

The West Wing Weekly
2.05: And It's Surely to Their Credit

[intro music]

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

JOSH: And I be Joshua Malina.

[HRISHI laughing]

HRISHI: Today we're talking about season two, episode five. It's called 'And It's Surely to Their Credit.'

JOSH: The teleplay was by Aaron Sorkin, the story by Kevin Falls & Laura Glasser; it was directed by Christopher Misiano, and it first aired on November 1st in the year 2000.

HRISHI: At the very beginning of this episode –

JOSH: I've got something pre-beginning!

HRISHI: Oh, OK. Let's go.

JOSH: "Previously on *The West Wing*" features a shot of Bradley Whitford as Josh Lyman being pulled out of the ambulance, and it reminded me that somebody commented that Josh is brought out of the ambulance head first, and that this is not traditional.

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: And that, normally, an injured person is put into an ambulance head first, and thus would be pulled out feet first. So, I did a little research, and indeed I think that it tends to be that you put a patient into an ambulance head first, because: one, the oxygen equipment is kept at the front of the vehicle, so if it's needed the patient's head ought to be there; it's less nauseating generally, to travel head first –

HRISHI: Fewer bumps.

JOSH: Right. And then the danger of a rear-end collision makes it more dangerous for the patient's head to be in the back.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Now, maybe – I'm even going to say inevitably – someone will explain to me why with gunshot victims they're sometimes put in feet first, or something like that, but I'm going to say that that person, whoever commented out there, made a good point, and I think for dramatic purposes, with that great overhead shot that Tommy talked about –

HRISHI: Right, the ER shot.

JOSH: Yeah, exactly – Josh is pulled out head first.

HRISHI: Yeah. Otherwise you've gotta delay the dramatic moment of seeing his face –

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Open up the doors and suddenly: Josh's shoes.

JOSH: Josh feet! Ohh!

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: What were you gonna say when I interrupted – when I so rudely interrupted you?

HRISHI: I like when Josh and Donna are disagreeing with each other about the principles of yelling:

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

DONNA: Did you hear me say "don't shout"?

JOSH: No.

DONNA: Do you know why?

JOSH: 'Cause you weren't shouting.

DONNA: That's right.

JOSH: That's right.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: They both say "that's right" like they have been vindicated.

JOSH: [laughing] Right.

HRISHI: I love that.

JOSH: That's how they argue.

HRISHI: This is the first episode of the season where we're returned to the Josh/Donna dynamic. And I like it!

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I'm happy to get back to it. And it almost seems like, after the trauma of his shooting, there's something even sweeter about Donna's teasing and, you know, exasperation with him.

JOSH: Yeah, I could see that. A little deepening of their relationship; clearly what's passed, even though we haven't seen much of it, in those three months is her deep concern for him, I'm sure, was made even clearer to him, and maybe there's a strengthening of their bond.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: A deepening of their relationship, I buy that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I also realized, as I guess, maybe – I don't know whether we touched on this or not, when you were pointing out that compressed time frame in episode three, I think? In the "Midterms" episode – I guess there was a decision not to have a long recuperation onscreen for Josh Lyman, and that was one of the reasons why they wanted to shoot forward to when he was just healed already.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: So, we didn't have to watch Brad Whitford go through nine different stages of playing wounded. I think they really spared us, they made a good decision.

HRISHI: Yeah. Because this is the show that we want, is all of them –

JOSH: We want them all whole.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I bet Brad was upset though. I bet Brad wanted to do wheelchair, to two crutches, to one crutch, to a cane, to forward roll, to "I'm back."

HRISHI: [laughing] A little Gene Wilder reference there?

JOSH: [laughing] Right.

[excerpt from 'Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory']

WONKA: Welcome, my friends, welcome to my chocolate factory.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We're introduced to our second Tribbey in the Bartlet administration.

JOSH: Our second Tribbey.

HRISHI: Not Roger Tribbey, who is now being played by Kiefer Sutherland in *Designated Survivor*.

JOSH: Wait, that's not true, is it? [both laughing]

HRISHI: No, I'm saying Roger Tribbey –

JOSH: Oh, right. He was the guy, he was the cabinet guy. Oh, yeah, I remember.

HRISHI: Which is why he's no longer – you know, they had to find a new Tribbey. So we get Lionel Tribbey.

JOSH: Right. As played by the wonderful John Larroquette.

HRISHI: Yeah. So many years after *Night Court* and he's still a lawyer.

JOSH: Yeah. There you go. I was surprised when I went to look up and see how many episodes he had done, to discover that this was it.

HRISHI: Yeah. One, done.

JOSH: I guess he just made a strong impression on me, and when you enter, bellowing, with a cricket bat, you tend to make a strong impression. But I had a sense, in my vague memory of the show, that he was on multiple episodes – but, indeed, this is it. One and out.

HRISHI: Yeah. He does make a strong impression. Especially the way he pronounces the word “umbrella.”

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

TRIBBEY: I was gonna go someplace warm, with a beach, somebody bringing me drinks with little umbrellas in them.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes! Yes. I had the same thought. It's like an actor thing. It works for me. His very distinct way of saying it. But I kinda liked it. It felt like a character thing. I like him in the role.

HRISHI: He's great. He's really funny.

JOSH: To me this was kind of like a palate cleanser of an episode.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Maybe I've used that before, but it's light, it doesn't move anything too far forward, it kind of just re-establishes the pace of life among the senior staff, and it's funny, and you have some nice dramatic moments that land – but it's not trying to accomplish too much. And after some

very, very heavy duty episodes, it feels about right to have an episode of this kind of pace and intensity – or lack thereof.

HRISHI: There are some moments in this episode that I really love but I have to say that overall I have mixed feelings about it.

JOSH: I bet I know why. Maybe I'm wrong.

