

The West Wing Weekly
1.22: What Kind of Day Has It Been

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening the The West Wing Weekly, I'm Hrishikesh Hirway

JOSH: ..and I'm Joshua Malina

HRISHI: Today, we're talking about the finale of season one

JOSH: Woo!

HRISHI: It's episode 22, and it's called '*What kind of day has it been*'.

JOSH: It was written by Aaron Sorkin, it was directed by Tommy Schlamme, and it originally aired on May 17th, in the year 2000.

HRISHI: Here's a synopsis..

JOSH: A hrynopsis?

HRISHI: [laughs] Sure..

JOSH: I just wanted to make sure because, you know, it's an important distinction.

HRISHI: An American fighter jet goes down in Iraq, and a rescue mission ensues to find the pilot. But, it's a covert operation, so CJ has to mislead the press. Toby's brother is onboard the space shuttle Columbia, but it's having mechanical difficulties and can't land. Plus, Josh has to meet with the Vice President to bring him around to the Bartlet administration's plans for campaign finance. President Bartlet travels to Rosalind, Virginia, to speak at the Newseum and give a live town hall meeting. But as they're exiting, S#&* goes down and shots ring out.

JOSH: Well done

HRISHI: Before we even get into the episode though, Josh, I want to ask you about the title. '*What kind of day has it been*' is a very Sorkin title, it's been the finale for lots of things that he's done before..

JOSH: Season one finale of 'Sports Night', right?

HRISHI: Yep.

JOSH: Season one/series finale of 'Studio 60'?

HRISHI: Yep.

JOSH: Series three/ series finale of 'The News Room'?

HRISHI: Right, so spread across fifteen years it's become a little calling card for him.

JOSH: The story seems to be, that the lead producer of the Broadway production of 'A Few Good Men', a man named Robert Whitehead, used to, begin every meeting... [inaudible]. In previews of 'A Few Good Men', Aaron, and Don Scardino, the director, and Robert Whitehead, the lead producer, and multiple other producers and department heads would meet, and, Mr Whitehead would begin every meeting by saying 'What kind of day as it been?'.

HRISHI: Wow, that's pretty cool that he has a little legacy, in all of these different shows.

JOSH: Yes, he lives on. Robert Whitehead has quite an impressive CV. His very first production; *Medea*, starring Judith Anderson, who would become Dame Judith Anderson, [and] John Gilgood, who probably became Sir John Gilgood, I'm just going to guess. He was a big producer.

HRISHI: He was given a Tony award for lifetime achievement in 2002

JOSH: There you go. And I think Aaron, in addition to honouring those whom he admires.. Aaron appreciates, I think, calm in a storm. I think that's what he appreciates about the phrase 'What's next?', and I think that's what he likes about 'What kind of day has it been'. This idea of taking a beat, no matter how crazy things are getting, taking stock and saying 'Ok, now what do we do?', and 'what's the story', and I think it speaks to a quality that he admires in people like Robert Whitehead and Jed Bartlet.

HRISHI: Before you can ask 'What's next?' first you have to find out what kind of day it's been.

JOSH: There you go

HRISHI: So now let's get into the actual episode. We start off, with a reverse flentl, which happens a lot of times..

JOSH: A front-I

HRISHI: A front-! This happens a lot of times, where we're still on the title card but we get lead into the episode through the sound that comes up. Here it's laughter [recorded laughter plays] as we get the tail end of a joke that the President has said at the Newseum, which is a real place.

JOSH: So the Newseum, is not just a new museum, it's a museum dedicated to the news?

HRISHI: That's right. The Newseum is an actual museum, that used to be in Virginia, now it's moved to Washington D.C. One of the things about the Newseum is that they have this interactive aspect to the museum, they have a feature where you can actually pretend that you are a correspondent delivering the news. I think a lot of field trips go there, a lot of students end up doing this, and somebody discovered that all

the videos are actually being uploaded to Youtube.

JOSH: You showed me a few, they're pretty hilarious. It's clear that the Newseum is not moderating the content they're putting online.

[Newseum audio clip plays]

FEMALE STUDENT: Top story today, the bathrooms are out of toilet paper and soap. My friend here also might be pregnant, the father is unknown at this time, and, over to you Tabatha

[laughing]

TABATHA (we presume): Your Dad

[both girls laugh]

[end audio]

[laughter]

HRISHI: It's so good. We'll put a link up to all of them on the website.

JOSH: Enjoy

HRISHI: This episode is told in an interesting way, with flashbacks. We get a lot in the cold open... it's a very long cold open. After the build up in the cold open and the title sequence, we go back to earlier and then slowly make our way back to where the episode started.

JOSH: Right, and we're left, as we go into the opening credits with an enormous cliffhanger.

HRISHI: Right, yeah, we don't know what it is that Gina has seen, but it's something

JOSH: And there's certainly a sense of, impending crisis.

HRISHI: But before we get to the dangerous part, there's a lot of really funny stuff, and just a little moment of physical comedy between CJ and Danny, when she pulls him outside. She smacks him on the side of the head and tells him to follow her

JOSH: It's a palpable hit

HRISHI: Yeah [laughs], and then she goes outside to whisper to him

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

CJ [whispers]: I have it, I have a tip

DANNY: You do?

CJ [whispers]: Yes. I have a tip and I'm gonna give it to you before the others

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He's gone around the other side of the pillar and she turns [chuckle] and talks to nobody. It's just a great, it's like, I love that this show is not above a little sight gag..

JOSH: Yeah absolutely, I assume that's a little Tommy.. touch

HRISHI: Is that really, is that a Tommy Schlamme kind of move?

