

The West Wing Weekly  
1.10: "In Excelsis Deo"  
Guest: Richard Schiff

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. We're here today to discuss Season 1, Episode 10 of the series: "*In Excelsis Deo*." It first aired on December 15, 1999. It was written by Aaron Sorkin and Rick Cleveland and directed by Alex Graves.

HRISHI: Here's the synopsis from NBC: "As Christmas Eve approaches, President Bartlet eagerly sneaks out of the White House for some last minute Christmas shopping, while a haunted Toby learns more about a forgotten Korean War hero who died alone on the District's cold streets, wearing a coat that Toby once donated to charity. In other hushed corridors, Sam and Josh ignore Leo's advice and consult Sam's call girl friend concerning her confidential clientele when one political rival hints at exposing Leo's previous drug problem. C.J. wonders aloud about the president's public response to a notorious hate crime, while her personal resolve weakens as a persistent reporter continues to ask her out." And today we're joined by Richard Schiff.

JOSH: Huzzah!

RICHARD: Hello, Hello.

HRISHI: Thanks for joining us.

RICHARD: Glad to be here.

HRISHI: Before we start talking about the actual episode, could we ask you some background questions?

RICHARD: Sure.

HRISHI: How did you get the role of Toby Ziegler?

RICHARD: I slept with a lot of people. [laughter] No, I auditioned like many other people. You did not have to, as I recall. You didn't have to –

JOSH: That is correct.

RICHARD: - You just bribed Aaron to put you on the show.

JOSH: I Heimlich-ed him, years earlier.

RICHARD: Once we became irrelevant, it was like it didn't matter if Josh Malina was on our show.

JOSH: Yes, and if we're going to jump straight ahead [laughter], one of the most memorable quotes I remember from you was, not long into my tenure on the show, you turned to me and you said, "We used to get awards," [laughter] "...before you joined the

show.”

RICHARD: Yeah, well, you know. You gotta keep going until you just drop off the cliff, and you kinda pushed us to the edge.

JOSH: I'm the cooler.

RICHARD: No, we were very happy when you joined the cast.

JOSH: Don't buy it back. How did you get the job?

RICHARD: How did I get the job? I auditioned, and it's kind of a long story and I'm kind of, you know, I had been given test deals for a lot of shows the year before, like four different shows, and I wasn't showing up to the test deal because I had realized, "I don't want to do this show." And so *The West Wing* came up and I was very tortured about it, because you audition and you try to get stuff, and I wanted to do movies. So this came along, and it was Tommy Schlamme who wanted to see me, and we had worked a couple of times before, and I came in and auditioned and I kind of knew a) this was great material, b) it would last for two terms of a presidency, I think I'm the only one that actually said that out loud back then, and c) I have a good chance of getting it because I knew this guy, or thought I did. So I went and auditioned for the first round, but I was also supposed to possibly do a movie by the German director whose name just popped out of my head,

JOSH: Wim Wenders.

RICHARD: Wim Wenders, yeah, Wim Wenders. Wim Wenders had said Steve Buscemi might be dropping out of this and if he does then you're my new favorite actor and I want you to do this role. And sure enough, he dropped out right as the process of *The West Wing* was happening, and I wanted to do movies. And I was asked by my representatives, "So this movie conflicts with the pilot directly, which one do you want to do?" And I said the movie, I mean NBC will never hire me anyway, I thought, and I wanted to do movies. Well then the movie fell out and he wanted me to come back and audition, and I was very upset by that. And it was all given to somebody else, and I went to the *West Wing* process. Bradley Whitford was there the second time I auditioned, for the Warner Brothers studio thing. You have to audition first for the guys and then the studio, and Tommy said, "This is just a formality." And then you go and test for NBC, which I've done before, it's just this little room and everybody's stacked up behind a desk, it's very unnatural and odd.

JOSH: Horrible.

RICHARD: It was weird to see Brad, I've known Brad since he was in college, because he was my brother's roommate. He and my brother took care of my dog for six months, so I was forever indebted to Brad for that. I got him his first audition in New York, I was a director back then. He would always call me for advice. So I've known him forever, and I walk in and there he is, and he's playing Josh, and I just started giggling, it was so weird.

JOSH: He wasn't there to test, he had already been cast?

RICHARD: I think he was already cast, yeah. So that was awkward, and I hate

auditioning. You hate auditioning.

JOSH: It's the worst.

RICHARD: Everybody hates auditioning, and I get nervous sometimes and I just start giggling. So I got through it and I said, it's just a formality, let's just get through it, and Tommy says, and so I did it, and Brad's trying to be very helpful, and I walk out the door and Tommy walks me out and he goes, "Well, tomorrow's the test, and this was just formality, I'll see you there." And I go, "Well, just so you know, I might not show up." And he says, "Yes, I've heard." And then I said, "I might also, if I do show up, I'll be really, really bad." And he says, "Yes, I've heard that, too." So he put his hand on my shoulder and he said, "I hope you come." And it was said with such incredible love and respect for each other's insanity, if you will, that it kind of melted me. The first of many times Tommy was able to do that, kind of disarm all of my neuroses and psychoses. And as I'm walking out I saw Allison Janney in the pool of actors waiting to audition. I said to myself, if they're serious about her, then these guys really know what they're doing. And I got a little excited about it. So the next day I came in for the test and I was awful, really bad. So much so that I again started giggling, and I went, "I'm sorry, this really sucks. And I'll do it again." And I did it again...

JOSH: Giggling is not something you would normally associate with Toby Ziegler.

RICHARD: Yeah, it's right in the middle of a negotiation with the congressional leaders – "I'm sorry, I suck today, let me start again." So I got through it and left, and got the part. Years later, someone came up to me, an actor who I know and love, and said, "Do you know, I was the other actor up for that part." And I said, "I had no idea, you're kidding me." And he said, "And I was sure that I got the part." And I went, "Why?" And he said, "Because I put my ear to the door when you auditioned and I couldn't hear a word you said. So I said, I've got this." And that actor was Eugene Levy.

JOSH: Wow.

RICHARD: Can you imagine?

JOSH: Different show, I think.

RICHARD: Well I don't think it's a different show, but totally different Toby, obviously. But I think equally... Well, I was going to say equally brilliant, thank you very much.

JOSH: You're absolutely right.

RICHARD: But equally fascinating in terms of what he would bring from the other side of the spectrum.

JOSH: Right. Well, it's a tribute to you, I can't imagine anyone else. It's such an indelible portrait, I can't imagine anyone else playing the role.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: Well, now I can't either.

JOSH: So this episode.

RICHARD: Yeah.

JOSH: How well do you remember it?

RICHARD: I watched it, but with my eyes closed. It's very tough for me to watch myself, and I don't enjoy it. And I have very good sense memory, if you will, and I remember the emotional aspects of everything that was happening at the moment, you know? What was happening with the work, and what was happening personally. You have to want to relive that, I think, to sit through it. But I turned on the Netflix thing, and then *The West Wing* came on, and I couldn't resist watching the pilot, because I went, you know, everyone talks about this pilot. And so I watched it. It was pretty good! It was a pretty good pilot!

