

The West Wing Weekly
4.00: "President Bartlet Special"
Guest: Martin Sheen

[ad insert]

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And mine is Joshua Malina. This is a very special episode of *Blossom*, no, of The West Wing Weekly. We finally got to sit down with Martin Sheen and so we decided to celebrate. Let's give him his own episode. The man deserves it. Hrishi and I were planning originally to pair our talk with Martin with our own conversation about the season opener "20 Hours in America" but then we decided to make an executive decision and give the president his own episode of the podcast. We hope you enjoy it. We think you will.

HRISHI: Thank you so much for finding time to speak with us.

MARTIN: I'm delighted.

HRISHI: We actually have some gifts for you.

MARTIN: You do?

HRISHI: We do. Every president has a challenge coin and so we thought that President Bartlet deserves one too.

MARTIN: Oh my...Thank you...

HRISHI: [crosstalk] so here's one.

MARTIN: Look at that! Wow! Bartlet's Army...ohh! Look at that...Do you know someone did a survey on the show for all of our seven years and do you know what the most frequent phrase was? "Hey."

ALL: [laughter]

JOSH: That's funny. That's Sorkin's legacy

MARTIN: Exactly. How often do you remember saying it? I mean, did you ever do an episode where you didn't say "hey" to somebody?

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's funny. Hey. Yeah, no, there's a lot of hey.

MARTIN: [laughs]

JOSH: We were making "hey" for seven years...

MARTIN: Thank you for that. That's a treasure, yeah.

HRISHI: And here's another. This is a lapel pin.

MARTIN: Oh my...thank you very much.

HRISHI: Thank you. We focus in on the word "OK" or I've always noticed how much it's used in different contexts to mean different things- the versatility that Aaron Sorkin found with the word, with just the work "OK"...

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Yeah

HRISHI: always blows me away.

MARTIN: ...yeah, yeah, we fell under the tutelage of a very, very special writer. Didn't you feel that way?

JOSH: Absolutely. So I knew Aaron for a long time before *West Wing*. I weaselled my way in through my friendship with him. You must have known him, I guess, prior to this. You did *The American President*...

MARTIN: *The American President*.

JOSH: Had you spent much time with him during that process, or just?

MARTIN: Hardly any at all, no.

JOSH: I had the feeling you'd say that.

MARTIN: Yeah and when he called me for *The West Wing* I was in Ireland, and we hooked up and I had taken the script with me, the pilot script, and he said he would call me cause I was planning a trip to Ireland and we hooked up and I said "yes" before he answered the phone [laughter].

JOSH: [laughter] As he picked up the receiver. So having read the script, you were just, yeah, sold?

MARTIN: Oh God yeah, and did you know this? I don't know if I told many people but when I agreed to do the show they said, "Ok, here's the deal, the show is not about the president or the first family." Did you know this?

JOSH: Yes, the original intent, the focus was going to be elsewhere, on the staff.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] The staff. So the agreement I made was, they said, "well, you may be called upon to do one every four or five episodes, so that's four or five in the year. Are you alright with that?" I said, "Absolutely," and then they said, "the only proviso is that you cannot play another president while we're on the air." I said, "What are the chances?"

[laughter]

JOSH: Now that's funny.

MARTIN: I had a very, very strong feeling that once that pilot show was shown to the network that they were going to ask "Who works in that office?" [laughter] and I was going to be called back in as a regular and that's exactly what happened.

JOSH: Well, see, I attribute the shift in focus in large part to your performance.

MARTIN: Oh ho, well.

JOSH: I think you watch you, I mean everyone is fantastic, and one of the things we've commented on is that a lot of the times you watch a pilot to a series that goes on to become very successful but in the pilot things are a little clunky or people are finding their feet or ... but from the get-go you guys were a very cohesive unit. You and John seemed liked you known each other for years...

MARTIN: Oh, right.

JOSH: Everybody worked so well together and then you watch the pilot and then you definitely want to see more of President Bartlet.

HRISHI: But it's true, even though the scene is very short and it comes at the end, it does set you up for the expectation of "well, I wanna see more of this guy." He, he's the-

MARTIN: [crosstalk] -the klutz on the bicycle

ALL: [laughter]

JOSH: and how quickly was the decision made? How quickly did they come back to you and say, "Remember the thing about four or five? It's not going to be like that, we'd like you every episode."

MARTIN: It was weeks later. I think that if they had a rough cut that they showed to the network, cause they had to get up and rolling you know I think we shot it in the spring of '99, so they had to get started in the summer so yeah as soon as I got back from Ireland, we started shooting it and then I don't know how long I was back and they said "Oh by the way are you free for the season?" and I said "Yeah," so I was very, very fortunate and again without hesitation I said "Yeah, I would do it."

HRISHI: You'd already done *The American President* and that movie in a lot of ways sets up the template for *The West Wing*. Did you feel like you knew what to expect because of having played A.J. in that movie?

MARTIN: Yeah, it was so Aaron Sorkin, and I get a big kick out of...the amount of times I get mistaken in public for Michael Douglas and I hope he gets mistaken for me. So, once I told Michael I said, "You know, I'm taking the blame for a lot of things that you do, I hope you're getting the credit for what I've been doing."

ALL: [laughter]

JOSH: That's very funny.

MARTIN: But yeah, that film struck a real kind of waiting to be struck nerve in our country at the time, I think it was in '94 wasn't it?

JOSH: Yeah, I think that's right.

MARTIN: *The American President* and it had, uh...

JOSH: [crosstalk] Look at you with your dates!

MARTIN: Huh?

JOSH: Look at you with the recall [Martin laughs] I believe so, '94 sounds right.

MARTIN: It was in '94, yeah, and I was so out of touch with the, the whole production at that time. I remember we practiced for about a week before we started shooting so I had to come in for a few days and I was finished practicing one day and as I was leaving I was watching this scene with this young girl and Michael in the oval office and I said my God that little girl is terrific, what's her name? It was Annette Bening of course. I had never heard of her, never seen her. Where have I been? You know...

JOSH: [crosstalk] Whatever happened to her?

MARTIN: And she was already an established star, but that's how far away I was. But the film, I knew the film was going to do well, and he didn't even make any bones about it you know who's our *It's A Wonderful Life* director, he even celebrated Frank Capra-

JOSH: [crosstalk] oh yeah, that's right

MARTIN: -in *The American President*, he used his name right when she was trying to get in the gate, so I said oh my, this guy, he's something very special.

JOSH: and *The American President* has the scope and the romance and the immensity of what he would bring to *The West Wing*-

MARTIN: Yeah.

JOSH: -that you can see it there, it is kind of, it's like a workshop lab, I mean, not that it wasn't it's own piece of art, it's a great movie but you can see the sort of incubator for what would become *The West Wing* in the movie.

MARTIN: Yeah...yeah...were you subject to every word, every syllable when you were doing the play.

JOSH: Oh yes! Oh yes that's Aaron and my feeling is when someone writes like Aaron Sorkin, I have no problem being asked to not rewrite it.

[laughter]

MARTIN: Yeah, I only made one change, or addition, I shouldn't say change-

JOSH: Yes, that's the spirit.