JOSH: I'm guessing, yeah

HRISHI: Another thing that happens a lot, that we've talked about, is how an episode will kind of run ahead of the audience, and we don't know exactly what's going on, and they aren't waiting for you to catch up. And you kind of have to just hold on, and try and keep all the details in your head.. Eventually things will unfold and it will be revealed, but if you aren't paying attention you might not put the jigsaw puzzle together completely. So, it starts to run ahead and we get all of our senior staff guys giving the signal, but we don't know what the signal is, and you know, we see it and Leo doesn't know, he's like

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

LEO: What's that?

JOSH: It's the signal

LEO: I thought that was the signal for the other thing..

JOSH: It's the signal for this thing now.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But when they finally tell him 'Ok, go tell the President', there's that really beautiful shot of Leo standing up in the heights on the balcony, and there's a monitor, so we get the President both in close-up, on the monitor, as well as in this very long distance shot of him on the stage. And then you see Leo, just his hand, giving the signal, and even though, you know, between them the distance is so vast, we get to see the President's reaction to that in the middle of his speech, because of this close-up monitor. It's so cool

JOSH: And we're not even sure at that point what it means..

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: We have no real sense of what it means, and there's even a second layer that gives a misdirection, with the subplot about the fighter who's downed..

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: I'm thinking through, as I'm watching that plot unfold and assuming that this is the sign that there's good news, that the pilot's been found.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: Which, I think is what we're meant to believe, and I like that, there's actually.. there's so many balls in the air that it turns out there's ... there are other things to be wondered about and to be secretly signalled as to they're having worked.. out..well

HRISHI: Yeah. I also like Sam's description of what the gesture is..

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

SAM: Very subtle, very simple

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Everything about that gesture, and then, Leo trying to understand what it is, and Josh's extremely weird take on it when he tries to show them, he's like..

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

LEO: What's the signal

JOSH: It's this, here..

[pause]

LEO: What is that?

JOSH: That's, the signal

LEO: It looks like a hip hop gesture

JOSH: It's, uh, a plane, taking off..

LEO: It doesn't look like a plane taking off

JOSH: It means something good has happened, this means that something bad has happened, and this means something good has happened.

LEO: I got it

[end excerpt]

[laughter]

JOSH: Another opportunity for each actor to do his particular version of the same thing.

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: I like to do that, although this one is comical so I embraced it. We also know that there's a great moment at the most recent Tony Awards, where Lin Miranda made that sign to the camera, and certainly linked to that.

HRISHI: And I think that, I really like this. Several people have suggested that when two West Wing Weekly listeners come across each other and you see another one that has the lapel pin, that this is the signal, and I really like that. I'm gonna advocate for that.

JOSH: Right, I think it's clear that's a slam dunk. As of today, I have a pin so I'm looking forward to this, so let's make this official.

HRISHI: To go along with the official West Wing Weekly lapel pin... safe departure

JOSH: Absolutely, after that you can decide whether to actually communicate verbally.

HRISHI: Right, so should I spread that around?

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

POTUS: Well I think it'll get around all by itself, but if you want to help it along a little, there's nothing wrong with that.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: In this cold open Charlie says to Josh

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

CHARLIE: You were right, it doesn't go away

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, lovely callback to, the third episode of the series?

HRISHI: Yeah, where his first appearance... I love that.

JOSH: Yeah me too, absolutely.

HRISHI: I have a note about typography Josh.

JOSH: About typography? Bring it!

HRISHI: The signage in the town hall, where it says '*MSNBC presents a live town*

hall meeting with President Bartlet' is in, Trajan, I'm not sure if that's how you pronounce it, [spells it out] T-R-A-J-A-N, Trajan, the official West Wing font.

JOSH: Huh

HRISHI: Little meta usage, they brought it from the titles, to actually within the show. It went from non-diegetic, to diegetic usage.

JOSH: I've got nothing

HRISHI: Alright,

[they both laugh]

JOSH: I've got new words to look up

[more laughter]

JOSH: I know that font was snuck into Troy, I think..

[laughing]

JOSH: A long long time ago

HRISHI: [inaudible]

JOSH: Ouch, moving on.

HRISHI: Yeah, let's not beat that dead horse

JOSH: Ohhhh

[laughs]

JOSH: You win this round, Hrishi.

HRISHI: Oh I've got more

JOSH: Do you? Wow [laughs]

HRISHI: Yeah, well, I was a little jarred by, the appearance of Fitz, of Admiral Fitzwallace in this episode

JOSH: Hmm

HRISHI: Because I noticed that John Amos was missing his, Amos-stache.

JOSH: Ooph... nice! See, I didn't even notice that, much less come up with a groanful pun for it.

HRISHI: I would like to hereby submit that we call John Amos' mustache, the Amostache. [pause] And Josh has just done the gesture for a safe departure.

JOSH: It doesn't play that well in an episode of a podcast.

HRISHI: That's true, that's true. [...] We also find out some backstory from Leo, it turns out that Leo flew jets in the war and it leads to a really heated reaction that he has when they're negotiating in the Sit. room, what to do about the pilot and the rescue mission?

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

PHIL: I'm saying Leo, that three hours spent on diplomatic solutions is..

LEO [interrupts]: I'll tell you what Phil, how about I drop you, and your \$47 million American warplane that's already been picked up by Iraqi radar in the middle of a desert. Then you tell me, if we've got three hours to find a diplomatic solution before we come get you.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I like when Leo gets, testy, I have to say. The President actually like puts his hand on Leo's arm.

JOSH: But is this not the scene where at some point the President says, you know, if he doesn't come back I swear to God I'm invading Iraq?

HRISHI: No no, you're right. It's the exact same scene, that's right.

JOSH: I was struck by that, here we have a devoutly religious man saying '*I swear to God I'm gonna invade Baghdad*', it made me a little nervous.

HRISHI: Because then, he really must mean it

JOSH: Yeah, a little bit, that it's maybe not just, fronting, he might just mean it.

