

The West Wing Weekly
4.07: "Election Night"
Guest: Clark Gregg

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're listening to the West Wing Weekly. Welcome back. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about episode 7 of season 4, "Election Night".

JOSH: It was written by Aaron Sorkin, the story's by David Gerken and David Handelman, David Handelman, a friend of mine, and it was directed by Lesli Linka Glatter. Terrific director with whom I've worked on more than one occasion. It first aired, oh, all I wrote down was that it first aired, and you know what? I feel like that's good enough.

[Hrishi laughing]

JOSH: You don't care when it aired. It aired in 2002.

HRISHI: No, I like knowing that it aired on November 6, 2002, which I think is a nice detail because it lines up with actual election week.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: Here's the synopsis from Warner Brothers. The official synopsis. I like this because of the way they talk about you.

JOSH: Oh.

HRISHI: Well, your character. "On election day Bartlet and his staff begin counting exit poll votes across the country. In a conservative California congressional district the results have important implications for Sam and a maverick democratic campaign manager, Will Bailey."

JOSH: I like the sound of that.

HRISHI: "Meanwhile Donna meets an intriguing Navy Lt. Commander, Jack Reese, who has been transferred to the White House as Deputy Military Aide."

JOSH: Played by Jack Nicholson impersonator, Christian Slater. Just kidding. If you're listening you're your own man and you're a terrific actor.

[Hrishi laughing]

HRISHI: When I was watching the episode I thought Christian Slater's voice reminds me of FiveThirtyEight Politics host, Jody Avirgan's voice.

JOSH: Ok, maybe, well his eyebrows remind me of Jack Nicholson's. Actually his eyebrows don't remind me of Jack Nicholson's eyebrows. His eyebrows remind me of Jack Nicholson. It's an important distinction.

[Hrishi laughing]

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Speaking of Jack Reese, and for those who are parched and need another shot at home, there is a character Captain Jack Ross in *A Few Good Men* and he's the Marine Judge Advocate assigned to the Washington Navy Yard, and he was played by our guest today in the Original Broadway production of *A Few Good Men*, Clark Gregg.

HRISHI: What did you think of this episode?

JOSH: I liked this episode. I mean, my first impression was the first scene, I guess that makes sense. I thought the cold open might be a dream sequence. Like a bad trip that Josh Lyman is having after maybe some Oysters Rockefeller that went bad or something, because, of course, it turns out to be a prank, a rather elaborate prank. And I like the way Lesli Linka Glatter decided to film it. At a certain point she's swooping, we've got a steady cam kind of going around and around giving us the sense of inner turmoil that Brad is in, or Josh Lyman is in, as he meets up with all these voters that seem to have incorrectly voted for the wrong person. It was well done. I guess I forget what a fan of pranking Aaron is. I don't know him in real life to have done much of it, but he writes a good prank.

HRISHI: There are lots of pranks in *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Yeah, they're very well thought out. I realized as I watched this episode I really should consult with him. I think I'm good at execution, and sometimes coming up with stuff, but he's like on another level.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I think together we could do fiendish things.

HRISHI: It makes me think, is there is anyone you would want as a blood enemy less than Aaron Sorkin?

JOSH: Well, no. Given my career, no.

HRISHI: Right.

[both laughing]

JOSH: I can't have him turn against me. What's your macro take on this episode. I'm guessing you didn't like it so much.

HRISHI: Oh, I love this episode.

JOSH: Oh, I sensed that from the way you asked me, I guess that I don't know you as well as I thought.

HRISHI: I liked this episode.

JOSH: Yeah, it's a good episode.

HRISHI: I wonder if this will surprise you. My favorite parts of this episode are the scenes with Orlando, Anthony's friend.

JOSH: Oh, yes, Omar Benson Miller as Orlando Skittles. It's a *Ballers* reunion.

HRISHI: Pre-union.

JOSH: It is a pre-union, very good. And of course, Richard Schiff, also on *Ballers*.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: So, it's a three way pre-union.

HRISHI: A three pre-union.

JOSH: Yes, yeah, of *Ballers* or Ballser as the correct plural.

[Hrishi laughing]

JOSH: I enjoy the show *Ballers* very much and I was delighted to see them together again having never been before.

HRISHI: Together again, for the first time.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Which reminds me of the speech that the president gives. The moment when he goes off the prompter, towards the end.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: He basically says, "Together again for the first time." He says:

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: To ensure that the promise of this country is the birthright of all the people. We've achieved so much together. Always believing, always knowing, that America could be made new again. And so it was and so it will be again. God bless you all!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: So you're saying he's talking about *Ballers*.

[Hrishi laughing]

HRISHI: Right. He was talking about Richard Schiff, Dulé Hill, and Omar Benson Miller...

JOSH: As Orlando Skittles. Orlando at one point refers to Charlie as "boss" which I thought was prescient because, in fact, Mr. Siefert, Dulé's character in *Ballers*, is Charles Greane's boss.

HRISHI: You're not ever gonna get off this *Ballers* thing.

JOSH: I'm just trying to drum up business for *Ballers*. And I like saying "Ballers."

HRISHI: Elizabeth Warren did a shout out to *Ballers*. Did you see that?

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: It was pretty funny. Yeah, where she said that *Ballers* was her favorite TV show.

[both laughing]

JOSH: Where? In what context?

HRISHI: On her Facebook page she wrote: "I stand with the Writers Guild of America for fair pay and decent healthcare because it's the right thing to do and because Bruce and I can't wait for the next season of *Ballers* to start."

[Josh laughing]

JOSH: That's funny!

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I like it.

HRISHI: That was real.

JOSH: I like very much Brad's pratfall as he smashes into, or walks into, Orlando, it made me laugh. Out loud.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

CHARLIE: Alright we're gonna have to wait until the secret service....(smashing)

ORLANDO: Whoa, sorry man that wasn't cool.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did you see that Brad was called Brad Whitfield in the...

JOSH: Ah, I can't believe that I didn't amplify that. I love that we have, among our legions of fans are people that are looking to just tee up for me any opportunity to mock Brad. They may be providing him with opportunities to come at me as well, I don't know. They may be working both sides. But, yeah, I had several people point that out to me on Twitter like "Any Comment?". I thought it best to let it speak for itself that, Yes, he was on the red carpet somewhere identified as Brad Whitfield.

[Hrishi laughing]

HRISHI: Brad's pratfall is so... so this is one of the reason why all of the scenes with Orlando and Anthony are, I don't know, there's something so pure about them. I really love them. They're so sweet and Josh's fall to the ground is great and his reaction as he recovers, but then this line, their exchange where he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

JOSH: You should play football.

ORLANDO: Hey man, I'm trying you know, but I had an open Pabst, and that's the way that goes.

JOSH: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

[both laughing]

HRISHI: And Josh just says "yeah".

JOSH: Yeah.

[both laughing]

HRISHI: I love that part. I also love when Donna calls Josh "Pumpkin Patch".

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

DONNA: Pumpkin patch, is there anything I can do to get you to go to the movies for eight hours?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Cute.

HRISHI: It's really cute. You know who else is cute? Josh Malina!

JOSH: Am I cute in this episode?

HRISHI: These last two episodes, every time you've come on screen I say "Look at that cutie! Who's that cutie?"

[Josh laughing]

JOSH: Awwww

HRISHI: I watched this episode, as I sometimes do, with the closed captioning on. Just so I can anticipate things that you might say.

JOSH: Yes, I do. Always.

HRISHI: And there are a couple of things that changed for me because of that. One was that I realized was a word that had kinda slipped by me before stood out this time because I don't know this word.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: Yeah. The president says:

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I gotta get back. You can hockle Abbey for awhile.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I've seen this episode of course many times, but that word had never jumped out at me before the way that it did this time because I don't know what that word is.

