

The West Wing Weekly  
0.16: "Annabeth Schott"  
Guest: Kristin Chenoweth

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're joined by special guest, Kristin Chenoweth, to tell us all about her time playing Annabeth on the *West Wing*. It was a great conversation so without further ado, let's get right into it. Shall we start at the beginning?

KRISTIN: Yeah.

HRISHI: How did you first end up on *The West Wing*?

KRISTIN: Well, there's a little known fact about the beginnings of *The West Wing* for me. I had been offered a part early on on *The West Wing*, Aaron Sorkin had seen me in a TV movie version of *The Music Man*, and at that same time I was offered *Wicked*, the Broadway show. And *West Wing* had been on, I think, a year or two. It was new and it was the hit that it was, you know, it was just changing the world. And I didn't know what to do, because I had invested in creating this role of Glinda on Broadway but it's *The West Wing*. And I would really like to work with this amazing cast, right? So I made the decision, I prayed about it a lot, and took some time, and ended up doing *Wicked*. And I thought, 'Well, that's the end of that'. I got really kind of depressed about it.

JOSH: In fairness, *Wicked* went well.

KRISTIN: [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs]

KRISTIN: *Wicked* did alright!

JOSH: It wasn't a terrible choice.

KRISTIN: No, and things that start with W seem to do alright for me.

JOSH: There you go.

KRISTIN: So then I was leaving *Wicked* to go do *Bewitched* with Nora Ephron, and so I moved to LA, and I get this call from John Wells, 'Would you come in and read for a part?' And I thought, 'But I was offered a part before!' [cross talk] But I....

JOSH: [cross talk, laughs] 'Read? How dare you, sir!'

KRISTIN: [laughs] Yeah!

JOSH: How dare you! [laughs]

KRISTIN: How dare you!

JOSH: Have you heard of *Wicked*?

KRISTIN: [laughs] But you know what? I understood, because the cast and the writing is so specific and special and unique, that if you're not able to get on the train then you're gonna be left at the station. And I just told my manager, 'Yes I will go read.', And I remember I had a very long monologue, and that was back when my memory was pretty good...

JOSH: Ha.

KRISTIN: ...and I just was excited, and I did my due diligence about the White House, and I had sung there but I had no idea who anyone was...

JOSH: Ha.

KRISTIN: ...so I just did some research and I went in and read, and I got the part. Now, I don't even know if Josh knows this story, and you can tell me if I'm talking too much, but I never get to tell it. [cross talk] Ok?

JOSH: Ha. Let's hear it.

KRISTIN: My first day I'm in my office, remember my little office? We had some good scenes in there...

JOSH: Oh yeah.

KRISTIN: ...as Annabeth Schott, the deputy press secretary. And I was nervous, forgot to get the sides that they give out the script, that they give out for you to read, and I opened my desk drawer and there were a pair of sides in there and I thought, 'Great!' I can just, like, cheat, sort of, and look, cause I was nervous and I wanted to prove myself, and I looked down on the call sheet where my name would have been, and it had a different name...

JOSH: Huh.

KRISTIN: ...and I [laughs] was like, 'They've already fired me, and they've replaced me!'

JOSH: [laughs]

KRISTIN: And so now I'm just gonna do the best I can to get through this scene, right, or should I even try, like? So it was touch-ups, and I was really trying hard not to cry, and you know and just pull it together, and Darlene, who did my hair, said, and remember this is day one...

HRISHI: Yeah.

KRISTIN: I, pretty much, I mean Josh knows, when you work with me it's kind of like, it is what it is, [cross talk] I don't change that much

JOSH: [laughs, cross talk] Right away, that's how I remember it.

KRISTIN: Right?

JOSH: [cross talk] Meeting you and like, oh, ok...

KRISTIN: [cross talk] I mean we all have our moods but...

JOSH: Alright, here we go.

KRISTIN: Yeah! So she goes, 'What's the matter?' And I go, 'Um, just so you know, this'll probably be my last day,' and she goes, 'Why?' And I said, 'Because I just saw on the sides they've already recast me.' And she goes, 'Girl, that was last week.'

JOSH: [laughs] You replaced her.

KRISTIN: [laughs] I never looked at the date, nor did I look at the sides after that because I didn't think to, but can you believe that story?