JOSH: It really was.

RICHARD: You know? And that scene with the lovely, wonderful, rest in peace, John Spencer, that opening sequence just walking through and just establishing the world, this crazy busy world, and specifically Leo as a character, and running into CJ and running into Josh... was awesome. And establishing who Josh was and Toby was through the Christian Right sequence. And it was just kind of brilliant writing, I have to say. I mean, who is this guy Sorkin? Oh and then, yes, I watched this episode and remembered it very vividly. I didn't need to re-watch it because I remember everything about it.

JOSH: Did you remember reading it originally? Did you know this is a special episode?

RICHARD: Well that is another story. It was when I read it - and all due respect to the people who initially wrote it, but this was the first episode that we read that Aaron didn't write, before Aaron got a chance to kind of OK it. And part of the reason was to speed our process along. And we did a read through of it, and I got very upset by it, honestly. And I remember we read it and we got into a van and we were driven in a van from the set to the other side of the lot where the writers were. And I remember it was very quiet, I guess because I must have been emanating a somewhat tense creating or something, and Allison broke the ice by saying, "This is a really good episode for you." And I just kind of went off, I was so upset at the original story as written.

JOSH: What was it? What was it that set you off?

RICHARD: All due respect, Rick Cleveland, it was his story, and it actually happened to his father I think, and it's a lovely story and I don't mean to disrespect that at all. But it was written from the opposite perspective of who Toby was. It was written about someone who was reluctant to participate, the police kind of had to drag him over to the site, and he was cracking jokes, and that kind of stuff, and it was polar opposite. Now I know that Toby was a little coarse right from the get-go, and a little harsh maybe, in his opinions and not the most open person in the world, but I thought I was creating a character that felt things very, very deeply, and who cared extraordinarily about things. And so this didn't make any sense, and I was offended by it, to be honest. And anyway, Tommy came over to the trailers. We were by the cafeteria at Warner Brothers at that time, we were up at those stages up there. And he said, "I hear you're upset." And he is

nodding his head like we're going to talk, it's ok. And I just started crying, I started actually – I couldn't [pause, voice breaks]– See, this stuff comes back when I talk about it and when I look at it. I was really upset. And he goes, "Listen, we're gonna work on it, it's going to be fine. It's written, we get it, blah blah blah." And he calmed me down. And over twenty minutes later Aaron shows up. As soon as I see him, I started crying again. And he says, "We're gonna fix this, we're gonna... blah blah blah." And years later, I don't know if I'm talking out of school, but I think Tommy mentioned to me that originally – I don't think this disrespects anybody by saying it – it was written for Sam. It was written for...what's his name?

JOSH: Rob Lowe.

RICHARD: Rob Lowe...No no no, that's not it. Yeah, it's Rob Lowe.

JOSH: Janel had the same problem. We're going to address this in some sort of group therapy session down the line.

RICHARD: And for Sam, I guess, who's a little bit more glib and a little bit more... Maybe that disposition made sense, and Rick had not had time to readjust for my character. I don't know, I think it was Tommy who said that this has gotta be Toby, this has gotta be Toby. And we went and collaborated. Mostly Aaron, who I think loved my character and loved what I was doing with it, and got it. And I always thought that, with all of the beautiful language of Aaron Sorkin, and all of the flowing kind of wonderful language, that he had tendrils – is that the right word? – underneath the soil, roots, that that's what I was digging for. I was looking for...what's that mushroom?

HRISHI: Truffles?

RICHARD: Truffles. I was looking for -

JOSH: Chatting with you is fun, it's like a quiz show.

RICHARD: I was looking for stuff underneath. And I think he recognized that. And then he wrote something very simple, it's really only four or five scenes, this episode, that I'm in. But that was from the correct perspective, I think. And that's how it evolved into becoming, I think, one of fans' favorite episodes. It doesn't just come out of someone's brain and then it's brilliant. These things have to happen, where someone has a visceral reaction to something that might not be right, and then people go, "Well, [Expletive deleted], that makes sense," and then adjust it. And then it's better than you could have even imagined it would have been from the beginning.

JOSH: That speaks to another question we discussed earlier, about collaboration and give and take, and I'm on the other end of the spectrum, where I – four years on the show, and I never had an idea or feedback.

RICHARD: Wasn't that just your character? That's you, too?

JOSH: I don't think so. It's also I remember Brad once characterizing my acting as a single layer cake. [laughter] And yours is considerably deeper and better and richer. This is a great specific story, would you regularly...?

RICHARD: [to Hrish] First of all, I think he was great on the show. I can't say it to his face, I'm saying it to you.

HRISHI: That's fine, I'll take it.

JOSH: Are you talking about Brad or me?

RICHARD: You.

HRISHI: He's talking about you.

JOSH: All right. Would you frequently after table reads say, I think you got this right?

RICHARD: Yes. Always. And it's the reputation I have.

JOSH: That is true.

RICHARD: That doesn't scare smart people, and scares the daylight out of hacks. I'm saying that with a facetious... I think people are a little nervous about people who have opinions and are willing to stand up for them. I'm much mellower than I was back then, in terms of I think I understand things better, so I don't get so viscerally upset, and I realize there's something we can do about it. Yeah, I have opinions, and it probably comes from the years of directing theatre back in New York, or it's just the way my brain works, where I kind of work backwards. I kind of see what it's going to be and then I fill in how you get there. And I did that a lot, and Tommy and I would get into real healthy fights. At one point, I thought, later on, I think in year two, I think I gotta stop doing this to myself, because people started to walk away whenever I was starting my reaction to a thing. I went, I think I just better stop. And after about two weeks, I get a knock on my trailer, and it's Tommy. And Tommy comes in and says, "Are you all right?" I went, "Yeah, why?" He goes, "Why aren't you fighting with me? I miss our fights." He goes, "I learn more about what we do and what we're doing by you challenging me. If you stop, I am not going to be as good." He's a remarkable man, actually, and quite a phenomenal director. He can see what's happening in the human being that's creating the role, it's not a puppet show for him. And he realized that I was off, I wasn't doing what I do. And he was saying, I appreciate the way you work. Not everybody does, but he does. So, there was a lot of that. And I think I got the respect of Aaron and Tommy early on because I gave away stuff. I'd get a three-page monologue and I would go to Aaron afterwards and I'd say, "This is Josh, this isn't Toby's voice." And he would go, "You're right," and then Josh – Brad probably never knew this, but all those long monologues that were a pain in the ass for him to learn, a lot of them were written at times for me, here and there. Other things that I thought this is Leo, this is... And so, when I went to him and said I think this is Toby, they listened. They knew it wasn't an actor who just wanted to speak more words, I really wanted – and I also wanted Toby to not speak unless it was necessary. I thought he was someone who was formulating and ruminating and gurgling like a volcano, you know what I mean? Until he had to speak and he had to say something. And so, arbitrary stuff I thought wasn't right either.

HRISHI: It's amazing how much that dynamic that you're describing between you and Tommy feels like a reflection of Toby and the president in the show.