JOSH: I noticed the same thing because, I want to say, that's because it's not a word. Although, in fact it is a word. It is not the word they want to use here. I think it's an attempt to use the Yiddish word hock. You know, don't hock me - means don't pester me. Don't bother me. Don't keep on at me. There is a classic Jewish phrase: "hock mir nicht kein chinik" -- don't beat on a teapot. So hock kinda means beat on something and beating on a teapot means, you know, stop annoying me. It usually means stop pestering me about something. Which would have been quite an apt phrase or word to use in the scene in *The West Wing*. For some reason, the

writer, I guess Aaron? Wrote hockle and I don't know if it's supposed to be Bartlet's clumsy attempt to deploy Yiddish or just someone's, maybe Aaron's, mistake and...I did look up hockle which means to damage cordage by [crosstalk] by twisting against the lay or it can also mean to disable by cutting the tendons of the ham. I don't think our esteemed teleplay writer meant to use the word in that sense. I think it was an attempt to say "hock". Stop hocking me.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right, it's a nautical term.

HRISHI: I like that. I like the idea that it's misemployed Yiddish, that warms the hockles of my heart.

JOSH: There's nothing like hot hockles.

[both laughing]

HRISHI: Here's another one that caught me. At one point Sam says to Josh

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

JOSH: Hey, when I said exits before I meant tracking and I'm pretty sure they did the last one about a week ago and then left town.

SAM: Yeah, yeah, they may have called that putt a little early.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Watching those captions I thought "Oh, PUTT". This whole time I thought it was not a golf metaphor but a poker metaphor, and that he had said "they may have called that pot a little early."

JOSH: Interesting. See how much you learn when you watch with the CC's like I do?

HRISHI: Mmhmm. I still feel like the poker metaphor would have worked as well.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: But maybe not...can you call a pot too early?

JOSH: Well, you call a bet more than calling a pot.

HRISHI: Ok, sure.

JOSH: Unless you're playing pot-lemon and someone bets the pot then I guess you could then call the pot...but...

HRISHI: Alright, don't hockle me.

JOSH: Sorry, I don't want to hockle you about that.

[Hrishi laughing]

HRISHI: Another word choice that I liked is that Anthony gets to use the phrase "not for nothing" which I think of as such a C.J. or certainly like a Bartlet administration kind of phrase. And I felt like "oh, he's part of the family too."

JOSH: That's funny.

HRISHI: He says "not for nothing".

JOSH: To me I felt like come on, you should have pulled that, don't put that in his mouth.

HRISHI: You [cross talk] caught it as well.

JOSH: [cross talk] I mean,

JOSH: Oh for sure, as a Sorkinism. [cross talk] and it a little bit bumped on it, although I suppose I decided to take it as, you know, he's been hanging around Dulé or hanging [cross talk] around Charlie rather and so he's picked up the terminology that our gang likes to use.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: Mmhm. In some ways there's not that much to do in this episode except for crack a lot of jokes.

JOSH: That's true. Which I enjoy.

HRISHI: Crackle a lot of jokes. Sorry.

[Hrishi laughing]

JOSH: Yeah, there you go. We have a couple of a little *Sport's Night* appearance. We've seen Tim Davis Reed before who plays Mark the reporter. Now we also have Ron Ostrow who played, I should probably know, he's one of my oldest friends, he was another guy in the control room on *Sport's Night*. There's a Will in almost everything Aaron writes and Ron was the Will of *Sport's Night*.

HRISHI: Where there's an Aaron there's a Will.

JOSH: There you go. Ron I've known for many many, many, many, many years. He goes back to West Chester and that whole gang. He lives in Scarsdale and went to high school with Aaron. He and Aaron were roommates, I believe for quite a while, in New York City. And I was remembering this funny story. To mention, I know that part of The West Wing Weekly drinking game includes taking a shot every time I mention the play *A Few Good Men*. But, during the play *A Few Good Men*, in the original cast I was one of five guys who played Marines. We did a lot of moving furniture around and standing at parade rest and played little roles in addition to under studying the leads and I took over one of them for the last eight months of the run. But, what would happen is Ron Ostrow played the Marine who would stand in the tower. This tower was not even really onstage, it was behind a scrim, so depending on the lighting you would either not see him at all or then you would see a guy just facing upstage back to the audience holding his gun and kinda keeping an eye. You know, there's a lot of, there's talk about "Not on my watch." and he stands on a wall and [cross talk] so he was that Marine. On a wall.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: He's basically a part of the set.

JOSH: Essentially. And we would do lots of horrible things, like I bought these little disc guns, guns that shoot little plastic discs, and we would shoot him during the play. Up in the tower. And he's supposed to be this solid marine, you can't be flinching so he would just have to take it, we would shoot him in the face. And if I had to go on as an understudy, I would go on for that role, Ron would come down from the tower and play my roles, and they would stick a manikin in the tower. Our stage manager, David, would have to announce when understudies went on, and I used to beg him to say "The role normally played by Michael Dolan will be played by Joshua Malina, The role normally played by Joshua Malina will be played by Ron Ostrow. And the role normally played by Ron Ostrow will be played by a dummy." But, he would never do it.

HRISHI: Aw.

JOSH: But, Ron's there. He makes it onto *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: I'm looking at Ron's credits right now...he and I are already on a first name basis...

JOSH: Apparently.

HRISHI: I'm looking at Ron Ostrow's credits, and you've done a lot of things together. You have a lot of shared credits.

JOSH: That is true.

HRISHI: He was also in *Bulworth*.

JOSH: He was?

HRISHI: Yes. And he was also in *Scandal*.

JOSH: Yes. He stands in on *Scandal* and has appeared on camera, he's played a couple of roles on the show as well he's played some secret service guys. He's a great actor and a terrific guy and one of my oldest friends. And the name Ron, spoiler alert I won't give much detail, but remember when we call back a few episodes from now, will be wielded, I think, by Aaron as a joke on Ron Ostrow later in this series.

HRISHI: Hmm. I don't know what you're referring to. [cross talk] no.

JOSH: [cross talk] And you don't remember. Oh fantastic. Ok soon enough we'll discuss it.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Just remember that.

HRISHI: Ok. I thought this part was really funny. This exchange between Josh and Sam:

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

JOSH: In your life you have never been on time to this meeting.

SAM: Yeah, I wasn't actually. I was just incredibly late to the meeting right before it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Fantastic, so clever.

HRISH: Yeah. Here's a thing that I learned from the podcast that informed the way I watched this episode a way I would not have before. Normally, I was right there with Anthony, who's Officer Cupcake?

JOSH: Ah, yes, of course I thought of you.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

CHARLIE: When did you start talking like Mickey Spillane?

ANTHONY: I don't know, who's officer cupcake?

CHARLIE: Ok....

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He's referring to Officer Krupke. Now I know who Officer Krupke is.

JOSH: We've already name checked the good officer.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: I did like the line.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

CHARLIE: Ok, you're seeing a musical.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I thought "merchandise", that would be a good shirt for you.

HRISHI: That's true. Well, shirt for you [cross talk] that I should look at.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, I guess so.

JOSH: I wrote down Balzac. Where is Balzac mentioned in this episode?

HRISHI: Like Honoré de Balzac?

JOSH: Correct, very nice. Ding ding ding.

HRISHI: There's a thing where Debbie [Hrishi laughing] Debbie says to Josh when she's berating him for not following the rules.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

DEBBIE: The email, which is exactly this long, by the way in case, as a boy you had some sort of frightening experience with Balzac, and that's why you didn't read it..

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ah, well I wrote it down for two reasons, one I believe in *The Music Man* there's some, these kind of, old biddies are complaining about books that they want banned from the library and one of them just keeps saying "Balzac".

[The Music Man song "Pick-a-Little, Talk-a-little" excerpt]

MAUD: *Of, course I shouldn't tell you this but she advocates dirty books.*

HAROLD: *Dirty books!*

ALMA: *Chaucer*

ETHEL: *Rabelais*

EULALIE: *Balzac!*

[end excerpt]

[Hrishi laughing]

JOSH: There's that. [cross talk], and two have you read by any chance, because we haven't thrown out a good book recommendation in a long time, but Balzac wrote a novel called *Père Goriot*. Father Goriot.