HRISHI: Yeah, no you might. I bet you do, actually. OK, here's the synopsis as it appeared in *TV Guide*: "Ainsley Hayes meets her new boss, White House Counsel Lionel Tribbey, and receives her first assignment: clean up after two domestic policy staffers who presented inaccurate testimony before a House committee. Meanwhile, Sam hits on the idea of Josh suing the hate group whose members shot him, and CJ stares down a soon-to- retire General, who's planning to blast the administration on TV talk shows." And so my first issue is with that last subplot. And this is why I have mixed feelings. I think this episode might have my favorite Allison Janney performance to date.

JOSH: Oh, interesting. In her scene with the General?

HRISHI: In her scene with the General. I mean, she is incredible. First of all, the dialogue is incredible. This is like, for me, straight out of the best lines of dialogue from *A Few Good Men*, their confrontation. I always think of *A Few Good Men* when it gets really, like, the height of a mano a mano aggressive exchange.

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

CJ: I think jumping up and down on the Commander in Chief and then beating a path out of town is an act of cowardice.

GENERAL: I think alerting the public to staggeringly dangerous vulnerabilities of the current state of the military is an act of conscience.

CJ: And I would too sir, except, and I say this with all due respect –

GENERAL: Shove your respect! I don't want it!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And particularly involving the military-

HRISHI: Yeah, that of course.

JOSH: There's a little Colonel Jessop phraseology in there.

HRISHI: Exactly. The cadence of CJ's delivery is so fantastic, when she says:

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

CJ: No sir, again with all respect, I hate to disagree but it means unfit for service based on the Pentagon's "Two War" doctrine.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's so intense and musical at the same time, it's like listening to a drumline or something like that. And then afterwards, in the next part, when she comes down a little bit, when the general says he's going to go and do his thing, she says, "I don't think you will." And then she continues,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

CJ: I notice among your many decorations is the Distinguished Combat Service Medal. You're wearing it now, as well as in numerous photographs, including some taken with enlisted men in the field. You won it while on temporary duty with the Navy's USS Brook. The thing is, the Brook was never fired on, and it never shot its guns.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You can hear – she lets out these breaths that are a little ragged, like she has these little exhalations that like betray how badass she was, just a second ago. It shows that that was an intense thing for her to do, because she's riled up the whole episode, and then lets it rip. Anyway, that whole performance.

JOSH: I completely agree with you, I thought the same thing and I made notes to the effect that it's a great performance because – again, it's one of those great, Sorkin-penned, smackdowns but you can see during the scene that there is some real intimidation. It's not just pure, "I hold all the cards and I'm gonna hand you your ass on a platter" – exactly what you said. Including, you're right, at the end, I noticed this breath, this sort of like, "that wasn't easy." And I can also see it in her earlier in the scene, where it's not just "I'm gonna slam you".

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: It takes courage. You know, courage isn't the lack of fear, it's overcoming your fear. And there is some intimidation from this guy, and she really has courage, she is brave in this scene.

HRISHI: I like that in the middle of your comment you just dropped a little, beautiful pearl of wisdom, Josh.

JOSH: [laughing] Stolen from someone, I'm sure.

HRISHI: [laughing] I like it anyway, I'm gonna put it on a kitchen magnet and attribute it to you. There's even a little detail that I also love in this scene, which is that the General storms in and starts yelling, and CJ starts to respond but even as she responds, she gets up and she closes

the door, behind him. Because she's in the moment and she's reacting, but she also knows that a General coming in and making that much noise is going to be a story, and the press are close enough that they might catch wind of it. So she's trying to be discreet while also engaging in this verbal combat.

JOSH: Good detail. One wonders, was it director's choice, actor's choice? You're right.

HRISHI: Yeah. But my problem with this scene was, it again feels like an unearned solution, like deus ex machina.

JOSH: The stolen valor.

HRISHI: Exactly. Stolen valor.

JOSH: That that's what he should be guilty of and that that's the way out.

HRISHI: Right. If people don't know what stolen valor is, it's basically people either wearing medals that they haven't earned, or walking around in military uniform even if they aren't actually servicemen or servicewomen. There's a great episode of the podcast *Reply All* about stolen valor and the phenomenon on the Internet and how complicated it is, and I highly recommend it and I'll put a link to it on the website.

JOSH: I'm gonna check that out too. And there are lots of good videos on YouTube. If you just search "stolen valor."

HRISHI: Yeah, it's great, and it actually unpacks some of those – it's really fantastic listening. But yeah, so my problem with this episode is that the bad guys are a little too thin, too easily knocked down. Like this idea that a four-star General would wear – I mean, it seems a little bit beyond belief to me, that someone in that position, with all the other decorations that he's earned, would also include one that he hasn't earned. It just doesn't seem –

JOSH: It's very convenient, and I thought it was a hard buy as well. The guy's got a chest full of medals.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Would have loved to see the lapel pin in there. [HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: I mean, of course, it didn't exist then, but it would have been a great little shoutout to us. It would have been great if she'd pointed to it – that's the one. "That is for *West Wing Weekly* listeners, sir, and you are *not* a *West Wing Weekly* listener." No. But back to your actual substantive point. It's a hard buy.

HRISHI: It is. And why? The convenience.

JOSH: Both because it's too easy, and really? This guy? Is guilty of that?

HRISHI: And CJ happens to know but nobody else does? She's gonna out him? How does she have this information that nobody else does and he's never been called on it? I don't know. It just felt like, getting around the point of what he was actually trying to do, which is that he wanted to take on the President's lack of military experience and talk about the country's lack of military readiness, and she was gonna stop him with this left field, suddenly like magical fact that she had at her fingertips.

JOSH: Yeah. She might as well have just said, "Oh, I don't think you are going on those shows," and then produced a folder of pictures of him with a goat.