RICHARD: Well, very much so. And that's a good point, and Aaron is brilliant not just

because he's got a really encyclopedic brain and an ear for music and for language, but he reacts to the living world of creativity on the set. And he sees who these people are, that are creating these characters, and he will do anything for an idea. So he's this smart, very smart television writer to go, "Wow." Remember *Day for Night*, the movie *Day for Night*? Truffaut? About the making of film in France, and the actress had a drama and she went up to him and she was very upset because her boyfriend this, and her boyfriend, I think, was the other leading actor. And she spends twenty minutes and you see the director, he's nodding and nodding, and listening and nodding. And they cut. And the next day, they're getting ready for a scene, and they've got their rewrites, and the actress is reading the new lines, and it's verbatim exactly what she was saying in real life to the director the day before. Well that's a great writer, a great writer will just take whatever's in front of him, and I think Aaron saw that quality in me and –

JOSH: - synthesized it into the character.

RICHARD: Right, in a beautiful storyline, yeah.

HRISHI: Even the gesture that you describe, Tommy putting his hand on your shoulder, there was a moment in this episode that I love, at the end when you have a scene with the president.

RICHARD: That's right.

HRISHI: And he puts his hand on your shoulder.

RICHARD: That's right.

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*[Hear choir boys singing "Little Drummer Boy" distantly in the background]*

*BARTLET: Toby, if we start pulling strings like this, you don't think every homeless veteran would come out of the woodwork?*

*TOBY: I can only hope, sir.*

*BARTLET: When is this thing?*

*TOBY: I'm going to pick up his brother and go there now.*

*MANDY: Mr. President, sir, your absence in the other room is conspicuous.*

*BARTLET: Ok. [Long pause followed by the sound of a hand gently tapping a shoulder]*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: That's quite a powerful moment in many ways because he's not only saying it's ok that you did this, he's saying that is the very core of what we do. We do not give in to the parameters of etiquette and social restrictions; we do what we have to do in our gut. And that's who we are. And that was quite a... I remember that scene very well.

HRISHI: I felt like that was kind of a theme for this episode, the lines that the characters

were willing to cross out of loyalty, and they're sort of explored in these two different ways. One is in this –

RICHARD: Leo and Josh have the exact same moment.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: Literally, just without the hand on the shoulder.

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*JOSH: We meant well*

*LEO: Is that supposed to mean something to me?*

*JOSH: No.*

*LEO: It does.*

*JOSH: I'm glad.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even though what he did was really not the right thing, it does break the sort of compact that they have with the world at large. Josh keeps getting told:

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*LEO: It's not what we do.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The idea of going to Laurie and trying to mine her for information, yeah.

HRISHI: Even though his base instincts are out of loyalty, again, that's an example of him willing to cross the line in a way that isn't ok. I love that there's that kind of balance.

RICHARD: Right, but Leo knew that that's who he was. That's why he had him tailed.

HRISHI: Right, yeah.

RICHARD: And in the end says, "I'm glad you did." Meaning, I'm glad that's who you are. That's who I want watching my back, or at my side.

HRISHI: When you guys were shooting this, a bunch of this is on location, you're in Arlington.

RICHARD: This easily could have been shot weeks apart.

HRISHI: Yeah, that's what I was wondering, if that eight or nine days happens like, you shoot for five days on the lot and then you go to DC and you shoot.



RICHARD: Well, you go to DC and you shoot...we only went four times a year, so we would shoot three or four episodes worth of exteriors. So, I don't remember the timeline of our shooting schedule. I know we had to get it done before Christmas, because there was a Christmas episode. But it was still warm. I remember thinking, because it was playing for Christmas, which is cold in DC, I remember asking Tommy, "What are you doing about all of the green leaves?" And he goes, "You know what? No one's gonna notice."

HRISHI: My wife noticed [laughter].

RICHARD: Really?

HRISHI: She's like, "Isn't this supposed to be Christmas time?" And I was like, "Washington, DC, is kind of warm."

JOSH: It was unseasonably warm.

RICHARD: We probably shot it in, well we started in July, so we probably shot it in early September.

JOSH: And having seen that the Korean War Memorial, that was powerful.

HRISHI: Incredible, yeah

JOSH: That was one where the location really just increases the scope of the show.

RICHARD: Well I'll tell you what. First of all, we weren't allowed to shoot on the memorial. That was a stolen shot.

JOSH: Is that right? A little guerrilla filmmaking.

HRISHI: Wow.

RICHARD: Now I've said that out loud, we're all under arrest. There was a lot of guerilla filmmaking. We were jumping around stealing shots. You're not allowed to shoot on the memorials. I remember pacing around before the scene – what was the actor's name? Tom Quinn? The actor who was in the kiosk, do you remember that scene?

JOSH: He plays Noonan.

HRISHI: Tom Quinn, yeah you're right.

RICHARD: Is it Tom Quinn? I loved that actor. I absolutely loved him. I'm gonna get –

JOSH: Cry. Cry. Cry.

HRISHI: You're getting choked up. That exchange is really beautiful. You were talking about the way that Toby was represented originally in the first draft as being maybe too abrasive. I loved in the final product how much it kind of pulled between the Toby that we knew, this sort of very prickly person.

RICHARD: Right.

HRISHI: And even the beginning of the episode, Bah Humbugging the whole Christmas pageantry. And then in this moment, in that exchange with John Noonan, at the end, Toby volunteers:

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*TOBY: Merry Christmas.*

*NOONAN: Merry Christmas.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And it's a reversal from the beginning, and it's even a reversal from the scene with Lance Reddick, where I think he wishes a Merry Christmas, and it feels like you're kind of taken off guard by that.

RICHARD: Right.

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*TOBY: This guy was in Korea.*

*POLICE OFFICER: Thanks.*

*TOBY: Yeah, thanks.*

*POLICE OFFICER: Merry Christmas.*

*TOBY: [mumbling] Merry Christmas.*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: Well, there's a number of things in my mind. Let's go from the kiosk, and then talked about Lance, but that scene, I remember walking around, pacing around. And I had this incredible emotional reaction to this story at this point. And it was hard to contain, and that's what I was working on, I was trying to keep a lid on. As you can see, the memory of it is bringing up emotions now, even. And I was walking around in the Korean... [Richard gets choked up and can't continue speaking, pause, awkward laugh] You're just gonna let there be silence now?

JOSH: No, I'm curious, is it the memory of it?

RICHARD: It's the memory of it, it's the emotions coming right back, which I was able to contain on the day. Just walking around the memorial was really powerful [sniffle] for me.

HRISHI: You wanna take a second?

RICHARD: It is what it is.

JOSH: It's beautiful.

RICHARD: And the relationship that I created for Toby to have with veterans, it almost

appears that Toby was a veteran, because he recognizes the tattoo. But he was also clearly someone who protested the war in Vietnam, but I remember being young and being a protestor against the war, and at that time, in the Vietnam War, there was a vitriolic reaction to people when protestors saw military. And I always had the opposite reaction to them, I always made a point of talking to them. And if I had the words I would have said thank you for your service.

