

The West Wing Weekly
7.11: "Internal Displacement"
Guests: Bradley Whitford and Annabeth Gish

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're talking about Internal Displacement. It's episode 11 from season 7.

JOSH: It was written by Bradley Whitford, it was directed by Andrew Bernstein and it first aired on January 15, 2006. And coming up later we're going to talk to Annabeth Gish who played Elizabeth Bartlet-Westin.

HRISHI: In this episode C.J. is in the thick of negotiating a deal so that Russia and China don't go to war over oil in Kazakhstan when some potentially embarrassing information about President Bartlet's son-in-law surfaces. Meanwhile, Josh is trying to pressure the White House in order to have the president and Congressman Santos announce a scientific research lab opening in Texas, which goes against C.J. and the administration's wishes. And joining us today, Bradley Whitford.

BRAD: Hi guys.

JOSH: Hooray. Let's get this out of the way, congratulations. I don't know how it happened, but your third Emmy.

BRAD: Thank you and I'm sorry.

[Laughter]

JOSH: He's done it again.

BRAD: I was really close to attacking you in the speech.

JOSH: And again I would have loved it, there's no press that's bad press when it comes to my career.

BRAD: I know, I know.

JOSH: I'll take what I can get. So talk us through it. Was it thrilling? Or are you over it by now?

BRAD: No it was thrilling and exhausting, but wonderful. I love that part and so I was glad that I didn't ruin that show.

HRISHI: And that was your second win in that same category right? That's the same category that you won for in *Transparent*.

BRAD: No I won for com...that was comedy.

JOSH: Ugh he does it all folks, he does it all.

BRAD: I know. It's unfair that that role was seen as comedy, but I don't care. I'll take it.

[Laughter]

JOSH: What's unfair is that it was considered award worthy.

BRAD: Yes.

JOSH: I have no trouble with the comedy part.

BRAD: Yeah, yeah I'm sorry, I'm sorry it's upsetting. But yes, it was fun and knowing how complex it is for you to process just made it better.

JOSH: It was a lot to process.

[Laughter]

JOSH: Yeah, I had to wait a bit before we did this interview, but I think I'm good to go. This was the second episode you wrote of *The West Wing*.

BRAD: It was.

JOSH: I'm amazed that you wanted to do it again. I mean you deserved to, your first episode was great, but you actually wanted to go for it again.

BRAD: Yeah I really wanted to do it again, you know the first time I didn't get to go through the sort of John Wells process, where you basically come in, you pitch a story to him, you go into the writers room, and there's a big story meeting and then you go off and do an outline, and then you get notes on the outline, and then you go and write a draft, and then you get notes on the draft, and then you write a second draft.

HRISHI: You make it sound so thrilling.

BRAD: [Laughs] No, but actually...

JOSH: You really do make it come alive.

BRAD: After going through the chaos of the first time, which was just like splat it out and get it up.

[Laughter]

BRAD: It was calming to be able to kind of go through that process. And when John told me that I was going to get another shot, one of the things I wanted to do, we knew the show, you know, was clearly winding down and that was sort of, I wanted to sort of look at what C.J.'s life would be like at the end of this experience. So that was one thing I wanted to do and the other thing that I just wanted to find some way to do was just to humiliate Josh on national tv.

[Laughter]

BRAD: And pretty quickly there was part of the pipe that John wanted me to put into the episode was discovering this affair, totally inappropriate affair, that his son-in-law was having. So, they had had this idea brewing in the writer's room and the other thing I wanted to do with this episode was, I think I've said this before but, the most exciting Sorkin writing to me is when there is the maximum contrast between the real urgency of the issues and some sort of slap stick element. So, combining what was going on in the Sudan with just kind of a flat out sex farce was something I was attracted to.

HRISHI: Right. Besides knowing that you wanted to have the experience of the traditional John Wells writing apparatus this time around, were there other things that you took from the experience of writing the last episode that you knew you wanted to either repeat, definitely not repeat, or just learn from?

BRAD: Well I don't think I articulated it to myself at the time, and it's probably a result of just flat out insecurity, but I knew I wanted Allison to be at the center of it. But, I was really interested in this idea of what it feels like, because it felt like something I could connect to, of what it was like to be knowing, especially for a woman, to be knowing that they have perhaps been socialized to think that they are missing something by being so successful professionally and what it feels like when that extraordinary out there in the world working experience is about to end. So, I was trying to play with that too.

JOSH: I was just going to say you mentioned the show winding down and things are definitely winding down for the Barlet administration, but was it clear at this point in production that the show itself was doomed?

BRAD: I think we had a pretty strong sense that this was going to be it. I remember walking around saying, you know, you don't want your banana to turn brown. I think looking back, I think you could have continued the show, but I think it felt to everybody like this was the time when it was, it needed to be over.

HRISHI: There's a line that you wrote in this episode that feels pertinent to both what you were talking about in terms of the inspiration around C.J. and also what you're talking about with coming to the end of a show that's been so monumental and has won so many awards and was so creatively exciting. It's a line that I have not been able to stop thinking about since I first saw this episode months ago

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

C.J.: You think I'm not aware that I'm living the first line of my obituary right now?

DANNY: So don't get...

[end excerpt]

BRAD: Right.

JOSH: I thought you said that in your Emmy speech a couple weeks ago.

BRAD: Oh I may have, I may have. I forget all the Emmy speeches that I've given.

[Laughter]

BRAD: I'm kidding, I'm kidding. No, that was something that, it was a formulation I think I had, I felt pretty early on doing that show, there was this, there was a parallel sense that doesn't compare in terms of importance or responsibility, but it was always something that, you know I think everybody in the White House understands that this is probably the first line of their obituary and just because of the way the show took off and was embraced, you realize pretty soon that's probably the first line of your obituary. And it's simultaneously, you know, kind of a wonderful thing and kind of deeply depressing and I think we were all feeling that: a combination of exhausted, grateful, and insecure in not knowing about what was gonna come next. And

there was also an element, you know, doing that show for everybody on the crew and their families and the cast, you know, it was, it took a toll. It was long hours, short hiatuses, it was a tough show to shoot. So, I think I was trying to sort of sort out all those jumbled feelings through C.J. By the way, I think before *West Wing* I think *Billy Madison* was going to be the first line in my obituary.

