

The West Wing Weekly
4.14: "Inauguration: Part 1"
Guest: Danica McKellar

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today were talking about season 4 episode 14. It's called Inauguration: Part 1.

JOSH: That's right, a two parter. This part was written by Aaron Sorkin, based on the story by Michael Oates-Palmer and William Sind. It was directed by Chris Misiano and it first aired on Feb-ruary 5th in the year 2003.

HRISHI: Coming up later in this episode, we're going to talk to Danica McKellar. Here's a little synopsis: We open on the Inauguration. Danny digs in on assassination. C.J. tempts him with flirtation. Hutchinson's filled with indignation. That's as far as I got.

JOSH: Oh my God people Hrishi's losing it.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I wanted to do it in the form of a cinquain, but I ran out of time.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I only had the idea about three minutes ago. That's what I came up with in 3 minutes.

JOSH: I thought that entire subplot would have been funnier if the guy was handing down decisions in the form of limericks.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Here's the real synopsis: In this episode the President's about to be inaugurated, but first, we cut back six days earlier to find out how the administration has arrived at the decision to announce a new Doctrine for the Use of Force. It involves Will Bailey finally speaking truth to power and Jack Reese being asked to put his head in the lion's mouth and then the lion's mouth closes. Plus, Charlie's on a mission to find a bible for POTUS and Danny and C.J. continue their cat and mouse game around Shareef's assassination and their own flirtation. That's when I started to realized I could make this thing rhyme.

JOSH: This is doable. So that was a hrynopsis.

HRISHI: It was.

JOSH: Yeah that seemed too good to have been found elsewhere.

HRISHI: I didn't do it in trochaic tetrameter or as a cinquain or anything so you know, y'know, it was a lackluster poem.

JOSH: I like that Toby apparently knows his way around meter and verse and poetic form.

[Josh laughing]

HRISHI: They're super heroes when it comes to the written word. Will Bailey knows the exact number of words in the State Department text and he's memorized it. They have special powers.

JOSH: Yeah I was wondering during that scene on that particular line.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

BRYCE: You memorized it? It was 1200 words.

WILL: I'm pretty sure it was 1123.

BRYCE: What's his concern?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I thought maybe, I definitely delivered that line as if that is in fact, the number of words, and I think there probably could have been a slightly different delivery, suggesting that he's just being a wise-ass

[laughter]

JOSH: He doesn't actually know. I don't know if it's credible that this guy knows the word count.

HRISHI: Right. I had a lot of fun doing research for this episode.

JOSH: Ah!

HRISHI: I got to dig into all kinds of Inauguration trivia.

JOSH: Oh right on. Bring it.

HRISHI: Well for one, the Inauguration is usually on January 20th or sometimes the 21st if the 20th is a Sunday, but it turns out it used to be, for a long time, from Washington's second term all the way until FDR's first term, it used to be on March 4th. Did you know that?

JOSH: I didn't know that. And I thought, didn't someone famously die after giving an Inaugural address without wearing a winter coat?

HRISHI: Apparently not that famously.

[Josh laughing]

JOSH: If you didn't come across it. Well, maybe I'm wrong. God, I could have sworn somebody got sick. Why don't they just do this stuff when its balmier?

[Hrishi laughing]

HRISHI: Well, there's a reason. Inauguration used to be on March 4 until FDR when they finally realized there was too much time in-between Election Day and let's get started on Getting-[Expletive deleted]-Done Day, and so the 20th amendment was passed after FDR's Inauguration because they had to deal with the Depression and so then they said, "Ok we're going to do this earlier so that we can actually have the administration, you know, address potential crisis and things like that."

JOSH: Interesting. Of course they could have moved Election Day, but that's probably too involved.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: Apparently, it was President William Henry Harrison, our 9th president, who died only 31 days after assuming office having contracted pneumonia and apparently he gave his inaugural without wearing a coat.

HRISHI: That's just bad staff work.

JOSH: Indeed. Yeah right. Were Charlie alive.

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: Back in the day, well, I don't think he would have been tending to the President of the United States, let's say. [cross talk] I don't think he would hold the position he holds in the Bartlet Administration, but were he there he certainly would have made sure the President wore a coat outside

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's true. Although, if the President decided not to wear a coat, then Charlie would have not worn a coat, and then Charlie would have died too.

JOSH: Indeed. Although, maybe the whole thing might just be bubbe-meise because I feel like the whole thing about going out in the cold without layers, it doesn't really make you sick. It makes you cold.

[Hrishi laughing]

JOSH: Maybe I'm wrong. This is beyond my pay grade, medically speaking.

HRISHI: This is joshmd.com for more words of medical advice.

[laughter]

JOSH: But, while we're at it folks, check your smoke detector batteries and you want to get rid of your sponges. Forget about, I used to tell you to microwave them. Just throw them away. Really, after about a weeks use, kitchen sponge throw it away, buy a new one. They're inexpensive.

HRISHI: What about washing them in the dishwasher? That's what I heard was the way to keep them.

JOSH: I don't think so. I don't think so. I'm going to Google it while were talking, but I don't think that's good enough.

HRISHI: Josh is in the pocket of big sponge.

[laughter]

JOSH: That's funny.

HRISHI: Reading the 20th Amendment, by the way, is sort of like reading the rules to Settlers of Catan.

JOSH: A game which I've never played, but I've always been intrigued by.

HRISHI: Oh come over and we'll play.

JOSH: Ahh, is it great?

HRISHI: Yes it is great. It's subjectively great, it's just, now I've played it so many times it's almost, there are just too many other new games to be excited about to feel like I can return to it often. But every now and then we bust it out again and it's great.

JOSH: What's your latest jam, game wise. The two most recent games of, this already goes back months, you turned me onto that have been big hits with my family, have been Anomia and Code Names.

HRISHI: Code Names is great.

JOSH: Did you not turn me on to Anomia? Because you went blank.

HRISHI: Yeah I don't think I did.

JOSH: Oh then it was one of your friends, then.

HRISHI: Tokaido is the newest game that I've played and also Coup. I think you would really like Coup.

JOSH: Oh right, you did tell me about that, as in Coup.

HRISHI: It's very up your alley.

JOSH: And let me just say, that some cursory googling, that maybe you are fine just tossing them in your dishwasher and washing them through the drying cycle, so I withdraw [cross talk] my earlier comment.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Ok, good. I've been doing that, but don't microwave them, you're saying. Stick with your no microwave.

JOSH: I might be wrong about that too. I don't know. I read recently just throw em away and take a new one, but ya know, but I'm going to be out of work in March, so I might, I might go to the dishwasher.

HRISHI: Or you get a job shilling for the sponge industry.

JOSH: If you're listening.

HRISHI: Ok, back to some rules of the game. As Josh points out, there's actually nothing that says that the president has to be sworn in on a Bible. I think Jake Tapper must have watched this episode.

JOSH: You got there before I did.

HRISHI: Because in December, just recently, Ted Crocket, who is from the Roy Moore campaign, got schooled on this very fact.

[CNN Jake Tapper/Ted Crockett Interview excerpt]

CROCKETT: You have to swear on a Bible to be an elected official in the United States of America. He alleges that a Muslim cannot do that, ethically. Swearing on the Bible.

TAPPER: You don't actually have to swear on a Christian Bible, you can swear on anything, really. I don't know if you knew that, you can swear on a Jewish Bible...

CROCKETT: Oh, no, I swore on the Bible, I've done it three times.

TAPPER: I'm sure you have. I'm sure you've picked a Bible, but the law is not that you have to swear on a Christian Bible. That is not the law. [long pause] You don't know that?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: If only Roy Moore had watched *The West Wing*.

JOSH: As clearly Jake Tapper did.

HRISHI: Right. So, Ted Crockett has not seen this episode. Josh points out that nothing says that you have to be sworn in on a bible and there are some stories about presidents who didn't use a Bible for their Inauguration. John Quincy Adams and Franklin Pierce used law books and Teddy Roosevelt didn't use a book of any kind and then I think there's a rumor, I don't know if it's confirmed, that Lyndon Johnson used JFK's Roman Catholic missile, instead of a Bible to be sworn in on.

JOSH: Has anyone ever been sworn in on the book of Wiccan? That would be bad ass, but probably not uncontroversial.