JOSH: That's one of the things I loved about that scene with Noonan. Because you don't say those specific words, but it's clearly what you're saying.

RICHARD: Right, no, that "Merry Christmas" is clearly "thank you for your service," exactly right. And Tom was a veteran, I asked him. And you could see it in his face that he was, you can see his whole history and relationship and that kiosk is real, that kiosk was raising money for veterans, something related to the VA, I don't know what specific. But people come, you sign the name, he asked me to sign the thing. And he blew me away. He blew me away with such simplicity and such depth that he had, just in his face, you know? So that was a tough scene to do, and I remember pacing around, pacing around. And Tommy, God bless him, punched Alex in the shoulder, I saw this peripherally. And went, "Shoot, shoot, shoot! Richard's ready, shoot! Are you not ready yet? Shoot!" He saw me pacing, and pacing and pacing. And that was, you had to carry that around all day, and so it was tough to contain sometimes. And then the scene with Lance, it was very tricky for me to not...all these factors were playing: What the hell am I doing here? This is a dead man on the bench. And this cop who seems to not give a [Expletive deleted]. I don't know if this was pre-meditated or discovered in the moment, but Lance played it beautifully as a cop who was just doing his job, and then Toby notices, he says:

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*TOBY: This isn't a crime scene, is it?*

*POLICE OFFICER: No, sir.*

*TOBY: Because I got the call an hour ago, I went to the coroner's office, and I'm just wondering why the body's still here.*

*POLICE OFFICER: An ambulance will come by. It's not a high priority.*

*TOBY: And then you're gonna call the VA, right?*

*POLICE OFFICER: The VA?*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: To me, it was this is a veteran. This is a man firstly, and a veteran secondly, and you're not showing respect. But the confusion of it all had to play throughout that scene as well, like what is this? And I remember just giving Lance two or three looks like...

JOSH: It's all in the silences, that first scene.

RICHARD: Yeah.

JOSH: And your face.

RICHARD: Yeah, exactly. Anyway, Lance was great in that scene.

HRISHI: One thing I noticed in this episode was your shoulders. It felt like you were making big moves, I don't know, I was getting a lot from –

JOSH: Body language.

HRISHI: Yeah, the body language. And just there were a few shrugs in the episode that I felt like I was seeing it with a different eye and catching new things.

RICHARD: Well, a couple of things I think were affecting that. One, I think he was around real men in his mind, you know, he was on the street, a dangerous part of the world, when he was going looking for, what was his name?

JOSH: George Hufnagle.

RICHARD: George Hufnagle, and in the street under the roadway there, in the cold, and it was a heavy coat. And a lot of times, you adjust the coat. But I think it was also something wrong, you know? And it's like that boxer who...or my grandfather used to do it, who was a prizefighter and a gangster. If he sensed something was wrong, he would start twitching, and these things would happen to his body, so maybe that's where that came from.

JOSH: Ok, now we're going to take a quick break to thank our sponsors.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Josh has told me about how meticulously you would prepare on set.

JOSH: *The West Wing*, as TV shows go, had a lot of rehearsal.

RICHARD: Yes, and that was the culture that I think I helped create, I think John Spencer helped create.

JOSH: Yeah, I expect that's true. It was a little bit like working on a play, which is not the normal.

RICHARD: But there's two factors there: a) we were all theatre people, and b) Aaron Sorkin's writing is playwriting, and it has depth and it also has nomenclature we might not understand. It also has policy we might not totally get and we need clarification. We also need to know how we feel about it. And that requires attention. And you can't just throw that crap against the wall and pray.

HRISHI: You guys would rehearse without cameras?

JOSH: Yeah.

RICHARD: Oh, yeah. Nowadays, because it's digital – we started on film, you'd say do

you want to shoot, do you want to rehearse – they just shoot the rehearsal. But then, first of all, Tom Del Ruth is very particular about the lighting, we had the best cameramen in the world, in...

JOSH: Rob Lowe?

RICHARD: Dave Chameides, who was a dear, dear friend and a wonderful man. One of the best Steadicam operators in the world at that time. So we had to work out our moves, a). We had to figure out where we were, and guest directors would often, because they wanted to save time, and it's television and they often do this, come in and block it over the weekend for themselves. And I would walk in, and this is not Tommy and this is not Alex Graves, but the guest directors, especially the TV ones, would have the scene already blocked. And I'd walk in with our scripts in our hands and they would go, "Richard you go over there, and then you cross over here," and I was like, "I'm sorry, what? I cross where?" "You go over there." And I asked the cliché, "Why am I going over there?" "Oh, because..." And years later, I realized they've choreographed these shots and they want everyone, but I didn't particularly enjoy accommodating that for the sake of accommodating it.

JOSH: From your point of view, they've skipped an incredibly vital part of your process.

RICHARD: Of all of our processes! [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk]...if they've pre-blocked it.

RICHARD: He's including me in a group shot when emotionally or even if you just look at the words, I'm opposed to this, you know what I mean? And my physical disposition might be to cross to the other side of the room and confront them, or to have one foot out the door, or be private and not let them know that I'm formulating a response that is going to upset the cart. To dictate that without understanding, without caring, what the impulses of the actors are, I found difficult. So we got into a culture of rehearsing for us, and then rehearsing for camera. And directors were able to adjust quite easily. And it saves time, that's what people don't get. When I say people, I mean people in the business, the producers and directors of these other TV shows. They don't get that if everything is worked out, then you don't have the gears grinding into each other three hours from now because something doesn't make sense, you know what I mean?

JOSH: You talked earlier about containing emotion. I think when you watch Toby, there's always a lot bubbling underneath, that he's dealing with on his own. And there is another piece of acting and I feel like that's the perfect word in this episode, Kathryn Joosten, may she rest in peace.

RICHARD: Wasn't she amazing in this episode?

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: I've never seen a Christmas look like this, the trees, and the lights, and everybody singing.*

*MRS. LANDINGHAM: Yeah.*

CHARLIE: *The presents.*

MRS. LANDINGHAM: *Yeah.*

CHARLIE: *I brought it up because, I don't know, you seem a little down this week.*

MRS. LANDINGHAM: *Yeah, I know, Charlie, I tend to get a little down during the holidays.*

CHARLIE: *You don't like Christmas?*

MRS. LANDINGHAM: *I miss my boys.*

CHARLIE: *I never knew you had kids.*

MRS. LANDINGHAM: *Twins. Andrew and Simon. I tried not to, you know, I dressed them differently, but they still did everything together. They went off to medical school together, and then they finished their second year and of course, their lottery number came up at the same time.*

CHARLIE: *For the draft?*

MRS. LANDINGHAM: *Yeah.*

CHARLIE: *Well I would've thought they could get a deferment to finish med school.*

MRS. LANDINGHAM: *They didn't want one. Their father and I begged them, but they wanted to go where people needed doctors. Their father and I begged them, but you can't tell kids anything. So they joined up as medics, and four months later they were pinned down during a fight in Da Nang, and were killed by enemy fire. That was Christmas Eve, 1970. You know, they were so young, Charlie. They were your age. It's hard when that happens so far away, you know, because with the noises and the shooting, they had to be so scared. It's hard not to think that right then, they needed their mother. Anyway, I miss my boys.*

CHARLIE: *Ok.*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: It's an incredible scene, during the entirety of which she's still working on her computer and [cross talk] as she works through it, and [cross talk] – that's exactly the word: she contains.

