the nation accepts it. And it gives kind of a funny quote to the press.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes, yes, yes.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

SANTOS: So, I'm going to address this once, just this once, and that will be the end of it. Okay? No way was that bed steel-reinforced.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: As if there wasn't enough innuendo already and just explicit references already in this episode, Lou says, one of the problems with this storyline is that

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

LOU: You haven't given anybody an alternative formulation on who is, so he's taking body blow after body blow.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: There are so many moments in which Steve Carell could have popped in and said

[The Office excerpt]

MICHAEL: That's what she said.

[end excerpt]

[Josh laughs]

HRISHI: Okay, so here's a nitpick that I have, a typographic one.

JOSH: Oh, *The Enquirer*?

HRISHI: No actually the jet! On the side of the jet it says Matt Santos. When we see Santos actually at the end of the episode going to do his reserve duty, he gets in the jet and it says Matt

Santos on the side of the jet, and then his nickname Badger underneath. But it goes: open quote Badger, open quote again.

JOSH: Whaat?!

HRISHI: Yeah, the quotation marks are facing the wrong way on the 2nd set.

JOSH: Wow, badly done.

HRISHI: Badgerly done. [laughing] Maybe that's actually, his nickname is actually: quote Badger open quote.

JOSH: [laughing] There's nothing better than the sound of you amusing yourself. It's delightful.

HRISHI: [laughing] I love the idea that actually in this division, they don't put quotes around the nicknames but part of his nickname is quotes included and there is some inside joke of one time when he did two open quotes, so his nickname is Badger with open quotes on both sides.

JOSH: [laughing] Sure, exactly, I like it.

HRISHI: That's probably the reason, plausible pliability.

JOSH: There it is. While we're on small gafs, Bradley Whitford is the latest in celebrity mispronunciations as he says, "ogling." [pronounced ah-gling]

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOSH: I won't have us ogling his dirty-

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Which I don't think that's an accepted pronunciation of the word ogling.

HRISHI: I've certainly never heard anybody else say ogling.

JOSH: It boggles the mind. How did he come up with that?

HRISHI: If it's something went arie.

JOSH: [laughing] funny stuff.

HRISHI: I have the daddy of all nitpicks.

JOSH: Yes, nitpick. [laughing]

HRISHI: At the very end of the episode, you know when everybody is feeling good about the outcome of Santos's move, you know they're saying yes people are calling it a stunt, but everybody's running the footage and they're connecting Santos and his military record and they're presenting that to the public. But at the very end, the camera swings around to a TV, MSNBC is playing, and Vinick is on screen and they say

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

REPORTER (on TV): They say that he will stick to his game plan, but they are confident that on national security and other issues, their candidate has a commanding advantage.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's how the episode ends. It is sort of a reminder that this is not won by any means. There's a chyron at the bottom of this MSNBC where it says, "U.N. send flood team to Bangladesh."

JOSH: Rather than "sends"?

HRISHI: Yes, and I thought well U.N. stands for United Nations, so maybe they were like oh United Nations, send, but it is the united part really makes it a singular entity. Here is a headline from MSNBC, "U.N. sends team to investigate ISIS."

JOSH: That sounds better to me. That sounds right.

HRISHI: That sounded better to me too. This was around three in the morning last night when I really should have been going to bed in preparation of us recording, but I was just like furiously writing notes. And then I saw that and I was like, "Well let me look into this too! This is definitely a good use of my time."

JOSH: I think I was watching this at three in the morning too. We could have chatted!

HRISHI: Did you ever watched TV on the phone with a friend watching the same program?

JOSH: No, but my friend Jeff Berstein when we were in maybe fifth grade, would call me and read me mad libs.

HRISHI: Oh man. Wait, Josh that reminds me that I meant to bring this up to you. Did you hear that *Mad Magazine* is shutting down?