[Laughter]

JOHS: Phew

HRISHI: I'm so curious about the mechanics of this episode and this plot that you're introducing in some ways in this episode of the return of Danny Concannon. I say only in some ways because the very first episode of the season begins with this flash forward where we find out that C.J. and Danny have a baby together

JOSH: Yeah this felt like a direct line to that.

BRAD: God, I don't even remember that.

HRISHI: So, the idea of C.J. and Danny getting back together feels a little bit like a foregone conclusion. We're watching, they're really entertaining back and forth and I think you did a great job writing those scenes. They're so fun and it feels like them and they're hilarious, but at the same time I was like, well I know that they're going to get back together so it took a little bit of the wind out of the [cross talk] will they, won't they feeling that they might otherwise. You know that they've otherwise classically had.

BRAD: [cross talk] Oh right.

BRAD: Right, God, I totally forgot that there was a scene of them flashing forward.

HRISHI: Do you remember if the idea of C.J. and Danny getting together was something that you were bringing into it or was that another sort of plot line that had to be incorporated?

BRAD: I remember very specifically that the only pipe I got was that the son-in-law was having an affair with the nanny. That was something that the writers had been, it was gonna be in a previous episode, but it was something that for story telling reasons, that had to be done. I remember the impulse to put them together and to have this conversation, I'm positive was mine because I felt like it was the best way for her to sort of deal with what she thought she might have been missing and what she was afraid to be missing was, you know, had to come through this, you know the audience is watching them and I think wanting them to get together. And I remember thinking that and wanting to play around with expectations there.

HRISHI: And in your mind while you were writing it, did you have the sense that eventually yes, in your version, somewhere in the timeline, they were gonna eventually get together?

BRAD: Yeah, I think kind of a sloppy sentimental way, I enjoyed their relationship and wanted them to get together, but wanted to just- I also wanted her to not make an idiotic sentimental choice. I wanted her to be hanging on to her passion for her work and have it just sort of obliterate the possibility in that moment. But I did want their connection to be real and not dismissible.

HRISHI: Yeah. My feeling about C.J. in this episode is that you ramped up her toughness, I think. Not that she wasn't tough already, but I feel like we're seeing a C.J. who was very used to the position of Chief of Staff now and like it turns out in the position, has actually a little bit of a different demeanor than she did as press secretary.

BRAD: Yeah, I didn't realize it at the time, but watching it, having some distance on it, yeah she's in a different position. I mean it was part of what I wanted, I also wanted to play with a woman in a power position finding her strength and I wanted to sort of tease the audience with the possibility of her dwelling on what she had missed and then having that actually turn her in a different direction. And the president gets uncomfortable with it and ultimately, as I remember, embraces it, but I wanted her fueled by that sort of existential feeling when something is about to end I wanted her to be you know flexing a little bit. I wanted to find an issue that was incredibly tricky. I remember, I think I used the line in there, I heard somebody talking on the news and they were talking about the danger of being hypnotized into inaction by complexity.

HRISHI: Yeah Danny says that to C.J. after she says that line, you don't think I'm aware I'm living the first line of my obituary. When he's giving her advice, his advice, he says don't get hypnotized by complexity.

BRAD: Did I say it twice?

HRISHI: Well C.J. then repeats it later.

BRAD: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: Danny says it to her first and then C.J. when she's talking to the president she kind of internalizes that.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

C.J.: We've all been hypnotized by the complexity of this thing in the Sudan. The EU, the UN, State. This isn't a solution but it's a start.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I can't have...

[end excerpt]

BRAD: Yeah, she regurgitates it. When I heard that phrase, I just thought that really goes to the crux of kind of the frustration on so many different issues is that we just get exhausted by the complexity of it and so we do nothing. I had read this horrible account of women in horrible situations, unable to put their children who were dead down.

JOSH: Mhm

BRAD: And I wanted that as a counter point to the, you know, it was an absolutely impossible issue. That was the trickiest thing about this was figuring out how UN resolutions work and how you could play these different people to get to an unsatisfying but perhaps a tiny bit of progress on an issue.

JOSH: Right, incremental

BRAD: Yeah and again, I've always felt this about the show, I always felt like it was Josh's quandary in every show and I thought what Aaron really got right was the position that

politicians are in. It's not all these long glorious Hail Marys, most of the time it's just a long punishing battle up the middle to make some progress and I wanted to get C.J. to hold on through many obstacles to that idea. Like no, I'm not gonna give up on this. It's a version of what Elizabeth Warren said. Why would you want to do this if you don't want to do tough things, you know? And with her time running out, I wanted to just give her the most sort of painful problem to wrestle with that issue about.

HRISHI: The person that delivers that information to C.J., the character of Steve Laussen, who comes in to urge them to act on the Sudan.

BRAD: Yeah, yeah Tim Guinee, yeah, he was great, he was great.

HRISHI: I'm curious what it was like from your perspective, to write those scenes for someone who you know is going to be coming in, someone who is not part of the regular cast.

JOSH: Were you involved in the casting choice?

BRAD: I think I was. And there's a quality to him, there's a pained ethical quality to him.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

LAUSSEN: We need strong preemptive action lead by the Bartlet administration.

C.J.: Overwhelming American military might? Followed by a decade of nation building in a part of the world where many consider us infidels so that we might bring forth a new and benevolent democracy?

LAUSSEN: Of course not. Come on, C.J.. When did it become naïve to try and put an end to genocide?

C.J.: We are monitoring the situation...

[end excerpt]

BRAD: I do remember seeing him do it for the first time and think that he just had a sort of grounded, moral, uncompromising stature that would be a good obstacle for her.

JOSH: How did you feel when you saw me do stuff you wrote, similar?

[Laughter]

BRAD: I was, you know, typically disappointed.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: I just wanted to make sure.

BRAD: You had stuff in this.