RICHARD: [cross talk] She keeps working. [cross talk] She's phenomenal. She cannot go there. And she knows it, but she's placating, if you will, or providing the story that he's curious about.

JOSH: She can't even quite bring herself to look at him.

RICHARD: Right. And then she asks to go to the funeral. The one thing that bothered me in watching it again was that I didn't, I mean there was no time for it I think, and all I did was kind of go...

JOSH: By God, what are you going to say, what did you feel was missing?

RICHARD: I don't know. But I just thought because I had to assume that I knew the story.

JOSH: Absolutely. But for me as a viewer it was there, the same way without saying thank you for your service, you said it. You did it in your Toby way.

RICHARD: I just thought it was a tad quick. I just thought I would look at her and maybe remember the story, because it was a little too convenient. I don't know if that's necessary or not, but that's a mini, mini little thing.

JOSH: Yeah, I completely got that you understood why she would want to go with you, and that you made her welcome.

RICHARD: Well, that's a relief.

HRISHI: In Episode 5, they introduce that idea in the "These Women" scene, when the president and Leo are looking around at the staff, and the president says:

[West Wing Episode 1.05 excerpt]

*BARTLET: Mrs. Landingham. Did you guys know she lost two sons in Vietnam? What would make her want to serve her country is beyond me, but in fourteen years she's not missed a day's work, not one.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So the fact that she's actually literally at work while talking about that feels in some way like an answer to that.

RICHARD: Well, the great writers and the great storytellers earn every moment. And if you do not plant the seeds, then the reveal isn't impactful. And if anyone did that... All you gotta do is look at *Breaking Bad*, and they plant seeds three years before the payoff.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: You know? Someone said the other day that was like a five-year movie.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: An ongoing novel. And Aaron does the same thing, he does not just go for, "Oh it would be cool if she lost her two kids." He plants it.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: And then it pays off. It's true of a lot of things.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's a lot of death in this episode. [cross talk] Between Mrs. Landingham's sons, and Walter Hufnagle, and [cross talk] the kid, yeah. [cross talk] Who's modeled after Matthew Shepard.

RICHARD: [cross talk] MmHm. [cross talk] The kid. [cross talk] Right, the gay teenager, who was pelted to death, really.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And that really lovely moment that Martin Sheen has...lovely is not the right word, but powerful moment. When he's told of his death.

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: I'm sorry to interrupt, sir, but you asked me to keep you posted.*

*BARTLET: Yeah.*

*CHARLIE: Lowell Lydell died about fifteen minutes ago.*

*BARTLET: [Sighs] Ok.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, as he's just moments away from sort of entertaining a group of visiting kids.

RICHARD: Then he goes back to entertaining them. He goes back and it's one of a recurring theme of *The West Wing*, which is no matter what happens, you gotta go back. You gotta keep working. What's next? Is probably the most important line or tagline of the series, because no matter what, you gotta keep going, you're still the President of the United States.

HRISHI: You know, "What's next?" we've adopted that as our tagline at the end of every episode.

JOSH: We're going to make you say it later.

HRISHI: We're going to make you say it, yeah. We say, "Ok. Ok. What's next?" And for me, that's part of the fabric of the show, is the word "ok." And I feel like this is the first episode where it really comes out, I think I counted there were over twenty times of just the word "ok" is said [cross talk] between characters in this episode.

JOSH: [cross talk] In this episode?

RICHARD: Really?

HRISHI: Yeah, I think it was twenty-four times people say "ok" in this episode. And it's used in such a...every time it's said, there's a lot loaded into that one word.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: The president says it after learning about the death of the high school student, and Charlie says it after Mrs. Landingham.

RICHARD: Yeah, he says "ok." it's an odd moment, which is lovely that they keep using



that word. It's an appropriately awkward ending.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: What do you say to that story? There's nothing to say.

HRISHI: Yeah. The repetition of that.

RICHARD: God, I love that man. I just love Dulé Hill. I just love that man. And what was he, twenty-four when he got that job?

JOSH: We were just commenting on how young he looks this first season.

RICHARD: He looks so young. He's the only one that's aged!

JOSH: He's a different person. That's right!

RICHARD: We all are fine. And he looks like...

JOSH: He looks terrible now.

RICHARD: Yeah. You know, looks like his grandfather. I'm kidding; he's still a very young buck. Handsome man. But I was so impressed with him as a human being, just the way he...what's the word?

JOSH: Rob Lowe?

RICHARD: [laughter] Anyway...

HRISHI: Speaking of your love for the cast, last night I re-watched your Emmy acceptance speech.

[Emmy speech excerpt]

*RICHARD: Thank you. I just want all the cast members to come up here, I mean, I am really happy that Allison won. So that I don't have to repeat everything that she said, but I will anyway. I really thought that I missed my era, and I should have been around in the time of O'Neill, you know, Eugene O'Neill and Clifford Odets and Arthur Miller, and who would've thought that every eight days, I get to do a new play written by a writer who combines the greatest attributes of all those writers and is the greatest writer of this era, Aaron Sorkin. Thank you, Aaron. Tommy Schlamme is the executive producer and along with John Wells and many times director and Tommy thank you for encouraging us and allowing us and joining us in the impossible pursuit of excellence. Thank you. And the cast of The West Wing who I love dearly, this obviously is for everybody. Come with me and celebrate. Thank you very much.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh yeah, let's talk about that. You won an Emmy for this episode.

RICHARD: You're getting giddy over there.

JOSH: I am excited, just because I've had this conversation with you before. Do you have some regrets about that speech?

HRISHI: Really?

RICHARD: Just a tad.

JOSH: Well, say what you were going to say first, Hrish.

HRISHI: Oh, it's beautiful. I love that speech, and I love how un-Toby it is. There's no kind of curmudgeonly, begrudging anything, you're just like full of love for your cast mates and that's really sweet.

RICHARD: I remember the speech because of what I omitted.

JOSH: That's what I want to get to.

HRISHI: Ah, I see.

RICHARD: I remember it because I went over it a thousand times, like how can you do that? First of all, I did not enjoy the night.

HRISHI: Really?

RICHARD: Not in the least. And it's something I've come to grips with myself, and it's very hard to live here, which I don't want to be doing, in Hollywood, and realize that you're someone who really doesn't want any attention. I really just don't want anyone to notice me. But I want them to notice that guy who does that work, so I can get more work, you know? And I freak out when I get too much attention, my physiology rejects it. It's not in my control. And Allison won first, the Emmy award, and I literally said, "[Expletive deleted], I might win." And I had this speech and Sheila was being great and wanted to (my wife) make this about us, and not make it a big deal, and we had fun on the red carpet, which was very unusual for me. And then my name got announced, and I remember doing this with my hand, and I go, what do I do? And I got up and I ran to Aaron and Tommy and I hugged them, I remember that. And then I was making my way to the stage, and all of the *West Wing* actors were hugging me, and it felt like, all right, it's been thirty minutes since my name has been called.