MARTIN: I dare not say change but addition in one scene where the press were all outside and she had spent the night in the president's bedroom, and we were all called in to kind of deal with this and the press agent was saying "No, no we got to sneak her out the back," and Michael said "No, no, no, you'll go right out the front and we'll be in touch" and "Not to worry" and "Anybody got any problems with this?" and everybody was kind of getting ready to say something and I threw in, vis-à-vis Shakespeare...

[The American President excerpt]

A.J. MACINERNEY: *Thank you very much Mr. President. Come friends, let us away.*

[end excerpt]

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: Everybody-

JOSH: That's great

MARTIN: and so he had no objection. But you know when I started doing *The West Wing* the regular series, I very brazenly used to go in [laughter] with the script before we did a scene and said "Now Aaron, you know really this is-- and I would try to negotiate, can you imagine?"

ALL: [laughter]

JOSH: How did those negotiations go?

MARTIN: Not well.

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: And finally it occurred to me, after just a couple of episodes, it was clear to me that when I did it my way it was fine. It was Martin; it was not Bartlet. When I did it his way--

JOSH: Interesting!

MARTIN: -it was Bartlet. And I remember when he published the first edition of *The West Wing* the book and he asked me to write a bit of a foreword and I mentioned that of how I came around and how sorry I was that I didn't see clearly from the get-go. He was a great sport.

JOSH: We've heard similar stories from actors whose backgrounds are largely in film where that seems to happen more. Oliver Platt was telling us, too, he came in and he showed up for his first day and he had extensively rewritten and they said "No, no it's not how we do it here."

MARTIN: Yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: Well, I want to talk about a note that you gave that maybe wasn't in the script in terms of specific language choice but I think it was your idea that President Bartlet would be Catholic.

MARTIN: It was. I just asked if that would...when I agreed to go in, yeah, I asked not only could he be Catholic but could he be a graduate of Notre Dame?

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh, that's right.

MARTIN: -University of Notre Dame and in the last season before John Spencer died, God rest him, there was a lot of talk of us going to another network after we finished seventh season at NBC and they came to me, did they come to you about the possibility of going on?

JOSH: [crosstalk] Nobody comes to me for anything, Martin.

MARTIN: [laughter] The only thing I asked for, besides a huge bag of money, which I always told John [Wells], "How much dough you got? I want it all" you know he was such a good sport...he was one of my, I would say he was my favorite producer because he always told the truth, the whole truth-

JOSH: [crosstalk] He was wonderful.

MARTIN: -nothing but the truth all the time, if he told you something-

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah, he was very, very good to me. I'm looking forward to, I hope, talking to him.

MARTIN: -if he told you something if he made a promise he kept his word, yeah. John Wells, yeah.

JOSH: So I'm curious to know more about that was the nature...why...why didn't that happen?

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Oh the other thing, if we went on the Republican was supposed to win, Alan Alda was supposed to win.

JOSH: Right.

MARTIN: And I would be given a portfolio as a former president and I would be kind of in the image of Jimmy Carter; I would be involved in third world elections or you know aid or so forth like that.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Good work.

MARTIN: And I said “could I have that portfolio?” and they said “Absolutely,” and I said, “One more thing.” John Wells said, “What? Do you want a chair at Notre Dame?” and I said “You took the words right out of my mouth!”

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: He said “You got it.” [laughter]

JOSH: That’s great

HRISHI: So why was that important to you for this character? I mean, you’ve played so many characters that you know, your roles have been so diverse. Why was it important to you to imbue Bartlet with these bits of history?

MARTIN: Well, it didn’t have to be Notre Dame but I knew the whole country the whole world knows it’s a Catholic university. You know, I think there’s more Catholics here at USC that are at Notre Dame, but it’s a much smaller student body number at Notre Dame and I grew up with Notre Dame. I grew up in Ohio, and that was the shining light of the Midwest, and every afternoon, you know, Saturday afternoon during the season it was radio, and Joe Bolden was the announcer, and Notre Dame was the team, you know. So there was that image and everyone now and then you’d meet someone that went there and they were heroic, they were always heroic, you know. But I wanted Bartlet, I really wanted him to make decisions and particularly important decisions in a moral frame of reference, and I thought as long as he was a practicing Catholic, I would have credibility in that. And I remember in one episode where there was a federal case in which I was asked to give a leave on a man who committed a federal justice system, was going to die-

JOSH: [crosstalk] right

MARTIN: -he was going to be executed. And I kind of held vigil. The whole show was about trying to get this guy a stay, and I, as Martin, wanted desperately to make this stay, ‘cause I wanted to be heroic, and I wanted to be anti-death penalty. And my lawyer, Joe Cosgrove, one of my heroes, who went to Notre Dame who earned his degree there- that episode, he was our- I don’t know you probably met him- he was the consultant on this thing. He had, actually, he had five guys on death row, he was a public defender in Wilkesburg, Pennsylvania. And so he spent most of his time trying to keep these guys alive, so they brought him in,, and he appeared in one or two scenes. But at any rate, I said to Joe, “Can you talk to Aaron and John and see if we can give this guy a stay?” He said “No Martin, that’s you, that’s not Bartlet. This is a political decision, and you have to live with it, otherwise there really isn’t any angst.”

JOSH: Well it’s interesting, it’s a very a sharp thing of you to do to try to add this whole element. I mean we get these episodes like “Take this Sabbath Day”, and we get “Two Cathedrals”, and we get a remarkable deepening of Barlet’s character because of his faith and knowing the situation he’s in and the framework for the kinds of decisions that he has to make.

MARTIN: Yeah, you have to accept the responsibility for what you do, for good or ill, and it’s never easy, you know, obviously, that’s how character is developed. But if you’re going to make these tough decisions and stand by them it takes a toll on you. It has to cost you something when you make a conscious decision, a moral decision. And if it doesn’t cost, then I think you are left to question its value, of what you’ve

done, you know. So I always loved that angst. He never felt good about ordering any military action; it always deeply, deeply pained him. And I think that's Aaron too. He has a *huge* respect for the military, obviously, his whole career...when he writes about the military, it's usually about enlisted men who are heroic, and he gets it. And so, when he makes these decisions as a writer, they come from a very deep and personal place, and I get the feeling he really suffers through it before he gives it to us. You know, he's already been there, you know, he's like the angel who's going to accompany you on this journey, but he kind of knows what's in front of you, and you need not know it, just follow this guy. You know?

HRISHI: Was that unusual for you, that you would make a suggestion for a character you are playing, that you would have an investment in that way, into how the character might act or think?

MARTIN: It's very rare; I'm talking about films. Normally when you come to a film, it's usually the final draft if they're shooting and you get ready. If you have rehearsal time, you're very lucky and more and more films are realizing the value of rehearsal time. Wouldn't you agree? Particularly with the actors and the director to start forming a relationship and developing their characters before you begin to shoot. Because initially, without rehearsal, you don't even know anyone, and the first day you show up, you start making instinctual choices sometimes they're good and sometimes they're not, and so it's always to you, to everyone's benefit, that you have time to absorb and rehearse and improvise and get to know the players, with the director and the writer. So I would rarely infuse my will on a script if you will, unless it was a very low budget independent film, [laughter] that kind of needed my input, but that's rare enough, you know. I've always felt that the challenge was if you believed in the material and if it was a challenge to your talent to explore whether the character was a hero or a villain or somewhere in-between, that that was part of what our profession is about, you know you can't always choose to, we don't get the offers to [laughter] the hero parts and the older we get the less heroic we're asked to play. So I think that if your part is big enough and important enough, and you feel a certain way, that is contrary to what is written, I think you have to suss that out.