HRISHI: Yeah, he often invokes God, when it comes to military action,

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

[serious music]

POTUS: I'm gonna blow them off the face of the Earth, with the fury of God's own thunder

[end audio]

JOSH: Right, I think he also comes in hot in the Situation room, his initial emotional response is usually pretty hardcore

HRISHI: Yeah, we also find out another piece of backstory, it turns out that Josh and Hoynes, have a past.

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

HOYNES: Sometimes I wonder if I listened to you two years ago, would I be president right now? [pause] You ever wonder that?

JOSH: No sir, I know it for sure.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I immediately heard the President saying to Charlie [imitates Bartlet] *You two have a past?*

[laughter]

JOSH: That's very funny. That was very Yoda-like, and yet very Bartlet like! I think, you, you just missing linked something for me

[West Wing Episode 1.21 excerpt]

POTUS: You two have a past?

[end excerpt]

JOSH [imitates Yoda]: Have a past, do you?

[laughter]

HRISHI: Only when, when Yoda gets especially Kennedy-esque

JOSH: [laughs], That's right.

[...]

JOSH: Yeah, that's right so we, for the first time we learn that they worked together.

HRISHI: Yeah, and it's not even really explicitly spelled out, it's just that he says '*if I had listened to you*'

JOSH: Yes, it's certainly intrigued me,

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: Um, as a first time remember [laughs]... I'm guessing that you knew exactly about their paths, but I'd forgotten, so I, you know maybe we'll find out in coming episodes

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: And I don't know if you know this Hrishi, but a little bit later we're going to talk to Tim Matheson about playing John Hoynes

HRISHI: That's really exciting

JOSH: Yeah

HRISHI: Um, speaking of things that have maybe been forgotten, the show hasn't dealt with the President's MS in several episodes. And they bring it back in this episode in a few scenes, in pretty subtle ways. 'MS' is never said, but at one point he is sweating and Zoe notices, and she comments on it. He is uncomfortable with that line of questioning and he kind of tries to duck around it, and I really love this later moment, when Charlie's in the oval office with him and, the President takes a pill, but as he takes the pill he actually turns away from Charlie and it looks like he's hidden it. Basically, the way that they do the blocking is really clever, and you can see he's taking the pill and drinking his water but he's talking through the entire action, as if to hide it.

JOSH: It's subtly done

HRISHI: Yeah, but it reminds you, 'Oh yeah, the President has health issues', without having to spell it out and make it explicit.

JOSH: I like Toby's track through this episode, and Richard's performance..

HRISHI: It's amazing!

JOSH: It really is, and it's very finely realised. It's all in the eyes, and the face, and he doesn't say much and he plays things as Toby tends to do, and as Richard as Toby tends, very close to the vest. You know there are multiple scenes where I was trying to figure out, what his relationship is with his brother. Toby keeps things to himself and lives a royalling, intense inner life, and so as a viewer that intrigues me. I want to get in that mind and figure things out, and Toby will open up, but it's a very slow process and it's on his terms, and it's only when he's ready, and, you know, his version of opening up might be a single word, or a small gesture, but it's a great.. a great episode for Richard Schiff

HRISHI: He's like the pistachio at the bottom of the bag, that just has that tiny sliver of an opening, and it's up to you to try and get it open all the way. That's as much as he's going to give you

JOSH: And sometimes it's just as delicious as all the other pistachios, and sometimes it's just rotten [Hrishi laughs], it's just a bad pistachio. You never know which Toby you're going to get [laughs] [pause] Life is like.. a bag of Tobys.

HRISHI: [laughs] What?

JOSH: I don't know, I'm having a conversation with myself, and not enjoying it [Hrishi laughs in the background].

HRISHI: I want to go back to Leo and Josh, because we get to live more in this life of Leo, as a veteran, as a fighter pilot, because he finds out that Josh has politicised, in a kind of very cheap way, the stakes with the rescue mission of this pilot when he's talking to Hoynes. You know, he's not really sweet talking the Vice President here

JOSH: Certainly not

HRISHI: Which is, yeah, he's kind of pushing him around

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

JOSH: If we bring this airforce pilot back alive, that's another ten points, and then we're off to the races with job approval ratings in the high sixties. Now, every democratic congressman in a tight race is paying a buck to have their picture taken with the President and you're looking around the raquetball court saying 'where did everybody go?'

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love when Leo takes him to task on that

JOSH: Oh, as do I. I also gave myself a mental pat on the back because, again, of course, I had no memory of how the episode was going to play out

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: During that scene, which I liked very much, I did think 'wow this is really, this is not, this is a little bit tasteless of Josh, this isn't the most sensitive thing', and then when Leo starts tearing into him I thought 'wow, I took the West Wing quiz, and I got Leo McGarry'. Because I was a little bit turned off by the way that Josh was using an unfolding tragedy for political ends.

HRISHI: Right, you, you caught it right away. In the first you were like, this is cheap.

JOSH: Yes. Of course, I'd also seen it before [laughter] so it's possible that I remembered, but I'm going to give myself credit. I love the moment at the end of the Leo berates Josh scene, where Josh sort of leans in for a hug...

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

LEO: What are you doing?

JOSH: You looked, like, you wanted to hug me

LEO: Oh man, did you read that wrong

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] That's a great, great line, and super delivery of that makes it really

funny

HRISHI: Although I think that he read it right, I mean the physical gesture that Leo makes in that moment, I would have probably gone in for the hug too. [Josh laughs]. I go in for the hug a little too quickly I think

JOSH: Yeah. It's hard, navigating that kind of stuff

HRISHI: Yeah, are you saying yes, that you agree? That I go in for the hug too quickly?

JOSH: No, no, I mean, I'm instantly thinking about whether I do, whether one does, um, I often do. I've also had that thing where I intend to handshake into the hug, and the other person just goes for the hug immediately, and then it's like 'Oh, do we have different views about, our, our intimacy that we share?', and I'm like 'No, no, handshake into hug. I was absolutely intending to hug you, I just have a first step'.