HRISHI: [cross talk] uh huh.

HRISHI: No, the only Balzac that I read was, maybe it was *Père Goriot*. No, no *Colonel Chabert*. That's what I read.

JOSH: Ok. I think the only book I've read by Balzac is *Père Goriot*. But it's a fantastic book, it's a book for a very long time, that some how I don't know why, I got into an early spat with my wife where I was trying to force her to read it. I think she didn't like it and so I wouldn't read *Ethan Frome* and I think as a result I've never read *Ethan Frome* and she's never read *Père Goriot*. But what I really want to say is that our listeners should consider reading *Père Goriot*. I remember it being an incredibly great book about a guy who has put himself into a horrible situation financially in order to make his daughters' lives better. It's a great book.

HRISHI: How many pages do you think?

JOSH: How many pages?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I want to say it's about 250. Why do you ask?

HRISHI: Because Debbie name checks Balzac as if he's Tolstoy really.

JOSH: Yeah, you're right, that's a good point. I forgot that that was the context. Well lets see, the Oxford World's Classic edition has 304 pages.

HRISHI: Reasonable.

JOSH: Here's something I noticed. I need some scalp forensic help from our listeners. I think Rob Lowe is starting to grow his hair out for post *West Wing* work. In this episode I just noticed something. It's a little different, it's a little longer, and I think, I think he's looking to the next job hair wise. That's all I got.

HRISHI: Ok. Here's a question about Sam's next job.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Sam's next potential job not Rob Lowe's, but Sam's.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: He says, in conversation with Donna that one of the reasons why he doesn't want to run for Wilde's seat in the forty seventh, for the runoff election, is because he would like to someday run for office. You know he says...

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

SAM: 'Cause the alternative is taking ninety days off to go home, lose by twenty points to a Republican Committee Chair I hate, and never be able to run for public office for real, which is something I maybe wouldn't mind doing one day.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And maybe I was distracted by a bumble bee this day in civics but I don't know why would that be the case. Why wouldn't he be able to run for public office for real if he runs in this election and loses?

JOSH: Oh I think, he just figures it would be a strike against him to have lost his first campaign.

HRISHI: That I understand.

JOSH: That's how I took it.

HRISHI: But that's so different from "never be able to run." I mean there are plenty of people who have lost elections and then later won them.

JOSH: That's a good point. I didn't bump on it when I heard it. I think maybe it's a little insight into the perfectionism of Sam Seaborn.

HRISHI: I was thinking about Mitt Romney is considering a run for senator in Utah and he's run for all kinds of offices in all kinds of different places. And held, you know, he's been a Governor of Massachusetts.

JOSH: Yeah, no, that's absolutely true. And I would argue that resilience after defeat is a great quality to have.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: You know, why is it so unthinkable for Sam.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: That's a good question. Should we talk about vote swapping? I want you to help me reverse engineer, be my external hard drive. I know that I was very close to trying to pull off a vote swap and then I ultimately decided not to do it. So when, that must have been in the California primary?

HRISHI: In the recall election?

JOSH: No, it was I think, in the Presidential election. It was the Presidential election. So what was it, maybe I was willing to trade my vote for Hillary 'cause I was assuming that she would win...[cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh, I see, I see.

JOSH: It wasn't in the general I think it must have been in the Democratic Primary. But I can't remember what the-

HRISHI: You mean in 2016 this was something you did?

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: You tried to convince someone to [cross talk] vote for Hillary.

JOSH: No, I almost did it there even, there was some website where you could do it, and I guess I would have traded, I don't know what it was. I can't remember what the hell it was and finally I decided it just wasn't ethical. Nor did I have any guarantee that it, but why was I even lured into that? I can't remember what the goal, what the incentive was. I think, I guess I remember feeling that I could trade my Hillary vote and feel confident that she would win.

HRISHI: In California.

JOSH: Right, in California. This would [cross talk] [both laughing] make a better story if I had, even not all my faculties, but more than I currently possess.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: Not a great story, but, one thing I will say is: having cast your vote already, hard to make a, you've lost your leverage in terms of a vote swap.

HRISHI: Mhm. It's an honor thing.

JOSH: No, it's a stupidity thing. It's a dumbness thing. Why would anybody swap votes when the other person already voted?

HRISHI: Well, she did vote for Ritchie in Wisconsin where it's, you know, more consequential. There's no way that Ritchie was going to win the District.

JOSH: Right, but she already voted. You don't have something to swap. [cross talk] You only have something to swap when you haven't voted yet.

HRISHI: [cross talk] it's true.

HRISHI: Right, it's true, it's true. There is no incentive for the...

JOSH: It's like saying, you know, will you give me that football if I give you this sandwich I already ate? [Hrishi laughing] No, no I won't.

HRISHI: Or rather, here is a sandwich. Now, will you give me a football in exchange for the sandwich? You already have the sandwich.

JOSH: That's a better, [Josh laughing] yeah that's better. It's not as funny but it's a better analogy.

HRISHI: But, it worked.

JOSH: It did work. Because Christian Slater is all about honor.

HRISHI: I'd like to go back to the Donna moment with Sam. That scene. Because there is some really blatant terrible empty coffee cup acting going on there.

JOSH: Oooh. In which scene?

HRISHI: In the scene where Sam brings Donna some coffee. He says "oh, I was at the thing" when she is out there yelling at people to try and get them to trade votes with her.

JOSH: Right, yes, I do remember that now, yes.

HRISHI: Right, so he brings her coffee-

JOSH: uh-huh.

HRISHI: and he hands it to her. He opens his up to blow on it and then take a sip of it. And everything else that he's doing, fantastic, the delivery of his lines, everything is great. But the coffee cup... It came to my attention a little while ago I think through an article on *Slate*. I think that was the first place that I had found out about it, that there is this phenomenon of people with empty coffee cups acting like they are full, or just people walking into scenes with what's supposed to be a cup full of coffee and there's no way there's anything in the cup. There's no weight in it, there's no liquid in it.

JOSH: That's inexcusable, I mean, why wouldn't there be liquid in it. What's happening with the properties department that they couldn't put liquid in it? [cross talk] It should be steaming liquid because we have that technology.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I don't know.

HRISHI: I will put up a link to this *Slate* article.

JOSH: Oh, I'm very curious to read it because I'm obsessed generally with actor eating.

HRISHI: Oh.

JOSH: Because, some actors, for lack of a better phrase, tend to make a meal out of it. There's this like a, whole school of people who are really eating for the camera.

HRISHI: Uh-huh, the Brad Pitts of the world.

JOSH: Oh, is he particularly [cross talk] guilty? Oh, he eats all the time.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Constantly.

HRISHI: All the time.

JOSH: But convincingly so? Or see, for me it's just like sometimes I feel like they're putting on a show, like "we get it, you're eating". Just eat normally.

HRISHI: Well, I will point everyone to this *Slate* article. The headline is "The Most Infuriating Thing on Television: Unrealistic Acting with Empty Coffee Cups".

JOSH: Wow, interesting.

HRISHI: By Miles McNutt and Daniel Hubbard. They even had a hashtag going #EmptyCupAwards hashtag. And then there's a video, this empty cup awards video that shows all these different egregious examples. This one is not necessarily egregious, but now, I notice it.

JOSH: I'm dying to see it. Because, why wouldn't there be liquid in there?

HRISHI: I don't know.

JOSH: It's mind boggling.

HRISHI: The Yiddish word is actually mind bog. All the Toby stuff with Andy was great. Where they go to the ultrasound and Josh tells him to grease the nurse. I thought that was very funny.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

JOSH: Toby, when you get there it's a good idea to slip the nurse something. Tell her your hoping for a smooth second trimester.

ANDY: You grease the nurse?

TOBY: He's kidding. Give me one second would you? I'll catch right up. So what do you think like fifty bucks?

JOSH: I don't know, it's your first, it's twins, I don't know, I think I'd give her a hundred.

