

The West Wing Weekly  
7.18: "Requiem"

(with memories of John Spencer from the cast and crew)

Interviews: Jimmy Smits, Janel Moloney, Eli Attie, Matthew Del Negro, Emily Proctor,  
Michael Hissrich, Kristin Chenoweth, Rob Lowe, Bradley Whitford, and Richard Schiff

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Hello. You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. [pause] I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I forgot for a second. Had a brief identity crisis.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. And today we're talking about "Requiem." It's Episode 18, from Season 7.

JOSH: This one was directed by Steve Shill. It was written by Eli Attie and Debora Cahn, and John Wells, and it first aired on television on April 16, 2006.

HRISHI: This episode deals with the funeral of Leo McGarry, as well as the beginnings of the transition into the Santos administration. For this episode we're joined by a lot of previous guests who have been on the show, and we're going to do our own version of a memorial. We've got a bunch of stories from a bunch of people who knew John Spencer, and worked with him, and that'll be coming up later on.

JOSH: Hopefully it'll be more of a celebration than a memorial.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right.

JOSH: Just to hop on the platitude train that politicians apparently employ.

HRISHI: Yeah. That came from the mind of Eli Attie, one of the three writers on this episode. Apparently because this episode was put together so quickly after John Spencer's passing, John Wells divided the script-writing duties three ways. With Eli taking on one part of the story line, this idea of who the Speaker of the House is gonna be, and whether or not President-Elect Santos should meddle in that, and Debora Cahn and John Wells handling the other stuff. I'm guessing that Debora Cahn wrote the C.J. and Danny scenes, as well as the Josh and Donna stuff. And I think John Wells must have written the President Bartlet/First Lady scenes.

JOSH: Mm. It's intriguing to learn because this episode, to me, does not feel like the product of a television writers' chop-shop.

HRISHI: Right. Before we dive into details, I was just wondering, Josh, if you remember filming this episode.

JOSH: I do. I have a sort of impressionistic sense of that day. And the weirdness of it. And, you know, for lack of a better word, the mournfulness of shooting the funeral...of a buddy. You know, sometimes you do a scene like this, and there's almost kind of a mirth to it, because you're acting out something that didn't happen. There often was kind of a black humor to shooting these scenes, talking about the death of a character played by a friend who's, of

course, alive. This was a very odd, sad, meaningful...exercise. It was – I know it felt absolutely like a tribute to John, and a coming together – I thought it was sweet, and right, that they included as many people from the cast, probably as could make it. My guess is there was a much wider net cast for anybody that it would make sense to have at the funeral that could be there. And I think, you know, depending on people's availability, anybody that could come was there, and I thought Steve Shill did a good job of sharing with us who's there, giving everybody a little bit of a moment. Just... I feel like the feeling in that room transfers well to what we see. To what was broadcast.

HRISHI: Mm. Do you remember how many weeks had passed between – or maybe months? Between John Spencer's passing and this funeral scene?

JOSH: I don't recall. I remember it wasn't so soon that we hadn't processed his passing, you know, it wasn't, like, a fresh trauma that was happening too soon. It was something that we had all come to terms with. And when he did pass away it was very shocking, and it was traumatic. And, you know, let's not forget – as is mentioned in the episode – he died a young man.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And so it was a real...jolt. And I do feel that by the time we were filming this scene, it felt respectful, and it felt right, and it felt... like it was happening at the right time.

HRISHI: Mm hmm. I read part of an interview with Allison Janney that said that filming this episode, for her, was kind of... was a little bit traumatic. That, for her, it was sort of reliving the grief.

JOSH: Yeah. I'm sure everybody had their own experience of it. A little bit like what I was starting to say earlier, about watching Leo's death play out on the show.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: There's almost something that feels a little bit wrong about it. I remember, filming this, it felt right, and it felt like a healing experience. Other people might have a different experience. I don't remember anyone objecting to the process or objecting to the fact that we had to do it. I'm sure it was hard, or harder, for some people than others.

HRISHI: Yeah. You mentioned how the director gave all these different people their own moment. There are a lot of people who have come back to our show for this moment of tribute for Leo.

JOSH: That's right. And also, one thing I recall, also, about shooting this scene, is that there were a lot of – you'd take a break, and the conversation was about John. So we had our own sort of counterpart to the scenes with President Bartlet and the groups of people remembering him, and telling funny stories, and smiling, and laughing in remembrance of the special person that was John. That happened a lot on set while we were shooting his funeral.

HRISHI: Yeah. That scene later on with President Bartlet, that felt very lived in. And very real.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: [laughs]*

*WILL: First time I ever met Leo, he was wearing an Italian suit that cost about as much as the space program.*

*CHARLIE: English, not Italian. Savile Row.*

*DONNA: Has he ever worn a suit more than twice?*

*CHARLIE: I think he barely wore 'em once.*

*C.J.: And those peach shirts.*

*ANNABETH: Apricot. He corrected me more than once.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There's another scene that I absolutely adore in this episode. And it's sort of set up – we have these multiple congresspeople meeting with Santos, saying, "It's a beautiful funeral." "It was really more of a celebration than a funeral." So we've seen this sort of cliched way that a lot of people respond to a funeral like this. And then we see that President Bartlet and Abbey are talking about his having to attend this little get-together he clearly doesn't want to do, and he'd like to leave early, and we've seen in the limo with Dr. Bartlet and the president that he is, you know, deeply upset...

HRISHI: Distant.

JOSH: And distant, right. And then he puts on, sort of, his Presidential face. And he walks in, and he beams. And he says,

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Why all the long faces? Leo would be furious to think we were all standing around feeling sorry for ourselves. We need some music. Do we have any music?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He doesn't say it, he embodies it. And I just thought it was so presidential. And so well-written, and acted, and such a great idea of a scene. To see him do something that *we know*, having seen him, y'know, just offstage, so to speak, is going to be very difficult. And he just snaps to it, and kind of does the right thing, and puts a...just... different vibe on the whole get-together that really buoys everybody.

HRISHI: Yeah. It made me think about how much of our time with that character has been about his reluctant, but faithful, obligation to his duty. Whether it's here as a friend, or as a Commander in Chief. Here he's kind of doing both things, but he's somebody who always stepped up when he needed to, and set aside his own humanity, a little bit. In order to take those hard actions.

JOSH: Yeah. That's right. And Bartlet has been largely – he's a lame duck, he's largely marginalized, for most of Season 7. And I liked seeing him be presidential again. If not on a national stage, but in this room. Where it's so important.

HRISHI: Yeah. Largely Marginalized was the full name of the character Large Marge.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: What did you think about the very end of that scene that you're talking about? The president, you know, steps into this role of entertainer in chief, but the scene ends with a shot of the First Lady again. And she actually seems sort of perplexed, or concerned, at the way that he's acting.

JOSH: I did catch that moment, and I thought it was fascinating. I love that they gave her that moment. Because, sure, I'm reacting as a viewer, and, y'know, as a sort of fictional part of the electorate, but I can understand being married to the man, knowing where his head is at, seeing him do what he's doing, and being taken aback. It's almost like what I talked about, in part, the other day, where Melissa observed me –

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Bull–[expletive deleted].

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: [laughs] She said to me afterwards, like –

HRISHI: "That's chilling."

JOSH: Question everything. Right? So I think it was a little bit of that moment, from her.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Seeing how effective he was at masking what's really going on, inside.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's a really incredible shot, because he's telling the story at the end about –

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You remember that trip to Seattle, during the first campaign? When he couldn't find his umbrella? So you grabbed a garbage can to hold over him?*

*MARGARET: And it still had garbage in it.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: [laughs] Leo ended up with a three-course meal on his head.*

*MARGARET: Dry as a bone, though.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And there's this image of Dr. Bartlet, just concerned and having one moment. And everyone else around her is laughing.