JOSH: I had great stuff. Are you kidding? I was delighted. I mean this is of course also the result of a classic prank you played on me.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

C.J.: Suck it up.

WILL: I can't act. I'm a terrible actor.

C.J.: You were up in New Hampshire...

[end excerpt]

BRAD: Oh God yes, honestly my greatest achievement.

JOSH: It was pretty good, I have to say.

BRAD: I've shown, I've shown it to strangers on the street.

[Laughter]

JOSH: It's pretty good. And it all played out of course in front of everybody at the table read.

BRAD: It played out at the table read and I remember it was one of the greatest compliments that I've ever gotten is after the table read, John Wells said, "You actually made it work, you actually made attacking Josh work, we're going to leave it in", and I was just absolutely...

JOSH: Although my memory, I was going to say if memory serves, but I know this is the case that in addition to having me say on national television that I can't act, that I'm a terrible actor, there were stage directions suggesting that I was doing a terrible job, Josh Malina, as an actor in this episode.

[Laughter]

BRAD: Yes.

JOSH: I loved them, I thought it was hilarious. And it was of course read out loud as always stage directions are read at a table read and I think John made you take them out of the final script.

BRAD: I think he did.

JOSH: Which is sad.

BRAD: I think he did. I'm going to look up the draft.

JOSH: I hope you can find them.

BRAD: On my computer. Yes. Like in scenes you weren't in, I had stage directions of you like making a cross in the deep background and the audience not even believing that.

[Laughter]

JOSH: Yeah. My memory is that you laid it on pretty thick.

BRAD: Yeah

JOSH: "Josh Malina is doing a bad job." That kind of thing.

BRAD: And God, I remember when you guys were shooting weren't you just, you and Allison got to the point where you wouldn't even, if the camera wasn't on you, you would just sort of vomit obscenities and see if the scene could get shot. Am I remembering that correctly?

JOSH: I definitely remember, now I can't remember when it was, I definitely remember a scene where Allison was cursing ferociously at me. That was this? All I remember is that, I can't remember why, or what it was.

BRAD: I just remember it was so exciting and such a wonderful day, driving over the hill and knowing that you were going to have to play this scene and then there was just an especially celebratory air on the set and then I remember it just like spinning out of control and I don't think you actually spoke to each other. As I remember, she's at her desk and you're standing up. I don't think you were ever in the same shot.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

C.J.: So you have nothing.

WILL: No I found out that it's really cold in New Hampshire.

C.J.: You're useless.

WILL: And that the Westins...

[end excerpt]

BRAD: And I think you expressed your respect and support for my writing by just spewing obscenities at her when the camera wasn't on you.

JOSH: I don't think that's the case because my memory is, and I don't know why it would be.

BRAD: You think it was just Allison?

JOSH: There was some scene, maybe she was trying to get me to respond or a reaction out of me, where she was just spouting filth at me because I remember...

BRAD: Well that's her first mistake is trying to get you to respond or [expletive deleted] listen.

JOSH: Yeah right have you seen my work? Didn't bother me. But I do remember that later Janet Ashikaga, one of our editors, fantastic editor, was very offended by Allison's swearing.

BRAD: Oh my God, yeah.

JOSH: I just remember Allison being very embarrassed and my being delighted. So I don't think I was involved in the cursing. I think she was cursing at me to illicit some sort of response.

BRAD: Oh ok, I think you were, maybe she was just torturing you, you know sort of joyously while you had to say that.

JOSH; That may well have been. She may have just been piling on. All this said, I love the stuff that you wrote for me in this episode and it was fun to play and I loved the awkward pill moment and the weird exit from the office. Loved doing that.

BRAD: You just make people uncomfortable.

JOSH: Right, you wanted to make characters in the show feel like the audience at home.

BRAD: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

JOSH: Understood and look let's be honest, you wrote me a couple of scenes with you, so you wanted to act with me.

BRAD: Yes.

JOSH: That's clear.

BRAD: Yes, I did.

JOSH: This episode was a lot of fun to shoot.

BRAD: Yes it was fun.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

WILL: Support me in public, that's all I ask.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: I did really enjoy the scenes between Josh and Will in this episode, you know particularly knowing that this was happening behind the cameras.

BRAD: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: It just gave it this extra juice. Because in it, you know, Josh is kind of mean to Will.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

JOSH: Briefer boy, I caught you on C-SPAN you looked real cute in makeup.

WILL: Withering sarcasm, I love it.

[end excerpt]

BRAD: Oh yeah.

[Laughter]

JOSH: I think you do a clever thing too where you have Kate, I think, at one point in a scene with C.J., they're talking about the nanny and Kate wants to know if the nanny is cute, and C.J. is kind of offended by it.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

C.J.: It might break, it might not.

KATE: Is she cute?

C.J.: Who cares if she's cute?

KATE: I spent my life surrounded by men in uniform.

C.J.: I don't...

KATE: Biology kicks virtue's ass in my experience.

C.J.: *She's 26.*

KATE: *Yeesh ok, so she doesn't have to be cute.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: But I thought it just kind of shows how perfect Kate was for Will because Will also goes off on a little tangent.

BRAD: Right. Now I haven't seen it in a while but the last time I watched it I was like, ooh this feels a little dated.

HRISHI: I agree.

BRAD: Yeah, but I just want to say that part of the reason I had Mary do that is because Mary would say that exactly.

JOSH: That's absolutely true, but I kind thought it was kind of a good, dated or not, appropriate or not, oh Will and Kate kind of belong together.

BRAD: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. They're both off, morally compromised, yeah.

JOSH: Right. Yeah a little bit.

BRAD: Yeah, it wasn't my white male blindness, it was a character choice.

[Laughter]

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: When you were shooting all this stuff besides C.J., was it more fun on set? Josh do you remember it being more fun on set when you were filming these scenes where you're just getting dunked on by Josh and you just have to deal with it?

BRAD: I can answer for him, yes, yes, yes.

JOSH: I thoroughly enjoyed it, yes, if that's what you're asking.

HRISHI: Everybody did.