TOBY: Yeah, ok.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, very funny. One general thing about this episode, which is that often this show, or more often than not, this show tips more toward the political than the personal and this was refreshing in the way that it tipped more towards the personal lives of the characters.

HRISHI: That's true. Yeah.

JOSH: Which I enjoy. Let me ask you this about the whole Toby-Andy thing. Why is the news getting out such a potential scandal?

HRISHI: Because she is an unmarried lady. A single mother. I thought that we'd come a long way from the days of Murphy-Brown. Even in the era fifteen years ago.

JOSH: That's what I thought. I kept trying to put myself back there, and think, is 2002 was that, were the social morays such that this really would have been such a big scandal? I didn't know if I quite bought that aspect of this episode.

HRISHI: I mean I understand that there might be some people who would feel that way. But I was surprised that C.J. bought into it.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

CJ: It'd be nice if we could announce a wedding.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: What? What?

JOSH: Huh? Yeah, I bumped on that.

HRISHI: Mhm. I understand why Toby would like to announce a wedding.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: He's in love with her.

JOSH: He just wants to get married. Right.

HRISHI: One more thing about Jack Reese. I felt bad for him because he said he had never had the chance to vote in an election and he was really looking forward to "pulling that lever", but it had been established in the cold open that there is no lever being pulled.

JOSH: Good point.

HRISHI: And I thought "He's in for a disappointment." Ok here's something that we teased in the last episode.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And now it is time to discuss it.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

ELSIE: The dye has been cast, big brother.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, I was surprised to read that in the second script and I thought oh, there probably shouldn't have been maybe a little under current of flirting in the first episode. Which I don't think was explicit but I certainly... I thought maybe there was romantic potential there, and then I thought wow, that was an inappropriate thought even to have had when contemplating my first episode.

HRISHI: I think you're right though. That feels like a shift that doesn't feel like that was there. I mean, when Will goes to explain to Sam who wrote the jokes in the speech he says, "See that woman over there, her name is Elsie Snuffin" and yeah, Sam says [cross talk]

JOSH: I found her at my house 'cause she's my sister.

[West Wing Episode 4.06 excerpt]

WILL: She was the eleventh man on a ten man writing staff for a sitcom. They weren't using her stuff....

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Why not say also, "We're related, I've known her since she was born."

JOSH: Well, as you posited last episode I believe it's a bit of ret-coning. I think they didn't make that decision that there was a family relationship until this episode.

HRISHI: Right. I do take some points away for this big brother. It just feels like clunky exposition.

JOSH: It is a little clunky, yeah.

HRISHI: I never like it in any tv show. I'm surprised to see it in *The West Wing*, it happens a lot. Where it's like "hey sis".

JOSH: Mhm. I just noticed that actually I think in the first episode of *Happy Valley*, it's a BBC show which is superb. But it has a little bit of it in the first episode there's just, somebody tells someone else how that person is related to them. Just so that we can kind of go on with the show and get it. [cross talk] So, it does happen. It happens in the best of productions.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

HRISHI: It happens all the time.

JOSH: Because, frankly, it's a huge problem. I mean, there is information you need to get out. Although I don't know particularly why, I can't even remember an episode subsequent to this why it is important for us to know or important for them even to be half siblings.

HRISHI: Maybe to remove the possibility of a romantic relationship.

JOSH: It's possible that Danica went to them and said "If that's where you're headed, forget it. Now that I've seen him." [Hrishi laughing] "Write us related. He's my brother." No, yeah, I don't know.

HRISHI: That would be rough.

JOSH: Somebody actually says the word "trump".

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

DONNA: Don't try to trump me here.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's [cross talk] a literal Trump-ai-yi-yi moment. Just the word being said. Don't trump me here.

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

HRISHI: Yeah, Donna said 'trump' but really what made it feel like an ai-yi-yi moment is the line that she says afterwards. She says: "Don't try to trump me here, it's not a battle, we're in this together." And I thought [cross talk] "ai-yi-yi."

JOSH: [cross talk] ai-yi-yi

[both laugh]

JOSH: Will makes it rain. That's this episode right?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Yes, that was fun to shoot. I laughed to myself, I tifoled, when I watched the scene because I remember that Aaron was not very pleased with how it had been staged and shot and perhaps acted. I remember, I think he called down to I think it was Alex Graves, who did not direct this episode, but the producing director that got the phone call, Aaron having looked at the dailies, basically said "I wasn't trying to imply that Will has mystical powers".

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

ELSIE: Will!

JOSH: NOW!!! [Thunder clap] Jesus!

ELSIE: Wow, what else can you do?

JOSH: I didn't know I could do that!

[end excerpt]

[both laughing]

HRISHI: So, how did he envision the scene happening?

JOSH: Well, that's an interesting question. I think it was more... I don't know if it was in the timing of it...I mean, it really plays, like, I go "NOW!" [cross talk] and so, yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] KERGUUNG. Right, there was a crack of lightning and everything.

JOSH: I think it might have been a timing thing, perhaps the fact that it goes from zero to deluge [cross talk] in a nanosecond. [Hrishi laughing] But I do remember Aaron being slightly miffed at how it had been done. And I guess it was the kind of thing where it was probably expensive and certainly a big deal to re-shoot a scene like that so, that was that.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: Ok, here's a small detail about production, how do you shoot a scene like that?

JOSH: Well, Aaron has put me in the rain a couple times.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Had a great rain scene in *Sports Night* as well with Paula Marshall.

HRISHI: Right, with Jenny.

JOSH: Yes. And it's one of my favorite things just because it makes me feel like a kid. Just the wonder of filmmaking. They have these incredibly tall, I think they're called rain towers, that, I don't know, they're thirty feet in the air or something like that.

HRISHI: Do they look like giant shower heads?

JOSH: Kind of, and they're way high up and a flip of the switch and then it's pouring on you. And of course there are all kinds of concomitant issues when using these rain towers like everything's wet once you use them once.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: So, I can't even remember really what reset entails but it's amazing what the crew can do in order to have a second or third go at things like this. But you don't do it twenty times or at least not in my experience.

HRISHI: Yeah, well, 'ol one take Malina is what Jack Warner used to call you.

JOSH: There you go. Tremendous amount of fun filming that scene with Danica. I love being in the fake rain.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: And I kind of like the idea that I did have a super power.

[both laughing]

HRISHI: The president gets that victory glass of scotch.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: When they find out that he's going to win New Hampshire, and then he puts it on the table without a coaster.

JOSH: Oh, President Bartlet.

HRISHI: That table's probably from you know [cross talk] 1835 and was made from the timbers of George Washington's teeth or something like that.

[Josh laughing]

JOSH: [cross talk] Queen Elizabeth.

JOSH: Yeah, that's a shame. I didn't notice that. He should have had better coaster etiquette. President Bartlet on the more solemn side of things is having some physical side effects of MS and it's sort of heart breaking to watch, and I think it's a very, very good physical performance from Martin Sheen. It's very subtly and convincingly done.

HRISHI: Yeah, I thought all of that part of the plot was really well depicted and plotted too. The fact that the coincidence of Debbie being sensitive to potential oncoming effects of MS, this is the kind of thing we have just criticized and the recent last few, couple episodes. Where oh this thing happens and it feels like it's just too much of a coincidence. But here the coincidence is part of the plot in this really organic and wonderful way.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Debbie, I have to ask you... are we talking about... did you bring it up cause you noti... is there some particular thing today you've noticed?

DEBBIE: No sir....

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, there is something very tender and vulnerable about that moment between the president and Debbie.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: And I like the way Lesli also shot that moment. It's kind of from the outer office all the way through and he's still looking out and it's a good shot.

HRISHI: And this idea of for the first time addressing really to her face that she's replacing Mrs. Landingham. That there was someone here before her. I thought that was really a lovely moment, even though it was sort of painful, this idea that the president accuses Debbie of thinking that Mrs. Landingham might have been a rube, and that she's gonna come up here and whip this place into shape. I love her response to that.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

Debbie: You and I haven't met. In my life, I never would have that she was a rube.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, and Lily Tomlin her work is so precise and her timing is right on, spot on.