[Hrishi laughing]

HRISHI: Right. But, then it also turns out that there's no evidence that presidents number 2-10, John Adams through John Tyler, used a Bible at all.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: We just don't have the data. But, you know the president here is gonna go the traditional route and he's trying to find a Bible and that's Charlie's mission in this episode which has some...

JOSH: Yes, I know where you're going.

HRISHI: Echoes of the Thanksgiving knife.

JOSH: The knife, Absolutely. I'd like to be sworn in on Richard Scarry's *Cars, Trucks, and Things That Go*, because that book meant a lot to me as a kid. Do you have a choice what you would go with?

HRISHI: I don't, but I was thinking if Charlie does ever end up getting elected president, maybe he should get sworn in on Paul Revere's knife.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, that's good, that's dangerous.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Since it doesn't have to be a book.

JOSH: Good party trick.

HRISHI: At the time when this aired, no one had used it yet, but the Library of Congress has the Lincoln Bible and that's the Bible that Barack Obama used and also that Donald Trump used [noises of disgust] for his inauguration. They also have the Chester A. Arthur Bible, which no one has used.

JOSH: Aww, I may throw him a pity swear-in. Maybe that's what I'd use, yeah.

HRISHI: A lot of people use 2 Bibles.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: They'll use something like the Washington Bible and then their family bible as well. I also found out that there's subcutaneous layers of what you're choosing to be sworn in on because people will open the Bible to certain passages.

JOSH: Wow and do we have that data? Do we know?

HRISHI: In some cases, yeah. In sometimes it's recorded, you know, that the Bible is closed.

JOSH: Interesting.

HRISHI: Ok, as I mentioned in the synopsis, we start in the Inauguration, the president is about to be inaugurated and everybody's gathered and everyone is concerned. All the non-administration officials that we come across are concerned that they're writing a new doctrine for the use of force.

JOSH: And they've not been consulted.

HRISHI: Yes, nor have we. We have no idea what they're talking about.

JOSH: Right. That'll happened a few times in this episode. Phrases and subjects raised that we're not quite sure about, but our interest is piqued. This is a standard Sorkin stratagem.

HRISHI: But, before we even get to the doctrine for the use of force, we start off with this stuff for the Inaugural Balls and I'm reminded that sometimes Ed and Larry sometimes have terrible ideas.

JOSH: Right. What was Larry pitching? Or Ed?

HRISHI: I still use the pneumonic device that you suggested all the time.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: It really works. Larry rhymes with Duffy and Smith rhymes with Ed.

[laughter]

HRISHI: He says...

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

LARRY: What if he starts with all the states where jobs are in decline, making clear our message is the economy?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Well that's only going to be clear if we also hand out decoder rings - listen...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I like hearing the ideas every now and then that just clang off the rim. We get them every now and then when the staff's in a room and they're trying, you know, when they're trying to punch up jokes for a speech, things like that.

JOSH: I do too.

HRISHI: All this conversation about balls is followed shortly thereafter by Josh telling the president to knock them all down, a bowling metaphor, and I realized Aaron really just loves sports.

JOSH: That is true.

HRISHI: He does not discriminate. And then we finally hear a little bit more when the president finds Leo, or Leo finds the president, and they exchange a little, you know, just like Will and Toby know everything about meter and rhyme and how many words there are, the president and Leo just have Jefferson quotes at the ready.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

LEO: Peace, commerce, honest friendship with all nations and entangling alliances with none.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Problem is, that when he said it, your best chance of getting entangled with an ally was by row boat.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right, entangling alliances.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean, is it that they've already had the conversation? Have they done a pre-interview with each other?

[laughter]

JOSH: Like a talk show? No, I think they're that, they're history buffs, they know their stuff. I like the acting of that scene too. I like the hushed conversation that they have amidst the hubbub preceding the Inauguration.

HRISHI: Mhm. I mean, if you're gonna talk about Jefferson quotes, it's best to do it in hushed tones.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Then the Chief Justice shows up. We get the credits and when we come back from the credits, we are back 6 days in the past.

JOSH: We're in the press room.

HRISHI: And the President is preparing for Inauguration and the Chief Justice, who we did not see in the previous scene, is brought up again. It turns out he's written this opinion, or at least part of the opinion, in verse and it's making Toby giggle, which is always fun.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

TOBY: He [laughter] I don't know how to say this. He wrote it in a meter.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: A meter?

TOBY: He wrote a dissenting opinion in what I'm almost certain is trochaic tetrameter.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Whenever I see Toby smile in an episode, I think, Richard must have been sore the next day, just from using muscles he's not used to using.

[laughter]

HRISHI: For anyone who didn't connect these dots, the person that they're talking about here that's writing these wacky opinions, is the very same person that's about to swear in the president, you know, when we get there 6 days later.

JOSH: Yeah, I didn't really think about that as I was watching. There's no mention of perhaps some concern about how that's going to go in front of the world.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: Or the country anyway.

HRISHI: They don't connect the dots for us. I thought that the inspiration for this Chief Justice who's writing in rhymes, might have come from Michael Eakin, who was a Justice on the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and he wrote several opinions in rhyme and it was around this time that he was on the Supreme Court, so I feel like he must be a little bit the inspiration.

JOSH: I suppose so. I didn't know about that.

HRISHI: Yeah, let me tell you a little bit about this guy.

JOSH: Please do.

HRISHI: He has been criticized by his fellow justices for the way that he writes opinions. Here's an example of one: In 2011, he was writing for a majority, he was writing about a case where a man was trying to deposit a forged check and they said that this did not count as Insurance Fraud. He wrote:

Sentenced on the other crimes, he surely won't go free,
but we find he can't be guilty of this final felony.
Convictions for the forgery and theft are approbated,
the sentence for Insurance Fraud, however, is vacated.
The case must be remanded for resentencing, I find,
so the Trial Judge may impose the results he originally had in mind.

JOSH: Love it.

HRISHI: Unfortunately, rhyming is not the only legacy of Justice Eakin.

JOSH: Here we go.

HRISHI: He was suspended and eventually resigned from the bench after an ethics inquiry into lewd emails that he exchanged.

JOSH: Maybe those rhymed as well.

[laughter]

HRISHI: They definitely had cartoon naked ladies and things like that.

JOSH: So, the rhyming maybe ought to have been a red flag.

HRISHI: Yes, exactly. The other judges who said maybe this isn't the right kind of temperament, yeah, but actually in the review of his record when they suspended him, they said that it was really just about this behavior and actually his judicial opinions were sound. The actual merits of the opinions themselves.

JOSH: Ok. Let the record reflect.

HRISHI: I also remember during this run, Bruno Gianelli said, back in “College Kids”, in the episode with Aimee Mann

JOSH: Grammy winner Aimee Mann.

HRISHI: With Grammy winner Aimee Mann.

JOSH: Huzzah.

HRISHI: He said:

[West Wing Episode 4.03 excerpt]

BRUNO: I'll tell you, I'm not that comfortable with a Federal Judge being even a little bit crazy.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: I found one thing that I thought you would love and I wondered if you'd seen it. But, when the president is practicing here in the briefing room, he pauses, he's reading the foreign policy language and he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: America cannot be the world's policeman. America cannot enforce its own values, its own standards across the world. Yet when it's in our clear and vital interest...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And he trails off, but then when they cut back to Toby, you see the teleprompter has moved ahead and you can see, I was curious what the next line was [cross talk] would be and

JOSH: [cross talk] Mhm. [cross talk] I wrote this down.

HRISHI: You did! You did see it!

JOSH: Of course.

HRISHI: I was like, I felt like I left like, Josh

JOSH: There's actually a double gaf, but go ahead and point out the first one at least.

HRISHI: Well on the teleprompter, the line is something about something obliged.

JOSH: We are obliged.

HRISHI: We are obliged but they've spelled obliged A-B-L-I-G-E-D.

JOSH: Good eye.

HRISHI: And the president never actually gets to that text but I assume that if he did we would have heard about it.

JOSH: Yes, although, in a second gaf. A gaf within a gaf, or a gaffigan.

HRISHI: Uh huh. Gafception

JOSH: When we cut away from that misspelled obliged and then we cut back to another shot where we see the prompter, that language has been excised all together and there's a new ending to that beginning, when it's in our clear and vital interest, there's a new ending.