JOSH: Yes.

BRAD: I do remember it was bizarre, I remember it was weirdly hard for me to remember my own lines that I wrote which was interesting.

JOSH; That's interesting. It was hard to memorize your own work?

BRAD: Yeah but I found it trickier which was upsetting to me because anybody who's ever done Aaron's stuff will tell you that in terms of memorizing it's actually pretty easy.

JOSH; Oh because it's so good.

BRAD: Because there's, and I associate the ability to easily memorize something with good writing, and so it was heart breaking for me that I couldn't memorize.

[Laughter]

JOSH: I can't get this [expletive deleted] down.

BRAD: My own writing.

HRISHI: There's some other plot points that have to get introduced in this episode as well. I mean at the very end you leave the episode on this cliff hanger with the nuclear accident that's happened in California.

BRAD: Oh yeah, I knew, that was one thing I knew. But I remember feeling grateful because the hardest thing for me is how do you resolve all that stuff? How do you end an episode, not even resolve what's going on, how do you end it? And it's really a kind of gift to know that you have this kind of drop it all and that just gave me a way out.

JOSH: You also left us with a bit of a romantic cliff hanger as C.J. and Danny had a very sweet romantic scene where he appears to be about to propose.

BRAD: Yes and I remember in my head thinking, cause I knew I was going to have them together, and when I found out about the pipe with the nuclear accident I thought, "Oh wow that's a great way to sort of build up some tension and then just make it an issue where she has no choice but she has to go away, and for him to be sort of sympathetic to it."

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

DANNY: If I'm gonna jump off the cliff, and you're gonna get pushed off the cliff, why don't we hold hands on the way down.

Beeper sound

C.J.: Oh shoot.

DANNY: Oh turn it off.

C.J.: I can't.

DANNY Just for a couple of seconds.

C.J.: Oh my God.

DANNY: You ok?

C.J.: Oh my God. I have to go.

DANNY: Ok.

C.J.: I have to go.

DANNY: Go, go.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Let me ask you a question about a couple of other guest actors who appear in the episode. So, there's the German ambassador and the French ambassador who both show up to negotiate with C.J.. C.J. is doing these sort of side deals to see if she can figure out some kind of solution that she can bring to the president kind of already packaged. And so she's talking to

the French and German ambassadors separately and to me they have kind of a similar vibe, the two stately gray haired men...

BRAD: Right.

HRISHI: ...who come in as ambassadors and I was wondering if that was another piece of information you wrote in or had an idea about in terms of the casting.

BRAD: I remember thinking it would be good to have a couple of, I mean they have different issues that they're wrestling with. I forget the rationale but I remember I wanted basically two Europeans to set up a different contrast with the Chinese guy. And the Chinese guy, I wanted him to be all about the hypocrisy of, you know, the US sort of pushing capitalism.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

LING-PO: Capitalism vanquished communism. Obliterated it. And here we are having a discussion where you are trying to restrict our markets.

C.J.: We are trying...

[end excerpt]

BRAD: I knew I was trying to get that and I wanted that to be, for some reason set up by Europeans.

HRISHI: Yeah, no that's great, I get it, you were incorporating the rule of threes.

BRAD: Right.

HRISHI: Like what Toby teaches the security guard. The third one is different.

BRAD: Right.

JOSH: I think you could have got the same actor with three wigs, three slightly different accents. That's how I would have cast it.

[Laughter]

BRAD: I know, I did remember again I haven't seen it in a while but I did remember when I first saw it. The first time I saw it I was like oh wow, you know. I forgot that it's sort of like world accents of the Caribbean.

[Josh laughs]

BRAD: You know kind of wandering into a *West Wing* episode.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

ORNAND: [In strong French accent] What can I do for you C.J.?

[end excerpt]

BRAD: The hard thing writing it was I wanted again to set up this idea of the dangers of being hypnotized by complexity, but in order to do that I had to set up something that could hypnotize you with its complexity. I got a lot of help from Eli and I think Lawrence was around too, about how resolutions work and sort of the politics there. There was also something that really stuck in

my mind, the reason the mother's unable to put their babies down stuck with me, was with something actually people at the UN talk about all the time, which is tens of thousands of people dying are a statistic. A great example is what happened in Syria. You know there's this abstract slaughter going on and then you see a three year old child washed up on a beach.

HRISHI: Yeah.

BRAD: And I remembered needing to find that, so that it would land with the audience in a personal way and that's the other problem with dealing with these big issues is you lose the humanity of it all.

HRISHI: Right. But that detail definitely shocks the humanity back into it.

BRAD: Yeah.

HRISHI: What was it like working with Andrew Bernstein as the director? Last time you had Christopher Misiano.

BRAD: Andrew was great, actually Andrew and Chris share a slightly, very healthy, pessimistic attitude about the material.

HRISHI: How do you mean?

BRAD: You know they're always worried it's not going to work, which I think is a good place to approach making television shows from. Andrew was great. I mean he would question, he was worried about the things I was worried about. Are we getting too far, are we going to lose the audience with the intricacies of the United Nations? I remember him worrying about that and I think in several of those scenes we get sort of different takes, different approaches from them. He was just very careful about it and you know, Andrew to all of us, you know, he was a comrade through the whole trip, you know, we feel totally comfortable with him and he directed several by then I believe.

HRISHI: So after doing this for a second time, were there things that you learned from this process that were new lessons that you gained compared to the first time you wrote an episode?

BRAD: Yeah, well you know I felt an obligation, I mean I sort of had the same feeling that I was writing C.J. to have. I felt like I remember thinking to myself this is probably your last chance to write a *West Wing* episode and what are the episodes, especially what are the Aaron episodes, that you loved doing the most, and they always have this maximum contrast between the gravity of the situation people were dealing with and a silly farcical element. I did want to say that thing about what I think is most heroic about people who are, you know, slaving away in Washington fighting the good fight is how do you get an inch of what you really want done? Because over the years that really adds up. So, I wanted to be more ambitious about it in terms of setting up something complicated that, you know, I needed to figure out and I needed, I needed a lot of help on this, you know, in terms of the trip to Dallas, Eli Attie was extremely helpful on that. I forget what he had gone through during the Gore campaign but there was, you know, similar issues where you're trying to line up a campaign with what the White House is doing. So I tried to go into areas that I didn't understand.