HRISHI: Yeah. The fact that Christian Slater is on the show, I thought, you know that's a big guest star. That's a big get.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: And there have been some guest stars, but in the background, and it's like this insane casting. That Lily Tomlin is in this show, it's crazy that one of the guest stars is just, you know, coming in and out, is Lily Tomlin.

JOSH: Yeah, it is remarkable. It's less remarkable when you're an actor and you realize how little great writing there is to go around.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And dialogue that Aaron writes, attracts actors. This is the kind of stuff actors want. So, I totally get why people sign on and given the way Aaron writes, you sign on before you really know what you're doing.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Ok whatever, whatever you have in mind for me. If you're writing it, I'm in.

HRISHI: It's a tremendous like, sixth man to have on your bench.

JOSH: Yup. Indeed.

HRISHI: Going to another sport, back to football.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: One of the reasons why I love the Orlando Kettles stuff in this episode so much is-
[cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] Skittles.

HRISHI: the moment when they're in line waiting to vote.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And Orlando talks about football in a way that I thought was a lovely analogy for how our characters treat their jobs.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

CHARLIE: Why does a guy who's heading off to the Big Ten care about playing St. Erasmus Academy on Saturday? You're gonna be playing Michigan and Penn State.

ORLANDO: I don't know. It's what I do on Saturdays. Hey, you know what? I know I'm not the sharpest tool in the box or nothin' but try rushing the quarter back. Know what I'm saying? You're not gonna get there. You're not gonna touch him.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought in that little, what could have really been like, really a throw away exchange, there was some seed of the entire show, the entire series in that. Which is that if there's something that you are dedicated to, if there's something that you love, it transforms into more than just being a way that you spend your time or your job, it becomes like a vocation and you're calling. It's sort of like the birthday message that they have to write, you know, they just want to nail it. It seems like this trivial [cross talk] thing and, yeah, and when you do it with joy and a sense of duty,

JOSH: [cross talk] that's what they do.

JOSH: And pride in your work.

HRISHI: It doesn't matter what the scale of the thing is it's what you do.

JOSH: Very nice. Yes, and I think that's a rich moment, because Aaron doesn't try to explicitly tie it to just those things that you pointed out.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Because it exists on its own if you want to find it.

HRISHI: Right, it's just, this is the attitude of people who we like on this show. I found myself rooting for Orlando so much the whole episode.

JOSH: And I like also how the physicality of Omar Benson Miller. He's just so large, but he uses his body well, there's kind of almost a grace to him. And there's something funny even about the way he goes into the voting booth, he's kind of still sticking out of it. [cross talk] I thought that was brilliant. I don't know if that was just a, by necessity, that's how much space he took up, but it seemed to me almost, that that's what they wanted. [cross talk] It's like the little curtain is up on his back.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes! I love that! I loved it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. The blocking.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: It was well done.

HRISHI: It really was.

JOSH: And then his joy at the, having voted brought him such joy that he wants to do it again. It's kind of a very cute moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's so sweet. The last scene too, really crushed me.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

ABBEY: There gonna be more days like this. It starts now. It's gonna be harder this time.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah I know. We can still have tonight though right?

ABBEY: You got lots of nights. Smart people who love you are gonna have your back.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the president this entire episode has been kind of confronting his defeat, He's won the election but he's dealing with the impending defeat of his body by MS.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And so, in this moment that's supposed to be victorious, you can see this fragility, the way he asks "We can still have tonight though right?" and then Stockard Channing kills me when she says "You got lots of nights." In my notes I wrote down "crying emoji".

JOSH: It's a great and rich relationship that they have. And I like this episode because we're getting the personal side amplified in a way that we don't usually and I think the show benefits from the fact that we don't usually get this and so the import of these kinds of moments are magnified when we do touch down on them.

HRISHI: Josh, have you ever used an emoji in your life?

JOSH: I have indeed. Yeah, I fought them for a long time but, yeah, I do use them now. I also like to use them just out of context. So, like it was great to see you today - eggplant - inchworm.

HRISHI: Eggplant - inchworm really means something.

JOSH: Probably in some culture but I don't know what it means.

HRISHI: Ah, well eggplant is the emoji that's used for a man's penis.

JOSH: Oh it is, well, it does look phallic.

HRISHI: and so to combine that with the inch worm...

JOSH: Oh, I'm saying that I have a small [expletive deleted] every time I...It was great to see you today, I'm hung like a field mouse. Maybe I'll start doing soccer ball - Israeli flag.

HRISHI: In reference to *The West Wing* episode when the two American Teenagers are targeted?

JOSH: I thought it's was just a way of saying that I have one testicle and I'm circumcised. Any two emojis.

HRISHI: I wrote that emoji down and I wondered if you would disapprove of it. And then as I was asking you this I almost said "In your life have you ever used an emoji" the way that Josh says "In your life [cross talk] you've never been..."

JOSH: [cross talk] Ah, in your life, there you go. Now let's take a break and when we come back let's talk to Clark Gregg.

[Ad break]

JOSH: Ok, we're back and that means it's time to welcome to the show an old and dear friend of mine. He's a super talented actor, writer, and director. And an all-around swell guy. He plays Mike Casper on *The West Wing*, it's time to welcome Clark Gregg.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for doing this.

CLARK: My great pleasure.

JOSH: We finally got you. Twitter's very excited to have you.

CLARK: That's very nice of Twitter. I was just listening to "Red Mass" and I was like these [expletive deleted] are saying really nice stuff.

JOSH: We do love you.

CLARK: Just 'cause they know I'm coming on. [cross talk] you know, I was going to be obsequious but..

JOSH: [cross talk] No, it's not true. It's not true. You can go further back to previous [cross talk] Casper episodes.

HRISHI: [cross talk] It's true. We recorded that, I think, before I knew at least that Josh had reached you and you had agreed to do the episode. [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] That's true actually.

CLARK: Let's go with that, yeah, let's go with that.

HRISHI: Ok, well let's get into it.

JOSH: Hey, Scrump.

CLARK: There's only one ground rule Josh.

JOSH: Yes?

CLARK: Not that nickname.

JOSH: Ok. You know the origin of that though. Our nicknames seem to be interchangeable. We call each other Scrump and Bump or Scrumpy and Bumpy although it's unclear who is which. And do you remember where that, the origin story of those nicknames?

CLARK: I don't really. I just know they sound dirty and drug addicted.

JOSH: They do, but there not it's a hard G story. We were rehearsing for the Broadway production of *A Few Good Men*, and we were in some sort of rehearsal hall near a bunch of,

there was like a basket full of costumes, and we put on ridiculous hats, and we just decided we looked like Scrumpy and Bumpy.

HRISHI: And do you which was which?

JOSH: No, it was never quite clear, you could use them interchangeably. Which I feel is a sign of our close friendship.

CLARK: I thought it was kind of cool in meadow that we had nicknames and that they were interchangeable.

JOSH: Yeah.

CLARK: And now that you say it I remember that there were some really weird looking hillbilly hats.

HRISHI: Give me the background on that. How did you first meet?

JOSH: That would be in the Broadway production of *A Few Good Men*. What's your Sorkin origin story? How'd you get that job?

CLARK: I was running the Atlantic Theatre Company as a cocky twenty-six or seven-year-old and I know I was cocky because we had no theatre and rarely did plays but we would go to Vermont in the summers and put on a bunch of plays and then try to bring them unsuccessfully to New York which was too expensive. And I would ride around on my messenger bike scouting out plays by new writers and someone handed me one by this punk kid named Aaron Sorkin. Called removing all doubt and I was like "ok, this is some of the best dialogue I've ever read in my life." And it was an early play of his and I reached out and just started to try and kind of get him to write something or see about doing that play. And then somewhere in there I feel like you guys did a one act at the West Bank.