HRISHI: I thought about this very exchange when I first met Bradley Whitford, and after hanging out with him for a little while with you and we were saying goodbye, I gave him a hug, and I don't think he was ready for it.

JOSH: [laughs] Oh man, did you read that wrong?

HRISHI: I, I think I did. I've probably read it wrong a few times.

JOSH: Better to have hugged and lost, than never to have hugged at all.

HRISHI: Better to have hugged and weirded out..

JOSH: Brad Whitford

[laughs]

JOSH: Than to have never met him, although I'm not sure that it's true

HRISHI: Aww, it was nice. And I, really do like that even after that they come back, and Josh, you know, he screwed up and he really knows it. After Leo berates him he really gets it, and then, you know, he says it one more time..

JOSH: I love that last one

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

JOSH: Leo, I really do apologize

LEO: Thank you

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And you know that it's done between them. That's it

JOSH: Yeah, they'll move on

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: What about CJ lying in the press room? I wrote down 'CJ lies' and Danny's right, she didn't have to. It seems like, maybe I'm also, I still have the Jay Carney interview ringing in my ears and I remember Jay saying that part of press briefing 101 is 'just don't lie'.

HRISHI: Yeah he said 'never lie'

JOSH: In a sense I feel like CJ should have been given plausible deniability as there are times when maybe she shouldn't be given all the information so she can honestly say 'that's all I know at this time'

HRISHI: Right, well they tried that. But it's also possible for her to give an answer that, you know, obfuscates as opposed to denies or outright lies.

JOSH: True yes, she could have done. She could have done a verbal end run around the question

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. Which I think even, even, Danny says. He's like 'there are ways you could have done it without lying to me'. But his objection seems to be more that she lied to him, rather than the fact that she lied. I also love, that CJ in this episode both with her exchange with Danny there, and also in an exchange with Leo, earlier, she's unflappable in this episode. She won't be flapped by Leo, and she won't be flapped by Danny.

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

LEO: There was a problem a few months ago with India-Pakistan, you were uncomfortable

CJ: Leo

LEO: You were uncomfortable lying to the press

CJ: I wasn't lying to the press on India-Pakistan, I was lied to by you, which made me look like an idiot

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even though that's her boss, it's great, I love tough fighting CJ.

JOSH: I wrote down that President Bartlet in this episode says 'I honestly couldn't care less', which is obviously a character thing. Toby expresses himself by saying 'I could care less', see, it's a character choice on the writer's part.

HRISHI: Yeah, is that right? Because the writer knows. Maybe it's a New Hampshire

versus New York thing.

JOSH: Perhaps

HRISHI: There's some beautiful scoring in this episode, my favourite kind of West Wing score moment, when Sam goes to talk to Toby about the actual problem.

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

TOBY: Do you know if they have, primary RCS?

SAM: It's, they're trying now [pause -music starts]. Toby, if this was at a certain level they would call the President

TOBY: Yeah

SAM: Seriously

TOBY: Yeah

SAM: Anyway, Cathy's giving me a job, so I'd better..

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

HRISHI: The music is so subtle for so long, and it doesn't do a lot, and it doesn't need to. And anything more than what it does would just overwhelm such a delicate performance.

JOSH: Perfectly complementary yeah.

HRISHI: Richard Schiff really killed it in this episode. His scene with the President at the end, when the President finally comes to do his version of the reassurance, and Toby is just on the verge of tears. It's beautiful

JOSH: There's a similarity between President Bartlet and Toby Ziegler in their, sometimes, masking of true feelings and what's really going on more deeply inside. I think they share that often. Bartlet is more apt perhaps to use humour to make light of the situation when he's got something going on internally and Toby maybe uses silence, or just kind of shuts down a little bit, but I think they both have, their own kinds of walls up at times, often.

HRISHI: Yeah [pause]. Mrs Landingham maybe has the best line of the episode

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

POTUS: You're not going to spoil my good time for me

MRS LANDINGHAM: Oh sir, I think we both know from experience that that's not true

[end excerpt]

[laughs]

JOSH: Very funny. There's so many layers to this episode and so many, I think I've said it before, balls in the air, you know, that are going to be gracefully caught by the end. It's unbelievable, every tiny little thread, even softball threads through and the President's desire to watch women's softball. There's a moment very early on, I think it comes up in the cold open when Gina and Ron Butterfield are discussing it. And it's one of the great things that I noticed, a little subtle thing about Michael O'Niell's performance, he's the head of the Presidential secret service detail so even as he's discussing, this sort of really trivial aspect of the President's day, his eyes are darting everywhere

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: And, he's looking around and I love just the physicality of, you know, we're talking about women's softball but I'm also trying to make sure...

HRISHI: He's casing the crowd. There are so many examples of the episode running ahead of the audience here, before you find out what it all really means. Like we hear, just a small example, Toby asks Sam if they've used the primary RCS and we don't find out until the scene between Toby and the President, that RCS stands for Reaction Control System. It's much later that that pays off. It comes and goes in a way that you're like 'Oh ok..

JOSH: 'I'll probably never find out what that is..'

HRISHI: Yeah, but it sure sounds real

JOSH: It's something important

HRISHI: Yeah, but, then eventually you do get all the pieces, and, just like you find out what the full story is with Charlie in the cold open saying 'It doesn't go away'. You find out that this paper he puts in front of the President has been something that's like, been this tension for him, and putting it in front of the President saying he doesn't have the right to, because he works in a building with the smartest people in the world.

JOSH: That's right

HRISHI: And there's another pratt fall, this very big physical gag with Josh, we've set up the thing that his chair is out at the shop, and then right after Charlie delivers the 'I work in the building with the smartest people in the world' line..

JOSH: In the pilot of 'Sports Night', I have a moment where I, sit down and there's no chair.