HRISHI: Exactly, yeah.

JOSH: "I happen to have these." It was kind of magic beans, there.

HRISHI: Yeah. And so I feel conflicted about that because, like I said, I think that is maybe my favorite Allison Janney performance so far, but it's just tainted a little bit with the fact that I don't buy the convenience of that.

JOSH: It's also – it's a curious deflation of her interpersonal victory there, when she next talks to the President in the Oval and he says, "OK, let him out of his box." Which I thought was interesting!

HRISHI: Yeah, you think so?

JOSH: Well, I mean, and I'm not saying it's bad. It's just part of me went, "Oh. She didn't even really have to do that." The President's saying, "No, let him do his thing." I mean, I thought it was interesting what he was saying, and his attitude, and his respect for the General, but part of me kinda went, "Oh. After that great win, he's just telling her..." But you know, she takes it like a pro.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. And I think it is even more respectful that part of the Bartlet administration is letting those who disagree with you have a voice. Even just the inclusion of, like, Ainsley Hayes, is a further example of that, of like letting other voices in. But, my other problem is with the Ainsley subplot with the two staffers, Steve Joyce and Mark Brookline. Because these guys just feel like cartoon villains to me. Like they're such overt douchebags that it seems almost a little hard to believe that Sam and Toby would have them on the Communications staff to begin with. They seem like dummies and they seem like jerks. So, you know, you could maybe tolerate one without the presence of the other, but I would argue you shouldn't –

JOSH: Yeah, they are truly jerk-y. I have to be honest too, I had – I didn't really quite track what the essence of what they had done was, and what they were being – I didn't quite follow that.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I don't think you need to.

JOSH: No. Once I think that I don't need to do something, I don't do it. That's how I'm built. So certainly as a TV-watcher, if I think, "Oh, I don't need to follow this so closely," I just start looking at the clothes and the pretty pictures.

HRISHI: [laughing] No, I even noted that, like, it doesn't matter what the Rocklyn memo is.

JOSH: OK, good.

HRISHI: You know, they had to give a testimony about this memo. They said they didn't have it; they did have it.

JOSH: Given that it doesn't matter so much, their reaction to Ainsley was incredibly jerk-y. What – I don't even understand, beyond just being utter d-bags, why they would respond that way to her.

HRISHI: I think, you know, the idea is – and this is sort of set up in the "previously on" – is that people know who Ainsley is; she's been like a vocal critic of the administration, so people in the administration see her as the enemy. So here she is, in the middle of their world, and so I think they have contempt for her just to begin with, before she's even said anything, because they know who she is from her prior existence within the world of the show.

JOSH: Yeah, I suspect you're right.

HRISHI: But these guys seem like jerks and dummies, and as much as I'm like, "eh, these aren't great characters", it then takes me to a further level of disbelief to think that they would go through the effort of collecting dead flowers to put in a bouquet with the word "b***h" on her desk. Like, that's just – who makes that effort? If they can't even be bothered to order pizza for themselves.

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

BROOKLINE: Did anybody order a pizza? And if they didn't, could they do it now?

[end excerpt]

[both laughing]

JOSH: That is a fair point, Hrishi. I thought the aspect to which you objected was going to turn out to be the men-to-the-rescue nature of the resolution to that storyline.

HRISHI: You know, I didn't even get there because I was just still annoyed about the premise of it; forget about the resolution.

JOSH: It's a bit more damsel-in-distress-y than I had hoped. She is deeply upset by the way they treated her, and that gets Sam's testosterone flowing and he and Tribbey both come to her rescue. And on one level I'm like, "Yeah, they are sticking up for her, even though they've given

her grief and they have an objection to her even being part of the staff, they've got her back because you know what, she *is* part of the staff now." But it also felt a little bit like...

HRISHI: The boys all save the girl?

JOSH: Yeah, exactly. Boys to the rescue!

HRISHI: Yeah. I guess I hadn't thought of it in those terms because I'd thought of it more – I was more struck about the support for her patriotism. And I think you're probably right, and your criticism is just, and I took it the way I was probably meant to take it, which was, "isn't it great that these guys who are such staunch Democrats, who are such strong voices in the White House for particular positions, for them, there is a line you do not cross." And this is something we've talked about before, the idea of opponents versus enemies, and respecting – just a general level of respect, even if you disagree with somebody. And that is bigger than party. And so, even though she's a Republican, it's more like, Democrats to the rescue of a Republican because they respect her opinion and her right to an opinion and her patriotism and her sense of duty. Not so much, these are boys and this is a girl. But I totally grant your objection to that, and I don't think that you're wrong.

JOSH: It also made me wonder throughout, actually – now, she's been a particularly vocal opponent of the administration:

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

LEO: Editorials, op-eds; he's a drunk, he's dangerous, he should resign.

AINSLEY: I wrote one of those op-ed pieces.

LEO: I know.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And just to jump in on that, I love the way that Leo says,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

LEO: I know.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Me too.

HRISHI: When he acknowledges – just that delivery of that one line – oh! So good.

JOSH: Right. It's interesting, because I mean – yeah, just that quick little moment that we get – here's a guy who absolutely knows and should have every reason maybe to object to her presence, and he's got no problem with it, and he can dismiss it in a beat.

HRISHI: Exactly. And not just that, he is her lifeline really. Up to that point, he is the only one who's nice to her.

JOSH: I liked the whole, the production design is terrific as he takes her down into the steam – what is it?

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

LEO: This is the steam pipe trunk distribution venue.

AINSLEY: I'm working in the steam pipe trunk distribution venue?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's really fantastic, just as they keep going down, and around, and I'm almost waiting to see somebody from *Young Frankenstein* pass... it's really funny. And then when he finally gets her to her actual office, and you hear the whirring and the clicking and the humming, it felt like a computer game.