HRISHI: You guys, as in including Josh?

JOSH: I saw it. I was alas not part of it. But that was I think the one act version of *Hidden in This Picture*.

CLARK: Right, was that before *A Few Good Men*?

JOSH: Yeah, and Aaron was in it, no?

CLARK: Aaron was in it. Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. That was at the West Bank Cafe prior to *A Few Good Men*.

CLARK: Yeah. I remember I invited him up to Vermont, I said come on up - we go to Vermont in the summers and we do plays, and we swim in the quarry and its really fun, come on up we'll send you a I think it was like a Peoples Express, the equivalent of Jet Blue in those days, ticket. And he came up and we said did you, gonna read a play? And he said I have a play, but it's gonna be done on Broadway do you want to read it. And we said Yeah. And we read an earlier, A pretty early draft of *A Few Good Men*, which was remarkable, and kind of watched him put it back in his bag, and like, ok that's not available. And I'm like...

JOSH: Did you read the role of Jack Ross?

CLARK: I think it's possible I read the early iteration of Daniel Kaffee up there in the rehearsal hall in Vermont. And had a really fun weekend and found Aaron to be as wild and charming and he made quite a splash with the ladies.

JOSH: Speaking of making a splash though, Aaron didn't swim in a quarry, did he?

CLARK: No, I think he studiously avoided that part.

JOSH: Yeah, 'cause I don't see it. That's an image I have trouble with.

CLARK: I just remember him being at like a kind of evening party at one of these deserted summer dorms with us kinda saying you guys have a good racket here. There's no grownups and you just do plays and eat ice cream and go to the quarry. And then the next thing I heard it was probably a year or two later. I was there doing plays again in Vermont in the summer and I got a call saying there's this play on Broadway do you want to come down and read for a part. And I conned a ride off somebody and I went down and I read for the Daniel Kaffee part. And it went ok and I went back to Vermont and I was literally, I was starving, I was selling hair accessories on the street and doing, i think, an evening of one acts at night. And then they called me and said "You got a call back". So I had to get another ride down to New York a couple of weeks later. And then I got the call saying "Yeah, Tom Hulce doing it." And I was like "awwww, oh well, I'm gonna sell some hair, so I'm gonna really be successful at selling Hair Accessories then instead." And then I got a call two weeks later into my despondency saying, "Oh, the guy who is playing Jack Ross quit. Would you be interested in playing the other part?" and I mean, no one else has ever said "yes" faster in their life. And next thing you know I was in a rehearsal hall in Manhattan meeting this talented young newcomer named Josh Malina.

JOSH: And wearing hillbilly hats.

CLARK: And we brought it full circle.

JOSH: Coming up with nicknames. Wait a minute, this is the part I forgot, who was originally cast in the role?

CLARK: I think it was Dylan Baker. I think the part got some more scenes after he left. And he's, you know, one of my favorite actors. [cross talk] I was intimidated that they'd even seen him read any of it.

JOSH: [cross talk] great actor.

JOSH: So many great memories, many of which really cannot be shared, in the interest of family fair. But one I do remember is opening night party, I think in D.C. at the Kennedy Center, and you went out to get the review, like the early review, and then you came back to the party and I was like so, and you said, "It's not great I threw it in the bushes."

CLARK: It wasn't great and I just remember I don't want to bring this back I just said "it's not out, I couldn't find any newspapers."

JOSH: You made the absolutely right call.

CLARK: I think Aaron has thanked me for that [cross talk] in retrospect.

JOSH: [cross talk] I'm sure.

CLARK: And then there was the New York opening night,

JOSH: Yes.

CLARK: Where we, you know, the weird thing is it was very popular. There were standing ovations every night. People loved the play.

JOSH: Yeah.

CLARK: But, I think Frank Rich was a little dismissive in a way that I, while I respect him a lot, thought was kinda bogus. 'cause, you know, there was talk all the time about where were the American young play writes, and here was a twenty-nine-year-old who had written this cool play, kind of old school, and it was really working and they were a little, I don't think they really gave, like, this is a hell of a first play. And we were all a bit again, once again despondent couldn't keep the review out of Sardi's. I do remember one of my first jobs in New York was that I was a maligned and abused bar back out at Sardi's. And when we walked in for the opening night thing, this must have been seven years later [cross talk] a bunch of the old waiters looked at me like "oh my god, never thought I'd see that guy make it."

JOSH: [cross talk] that must have felt good.

JOSH: Bar back makes good.

CLARK: Yeah, and the reviews, that New York Times review was a bit of a missile in our side. But then they started, Liz Smith loved the play, that legendary gossip columnist, and so did Katharine Hepburn, and pretty soon we were doing really good box office.

JOSH: Yeah, that's what I remember Katharine Hepburn being an early booster. I'd forgotten about that.

CLARK: She came into my dressing room. I was like "oh, oh my god, it's Katharine Hepburn in my dressing room." and I...

JOSH: I'm pretty sure she made it up to the third floor at a fairly advanced age to say hi to the grunts in my communal dressing room which was impressive.

CLARK: Yeah. It was a highlight.

HRISHI: So, you went from *A Few Good Men* to making a memorable appearance in *Sports Night* towards the end of that series. Was that the next time you reconnected with Aaron?

CLARK: I remember one call where Aaron said "I'm doing this pilot, *Sports Night*. I would like for you to come in and read for one of the parts." And I was so, kinda flattered and interested, and really wanted to do it, but my acting career had been going so well that I was working as a screen writer and I had to say no to Aaron and to this incredible script and I was a little bit destroyed by it.

HRISHI: Which roll were you supposed to read for?

CLARK: You know, was one of the ensemble I just know it wasn't Josh's part.

HRISHI: Ok.

CLARK: It was one of the sports casters. And then I showed up to do the mysterious Calvin Trager fresh off an appearance on the New York stage in a Turgenev play so I had some of the sketchiest sideburns.

JOSH: That's funny. And do you remember my tormenting you during one scene with a remote-controlled fart machine?

CLARK: You know, I had forgotten, I had blocked that out 'cause it so was painful.

JOSH: It was unkind.

CLARK: You did put a fart machine, and a lot of people really played along with it well and I was like "It's not me. It's not me. I'm a guest star. I would never fart."

HRISHI: There's an episode of our podcast where Josh told this story, and I think it's the hardest I've laughed on this podcast, which is saying something, he made me cry as he described your reaction to the fart machine.

JOSH: Well, I just remember at a certain point it was clear, it was explicitly clear that I was doing it and I still kept doing it. I just remember, I remember Clark "Just stop, Josh, please, stop."

CLARK: Tommy Schlamme I think was directing it and I just was like, "Stop it. You're gonna get Tommy Schlamme mad at me somehow."

JOSH: Yeah, well, I went a little too far as I tend to.

CLARK: You're kidding, wait a minute, hold on now. Newsflash.

JOSH: Bombshell.

CLARK: But then I also remember that I almost lost my life on Sports Night.

HRISHI: What's that? What happened?

CLARK: Not many people know this story, I really feel like it's a scoop here on the TWWW. They were serving snacks, I was very hungry, and they had served snacks at crafty, which were really large round raviolis. Really large. And I was sitting there with a plastic fork trying to manageably cut this thing in half with the fork and all of a sudden I hear that thing that a guest, will really send a chill through a guest actors spine, which was "Clark Gregg, where's Clark Gregg?" And all of a sudden I accidentally slurped in the entire ravioli. And it immediately stuck in my throat and I was trying to, you know, not embarrass myself, I was kind of pushing on my own solar plexus and trying to make it come up, but it wouldn't come up. I may have tried to wash it down unfortunately with then that got stuck so I was also drowning. And I go over to the guy at the craft service thing and I remember somewhere in my dying moments your supposed to make the choking sign. So, I started making the choking sign to this guy and he thinks I'm doing some goofy clown bit, and he starts putting his ears-his thumbs in is ears and wiggling his fingers and making faces back at me.

HRISHI: Oh, God.