JOSH: My time's up already.

RICHARD: They're going to start playing the music. And then I started speaking, and then my body said, I can't keep you here any longer. [laughter]

JOSH: You played yourself off.

RICHARD: I think my body provided a hook, which dragged me off the stage, and I literally the physical sensation was of me spinning out of control in a spiral, in a gyro. And I just said, blah, and I left. And then as I'm walking offstage, this woman says "Congratulations." One of the women with the dresses says "Congratulations." And at that moment I stopped and went, [gasp]. And I realized I didn't thank my wife and my kids. Now, the opportunity as someone who's funny, which is you, Josh Malina. I had so

many opportunities to be hysterical, but I was too much in an existential panic. My daughter had been born seven days earlier and was in the building in Whoopi Goldberg's dressing room. That's good material to open with, you know what I mean?

JOSH: Better to draw a parallel between Aaron and Arthur Miller. How'd that go over with Sheila?

RICHARD: It was a tough night. [laughter] Sheila's no easy little piccadill. It was a tough night. First of all, I felt like my soul had left my body, or some betrayal in my own... Like, I disappeared off the stage before my body did. And you know when people go up there and go, "Oh man, this is so surreal." Well I experienced the ultimate surreal experience, which is I didn't exist anymore. [laughter] It was make believe version of me up there.

JOSH: Where's the Emmy?

RICHARD: It's in my office, behind me, along with my baseball trophy from the 1988 New York City Softball Championships.

JOSH: Nice.

RICHARD: And a bunch of other statues are back there and stuff. No one ever sees it because no one goes into my office, but I Skype in every now and then with directors, and meetings and stuff.

JOSH: Do you place it?

HRISHI: Just power play.

RICHARD: W. H. Macy and I were talking on Skype recently, and he goes, "Well I see your Emmys, man." And I realized that my computer faces behind me, and I got my 1927 - no, my 1961 New York Yankee little statue of all of the guys...

JOSH: Booooo.

RICHARD: Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle...

JOSH: Let's go Mets.

RICHARD: The Mets didn't exist in '61.

JOSH: Neither did I.

RICHARD: That's [Expletive deleted]ed up. [laughter]

JOSH: Well, if I won an Emmy, I would just attached it to my car keys.

RICHARD: You know, I'm a Yankee fan because my grandfather was a Dodger fan.

JOSH: So was mine!

RICHARD: Ebbets Field.

JOSH: My dad grew up going to...40 games a year at Ebbets Field.

RICHARD: Yeah, well my mother, my grandfather...my grandfather caught a ball by Duke Snyder that he gave to me that's now in a sewer in the Bronx. And there was no team except the Yankees, the Dodgers and Giants left in '57...'58, I was born in '55. Which makes me forty-six years old.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Checks out.

RICHARD: And so there was no team, and he was a baseball...he played minor league baseball, among many other things. So he took me to my first game, was I saw Ted Williams's last year with the Red Sox.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: So I went the other way with my New York Jewish family, I was weaned on hatred of the Yankees.

RICHARD: Well, you were either, it was one or the other.

JOSH: Right. Janel talked to us about a moment [cross talk] that is in this episode.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

RICHARD: [cross talk] With Josh.

JOSH: With Josh. She said that Alex Graves was the first person as a director to make explicit how they felt about each other with a shot of Josh, I think after he gives her the book.

RICHARD: Yeah, looking at her, she's smiling, reading the book.

JOSH: Right. And that's where -

HRISHI: Yeah, just that peek out of his office door.

RICHARD: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*JOSH: I wrote a note inside. [Donna reads note] Don't get emotional. Donna, don't get – no – let's try to maintain some sort of...*

*DONNA: You see? You spend most of your time being, you know... you. And then you write something like this to me. Thank you.*

*JOSH: I meant it.*

*DONNA: Skis would've killed you?*

JOSH: Yeah.

DONNA: Ok.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Tangent: did it bother anyone else that he bought her a rare book and then signed it? [laughter] Wrote a whole scroll inside, like dude, this is when you go to Hallmark, buy a \$5 card and write your love inside of it.

RICHARD: You know what, I was having this conversation the other day, with Kevin Pollak of all people, about how nowadays because people watch things 137 times, these little things...

JOSH: Every little thing.

RICHARD: Every little thing. But in the old days, Hitchcock used to have a philosophy, this is Kevin Pollak speaking, that all they want to do is be entertained. So all the little things, and Kevin Pollak is saying, "If you were going to kill a guy, you wouldn't decide a crop duster is the best way to do that." [laughter] Right? But that's what he saw for the poster. So he had to have a scene with a crop duster trying to kill Cary Grant in the middle of a cornfield, which Kevin Pollak also points out, it was never explained what he was doing in the cornfield. And in those days, you just had to be exhilarated by the "bomb under the seat," as Hitchcock would put it. And you just talked about how scared you were.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: You didn't go, "Oh come on, what was he doing in the cornfield."

JOSH: Actually, this really speaks to something that Hrish and I deal with a lot, which is we have fun sometimes with picking apart little things or little issues of credibility and then the truth is that I'm sure if you brought it up to Aaron I think he would say, "I was trying to entertain for an hour, does it matter whether Mr. Willis couldn't have been appointed to his seat as a Congressman?"

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And the truth is I-

RICHARD: That does matter. That matters.

JOSH: Well, I agree with you, I brought it up. But I can see, it's two sides of the same coin.

RICHARD: He couldn't be... the husband doesn't take over the seat?

JOSH: No, he would've had to have been elected.

RICHARD: Through a special election?

JOSH: Special election, exactly.

RICHARD: You wanna know a really cool moment from that episode?

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: Yes.

RICHARD: This always made me laugh. I was experimenting, what year was that?

HRISHI: 1999.

RICHARD: That was the first year?

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: I was experimenting already with the way I was this character. And experimenting with neutrality, based on this psychological study of seeing a neutral face and then seeing a picture of a murder, and then seeing that face again, and then seeing the same face, and then seeing the picture of two people in love and then seeing that face again. Same face. And almost 99.999% of the time, people would associate something evil with the neutral face when they saw the murder or the crime scene, and then something beautiful and serene or something with the face, same face. So I was like I'm gonna [Expletive deleted] around with this. So the very last scene, I think it was a poker table, we were at a poker table. And I get up and I go "I just want to see the vote," I had this whole experience with this Mr. Willis. And I'm looking at this screen and they don't have the picture, right? Because normally I would want the picture so that I can react to it, so I'm not gonna decide what my reaction is gonna be. So I'm literally going, I don't know what my reaction is going to be, because I'm not going to have a reaction, I'm going to create one. Which I'd rather not do; I'd rather have the reaction. So I'd rather have the pinch, and I will go, "ouch," you know? That's the Meisner way of putting it. And so there was just a green screen. So I'm just looking at it, and I'm going, "I wonder what my reaction would be." And then, I remembered this thing. And I just thought, "I'm going to think about something else. And I'm just going to look at the screen and think about that." And I did it. And they wrapped, and Tommy, very often two days later is when he comes up to you and goes, "Oh my god." Because he sees it in editing. He doesn't do it on the day, because he's too busy going on to the next shot.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: And sure enough, two or three days later, he comes running up to me, and he goes, "That was the most brilliant bit of nonverbal acting I've ever seen, it was phenomenal. We were all talking about it in the editing room." So I never told him what I was actually thinking.