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: I've played computer games that looked like they took place in that room.

HRISHI: [laughing] Right. *Doom. Wolfenstein 3D?*

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah, something like that. Yeah, might be. So yeah, I loved the design of all that. I wonder, just generally – I mean, White House Counsel, how important is it that your politics fall in line with the administration you're representing? I wonder – I mean, it's a question I can't answer. And I know that she's an extreme example, but I wonder when hiring staff, whether that – is it important? Do you have to be a great lawyer, or do you have to be a great lawyer who's a Democrat to be in the administration's White House Counsel crew?

HRISHI: Right, I think one of the tenets of the law in general is that you're supposed to have a clear-eyed stance for the person that you're representing and their position. You know, it doesn't matter whether or not you think somebody you're defending is guilty, your job is to defend them. It makes sense that she's – she's not being brought in to write speeches. She's being brought in to work in the Counsel's office, because she's a lawyer and those are things that are determined by the law.

JOSH: Right, yeah.

HRISHI: Not by politics, necessarily.

JOSH: Exactly. All of that goes to my thought that people really should be over it by now – she’s on the team, and people should be a little bit more like Leo, you know.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: She’s on the team. He was against her initially, but once the President tells him, “No no, I want her”, he gets it.

HRISHI: Exactly. Even Sam at the end, in his objection, says,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

SAM: She just – she works here.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: With like a plainness, of like, how do you not get it? This is her job?

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: There’s an Ainsley line that I love, when she’s trying so hard to be diplomatic and be helpful, talking to Joyce and Brookline. When she says,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

AINSLEY: This is so easy to fix, we are going to pick up yardage.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I know that Aaron Sorkin loves his sports metaphors; that’s one that I just, I love that one.

JOSH: That is a good line of dialogue. There’s another moment – since I touched on the male/female, men-to-the-rescue of it all – there’s also, I thought – unless I misread the moment – an odd moment where Toby and CJ are chatting...

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

TOBY: By the way, you are a beautiful woman. And no one around here has ever assumed you are either ambitious or stupid.

CJ: Toby?

TOBY: Yep.

CJ: Took two years.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That felt a little odd to me in CJ's voice, that – like, I've been waiting two years for you to say that I'm attractive?

HRISHI: I don't think that's what she meant.

JOSH: What is – so I thought I might have misread the moment.

HRISHI: I do think that line is strange, and I was like, "I don't think this line is coming across in the way that it's supposed to." I think what it is actually supposed to be saying is that it took two years for them to respect her opinion, and not think of her – to trust her, you know, she's been working, we've seen in previous episodes how they aren't letting her in, and I think when she's saying, "it took two years", she's saying it took two years for them to not believe that she was stupid.

JOSH: OK, good. I believe that you are right and, even as I wrote down that note, I thought, "I might just be misunderstanding this moment".

HRISHI: I think that's how it's meant to come across.

JOSH: Something felt off about that.

HRISHI: When I was watching it I paused it, and I was like- I've always bumped a little on that line. But this is again another example of an episode where charges of sexism within *The West Wing*, or within Aaron Sorkin's writing – this is a complicated sandwich. You know, there are a lot of layers to this sandwich. And you've got the bread of what you were saying about Sam and Tribbey to the rescue for Ainsley, but then you have the jam here of CJ's speech, explicitly talking about the sexism within the plot of the show. You know, Toby says a pretty sexist thing that, like, usually when you see a woman who looks this way and acts this way that means only one thing, this negative interpretation. And CJ calls him out and says, "That's sexist. And I've been subjected to sexism myself." And makes her point, and I think – you know, the ambiguity of that line aside – she wins that argument and she wins that point. So I think it's so complicated to say, "Uh, look at all the rampant sexism in *The West Wing*," the way some people would like to say. You also can't just dismiss it outright, because there is the point that you brought up. So it's, it's tricky.

JOSH: Yeah. Yeah, no, it's worthy of discussion but it's hard to tease out what is an interesting portrayal of *The West Wing*, and what is problematic in *The West Wing*, the show. This episode also includes the First Lady getting a randy President Bartlet to acknowledge the role of women in the history of the country, and their achievements.

HRISHI: Exactly. There's another – very explicit, there it is in the text.

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

ABBEY: When it comes to historical figures being memorialized in this country, women have been largely overlooked. Nelly Bly is just the tip of the iceberg.

BARTLET: I couldn't possibly hear about the rest of the iceberg right now.

ABBEY: Elizabeth Blackwell was the first American woman to be awarded an MD. She founded the Women's Medical College...

BARTLET: Keep talking... [music grows louder as their voices fade out]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's in the text. There are other things conflicting, maybe, in subtext, maybe – I don't know, there's no easy answer for it. But I like talking about it, I like thinking about it, certainly. So she goes to Cochran's Mills to dedicate a statue to Nelly Bly.

JOSH: Cochran's Mills. I had to look it up to make sure it wasn't just a dirty-sounding city that Aaron had made up.

HRISHI: It turns out that the Cochran in Cochran's Mills is actually her dad.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Nelly Bly was not her real name; her real name was Cochran.

JOSH: Nelly Cochran. I think she made a good choice. I'd go with Bly too.

HRISHI: [laughing] There is no statue of Nelly Bly, sadly enough.

JOSH: Oh, is that true?

HRISHI: Yeah. There's a memorial for her, a little monument in the place where she's buried, which is in the Bronx.

JOSH: How about that.

HRISHI: Now I'm thinking about Tribbey and the Gilbert and Sullivan of it all, as referenced in the title of the episode.

JOSH: Yes. Or as nearly referenced in the title of the episode. This is another classic, like, weird Aaron tick. Why didn't he just quote the song correctly? Why isn't this episode called, "And It's Greatly to Their Credit"? Because the line from *HMS Pinafore* is "and it's greatly to his credit." Why? Why, Aaron, why?