CLARK: I was like, "Oh my God. The last thing I'm gonna see in life is this idiot doing cooky clown gestures 'cause he doesn't know I'm giving him the choking sign." And then finally I think in just anger at that, I managed to get this ravioli out and walk over there like nothing was happening pumping with adrenaline and then all of a sudden I start hearing the sound of the fart machine.

HRISHI: And so you did two episodes there?

CLARK: I was told that if the show came back Calvin Trager might be a player [cross talk] in an ongoing...

JOSH: [cross talk] you're in the very final episode of the series, no?

HRISHI: Yes.

[Sports Night 2.22 excerpt]

CALVIN: It's a good show Dana. Anybody who can't make money off of Sports Night should get out of the money-making business.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Said Aaron to ABC through Clark as Calvin Trager.

CLARK: Yeah.

JOSH: Instead, they got out of the *Sports Night* business.

HRISHI: I thought that those last two episodes were so well done, it never occurred to me that there was a possibility that there would have been a third season. I figured, at that point it was clear, it had come to its natural conclusion.

JOSH: Oh no, no. And what is the final episode? "Quo Vadimus"? Is that what it was [cross talk] called?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

JOSH: Ok.

CLARK: And I must say an incredibly passionate group of people given that it was two episodes and I think that I was barely in the first one. Come up to me to this day like "Calvin Trager." and they quote that line "If you can't make money off of Sports Night"

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah.

CLARK: Like, the *Sports Night* has very ardent fans.

JOSH: You know what actually just hit me in a wave of memory? You were there when we were shooting the pilot, and you were very encouraging to me. I remember specifically, it's funny, I just remember a specific thing you said to me, I had that big monologue interview with Felicity and Sabrina.

[Sports Night 1.01 excerpt]

JEREMY: Now yes, sure, indeed, I can tell you what Ewin and Oakley are shooting from the field and that you're not gonna stop John Starks if he squares up to the basket, and put any defensive pressure on Charlie Ward and he's gonna fold like a cheap card table. But if you're asking me for generally sophisticated analysis, and I sense that you are, you've gotta give me some time, at least twenty minutes.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And Clark came over and he said "oh, I like watching you do this again and again. It's knocking the weights off the bat. You've been swinging with the weights on, knocking them off and then going out there and doing the speech." I just remember, I remember that specific nice encouraging thing that you said to me.

CLARK: That's nice. What the hell was I doing there in the pilot?

JOSH: That was kind of-I guess you were being a good friend to the many people you knew involved.

CLARK: Oh, yeah, I think you're right.

JOSH: You were there I know you were.

CLARK: Yeah. You're right. I'm kind of a good guy.

JOSH: You really are. Bombshell. Who knew?

CLARK: Thanks. You were killing it. And what else?

HRISHI: Oh, well and then..

CLARK: Oh there's this other show.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: That's right.

CLARK: Oh yeah. So then, I remember watching *The West Wing*, and going "Oh my god, I love this show so much. He's killed it." 'Cause it was, you know, I'd loved *American President*. I think we'd all seen each other at Aaron's wedding?

JOSH: Yeah.

CLARK: In the interim. That was it before *West Wing*?

JOSH: Yeah.

CLARK: I think it was. And then I got married and we would watch *West Wing* and just marvel at how much we loved it and sure enough I got a call one day saying "will you come play this FBI agent?" I didn't realize especially given my history of punk rock and criminal behavior that I was about to embark on a life of people wanting to call me agent this or that. And I said sure and it was a scene with Rob Lowe. It was a really cool scene about, there were a couple of scenes that was about someone who was possibly a communist sympathizer and Rob wanting to clear him of, kind of, McCarthyist stuff and me having to reveal cryptically, well no, actually the reason we're resisting this is because this guy actually was a communist [cross talk] who was working with the Russian government, against our government.

HRISHI: [cross talk] that's right.

CLARK: Which I always thought was an interesting component to the evils of McCarthyism was that some of these guys were really spies.

HRISHI: It's funny watching *The West Wing* again for the podcast in this sort of slower form for me. Because I at this point, think of Special Agent Casper in a certain way, I think of him in the

mode that he is currently in season four where he's a friend of the administration. He's someone we're familiar with, who comes back and has a great relationship. So when we got to that episode on the podcast I was surprised a little bit to remember how contentious that first scene was between you and Rob Lowe.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

AGENT CASPER: That man was named by Joe McCarthy as part of [cross talk]

SAM: For twenty years of treason?

AGENT CASPER: Yes. Which was called at the time a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man.

SAM: Somebody wake me up from this, because I think you just deputized Joe McCarthy into your argument.

[end excerpt]

CLARK: That's right it's testy, and I thought "ok, I'll be a bad guy. If they ever want to use me as a bad guy again" and then the next time, I think the next time I went in it was much more, it was, I think it was, you'll tell me 'cause I don't know, but it was the scene where Josh Lyman's walking me in somewhere and I'm like...

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

AGENT CASPER: Hang on, this wall is curved.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: That's right. Yeah, that's a great moment. Very endearing moment.

CLARK: Yeah, I really came to love old Agent Casper. And it was weird, people, *The West Wing* was so popular, and people loved it so much that it was one of the first things people kind of started recognizing me from.

JOSH: And here's the 64,000 dollar question, Is there a straight line to be drawn between Agent Casper and Coulson.

CLARK: Well, in the minds of the Marvel fandom, who seem to have a fair amount of overlap with *The West Wing* fandom,

JOSH: Sure.

CLARK: Mike Casper is Agent Coulson's real name.

JOSH: Ah. Ah ha.

CLARK: And that actually he went, after his time at the FBI, he went, and spent some time training with Nick Fury and adopting his new nom de guerre, which was Phillip J. Coulson.

JOSH: Mhmm, and your first appearance in the Marvel universe is in *Iron Man*?

CLARK: Yes, and it was a very small, I got a call saying they want you to do this part, I mean they're sending you a couple of his script pages, and I think his name was literally "Agent". And he, and it was about five or ten lines and they wanted to make a three picture deal. And I thought this is crazy, why would any-the guys name is "Agent". Why do they want a three picture deal? And I feel like I saw this cast with Gwennyth, and Jeff Bridges, and Robert and I thought, "Oh man, I'm gonna get so cut out of this." So I had a moment of idiotic hesitation, and my wife was like "Are you nuts, you love comic books, go do this." And nine years later, "Thanks, honey."

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: At what point did you realize that this five line roll had turned into what it is?

CLARK: Oh, it was a constant joke, that, you know, they said, you know, they kept, they, Jon who's a really good guy, Favreau, not Obama's speech writer, who's also apparently a very good guy and I love his podcast, almost as much as I love yours.

JOSH: Well said. I was about to demand that.

CLARK: He came to me at a certain point he said "You know, they're kind of, they're digging what you're doing here, they're digging Agent Coulson. And are you free? Because they might start adding some stuff." and I was like "Oh, I will make sure that I am very free." and they let him, pretty soon I had a scene with Robert where I said, I was being sassy and he was being sassy and I said I was from the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement Logistics Division. And I thought, I went over and to the guy and I was like "...Is that *S.H.I.E.L.D.*? Am I from *S.H.I.E.L.D.*?" And they were like "Yeah, shhhh, don't tell anybody." and then they just kind of would say "Oh, listen there's a couple of scenes in *Iron Man 2* we want Agent Coulson to show back up." and I was like "Get out of here. Ok, cool." And I was doing one of those scenes and they were like "Ok, this time go in and say 'I got to go Mr. Stark, I got to go, I'm leaving town I'm going to New Mexico.'" And I did it and he said, and he would say "it's a magical place" and I would say, and I think I improvised, "You have no idea." And they said-then finally after about four or five takes It was like, "Oh my god, a better actor would have asked this by now. What's in New Mexico?" and the amazing Marvel exec Louis D'Esposito said "Oh, *Thor*, *Thor's* in New Mexico. Didn't anybody talk to you about this? You have a good part in *Thor*."