HRISHI: Oh, so it's not even something like "Oh they've just moved ahead on the prompter to a new".

JOSH: No, it's an inexplicable.

HRISHI: And they must have, maybe they realized that obliged was misspelled and then wrote something new and shot that, but then when they were editing it together.

JOSH: But it's not like they just corrected it and spelled obliged correctly, so they changed it all together but they didn't really, they had a quick shot of the original mistake. Something like that.

HRISHI: Right. You know, I imagine when you're editing you're thinking more about the performance or you have to prioritize the performance over everything else.

JOSH: Things slip through.

HRISHI: Mhm. Yeah, but yeah the State Department language is bluntly taking a noninterventionist position.

JOSH: Mhm. Bartlet says, "well at least we're being candid" or something like that, when about the phrase "when it's in our clear and vital interest".

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: Outside of that self-serving sphere, not going to happen.

HRISHI: Right, which really I feel like is just code for oil.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: And then Will is told to meet with the State Department Communications Director, but then later it's brought up that it's gonna to be the Public Affairs Director, but then the person who he ultimately actually meets with is the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Bryce Lilly. So, as we get closer to the meeting, the rank actually escalates.

JOSH: It's a reverse Barry Moreland, if you will.

HRISHI: Exactly. And a West Wing Weekly listener pointed this out, shout out to Amanda, who by the way, according to her Twitter bio, works at the State Department.

JOSH: Nice. And was that her phrase? Reverse Barry Moreland?

HRISHI: Yes, exactly. Thanks Amanda.

JOSH: Oh, by the way, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs Bryce Lilly is one of the few Sorkin characters played by an actor with a better name than his character - Granville Van Dusen.

HRISHI: Granville Van Dusen. His name is amazing, his voice is amazing.

JOSH: Is it possible that Aaron got to him and changed his name before he appeared in this episode? But I see that he's done other things under the name Granville Van Dusen, so apparently someone else gave it to him.

HRISHI: His ability to make words just drip with contempt.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

BRYCE: We've been over this long before you got here and I imagine we'll keep going over it long after your three weeks are done.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, he's pretty wonderful in that scene. Yeah, I enjoy, I remember that scene all together, we're getting ahead, it's later in the episode. That's one of the instances, it's rare although maybe not so rare, when you have Aaron Sorkin writing for you, but occasionally as an actor you just get like a treat, a gift, an exceptional piece of writing, just dropped in your lap and I knew when I read that scene, you know, I cannot wait to film this scene and I was delighted to work with Granville because he's such a good partner, or foil, or adversary in that scene.

HRISHI: Yeah his delivery is just incredible.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

BRYCE: Apparently I'm not done with the Baileys.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Classic, classic line of dialogue.

HRISHI: Yup, if I drank, I would probably really like Bailey's and then I imagine myself pouring myself a drink and then going back for a second and saying "Apparently I'm not done with the Bailey's".

JOSH: Aah that's good. Yeah, you can use that college kids.

HRISHI: I don't think they drink Bailey's

HRISHI: Who does drink Bailey's?

JOSH: Who does? I don't know who, I don't know.

HRISHI: I would because I have a sweet tooth and that is as close to chocolate milk as I think alcohol gets.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true.

HRISHI: Let's talk about C.J. and Danny for a second.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: C.J. has gotten her groove back. How C.J. got her groove back is what we could have called "The Long Goodbye" and now that she has gotten her groove back, thanks to Matthew Modine, she is using it to pull some real mojo on Danny. Poor hapless Danny.

JOSH: That's true I'm curious to get your take on that scene. On the, on the, "How would you have me?" or "That's how I'd have you" scene.

HRISHI: Oh, I don't know that I have a take, just I think because of the lead that he has on Shareef, he has some leverage there with C.J., but she just really, with very little effort reminds him what the power dynamics of their relationship really are.

JOSH: That's true. Would you object to it were the genders swapped?

HRISHI: Which part?

JOSH: The entire using of your sexuality in a professional atmosphere. Where the stakes are actually super high in terms of what they're talking about. There's an actual assassination [cross talk] carried out that this guy is onto [cross talk] and that she's trying to obfuscate and trying to keep him off the right path.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. Right. No, I have I don't think so. I mean cause I feel like I've watched a similar kind of thing to what you're describing play out, maybe multiple times on *The Good Wife* and feel like it was fine there.

JOSH: Ok, interesting.

HRISHI: Yeah, I don't have a problem with it.

JOSH: All right, we'll see if they buy that on the West Wing Weekly comment boards.

HRISHI: Did you notice that the president or rather...

JOSH: President the President

HRISHI: President the President. Did you notice POTUS calls Hutchinson "Hutch-eh-son"?

JOSH: I think I did notice that.

HRISHI: Multiple times in this episode he refers to Hutchinson as “Hutch-eh-son”

JOSH: Yeah, put me in mind of I think today Paul Ryan said that “Sunshug” is the best disinfectant.

[Paul Ryan’s statement regarding FISA Memo, January 30, 2018 excerpt]

RYAN: Sunshug is the best disinfectant and so what we want is...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Clearly what he wanted to say is sunshine is the best disinfectant in reference to making this memo public, but sure sounds like he says “Sunshug”. Sunshug is the best disinfectant. I gotta get that. Where do they sell that? “Excuse me do you carry Sunshug?”

HRISHI: There’s another thing that the president says. President Bartlet says that when he’s talking to Charlie, as we’re in sort of the second scene about which bible he’s gonna use. You know he had said he wanted the Bartlet Bible and there were some disagreements from Mr. Cravenly.

[laughter]

JOSH: Sounds like a Dickens character.

HRISHI: Yeah it’s so great. And then he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Hey I changed my mind about the Bible.

CHARLIE: Yes, Sir.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I don’t know. I’m never. It just seems parochial. I hate saying that.

CHARLIE: I understand.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, is he making a pun?

JOSH: Oh.

HRISHI: Or word play, anyway.

JOSH: Yeah, perhaps so. Very good, good catch.

HRISHI: It’s a good one if it is. But then something happens that I took a little issue with, which is that he asks instead for the Jonathan Edwards Bible.

JOSH: Mmm.

HRISHI: And this is another fun part for me, working on this episode is digging in a little bit on this choice. The all-star is the Washington Bible. Makes sense that he might want that and then his father's bible and then also the Bartlet family Bible. These three all makes sense and kind of fit within the mold of what Presidents normally use. The only outlier, the only other Bible that he asks for is this one, the Jonathan Edwards Bible.

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: And I thought, ok, what's the significance of that. One thing I was thinking about just even as the episode started is that the President is Catholic and so which Bible would he choose from in terms of historical precedence, we only have historical precedence, historical presidents, we only have Kennedy who used his mother's family Bible, the Fitzgerald Bible and so I thought, ok, Jonathan Edwards that seems like a significant choice. But Jonathan Edwards is, I think, I don't think that President Bartlet would pick a Jonathan Edwards Bible. If you remember in *Two Cathedrals*.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Young Jed Bartlet says to his dad, when they're arguing about whether or not the service is nondenominational, he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.22 excerpt]

YOUNG BARTLET: Catholics don't believe man is saved through faith alone. Catholics believe that faith has to be shown with good work.

DR. BARTLET: You're the only one.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Jonathan Edwards kind of famously said that "We are justified only by faith in Christ and not by any manner of goodness of our own." This is one of his things. The Justification Doctrine. According to Jonathan Edwards put forth the idea that it is not reliant on good works and that seems like a really significant split for somebody who we already had this precedent in the, ya know, we've had this come up in the show already, that this is something that he believes in.

JOSH: Very good. Wow. Well done. Good catch. I'm sure you're right substantively. That said, Jonathan Edwards went to Yale.

HRISHI: That's true. but he was the President of Princeton, so split ticket.