JOSH: Have you written scripts since for anything?

BRAD: Yeah not that anybody's seen, but yeah I have them. They might see the light of day someday.

JOSH: I hope so, you're a good writer.

BRAD: I've just been so busy, Josh, with acting jobs.

JOSH: Yeah yeah yeah. Jesus and I was already trying to compliment you. Speaking of which, let's not finish before we get a good plug in for your show.

BRAD: Yes, it is exactly like the *West Wing*. *Perfect Harmony*, and it's a lot of fun.

JOSH: It looks fantastic. Are you having a good time on it?

BRAD: I am having an extraordinarily good time. It is a completely joyous group of people and it's got this kind of *Parks & Rec* feel combined with this crazy musical element and it's been a blast.

HRISHI: Do you think you'll end up writing an episode?

BRAD: Yes, I really want to.

JOSH: Will you direct an episode?

BRAD: Yes, and will you be on an episode?

JOSH: Hire me hire me, that's what I was working towards.

BRAD: Yes! You will be on an episode. In fact, we have a lot of writers, these comedies have big rooms and I did peak in and said how about an episode where we just humiliate the hell out of Josh Malina and...

JOSH: Out of a Jew.

BRAD: Yeah.

[Laughter]

JOSH: Good pitch. So this isn't actually going to air, your show will have aired by the time we do this, so we're promoting, it's on Thursday nights.

BRAD: Thursday nights, 8:30 Eastern on NBC. And by the way, something that might interest the fans of the podcast, every time I go to do anything at NBC they are aggressively trying, as if I have any power or effect, to get some sort of reunion episode or series of episodes going. It's just interesting to me that they are adamantly...

JOSH: They want it.

BRAD: Yeah they want it and I think...

JOSH: For sure.

BRAD: It's interesting and I don't know how this works because we are going into an era where Warner Brothers will have their streaming service and NBC will have theirs, but I think there is just economically, you know, if one of those two places is trying to launch a streaming service,

something like a *West Wing* reunion would just commercially be a good idea. I am not convinced, what do you think Josh? I know you just want a job, but, do you think...

JOSH: That is word for word what I was going to say, but...

BRAD: Honestly, do you think it's a good idea taking that out of it?

JOSH: I think, taking it out of it, it's not a good idea.

BRAD: Right.

JOSH: Save for somehow Aaron coming up with something that is a good idea. But yeah I think just in absolute terms this is one of those things you should probably just leave be.

BRAD: Yeah it's like remaking the *Princess Bride* maybe a little bit.

JOSH: Right. Which they're also talking about and I would be happy to be in if they do it. Even though it's a terrible idea.

BRAD: Yeah you'd do it. Yeah, no listen if he could find a way, you know, but he just spoke recently and said how do you ignore the elephant in the room and how do you not become part of, you know, a dead end partisan, you know, rage-a-thon.

JOSH: Yeah, it's unavoidable.

BRAD: Yeah.

JOSH: Well this was awesome, thanks for doing this again.

BRAD: My pleasure, I love you guys, even you Josh.

JOSH: Love you too.

BRAD: Ok.

HRISHI: Thanks for making time for us.

BRAD: My pleasure, thank you for caring and my love to everybody that is listening to the podcast, it's very moving. Ok guys, enjoy the impeachment.

JOSH: Ok, we're going to take a quick break now and when we get back we're going to talk with Annabeth Gish.

HRISHI: Joining us now is Annabeth Gish, who as you all know, played Liz Bartlet-Westin.

JOSH: Thanks for finally joining us. I'm glad we got you.

ANNABETH: Oh, finally, me too, I've been awaiting an invitation to join this esteemed podcast.

[Laughter]

JOSH: I guess we should start at the very beginning and figure out or hear your original story. How did you come to be on the show?

ANNABETH: Well, you know, strangely enough I had auditioned for a role prior to getting the role of Liz. And strangely enough it wasn't for the character of Annabeth, right? There's a

character Kristen Chenoweth plays, an Annabeth correct on the show? Yeah. Clearly not inspired by me since we are physically exactly the opposite.

[Laughter]

ANNABETH: But yeah I had an audition for the show kind of back early days and then this role came around and I auditioned and it was, I got it, and so I was very, very excited to kind of, you know, finally join this family.

HRISHI: Your first episode was in season 5, the season premiere of season 5. Up to the point, we'd heard about the third Bartlet daughter, but obviously we'd never met her, we'd never seen her on screen. How did you learn about what the scope of the role would be? Obviously becoming a member of the first family is a pretty big deal, even though the character doesn't live in the White House.

ANNABETH: Absolutely yeah no, I mean this actually wasn't the very first time I've ever played a President's daughter by the way. I also played Julie Nixon in Oliver Stone's movie and so maybe they, maybe there's, I have no idea what that says about me or...

[Laughter]

ANNABETH: That I have some sort of presidential demeanor or not, but I had been excited to kind of hear about who she would become and I can't remember, I know Nina had already been on the show right?

HRISHI: Yeah.

ANNABETH: As Ellie?

HRISHI: Yeah.

ANNABETH: And Elisabeth Moss as well, so I was kind of the third prong daughter. And you know my very first day of shooting and my very first scene ever on *West Wing* was this big long walk and talk with Allison.

[West Wing Episode 5.09 excerpt]

LIZ: Listen, you're going to get a call from an organization call The Hunger Plan. They should be fundraising for the World Food Program and instead they're developing freeze dried peanut butter and jelly or something. I got lassoed onto the board for two years, I just retired, and I recommended you.

C.J.: You didn't.

LIZ: They get a small C22 grant, it'd be a conflict. Just tell them you wish you wish, but you can't. It'll make them feel good just to know you were interested.

C.J.: Thanks for the heads up.

LIZ: We're going to talk about UNESCO

C.J.: You going?