JOSH: Yeah. That's right. I think you're right – it really is concern. I think he's helping everyone else heal.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And maybe she's concerned that he's not getting what he needs.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] On some level.

HRISHI: Yeah. Exactly. But I thought that was a great detail.

JOSH: Yeah. I agree. Backing all the way up to one of the things that I like about this episode, is that it didn't keep political reality at bay. As soon as our cast of characters walks out of this moving funeral, where we've seen different people's grief, they're talking politics.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Josh Lyman, and Santos, they're talking about the race to be Speaker.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And they're right into politics.

HRISHI: Yeah. What did you think of the lineup of pallbearers in the funeral scene? Just to step back again, a little bit –

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: – further? We get all these shots of people who we've seen, who we haven't seen in a long time. People who we haven't seen together. We see all three Bartlet daughters together. We see Nancy McNally, we see Vice President Russell. All these people have come back. And then when it comes time to take the casket out – well, first of all, there's an actual Air Force Honor Guard, which is an incredible detail–

JOSH: Mm hmm.

HRISHI: And level of production value. As tribute to Leo. An incredible, kind of *West Wing* thing, to have an actual Air Force Honor Guard there.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: But when the pallbearers line up, y'know, there's one guy who we don't know. We've got the president, and Brad, and Charlie, and...

JOSH: Barry Goodwin.

HRISHI: And Barry Goodwin. And President-Elect Santos. And then another guy.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And – look. For better or for worse, it sticks out. You have to think about who these people are. One, I'm pretty surprised that Goodwin gets to be one of the pallbearers. I did not realize that he and Leo had such a close relationship. But maybe, you know, we know Leo has been this long-term, Democratic, wise, elder-statesman. And Goodwin, as the head of the DNC, was probably a close confidant. But, still, it's a little bit funny to me that he's there.

JOSH: I think it's possible that Goodwin is just a lefty.

HRISHI: [laughs] I actually bump less on the guy who we've never met before, than on Goodwin.

JOSH: Well, see, I bumped on the stranger guy, 'cause... it may be small of me, but I thought of him as taking the Will Bailey spot.

HRISHI: [laughs] I mean, this is one of those things where I think fandom is a challenge, or something. There's just a part of you that wants it all to be our heroes, right? Like, this is a place of honor. But of course, Leo has had a life that went for fifty-one years before the seven that we've just experienced with him.

JOSH: Yeah. No, indeed. In reality, I took it as, like, "That's kind of a smooth move." Like it's a little bit of keeping a foot in reality, of, like, it wouldn't all be six of our heroes.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly.

JOSH: Like, I think it's actually a subtly smart thing to have done.

HRISHI: Yeah. But the one that sort of falls in the middle for me is Goodwin.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: Because I'm like, "Were they that close?" I guess they were.

JOSH: Apparently.

HRISHI: Everything in that scene was handled really beautifully. And well.

JOSH: Yeah. I agree.

HRISHI: I also really appreciated how Snuffy Walden was able to transition from the music in that scene into the theme song, and by doing so, gave the theme song a completely different character. Like it had a mournful quality.

[excerpt of the music leading into *West Wing* theme song with pallbearers' footsteps heard]

JOSH: I absolutely agree. I thought that was remarkable.

HRISHI: Yeah. But we're in a kind of a strange place with the series now. We know there are only a few episodes left. And the climax, really, has happened. So this episode, with the funeral, gives us a sense of closure, I think, about Leo's passing. But everything else that happens feels a little bit, like, I don't know, we're in epilogue territory.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. As of this episode, it really feels to me like this is a series that is ending. This feels like end-game. And wrap-up. I mean, you and I discussed, before we hopped on the mic, how relatively few notes we have. As compared to past episodes. And I think things are getting less plot-dense; as you say, they've wrapped up what has been a very significant arc: the election. And it no longer feels like a series, as it did earlier in this season, that is maybe trying to find a way to continue. Now it feels like a series that is...gracefully...wrapping up.

HRISHI: Mm hmm. I think there are some nice moments of fan service in this episode. With, not just the people coming back for the funeral, but we get this, kind of... post credits – only, it's happening in our episode – but the kind of post-credits – and then, here's what happened, after our story ends, with some of our characters. Getting to imagine Ainsley Hayes, who we all loved, coming back as the White House Counsel is such a great idea.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*AINSLEY: Can I talk to you about a job?*

*C.J.: How long did you say you'd been at the Hoover Institute?*

*AINSLEY: Two weeks.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The idea that Amy Gardner comes back, and she's gonna, for the first time, actually, be in charge of the White House agenda, as Director of Legislative Affairs. I mean, all of this stuff feels exciting. You know, we're thinking about this stuff. Wow, and now, Josh, he's really, he's the Chief of Staff. He's getting ready – he's warming up for that role. There's a nice warmth to all of this. Even if it borders a little bit on unrealistic.

JOSH: Yeah. Exactly. I feel like it's just– they're sort of seeding the soil for fan fiction, after the series ends [laughs].

HRISHI: But even as I say that, actually... I'm not entirely sure how unrealistic it is. I mean, you think about somebody, like our former guest Gene Sperling, who served in both the Clinton administration and the Obama administration. Ron Klain, who served as both Chief of Staff to Vice President Gore and Vice President Biden. I mean, there are definitely people who have recurring roles. So maybe it's not that unrealistic. It just... you know, there's something that feels so good about it, from the fandom's perspective, that it almost feels like it's too good to be true.

JOSH: Yeah. I like it, though.

HRISHI: Yeah. I liked some shoutouts that we got, to some actual other real-world White House insiders.

JOSH: These were Eli's... Easter eggs.

HRISHI: [laughs] I think so.

JOSH: Eli eggs.

HRISHI: Yeah. [chuckles] Yeah. There's a moment where Santos is speaking to Congressman Fields, in their conversation about how he might be able to influence the race for the speakership. And Fields says –

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*CONGRESSMAN FIELDS: Segal flips if you ask him. Blinken, Carney, plus you got at least five...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You know, these are supposed to be the names of congresspeople, but of course, we've had the actual namesakes, both on as guests on our podcast –

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: That's Antony Blinken, who, at the time, he was working for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but he had worked in the Clinton administration. And then after this episode aired, he would go on to become the Deputy Secretary of State under President Obama. And Jay Carney, who of course was the Press Secretary.

JOSH: That's right. You could say that Eli gave a wink and a nod to Blinken.

HRISHI: [laughs] And a little blarney for Carney.

JOSH: [laughs] Very nice.

HRISHI: Speaking of the position of Speaker of the House, there is this...plot here, where we're trying to figure out who might be... the next Speaker of the House. And it's between three possibilities, but really just two.