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: Why "And It's Surely to Their Credit"?

HRISHI: Yep. That is pretty funny.

JOSH: I think he's rewriting Gilbert and Sullivan. I think he was like, "Eh, this sounds better."

HRISHI: Maybe he was just thinking ahead about his Google search results. And when people are looking for this episode he didn't wanna compete with the song, he was like, "I'll just change it a little bit."

JOSH: Wow. Very Machiavellian. Very interesting. One of the other funny things is that, as I watch this whole thing play out about who's right – is it *Penzance*, is it *HMS Pinafore* – I kept thinking, "For the love of God, somebody invent the smartphone already."

[both laughing]

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: This really should be a three second question.

HRISHI: That's true. Search engines did exist at this point. But maybe they -

JOSH: Yes, I know. I mean, really – I would have liked somebody to have whipped out an iPhone and settled it.

HRISHI: I like when Sam points out,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

SAM: I'm a lawyer, everybody in the room's a lawyer.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But he didn't mention that apparently everyone in the room is also a huge Gilbert and Sullivan nerd.

JOSH: [laughing] Everyone!

HRISHI: Like, what is the likelihood that every single person who works in the White House knows just an encyclopedic amount of information of Gilbert and Sullivan musicals and who says what in which.

JOSH: I know. Tribbey gets in a little piggishness as well:

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

SAM: I hate to stick my head in the lion's mouth but I gotta ask you; were you the recording secretary of the Princeton Gilbert and Sullivan Society for two years?

TRIBBEY: *No, but then again I'm not a woman, so...*

SAM: *I'm just saying.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That classic putting someone down by comparing them to a woman –

HRISHI: Yeah. That grates. Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Let's take a break to thank our sponsors.

[ad break]

JOSH: By the way, I am a big Gilbert and Sullivan fan, and I should mention that I played the role of Sir Joseph Porter KCB, in *HMS Pinafore*, at Camp Ranger in 1975 at age 9 during a heatwave – we had to do the show outdoors – and the scenery, being painted paper, representing the ocean, blew away during the performance.

HRISHI: [laughing] That's just how good you were. You blew them away.

JOSH: Yeah. Yeah. Some people blow away the audience; I blew away the set. I also sang the role of Sir Joseph – that song, "He Is an Englishman" is about Sir Joseph Porter – I sang the role in concert with the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, as conducted by my cousin Stuart, a few years ago.

HRISHI: Hit me with a line. Something.

JOSH: Oh no. God no.

HRISHI: Come on, you've gotta give me something.

JOSH: Hrishi, I haven't warmed up.

[excerpt from "For He Is an Englishman" from *HMS Pinafore*]

*BOATSWAIN: For he himself has said it
And it's greatly to his credit
[fading] That he is an Englishman*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: By the way, nice gesture, but I could just see, twenty minutes after the final scene of this episode, Ainsley's going round taking all the Gilbert and Sullivan posters down – she's like, maybe one of these – or maybe even two! It's like a theme park.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: She's like, "Hey, loved the music, nice gesture, I don't want my office decorated like this."

HRISHI: This is how I feel a little bit on this podcast when it comes to *Star Trek*; I made one reference to red shirts, the fact that I knew what a red shirt was, and suddenly people think that I'm this huge *Star Trek* fan and my whole world is about *Star Trek*. I don't even know that much about the show. And I imagine Ainsley's in the same position, that she's like, "I just happen to know this one thing, I saw *Pinafore*, so you know."

JOSH: That's very funny.

HRISHI: "I've seen two plays and you happened to pick them and now this is my defining characteristic to all of you."

JOSH: Sometimes like, I don't know, you eat a cookie, and you're like, "Oh, this is good" and you get that from the people you were with for your next birthday gift every year for the rest of your life.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: You're like, "Hey, I kinda liked it. It was one cookie!"

HRISHI: Yep.

JOSH: That's not a great analogy. Just to make this as much about me as possible, and my life at camp –

HRISHI: I love it.

JOSH: I had an even worse version once: my great aunt Jean, may she rest in peace, used to send me little packages at camp, and she sent me a big package of gum. I remember it very well. They were like, coins of white, white gum, in little silver single serve packages, and I *loved* them, and I raved to her and I thanked her, and that set up a many, many years of getting not that gum, but other gum that she would send me. That's very small of me to complain about it, but.

HRISHI: Yeah, she gave you gum.

JOSH: She was like, "You love this!" I'm like, "No! I like the coin gum! The white coin gum!"

HRISHI: I had an auntie – family friend but, you know, we call them auntie – for whom my defining characteristic was that I am a musician. And that is a legitimate thing to hone in on, but the way that it manifested in gifts from her – one time she gave me a wall hanging of like two music notes, to put up in my room.

JOSH: “Oh, you love music!”

HRISHI: Yeah, “You love music! Here’s...

JOSH: “He’s gonna love these!”

HRISHI: “...two giant music notes to put on your wall... in your room.” Every time she would go to Hard Rock Cafés she would bring me back a guitar pin from the Hard Rock Café because I played guitar.

JOSH: [laughing] There’s something actually excruciatingly sweet about that.

HRISHI: I know. It was both those things.

JOSH: And did you hang the notes?

HRISHI: [sighs]

JOSH: Or only when auntie came over?

HRISHI: Yeah, I think I placed them on a shelf strategically – at strategic times.

JOSH: I’m thinking that’s what Ainsley did too. She’s got a stack of Gilbert and Sullivan and D’Oyly Carte posters, and when she hears that Sam’s going to come down and discuss something she runs around putting them back up.

HRISHI: Right. In the rare event that someone’s going to be at the steampunk – steampunk?! Steam pipe trunk distribution venue.