HRISHI: I think I'm dancing around a question of, if from the very beginning, you felt a special kind of relationship with this character? Did it feel different than other roles?

MARTIN: Oh yeah. Very, very different.

HRISHI: Even has early on as the first season?

MARTIN: The first scene. I know we were on to something very special and John and I discussed this, and I don't know if any of the other players discussed this with you Josh, but in the beginning, the only doubt we had about that show is that it would be a success on a commercial network because we couldn't use the language, we couldn't use certain, there was no nudity of course or any of the things that a lot of shows were starting to use at that what do you call? Pay-per-view?

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah, cable shows.

MARTIN: They started coming in, remember, when we- this is- we ended our show ten years ago. So, John and I talked about it a lot, we said, as we were going- the pilot got picked up and we started filming and John and I felt, "I don't think we got a prayer" because it was too straight.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Straight.

MARTIN: We were straight-laced, and it was a show about politics and we were democrats and we knew that probably that-

JOSH: That it was swinging back the other way.

MARTIN: -it was going swing the other way. It was the end of the Clinton administration and we felt, that we know we had a really, really good show but we didn't think it would last selling cars, and dog food, and insurance-

JOSH: [crosstalk] Excel soap.

MARTIN: -and whatever else you need

JOSH: At what point did you realize how badly you guys were wrong?

JOSH and MARTIN: [laughter]

MARTIN: Halfway through the season.

JOSH: Is that right?

MARTIN: Yeah, the first season. I thought "Oh, my God," it was like we were getting calls from the president, you know. I love his phrase [impersonating President Clinton] *You're my president, Martin.*

ALL: [laughter]

HRISHI: I was going to ask you actually, so we're talking about the season premiere of season 4 and in this episode, and at one point President Bartlet meets a character and asks who's your favorite president, and he says "Harry Truman."

ALL: [laughter]

HRISHI: And you have say

[West Wing Episode 4.0 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Well I was just kidding, but sure, Truman, if you like kind of thing.

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: [hearty laughter]

HRISHI: So I wanted to ask the question to you, I mean the show and your career, your incredible career has given you all kinds of access to people, including presidents, who's your favorite president?

MARTIN: John Kennedy. I was in New York, Jan and I had met when he was elected. Incidentally that's how long we've been married, when John Kennedy was president-elect in 1960, in New York, and the change was so palpable. The level of excitement about him, about politics, about government, about our country, was hit with this tidal wave of grace, and humor, and confidence in our country. It was unimaginable, and this guy looked like a movie star. I remember at one point I was going down the South Ferry, and he'd come to dedicated the Sailor's Monument down in Battery Park, and I pushed my way through the crowd just as his limo went by, and he leaned forward in the back seat of the car, and I said "Oh, my God, look at that suntan," and this was like November/December.

JOSH: Ha!

MARTIN: That's amazing that he's suntanned, we're all white as sheets in the cold and he had this movie star look, he was dazzling, and yet he had the grace, and the humor, and the self-effacement, and the intelligence, the quips, the sense of humour, the energy, and that family you know. Mrs. Kennedy, Jacqueline, and that whole, Bobby Kennedy came in, and all those people that he surrounded himself with, they were so energetic. They were on fire! And it was like "Boy, we're off and running," and then that inaugural address. We're still inspired by that!

[President John F Kennedy, Inaugural Address delivered 20 January 1961]

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: And so yeah, he was my favorite.

JOSH: Grace is a great word; did you consciously imbue President Bartlet with some of that JFK grace?

MARTIN: I did yeah, and Aaron and I had talked about it and I said that if I were to describe Bartlet's character, would I be right in saying that he was a cross between John Kennedy and Jimmy Carter, and Aaron says "That's pretty fair." Yeah, they are, in these days, newly remembered in such unusually beautiful terms. Jimmy Carter is like this extraordinary man, and he wasn't any different when was in the White House, he just had a lot more Secret Service protection you know. But he was this extraordinary man, and of course he had a full term and John Kennedy did not, but the legacy of Kennedy and Bobby embodied that when he ran in '68, and we lost both of them, as well as Reverend King, in a span of five years. The most important leaders, certainly of last 40-50 years.

JOSH: There is certainly a shortage of grace these days-

MARTIN: Very much so.

JOSH: -in public office.

MARTIN: we just finished watching, just last night, we watched all episodes of *The Vietnam War*-

HRISHI: -the PBS special-

MARTIN: -special. I think it starts September 17 and I think it's 5 nights and maybe 3hrs each night. Oh, God, it's so powerful, it's so painful, it's so insightful, and human, and compassionate. There's one episode where this one north Vietnamese soldier- he's still in uniform, and he's an old guy now- and he's talking about his reaction to this fire fight and they watched. They just tore up this squad of GI's, and they were astonished by how compassionate, and loving, they were to the dead and wounded. How they bounded them up, and they hugged them, and they carted them off, and they wept with each other. and held each other. They mourned so deep, and the guy said "just like we Vietnamese." That's really what the central lesson of the whole piece is that, we were all human, and we found our humanity in the worst part of ourselves: in a war. We were made to do things that none of us would ever be

proud of, or ever want to do again, but that we've had to live with them since then. It's a powerful, powerful documentary. I think it's going to have the effect that *The Civil War* had on the country just a few- Ken Burns, the same guy.

JOSH: His work is astounding.

MARTIN: Oh god, and the war at home, in the streets with the demonstrations. Kent State, and Nixon, Watergate, the riots in the city, cause it was parallel with the civil rights movement, you know. And then when Reverend King came out against the war a year to the day of his death, April 4, 1967, he came out against the war and the tide went against him. and there's always been great, great suspicion that the assassination was

JOSH: [crosstalk] motivated

MARTIN: motived by something far, far more sinister than a lone gunman

HRISHI: there's always a question I have of the sense of legacy with both Kennedys and Dr. King that, had they'd been allowed to live a longer life, their legacies felt so strongly because of their absence, and what would it have been like if John F. Kennedy had lived a long time and he stuck around long enough for people to get sick of him and say ok, stop talking.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] He'd have been 100 years old this past May. That's always something we think about when someone's is taken from us...I remember as a young actor when I heard about James Dean's death you know I was 15 years old...I saw him and by the time I saw him he was already gone and I thought oh my God what happened here why didn't we see this light when it, when it was among us you know, but you can only ever know that after the fact, you know you can project possibilities and it's so much, it's so painful, and then everyone else is compared to that and they're never going to measure up no matter what they do. A lot of good and decent people have served since then but none of them had that grace or humanity or compassion or intelligence and commitment, I don't know. I read a book not too long ago called *JFK and the Unspeakable* and it explores the assassination, and it really, I think, tells how and why they killed him, because he was going to end the Cold War in his next election. His next administration, and that people, felt--these were CIA-- felt that he was unpatriotic, so to kill him was a patriotic act.

HRISHI: Let me ask you, again, about a moment from this episode and if you can correlate to your own experience. There's a scene where President Bartlet is speaking to a group of servicemen and women.