JOSH: Two are viable in terms of the votes they've mustered.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's Fields, who was a great friend and ally to Santos, both in Congress and then on the campaign. And the other is Sellner, who is a Democrat, but really seems to be quite at odds with Santos's ideology. He's more centrist, and states up front that he is against the...left-wing...tendencies and potential legislation that a Santos administration would bring about.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*SELLNER: Well, you can push for it. I'll do my best to block it. May the best man win.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This story line came from Eli, and so, we sent up the Att Signal, and Eli said that even with a Democratic majority, independence from the White House was, and is, seen as a huge plus for House members in electing a Speaker. And I asked him why that was, because it doesn't feel that way, with Republican administrations or Republican majorities, it feels more like everyone acts in legislative lock-step. And Eli said this: "I think it's because Democrats generally



come from a more iconoclastic, less monolithic tradition. On one hand, I find it frustrating, and it's why we tend to get less done. On the other hands, liberals believe in independent thought, which also means we believe in thought. It's why we think climate change is real, because scientists, y'know, have done science. But back in the Clinton days, there was a constant feeling about House Dems, that he was about to lead them over a cliff. They wanted the Democratic leadership to be a check on him. And the scene about law being reformed, is based on Clinton's experience too. Early in Clinton's first term, he tried to push a whole package of political reforms, never mind that the House Dems had supported all of them when they knew that President Bush would never sign them. Now that they had both Congress and the White House, and therefore, finally, a fundraising advantage, it was the *last* thing they wanted, and they were furious at Clinton for pushing it."

JOSH: As it plays in the script, it's so *crass*.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*SANTOS: Which must be why you voted for lobbying reform when Fields introduced it three years ago.*

*SELLNER: [laughs] When we were in the minority, damn right I did.*

*SANTOS: Now we're in the majority.*

*SELLNER: By four seats. We finally have a fundraising advantage. Now's not the time to switch the rules.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Right. Yeah. It feels like they've written this craven character, but it turns out...is based on many real-life examples.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: Eli said that another huge Clinton error was pushing political reforms so early in his first term that it alienated Democrats on healthcare reform, which many think should've been the bigger priority. And some argue that the political reform agenda ended up costing him universal coverage.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: I see both sides of this, y'know, idea, what Sellner is saying, that, like, you can't have the first thing be procedural. That there is some element of cosmetics that need to be taken into account, so that – so thing that's most likely to succeed, is something that the people who are gonna run in mid-terms can kind of bank on. That Democratic Congresspeople can say, "Look at this legislative win that we had." That's sexy.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And lobbyist reform doesn't play that way.

JOSH: I liked Santos's response, though, that basically lobbying reform would ultimately bolster the president's legislative agenda all together. You get the insurance money out, and it makes it easier to pass some healthcare reform. You got the drug company money out of politics, and we can do something about prescription drugs.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's a great idea. And they finally feel like they have the means to do it. But this ever-present issue in *The West Wing*, of idealism and pragmatism, clash again. What did you think about the love stuff in this episode?

JOSH: A lot of [expletive deleted]—blocking going on. Inadvertent [expletive deleted]—blocking.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: That's all I got. Um, yeah. I liked it. I think Danny and C.J. are charming, and I have great hope for them. I think Josh and Donna have some real issues, and most of them are his.

HRISHI: Y'know, we have gotten some flack from a segment of Josh Lyman stans for being too hard on him. But I think it's warranted in some cases, especially right now. I like that Charlie steps in for us and voices this right there in the episode.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: I'm serious. He really hasn't talked to you yet?*

*DONNA: Election Day was only three days ago. It's complicated.*

*CHARLIE: You want me to slap him around a bit? I can round up a few guys from the old neighborhood.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He cannot believe, on our behalf, he can't believe that Josh hasn't talked to Donna about what position she's gonna have in the Santos administration. And I love the look that he gives Donna, when she tries to make an excuse about it. He gives her, just such a, like, "Are you *kidding me?*" expression.

JOSH: Mm. Their brief scene together is excellent, I thought.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's so nice to reunite our original gang.

JOSH: Yeah. Is Charlie in *my* old office?

HRISHI: He is.

JOSH: That's what it looked like. Right?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. Good for him. I was also watching, and just thinking, I liked that scene with Charlie and Donna, and I still think we've watched Dulé grow up on television.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You know, he was such a young, I mean, Dulé, largely even today, looks the same as he did in the first episode of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: So, I don't mean *that* kind of aging. But we've seen...he's maybe had as significant an arc as any other character on the show.

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean their dialogue only takes up a page, but it's just – it's a great scene. And a memorable one. I think their dynamic is so wonderful, and feels like a unique one within the series. I think that the contrast is so... pointed there. You know? Charlie's in this office, he's got a real West Wing office, it's the former Deputy Communications Director's office. He's working for C.J., and Donna still doesn't know what her fate is gonna be. Despite having been this incredibly, immense contribution, y'know, this integral part of the team that got Santos where he is.

JOSH: And do you think – is there an unspoken and unaddressed current in the episode, that maybe Josh is hesitant, now, because he has a romantic relationship with Donna, to deal with what kind of professional position she might fill in the administration?

HRISHI: I didn't get that. You know? I thought – if anything, the professional relationship between the two of them made me a little bit uncomfortable, because at one point Donna tells him that someone's looking for him, and Josh is, like, "Oh, is the president here? Where's the president-elect?" And that scene *almost* fell into a... boss/assistant kind of dynamic. For a second. And I got nervous about that, because I was like, "We all know that you two are past that."

JOSH: [laughs] Right.

HRISHI: Both personally and professionally. You know? Because if he's Chief of Staff, and she's Deputy Chief of Staff, those are two – that's a very different dynamic than Chief of Staff and assistant to the Chief of Staff.

JOSH: For sure.

HRISHI: So I got a little uneasy about that scene.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: Even as short as it was. And then they transition into their romantic conversation. So, I wasn't sure. I mean, Charlie makes this joke:

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: He owes you big. Anything short of Secretary of Commerce, you gotta challenge him to a duel.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's only *kind of* a joke. I mean, he does owe her a real position.

JOSH: Yeah. She's earned it.

HRISHI: She's earned it. Yeah. Exactly. She's earned it.

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Why is C.J. concerned about keeping her relationship with Danny so secret?

HRISHI: That's a great question. It's a great question, and a frustrating one.

JOSH: Yeah. I did feel a little frustration at that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: As did Danny.

HRISHI: Yeah. For all these years of her being married to her job, and previous feelings of not wanting to date a reporter, and all that stuff. The election's over. Like, we are in the epilogue, and so we can move past that. And I was a little bit frustrated by the fact that we're still stuck in that mode. I'm ready for them to break free.

JOSH: Yeah. Y'know, it's almost without directly dealing with it, I'm getting a little bit of the sense that these workaholic characters, that we've come to know and love, have real issues with their real personal lives. We know they always have, because of work itself, but almost with the approach of having greater freedom in their lives, they're not necessarily equipped to deal with it, or are comfortable with it.

HRISHI: Yeah. Not a lot of time for relationships, indeed, probably not a lot of time for therapy. Right? [laughs] And I feel like they could *all* use some.

JOSH: I think so too. Vice President Russell and Will have a brief conversation...

HRISHI: Ughhh. Vice President Russell.

JOSH: Oh, dear.

HRISHI: Yeah. He's...not so much a sight for sore eyes.

JOSH: Right. I was a little concerned with Will's...hygiene around the food table.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I seem to be just grabbing things with my raw hand. And I gotta believe there are little tongs to be used. [laughs]

HRISHI: I don't think that's the case. I feel like there's probably off-camera— Will's hand was probably fully cooked.

JOSH: [laughs] Ok. Fair enough. It's supposed to reach an internal temperature of 165°.

HRISHI: [laughs] Exactly. Man. But yeah, I mean, Russell's, just, his...in two lines, he's like, "Yeah, I gotta go get the...gonna do a treadmill check." He just manages to be distasteful so quickly, and immediately.

JOSH: Yes. And I saw concern of some sort registered on Will's face, and I think at first blush, it appears that he's just put off by the vice president discussing colonoscopies. And this particular setting. But I'd like to believe that it's Will's concern that Russell is in his fifties and has not *had* his first colonoscopy.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: And I think, as a public service, let me remind people that at age fifty, that is considered the time when colorectal screening ought to begin.