HRISHI: Wow.

CLARK: And I was like "What???" And since then it's just been like, a kind of, a comic book fans make a wish thing that just keeps going on. It's like I defy the doctor's expectations.

JOSH: That's fantastic. [cross talk]

CLARK: [cross talk] Until *Avengers* when I very much didn't defy the....

JOSH: Right. And you still...[cross talk] came back

HRISHI: [cross talk] and you still came back. Right.

CLARK: I still came back. There's one more *West Wing* story which is, I had to go to Tommy and Aaron when I was doing an episode and say "You had me down for Friday but that's my wife's due date..." and they said "Oh, got it, ok well, thanks for the heads up, listen obviously if you're gonna have a baby, you're gonna have a baby, we won't expect you to come in." And I said "Oh thank you." And sure enough on Friday I did that thing that an actor never does, in

their whole life, I called up the AD at 5:00 in the morning and said "My wife's in really extreme labor right now, so I don't think I can come in." and they were like "Ok, how far along?"

JOSH: Ah, TV production.

CLARK: "I think I'm gonna probably be kind of busy with this for most of the day." And they were like "Ok. You sure?" And I was like, "Yeah, yeah, I understand that the show must go on, but I'm really, I'm thinking I'm gonna be here at the hospital today." And they were really cool and I guess they kind of changed some of Martin's scenes around for that day. And then late, late, late that night, when my daughter had just been born, my phone, I get this call saying "so, where are you now? How's it going now?"

HRISHI: Wow.

CLARK: And I was like "Listen, I'm really, the baby is out. But I'm still not coming in."

JOSH: I had a similar experience but my crisis was the second day of Rosh Hashanah.

CLARK: Yes. Very similar.

JOSH: Yeah.

CLARK: And I'm grateful to this day that they actually, kind of, gave me the slack to let me have a baby.

HRISHI: Do you know in the casting of Agent Coulson if Agent Casper played at all into it? As Josh said you have a very impressive and long body of work.

JOSH: Is Favreau a *West Wing* fan?

CLARK: I asked him that once and he said "No, I hadn't seen that yet, at that point." I was kind of surprised I thought he, I was like "yes, yes you did, you just don't remember." But, I gotta say it was at a time when I really had been an actor and it was always my dream was acting and I loved writing and trying to make little films. But, you know, to be such a fan of the show and to show up, and it was such a bunch of New York theatre people, Josh and everybody it was so welcoming, Allison Janney, people I had met before, and of course Leo.

HRISHI: John Spencer.

CLARK: Who I'd seen in plays and just was such a huge fan of. And he was just one of those gentlemen who came up very, like the first day, when I felt like I was going to ruin the show, with my four lines. And was like, "Oh, wow, I'm so glad, look I'm so glad you're here, we're so lucky we got you." And I'm not sure he knew who I was but it was so classy. And it made, it just, I was like "Oh ok, this is the greatest family." Everybody was so kind of, kind and generous and the directors and the Misianos and Vince still directs some of our show and when they, when I had the first meeting with the show runners, Jim Merso, Whedon, and Jeff Bell on our show I said, "I just want one thing." And they said "What do you want? You're number one on the call sheet, what do you want?" And I said "I just want to do table reads." and they kind of looked at me like "It's an hour lunch. You're talking about an hour lunch." and I was like "I know, but can we just try it?" And they said "Ok." And we still do it to this day, and it's really just, and everyone kind of loves them. And I really, it's one of the things I got from Aaron.

JOSH: That's very cool. It's a great, to have that moment where everybody sees everyone else's, even though it's an initial, it's just a read, but you see everyone else's performance you

kind of have a little bit of that communal moment before you all go off to shoot your scenes separately.

CLARK: Yeah.

HRISHI: When we were talking about your memorable line delivery in our last episode, Josh mentioned that he felt that it was a product of a particular school of acting that you're part of or training that you did. You've been in a bunch of David Mamet things as well as Aaron's work and I was wondering [cross talk]

JOSH: and part of developing a technique with the Atlantic Theater Company. I would say, no?

HRISHI: Yeah, that's what I was wondering, did that, is that the school of acting that Josh is sort of referring to? Can you tell us just more about your way in to these lines, because they are so indelibly yours.

CLARK: Oh, thanks. I had to turn that part off because it was making me self-conscious. I was like, I don't want to think about how it comes out. I, you know, I've heard that before, I stumbled into a class at NYU was being taught by this young play-write Dave Mamet, and a young actor named Bill Macy, and they were remarkable and generous and had very, very forceful ideas.

HRISHI: They taught the class together?

CLARK: Yeah, they did, I was really blown away by them. And they definitely espouse a very minimalist Meisner based improvisatory stripped down style, and I, would say I picked up on whatever that is from watching Macy work. And doing Mamet scenes and their kind of philosophy of it. And at the same time there is a, I would say, not specifically hyper realistic style to Mamet. It's poetic in its own very human way. And I think Aaron's writing is very different, but it's in the same category, its musical, it's got its own rhythm, it's more than realist. And so when I got a chance to act some of Aaron's stuff it felt very similar to me in a way.

HRISHI: Have you ever been in a situation where you've brought that kind of technique to material instinctively and found that it didn't work?

CLARK: I've certainly had directors who felt that way. It's funny, I'm so, not conscious of it as being a style. I probably found that place and that school of thought because it's where my aesthetic leanings lay, and probably how I am as a person.

HRISHI: There are so many moments and things that you've been in, where it's not just the line it's also your performance of the line, where things, bits of dialogue that you've delivered have stayed with me for so long. The making money business is one, clearly I'm not the only one in that, and I think we've talked about this on the podcast too. There's a line in *In Good Company* that you say to Topher Grace, when you say:

[In Good Company excerpt]

STECKLE: Wow you're the new me. No, I'm the new me.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think about that line, I think about that delivery, all the time. I like that movie very much but that is my favorite moment of the whole thing.

CLARK: Oh, that's nice. You know, it's funny, not to deflect from your very valid praise, but the theme you have found, that that's Paul Weitz, and Mamet, Aaron, Paul Weitz. These are all play writes who became screen writers and film directors. There's a willingness to kind of make dialogue take risks and be, kind of, more than just conversational English that I think and actors [cross talk] lucky if they get to be part of.

JOSH: [cross talk] Well said.

HRISHI: Clark, thank you so much for talking to us this has been terrific.

CLARK: Thank you, I love the pod [cross talk] I consider myself a friend of the pod.

JOSH: [cross talk] Friend of the Pod. Thank you Scrumpy.

CLARK: I'm really honored to be here.

HRISHI: And that's it for this episode. Thanks so much to our guest Clark Gregg and thanks to you for listening to us once more.

JOSH: And thanks to Zach McNeas and Margaret Miller for helping us make this show.

HRISHI: You can follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. You know where to find us. You can follow Clark Gregg he's on Instagram and Twitter too @ClarkGregg and Gregg has three "g's".

JOSH: The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia which is a collection of intriguing and exciting story driven podcasts check them all out at radiotopia.fm

HRISHI: And thanks to everyone who supported our fundraising campaign which is now concluded.

JOSH: Yes. Hugely successful.

HRISHI: Incredible. Our goal was to reach 20,000 donors.

JOSH: And did we get there?

HRISHI: It was an ambitious goal we actually got to 23,000 over 23,000 donors. So thank you.

JOSH: Incredible. That means next fund raiser we're gonna have to break 25,000 but that's a year away. We'll still be here. You can buy some merch at thewestwingweekly.com/merch you can check out our tour dates at thewestwingweekly.com/live come out and see us we're doing a bunch of live events. It's gonna be a lot of fun. We're looking forward to seeing you.

HRISHI: With Thanksgiving coming up we're gonna take the next few days to spend time with our family, so we're not going to have an episode next week. But we'll be back the week after that to talk about "Process Stories" with special guest Joanna Gleeson who will be joining us to talk about her final episode as Jordon Kendall.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

CLARK: What's next?

[Outro Music]