JOSH: Why do I like that phrase so much?

HRISHI: Steam pipe trunk distribution venue?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Because you are a Sorkin player and clearly you’re meant to like it – it’s said multiple times in this episode, and it’s said – this is not the last time we will hear that phrase.

JOSH: Oh, is that true?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I didn’t know that. There’s another classically Sorkian linguistic construct in this episode, when Donna and Josh are chatting, and at one point she says,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

DONNA: This relates to leaf peeping how?

[end excerpt]

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: And I know – it reminded me, as Jeremy on *Sports Night*, I once had a classic line butt into a scene, where it said – we were talking about Easter with Isaac, it's kind of a theological discussion:

[excerpt from *Sports Night*]

JEREMY: Jesus said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have."

ISAAC: What's your question?

JEREMY: This relates to the bunny rabbit how?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love it!

JOSH: I thought, oh! It's such a great little Aaron thing.

HRISHI: Speaking of leaf peeping, for a second.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: The President used to be the Governor of New Hampshire.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: In New Hampshire, leaf peeping is quite the thing. When he says,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Leaf peeping, is that something we do now?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He should be so familiar with leaf peeping.

JOSH: Can I ask you, though?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And this shows you the depth of my research – what is leaf peeping?

HRISHI: I'm glad you asked that, Josh.

JOSH: That's what I'm here for, Hrish.

HRISHI: Because now, I'd like to cut to a phone call that I had with someone from the department of – New Hampshire Travel and Tourism Department.

JOSH: What the – what?

KRIS: My name is Kris Neilsen; I'm the Communications and Social Media Manager at New Hampshire division of Travel and Tourism Development.

HRISHI: What is leaf peeping?

KRIS: Leaf peeping is an activity that happens throughout the fall; it involves people travelling around to areas with deciduous trees, for them to see how the leaves change colors.

HRISHI: Is it a big thing in New Hampshire?

KRIS: Leaf peeping in New Hampshire is a really big thing. I actually do a blog on leaf peeping, it's called "Leaf it to Kris" because it's such a big thing and people wanna know where to see the foliage right now and what else is going on.

HRISHI: So what do you think of a New Hampshire Governor not knowing what leaf peeping is?

KRIS: I guess I'd have to meet that Governor, and find out where they'd spent their time to not know what it was about.

HRISHI: [laughing] Thank you so much, that was perfect. KRIS: Alright, bye-bye.

HRISHI: Leaf peeping – President Bartlet, you should know better. Of all people, he should know better.

JOSH: In fairness though, as has been pointed out on our website by a variety of New Hampshiremen and New Hampshirewomen, the former Governor of New Hampshire doesn't know how to pronounce Concord, New Hampshire – he says "Concord" [stress on second syllable].

[West Wing episode 2.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I put the hammer to farms in Concord, Salem, Laconia, and Pelham.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, it's actually "Concord" [stress on first syllable].

JOSH: Yeah, he also says that classic line: I came, I saw, I Concord.

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: So it's really just, I think it's a pronunciation thing, I don't think it has to do with New Hampshire –

HRISHI: Josh. Josh!

JOSH: That's bad. Yeah, you see, I set the bar low and I still manage to crawl under it.

[HRISHI still laughing]

JOSH: But anyway, what was I trying to say? What I'm saying is, he doesn't know New Hampshire that well, and, uh – nor does he know Julius Caesar. Did you used to jump into piles of leaves, as a kid?

HRISHI: Yes, when I was rarely given the opportunity. The thing is, my chores at home included raking the leaves. So it meant I would have to actually make the pile to jump into it, and then I would have to be responsible for raking them back up. So it kind of took some of the fun out of it.

JOSH: Ah. That would take some of the joy out of it, yeah. No, I was just a mad neighborhood leaf-jumper and left it to others to clean up my mess. Although I remember my mom was always concerned that dogs would poop in piles of leaves, which took some of the joy out of it, I was like, "Oh, am I jumping into a big pile of poop?" Never encountered poop in a big pile of leaves, but-

HRISHI: That would have been a great trap to set for you. A doody trap.

JOSH: They're all about doody.

[both laughing]

JOSH: Yeah, I went there.

HRISHI: Speaking of moms – oh, this is a terrible connection. I'm gonna change that transition.

JOSH: No, please do it anyway. I think this is the episode of bad transitions, poor analogies, and horrible left turns.

HRISHI: Well, this is horrible.

JOSH: Do it, do it, do it.

HRISHI: Hearing the President and First Lady talking about having sex, was not totally unlike imagining one's own parents having sex.

JOSH: Little bit.

HRISHI: It's a little disturbing. Still kinda cute, but also a touch disturbing.

JOSH: Yes, and I thought it was odd that they would drag Charlie into it.

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: I feel like, I thought maybe that they were angling for a threesome.

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

ABBEY: Your electrolytes and metabolic panels are within normal limits, chest x-rays are clear, and prostate screens are fine.

CHARLIE: Okay.

ABBEY: So, we can have sex now.

CHARLIE: [pause] Okay, that's not me and you, right?

ABBEY: Go.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Really? Really? He's just a kid!

HRISHI: There are no boundaries, apparently. The First Lady is really – she's a great flirt.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: It's not a skill that comes to everybody. Clearly. One might only look at my teenage years for evidence.

[JOSH laughs]

HRISHI: What? There's also a little reference that she gives back to Lilly Mays, which is a nice, deep callback.

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

ABBEY: You talk to Charlie. I'll talk to Lilly. We'll coordinate our schedules and we'll find a free hour.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That reminded me that, you know, the one time we'd met her Chief of Staff, Lilly Mays, way back at the beginning of the first season. So for all the weirdness of calling- introducing a new character and calling him Lionel Tribbey when we already had Roger Tribbey, it's like, oh maybe there's just some shortsightedness, some forgetfulness – but obviously there isn't that much forgetfulness, because she's remembered that her Chief of Staff's name is Lilly.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true.