HRISHI: You heard it here, but hopefully not for the first time. Let's not be the first time you're learning this information.

JOSH: That's right. And let me just say, I had my first colonoscopy at fifty. But colonoscopy sounds daunting, and can be expensive, but apparently there are good alternatives now. So, at fifty, folks, if you're hearing this, look into it.

HRISHI: Or rather, let someone else look into it.

JOSH: Yes. Or, use a mirror.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: But, probably consult an expert.

HRISHI: I would like to think that Will's look of concern was a little bit of an internal cringe. Like, at this moment, now, he has moved on. He is thankfully out of the clutches that he put himself in, for sure, but he is out of the world of the vice president. Having now moved to White House Press Secretary.

JOSH: Mmm hmm.

HRISHI: And this moment of, kind of professional pragmatism that he had engaged in by seeing this as a good gig, and a good idea. You know, working for the vice president as his campaign manager. He's past all of that, and then it's like running into someone who you dated for a little while during a bad period, and you're like, "Aughh, right."

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: Be reminded of a self that had slightly worse judgement.

JOSH: Mm. I also – maybe it's just me, but I just looked like – maybe it wasn't even Will, and it was just Josh Malina, just kind of still hanging around the set.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: “Can’t believe I’m getting paid this much for doing this little, and oh, look, free cheese.”

HRISHI: [laughs] That’s what I love about your performance. It has layers. It’s really –

JOSH: [laughs] Right? Yes. There’s a lot going on.

HRISH: [cross talk] Complex. Yeah.

JOSH: Mm.

HRISHI: Another little dig on Donna is the fact that Amy, who has been a foil romantically, for the Josh/Donna story, she shows up kind of out of the blue, and once again, not only immediately has Josh’s attention, she’s throwing ideas for other women that he should date at her.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

AMY: *For sex, in civilized conversation.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And again, because they’re keeping this idea of their romance secret, she gets, you know... free license to say this. And Donna’s not allowed to, kind of, just put her hand up and say, “Yeah, how ‘bout not any of this, because we’re actually together. This person who I have loved all these years. It is finally requited. And can you get out of here with that?”

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: “And meanwhile, I don’t have a job from this person, who I love. And through your jousting, you just managed to get an incredibly plum position as Director of Legislative Affairs.”

JOSH: Mm hmm. Indeed. I’m glad you brought this up, because I though, as I watched Josh and Amy before Donna entered the scene, that they themselves were a little bit flirty.

HRISHI: Oh – sure.

JOSH: As they tend to be.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And that when she brought up the idea of setting him up with this other person, you know, without mentioning Donna, he certainly could’ve quashed that. And said, you know, “I’m seeing someone.” Or, “I’m not interested.” I just kept thinking, “Ooh, if Donna were observing this, would she be happy with the behavior of her new paramour? I think not.”

HRISHI: Yeah. Even though it’s determined that Amy herself is seeing someone.

JOSH: Mm hmm.

HRISHI: It really did feel like there was a vibe between the two of them. And maybe it always will be. And there's also this thing, I don't know if you've heard this, that when you go to try and set somebody up, a lot of times that is actually some level of deflection for your own attraction to somebody.

JOSH: Sure. Yeah. I get that.

HRISHI: So, you know, we've seen a version of this before, from Donna herself. When Joey Lucas comes into the scene, and Donna's saying, "Oh, she's cute, you should ask her out. You should ask her out." And Joey's the one who turns it around and says,

[West Wing Episode 2.14 excerpt]

*KENNY INTERPRETING FOR JOEY LUCAS: If you polled a hundred Donnas, and asked them if they think we should go out, you'd get a high positive response. But, the poll wouldn't tell you it's because she likes you. And she knows it's beginning to show, and she needs to cover herself with misdirection.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ahh. Good pull. You're absolutely right.

HRISHI: While I love Mary-Louise Parker, and I think Amy Gardner is such a fantastic character, the Josh/Donna fan in me is...annoyed.

JOSH: Agreed.

HRISHI: Annoyed? Something.

JOSH: Put off.

HRISHI: Put off.

JOSH: I also— I don't know if you noticed, during the wake scene, there are some moments when Will and Donna are standing by a column in the background and chatting, without being heard, and that is probably my least favorite thing to do on screen.

HRISHI: Because they don't give you actual dialogue there?

JOSH: Right. Exactly. And usually, you know, by the end you have to do it take after take after take after take, and usually the first thing I do is say to the other person, "Are we gonna pretend to be Will and Donna, or can we just do this?"

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] Like, "Oh, please, God, tell me that we're not gonna do, like, sixty and ninety second long takes where we improvise in character."

HRISHI: [laughs] And — but what was usually the response?

JOSH: Ummm...Well, it depends how well I know the person. I'm sure with Janel, I would've been, like, "Let's just talk as us. Okay?" And probably that would've been fine with her. Other actors, or if it's somebody I don't know, I gotta try to take the, sort of, thing off of them, like, "How seriously do you take this?"

HRISHI: [laughs] Right. Right. Can we just talk about the cheese and grapes we're eating?

JOSH: Right. Exactly. "I'm gonna follow your lead."

HRISHI: Yeah. So back to the speakership concern.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: In the end, Santos *does* follow Josh's advice. Doesn't back Fields. Which would be a legislative blunder, as Josh puts it in no uncertain terms.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*JOSH: My job as Chief of Staff is to keep you from making political mistakes. And this is a whopper. If you're looking for a Yes Man, I'm not it. I'll be out in the lobby with Amy Gardner.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Josh is having a hard time in this episode with his position. Even after everything that they've been through, even after having done the dance, I feel like, many times for us on camera, with Santos about where he stands with him. We have to get it explicitly, once more. "I'm not gonna just be a Yes Man."

JOSH: That's right. No, he *raises* his voice. He's quite angered.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And triggered.

HRISHI: To me, it feels like a reaction that's borne out of insecurity.

JOSH: Yeah, I do think that. I think so too. I think so...there's an undercurrent of that throughout this episode, where he's a little bit worried about his place in the new administration. As is everybody. I mean, even the people who already have jobs are kind of jockeying for what their jobs are going to mean. I think it's interesting, just with this, y'know, a new administration represents so much power, and so many positions of importance, that I suspect job seekers were told that Santos has twelve hundred messages, I'm sure many of them are congratulatory, but, I mean...the number of job seekers must be *unimaginable* at the transition time. As soon as an election is over, I'm sure it all begins. But it's interesting to see Josh, who has his high level job locked up already, even *he* is worried about what it's going to mean, and how it's going to work.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And establishing his territory.



HRISHI: Two people in this episode who *don't* exhibit insecurity, I think, are Amy Gardner and Congressman Sellner.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: They're absolutely determined. Sellner says, "I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do. And I hope that we can work together, but this is who I am, and I'm not going to budge for you, and I'm not going to ask anything of you. But this is what I think is right." Fields isn't like that. He's asking the president-elect for help, he does have this insecurity. Josh has insecurity. Donna has insecurity. She's not asking for her own job. She's not making a fuss to ask for her own job. Danny and C.J., that whole thing, is just being dragged down by insecurity. But Amy says— I love this line:

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*AMY: I have an agenda. I pursue it relentlessly.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's true. And because of that very quality, she gets offered this job of Director of Legislative Affairs. A job that she wasn't even looking for.

JOSH: That's right. Sellner's approach seems to be both a principled stand, and, I think, a recognition of the position that Santos is in. That if he's to make the wise decision, he's gonna let the vote just happen. And not step in to sway it towards his friend.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And it's interesting, too. Fields is sort of peaked and petty when he finds out he's not getting his way.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He doesn't take it well.