HRISHI: That's right. Yeah, I've been re-watching 'Sports Night' in between our episodes

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: Yeah, and, it's great

JOSH: That's the palette cleanser for you

HRISHI: [laughs] It is. I watch the show completely differently now. I haven't really seen you in anything since we started this podcast. Those are episodes that I know so well, those 'Sports Night' episodes, just like I know the first four seasons of the West Wing so well, and to go back now and to watch it and the familiarity that I have with you, and with your voice, and your mannerisms, and your sense of humour.. It just gives those episodes a whole other level to it, it's a really dense viewing experience now. You're very good in that

JOSH: Aww, nice of you to say. I would think that you would be so sick of me in between having these conversations that the last thing you'd want to watch is something I was in.

HRISHI: No it's great. If Sam Seabourne is sort of the aspirational character in the Sorkin universe, then I'm like, 'I would love to be like Sam Seabourne' someday. Jeremy Goodwin is the person who I look at, and I'm like, 'that guy is me'

JOSH: Actually that's funny, because people used to ask me at the time, whether I felt that I was similar to the character, and I would say, 'there's certain similarities, but they way Aaron has written Jeremy, he's significantly smarter and nicer'. And that's, I think that is actually a reasonable description of you [laughs]. Not that we're identical, but you are like a smarter, nicer, and younger, which is also appropriate for Jeremy at this point, me.

HRISHI: Well thanks, you turned it around on me.

JOSH: Yeah, I win. Now we're done.

HRISHI: This episode connects President Josiah Bartlet, Bartlet with one 'T', to Josiah Bartlett, with two 'T's

JOSH: A real person, and signer of the declaration of independence

HRISHI: Yeah, in the parallel universe of 'The West Wing', I'm guessing that that declaration of independence signatory spells Bartlet the same way that the President does, [spells] B-A-R-T-L-E-T. But, in our slice of the multiverse, Josiah Bartlett is spelt with two 'T's at the end.

JOSH: Mm-hmm

HRISHI: But still, clearly the same guy.

JOSH: Even as references made, to a real signer of the declaration, an urban myth, or, to Jim out there, what you call in Yiddish a Bubba Meisah* , an old wives tale, is perpetuated as Admiral Fitzwallace remarks to President Bartlet that the carpeting of

the oval office is changed out during wartimes so that the eagle faces his left talon, which holds the arrows

**transcriber note: this may not be the correct word - I couldn't make out the actual words on the audio, but Bubba Meisah is (according to Google) the Yiddish for 'old wives tale'. I also don't know who Jim is.*

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: And during peacetime his head is turned to the right, at the olive branch I guess, and it's just not true

HRISHI: It's not true

JOSH: It is not true

HRISHI: At one point the eagle did, in fact, face towards the arrows but that was changed, it was changed by an executive order. So you could see the Seal of the President, and find versions where the eagle's head is turned one way or the other, but it's not like..

JOSH: It's not a peacetime-wartime thing

HRISHI: No, it's a before 1954 or whatever, and then after 1954

JOSH: That said, you assume the change was made so that we were symbolically always looking toward peace

HRISHI: I think it was, yeah, and also, you know so the eagle is looking to the right which is the dextery side and not the sinistry side.

JOSH: Woo! Boom! This is what I wish - I wish that, depending on what's happening in, a specific West Wing episode, the eagle would be holding different things, kind of like Gail's goldfish bowl.

HRISHI: Ohh, that would be great

JOSH: Although it would be really big and obvious, like 'Oh my God, the eagle is carrying aloft a Panda!'

[laugh]

HRISHI: Yeah, I'm sure I got the Latin of right and left wrong, by the way.

JOSH: I certainly bought it, you sounded full of confidence

HRISHI: Ok, let me go back to the score, and the scoring choices for the moment. The end of the episode, you know what we first hear in the cold open, but then really rise to a huge crescendo before the shooting happens at the end of this episode, is a really different type of scoring, [be]cause for this, it's a really narrative driven

focalisation from within Gina's POV. Everybody's going around, happy, like the President is shaking hands, everybody is just sort of joking

JOSH: We're in her world, right

HRISHI: Yes, we're seeing the world through her eyes in that moment because she's the only one who knows that there's danger, somewhere. She doesn't know where it is, but you know..

JOSH: And the camera starts spinning around her, right?

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: And the music sort of reflects also, her frame of mind

HRISHI: Right, but that's an unusual decision for The West Wing, that is rare, usually the music plays more of an omnipotent role, and kind of looking at the world from above and saying, 'ok here's the feeling', more to us with a kind of detachment. But here there's a real separation between the character's experiences, and it was absolutely following only one of them.

JOSH: This show is starting to feel like a movie each episode, or at least this episode feels different altogether. I had one of those viewer moments, 'Oh, this show is doing that?' , like, you know it went to new areas and new places and I felt like the entire season leading up to it had earned it the right to take us wherever it wanted to, and, in a way, this is the kind of episode that happens in the pilot of most political shows. You know, '24' or whatever these, you know, crazy stuff like this, off the rail. It gets you from the get-go, like 'just so you know, it's going to be crazy thrill ride all the time'. This one, we had policy, we had moments of high drama, and import and great comedy and all that, but this was sort of..

HRISHI: And then you see bullets being loaded into a magazine

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: And you're like, this is a whole new language

JOSH: Exactly, it wasn't jarring in a bad way tonally, it worked, and it was, this is one of the things that can happen in the world of the White House and the White House senior staff, and I just thought of it as sort of 'wow, this entire season has lead us to this moment where we care so deeply about these people, and now we're going to see them in a moment of ultimate crisis'. It just worked, on, firing on all cylinders.

HRISHI: I thought one thing that they did, one, maybe Tommy Schlamme decision that helped make that feel more seamless is that POV from the shooters is so specific, them high up looking down at the motorcade, and that would be normally a very distinctive different shot for this series. That's the kind camera angle and camera move that we never see. But before we ever get to that, we actually get that angle a few times, earlier within the Newseum. There are all these shots of the President from up high, and it felt like they were kind of training us to have that kind

of camera angle, so that when they go to the shooters it's...