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: So what will I remember? What will I tell my grandchildren? I'll tell them I stood on the Great Wall of China, and that I stood in the well of the US House of Representatives. I'll tell them I sat with kings and cardinals and made an appointment to the Supreme Court, and I'll tell them that one morning in September, I got to spend a few minutes with the men and women of Air Wing One.

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: That's pure Sorkin.

JOSH: Yeah, oh it's such great writing. As I watch that scene I thought "Why isn't he writing for our politicians today? Maybe not *today*... but" [laughter]

MARTIN: Pure Sorkin, and these were enlisted men and women.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right, yes.

MARTIN: That's Sorkin.

JOSH: Yeah, it's a beautiful piece of writing.

HRISHI: And so I was wondering which moments over the course of making the series are the ones that have that same kind of importance in your memory? Which are the moments from the making of the show or around the course of show, that merit being told to your grandchildren?

MARTIN: For me, watching it, "Two Cathedrals" was the one that just caught me, and how Tommy Schlamme who directed that episode engineered the last five or six minutes of that--

JOSH: [crosstalk] It's pretty remarkable

MARTIN: That show! I couldn't believe I was a part of it. I said, "Who are those people? Wow! What's going to happen? Isn't that something? Look at the rain falling down, and my hair is all mussed up." [laughter]

JOSH: Was it difficult to rage at God? For you? That scene?

MARTIN: That was...thank God I was an alter boy and I knew the old Latin so I had a leg up on that. I remember asking Aaron why we were doing this in Latin, and he said "Well, you're Catholic. That's the language. That's God's language." And I said "Oh, okay, I thought it was Hebrew, didn't you?"

ALL: [laughter]

JOSH: Well yeah, that's my take, sure. Or Yiddish.

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: But, yeah, that episode stands very close. But you know, a couple of years ago, I was invited to the Smithsonian in Washington, to have a one-on-one with a writer. And they would show a couple of scenes, and then we would talk about the show and other stuff. And they'd picked a couple of scenes I had never seen.

JOSH: Oh, that was going to be my next question. So you haven't seen the whole series?

MARTIN: [crosstalk] I have not seen the whole series, no.

JOSH: Nor do you ever watch...? Or when's the last time...? Was it ten years ago you watched an episode or...?

MARTIN: The whole episode? Yeah. We tried to watch last night [laughter] I guess we--

JOSH: [crosstalk] Technology failed you.

MARTIN: --haven't paid our bill at Netflix [laughter].

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: It did. It suddenly went out. We were watching the previews for last, last on *West Wing*, and then--

JOSH: [crosstalk] Previously.

MARTIN: --there is the Kumar story. And then we started getting into the "Twenty Hours" and it just went totally dark, and so they ran these four scenes, and two of them I had not seen.

JOSH: No kidding.

MARTIN: And one was the Butterball Turkey--

JOSH: [laughter]

MARTIN: --sequence I don't know if you remember.

HRISHI: Yes!

JOSH: Of course!

MARTIN: I sat there and I roared with laughter

JOSH: [crosstalk] It's hilarious!

MARTIN: And I went, "My God, is that funny! I remembered shooting it, but you don't remember the specifics, and you don't remember the energy of the piece, how I was trying to come up with a name!

[West Wing Episode 3.08 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I am Joe Bethersenton. That's one T, and with an H in there.

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: And Richard is writing down real quick and Charlie was trying help. I just roared with laughter, and I wept with an equal measure of energy for the Korean War veteran who was found frozen on the streets of DC.

JOSH: [crosstalk] A big episode for Richard.

MARTIN: Yeah, that's one of the best episodes, you know?

JOSH: [crosstalk] So had you not seen that?

MARTIN: I'd never seen that, no.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Martin, you've got to get your Netflix fixed!

MARTIN: No, I gotta get that... do you know why I didn't see it? I watched the first-it was a Christmas show-and we had this wonderful choir in the White House, and I came out and introduced myself to a bunch of kids and took some questions and disappeared. And I remembered when we were watching it something happened. We just had to turn off the show and go about some family business. And I remembered always thinking, "I've got to get back to that" because I loved the singing of "The Drummer Boy" from that little choir, and I knew the script of course. I said, "And this is Richard's episode! And I need to find..." and I just, you know how you are--

JOSH: Sure.

MARTIN: "Oh, I'll just see it later. I have all the episodes on tape, I have the old tape things."

JOSH: VHS?

MARTIN: VHS. I remember watching that sequence and there was one little tiny incident where they fired the rifles, and Richard flinched.

JOSH: Just a little thing.

MARTIN: It was like he didn't see it coming, or was it a choice, that he did it on every take? I don't know. We only see one take. And it was so intriguing, and how, how he got there, and how Mrs. Landingham went with him, and I thought, "Oh, my God. Did you have this experience? Sometimes you'd step outside of it and think, "Geez, that's our show."

JOSH: [crosstalk] Pretty good!

MARTIN: I'm on that team!

JOSH: Yeah.

MARTIN: Yeah.

JOSH: Oh, I absolutely did. Look, for me I came on midway when the show was already something of which I was such a huge fan that I had that walking into it. My first table read was like, "Oh look at this team, I'm being asked--

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Wow.

JOSH: --invited to be a part of, so, yeah, I absolutely had moon in my eyes.

MARTIN: Wow. I must say you were such a welcome addition. You were one of the very few, if not the only one, that ever came on - besides C.J.- that ever came on the set precisely knowing their lines. And of course how to deliver them. And we were so impressed, "This guy really works hard and shows up, and he knows *all* the words. Good for him!" And I thought, "Wow."

JOSH: That's a sweet thing to say Martin.

MARTIN: No, seriously.

JOSH: I attribute that to two things. I really came up in this school of Aaron Sorkin, so having worked for him previously--

MARTIN: Yeah.

JOSH: --I was trained, really. And the other was having been invited to be part of this team, I was not going [laughter] was not throwing away my shot.

MARTIN: But you remember how often we struggled, you know. And even if we did a good take, and it was well played, if wasn't Aaron's lines it wasn't going to be in the show so you may as well get it...but sometimes, I won't say tedious, but it was sometimes very difficult to get it right with the emotion.

JOSH: Sure, oh yeah?

MARTIN: And so very often I would end up settling, and there was always something I didn't get right-- names, number one. I remember one sequence I was talking to somebody in front of me and on my coverage everybody put on a nameplate. Were you one of those guys? Yeah.

JOSH: [laughter]

MARTIN: Because I literally couldn't remember a name.

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's funny. That's very funny.

HRISHI: Allison Janney was, we just spoke to her recently, and she told us that story.

MARTIN: It's true. [laughter] She kept pointing to her name on the badge, oh geez.

JOSH: "I'm C.J. I'm C.J." Had you worked among that incredible cast, had you worked with anyone previous to *The West Wing*?

MARTIN: Ah, no. I knew everybody, and I think that we all knew going in, we'd kind of all look at each other and think, "Do they know how good this is, and what an opportunity?" [laughs] and everybody did. 'Cause remember, I think I was the oldest, I was 59 when we started, and John was the second oldest. So he and I kind of assumed a kind of a parental kind of role, you know, we were these two old theatre guys from New York. We were both AA, and we were both that discipline, you know, you get to the theatre in that snow storm it doesn't matter if the cast outnumbers the audience, you know. You wait till you get there to make that judgement, cause remember, in the theatre that if the cast was bigger than the audience you didn't have to play.