LIZ: Yeah, and we're going to talk about a guy named Chris Beck I want you to meet.

C.J.: *He from UNESCO?*

LIZ: *Nope.*

[end excerpt]

ANNABETH: And it was quite exhilarating and terrifying at the same time, so much so that the sound guy had to check on me because my heart rate was just beating so fast, I was so nervous.

HRISHI: Wow, wait, like the sound guy could hear?

ANNABETH: You know they put the mic near your chest and I think I was just exploding out of the “boom boom boom boom boom boom” and he could hear it. [Laughs]

JOSH: That’s funny, they are very nerve wracking.

ANNABETH: They are, you know these super long steady cam shots where it’s so, it has to be completely choreographed and when you turn and yet still, you know Josh as you know, you have to have this ability to speak intelligently and quickly and with a certain detente right? No pressure.

JOSH: Yeah, of course, and you screw up one line in a walk and talk and it’s over, or you step out of frame and you have to go back to the beginning. There’s no recovering, there’s no fudging it.

ANNABETH: Exactly, so the stress is high. That was my first day of welcome to *West Wing*, Annabeth.

JOSH: And Allison’s not that nice so she probably didn’t put you at ease.

ANNABETH: She was cruel and heartless and I just can’t imagine how she’s still works in this town.

[Laughter]

JOSH: Exactly.

ANNABETH: No quite the contrary. What a formidable, magnanimous woman. I love her.

HRISHI: Before that day, what was your most stressful acting day or gig?

ANNABETH: That was probably the very most stressful day in my acting career.

HRISHI: Really?

ANNABETH: [Laughs] Yes, yes. You know at that point in time the show had such immense profundity and everyone like you knew that it mattered. And plus just wanting to be good and I had been around for a long time, but even you know for *Nixon* or whatever, I didn’t have much to say, so when you have to really stay and have posture and hold yourself and I’m a presidential daughter, so it was big shoes to fill.

JOSH: So wait were you a *West Wing* fan prior to you joining the cast?

ANNABETH: Oh yes, very much so.

JOSH: That's pretty cool. Yeah me too.

ANNABETH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And how about since then? Has there been a day that has been as stressful? Or is it just sort of once you've done a walk and talk with Allison Janney, everything else is lower stakes.

ANNABETH: [Laughs] Well that is definitely a feather in my cap that I will never forget, but no strangely enough I had another stressful day on *Scandal*. I don't know what it is about me and the White House.

JOSH: Hey you and me both.

ANNABETH: Yeah, right Josh? But I had one of those sort of horrific actor's nightmare situations where you get to work and they've rewritten the entire scene and you didn't get the pages the night before.

JOSH: Ugh.

ANNABETH: Yeah, but that's what we do and you've gotta be prepared and learn quickly and go with the flow and never let them see you sweat, even though you know inside you're completely dying.

JOSH: Yeah, I've never heard of not being able to hide it from the side guy though. That's new.

ANNABETH: Right, right. Yep.

HROSHI: Were there things that you learned from the episodes of *The West Wing* that you ever felt like you could directly draw upon on other shoots? You know, thing that you could sort of tap back into and say this is a lesson that I learned on my days of *The West Wing* that I could use right now.

ANNABETH :Yes I think just because of the pace of that show is fast and it is a well-oiled machine and so you'd better know your [expletive deleted], and you'd better deliver, and you'd better bring your A-game and certainly watching Allison work, and Martin and Bradley, those were the people that I did most of my stuff with, were just sort of these examples that become indelible in your mind in terms of professionalism and pace, so I always look towards my time. I think I did six episodes and just as an honor you know, it's like the guerilla warfare place to learn your craft.

HRISHI: Yeah

ANNABETH: Do you feel that way Josh?

JOSH: Yeah, oh absolutely. I felt like I kind of went to school in *Sports Night* and particularly *The West Wing* and after that it's kind of like a confidence that I have carried with me to later stuff. Like if I could survive that, yeah.

ANNABETH: Yeah.

JOSH: And I also felt like, I use the analogy, if you're playing tennis with someone better than you, I always felt like they were bringing me up and like if I was able to pull it off there, alright, ok, I can do this. Anything subsequent.

ANNABETH: And there is this sort of energetic support that people like Allison would give me as a younger actor or as a new person on that set, that would create this facility of support, which is sometimes that's not there, but most professionals really set that tone and I think that makes all the difference in the world, for sure. And the other thing about this show is that you have to understand what you're saying, you know. It is high intellectual political dialogue you can't just sort of memorize words and not understand what they mean.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

LIZ: We're giving an environmental speech next week. We can win back the Greens.

JOSH: Are you still mad at me for having concerns about Doug's campaign?

LIZ: Not at all.

JOSH: I'm glad.

LIZ: I'm mad at you for sharing those concerns with the D-triple-C and the White House Office of Political Affairs.

[end excerpt]

ANNABETH: So, it's like a brain exercise, you have got to be sharp.

JOSH: Yeah absolutely I agree, this is not a job where you can phone it in. Not that we ever would.

ANNABETH: [Laughs] Right.

JOSH: But certainly, if you phone it in on *The West Wing* as an actor, you're gonna look bad.

ANNABETH: Yeah exactly.

HRISHI: What did you think about the character that you're playing? I feel like she's pretty complicated but then this episode complicates her even more deeply.

ANNABETH: I agree I think "Internal Displacement" as an episode really shows us who Liz is just in that one scene with Allison, where you kind of, we understand the intensity of what it's like to be a President's daughter, but also a politician's wife and you know, I mean Liz should have been the politician. Her dad said that, you know, you're the politician why aren't you running? So, you know I think there is this hidden layer to her that she really didn't want to be in the public eye, the political sphere, and she tried to do it for her husband and then also in that scene knowing that her father has to take the country and his, you know, job as a President as a priority over his daughter.

HRISHI: Mhm.

ANNABETH: And her reputation right because obviously the knowledge that her husband Doug is schtupping the nanny is gonna come out.