JOSH: Ugh, yes. That one was like an arrow to the heart. Usually these things about oh this thing's going away it's meant so much to me and I was like "yeah whatever". But this one hurts me. It was a big part of my childhood and I'm sure *Mad Magazine* and its authors and illustrators

were a part of my whatever formed my comic outlook. And as you probably know, being part of *Mad Magazine's* take on *Sports Night* was huge. That might have been when my career actually peaked and I bought the original art from *Mad Magazine*. The artist is Ray Alma. So yeah, very sad to see *Mad Magazine* go.

HRISHI: Yeah, ok back to the third box. Trivia, in this episode Josh says to that group of media consultants, he says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOSH: Thank you all for coming to this high level strategy meeting. This is probably the greatest assemblage of democratic talent since the last time Jed Bartlet dined alone.

JOEY: [laughing]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Joey laugh

HRISHI: [laughing] I love it when Joey laughs. But that line is a reference to JFK. He said to Nobel Prize winners at the White House. He said, "I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent human knowledge that has ever gathered together at the White House with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone."

JOSH: Ah, very nice.

HRISHI: And again Joey Lucas was the only person who laughed at that. Actually a bunch of people just booed.

JOSH: They would now.

HRISHI: And then he said, "I think it was just a funny line."

JOSH: Jefferson would have gotten boos now.

HRISHI: Was he a drinker?

JOSH: No, he was a slaveholder.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Here's another little nitpick. Margaret says to C.J. that Greg Brock wants a few minutes. This is while they're talking about a working dinner with the Norwegian delegation or something like. But C.J. says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

C.J.: Tell him no, in Norwegian if you have to. That would be noske.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's not.

JOSH: It's notske.

HRISHI: It's notske. Norwegian for no is nay.

JOSH: Well I think that she was making a joske. Are you suggesting that was just poor research?

HRISHI: I guess the joke part of it was lost on me because it wasn't funny.

JOSH: Well I agree. You're right there. It's an open quote joke, open quote.

HRISHI: [laughing] I think referencing bad quotes is going to make me laugh every time. So that was just a joske.

JOSH: I thinksk. I liked Sam Robards performance in this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean Greg Brock is going to go to jail.

JOSH: Right, and there's something sweetly moving about the way he plays that scene. He can't even quite look at C.J.. He is kind of in profile and turns and remains in profile. And he's there just to say it out loud.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

BROCK: He refused to stay the contempt; at least 18 months. I have to appeal from behind bars. You don't have to worry about your call sheet for a while.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I don't know what he wants from her particularly, other than to particularly than to just share this piece of information.

HRISHI: Yeah, it feels a little bit like there is some rage there. That is professional courtesy that is not allowing to actually be expressed, but I think you know, he's waiting for C.J. just to tell her that. And I feel like it's just letting her know that these are the consequences of everything that's happened and it just puts more pressure on the White House to get this thing resolved.

JOSH: Well that said, to my surprise, she releases him. She says name your source.

HRISHI: I know.

JOSH: That actually got a little mini gasp from me.

HRISHI: I know, it felt like we got a crack in C.J.'s professionalism, one you know that as Press Secretary, we know that she loves the reporters. Even the ones that give her a hard time. She loves the reporters in the room, and it felt like we got that C.J. again.

JOSH: That moment made me wonder whether C.J. herself is the leaker and that's why she says go ahead name your source. The same when she says to Margaret, "I just want you to tell the truth." Because Margaret seems to be a little concerned that she needs to protect C.J. and she says I just want you to tell the truth. And then we get this from Brock and she says name your source. So she might be saying I'm ready for this, I'm ready to take the fall.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's another example of the show kind of pointing us towards the idea that C.J. is responsible for the leak. When they talk about the leak, they will cut to C.J. and things like that. Here it feels like she's offering to fall on the sword.

JOSH: And that flashing chyron, "C.J. is the leak."