JOSH: Oh, that's hilarious.

RICHARD: He goes, "It was the most brilliant, brilliant..." You know what I was thinking?

JOSH: What's for lunch?

HRISHI: Neutral face?

RICHARD: No, no. Wasn't so neutral. I was looking at the screen, thinking "What would it be like to have sex with Allison Janney?"

HRISHI: [laughter] Whoa.

JOSH: This is a bombshell.

RICHARD: And so people should...

JOSH: Is that what you always do now?

RICHARD: In every scene and in every character that I play, that I want simplicity and my body to get quiet, I will think about having sex with Allison Janney.

JOSH: That's what you're actually acting. This is revelatory. When you did *The Lost World*, did you insist on real dinosaurs? Or were you willing to work with the green screen?

RICHARD: I had real dinosaurs! Those were real. What were we talking about, just now?

HRISHI: We were talking about Alex Graves making explicit the moment between Josh and Donna.

RICHARD: Well, that Alex Graves directed this, that's true.

JOSH: Yeah, so what was your experience?

RICHARD: Well he became the producer in the last years of *The West Wing*.

JOSH: He directed my first episode.

RICHARD: Yeah. Well Alex is very, very talented. He was very confident with the camera, and very effusive to the actors.

JOSH: That's true.

RICHARD: We'd walk on set, he's wiping away a tear, I'm going "Did we get it?" and he'd go, "Am I crying?" that kind of thing. So effusive that you tend to dismiss his comments and you kind of look for another source to see if you actually did have an effect on someone.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: But very, very talented. Very talented guy. But Tommy was always around for this episode. Tommy was still overseeing everything, which I was happy about.

JOSH: Yeah, well you guys were still establishing what the show was and who the characters were.

RICHARD: Yeah. But Alex really deserved at least a nomination for that. You know how beautifully it was edited? I think that's another thing Alex prides himself on, is the final edit, and that beautiful sequence at the end of this episode, going back and forth from

the funeral to the kids singing “pa-rum-pum-pum-pum” what’s the name of that song?

HRISHI: “The Little Drummer Boy.”

JOSH: We’re Jewish.

RICHARD: What?

HRISHI: “The Little Drummer Boy.”

RICHARD: Yeah that one. “The Little Drummer Boy.”

JOSH: So why is it called “*In Excelsis Deo*”? Because “Little Drummer Boy” sounded like a lame name for an episode of television?

HRISHI: I believe the working title was “A Christmas Episode.”

RICHARD: I don’t remember.

HRISHI: In the original Rick Cleveland draft, it was called “A Christmas Episode.”

JOSH: In the original, not Toby Ziegler or not Richard Schiff endorsed.

RICHARD: Right.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: Rick Cleveland was at the time a great writer, great playwright before that, and has gone on to have a wonderful career.

JOSH: That’s right. He’s gone on to write for *Mad Men*, and *Six Feet Under*, and all sorts of things.

RICHARD: Yeah.

JOSH: And he and Aaron have an interesting history that people can Google if they like. Since neither of them is here we won’t get too far into it, but they have an interesting history with regards to this specific episode.

RICHARD: Oh yeah? Really?

JOSH: Oh yeah.

HRISHI: And the Emmy win for writing for this episode.

RICHARD: Well, I know, Rick was upset, and I should have mentioned him as well as my wife, but my wife gets the first regret.

HRISHI: [laughter] Right.

RICHARD: Rick’s down the list



JOSH: Secondary regret for Rick, fair enough.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And Aaron totally retooled the essence of it, you know. But it was Rick's story, and he got it started and you gotta give due, no matter what the final product is, someone comes up with a great idea and gets it going, they deserve the credit for it.

HRISHI: I am curious about the title though, because, I mean, "*In Excelsis Deo*" is part of a longer Latin phrase, "*Gloria in excelsis Deo*," glory to God in the highest.

RICHARD: It's a Christmas thing, isn't it?

HRISHI: I mean it's part of a hymn.

JOSH and RICHARD: [singing] *GlooOOooOoria in excelsis Deo*.

HRISHI: Everybody knows except for me.

JOSH: It's the New York Jew choir. [laughter]

RICHARD: There was also Lisa Edelstein, and how great was she, a., and b...what?

JOSH: I'm a long-time fan of yours, pre-*West Wing*, and weren't you in *Relativity* with –

RICHARD: She was my daughter!

JOSH: Yes, I thought so. I loved that show.

RICHARD: She played my lesbian daughter.

JOSH: I loved that show. It was very short-lived but it was very good.

RICHARD: It was really good.

JOSH: And a hell of a cast.

RICHARD: By the way, to this day my favorite character.

JOSH: Is that right?

RICHARD: Yeah.

JOSH: Interesting. You really wanna say that on *The West Wing Weekly*.

RICHARD: That character – well, he was. I love Toby, but I have a love-hate relationship with him. Barry was his name, Barry...something Jewish. [laughter]

JOSH: Barry Something Jewish.

RICHARD: *Schwitzenbaumenflammen*, *Goldenberg*. It wasn't Barry Roth, was it?

JOSH: Rob Lowe? [laughter]

RICHARD: He knows that I'm gonna laugh whenever he says that name.

JOSH: I like it, it's an easy laugh.

RICHARD: That's a defensive response.

JOSH: I'm just trying to make you cry again.

HRISHI: To get considered for an Emmy, you have to pick episodes to send them, right?

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: So I think I read that this was one of two episodes that led to your Emmy win. Did you know while you were shooting it, did you know this was going to be a big episode for you? Or was it only after you saw the final edit?

RICHARD: No, neither. Tommy came up to me and said, "Do you have any idea how people are reacting to that show?" And I went, "No." I had no idea. I never looked at ratings, I never read reviews, I don't think. Because my reps would go, "Well we have to do this Emmy thing," and I had no idea what that meant, I mean I knew what Emmys were, but what do you mean we gotta do a thing? "Well, we gotta pick episodes, or we gotta..." And I go, I can't even look at it, I'm not gonna pick, you pick it. And so, I think Tommy ended up picking them. This episode would never win an Emmy these days.

HRISHI: You don't think so?

RICHARD: Not even close, no way. No chance.

JOSH: Why? Why do you think that?

RICHARD: Why? Because nowadays you have to act the [Expletive deleted] out of it. If you, in other words...

JOSH: Too subtle.