HRISHI: How do you feel about the clarinet – not an oboe, I believe, I believe it's a clarinet – when Leo says to Ainsley,

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

LEO: Ainsley, don't worry about Sam or Josh and Toby or CJ or the Democrats on the Hill or the Republicans on TV. You're here to serve the President. Anyway. Welcome to the White House.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Well, I certainly noted it, and I felt that it was more muted – is it possible the volume's been dialed a little bit back? It didn't feel intrusive to me.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah, I thought it was nice. I loved Emily Procter's performance – like her joy at getting the gig to take on fixing Brookline and Joyce's mistake.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: She's like, barely able to contain her smile, in the face of Tribbey's grumpiness.

JOSH: Yeah, that was a nice touch.

HRISHI: It's really great. And I wanna go back, we mentioned it in passing, but her own iambic pentameter – this is a classic moment from this episode, for me:

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

AINSLEY: I'd like to do well on this, my first assignment. Any advice you could give me that might point me the way of success would be, by me, appreciated.

TRIBBEY: Well, not speaking in iambic pentameter might be a step in the right direction.

[end excerpt]

[both laughing]

HRISHI: That's one, this is where we're like – when we were talking to Emily Procter in our last episode, where I was wondering if that would have been written that way by Aaron, if it hadn't been Emily speaking the line.

JOSH: Fair question.

HRISHI: She delivers it in such a great way.

JOSH: We saw Daniel Roebuck, Daniel Roebuck as Lieutenant Buckley.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's one of those actors who's done – I looked him up on IMDB, he's done 220 things.

[both laughing]

JOSH: He's just ever-present; I remember him playing Jay Leno in *The Late Shift*.

HRISHI: Right, right.

JOSH: That Letterman/Leno TV movie. Another excellent character guy in a small role.

HRISHI: I remember seeing him most recently before this in *Jane the Virgin*, playing Michael Cordero's dad – *Jane the Virgin*, which also features Kathleen Bird York.

JOSH: Ah, very nice.

HRISHI: I also love “a special meeting of the government.”

JOSH: “A special meeting of the government.”

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I have to go now, to a special meeting... of the government.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Could we ask our listeners to only refer from now on to coitus as “a special meeting of the government”?

JOSH: Let's. But in any event certainly not to refer to sex as “coitus”.

[both laughing]

JOSH: I think that's the very least we can expect from them.

HRISHI: That is fair, fair enough. Yep. I apologize. I liked when Toby steps in and shuts down Sam:

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

SAM: I'm a lawyer, everybody in the room's a lawyer.

LEO: From the Counsel's office.

SAM: Good. And I'll tell everybody else to keep their fingers crossed the story hasn't been leaked that we withheld evidence then tried to cover our tracks.

TOBY: Sam, that's enough.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's really interesting. Sam's talking to Leo, who is Toby's boss, but Toby's the one who comes in and is like, "dude".

JOSH: Yeah, interesting power dynamics in that scene.

HRISHI: Exactly, yeah, that's a better way of putting it. I appreciated that insight. And then, this is a thing we've seen Toby do, is after that, when that person is out of the room, he then stands up for them. Once again, he stands up for Sam, you know, Sam leaves, and then Toby says, "His point isn't wholly without merit." It's just a great insight into Toby as power broker, as-how he fits into this family.

JOSH: Yeah and, it's also, I think, a little reflection of the respect for propriety.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: That even when there's substance to what the person is saying, if it's not really being expressed at the right time in the right way, you might get your mini-smackdown and then, as you say, he leaves and immediately Toby will say, "There is something to what he's saying, though."

HRISHI: Right, exactly. Like he acknowledges the merit of the substance, while also admonishing him for the way he's delivering it. In the last episode and in this episode we see a side of Sam that I think we haven't very much, or maybe at all – which is Sam as a guy on the warpath.

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: And also, yeah, like a little bit more aggressive and a little bit more hostile. I do like, though, the sort of, the opposite side of that, when he comes to the idea that Josh should sue the KKK. It's in such stark contrast to the way that Toby talked about trying to figure out a

solution – you know in the last episode, when Toby’s railing about trying to get around the First and Fourth Amendments and doing everything he can to subpoena all these people who are related to hate groups. But Sam comes across what he thinks is this really elegant way of achieving some effect and meting out some kind of justice for Josh, while also getting some justice for the American people through the government. And all those cases that Sam brings up – I like this about the show so much – all those cases about people suing the Ku Klux Klan, those are all real cases that were actually won by the Southern Poverty Law Center. It’s so great that you get like, Nelly Bly and Elizabeth Blackwell, and-

JOSH: There’s real content to the show.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah. Even though that is just in there to help serve the plot a little bit about Josh and how he’s going to deal with the ramifications of what he’s – you know, the medical bills and all this stuff. It’s great, you do get that civics lesson.

JOSH: I agree with you – we’ll frequently hear from teachers, whether middle school or high school or even college courses that include or even focus on *The West Wing*, and you can see how an episode, any given episode, can be a great jumping off point to further discussion about any number of issues and historical events and it is – the show is rich, in that sense, with content.

HRISHI: Yeah. Just one of the cases he mentions is Donald versus the United Klans of America, and you can look up that case on the Southern Poverty Law Center, we’ll put the link up on the website.

[West Wing episode 2.05 excerpt]

SAM: Donald v. United Klans of America. They sued on behalf of a black youth who was lynched. The jury returned a seven-million-dollar verdict and deeded the headquarters to the mother. The court took the bat cave, Josh.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That same group, the United Klans? Turns out they’re the same people who bombed the Birmingham Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in ’63, the one where four little girls were killed.