HRISHI: Yeah. For me, the part that was most complicated about this almost transcended that realm of politics entirely. The idea that she wanted Doug to win, for the sake of her children and the sake of her children's sense of their own father was the...

ANNABETH: Yes.

HRISHI: The part that I guess shined through for me.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

LIZ: His father-in-law's the President, fact. He can't run away from that.

C.J.: It's gotta be hard to try to live up to the President.

LIZ: You can't.

C.J.: No.

LIZ: But he is the father of my children and I want them to be able to look up to him.

C.J.: Sure.

LIZ: No matter what he's done.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Because that could be in any context, you know, that a wife would be willing to ignore and even kind of paper over her husband's wrong doings towards her.

ANNABETH: Yes.

HRISHI: For the sake of her children's relationship with their father. It takes a level of selflessness and also kind of, I don't know self-flagellation even, to be willing to do that.

ANNABETH: Yes, well I think it's what people who are children of celebrities or children of politicians. It's just that trade off, knowing you are in the public eye there is a certain public service element to your work, but yet the cost of that is so great. You know?

HRISHI: Yeah.

ANNABETH: I think there's a wasted sadness about Liz, right? She could have been great. She could have followed in her father's footsteps probably more so than the other two daughters, than Ellie or, you know what I mean, just because she has that ability.

HRISHI: Yeah she has, it looks like she understands the world of politics so deeply that, yeah either she could have been a political operative, or if not a politician herself.

ANNABETH: Yes, I think one of the beauties of those scene, the whole episode really is written so brilliantly from the very first scene with C.J. and Tim Busfield in the restaurant at the end, book end...

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

DANNY: Don't get hypnotized by complexity, make it count.

[end excerpt]

ANNABETH: And then Liz says that later in her scene with Allison. She's like marriage is complicated. So the whole theme of all of these complicated elements and Liz trying to

maneuver them and do what's best for her children even though her father's not going to do what's right for his daughter because he has to maintain his political legacy.

HRISHI: Well I think that's debatable, whether he's doing the thing that's right for his daughter or not. It's not what his daughter would like.

ANNABETH Right yes.

HRISHI: But I'm still not sure if it's right for his daughter or not, knowing everything....

ANNABETH: Yes.

JOSH: Well there's also the extra element that we know that C.J. is doing an end run around the President.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ANNABETH: Yes, and that scene too in terms of the writing, there's so much said and unsaid and veiled, and you do think that Liz knows how to play chess in these kind of political conversations, but she doesn't win the match.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

C.J.: I'm sorry Liz we've given the date away.

LIZ: Already? You can't have.

C.J.: It's gone.

[end excerpt]

ANNABETH: She's shocked to find out that she's not gonna win this match this time.

JOSH: That's what I, exactly what you said is exactly what I love about this scene. You both play it so beautifully and it is very well written because there's as much being said and what going unsaid as in the dialogue itself.

ANNABETH: Exactly.

JOSH: And you can see in this scene that she is the better abled- maybe to take on a public mantel and hold office she's got character, she's got wisdom, all these things that her husband appears to lack.

ANNABETH: Yes, it makes me wonder why she married him.

[laughter]

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI; Well that's certainly the perennial question.

JOSH: For sure.

ANNABETH: And I loved Steven Eckholdt who plays Doug so great, he's just kind of a skeevey kind of cad.

[West Wing Episode 7.11 excerpt]

DOUG: I am so jazzed about this event with the president next week. We are gonna win this thing. I've never felt so strongly about anything in my life. But until that last vote is counted I'm going to operate under the assumption that I'm going to lose.

[end excerpt]

ANNABETH: But you wonder why she married him.

HRISHI: Yeah you know, you mentioned the book ending of the scenes between C.J. and Danny but there's also this incredible moment of book ending with these two scenes and it really does set you up to think that Liz is going to win this argument, that, you know she's going to overturn this decision that C.J. has made. I think there's a structural element here that makes you feel as surprised as Liz when C.J. says actually no, because in the first time through, C.J. and Doug have this little back and forth where C.J. says, "Do you understand me?" and Doug says, "I think I do," and C.J. says, "I think you do too." And they're communicating without speaking explicitly about the affair and they're saying things that, like you said Josh, are going unsaid, and then that exchange is mirrored in this scene where Liz says that to C.J.

ANNABETH: Yeah that was the word I was gonna use and again that's such a sign of masterful writing when you can, when you don't see the manipulation of it but it's just planted to beautifully that there are repeating themes and mirroring the tension right? And you're right when Liz gets up, she thinks she's won.

HRISHI: Right.

ANNABETH: And then C.J. gets up and it's a whole different ball game. The other thing that I wish I could have seen or that is that scene between C.J. and the president when she knocks on the door, like what did she say? And what was his reaction? Clearly she's saying Doug had an affair, Liz knows, yadda yadda but then I wanna know what Dad called and said to me.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Yeah me too.

ANNABETH: Just all those unsaid unwritten elements.

HRISHI: Yeah for someone whose been established as such an overprotective father, the rage that the President must have at the moment, it would have been interesting to see. I think there's something interesting in not showing it to us as well but...

ANNABETH: Of course that's beautiful.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ANNABETH: But you do wonder by the three daughters, well we don't see Zoey, but you know he wasn't happy with either of his...

JOSH: That's right.

ANNABETH: Either Ellie's or my spouse.

JOSH: Not a fan.

HRISHI: I think he's gonna come around to Vic, sort of-ish.

ANNABETH: Yes, yes. His heart, is a little bit more heart-warming than Doug.

HRISHI: Yeah, at least he's been reassured that Vic properly cherishes Ellie.

ANNABETH: Yes.

HRISHI: I just realized that phrase, properly cherish, I think I'm pulling that from President Obama's book. It's been stuck in my head a little bit ever since reading it, however many years ago. He talked about losing an election and sort of regrouping and he said he had to reexamine what his priorities were and he said he wanted to go back and properly cherish his wife and I thought that was such a great...

JOSH: Turn of phrase.

ANNABETH: Oh God, that's so elegant, isn't it?

HRISHI: Yeah.