JOSH: Some good and some bad in everyone.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I love that we have just this panel of experts that we've gotten to meet through this podcast and every now and then we can sort of return to them to ask their thoughts on things that they've already, on new episodes. Anyway, that's what I did. I went back to Mike McCurry, who had been the Press Secretary for Bill Clinton and is now a Professor of Theology. What he thought about the idea of the Jonathan Edwards Bible choice, if he also felt like that didn't sound

right. I mean he's a theologian. I just wanted some expert advice or an expert opinion. And he wrote back, which is incredible. He wrote "Bartlet's choice of the Edwards Bible for swearing in might be seen as a very sly way for him to confront the stodgy established church. Catholic and Protestant. It would be" I'm reading from his email 'It would be Bartlet saying "I know what I do as president in the long run does not matter when it comes to my salvation but my good works as president will reflect the grace I've been given as a saved soul of God." That would have been approved by Reverend Edwards.'

JOSH: Wow. Ok.

HRISHI: I like the diplomacy that Mike McCurry gives the president, even in this choice.

JOSH: Yea, this is very Rabbinic of him, something that clearly there was no intention of this in the original text. This is, this is just going, digging deeper and finding a nugget on your own. I love it. I mean I'm guessing Aaron didn't have that particular take on it himself, but I like Mike McCurry's take on it. That's great.

HRISHI: Yeah, I really did too. This really was a fun episode.

JOSH: This was a good episode.

HRISHI: Yeah and then especially in combination with the next episode, it's a really wonderful pair, but yeah just getting ready to talk to you, I had a lot of fun. Did you notice the really weird little bit of ADR that happens?

JOSH: I don't know.

HRISHI: At some point, when they're in the Oval Office, Leo and the president are talking.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I've asked for a Forced Depletion Report on action in Kundu.

LEO: Who'd you ask?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Slaughtery got Jack Reese.

LEO: What'd it say?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And it's a completely different sound.

JOSH: You can tell.

HRISHI: Yeah, his delivery is different, the audio is different, and I wonder how obvious that is to people who are watching casually.

JOSH: It looked to me like when the Chief Justice shows up and says his one line of dialogue, that that was a real piece, cause you don't even see his face you just [cross talk] you know an

opposing guy in a robe, you know a torso in a robe, and then it sounds like a piece of ADR laid in to me.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. [cross talk] Yeah, probably. There's a moment in the episode that I really liked. It's one with our guest, Danica McKellar, when Toby comes into Will's office and is grilling you about actually writing and doing the work, the speech writing, as opposed to just...

JOSH: Pouring over Bartlet's previous writings.

HRISHI: Yeah, this is like the analogue version of you having a million tabs open on your browser, looking at lots of things instead of actually writing the thing in the one original tab and that's how it felt to me. I was like hmm, I paused the episode and did about an hour and a half of digging on, you know, Inauguration trivia [cross talk] and John Edwards theology before I even got to the first scene so it felt like that.

JOSH: [cross talk] You did do a deep dive. [cross talk] I like Danica in those scenes. Elsie is a good half-sister, step-sister, whatever she is.

HRISHI: Uhh half-sister, I think they have the same dad.

JOSH: Yeah. That's right, she speaks up on Will's behalf with Toby and she also, you can just see in her face, she likes when Will battles back against, you can feel her support. I like the performance.

HRISHI: Yeah, she says

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

TOBY: You're not thinking about policy language.

WILL: I'm doing both.

TOBY: Because we have 5 days.

ELSIE: He knows and I can confirm the he's thinking and familiarizing himself simultaneously.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which made me think of Albert Brooks in *Broadcast News*. One of my favorite scenes is when he is home by himself and William Hurt is anchoring the broadcast.

JOSH: He's watching.

HRISHI: He's trying not to watch and he's got music on and he's reading and he's just at, on point, he says:

[*Broadcast News* excerpt]

AARON ALTMAN: [sung] I can sing while I read. I can singing and reading both.

[end excerpt]

[laughter]

JOSH: I don't remember that. That's funny.

HRISHI: And then we get this like wonderful little bit of deus ex machina, which I normally object to, but here I thought it was actually quite funny [cross talk] and cool speechus ex machina.

JOSH: [cross talk] Which is that?

HRISHI: When Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

TOBY: Will, the idea isn't going to walk in here announce itself as being important and take a place on the top of the pile.

WILL: I understand.

SECRETARY: Excuse me, Will? This is from the Congressional Research Service. It's an old Bartlet speech on foreign policy. Should I place it here on top of this pile?

WILL: No, I'll take that.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And again one of those things where Aaron is pointing out...

JOSH: Right. He's like, I can't get away with this.

HRISHI: Probable impossibility.

JOSH: Right, by pointing it out. By shining a light on it rather than trying to sneak it past you.

HRISHI: Yup, in another episode I feel like it easily could have been Toby taking the position that Will takes here.

JOSH: I agree and I think although they seem to have, on the surface, some conflict over it, I think Will is earning greater respect from Toby as their interactions during this episode play out.

HRISHI: Right, I think so too. I think Toby knows that on another day he might have been the one making this position and in some way he has to argue with Will out of principal and as well to get Will to sharpen his own argument.

JOSH: Yes, I think that's true and I think that's also Toby's M.O. is to immediately take a contrarian position with people all together, he's just sort of, that's how he's built.

HRISHI: Yeah. Later, we get the Jonathan Edwards Bible, which is enormous, and then there's a funny thing that happened where the, Adam Kent who is from the Jonathan Edwards Historical Foundation calls it the John Edwards Bible [cross talk] And I thought John Kerry's

running mate, like former Senator John Edwards. I don't think that somebody from the History Foundation at the White House would call Jonathan Edwards, John Edwards.

JOSH: [cross talk] Aah. Right. [cross talk] No, I suspect not.

HRISHI: It was 2013, so maybe real-life John Edwards somehow subconsciously [cross talk] snuck in there.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Was resonating. Does John Edwards mean anything to you as a singer song-writer guy from the 70's?

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: Oh, well, he does to me maybe we'll lay in a little bit from "Shanty", one of his classic songs.

[John Edwards "Shanty" musical excerpt]

[sung] Well pass it to me baby, well pass it to me slow, we'll take time out to smile a little before we let it go

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Is it about the Bible?

JOSH: It's about smoking pot and hanging out, so in a sense, yes.

HRISHI: Ok. If I were smarter about theology, I would try and figure out a way to make that a joke about justification, but I'm not. Hey, do you understand, did they make clear why the president had his speech stricken from the record, this sort of fiery speech?

JOSH: No, I had the same thought, was there something so incendiary about, I mean or he wanted to hide the paper trail to this, these thoughts of his. I don't really get why it's this sort of smoking gun thing or why it had to be delivered as such rather than something Will had just found.

HRISHI: Right. I mean even, if it were something where "Oh here's this one other speech that come for Congressional." I don't know, but yeah he gave it on the floor, was it something that he had to disavow? Doesn't seem like it.

JOSH: No, unclear.

HRISHI: And clearly, as we discover by the end of the episode, it's stuff that he still believes.

JOSH: Right, so, maybe something that he wanted to obscure in order to be more electable at a certain point, that scene with all the religious figures at their [cross talk] kind of, I was struck by the skull caps of the world at that table. You got the, you've got represented the Jewish yarmulke or kippah, the Muslim taqiyah, and the Roman Catholic zucchetto. It just made me think, look, you're all wearing skull caps. Can't we all just get along? [cross talk] you're all coming, you're coming at the same thing just from different directions. And there's certainly a man there. The African gentleman there, what's the character's name?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes. [cross talk] Right, I mean... your fashion senses are so close. [cross talk] Kintaka.

JOSH: Kintaka, Archbishop Kintaka, not afraid to speak truth to power. Although he starts in with the Cardinal, but he's clearly addressing the president as Bartlet makes clear.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: No, he was talking to me Your Eminence.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And he just lays it right out for him .and that resonated for me in a huge Trump-ai-yi-yi way that and the scene a little bit later in the episode with Secretary of Defense. It's another classic, it's another, it's the [Expletive deleted] hole conversation.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: It's exactly the Secretary of Defense, who is it, Miles Hutchinson?

HRISHI: Or Hutch-eh-son.

JOSHI: Or Hutch-eh-son, either is acceptable. But you have to be the president to say Hutch-eh-son.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Basically saying, "Do you want to lose people in Kundu? It's a [expletive deleted] hole. I mean that's the gist of his conversation within, what I think, is a great scene with John Spencer.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So, I wanted to give him a shout out. I love that scene and I think Steve Ryan, he should rest in peace, gives an excellent performance in his first appearance of what will be quite a few I believe, as Secretary of Defense Miles Hutchinson. They're very good together and it seems like maybe it happens in Part Two because, of course, I don't remember, that's a very volatile conversation going on between Leo and the Secretary and it ends with a "Go to hell".