JOSH: That right, you could go.

MARTIN: I'm talking about Off-Broadway, and that happened a lot. Snow storms over in New York and things and so...but we were that disciplined thing where we did theater was the most important thing in our lives, you know. And so we came this and we kind of knew that we were kind of like, for lack of a better image, we were the parents.

JOSH: Yeah that's absolutely, I always described it like that. Let me pay the compliment back to you: in these TV shows, and large casts in particular, and long-running shows, there's a trickle down sense to it and when the person whose name is next to number one on the call sheet is as down to earth and is as big a pro as you are, and as genuine and kind to everyone, everyone else has to fall in line. So this one of the great workplaces, because the president.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Oh, that was John, too, you know.

JOSH: And John as well, of course, complete pro.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] The two of us felt this responsibility. It was a very, very conscious responsibility that I was never late in seven seasons, it wouldn't occur to me, I mean.

JOSH: [crosstalk] And it's not acceptable from anyone else when the star of the show sets an example, and is a model citizen everyone has to--

MARTIN: And I think most of the players were in their forties. I think Charlie was the youngest, he came in and he just was 21 or 2.

JOSH: Yeah. We basically watched Dulé grow up on television.

MARTIN: Yeah, exactly. We did! Yeah! And he wasn't in on the original, remember he came in on the--

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. He came in on--

HRISHI: Episode three. Three episodes in.

MARTIN: Ok, good, yeah. And he was a welcome sight and everyone adored him you know. And then the little girl, who's now become so...

JOSH: [crosstalk] How about that? Elisabeth Moss.

MARTIN: ...popular. Elisabeth Moss, gosh.

JOSH: It was always that kind of- we comment episode after episode, even the small casting- forget about regulars or recurring arcs- people come in for one episode, the acting is always so good and cast, the show was cast so well. It really was another--

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean, I don't think you had any scenes with her so I'm not sure if you would have even interacted with her but in this episode, in the season premiere, we have Amy Adams.

JOSH: Amy Adams, that's right.

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

DONNA: What's the best way for me to get these guys to Unionville?

CATHY: We'll take you.

JOSH: Really?

CATHY: Yeah, it will give me a chance to show you the soy diesel car.

JOSH: Ok, this car, it can...

CATHY: It's a regular car.

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: Oh, my God.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: It was the first time I'd ever seen her in anything.

JOSH: She's on the farm.

MARTIN: I didn't know that!

HRISHI: Yep.

MARTIN: That was her?

HRISHI: Yep. She has a guest-starring role just in the first half of the premiere.

MARTIN: I hope that's on her resume.

JOSH: Oh, it is.

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: I had no idea that was her!

HRISHI: Mm hmm.

MARTIN: My, my.

JOSH: It's remarkable. And so just talk about John again, and as you say, may he rest in peace,

MARTIN: [crosstalk] John, John, may he rest--

JOSH: what a remarkable man, and actor, and do you and he? There is such a sense of history, and I was curious to know you had never worked together, because from the get-go there is a sense that these are two old friends, and they know each other, and they know how to push each other's buttons when they need to. And they know how to buoy each other when that's what's necessary. That relationship there from the beginning?

MARTIN: [crosstalk] It was a very special. I adored John. It's a very overused phrase sometimes, but he was an actor's actor; he had sense of all of it, together you know. And, I remember, and it was one of the best sequences in the whole series, is in that pilot when -remember there was the scene when he arrives and he has, like, there is four or five little scenes when he's talking to the secretary?

[West Wing Episode 1.0 excerpt]

LEO: Yeah, Margaret, please call the editor of the New York Times Crossword and tell him Gaddafi is spelled with an "h" and two "d's" and isn't a 7-letter word for anything.

MARGARET: Is this for real or is this...? [fades out]

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: And they put those four or five scenes together in one scene and I think it was almost 13 pages, right? And it became the first kind of famous walk and talk.

HRISHI: Mm hmm.

JOSH: Right.

MARTIN: And he keeps going, and the camera keeps following, and I remember they did it endlessly. You remember, in the show? And they finally got it, and it arrives, and you only realize when he goes through the door and he sees Mrs. Landingham crossing in front of him, and the camera pulls back and you realize they're in the Oval Office...

[West Wing Episode 1.0 excerpt]

LEO: (fades in)...I'd never lend anyone...

MRS. LANDINGHAM: I don't understand. How did he...?

LEO: He's a klutz Mrs. Landingham. Your president's a geek.

MRS. LANDINGHAM: Mr. McGarry, you know how I feel about that kind of talk in the Oval Office.

LEO: I apologize.

MRS. LANDINGHAM: Just in this room, Mr. McGarry, is all I'm asking.

LEO: Yes.

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: And it was like "Uh-oh. This is a different White House. This is a sacred place. Yeah, you don't use that language in here," and I thought "I'm the guy that works there [laughter]. That's the kind of administration this is going to be." I thought, "Oh, my God." I was so thrilled, so thrilled.

[insert ad]

HRISHI: What was the hardest part about making the show? You talked a little bit about the precision of the language being a challenge, but was that the hardest part, or was there something that you found most difficult while you were actually on the show?

MARTIN: There was so much compensation, you know. If I got a lot of lines in one episode, you had to rely on everyone else to help you, because sometimes I had difficulty staying on script, you know. I didn't have any difficulty with my lines; it was Aaron's that gave me the problem.

JOSH: That's right.

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: So I always knew that no matter what director- we had a cycle of directors and my favorite was Tommy Schlamme, I don't know how you feel--

JOSH: Love Tommy, yeah, absolutely.

MARTIN: But I'd see him coming and "We got it. We got it in hand. Here comes Tommy." And he knew us all so well, and he loved actors. That's so important. I think an actor knows when--

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah, you sense it immediately, certainly with the director.

MARTIN: --When you're valued, you know. And so I always felt that way, and he had such a sense of humor, and knew all of our foibles and things, and he knew.

JOSH: [crosstalk] He's the best.

MARTIN: And he was the best, and he and Aaron were really, worked very, very close so that was always a thrill when Tommy came into direct. But I knew that the show depended on a *real* ensemble, and you got it at the reading. The only players you wouldn't see at the reading were the guest stars, somebody coming in, but someone would read it for them so we knew it. We always knew, every episode, and they got better and better and better. We'd just break into applause at the, after the table read, you remember.

JOSH: Oh, sure.

MARTIN: And in a lot of cases we couldn't wait to get there, and we also knew how important it was to depend on each other. And we also knew that a lot of these stories were born in real incidences with real people going back to administrations all the way back to Eisenhower and even Truman. And so they were all, had a grain, and sometimes much more than that, of reality. And so they were historic in that sense, you were playing someone who actually lived and breathed, and the one- I love this one- where a letter was sent to President Roosevelt from a kid in Brooklyn, asking the President to get his father a job, this young black boy in Brooklyn wrote in, and the letter got lost in what we used to call the "dead letter box" when we were kids in the post office, was in the Roosevelt era. You know the actual president was Jimmy Carter.

JOSH: Oh.

MARTIN: Yeah, that's what we were told, yeah. It landed in Carter's administration.

HRISHI: Oh this is real, a real story?