HRISHI: He doesn't take it well. I think it's a pretty brutal comment that he gives.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*FIELDS: Fill a starving dog's belly, he'll never bite you. The difference between a dog and a man.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What exactly did that mean? I was a little bit confused by that. I watched it a couple times. Is the starving dog Sellner? Is he saying give him his job and he'll be...?

HRISHI: No. This is what makes it so harsh. *Santos* is the starving dog.

JOSH: Okay, I'm stupid. Talk to me like I'm an eight year old.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: And if that doesn't work, I admit, this is like Steve Carell in *The Office*.

[The Office Episode 5.10 excerpt]

*MICHAEL: Why don't you explain this to me like I am an eight year old?*

*OSCAR: You can see clearly, on this page, that we have a surplus of \$4,300.*

*MICHAEL: Mm hmm. Okay.*

*OSCAR: But we have to spend that by the end of the day, or it will be deducted from next year's budget.*

*MICHAEL: Why don't you explain this to me like I'm five?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughs] Fields was there for Santos when he needed him.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: At a few different points they talk about all the ways in which he helped him, both in the campaign, and Santos says,

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*SANTOS: We're from neighboring districts. When I was mayor of Houston I practically camped outside of his office for federal aid.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And Fields fed that starving dog.

HRISHI: Yes. And when he needed help campaigning in Texas, he was there for him as well. And if you feed a starving dog, he'll never bite you. But here –

JOSH: Now he's getting bitten.

HRISHI: He's getting bitten.

JOSH: Okay. Now I understand it.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's a great line, I thought. Although, maybe – maybe not so great. [laughs]

JOSH: Well, no. It was great for the more intelligent viewer.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: It left me a little cold, because I couldn't figure it out.

HRISHI: But, man. That's...that's harsh. Again, it feels like echoes of things that we've seen in *The West Wing* before, you know, when other people have been talked into running for something, or putting themselves up, only to have the support of the White House yanked out from under them. It's been a recurring theme throughout the series. And I guess it's just a reminder that those things don't change, even when the administration does.

JOSH: Right. How 'bout the scene with Congressman Marino? I loved that.

HRISHI: [laughs] I couldn't believe how this person got elected to Congress to begin with.

JOSH: Ooohhh, I believe it.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] It's funny. It's a very funny scene. It's a great performance by Ken Lerner, who would go on to play, or maybe I should say *I* would go on to play his son on Mary McCormack's show *In Plain Sight*.

HRISHI: No kidding?

JOSH: We did a few episodes together of that.

HRISHI: And you play father and son?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: That's great. What was he like to work with there?

JOSH: He was a delight. He's just funny, and charming, and...good stories, and a great actor.

HRISHI: That's fantastic.

JOSH: But he's funny, and then I loved that – it was very well written and acted. That scene.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Just, almost the overlap of what Marino is saying, as Santos is explaining how he doesn't want it to perceive that he's just, you know, swung the vote over to someone who's just going to be a lackey.

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

*MARINO: Lobbying reforms. You got it.*

*SANTOS: Even with a razor-thin majority? There could be an issue with the D-Triple-C.*

*MARINO: I do cartwheels on the rostrum.*

*SANTOS: I'm not saying that Fields is dropping out.*

MARINO: *You name it, I'll do it.*

SANTOS: *But there clearly is a perception that he's a White House...jackey.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughs] Right, right.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: That's great.

JOSH: That gave me a good chuckle.

HRISHI: Josh, what do you think about the agenda that Amy is there to relentlessly pursue? That she wants to put up a woman who is a congressperson from Florida for the role of Vice President? And Santos's reaction is, "We can't break too many barriers at a time."

[West Wing Episode 7.18 excerpt]

SANTOS: *It's already a paradigm-breaking administration. I can't walk in here and start staffing the place like it's Noah's Ark.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I found...interesting. Surprising. A little disappointing, in Santos.

HRISHI: Yeah. First of all, she's only asking for one.

JOSH: Yeah. Good point. Unless there's something, somebody else we don't know about.

HRISHI: [laughs] But yeah. I think this is one of the frustrations with Democrats, and I think it's one that has come up in the Bartlet administration too. I think of Bruno's great rant to Sam, where he says,

[West Wing Episode 3.07 excerpt]

BRUNO: *I am tired of working for candidates who make me think I should be embarrassed to believe what I believe, Sam! I'm tired of getting them elected! We all need some therapy. Because somebody came along and said, "Liberal means soft on crime, soft on drugs, soft on Communism, soft on defense, and we're gonna tax you back to the Stone Age, because people shouldn't have to go to work if they don't want to." And instead of saying, "Well, excuse me, you right-winged, reactionary, xenophobic, homophobic, anti-education, anti-choice, pro-gun, Leave It To Beaver trip back to the fifties," we cowered in the corner. And said, "Please. Don't. Hurt. Me."*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That reaction from Bruno feels like it, you know, you could just drop him in. You could just parachute in right there, and say that to Santos in that moment, where he's saying, "We're already a paradigm-breaking administration." Then great. Go for it.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Own it! As Amy says, this is a chance for real change to happen without having to convince the electorate that a woman is qualified for higher office.

JOSH: Yeah. It's a disappointing reaction from Santos. I like earlier, too, doesn't she make that there's electoral ramifications to consider, too? Of having a female VP from Florida?

HRISHI: Yes. She says in four years, that's gonna make a big difference. I mean, I think having a VP from Pennsylvania also helps. Pennsylvania's still gonna be an important state. But Florida's, for sure.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Even shakier ground. So, she's right about that. But it is kind of...while I'm happy for Amy to get offered this job, it feels a little bit like – do you watch *BoJack Horseman*?

JOSH: I do not. I should.

HRISHI: There's a small subplot that happens in the series where all of the assistants in Hollywood go on strike, and the whole city is just, like, run aground, nobody can do anything. The whole town is just...in chaos. Without assistants doing their jobs. And then the way that the executives end the strike is by, one by one, offering the organizers of the strike development positions.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: And getting them to, like, they're like, "Well, we hear you. But how would you feel about having your *own* assistant?"

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs] And that feels a little bit like, "Great for Amy, but did Santos just pull a fast one on her?" And distract her from her cause by saying, "How 'bout you do this other job instead?"

JOSH: And as he walks away, there's a shot of her kind of smiling.

HRISHI: Yeah! No, I think she's gonna go for it.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah. Looks like it.

HRISHI: I mean, I feel like she should be, like, "How 'bout both?"

JOSH: Right. Right.

HRISHI: If you value you my counsel enough to offer me that job, then maybe let my first win be this. Because I'm right. She thinks that the congresswoman is gonna be better than Governor Baker.

JOSH: Mm hmm.

HRISHI: And we aren't really given a reason from Santos. I mean, you know, Josh says, "Executive experience is important," and he says, "Governor of Pennsylvania is as big as it gets." So I think we were wrong, Josh, There was a lot to talk about in this episode.

JOSH: I guess so. Who knew?

HRISHI: We're gonna take a quick break, and when we come back, we're gonna feature the voices of lots of people you've heard on the podcast before. Cast members from *The West Wing*, remembering some times with John Spencer.

[Ad break]

JOSH: And now back to the show.

[Intro music]

HRISHI: And now we have some stories that we've collected over the past few months, with some of our guests that we've been approaching this episode. We'll start with some words from Jimmy Smits.