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Or there's kind of an insubordination going on or depending on, I guess I don't know who technically outranks whom, but they're going at each other. There's no punches pulled.

HRISHI: No, yeah, I mean I think technically, you know, the Chief of Staff, like they all work for the Chief of Staff, I mean they all work for the president, but the Chief of Staff is the Chief of the staff, so I think that really Hutchinson is out ranked by Leo. Although, Leo is not in the succession, whereas Secretary of Defense would be.

JOSH: Right, no, I suspect you're right in terms of power or leverage, but you've got a Secretary of Defense there, that's bridling against Bartlet as Commander in Chief and I like how Leo lays it out after Hutchinson refers to Bartlet as someone who's never run an army.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

HUTCHINSON: Magnificently, so when we realize that we're talking about a guy that's never run an army.

LEO: A) the guy is the president. B) He's been leading one for three years 51 weeks and 3 days. How much more training would you like him to have? And C)

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah.

JOSH: Reminds him he has, in fact, been Commander in Chief for almost 4 years.

HRISHI: I love what Leo's way of calling him out.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

LEO: I don't know what you mean when you say in Kundu. Nah, yeah, I do.

HUTCHINSON: Go to hell.

LEO: Ok.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then after the "Go to hell", Leo loses it in a way that we really don't see with him, you know, he throws his thing down and he knocks over a glass of water.

JOSH: Yeah, which I think is a happy accident. Didn't look to me [cross talk] like it was meant to happen and that's also just a great little, maybe it seems obvious, but always going taking in whatever happens, you know John Spencer's in the moment and probably was not meant to knock the water over but instead of going "Ugh can we go again? I'm sorry I knocked the water over" like you know, he's just so in it that he kind of lives the moment, and then there's something almost, to me, there's a little [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, I think so too. [cross talk] Contrition?

JOSH: Yeah, you get a little something more out of the moment than probably anyone anticipated by the glass being knocked over because then he's sort of kind of instead of just being furious and let an aww [expletive deleted] it's, there's almost something, he almost wants to take back the whole outburst. [cross talk. Like he's a little bit embarrassed by it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly. That's my favorite part of that whole exchange is after he knocks the glass of water over, how he kind of tries to collect himself and picks it back up.

JOSH: Right. And that's a great actor who finds a little extra something, a little extra zest to put on because of a happy accident like that.

HRISHI: Totally. Speaking of some great acting, I really loved getting to see you and Bradley Whitford and Richard Schiff doing *All the President's Men* live in City Hall last week. I feel incredibly lucky to have gotten to witness that. It was a live reading in Council Chambers at City Hall with you playing Bernstein.

JOSH: Mhm, Carl Bernstein.

HRISHI: And Bradley Whitford playing Bob Woodward and the cast was incredible, I mean you had some of your *Scandal* castmates, Joe Morton.

JOSH: Joe Morton as Deep Throat. Jeff Perry, Ben Bradley.

HRISHI: And Jeff Perry is one of these people who is another *Scandal*/*West Wing* crossover. We haven't gotten to his episode yet, but he's going to appear soon on *The West Wing*.

JOSH: And Richard Schiff played Harry M. Rosenfeld. [cross talk] And Ed Begley Jr. played Howard Simons. And the rest of the cast was also filled out with incredibly great actors, many of whom I think have associations with the Fountain Theater and it was directed by Steven Sachs. It was a very special event to be a part of. I know an audio recording was made of it for quote/unquote archival purposes, but maybe somehow they'll find a way to get it out, and then I think also an audio recording was made by Hrishikesh Hirway for pirating purposes so [cross talk] so and maybe we'll share that if someone says we can.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. [cross talk] You're going to out me like that?

JOSH: How'd it come out?

HRISHI: I haven't listened yet. It probably sounds like a lot of rustling from my jacket pocket.

JOSH: Right.

[laughter]

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: What I loved is in addition to all of you on stage, the rest of the cast from the Fountain Theater were also filled with familiar faces from *The West Wing*. For example, Sam Anderson was one of the roles and he, Sam Anderson who I know most prominently from playing Bernard on *Lost* but he was also in *Shibolet*.

JOSH: Great actor.

HRISHI: It was great. Anyway, it was really, really terrific.

JOSH: My theory in that whole reading is that they needed to bring in someone who was ugly enough to make Whitford look like Robert Redford.

[laughter]

JOSH: And that's how I ended up reading for Carl Bernstein

HRISHI: That's a self-burn in order to burn Brad.

JOSH: Ah, yeah, I'll take the hit if he even gets, if he even just takes a lesser hit. Worth it.

[laughter]

HRISHI: That's, I don't know what that is. There was a line in this episode of *The West Wing* that reminded me of a line from *All the President's Men*. When Danny's telling C.J. about his contact in Bermuda, he's been trying to find him and then he finally finds him and he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

DANNY: I called him.

C.J.: And?

DANNY: He doesn't remember me. Then he does, but he doesn't remember anything about an airstrip. He does, but he doesn't remember anything about not getting in.

C.J.: Mystery solved.

DANNY: C.J.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It reminds me a lot of this moment in *All the President's Men* where...

JOSH: Bernstein is talking to the Library of Congress.

HRISHI: Exactly. Bernstein calls and the Librarian says and he asks about if Hunt had checked out these books about Ted Kennedy and the librarian says yes, and then goes on hold and then comes back and says

[All the President's Men excerpt]

LIBRARIAN: Mr. Bernstein?

BERNSTEIN: Yes ma'am

LIBRARIAN: I was wrong.

BERNSTEIN: I beg your pardon?

LIBRARIAN: The truth is, I don't have uh, a card that says Mr. Hunt took any materials. I don't remember getting material for, I do remember getting material for somebody, but it wasn't for Mr. Hunt. The truth is, I didn't have any requests at all from Mr. Hunt, the truth is I don't know of any Mr. Hunt.

[end excerpt]

[laughter]

JOSH: Look at you, you've got a mind like a steel trap. That's a great catch, a great parallel to draw.

HRISHI: And we know, as we've discussed before, that Aaron is influenced by that movie.

JOSH: This is true, by William Goldman in general.

HRISHI: Ok, on a separate note, towards the end of this episode, I think Josh Lyman may have achieved new lows in dickheadedness in this episode.

JOSH: Talk to me.

HRISHI: When Donna finds out that Jack has been transferred and she asks Josh to look into it, he's kind of like jokingly parrying with her, but then eventually he really, he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

DONNA: ...something

JOSH: Is he complaining?

DONNA: He doesn't complain.

JOSH: I ask you that because sometimes people request transfers.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He's just being mean. It's just unkind.

HRISHI: He is. It is unkind and I understand that it probably comes, we don't really get the depth of this so explicitly in the episode, but I feel like it probably, you know they've been laying these little crumbs for us of how much Donna's talking about Jack and the buttons on his pants and the saber and really like building him up. It just seems exceptionally petty for Josh to take all this in and turn his jealousy into this really, just like a dick comment.

JOSH: You're right.

HRISHI: But really that is badly done Josh. There's one really subtle way I felt like they portrayed Josh's feelings for Donna. At one point early in the episode, she leaves his office after talking about, ya know, about the saber and everything like that, she leaves the office, the conversation is over and Josh just watches her the whole time. Like he's at his computer I think, he's like working on something and she finishes and she leaves and it's not even, you see his face, ya know, I think it's shot from over his shoulder. But while she walks out, he just continues watching her the whole time.

JOSH: Ah nice piece of direction by Chris Misiano.

HRISHI: Speaking of jealousy, we also get Charlie. There's a nice, again, little like seed that gets planted and then a payoff for it when, earlier, Charlie's looking at the seating chart and then Josh tells him "You're sitting with us" and he's like "I'm looking for someone else" and then later at the end of the episode, we find out the person he was looking for was Jean Paul or Jean Pierre, as he calls him.

JOSH: Zoey's lover. Josh says in another dick move.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I liked that, because the first time when Charlie says it, it just slides by and then you really, that even that little comment has meaning that's going to pay off later.