ANNABETH: I also noticed, not to kiss your ass or anything.

JOSH: Oh please, nobody does.

ANNABETH: This episode for you, I think you had so many just wonderful little kind of zingers and moments were peppered throughout the episode, where you know you have the certainly the humor. I don't know, I thought this was a good episode for you as well.

JOSH: I appreciate that, you're sweet to say. It's hard for me to get past Brad's having had me say "I can't act, I'm a terrible actor."

[Laughter]

JOSH: But I'm glad there's other good stuff, maybe I'll go back and re-watch it again.

[Laughter]

ANNABETH: No it's really good and there's some moments where I just burst out laughing just because, you know, it was just such great comic relief and you give it with such a deadpan brilliance.

JOSH: Thank you, that is a very kind thing to say. It's a mutual admiration society, you're terrific in this episode in particular. That one scene is a knock out.

ANNABETH: Thank you.

JOSH: Any other memories of *West Wing* related or unrelated to this episode that stand out?

ANNABETH: Anecdotally right? I mean I do remember, did you go up to Canada? I can't remember which episode we did, but we were all going up supposedly to stump in New Hampshire and it was freezing cold.

HRISHI: For "Opposition Research" I think.

JOSH: Oh yeah, good catch.

ANNABETH: And we went to Toronto I think and it was so cold that everybody, you know, I think production had to, in all of our hotel rooms we had triple fleece lined leg warmers or whatever because it was so damn cold, I remember that being kind of a cold day in hell.

JOSH: They gave you those little hand warmers.

ANNABETH: Yes.

JOSH: Just stick in your hand and your hand in your jacket with those hand warmers

ANNABETH: Yeah.

HRISHI: That's a great episode for Liz because you know that's the one where in the end she gives a personal campaign donation.

ANNABETH: Yes.

JOSH: Right, right.

HRISHI: To the Santos campaign.

ANNAEBTH: Yes.

HRISHI: Knowing that that's going to be publically recorded and sort of what that says about the Bartlet family and Doug's own relationship, they had that kind of skirmish in the restaurant.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: What's this?

LIZ: A personal check.

JOSH; You're donating, you're giving Matt Santos \$2,000.

LIZ: Yeah, sorry that's the federal limit.

JOSH: Liz this goes on a publically disclosed donor list. This is a Bartlet family contribution to Santos for President.

LIZ: Funny thing about the FEC, they really like it when you report this stuff.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love that episode because it shows this other side of Liz, you know, that her own independent political streak and her own acumen and she feels like one of our heroes there, but then they complicate it with this episode, it's not so straight forward, none of it is straight forward.

ANNABETH: Right, yeah, I remember the scene with Brad, whatever we were up top of the restaurant or something right? It was such a great again, like you said Josh, playing tennis with someone who is up-leveling your game, and that sort of banter, which is inspiring so that was definitely a fun work experience.

HRISHI: Can I ask you a little bit about your other work experiences? I mean Elizabeth Westin is such an awesome character, but you've played so many great characters, I think most recently I watched a lot of you when I was going through and binging *Halt and Catch Fire*

ANNABETH: Yes, yup.

HRISHI: And the character you play in that show, Diane Gould, is amazing as well. Are there other roles that you've played that are highlights for you?

ANNABETH: You know one of my favorite roles and shows that I was ever a part of was kind of a short lived show on Showtime called *Brotherhood*.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ANNABETH: And again I play a politician's wife, Jason Clarke, but it's just a brilliant, deep, dark show into, it's a dive into Rhode Island politics and I loved it because I played this sort of flawed, mother, woman who, you know, she's trying on the outside to be a political wife, but she's quietly dealing with her own, she smokes a lot of weed and she does cocaine and she's trapped. I love playing, as I was, as we all do, characters that are flawed and not one note and complex, which all starts with the writing.

HRISHI: Oh I'm going to watch it.

JOSH: Does Janel Moloney also appear on *Brotherhood*?

ANNABETH: Yeah Janel Moloney, yes she did.

JOSH: Thought so, you can get a double dose of West Wingers.

HRISHI: And Jason Isaacs, also.

ANNABETH: And Jason Isaacs, that's right, because she had an affair with my husband on the show, in *Brotherhood*.

JOSH: Spoiler alert

ANNABETH: Spoiler, oh, sorry, sorry.

JOSH: That's ok, we only protect the *West Wing* on this podcast.

ANNABETH: And then I went on again to work with Jimmy Smits briefly on *Sons of Anarchy*, which was a total departure for me in terms of I get to play a dirty sexy cop.

HRISHI: Your character on *X-Files* is also a sexy cop, not that far outside, I know the shows, *X-Files* and *Sons of Anarchy* are very different worlds but...

ANNABETH: Yeah and Monica was very sort of esoteric and optimistic and a believer as opposed to a dirty cop.

HRISHI: Right.

ANNABETH: Chris Carter and Kurt Sutter live in very different worlds.

JOSH: That indeed they do.

ANNABETH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Thank you so much for talking to us, it's been so nice to finally get you on the show and talk about a character who just brought so much even in just these 6 episodes.

ANNABETH: Oh, well thank you very much.

JOSH: Like Hrish, I was surprised when I looked on IMDB, your presence on the show is so significant to me, I thought, "Wow, she's actually only in six episodes"

ANNABETH: I know, I know.

JOSH: It's incredible what an impression you make across the series.

ANNABETH: Oh, well thank you.

HRISHI: And that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening. Thanks to Margaret Miller and Zach McNees for helping us make this episode.

JOSH: Thanks also to Bradley Whitford and Annabeth Gish for joining us. You can find them on twitter, Annabeth is at @annabethgish and Bradley is at @bradleywhitford

HRISHI: You can find us at @westwingweekly or at thewestwingweekly.com or on Facebook, Instagram, all of those places, let us know what you thought of this episode.

JOSH: Thanks to PRX and Radiotopia. Radiotopia is a collection of the finest podcasts in all the land. If you'd like to learn more about the other shows, go to radiotopia.fm

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

BRAD and ANNABETH: What's next?

[Outro Music]