JOSH: That's unbelievable!

KRISTIN: Did you know that?

JOSH: No! I never knew that. That would be a rough, I'd have a hard time processing that. [laughs]

KRISTIN: [laughs, cross talk] I don't tell it!

JOSH: [cross talk] I'd probably just get in my car and drive home.

KRISTIN: I almost did! But I thought 'No, you got here, you've got the day, you're gonna finish your work and then they can fire you'. Wow! That happened, but I never tell it because the actress that's name that was there is a very good, very fine actress, it just, you know, sometimes things just don't gel.

JOSH: Yeah. That just is this business, that I think a lot of people don't realize. Sometimes things don't work out, and sometimes you can't even put your finger on what it is, there are a lot of intangibles, sometimes from the actor's point of view it's not working out and doesn't feel right and they want out.

KRISTIN: Lots of times!

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Things happen.

HRISHI: There's a story that Richard Schiff told us, way back when we were in the first season, when he was auditioning for the part of Toby, and that it was down between him, it was between Richard and Eugene Levy.

KRISTIN: [gasps]

HRISHI: And he thought for sure that Eugene Levy had gotten it, you know for a moment you have the, you're able to imagine this alternate universe where somebody else is, but then it disappears in a puff of smoke because obviously Richard Schiff has so indelibly...

KRISTIN: Toby.

HRISHI: Toby.

KRISTIN: He *is* Toby.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I feel the same way, I can't imagine anybody else, like maybe someone else might have played something, but it wouldn't have ended up with the character that we got.

KRISTIN: No, and you know, God, Eugene to be in that company, you know he is incredible in *Schitt's Creek* and everything that he's done.

JOSH: I love that show.

KRISTIN: Oh I love it, it's one of my favorites. And that to me just goes to show you that there are things that work out the way they're supposed to.

HRISHI: Yeah.

KRISTIN: And this cast, and I was only there the last two seasons, it was only supposed to be three episodes, like an arc.

HRISHI: Oh when you first came in for that audition it was just for three episodes.

KRISTIN: Mhm. And my second day was with Richard Schiff. So imagine Richard, and Richard if you're listening to this you know that I love you and you know that [cross talk] I find you...

JOSH: [cross talk] Here come's a but.

KRISTIN: Oh, I love him so much, and here's perky happy little Kristy Chenoweth from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma and there's Richard Schiff. And I'm like, 'Hi! I'm so excited to be working with you, I can't believe it!' You know my accent was really thick back then, and he was just like, I remember him looking at me like, 'What is this?'

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Ha ha ha.

KRISTIN: In front of me. But do you know that when we were on camera together something magical happened.

[West Wing Episode 6.05 excerpt]

TOBY: *Well?*

ANNABETH: *And a pleasant good morning to you!*

TOBY: *Find someone?*

ANNABETH: *Slept extremely well, thank you so much for asking.*

TOBY: *Sleep less and get us a new Press Secretary, will you?*

ANNABETH: *I'm sorry.. [fades out]*

[end excerpt]

KRISTIN: But it's a testament to all the cast, first of all they made me feel welcome, Josh made me feel incredibly welcome and loved and like, 'We got you', you know? So you feel,

start to feel confident, and like you can do it, but Richard, my character had to teach him how to be a public speaker.

JOSH: That's right.

KRISTIN: And it was funny.

JOSH: It was very funny. You were a breath of fresh air, you brought in energy to the show, a little injection of energy that we needed.

KRISTIN: Thank you.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And how long did you take for you to feel like you found your place in that ensemble?

KRISTIN: You know, it's again, I keep saying it about the cast, but the writers everybody made me feel so loved that it didn't take long, and I have forged friendships that I still have today, very special ones. Especially with Allison, and also John Spencer and I had known each other before, he was sort of like a mentor to me so when I came he just kept saying, 'You've got this kid, don't you be nervous.' I was like, 'I don't even know what Uzbekistan is!'

JOSH: Ha ha ha.

KRISTIN: You know, he taught me a lot. He taught me to be patient with myself, and then of course our relationship on the show developed into 'are they going to be a couple' which was cracking me and him up, but I had a relationship with John before this show and then of course being there you know, singing at his memorial, was one of the hardest things I've ever done but also one of the most special memories I ever had.