JOSH: Right, yeah.

HRISHI: Same people. That’s who had their headquarters taken away. It’s just, I love that you can take a little thing, a little stray line of dialogue, and have that whole history lesson, civics lesson out of it.

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: How about Sam’s penmanship?

JOSH: Ah!

HRISHI: I already find the guy so swoon-worthy, but then on top of that he has to have beautiful penmanship? That's a quality that I really admire, that is –

JOSH: Not just beautiful penmanship, but quick! Fast, fast, fast! And beautiful.

HRISHI: Very fast!

JOSH: I only wish it had actually been calligraphy, and then he'd done a couple of, you know, illustrations of flowers as well. He took four seconds.

HRISHI: Exactly. Came up with the illuminated manuscript of –

[both laughing]

HRISHI: Out of the Gutenberg Bible.

JOSH: That's funny. Now I want somebody to Photoshop that, some really ridiculously elaborated version of his sign.

HRISHI: Yeah. Any calligraphers out there, if you can create the Gutenberg Bible version, blackletter version of "You're fired. S. Seaborn", we will put that up everywhere.

JOSH: *HMS Pinafore* isn't really about duty.

HRISHI: Is it not?!

JOSH: Not really. *HMS Pinafore* I think is about – if you're gonna give an overall, an overall description – is about class distinctions in Britain. There's one character, Josephine, who feels a duty to marry Sir Joseph rather than another character, but it's not really – not really about duty, I don't think.

HRISHI: Everything I know about *HMS Pinafore* I learned from Side Show Bob singing on an episode of *The Simpsons*, the "Cape Feare" episode of *The Simpsons*.

JOSH: Ooh, I love that episode, I forgot about that.

HRISHI: Yeah. As you know, I don't know that much about musicals, especially – *especially* – when you start to get into the topsy-turvy of Gilbert and Sullivan.

JOSH: Ah, look at you.

HRISHI: This is my, “Ah, the grand unified theory.” “Do you know anything about it?” “No.” I don’t know anything about Gilbert and Sullivan, except I can say, “topsy-turvy”; I know that Kevin Kline was in a movie about Gilbert and Sullivan, and I tried to watch it, and I fell asleep.

JOSH: Kevin Kline’s in that movie?

HRISHI: I might be wrong.

JOSH: It’s a Mike Lee movie, yes?

HRISHI: I think you’re right, yes.

JOSH: Kevin Kline is in the movie version of *The Pirates of Penzance*, or *The Slave of Duty*.

HRISHI: You’re right. *Topsy-Turvy* does not have Kevin Kline in it, but it is – it is a Mike Leigh movie.

JOSH: Go watch the movie.

HRISHI: [sighs]

JOSH: It’s fantastic, it’s about, I guess, the production of the *Mikado*, I think the original production.

HRISHI: I am not misremembering the falling asleep while trying to watch it.

JOSH: [laughing] Well, let me ask you this. So, we know, the listenership knows well of your distaste for musicals – does that carry over into light comic opera, or are you just – have you ever listened to a Gilbert and Sullivan production or an album?

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: I mean, the wordplay alone is brilliant, the lyrics-

HRISHI: I wouldn’t know.

JOSH: The libretti of these operas – you wouldn’t know! I think you need to expose yourself to it. I have an idea sometimes to present it somehow in LA; I don’t know if anyone is doing G&S in LA, but I like the idea of getting people you wouldn’t expect to perform this stuff to do it, like concert-style. It would be fun.

HRISHI: Then I’ll wait for that to watch Gilbert and Sullivan.

[both laughing]

JOSH: OK. Alright.

HRISHI: And that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for joining us, and we hope you'll join us next time.

JOSH: Yeah. Yeah we do. We really hope so. And in the meantime, you can follow us on Twitter – and really, why haven't you yet? I'm @JoshuaMalina, Hrishi is @HrishikeshHirway, and the show is @WestWingWeekly.

HRISHI: I think we have so much fun on Twitter – I hope that everybody who listens at least checks in, even if you don't have a Twitter account, because there is all this additional conversation that's happening outside of the podcast. Both of us engage with people about thoughts and follow up ideas – for example, it was just pointed out to me, that Andrew Mackintosh, the actor who played Andrew Mackintosh, is the son of Morgan Freeman.

JOSH: Whaaaaaat. That makes him Jesus!

HRISHI: Right. Or even just, when he says to Charlie: "Know what your mother would say? Same thing my father used to say: if they're shooting at you, you know you're doing something right." Imagine that being said by Morgan Freeman, how much better that already incredible moment is.

JOSH: How about that? And so, someone tweeted that information to you?

HRISHI: Yeah, someone tweeted it at us, at @WestWingWeekly, and I retweeted it, and I'm mentioning it here on the episode, but there are things like that that happen every week. So please follow us on Twitter, I think it would be fun.

JOSH: And it's not too late to give me crap on Twitter for not loving the Jenna Jacobs scene. That seems to be evergreen. So, come and take your shots at me.

HRISHI: That's true. You can also find us on Facebook. We're at [facebook.com/thewestwingweekly](https://www.facebook.com/thewestwingweekly). You can always leave a comment for us on our website, which is really the central repository for each episode: that's [thewestwingweekly.com](https://www.thewestwingweekly.com). Remember we have one more week right now on our first ever *West Wing Weekly* t-shirts – if you want to go get one, go to [thewestwingweekly.com/shirt](https://www.thewestwingweekly.com/shirt).

JOSH: Buying a pin or a shirt is a great way to help support the podcast, and to give us your money.

HRISHI: And to recognize your fellow *West Wing Weekly* TV book club members.

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HRISHI: OK.

JOSH: OK.

HRISHI: What's next?

["He Is an Englishman" plays]

[outro music]