MARTIN: [crosstalk] A real story, yeah.

JOSH: Oh interesting. No, we didn't know that.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] We didn't know that.

JOSH: We just did our episode about it, too, and we actually included an episode of another podcast called *99% Invisible* and had a look at how President Obama's administration, he would have ten letters a day curated and brought to him for him to read.

MARTIN: I heard that, yes, yeah. Do you know if he was a fan of the show? Did anyone ever talk to him about it?

HRISHI: I believe so.

MARTIN: President Obama, he was?

JOSH: Oh yeah, yes, yes.

MARTIN: Because we knew Clinton was.

HRISHI: Right.

MARTIN: He was very forthright about it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

MARTIN: Yeah.

HRISHI: And you had a lot of interaction with him.

MARTIN: You know, for as far away as I was, I adored him. I thought he was just great.

HRISHI: We heard stories of you two meeting, and he would address you as Mr. President.

MARTIN: [imitating President Clinton] You're my president, Martin.

ALL: [laughter]

MARTIN: He came to the set one day, remember, and he started to rearrange--

JOSH: Before my time.

MARTIN: [laughter] He started rearranging the furniture.

JOSH: Oh, is that right?

HRISHI: [crosstalk] For accuracy.

JOSH: [crosstalk] This is not my Oval.

MARTIN: [imitating President Clinton] Well you know we had this painting over there but it's fine, but the color is different. [As himself] I loved him, I still love him.

HRISHI: Also in this episode, Lily Tomlin joins the cast as well.

MARTIN: Yeah, you know I'm doing a series.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Back to working with her!

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Yes, exactly, yes. That's what I wanted to ask.

MARTIN: We have that in common, we refer to that a lot.

HRISHI: And there's a joke in the show about alpaca farming, I think, in your new series which I was wondering, you know, it feels like a call back.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] That's where it came from, yes, it's a send up to--

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's nice, a little hat tip to *The West Wing*.

MARTIN: --to Aaron.

HRISHI: That's great.

MARTIN: I remember when that came down I thought "Aaron, come on, be a sport. Don't do that, and if you just do it and let it go, it works." One time we were into the show, maybe you were there at this time, I don't remember, but there was one stage direction where I just banged my head. It said "Bartlet bangs his head on the desk in the Oval Office." I said to Aaron, I said "That's so undignified" [imitating Aaron Sorkin] "Just give it a try, you know, give it a try" [as Martin] I said "Ok," and it was the most expressive thing at that moment you could possibly do and it worked brilliantly.

HRISHI: It's a wonderful moment.

MARTIN: [laughter] It's so funny, the president banging his head.

JOSH: [crosstalk] You will see that moment on social media often these days.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] People invoke that little scene.

JOSH: [crosstalk] It's true. Yes. Absolutely a gif so it's just the same 5 seconds playing over and over of you hitting your head against the desk.

MARTIN: [laughter] Is that true? Oh, my God, oh, my God. Do you suppose--

JOSH: [crosstalk] It's very apt these days.

MARTIN: --could I just, could I just fantasize a little bit?

JOSH: Please.

MARTIN: Do you suppose the current, or anyone in the current administration is familiar with *The West Wing*?

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: I see daily, people asking "Could someone just put *The West Wing* on in the background on the TV, [laughter] in the bedroom?" and maybe, maybe a little bit of it will seep in.

MARTIN: Yeah.

HRISHI: Where we are in the series right now in season four, the beginning of season four, we've got the introduction of Governor Ritchie and he was brought in, in some ways as the spectre of George W. Bush, but people are looking at the character a lot now and are seeing echoes of Donald Trump as well.

MARTIN: Really?

HRISHI: In this episode there is this line where Josh and Toby are discussing Ritchie and he says

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

JOSH: Surrounded by-

TOBY: Do you think he's ever disagreed with one of his advisors? Do you think, honestly, do you think he's ever said to one of his advisors "I've got a different idea!?"

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It feels a little bit like harsh now to think of George Bush in those terms, but then hearing those words as I watched it earlier today, I thought "Yeah, Toby refers to him as a hairdo, coming through who wants to be president and really couldn't be a better description of what we've got."

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Toby actually said that?

[West Wing Episode 4.01 excerpt]

TOBY: 'Cause we're coming to the line, and we're seeing a hairdo from Florida with pass coverage that's... [fade out]

[end excerpt]

MARTIN: I'm curious, who played the part? Who played the...?

HRISHI: [crosstalk] James Brolin

MARTIN: James Brolin. Yeah, he's the guy who ran, yeah.

HRISHI: Exactly, yeah.

JOSH: You had a great, sort of pre-debate showdown with him at the episode you guys filmed in New York at the Broadway show they used to call the Henrys, and you're smoking a cigarette, and he comes out with...

[West Wing Episode 3.22 excerpt]

GOVERNOR RITCHIE: Crime, boy, I don't know.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And that's, you tell him "That's when I decided to kick your ass."

MARTIN: [laughter] That's right! I told him that in the toilet.

JOSH: It's a great, it's...

MARTIN: [laughter] Yeah, yeah that James Brolin. He was very sweet. He was a good sport.

HRISHI: You're involved politically with so many causes. It seems like it's been a big part of your life for a long time. Did taking on this role as president ever seem like it was in conflict with your own personal beliefs, or did you ever try in other ways, in addition to the Catholicism, try to nudge policy, like in the death penalty episode?

MARTIN: Mmm, I didn't have much luck with that.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But you gave it a shot.

HRISHI: Were there ever moments when you thought, "Well here's something I can bring from my own life," into this, either to Aaron for a script or in the opposite way? Did it ever feel like there were things that just pained you to have to have your character say because they went so contrary?

MARTIN: Contrary. It was rare. I liked it because he was always so fair-minded to people who disagreed with him, particularly the Republicans, you know. He never took it personal.

HRISHI: And where did your own origin story begin with political causes?

MARTIN: Well I came up, you know I was born in Ohio, immigrant family, both my parents were immigrants. My dad was from Spain, my mother from Ireland, and they met in citizenship school in Dayton, Ohio. I remember my father being very, very shy outside the hall of the house- he was a tiger in the house- but outside the house he rarely talked to people. He was always “Yes ma’am, no ma’am, yes sir, no sir or hello, hello, goodbye” or something, and we began to realize that he was uncomfortable with his accent. He had this beautiful tone, he was this basso profundo, you know, and he had this magnificent, I loved his accent, I used to tease him all the time just to get him to talk, you know, ‘cause his accent, [imitating a deep bass voice like his father] “Well Ramón, I cannot go” [as Martin] “Well, you know Pop, I’m doin’ a play if you...” [imitating a deep bass voice] “Well Ramón, I cannot go in there but you know if I, if I have some time in the day, I come on in the day.” [As Martin] He never showed up in 4 years I was at the place. I knew he’d never come but I used rib him about it, you know?

JOSH: To get him going?

MARTIN: He was intimidated by his accent and his standing as an immigrant, and so he grew up never kind of able to kind of express his culture or his language, he was really kind of intimidated. But he loved the country, and he loved that we were all born citizens you know, and we love the country, too. But I naturally gravitated towards a liberal bent ‘cause I started caddying, I think I mentioned it earlier, at a very exclusive private country club in 1949, I mean I was 9 years old, it was one of the longest jobs I ever had ‘cause I didn’t stop until I left home at age 18. And so I saw kind of how the other side lived, you know, and I that had sense of what it was like to be a servant, and to just remain silent, and then I had a better understanding of how my father dealt with being an immigrant, you know in his own. And so I was always prone towards the liberal union side. I founded a union when I was 14, I called all the caddies out and went on strike.