HRISHI: Oh yeah, on MSNBC? So weird, and grammatically phrased incorrectly. Lou is really heavy with the cult references in this episode. She invokes Jonestown, and she tells Josh stop drinking the Kool-Aid and she also says I'm not a cultist like you.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

LOU: I am not a Bartlet-ista and I'm not a Santos-ista. I am completely untethered to your crazy cults of personality.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She's laying into him with this stuff.

JOSH: No kidding, yes. Frequently people will make the reference to drinking the Kool-Aid and I sometimes wonder where they realize how grim a reference it really is. But here she mentions Jonestown and then employs the phrase, and I'm like, "Wow!" she's really going in. Some stark images. I like this little bit of dialogue, this exchange between Josh and Ned

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

JOSH: The press wants to write about the security leak, we want to write about the economy. Let's show a little leg.

NED: And by leg you mean?

JOSH: Targeted tax credits, preferably index to inflation.

NED: When was the last time you went on a date?

JOSH: I don't want to talk about it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I just like that whole back-and-forth, great dialogue by Eli.

HRISHI: You know another thing I really like about Lou is she tells Josh, she's not on the job or anything like that, but she gives him a piece of advice. She's telling him why she doesn't want to be part of the team, because he's screwing things up, and she says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

LOU: While Santos was serving in the Gulf, Vinick was serving himself Chardonnay. That Santos is still serving in the Reserves as a Congressman. He's been in the Senate for, like ninety years. He was practically born in a committee hearing. If you aren't using the phrase "Beltway Arnie" in every press release...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Josh says we aren't going negative. But what I love about her is that she is so internally consistent and believes in what she's saying, throughout the rest of the episode, she only calls Arnie Vinick "Beltway Arnie."

JOSH: Oh, I didn't notice that, good catch.

HRISHI: She uses the phrase two more times.

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

LOU: That's something you're going to have to answer for yourself, because right now Beltway Arnie is kicking you all over the electoral map.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She says that to Santos when they have their meeting. And then she says it again to Josh. She says

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

LOU: You won't lift a finger against Beltway Arnie Vinick who never served and flipped and flopped...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's fantastic.

HRISHI: I love that, it's such a great detail.

JOSH: Yeah, good on her and good on Eli, that's great. I like her too because she's just got an edge that we don't see that often on this series. She's kind of mean. She's got a bit of a job for Ned, calling him Elmer Fudd Junior. And I'm like Wow, she's just actually kind of mean and I love it.

HRISHI: Yeah, one more for the Margaret Museum just to wrap up on this. C.J. is asking for something better than just little flags for the bill signing for the Fisheries Bill. Margaret is thinking about what they can do besides little flags, and the scene ends with

[West Wing Episode 7.02 excerpt]

MARGARET: Little fish.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right, yeah I liked that moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, nailed it.

JOSH: It's good, yeah.

HRISHI: Alright.

JOSH: Fantastic, I think that does it for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*.

HRISHI: Yeah, thanks so much for listening and let us know what you thought of this episode, either *The West Wing* episode or *The West Wing Weekly* episode, by leaving a comment on our Facebook page or our website, thewestwingweekly.com or you can tweet at us @thewestwingweekly, or on Instagram, all kinds of places.

JOSH: Yeah, follow us on Twitter already, it's been four years. What are you waiting for? You're missing gold. *The West Wing Weekly* remains a proud member of Radiotopia, a collection of fabulous cutting edge podcasts about which you can learn more at radiotopia.fm

HRISHI: Thanks to our production team, Zach McNees, Margaret Miller, and Nick Song. Thanks to Eli Attie for responding.

JOAH: So promptly to the "At phone."

HRISHI: It's fantastic. You can follow Eli Attie, @eliattie, he's the best.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: What's next?

HRISHI: What's next?

HRISHI: You know, I think the biggest problem is our internal speeds on how we say, "What's next?" I think you say it more measured than I do. Let's try that again; I'll try and go at your speed.

JOSH: I'll meet you halfway, one, two, three. What's next?

HRISHI: [laughing] Little fishes.

[Outro Music]