JIMMY: I worked with John... at the New York Shakespeare Festival – we did a play together, like, twenty years beforehand. I have these vivid memories of him playing poker. As a warmup at half hour. And then we worked together on *LA Law*, and he came on board and did a fantastic job. Moved on to working on *West Wing*. And, again, you know, he was like my touchstone when I came onto the show. It was a campaign convention episode, that we had this really short scene with each other. We were in the bleachers. It was like the characters' relationship and our relationships kind of, as actors, kind of melded there. And that was a great moment. But it was, you know, it was a shock for all of us, and...yeah. A loss. Big time.

JOSH: Next up we have Janel, and her thoughts on John.

JANEL: John was just so unbelievably kind to me, from the very beginning. And I would have to tell you my first real interaction with him, it was my first scene. And I think that it was one of the first scenes we shot on the pilot of *The West Wing*. And it was when Donna is at the desk, and Leo comes in and says, "Get me Josh."

[West Wing Episode 1.01 excerpt]

LEO: *Is he in yet?*

DONNA: *Yeah.*

LEO: *Can you get him?*

DONNA: *[shouts] Josh!*

LEO: *Thanks.*

[end excerpt]

JANEL: So, I was just doing that scene. I was just doing it, and I was really, really excited to be there, and in my little mind, planning on never leaving. But at the end of that scene, he said to me – and we had just met, you know. He said to me, “You are gonna be here until the curtain comes down.” And you know at that point, there were a lot of assistants. There was no reason for him to say that to me. You know? There was a lot of assistants. So, that’s one thing. And it was just very... I just really remember that, because it was so nice. But then, more than once, in the morning after I had a good episode, he would come, and he would knock on my door, very often with Martin. And they would be standing there together, and they would knock on my door, and I’d open the door and the two of them would be standing there, and they’d say, “Kid, we just wanted to tell you, we were just out here talking about the episode that was on last night, and just what great work you did.” And they would just be talking about my work, and saying how great they thought I was, and...they were just so, so nice. It was even before I was even a regular. He would, like, seek me out, you know, two blocks away from the other trailers, and knock on my little camper door. So. He was a wonderful guy.

HRISHI: Here’s Eli Attie.

ELI: There are a couple stories I want to share about John Spencer. He was such an amazing actor, he was such a lovely person. I was really lucky to get to know him a little bit. Just a little bit outside the show. I still remember the first time I had dinner with him, with a group of, I guess, actors from the show, and John showing up in a black turtleneck. And it was so shocking to me, because, to me, at that point, he was Leo McGarry. Just the idea of him not wearing a suit, not commanding, like, a wood-paneled room, he so completely inhabited that character. And the other memory that really kind of stands out in my mind, is of...actually the day in Season 3 of the show, that the episode “Bartlet For America” aired, and, you know, obviously it was an episode that dealt with Leo’s alcoholism, and sort of falling off the wagon, and mirrored some things in John’s life. And there was a screening of the episode, as there often was during crew lunch, that cast and anybody who wanted could go to. And I went, and I was sitting a row or two behind John, and I just remember when the episode ended, and when Barlet made that incredible, you know, magnanimous gesture to Leo, John was just sitting there with tears streaming down his face. And Aaron sort of appeared in the aisle, I don’t think he had sat through the whole episode, but he just kind of appeared, and he and John locked eyes. And it was such an incredible moment, because you saw the...love that I think was part of that show, that people expressed toward each other, often through the work. And that story was such a gift from Aaron to John, and probably also about Aaron. And it’s just one of those moments I’ll never forget. He was a great guy. It was so shocking and sudden when he died, and...I think we were coming to terms with it, both personally and on the show, for the whole rest of that season. And I miss him still. I wish he was here. The *West Wing* cast and writers are still a pretty close group, and get together a lot. And I know he would be there, and I have a feeling I’d know him a lot better, even than I did then, if that was the case. So this is for John.

JOSH: And now let’s hear from Matthew Del Negro.

MATTHEW: This quote that I’ve used of his, I love it, I’ve told so many people. He would say, “I love actors. Even the ones I hate.”

HRISHI: [laughs]

MATTHEW: And then he’d say, “I love ‘em for taking the journey.” He was an actor’s actor. I remember, he had a little scene, really, like a pass through an office. And they were setting up the lighting, and he was looking around, and he’s looking at the desk, and he goes over and he

opens this drawer, and he pulls out this pen, and he goes over to Chris Misiano, and he's, like, "I really think I'd have this in my pocket. Jed gave me this." And he was like a little kid. And this was Season 7. And he was so into the details, and so excited to be there, and really an actor through and through. It was inspiring. You know? I was young, and looking at him, going, like, "That's what I want to be like when I'm on season seven of a show that's already gone through this huge heyday." And here he is, he's just, he was fully in it. He was great. And then the other funny thing is he would talk about smoking, if someone was smoking near him. And I was like, "Yeah, you know," I said, "I played some roles where I had to smoke, and I can, you know, I would smoke while I was doing them, and then I'm totally fine after." And he's like, "I don't understand you."

HRISHI/JOSH: [laughs]

MATTHEW: He's like, "I love it." He just never – he just loved, loved it, and was so mad that he had to quit.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah. That's his personality.

MATTHEW: Great guy. Great actor, too.

HRISHI: This is a story that you've heard before on the podcast, from Emily Proctor. But it's one of our favorites, about John Spencer. So we wanted to play it again here.

EMILY: I used to go over to John's house, he was very sweet. And he used to tell me how much he appreciated our on-camera relationship, and having this, sort of, like, parental relationship with Ainsley's character. And I would go over to his house, and he would set up obstacles around the pool.

HRISHI: [laughs]

EMILY: And we would – you know, so, high stakes. You know? There was a body of water. And he'd put a pot. And John was a great gardener. He had all of these roses. I don't know if people know that about him. But you'd – oh, he was...

JOSH: [cross talk] I didn't know, though.

EMILY: [cross talk] He was a wonderful rose gardener.

JOSH: [cross talk] I never made it to that house.

EMILY: He lived in one of the canyons, and he had this beautiful rose garden. He loved his roses. And he would set them out, and set out pots, and set out hoses, and we would time it. And he'd have bagels, and things, and we'd – we'd loop it. And time it. And he'd say, "I want you to know, this is how it works." And he was so – I'm gonna cry. He was so great to me.

JOSH: So, wait. Are you telling us that John Spencer set up a walk-and-talk obstacle course around his pool for you guys to prepare –

HRISHI: Rehearse off-set?



EMILY: Yes.

JOSH: That's an incredible story.

EMILY: With roses and bagels.

JOSH: With roses and bagels.

EMILY: [laughs]

JOSH: I'm gobstopped.

HRISHI/EMILY: [laugh]

JOSH: This wasn't for the original episode, this was –

EMILY: It was for episode number two.

JOSH: No kidding.

EMILY: Yeah. And I just adored him. I just...

JOSH: Yeah, he was a doll.

EMILY: God, he was the bee's knees.

JOSH: You guys do have great chemistry.

EMILY: It's thanks to John.

JOSH: Now, here's a memory from Michael Hissrich.

MICHAEL: You know it's funny, 'cause we'd done a series prior to this with John, called *Trinity*. That was a John Wells show, set in New York, where John and Jill Clayburgh were the mother and father of a large Irish family. And I think we did...maybe thirteen episodes of it, and it was cancelled. But he was the wise, soft-spoken, Irish father of four or five different kids, who were off and doing many different things. So, when this show came around, and John was cast for Leo, I just expected that same kind of soft-spoken, wise, character, for him to bring that. And I distinctly remember, in "A Proportional Response", where Leo takes Bartlet into his office, and basically dresses him down for how he's been – he gives the Charlemagne speech.