JOSH: Is that right?

MARTIN: Yeah, it lasted 72 hours and I was thrown off, it was first time in all the years, I worked there five years by then, and it was the first time I heard the term private property, “you’re on private property” and threatened to arrest me. And so I said “Geez, I’ve worked here all this time, you all know me” you know, they threw me out. Eventually they brought me back because I was a good caddy and all the guys I brought out with me were good caddies.

JOSH: Did you get what you were looking for?

MARTIN: No, not even close.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Just your jobs back.

MARTIN: and we chose Ladies Day because you know they were not going to carry their... Tuesday was Ladies Day so it was well planned. We just didn’t plan for the long haul and one of the things that we argued for was a sense of recognition, of

dignity, you know. One of the most embarrassing parts of that job was listening to the obscene talk and jokes of these men, particularly the men, in front of us young boys as if we were not there, they didn't see us, and that always stayed with me. And so that was kind of my background when I went over to New York and wow, this was the Kennedy Era, and the civil rights movement started heating up, and so protest was a very energetic reality for unions, for women's rights, gay rights even as far back as then, but civil rights was the main thing. And then the anti-war movement, of course. So a lot of moral issues were at stake and I never really separated them you know, if you were for the unions you had to be for all the other stuff too, just natural progression. How could you relieve yourself from one issue to another, so I didn't think of them as causes, they were issues and they were all united by a sense of compassion, and you had to get involved for yourself, and it had to cost you something, and if it didn't cost you something then you had to question it's value.

JOSH: Did you ever consider running for public office at any point in your life?

MARTIN: Only in my imagination.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Fantasy.

MARTIN: I remember when we were doing *The West Wing*, there was a very serious inquiry out of my home state of Ohio, and they were serious and said "Would you consider it?" because they were getting ready to line up a candidate, and I said "Oh gosh, I'm flattered but I think you have to really understand the difference between celebrity and credibility." I had no credibility, and I could never. I always knew I could never service a specific constituency, that I would have to work my conscience, that just was a given. The only guy I can think of in congress is dear Bernie Sanders who, you know, everybody tugs at him but he's the, I think, most morally conscious man in all of the Federal Government now. I just love him.

HRISHI: Even if it means going against his constituency.

MARTIN: I think he's done it consistently, that's why he's not a democrat. I don't think he wants to be a democrat, because he doesn't want to feel he has to--

JOSH: [crosstalk] Beholden.

MARTIN: --beholding to anyone. But for my own part no, only in fantasy I would, like I used fantasize playing centre field for the Yankees or Grand Marshall of the Saint Patrick's Day Parade in New York or--

JOSH: [crosstalk] That seems within reach.

ALL: [laughter]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Let's make that happen, c'mon.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Oh, that might work.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] That seems like aiming a bit low, actually.

JOSH: [crosstalk] I'll make a couple of calls.

HRISHI: But having done the show you know I'm sure, it must have put you in the proximity of being able to elevate issues that were important to you. In certain ways, did you find that you had that chance, or did you seek out opportunities because of getting to play the president on TV?

MARTIN: Well I never had any real issues with any of the choices that I had to make as the character, because Aaron was so fair-minded and so human in his own life, his own conscience.

HRISHI: It's interesting today, at the time of this recording, is the day that Trump announced he was ending--

JOSH: [crosstalk] DACA.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] --funding for DACA and immediately the first thing I thought of, I just can't help it having grown up with *The West Wing*, I thought of the last lines that you deliver in the pilot of *The West Wing*.

[West Wing Episode 1.0 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: With the clothes on their back they came through a storm, and the ones that didn't die want a better life and they want it here.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Talking about people coming from Cuba to Miami on just improvised rafts, and people you know, drowning in the process, but still, making the effort because of the promise of what they could get in America.

MARTIN: Exactly, yeah.

HRISHI: And it feels like people need *The West Wing* now. I don't know if it's over-dramatic to say they need it more than ever, to have just to even have, that reminder that these are the kinds, even in a fictional context.

JOSH: Sure, the sentiment.

MARTIN: Yeah. It wouldn't hurt. And I think we are in lot of hurt these days. We are starting to separate ourselves from each other and our politics are becoming almost dangerous. You almost have to make sure if you speak in a restaurant these days or send a message, that it is not going to be turned against you, and people are so frightened, and it's exhibited in so many really scary ways, how people are less compassionate, less patient with one another, less interested in being present to someone that they have the advantage over. I don't know how to articulate this but, do you know what I mean Josh?

JOSH: Absolutely.

MARTIN: We're seeing stuff in the country, where people are not inspired to be more human, to be more compassionate, to be more loving, to have a better sense humor and not take themselves or their philosophies so seriously. We've lost the sense of trust. I think that that's going to be affected by this show I just mentioned, *The Vietnam War*. Jesus, it just ends, you just weep for all sides, all sides. We are all victims of the lies and the distortions and the greed, and there's one little segment where a very famous news anchor, David Brinkley, is standing in the middle of the stones at Arlington National Cemetery, and he's looking in the camera and he's giving an editorial and he says "I hope that the next time a president or any leader wants to convince us to go to war they come here and make the announcement and tell us what their plans are. Here in this place" he said. Woah. The end, I'm not spoiling the sequence for you, I hope not, but the whole series ends at the Wall and they all come together at the Wall: the protestors, the politicians, the generals, the

enlisted men, the white, black, rich, poor, old, young, crippled, broken and they weep. They weep! That is our sacred wall. They touch it and they pray, it goes, the last 20 minutes of the show is the wall, how it came into being, how it was fought against, how it was built, and then it happened, and so many of the guys that we followed through the whole show, tell of their experience and they break down and wept at the Wall because it was finally ok to mourn yourself, your loss, your friends, your country, the truth suffered. And if you look at that monument it's like a grave cause you can walk at it from the side of the Lincoln Memorial and you can't see it, you could trip over and fall in it, it's like a grave. And you go around to the other side and any time day or night, the first thing you see is yourself, it's a reflection. It's so powerful, and the guys that we're talking about throughout the show, that were killed in Vietnam, relatives come, their friends come, and they find their names and they're permitted to do that thing that is so fundamentally necessary for, we must mourn and weep for each other and for ourselves, for the truth, for our nation and that's the only place, it's the sacred Wall. It's like in Jerusalem. It's sacred ground and you just get it, you understand it, you can be yourself, you can reflect, everything. There's one guy who, this one guy, who really got beat up and came back and just struggled and hid and went through all these...and he said when he first saw it, he fell on his knees and he could not control the sobbing; he wailed. And it was as much a wailing of release and joy that he was allowed to do it in public, but only here, in this place at this time. You had to be present to it, you had to go there. I had two brothers in Vietnam. One was offshore in the Navy on a delivery ship, but the other one was in the Navy and when Gulf of Tonkin was declared in '65 I guess it was, the Marines took up all of the corpsmen and he was a Naval corpsman so he went into combat. He had never fired a weapon. He never fired the whole time he was in Vietnam. My brother Johnny, one of my heroes, I just, what he went through, 12 months and, oh god, it's so powerful. I'm gonna call him and tell him I saw it. I don't even know if he can bear watching it because he was there for, all of 1967, he was there, just before the Tet, he came home and to know what he went through. Janet was studying, my wife Janet, was studying, at an art college in New Mexico for a semester one summer, a few years ago and one day, we were out there renting a little apartment, we were staying for the summer and one day she said, she gave me a list of stuff and said go down to the art store and get me all these supplies and she wrote them all down and I went down to this big art store because there is so many artists in New Mexico and, you know, we were in Sante Fe. And I'm wandering around this enormous store with all of this stuff and I'm asking this, "Now what's this?" and I'm looking at this and I'm taking and buying all, and a guy comes around the corner, looks at me and he says "Are you Martin Sheen?" "I am." He said, "You have a brother, John." I said, "I do, do you know him?" "He saved my life in Vietnam." Can you imagine? My brother John never, ever told me that story and I said "Well, would you like to contact him?" "Well I don't know where he is. I don't know how." I said "I'll find him, give me your information and I'll find him." "I will," he said, and he wrote down his name and his address and number and a few days later I called my brother and I said "Does this guy sound familiar?" "Oh hey, did you run into him? How's he doing?" I said "Well, he told me you saved his life." "Oh what nonsense, no. I had to drag him out of a ditch one day but, hell, we did that every day."