HRISHI: You have to chew the scenery?

RICHARD: Way too subtle! I was looking at it, even yesterday, going, "Are people even getting this? Did they get that?" Because I know I felt it, but did they get that? Because nowadays look at the stuff, with the material also that's written calls for that, whether it's even *Breaking Bad*. It's Shakespearean, it's larger than life, it's crazy. And *Game of Thrones*. I don't know who's winning Emmys these days, I don't really know, but I'm guessing how people have to wave two hands, jump up and down, get naked [cross talk], and then slit somebody's throat just to get people to look at you.

JOSH: [cross talk] "Look over here."

RICHARD: And I can't imagine that this would even be nominated nowadays. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. Tell me I'm wrong.

JOSH: You're wrong.

HRISHI: I think you're wrong, too.

RICHARD: I don't think so.

HRISHI: The last thing I wanted to say about that Emmy moment is, on your way down to accept, you gave John Spencer a hug, and he was also nominated that year.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: And that exchange.

RICHARD: And Brad. No, Brad wasn't nominated that year.

HRISHI: It was just the two of you.

JOSH: He wasn't that good.

RICHARD: He really, really wasn't. He just had a...and his hair was weird.

JOSH: That hasn't changed. [laughter]

RICHARD: It's grey now, did you see him gray? He's very gray.

JOSH: Yes, I think he plays LBJ's grandfather in an upcoming HBO film.

RICHARD: Is this true? [laughter]

JOSH: He's in it. I assume he plays old Pappy Johnson. [laughter]

HRISHI: Well I was trying to point out a nice moment, but that's fine.

RICHARD: No what was the moment, go ahead.

HRISHI: Just the hug that you guys had was really just beautiful.

RICHARD: John was a very special man, and we were all ecstatic when he won.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: And we were nominated the year he won, and we were literally, "He should win." I remember interrupting him when we were all interviewed afterwards, because I think we won Best Show as well. And you know, you go through this press thing afterwards, and the silly person, Entertainment Tonight or Hollywood Whatever, was asking him, "How does it feel to win an Emmy?" Which is kind of like saying, "How does it feel to be the best?" And John started stumbling, and I just said, "John, shut up." And I just started speaking about what an incredibly generous, thorough, spectacular actor he's been, over decades. And I think I expressed for everyone how we felt about him. I think at first there was a little bit of rubbing the wrong way between us, I think there was some...

HRISHI: Really?

RICHARD: Not in a significant way, but I think... John Spencer walked around like – who's the character with the dust in Peanuts?

JOSH: Pigpen.

HRISHI: Pigpen.

RICHARD: He walked around like Pigpen.

JOSH: I buzzed in first: Pigpen.

RICHARD: But the dustbowl around John Spencer were the many, many demons he carries with him. And what's phenomenal about all the incredible work that he did in his life and his career was that he would find these demons and put them to use for his work. But they took over his life a few times. He got into some trouble with, well, it was dealt with on the show, with alcohol and with other things. And at that point in his life, the demons were in check. And he was, as fiercely as someone dives into the world of abuse of substances, is as fiercely as he dived into the feeling of love for his fellow actors and for the people he respected. And I remember writing for his memorial, he would come at you like Joe Frazier going at Muhammed Ali, you know, low and he'd smack you with compliments: "Oh my god, did you see that?" Like on a Thursday morning, "You were...That moment you had!!" And he'd just come at you, and really close to your face, and I remember that because there were some projectiles. [laughter] And he'd landed a left hook and he'd just melt you down, just buckle your knees with his incredible enthusiasm for what you brought to the table and this love. He loved every single aspect of acting. He loved, he was a great theatre actor as well, he loved the dressing rooms, he loved the trailers, he loved the makeup. He'd show up in the makeup in the morning, I mean he would show up about three hours early and just lie back in his makeup chair, and he'd have two little eye pads. And he'd be in his robe and his slippers, and he would just gossip with the makeup people for two or three hours. And he had thick makeup on; he just loved the whole thing. And so that hug was part of that intense love that he had for me and that I had for him, even that early.

HRISHI: That's beautiful.

RICHARD: He was frickin' amazing.

JOSH: Yeah, he was a special person.

RICHARD: And how great is Allison in every episode? I saw the pilot and I saw her in this, in this episode she had the thing with Danny, right? And the fish, and she finally says yes to the date?

JOSH: Mhm. Oh we should note, because we want to continue, starting with this episode, Gail the Goldfish's fishbowl has an occasionally topical ornament, and in this episode, it's a Christmas tree. It's the first time.

HRISHI: This is the first one.

RICHARD: Well that was important, I'm glad we brought it up.

JOSH: Very important. This is the kind of thing we try to obsess about, Richard.

RICHARD: I was gonna say, at some point, when I heard one of your podcasts, because you sent me the thing, I went, these guys should get a life. [laughter]

JOSH: We're going to again, in about three years we'll get a life again. Until then...

RICHARD: How long are you gonna be doing this for?

JOSH: As long as people will listen, we plan to get through every episode. So that means you have to come back multiple times. But you'll come back, right? You'll do this with other episodes, right?

RICHARD: Uhhh, yeah. I wanna...

JOSH: That sounded tentative. Can we take that again?

RICHARD: It's not tentative, I just don't know if I'm going to be alive by Thursday, but yeah, I'd be happy to. All doubt comes from the fact that I could be dead soon.

JOSH: Is there something we don't know, or that's just your take on life?

RICHARD: No, I just think it's the nature of existential strife.

JOSH: Fair enough.

RICHARD: But yes, I'd be...

JOSH: We're very similar, I think, you and I.

RICHARD: We're similar, it just comes out differently.

JOSH: Yeah, perhaps.

RICHARD: But we might be from the same fire, the same little source.

JOSH: Might be the case.

HRISHI: So next week, after this episode, we're actually going to take a little bit of a break from recapping. We're going to pause on "*In Excelsis Deo*" and sort of stay with the episode, we're going to be talking to Melissa Fitzgerald.

RICHARD: She's the only one of us that has become the real thing and is the National Director of Justice for Vets. The great work that they're doing, keeping vets out of jail and rehabbing and all that stuff.

HRISHI: We're gonna take the week off and instead on Memorial Day, a few days early, we're going to put out our interview with Melissa Fitzgerald talking about both her role as Carol and then also her role in Justice for Vets.

RICHARD: And talk about the fact that she has not aged one single nanosecond.

JOSH: I feel like she and I are the two that just –

RICHARD: No, that's not quite accurate. [laughter] She is as beautiful and as lovely a spirit as she was back then, it's quite remarkable.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us. In the meantime, if you have comments or questions, you can discuss this episode with us on our Facebook page, [facebook.com/thewestwingweekly](https://facebook.com/thewestwingweekly), or on our website [thewestwingweekly.com](http://thewestwingweekly.com).

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

RICHARD: What's next?

RICHARD: No, that was awful, let's do that again.

JOSH: He wants to do more. Do it again.

RICHARD: Another take, please.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

RICHARD: What's next?

[Outro Music]