JOSH: Right. How about Kundu, all together, do we, it seems to be like a Rwanda manqué, right? It seems to be standing in for Rwanda and the Hutu/Tutsi ethnic cleansing in the 90's. Do we just assume that's, that this is kind of about Rwanda just by another name?

HRISHI: I think so, I feel like there's also still some, I was wondering if there's also still tying, because of the people we know, who are advising Aaron on this, that there might also be some Kosovo blended into it too. But yeah, no, I think it's probably Rwanda. We're going to find out more about the connection to Rwanda when we speak to Gene Sperling next week.

JOSH: Mhm, I think President Clinton has shared that one of the great regrets of his two terms was failing to do more, ya know, I think they say that between half a million and million people died over the course of a 100 days and the US, stung by what had happened in Mogadishu, and the battle of Somalia that made famous with *Black Hawk Down*, the book and the movie, that Clinton was hesitant to act and I think would later look back and regret that hugely. And that maybe this is a way of, I don't know, talking about it.

HRISHI: Revisionist history.

JOSH: Yeah or just talking about it in a fictional way without putting too fine a point on what actually happened and, ya know, calling it Rwanda or...

HRISHI: Right, I thought it was really beautiful the moments where characters are turning away from the facts of the genocide, Charlie asks the president about it and the president starts to tell him and Charlie kind of cuts to "Did we get the Americans out ok?"

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: In a way that made me feel like Charlie's priorities are as he said, ya know, they're with the Americans there and then at the very end of the episode, when they cut to the TV and you see the bodies and Josh has just outlined this horrifying situation about what it really means to be switching family members at night, or swapping family members.

JOSH: Which apparently happened and happens in conflict zones all over the place. This kind of forced incest, this kind of, you know, as horrific a thing as you can imagine. One of the, I think, brilliant things about the writing and the direction is that, you're right, there's all this verbal sort of parrying and slightly getting into the subject then moving off of it with like, "oh he seems one seems to care and this one seems to care not so much" and then you end with a picture, rather than words and it's just this gut punch of what appears to be actual footage of a pile of

corpses and then, there's something about seeing something, as opposed to talking about something, that's just, you can't get around it, and you can't cut away and the episode ends where it should off that.

HRISHI: Right and even confronted with it, it's too much for Josh. He has to turn the TV off.

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: Let's talk about the scene where Will does speak truth to power to the president.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Why is it a Kundanese life is worth less to me than an American life?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What I like about the character's arch in this episode is, you can see him, and we've even seen it in a previous episode, almost trying to psych himself up into speaking truth to power. He knows what he wants to say, but he can barely even stand normally. In that first scene, in the Press Room, I'm clearly not comfortable even really being in the same room as the president still. There's still some residual shame and mortification from that first interaction and there was [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] You're still averting your eyes.

JOSH: Right, and at the end of that scene, I did notice I seem to be trying to get someone's attention. I can't tell if there was a rewrite in this scene. As I exit that scene, it seems like you're gonna continue with me because I'm trying to get the president's attention or see something, but that's not where the episodes goes and I, to me, it works because it seems to still be that, sort of, Will's trying to put himself in a position, he comes into the Oval later and he kind of a little bit pussy foots around, saying something, and then he gets tongue tied and the president says:

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

BARTLET: I can't remember your name, but are you asking me out on a date?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I like how rather than building up in a way to a super heroic moment where Will marches in and says "Look there's something I have to say," it just kind of comes out and it's not even initiated by Will, it's the president asking him a rhetorical question and he just says what's on his mind, probably before he really thinks twice about it.

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

WILL: I don't know, Sir, but it is.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Sort of character revealing. It's great writing.

HRISHI: Yeah, it is a nice incremental build to that kind of dynamic. If he had gone in and done the triumphant thing, it might have felt like...

JOSH: Yeah, I think we wouldn't have bought it.

HRISHI: Yeah, not after having fumbled so many times previously.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I also like the idea that the Foreign Aid Bill, that had come just recently in some ways, we can imagine it as being a ramp up to this doctrine, you know, when their sort of penned in by Congress and what Congress wants to do, they weren't able to pass the Foreign Ops Bill. But, here in the Inauguration, you know this is really an announcement of intention. They can kind of take a second swing at it, and say "Ok, you know, you didn't want to give money to people" you know that was a small ask, less, you know, one percent of the Federal Budget where we could help these things and here it's like they've come back even stronger.

JOSH: Yeah I like things when, that carry over that suggest a build, episode to episode, that whether or not Aaron really knew where he was going it. It seems like almost there are things that belay his contention that he's constantly at the last minute just trying to come up with anything. That things seem better put together than his statements would suggest.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean the reason why it doesn't feel more explicit, I think is just because having had "The Long Goodbye" inserted in-between those episodes, it kind of takes your eye off that ball a little bit and then here in this episode, they don't make any kind of explicit reference to the Foreign Ops Bill, but I think it's easy to read it that way. Do you remember reading that scene with Martin Sheen, the "I don't know sir, but it is"?

JOSH: I do and I can't say, I don't have any anecdotes about it. I remember not wanting to screw it up. I remember feeling that it was an important moment and that I wanted it to be credible that Will would say what he says and that I wanted to hold his gaze.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: That like, you know, this thing finally came out, but I'm not going to buy it back or anything, you know, I said it, but not do one of those Will things where Will's constantly, but like the bumbblings over now.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Whether I meant it, it's out there now.

HRISHI: There's a thing that you do, we saw it in *Polling Night* and you see it in this episode too. A sort of, like almost like, a conducting, when Will Bailey is reading, reading a page and reading it out loud you know holding the page in one hand, in your left hand and your right arm, you're almost kind of conducting music.

[laughter]

HRISHI: And was wondering if that's something you actually do when you're reading scripts or if that's something you fabricated for Will to give some heft to the idea of him as a speech writer.

JOSH: I think it's something I do do. I haven't really thought about it, so I guess it wasn't anything I consciously did. My guessing, some of it's genetic, as my first cousin Stewart Melina is the incredibly talented conductor of the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, so somewhere in there I've got conducting in my blood and I then think it is just something I intend to do. I thought you were maybe going to pick up on something else. I forgot, I wrote it down though. I've got huge steel in my body language from my dad. Just that I, as Will, and I'm not sure if I do it in other roles as well. My dad does kind of a, he nods a lot, it's almost like a little bow and it can be funny or it can be "Oh, I'm acknowledge what you're saying." It's an incredible physical vocabulary that he gets into sort of the Bob Melina head nod/bow and I've stolen completely and used it as Will and in this episode in particular, I see myself do it about 9 different times.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah we didn't talk about one of my favorite lines of the whole series. When Bryce Lilly says:

[West Wing Episode 4.14 excerpt]

BRYCE: Are you rewriting the section?

WILL: Yes, Sir.

BRYCE: Dramatically?

WILL: Well, I like to think I have a certain flare.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I'm glad we mentioned that because that was another one of those, like I've told many, many people, I look at that line and I'm like "Thanks Aaron."

[laughter]

JOSH: That's a gimme, that line.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah, I loved it and I'm actually, I'm thinking of my dad now, I do the head bow a lot, I think when things like when, I may be wrong and I have to go and look, and I realize I'm getting tied up and it's not going well and then you know Bartlet says "Are you trying to ask me out on a date" there's kind of a head nod like "This is over, I'm ready to go," and there's a, I just think this is funny, in real life, there's this circumstance where my dad does this. That is when we're at a restaurant as a family, and when the waiter comes over "Would you like to hear the specials?" "Of course, we're happy to hear the specials." As soon as the waiter starts describing something that's not kosher and that as a result, none of us can order, his little head bow like "Well I'm checking out... aah scallops... huh scallops, ok."

[laughter]

JOSH: And it's like "Dad, just let him do his thing," but I know exactly what it means. "Very nice, scallops, someone else might enjoy that, that sounds great"

HRISHI: I am, I am done with this.

JOSH: That's right. Next.

[laughter]

HRISHI: That's great. and I'm done with this, so let's take a break. I'm nodding, you can't see me, but I'm giving a little nod.

JOSH: Well done.

HRISHI: Let's take a little break and when we come back, we'll speak with Danica McKellar.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Joining us now is Danica McKellar. Thank you so much for joining us.

DANICA: My pleasure.