JOSH: We've seen the secret service agents sort of pacing their rafters up above

HRISHI: Exactly

JOSH: Good point

HRISHI: Did you notice Gail's fishbowl?

JOSH: I didn't

HRISHI: Gail's fish bowl had a space shuttle in it

JOSH: Very nice

HRISHI: You know, one of the sadder things to realise in this episode is that there is all this tension around the space shuttle, and it's the space shuttle Columbia, and this is in 2000, and of course, and a few years later the Columbia would actually be destroyed on re-entry. It's one of those things where, sometimes *The West Wing* departs from our universe, and sometimes it adheres to it, you know, and in terms of not referencing past Presidents and things like that and, or creating new countries, you know, making up countries

JOSH: Yeah, and sometimes history and events tincture how we view episodes that preceded monumental moments.

HRISHI: Yeah exactly

JOSH: And tragedies

HRISHI: Yeah tincture is a great word, it totally changed the colour with which I took the scene in.

JOSH: One little moment, that's like a throwaway early on in this episode, or I guess the first few moments, as you said, the frontl. Bartlet, comma, President, is giving a speech...

HRISHI: [inaudible]

JOSH: He mentions apathetic millennials, well, he doesn't say millennials. He mentions apathetic 18-25 year olds.

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

POTUS: A man once said this, decisions are made by those who show up, so are we failing you, or are you failing us? [pause] It's a little of both

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I also like that moment when it's finally said, it's like the apotheosis of the West Wing, you know? It's not like Aaron is on high, trying to give a single message, but it is kind of, this is the message of The West Wing. If you look at the entire series that is a message to take away. But anyway, as he's talking about apathetic young voters I was thinking, how much more relevant can that be than now, as we're heading into a general election and when it's suggested that millennials, they could make the difference in the next Presidential election and the question is are they going to show up, and in what numbers?

HRISHI: Yeah, in the scene that you're talking about the President is referring to this advocacy group and he says 'Generation X advocacy group, third millennium'. So millennial is not a word that yet exists, in that time..

JOSH: But Aaron's just on the verge of coining it

HRISHI: Yeah. [pause] Let's take a break to thank our sponsors.

JOSH: And when we come back, we'll speak to Tim Matheson.

[ad break]

HRISHI: Joining us now, is Tim Matheson. He's had many roles across a career that's spanned over forty years, including one of our favorites - Otter in Animal House. He was nominated for two Emmy's for his portrayal of Vice President John Hoynes. Tim, thanks so much for talking to us.

TIM: I love your show, you guys are doing a great thing.

HRISHI: Wow, thanks so much

JOSH: Thanks for coming on. How did you become involved in The West Wing?

TIM: Well, you know, I live in Santa Barbara, and I knew Rob Lowe from up there, and he told me, he said 'Hey, I did this pilot, about the West Wing' and he was very positive about it, and I said 'yeah that's great, congratulations'. And I thought, 'Oh my God, that is like paint drying, it sounds so horrible'

[Hrishi laughs]

TIM: I mean no one's ever been able to do any kind of political show, and then you know he filled me in further and it was Aaron, and I'd loved 'Sports Night', so I was a fan of Aaron. Then he told me the show sold, and I got a call to come in and audition for the John Hoynes part, and I was delighted to come in. I was a fan of Aaron's and Tommy's so I went in and auditioned, and they were very gracious and fun in the room and we had a good time. And then by the time I got home they called and said they would love me to join them.

JOSH: It's nice when it goes like that

TIM: It's nice when it works like that, isn't it

HRISHI: Did you have any insight into how you were going to play the character in the audition? Like did they tell you what they were looking for, or a specific angle you wanted to try before you went in?

TIM: I forget what the description was, in the script, but, I do remember that, I think it all changed when I got there, and Aaron, well you know maybe I did it once, and then Aaron said 'Hey, let's just try it this way'.. It was basically just [inaudible], he plays a lot of golf

[Josh and Hrishi laugh]

TIM: You know, he just made out like he thinks he should be President, and, you know it's sort of LBJ. My impression was that he was fashioned after LBJ, and you know, he thought that this younger, in this case I think that Martin's older than me, but you know, this guy was less experienced and I should be President. He just lucked out.

HRISHI: Right, yeah and jumping all the way forward to the finale of season one, it like, really deepens the story, just this one exchange that you had with Josh Lyman as we find out that he and Hoynes worked together. Suddenly there's this whole wrinkle between a dynamic that we'd already seen, you guys talking in the show but now it has all this other import to it.

TIM: Well I know, and you know I was, I think I did four or five episodes in the first season, somewhere around then, and it was so interesting every time you'd open up a script you'd find out another layer would be peeled away of your history, and that it was all, they may have known all this stuff that I wasn't quite aware of, you know

JOSH: Sure

TIM: And I think, it was, Brad Whitford used to joke that the Vice President was a heartbeat away from the office of the President, and that Tim Matheson was just a heartbeat away from being a regular in The West Wing

[laughter]

TIM: It was funny, because I had people come up to me and say, you know, 'gosh you were so evil on that show', and I would say 'I wasn't evil, I was not..'. I mean, I always considered that I was part of the team, but then having, you know looking back at it, and looking at certain scenes that I play, especially the scenes that I played with Martin, you know it was like 'I guess I was'. I mean, it was, I was one of the villains, or one of the people not part of the team.

JOSH: Huh

HRISHI: Yeah, you were maybe an antagonist, but I wouldn't say a villain.

JOSH: Yeah no, nor I

TIM: Nice, well thank you

JOSH: Yeah well, you can see some simmering feelings and tension beneath it all, but you always came across as substantial and sometimes it was substantial antagonism, but you were always a serious presence that had to be dealt with. I never saw it as evil.