JOSH: Never spoke of it.

MARTIN: Never said a word. And I was giving a speech one time in Washington DC, and he and I are both in the program, I hope I'm not tipping the hat here, everyone knows I'm on old drunk, what the hell, so I was speaking for the Drug Court

JOSH: Melissa Fitzgerald has told us how much you've done for that cause.

MARTIN: So I would go and do these fundraisers in the big conventions they'd have, and they had this one in Washington DC, and we were meeting at the hotel, where Reagan was shot. So it was a famous, a very famous place, and they had this enormous ballroom down in the basement, and I call my brother John who lives in Dayton, Ohio, that's my home town, I said "John I'm over here in DC and I'm doing the big thing for Drug Court, what are you doing? You ought to come over here and join me for this" and he said "I don't know." And I said "You can go to the Wall, you've never been." "Ah see, I don't know, I don't know about that." I said "John, I have friends who escort people that've been there and they'll find your unit, your outfit, or the year you were there. Please just consider it." He said "Well, I tell you I'll come over and go to the drug thing with you, you know the convention for Drug Court, and we'll see." And I said "Ok, great." And so he came over and stayed at the hotel and buddied around together, but the next day, he went to the Wall. He'd been avoiding it since he came back, since it was built and he'd never wanted to go. And I asked him, "Why don't you want to go?" and he said "I don't want it confirmed that we lost all those guys, and I'll see their names and I'll know--"

JOSH: [crosstalk] Make it real.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] "--that they didn't make it." He still had a fantasy, a belief. He didn't want it confirmed that all those guys the he knew, loved, and served with, were gone. And finally he did go. He got someone to escort him and it was--

JOSH: [crosstalk] Was it cathartic for him?

MARTIN: It was cathartic. He wept, yeah. That one place where, as I say, thank God that we have that place for that purpose. It's there and it's accepted.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Beautiful, incredible Martin.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Is that the end of that? I thought we'd talk more about *The West Wing*, did we get around to it at all?

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: [crosstalk] We did, we did.

MARTIN: Hope we said nice things about everyone.

JOSH: I think so. Anyone else you want to say something nice about?

MARTIN: There was kind of a survey over the years, I don't know if you're aware of it, I know you are. Someone kept an eye on us for years and would interview us for various reasons, but all of us eventually would get interviewed and in the beginning we were so anxious to get interviewed and go on magazines covers and all that but after a while we'd get asked "would you do this interview?" and we'd be "Geez, talk to Josh."

JOSH: [laughter] [crosstalk] You'd pass it on. Pass the buck.

MARTIN: He hasn't done one for a while, pass it around. You know we did so many interviews and some person, I can't remember who it was, it could have been someone for the *Parade* Magazine, some deal like that, who was constantly with us, you know, John Beschloss interviewed us at one point, he's the historian, he goes on MSNBC a lot, the guy, he comes on Rachael a lot and talks about the presidencies, really a brilliant guy. At any rate someone kept a record of asking each one of us over the years who was it that we admired the most. Did you know about this?

JOSH: No, no.

MARTIN: And all of us only agreed to tell if it was never released until after the show ended. Every single one of use chose the same person, and it was Allison Janney.

JOSH: Oh, that's beautiful

MARTIN: John chose her, Richard, everybody chose her. Allison Janney, we all, she was the one person we loved to work with the most, the one person that we were most comfortable with, and we adored her sense of humor, and she was--

JOSH: [crosstalk] [laughter] There's only one Allison, they broke the mold with her.

MARTIN: --she always knew all her lines, and she knew yours as well, so she could help you off camera, but Allison Janney. I was always so proud she was from my hometown and we had some of the same--

JOSH: Great two Dayton kids.

HRISHI: Rob Lowe also.

MARTIN: Rob Lowe also.

JOSH: What's that all about?

MARTIN: Tell me, what are the chances?

JOSH: I know!

HRISHI: But I think that accounts for some of, at least some of the Dayton references in *The West Wing*.

MARTIN: I think so. Every now and then I would use a different cup.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Oh, that's right.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] And I think I used Notre Dame, then University of Dayton sent me a cup and said "What about us?" and I said "Ok, fine," and I would get Wilberforce College from Ohio.

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's funny.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] I had all these cups and occasionally I would get the property department to let me use them.

HRISHI: Is that why the cat was named Wilberforce? We haven't gotten there yet, but there is an episode in which the Bartlet family cat is named Wilberforce.

JOSH: Truly? Well clearly the answer is that is why.

MARTIN: [crosstalk] Oh, my God. Well, Wilberforce would have been the guy, the British anti-slavery guy who ended slavery for England, but there's a university in Ohio called Wilberforce University. So are these proceedings concluded?

JOSH: Yes. That's it for this episode. It was great fun to sit down and chat with Martin. At one point during the interview, I looked over and I saw Hrish and Martin deep in conversation and I took a picture because I know Hrish would want it.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: I was so happy for Hrish having come up with the idea for the reality that is now The West Wing Weekly, and to see him sitting and chatting with Martin Sheen was very cool. We'll post that picture to the website. Remember next week we will be back, with the premiere of season 4, "20 Hours in America Part One," and our special guest then will be John Gallagher Jr. who plays Tyler.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us, and we hope you'll join us next time, until then you can find us at TheWestWingWeekly.com or on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. You can carry a little piece of this podcast around with you in your pocket if you want to purchase a West Wing Weekly challenge coin. They're brand new.

JOSH: It's a lovely way to show your support for the podcast. The West Wing Weekly is a proud part of Radiotopia, brought to you by PRX and a generous grant from the Knight Foundation. Radiotopia is a cavalcade of curated podcasts. I think you'll like them, check them out. You can find them at Radiotopia.FM

HRISHI: Our show is produced by Josh and me, with help from Margaret Miller and Zach McNeese.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

MARTIN: What's next?

[Outro Music]