JOSH: We always intended to speak with you; we've been waiting to catch up to the episodes that you and I are finally on and we've, the moment has come. So how did you get the role?

DANICA: I auditioned for it and I auditioned for Tony Sepulveda, the casting director, and it was just one of those lovely auditions where you get the call back. I came in the next day and to my utter surprise Aaron Sorkin was in the room. I just figured that would be beneath him to be in a casting session, I don't know, but I was completely star struck by him. Luckily that didn't throw me too much. He read with me, which was also a thrill, and then afterwards he goes "Danica, I'm crazy about you!" and I said "I'm crazy about you, too!" Now I auditioned for this role, it was supposed to be one scene in that episode *Game On*, it was one scene and my character's name was Tracy. I came to the table read and there were three scenes, my character's name was Elsie Snuffin and I'm being told he wants to put me in more episodes after. That it was a dream come true and to be honest, at that time, I had, gosh, I mean I had taken a break from acting for 4 years to get a degree in mathematics and I came back and I was just doing these little independent films. I was kind of just messing around, trying to find my way back into this industry, to be honest. People, just wrote me off like, I was an ex-child star who hadn't done well. I used to get these casting directors, I'd go to auditions and they'd say, "Oh we haven't seen you in a while, is everything ok?" I'm like, "Yes. I was in college." "Oh, oh college, well that's great." You know undoubtedly, they had in their mind that I was on drugs or I was like shoplifting.

JOSH: I see.

DANICA: Anyway, point is, I was struggling and I don't think that I would have had the opportunity to audition for the role as it turned out to be, which is a recurring part. I don't think that would have happened. I think because it was one scene, I got in and then, I mean, it was just a wonderful little thing that Aaron Sorkin liked me and was a fan and decided to write stuff for me. Josh, you're no stranger to that, I mean like he's written stuff for you for a long time, I mean, I just think [cross talk] I think that's the greatest story ever.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yes, he's very good to me. He never told me he was crazy about me, but he has been pretty good to me.

DANICA: Oh, no?

JOSH: No.

[laughter]

DANICA: Well that was a moment. "I'm crazy," he used both hands. "I'm crazy about you." Like jazz hands to the side.

JOSH: And I hope you said, at that point, this better mean you're giving me the job. [cross talk] cause you can't say that [cross talk] and then not.

DANICA: [cross talk] Well you know what. [cross talk] if you know this business, you never know, so I didn't, [cross talk] I didn't count on it but I was hopeful. I was beaming as I left and I drove home and I got the call, "You got the job and he wants to put you in at least 3 more episodes." and I was like "Oh my gosh, this is fantastic."

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: When you found out that the name had been changed from Tracy to Elsie Snuffin, did you have a question about that?

DANICA: I did. That's fascinating. I mean first Winnie, Gwendolyn, which is awkward and then Elsie Snuffin. I mean, it's my face that does, ok apparently, it was an actor he worked with Elsie Snuffin, on another project and he just thought the name was so funny that he wanted to use it, but a variation. I was honored to be given such an awkward name by Aaron Sorkin. Really, I was so star struck and happy at that point, I would have been happy with anything that he wrote for me.

JOSH: Yeah that's how I feel too. It's good to have Aaron writing for you. And everything, as I recall, was kind of at the last minute. It's not like you got a couple scripts at a time, right? You got one script and we shot it and then somewhere right before the next one started, we got the next thing.

DANICA: Yeah, well I remember that one scene that we had.

[West Wing Episode 4.08 excerpt]

ELSIE: It's the greatest night of your life and you're going to sleep?

WILL: Special reward.

ELSIE: It's the shank of the evening and there are all kinds of volunteers that want to dance with you and you know what that means

WILL: Dance? I think I do.

[end excerpt]

DANICA: That scene, as I recall, cause I was taking this extreme running class at UCLA at the time, luckily I left my phone on by mistake and I got the call "You've been written into this episode and, by the way, the scene shoots today."

JOSH: Oh wow.

DANICA: I was like, oh, well. Don't tell me that you didn't also get that scene last minute?

JOSH: No I'm sure I did, I just don't remember.

DANICA: You knew you were in the episode. Yeah so it was like, "Oh my gosh" and so I dropped everything I was doing and the extreme running class at UCLA, I felt so glamorous and like important, "I have to go, I mean, I was just written into a scene at *The West Wing*, so catch you later." I got in my car and drove straight to set, did the wardrobe fitting, got into hair and makeup, and I was learning these lines and we got it and it was great.

JOSH: So you insta-learned them.

HRISHI: Had you met Josh before that? Were you aware of him as the person who was, you know, your primary scene partner? Did you know what you were in for?

DANICA: I was not aware of him. I was aware of Rob Lowe and was very excited about that, but I had not met either of them and although I'd watched *A Few Good Men* many, many times, I somehow did not have Josh.

JOSH: Possibly because I only had 5 words in the movie.

DANICA: What do you say? "Yeah" or "ok" or...

JOSH: Ah, "Sir," "Yes, Sir," "Yes, Sir." So, I take no offense at anyone's having seen that movie a hundred times and not noticed me.

HRISHI: And what was your impression of Josh?

JOSH: Wow, really putting her on the spot.

DANICA: He's here on the line, right now. While we're talking.

JOSH: You know I can hear you both.

DANICA: Yeah, it was great. I remember you doing voice exercises.

JOSH: Really?

DANICA: Yeah, you do like "Blaaaaaah" like doing all these funny things and I'm thinking "Wow, that's really cool."

JOSH: You're sure you're not thinking of Brad Whitford?

DANICA: No, I'm thinking of you. I didn't have any scenes with him.

JOSH: I was, boy, that doesn't sound like anything I've ever done in my life, but I'm gonna to take your word for it.

DANICA: And the reason I remember is because I was stretching my mouth and you were like making noises and I made a comment at the time, I said, I said "This is so interesting, because I tend to think about stretching out the muscles of my mouth and you seem to be more about making noises."

JOSH: Is it possible that I was voicing what you seemed to be saying?

DANICA: Maybe

[laughter]

DANICA: I didn't realize that.

JOSH: That sounds more like me.

DANICA: Funny.

JOSH: Well that's very funny, that's good. What else do you remember of those early days?

DANICA: I remember you and me and John Spencer talking one night about how much he loved acting and we just, we were just concurring with him, but he just was going on about how much he loved it and I just, that stayed with me when he passed on a couple years later. I just remembered that and I remember thinking, I remember being so happy that he had this dream job of his because it was, he said, he just it was his dream job to be working on *The West Wing* and he was magnificent on it. I was so happy that he was doing what he knew he loved to do so much, up until the end.

JOSH: Yeah that's a lovely memory and that sounds entirely characteristic of John, who was just the quintessential actor's actor.

DANICA: He was. He loved acting so much, he wanted to talk about acting in-between acting.

[laughter]

DANICA: Like, "Oh wait, we're not acting right now, let's talk about acting."

JOSH: Oh that's so sweet, that's fantastic.

DANICA: He's a special guy, he's a special guy. I remember Allison Janney in the makeup trailer saying her lines under her breath, like she had so many lines and you know, she's the kind of actress who makes it look easy and it was not easy, what she did. I mean, none, a lot of us had these big paragraphs, but she just seemed to have a lot of them all the time and watching her rehearse helped me to not be self-conscious being in the makeup trailer going over lines, to this day. To this day, I, somewhere in my mind, I think "Well, Allison Janney does it."

JOSH: Ha, she puts the work in. It takes a lot of work to make it look like it's easy.

DANICA: Yes.

HRISHI: But that's great, she gave you the room to feel like "Yeah, I need to respect my process."

DANICA: Exactly, I've always been more of a shy person and she is, these little moments in our lives, you know, it's funny things that have a ripple effect in our own lives, these memories, especially when you're a kid, but through our whole lives, little moments will stand out to shine there and have an effect on us.

HRISHI: Let me ask you about another change in the scripts. When you first meet Elsie, there's no mention of you and Will Bailey being related, but then in the second episode, it becomes clear or, you know, there's a change, that suddenly now you're brother and sister.

JOSH: Do you remember?