TIM: I appreciate that, I think you're right. I mean he was, he had his own agenda, and he was doing his own things, and...

JOSH: And at times, they would have preferred that you hadn't, but, you were your own man

TIM: [laughs] Right

HRISHI: I think that what was so impressive, Josh and I talked about this in earlier episodes, that even when we didn't always know what that backstory was or what true motivations might have been, especially your scenes with John Spencer the chemistry between the two of you was so complicated. You guys had an energy that made it feel like there was old history between these two, kind of giant political figures, like there were old battle scars.

TIM: Oh, you know, I just loved John Spencer, I mean, when I first started on the show, it was kind of intimidating to walk in there and, you know, Josh you worked with them on 'Sports Night', and that was such an excellent show, and I was a huge fan of that show. So, you know, Tommy Schlamme and Aaron, and that cast, and you'd walk in and you know, so I was always a little nervous the first day or so, or the first scene. I would just look at John Spencer, like look John in the eye and immediately be calmed, and focused. And whenever in a scene my mind would wander or something, or I'd think 'what's my line' or any kind of distracting thought, I'd just look at John and be rooted in reality and truth, you know. He was such a wonderful dear man and I just adored him, and he was a rock for me on that show and I loved doing scenes with him.

JOSH: Yeah I'd feel the same way whenever I was on camera. There was something very anchoring, and centring about his presence, that kind of settles and brings out the best in you when you're working with him.

TIM: So true

JOSH: And even off camera, I remember my first table read on the show, and John was the first person to come over and say 'hey, welcome, how are you doing?'. So even off camera he was still that rock, that guy that kind of made you feel like you were a part of the team right away.

TIM: Totally. We had a kind of a subtext about both of us being recovering alcoholics and, he was very open about his own alcoholism and his going to AA, and told me great stories about, you know, his life and we shared a lot of personal feelings. So maybe some of that was what gave it, for me, he was an anchor for me and a friend, and I just adored him.

JOSH: Actually, now that you mention it too, those early scenes with John, with Leo, between Hoynes and Leo about AA, those are some of the reasons too, why you could never be a villain. John Hoynes, we saw real humanity in the way you reached out to him, those were great early scenes that helped really establish your character.

HRISHI: Yeah, establish the character as multi-dimensional. Even though, like you said you were in only a few of the episodes in the first season. One of the things that I learned from Josh and from some of the other guests that have been on the show, is that Tommy Schlamme does a lot of takes, that he shoots a lot, and I was wondering for this episode, where you have to run, it's not just a walk and talk, it's a run and talk, if ...

TIM: [laughs] Brad's not a runner, he wasn't a runner [laughter]

HRISHI: Did you have to get in shape for the..

TIM: I don't think we did, I mean

JOSH: You seem to be in fine shape [laugh] Brad maybe less so

TIM: Yeah, I think was probably, you know Bradley said 'let's do a yoga scene, come on' [laughter] But I do remember, earlier in that season, where the night time scene in Washington in the rain, in the snow, and, we did a lot of takes, and slow, slow coverage of that, and on the screen it's like, barely a minute, you know, and it's like I remember we spent the better half of a day in Washington shooting that.

HRISHI: Right, on location that's got to be an especially expensive thing to shoot slowly.

TIM: And, yes, it was on super bowl Sunday I think. I can't imagine how much that would cost. So we were shooting on super bowl Sunday in Washington D.C... it was like 'yikes', you know

HRISHI: You said that you thought that Hoynes was based a little bit on LBJ, and I was wondering if you ever did any, kind of research on somebody like LBJ, or if there were any other kind of external figures, whether from real life or from other movies or stories or TV, that you looked to when you were trying to figure out your way into Hoynes. What I love about that character is that he does seem Presidential to me, a lot of times, like that idea that he thought he should be President really makes sense and it felt like he carried himself like a President.

TIM: I'm a nut on research, and I would visit with Pat Cadell and DD Myers, who were, you know, who were certainly from that world of politics, and were on the staff at the time. Pat Cadell was always talking to me about historical precedents, you know, like related to what we were doing and I read biography on biography on LBJ and about all Vice-Presidents and about the job and also I think it was a time.... Vice-Presidents today are more partners, but the old school way was pretty much what Jack Kennedy did with LBJ, and that's what Pat Cadell used to tell me about, they'd send him to a funeral or send him out of town, and they'd always send him on these

errands, doing things to get him out of the way because they were two camps and they didn't want him in their camp.

JOSH: So, you're wrapped on 'Killing Reagan', it's about the 1981 assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan,

TIM: I got to play Ronald Reagan, and I finally got to be in the West Wing, at the White House

HRISHI: You finally got a chance to be behind that desk

JOSH: [laughs] And leap out behind the desk, no longer in the OEOB

TIM: And, it was very reminiscent of what happened to Reagan, the assassination, the attempt on Bartlet's life was very Reagan-esque in that regard. You know, why wasn't he under a tent? Why was he exposed?

JOSH: You play the President, opposite Cynthia Nixon as Nancy Reagan?

TIM: Yes, she's wonderful

JOSH: And so what was that process like? If you did a fair amount of research to play a fictional Vice President, you must have done a tremendous amount of research to play the real deal

TIM: Yes, and the great thing is that there's so much media of Reagan, and recordings, and, you know I worked with a vocal coach to try and get that accent. I don't do impressions, and I didn't want to do an impression. I just wanted to get the quality of his voice, and the accent, which was sort of mid-Western, sort of washed over by Hollywood, but he was a radio announcer, so he had this certain quality that served him well. And I read every book, and studied constantly, I'm still reading about him. I learned a lot about him, being a liberal, you know I'm one of those Reagan democrats, I actually voted, he's the only republican I've ever voted for. And it was an interesting time, because he in a way calmed the nation, at a time when it was very confused. After what we'd gone through with Jimmy Carter, he was a child of the depression and, you know, certainly older than Carter, and it's interesting what he did bring. I, you can't act politics, so I really just..