[West Wing Episode 1.03 excerpt]

*LEO: We are behaving the way a superpower ought to behave.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Well, our behavior has produced some crappy results. In fact, I'm not a hundred percent sure it hasn't induced it.*

*LEO: What are you talking about?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I'm talking about two hundred and eighty-six American Marines in Beirut. I'm talking about Somalia. I'm talking about Nairobi.*

*LEO: And you think ratcheting up the body count is going to act as a deterrent?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You're damn right I do.*

*LEO: Oh, then you are just as stupid as these guys who think capital punishment is going to be a deterrent for drug kingpins. As if drug kingpins didn't live their day-to-day lives under the possibility of execution. And their executions are a lot less dainty than ours. And tend to take place without the bother and expense of due process. So, my friend, if you want to start using American military strength as the Arm of the Lord...you can do that. We're the only superpower left. You can conquer the world like Charlemagne. But you'd better be prepared to kill everyone. And you'd better start with me. 'Cause I will raise up an army against you, and I will beat you.*

[end excerpt]

MICHAEL: And getting chills as we shot that, because that's something I hadn't seen from John in that previous...series that we had done. You know? I'm sure I'm not the first person to say that scene was Shakespearean. It was a clash of two titans in this dark room. And waiting to see which one blinked. And, it's maybe one of my...no...favorites scenes in this show, or anything I've worked on, but maybe one of my favorite scenes in all the television I've ever seen. And I'll never forget that, that kind of, being awakened to, "Wow, John has that in his toolbox, too."

HRISHI: Kristin Chenoweth shared one story with us that we've been holding on to for this episode. Here it is.

KRISTIN: So, we sat down to read the table read, and there was a, a line in a parentheses, that said, "Is he falling for her?" And I looked at John, I was like, "What is ha-ha-happening?" And he goes, "Kristin. I think they see us, as, a, like, a, burgeoning romantic couple." And we started laughing so hard, I was, like, choking, and so he gives me a Jolly Rancher. And the Jolly Rancher plays a very important part of the story, because he always had them. And I, at the time, was a big sugar freak. Okay? I've changed my habits. But –

JOSH: Oh, have you? I've gotta learn how.

KRISTIN: It's hard. It's really hard. I mean, I would love sugar. So, he would always give me, like, "Green apple. Give me all the green apple you got."

JOSH: [laughs]

KRISTIN: So, in the colder times, I was always cold on set, we had those parkas. Right?

JOSH: Mm hmm.

KRISTIN: And he always had them in his his pocket. And I had my little petite parka, I think they went to the Gap Kids and got mine.

JOSH: [laughs]

KRISTIN: And, after John passed, there was this scene that I had to do, as Annabeth, obviously, but also as Kristin. Where I had to...be the...one to discover him. And, before that day, I was really avoiding it. I must – didn't hardly read the scene. I didn't want to do it. Didn't know how to do it. I didn't want to go there. We were all still in, like...I was in shock. Looking back on the health things, we shouldn't've been, but I was. I just wouldn't...there. Anyway. The day of the shoot comes, and they can't find my Gap Kids parka anywhere. I'm like, "Where is my Gap Kids parka?" I mean, I don't ask for much, people. Hah. Just kiddin'. And they handed my...they get, "Well, here's one. Here's a oversize...parka." And I'm gearing up for this scene. And, you know, remember, I can't play this scene before I know it. So, I'm like, "How...how...I might just...like..." Silently, come and said a prayer, like, "God, help me. Just be in the moment." Not a moment you want to relive. And I put my hand in the pocket, and it was a Jolly Rancher.

JOSH: Uh oh.

KRISTIN: And...I was like, "Okay. All right, John. I'm listening. Thank you." So I pulled that sucker out, it waSn't – I had all the green ones.

JOSH: [laughs]

KRISTIN: Um, it wasn't my flavor, but I ate it. And I'm a big spiritual person, so I believe that people speak to us. And their spirit, and it was his spirit going, "You got this."

JOSH: Rob Lowe shared this memory of John.

ROB: I had a lot of thoughts on Johnny. He was probably my closest friend on the cast, along with Dulé. He understood me, he really accepted me. John Spencer was obviously a great actor. I used to love, and marvel, at his ability to bring an entire story to two lines. He could do more with "Thank you, Mr. President." than most actors could do with a soliloquy. He was kind, man, he loved everyone. He was *hilarious*. And, just the epitome of an actor's actor. Tremendous work ethic. It was always about how to be better, being there for his fellow actor. There was never any ego, or weird subterfuge with Johnny. He was a total straight shooter. I mean, the only reason Sam Seaborn wasn't at Leo McGarry's funeral, for those who have been asking over the years, is because I was in Europe shooting a movie, and we couldn't get my schedule to permit. So, it was one of the great heartbreaks. But Johnny is somebody I truly think about almost every day.

JOSH: Here's what Bradley Whitford had to say.

BRADLEY: You know, John had struggled with...a horrific...addiction issues. And, I met John, who I had been aware of, and had actually known people who had worked with him, when he was really struggling with this. And he was always known as this wonderful, gritty, actor. And in New York, who had gotten...into very difficult situations with alcohol, and lost work and stuff, because of it. I met John, the teamster picked me up for the read-through of *Presumed Innocent*. It was a van, picked me up on 88th Street. John was already in it. And we were going to the read-through. And John had a very big part in this movie. And it had been a reason for him to finally get sober. And John is, you know, he's tough. And he presents this kind of tough, street thing. And almost immediately in the car, he was a little shaky. And immediately, in the most vulnerable way, revealed to me that he was absolutely terrified. Now, we're going from 88th Street to Columbus Circle. And he revealed to me that he did not remember ever acting not under the influence of alcohol. And he had gotten out of rehab, I think, a couple of days before.

And he had gotten through those days, and now, he was going to do a career-changing job. You know? Alan Pakula is directing, Harrison Ford's in it, Raul Julia – it's big movie that he's got his first, I think, where he felt to be his biggest part in. So the moment I met John, he was terrified, and he was really vulnerable. Completely vulnerable, to me. And we got out of the van, and I remember him spinning around and looking at me, and saying, 'cause they dropped us in front of a bar, one of those Irish bars. And he's like, "Oh, God, man, I used to drink there." And I remember sort of gathering him, in a way, I know – Aaron never knew any of this, but it was almost a mirror of what he says to me, and it wasn't as articulate. But it was me going, "I'll get you out of here." You know? "You can do this." So I have never had a relationship with anybody who I met in a moment of such...sweet vulnerability. I think because of that, because I met him in that moment, I think he immediately treated me – he was like a mentor to me. He would check in with me, he was always this voice of encouragement, and I think because I met him at what turned out to be a really wonderful turning point in his life, I think he associated me with a piece of good fortune.

JOSH: [laughs]

BRADLEY: Just 'cause I was there at that moment, where he was kind of turning in his life, and his career was kind of turning around. And, yeah. We were really...close. It's very weird for me to see him. Because he became this – this actor, who I admired, and – you know, early on in the show, we're younger, insecure actors. And, you know, John – again, nobody knows what they're doing. When you're doing it, it doesn't feel that great. And then he was the guy, very early on, on that show, who would, you know, knock on the door, not because I was, like, pouting, or anything. But he was always the guy going, "Trust the whispers in your head." He would say. Which, coming from him, to me, at that point in my life, was a real vote of confidence. And, you know, I think about actors like that. This is not about John, but there was a guy named Eddie Jones, who was an amazing actor, who I went into a play, early, very quickly, one of the first jobs I did. And I remember I had to go in in a couple of days, and I remember this, Eddie looking at me, and truly not thinking I could do it, but telling me he thought I could. And if not for that moment [laughs], I would not be an actor. Because he got me through that. But it was John who really said, "Really listen to the whispers in your head." And that gave me a kind of...freedom, with Aaron's material, that I never would've had. And, you know, you need those little votes of confidence. But yeah, I loved John a lot. And, you know. He was wrestling a vicious monster of addiction, that he was well aware, was always in the next room, he would say, doing push-ups. There are people who lug the big sack of humanity, and self-loathing, and failure, around with them. Because it's part of them. And they have the guts, you know, to hack through the jungle with a dull machete, despite this...anvil on them. And they are some of the most beautiful actors on the planet. And, you know, John was one of those guys. Also, John was this voice on the set, you know, John did not take this for granted.