DANICA: Yeah, I'm pretty sure that was a change. I'm pretty sure and then later on I was a script writer for the First Lady. But that was just, oh yeah forgot to mention, I just sort of off-handedly it showed up in the script as though those people were supposed to remember I was doing that the whole time. I didn't care, like you know what, Aaron, whatever you want to do, I am totally happy.

HRISHI: Did you feel like suddenly you had to re-comport yourself in a new way to accommodate the idea that you two were siblings?

DANICA: Yes, the sibling thing, I would have treated that first episode just slightly differently, it just would have been a little more familiarity. The truth is, that first episode, I think I interacted more with Rob Lowe than with Josh, if I recall.

JOSH: Yeah, that's probably true.

HRISHI: Yeah.

DANICA: But there still would have been a different feeling somehow to it, but that's ok, I don't think it ruins it for anyone.

JOSH: I remember looking at that second script seeing you call me big brother and thinking "Oh God, I hope I didn't flirt with her in the first episode."

DANICA: Well, you know, I think you said something to me about "I guess we're not gonna date."

JOSH: Knowing the way Aaron writes, I kind of thought that's where he was headed, so I was thinking, "Boy, I hope I didn't play that."

[laughter]

JOSH: But having re-watched it recently, I don't think I did. I don't think there's anything amiss.

DANICA: Ok, sure.

HRISHI: What else do you remember?

DANICA: Yeah, I had a great, I had a great experience on it. I loved the last minute scenes, I loved having to wing it, I loved just, I just loved all the urgency. It was almost like theater and the writing was always so good and I was in heaven. I loved the suits that I wore, I felt like, I felt like I was a grown-up actor now. You know, out of college and sort of just, this is well, this is real, this is like a real grown up job that I have and wonderful.

JOSH: Yeah, I feel like some actors kind of wilt in the environment you just described, that was *The West Wing*, and some just sort of bloom and blossom and so, you're that kind of person. I also like that kind of, I like the extra pressure of last minute and I think you're right on the nose when you talk about, it feels like a theater troupe, and you feel like you're doing a play. You know, you have rehearsal and then you know, you're not quite ready but, it's opening night. You go do it.

DANICA: Oh, I loved the table reads that we did because I didn't have scenes with everyone, but I remember every week we'd get together and do a table read. Martin Sheen, who I never had any scenes with, he would just say "Hello, I don't remember your name, what is your name? I don't remember your name." Every time, but I didn't mind and I liked the fact that he was so forthcoming about it, most people pretend to remember your name.

JOSH: That's right.

DANICA: Or just avoid you and then I would tell him "It's Danica McKellar, so nice to see you again Mr. Sheen." "Oh great, ok thanks."

JOSH: I reintroduced myself for four seasons.

DANICA: Yeah?

[laughter]

JOSH: Pretty much.

DANICA: I don't feel so bad.

JOSH: And has the show- it's one of those jobs I think that you carry with you, right, you know it's a decade and a half later and you say you have people at least on Twitter reaching out. Do you see people who remember you from the show, touchstones for you?

DANICA: You know it's not as common as *The Wonder Years* or now Hallmark movies. People love these Christmas Hallmark movies. Hallmark channel runs Christmas movies 24/7 in November and December [cross talk] and people watch them, like everybody tunes in. I mean, it's incredible and people come to me all the time now and mention Hallmark movies and then of course *The Wonder Years*. On my bio, like if I have a short bio, I always mention *The West Wing* near the top. Because I'm proud of it. I'm pretty proud of it.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right on. [cross talk] Sure. That's very cool and am I right that you also do a lot of voice work?

DANICA: I do. I do cartoon work. It's funny, the two series I'm working on right now, I'm not allowed to talk about yet.

JOSH: That's intriguing.

DANICA: Cartoons are so secretive, that's weird.

HRISHI: I'm going to venture that they're superhero related and like Marvel or DC projects because I know that you've done them before and I know that stuff gets really secretive especially...

DANICA: I cannot comment. I will not comment.

JOSH: Ding ding ding ding ding. I think you did just comment.

DANICA: You might be right for one of them, but not the other, maybe or maybe not, so there. But you know the other thing that's taking up a lot of my time, that I love doing, is writing these math books to inspire kids. I have this website mckellarmath.com. For ten years now, I've been writing these books. I was a math major at UCLA, loved it, love math, I love entertainment. And ten years ago, I started writing these entertaining math books. So, they're fun, they bring math to life, they make it not scary, which is really the biggest thing to me. Since I have so many books, my 6th one is coming out in February and there's more, there's two more after that in June and then more after that, I was like "You know what? I'm starting a website called mckellarmath.com." You go there, there's a big slider button, and you check, it's based on the age, which book is right for your kid and makes it really easy to have them all in one place.

JOSH: All right I'm going to do that, go to mckellarmath.com. I'm going to put in 51 and I'm going to see what I get. Very exciting.

DANICA: Yeah, it is exciting. It's fun because, you know, I asked what I get recognized for, I do get recognized quite often now for my math books, but I also do a series on Netflix called *Project Mc²*. I don't have a huge role on it, *Project Mc²*, it's really a show for teenage girls and preteen girls. It's so fun. It's *Charlie's Angels* except that they're teenage girls and I play the Charlie, so I come like a drop down screen appears in the laboratory for them and I'm like "Girls, your next mission is blah blah blah blah" and it's the same age as the middle school books that I've written, so I have a lot of kids come up to me and say "Oh my gosh, I love you as The Quail and I read your math books" and that's the best. They don't know *The West Wing*, but maybe their parents will show them when they get older.

JOSH: Well fair enough. Now you have 19 things to be known from. 19 major contemporaneous projects. You're the busiest person I've ever met. I'm glad you took to the time to talk to us. Appreciate it.

DANICA: It was a pleasure.

HRISHI: Can I ask you one last question about the show?

DANICA: Yes.

HRISHI: Maybe there's no answer to this, but I'm wondering amid all this sort of dreaminess of the situation, was there anything that was particularly challenging? What was the hardest part of being on the show? Was there any parts of it, of the experience that were less than ideal?

DANICA: Well, we shot pretty long hours, so sometimes there's, delirium would set in, but honestly, I was in such a good mood that I didn't really mind. Honestly say the hardest part was not getting any more calls for more episodes. I was like "Well, I wonder if I'm going to have any more this season" and then the next and then suddenly Aaron was not doing the show anymore and I was like "Well I guess that was probably it" and it was.

JOSH: [Sigh] That's sad.

DANICA: You asked me a sad question, you asked me.

HRISHI: I did.

JOSH: I want to thank you for the candid answer. That was a good answer.

DANICA: Yeah absolutely, but you know what, it's just like anything, nothing in life lasts forever. Not the good stuff, not the bad stuff. Proud of the work that I've done and I'm proud to even get to say that I was on *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Right on.

HRISHI: Well thanks so much for talking to us for this episode.

DANICA: My pleasure.

JOSH: Thanks Danica. That brings us to the end of another episode.

HRISHI: Thank you so much for listening. We'll be back next time with the second part of this two parter Inauguration - Over There

JOSH: It's time to remind you, as always, that you can follow us on Twitter, on Instagram. You can follow Danica McKellar @danikamckellar thats d-a-n-i-c-a-m-c-k-e-l-l-a-r.

HRISHI: Big thanks again to Mike McCurry and Irene DeMaris from the Wesley Theological Seminary, so cool. Mike McCurry's also the person that introduced is to the Alzheimer's Association, so double thanks for that, in the last episode.

JOSH: You did a very good job with that, by the way. Till we meet again, do listen to Hrishi's other, neater, podcast, *Song Exploder*.

HRISHI: And watch the waning days of Josh's series, *Scandal*.

JOSH: That's Thursday nights.

HRISHI: *Scandal* is off into the sunset.

JOSH: Yeah and while we're at it, watch *Wainy Days*, that was a great web series that David Wain made.

HRISHI: True enough.

JOSH: You should check out David's new movie on Netflix *A Futile and Stupid Gesture*, the creation of the National Lampoon. The West Wing Weekly remains as ever a part of Radiotopia.

HRISHI: A curated network of extraordinary, cutting edge podcasts. Learn more at radiotopia.fm. Thanks so much to Zach McNeese and Margaret Miller. And thanks to you, Josh.

JOSH: Well, right back at you Hishi.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

DANICA: What's next?

[Outro Music]