JOSH: Played the man,

TIM: Yeah, you just play the man and it's, for me what it really was was a love story between Ronny and Nancy, that was our side of it. And you know, Rob Laurie would never even let Hinkley get near us. We never met him while we were shooting, we never had anything to do with him, he wouldn't let him be on the set when we were there and we were never on the set when he was there

HRISHI: That's really interesting

TIM: Yeah, and, in a funny way I think it kept him, Kyle Moore is a wonderful actor who played John Hinkley, it kept him isolated and probably drove him crazy [laughs]

you know, six weeks in Atlanta. It kept us focused on what we were doing, and we didn't think about it like 'what assassination?'. It was a really strong directorial choice I think, that Rob Laurie made.

JOSH: When do you get to see this?

TIM: It will be on October 16th, on National Geographic channel

JOSH: That's fantastic

HRISHI: Looking forward to it.

JOSH: Thank you so much

TIM: You guys are doing, this is great, it's so much fun and it brings up so many great memories.

HRISHI: And that's it for our episode. Josh, I was wondering if you would permit me, to get a little bit nostalgic now that we're at the end of the first season.

JOSH: Oh Hrishi, I couldn't stop you if I tried

HRISHI: Do you know that it has been exactly half a year since we started our podcast?

JOSH: Is that right?

HRISHI: Yep

JOSH: Exactly?

HRISHI: 26 weeks

JOSH: My God, it seems like 25, it's flown by

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I mean that

HRISHI: Um, I wanted to play you something

JOSH: Oh, wow. Is it going to be you convincing me to make a podcast with you?

HRISHI: No, it's what's after that. Let me set the scene: I was at South by SouthWest, and I was in the middle of doing an interview with the band Chvrches, when my phone started blowing up. We had just the day before uploaded to iTunes, our cold open, our preview of what the show was going to be, thinking that it would take about a week to get it ingested into the system, before it went live. Instead, this is what I got in my voicemail inbox

[phone recording]

JOSH: It's up, it's up, [sings] the cold open is uuuppp! [speaking] I may be our first subscriber [laughs] I am. Alright, I want to, I'm going to tweet about it immediately because I cannot wait, I have no patience, you'll learn that about me if you haven't already, and um, what is it, hashtag TWWW or just hashtag WWW? I'm just going to have to pull the trigger on this, call me!

[end of recording]

JOSH: [laughs] Oh, I feel so raw and emotional now, I feel like you tore off my mask..

HRISHI: I love it, I love it

JOSH: My strong masculine, podcasting guy mask and you've..

[they both laugh]

JOSH: ... the quivering, enthusiastic schoolboy that I really am. Oh those heady early days

HRISHI: I will never delete that voicemail

JOSH: I remain, as excited about doing The West Wing Weekly as I was then, more so, and Wednesdays are a delight of seeing people react and checking how many people have listened to it.. and see who likes, who doesn't like, what they like, what they don't. This has been, and continues to be, a very enjoyable ride that we're taking with many thousands of people.

HRISHI: Yeah, some people have asked us, we've gotten some questions sometimes 'do you think you guys will actually do this for the entire series?', and at this point my feeling is 'why wouldn't we?'. I have been having so much fun, not only with you, but with our incredible community of listeners, and it really feels like a community. I see people, you know, tweeting at each other, strangers tweeting at each other, and, people commenting on Facebook and on the website, getting into spirited debates but also sharing jokes and bonding, and it feels like something that lives outside of whatever we're recording

JOSH: Absolutely, yeah I agree, I always feel the same way. Are you going to keep listening? If you're going to keep listening we're certainly going to keep doing it

HRISHI: Yeah,

JOSH: So poo-poo, we'll get through the entire seven seasons.

HRISHI: We're going to take a break for one week, because I'm going away, and we need to just recover because this has been an intense little flurry as we finish up this season

JOSH: We're going to rest and recharge right? I'm going to rest, and you're going to

to recharge

HRISHI: Right, and when we come back for season two, we're going to have some very special episodes, right away

JOSH: This is true, with some pretty special guests to discuss them with us

[audio clip]

TOMMY SCHLAMME: My name is Tommy Schlamme and I am the executive producer of The West Wing, and I directed the season opener of season two.

BRADLEY WHITFORD: Hi, my name is Rob L-, S\$%^, uh, hi my name is Bradley Whitford and I played Josh Lyman

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So this would be a great time to get your friends and family to listen and catch up to join in. So please spread the word about this show, we sincerely appreciate it. We also appreciate the hard work of Zach McNeas and Margaret Miller, who help us put the episodes together. So till then, if you want to talk to us, you can tweet at us, I'm @HrishiHirway, that's Hrishi with an 'H' at the front, Josh is @JoshuaMalina

JOSH: It's Josh with an 'H' in the middle

HRISHI: And our show is @WestWingWeekly, no 'H's

JOSH: We have a Facebook page, I don't know how to get to it...

HRISHI: You can go to Facebook.com/TheWestWingWeekly. You can also leave a comment for us on our website, thewestwingweekly.com

JOSH: And I suspect we'll be out of pins by the time you hear this because there are only a few left in stock, but you can preorder your West Wing Weekly lapel pin by clicking on 'Pin' on our website.

HRISHI: Or you can go directly to thewestwingweekly.com/pin. Get one so that then you can give a fellow West Wing Weekly listener the Safe Departure signal, the liftoff.

JOSH: That's right, and remember that PIN stands for Personal Identification Number

HRISHI: And therefore, don't say PIN number, because that sounds silly, you're saying personal identification number number.

JOSH: Right, it's lapel personal identification number, not lapel PIN number

HRISHI: Thanks to our guest Tim Matheson, and thanks to you for listening, we'll be back soon

JOSH: Ok

HRISHI: Ok

TIM: What's next?

[Outro Music]