HRISHI: Here's a story from Josh. I love this story. He told it back in Episode 4.06. And I wanted to revisit it now.

JOSH: We did a table read of this episode. I do remember walking into that room – it's the Roosevelt Room that we see on camera.

HRISHI: Mm hmm.

JOSH: All the time. And that big table. And everyone's sitting in there, and then in another outer ring around that table, are all the department heads, and all the writers, and the producers, and it's a big room, and a lot of people. And I remember very, very clearly, walking in. And, you

know, I wasn't overly daunted. I was psyched. I was really psyched to be there. And I'm sure I said hi to Brad, and I'm trying to think whether I knew anybody else. But I just remember John Spencer walking up to me, "Hey, how ya doing, John Spencer" introducing himself, and saying, "I just loved ya on *Sports Night*." And I don't know whether it's true, and I feel like I've heard a version of this story from almost everyone else who walked in the door.

HRISHI: Mm hmm.

JOSH: That John was just that guy.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Who would go out of his way to be warm, to make you feel good, to make you feel like you belonged there. Say something nice. And it's something I've tried to – and I'm sure I'm guilty of not always honoring his memory this way, but I try to do it, when I'm a regular on something. And not the new guy. Try to remember what it feels like to be – because you're walking into a well-oiled machine, when you do a guest spot on any show. Or when you're new on a show. And this was the crème de la crème of well-oiled machines. So thick, and fourth season – having one as drama, I mean, three seasons – this was, like, this was high level. So it was very kind of him to search me out, walk over to me. I feel like I had just taken three steps into the room, to put me at ease. I thought that was very, very sweet.

HRISHI: And finally, we wanted to end with some words from Richard Schiff. This was a speech that he wrote for John Spencer's actual memorial. He wrote it in a bar in New Jersey while he was doing a play in New Brunswick. He couldn't make it to the memorial, and so Bradley Whitford read the speech for him. So, this is an opportunity for Richard to, for the first time, deliver the speech that he wrote. And we're gonna end with it here.

RICHARD: To John, from Richard. I am a great actor. You can laugh if you want. For seven years, John Spencer has been trying to convince me, to get me to say it out loud. "I am a great actor." And so, to honor John, I have said it. For those of you who know me, you know how ridiculously impossible that is for me to say, never mind that I still think I suck. That's not the point. John Spencer came at you with love, like Joe Frazier came at Muhammad Ali with fists. Think about it. John Spencer would come at you, short and powerful, forehead first, with fiery eyes, and loading that left hook with complements and adoration, and admiration. Respect. An absolute and pure love. And throw them at you with ferocity and determination. And grit. And he would not let up. No matter how you'd ducked, bobbed, weaved, and sidestepped. And, sure enough, he'd catch you with that left hook, and buckle your knees. He had the spirit of the boxer, you see. He was a fighter. He fought his demons that way in, day in, and day out. He was triumphant over them. Batting them down as they popped up, like so many Jacks-in-the-boxes. Trying to divert his focus, his drive, his will to be the best human being he could be. And his great weapon was acting. He loved acting like no one I've ever met. He loved the makeup, the robe, the slippers, the trailers, the prizes, the gossip. He ate it, and dreamt it, drank it, devoured it like steak. And to do it right, he kept those demons nearby. Allowing them to live through his acting, and so always walking that dangerous, courageous line. The line only great actors and artists must tread on. And John Spencer was a great actor. I was doing a scene in the Oval Office on *The West Wing*, a tough scene. John was doing the Warren late play at the Taper, and had to leave the set every day by five p.m. to make his show. So he was shot out first, all day long I was doing this very hard scene, and all day it was going well, alive, in the moments. When I was being shot, I expected it to go just as well. But John had left for the play, and when I looked over to his chair where he had been sitting all day, the scene suddenly

stopped. Someone had replaced John in his chair, and the scene stopped, you see. And I realized that all day, in my glances over to John, I had received this great gift. One look from Leo, and I had been filled with substance, with purpose, with clarity. And now, with John gone, I was empty. And the scene stopped. The play was over. And I had to start again by myself, and I hated it. I told him that the next day. I thanked him for his great gift to us, his generosity, his presence. John was always there for us. Off-camera, giving. Constantly, and totally, and forever, giving. I am not present at the memorial because I am doing a one-man show in New Jersey, of all places. When I told everyone of this choice to do this play, I was greeted with such remarks as, "Are you out of your mind?" "Why on earth are you doing that?" But John responded with, "Oh, that's great. It's gonna be so great for you. What's the play? You're going to kill 'em." And so, on and on. And so each and every day, as I wait, terrified in the wings, to embark on this wild expedition on stage, I talk to John. And I thank him for his faith in me. And I think if John were back here as fearful and shaking as I am, he would smack down those demons, and put the proverbial mouth guard between his clenching teeth, and tear out on that stage, and conquer all. And so I thank him every night. I thank him for all that he has given us. And will keep giving us. At his funeral in New Jersey, I watched his friends and family, and the other Catholics present, reach over and touch his casket to say goodbye. And so, I did as well. And I felt a rush. An electric surge coming through my hand, from his casket. I was reaching out, and touching him, to say goodbye. Because I had missed the chance in Los Angeles. Some believe that the soul stays around for a couple of days, before it embarks on the next journey, wherever that is. Well, John had stuck around, I think. To say goodbye to us. And wouldn't it be just like him? One last act of generosity, to let us say goodbye. To stick around for a little, just a bit more conversation, and companionship. To chat about the things in this world, one more time. What's the greatest thing you can say about someone? That without them, you would not be who you are. John Spencer has changed my life, knowing him. And I will always love him for it. And so, with severely buckled knees, lying flat on my back, on the canvas, in fact. I say this for you, John. I am a great actor. And one day, maybe, one day, if I keep talking to you, keep listening to you, I'll be – just maybe – as great as you.

HRISHI: Thank you all so much for listening to this episode. I hope that we did justice to the episode, and, in whatever small way we could, to the memory of John Spencer. And I wanted to mention, while we're all thinking about him, this might be a great time to go back to episode 3.09, the episode that we did on "Bartlet for America", which featured a long interview with John Spencer from David Daniel at CNN. You very possibly could've heard it before, but I listened to it again, and it really is a special thing, I think. I never got the chance to ever meet him, or speak to him, and it's the closest thing that I got to his take on what it was like behind the scenes of *The West Wing*. Again, you can find that at [thewestwingweekly.com/309](http://thewestwingweekly.com/309).

JOSH: Thanks, everyone, for listening this episode. We remain, as always, a proud member of Radiotopia. You can check out Radiotopia's other fine podcasts at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). Thanks also to Zach McNees and Margaret Miller, for helping us put this episode out.

HRISHI: And thanks, of course, to everyone who sent us their memories of John Spencer.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

LEO MCGARRY: What's next?

[Outro music]