JOSH: How had you known John previously?

KRISTIN: Do you know that John had come to see me in plays and musicals on Broadway?

JOSH: He was a fan!

KRISTIN: He came backstage and introduced himself once, and I thought [inhales dramatically]...

JOSH: Ha.

KRISTIN: ...'No way! Cause I know him from other things, and then *West Wing*, and then I thought, 'Now I'm gonna get to work with him?' So he'd come to see me in shows.

JOSH: I've told this story earlier in this, speaking of your performing and your singing earlier on the podcast, I mean I knew who you were when you joined the show, but when it really fully sank in was when I went to see you at Disney Hall and I think you delightfully invited us and so I went with my wife, and they said your name and the entire place stood up.

KRISTIN: [laughs]

JOSH: And I was like, wait a minute...

KRISTIN: 'Who is this girl?!'

JOSH: She's a giant star! Like, I knew she was kind of a big deal. But I'm like but they just said her name, she hasn't even [cross talk] walked out yet.

KRISTIN: [cross talk, laughs]

JOSH: The entire place was on its feet. And then you, you know, blew the roof off the place. Oh, ok...

KRISTIN: Do you know what it mean that y'all all were there? Y'all all were there! You know that right?

JOSH: I know I was. I mean I really remember it, it was incredible. You were...

KRISTIN: You said something to me...

JOSH: ... fantastic.

KRISTIN: Thank you Josh And I have this weird memory, I can't remember what I did yesterday but I remember very specific moments, so Josh and I we obviously got to work together early on, and one of my most favorite scenes is with Josh Malina that I've ever done on camera, but you had said to me that night, I sang an aria from *Candide*, called [cross talk] '*Glitter and Be Gay*'

JOSH: [cross talk] '*Glitter and Be Gay*'

[*Candide* excerpt, '*Glitter and Be Gay*']

*And yet, of course, these trinkets are endearing, ah ha!  
I'm oh so glad my sapphire is a star, ah ha!  
I rather like a twenty carat earring ah ha!  
If I'm not pure at least my jewels are!*

[end excerpt]

KRISTIN: And after the show, and I don't know if you remember but you go, 'You sang '*Glitter and Be Gay*, you sang from *Candide*'. I said, 'Yes', you go, 'I had no idea.' And just the dead pan. "I had no idea". And the next day or two at work when he saw me, he was like, 'You sang from *Candide*, Bernstein, [cross talk] and then...

JOSH: [cross talk, laughs] Well, I mean I'm a massive fan and that particular aria is incredibly challenging, and you did it with an incredible amount of slapstick, incredibly funny blocking, I was like 'Who is this?' Who would even attempt to do this, in concert, with that much staging? It was, you blew me away.

KRISTIN: Thank you.

HRISHI: What was your favorite scene with Josh?

KRISTIN: Well, it was like, again, early on, maybe week number 1 or 2, once I finally understood that I wasn't going to be fired...

JOSH & HRISHI: [laughs]

KRISTIN: He came in to deliver a bunch of information, and then...

JOSH: That was my job. That could be any of my scenes. I'm glad I did it once with you.

KRISTIN: [laughs] Well, I had to correct you. And I can't remember what it was, but...

JOSH: That's funny.

KRISTIN: ...his character was like, again like, 'You sang *Candide*! It was kind of like, wait a minute, and I, my character was so attractive to me about her, which is why I wanted to do it so bad, here's this girl and I realize that I sound like, I know what I sound like when I speak, Betty Boop, or helium sucked person, I know that I'm petite, I know that there's like an aura about me, that people don't maybe think that I have a brain, but Annabeth she was so smart. And when I got to, not correct him, but tell him what it was gonna be, and his face, it was one of the most, it's so subtle comedy.

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

*ANNABETH: It's busy. People don't have time to pat each other on the back. And I don't want that. But gosh, it's just nice to hear that they think I'm good. [sniff] Sorry! [laughs]*

*WILL: I can come back later.*

*ANNABETH: No, the boots are over. The haircut was hasty, and in the debates he seems too interested in what the other candidates are saying. His S's are slushy. His A's are flat, he exhales too loud and inhales too often. But it's nothing [sniffs] nothing that can't be fixed. And I'm honored. Really honored that you asked.*

[end excerpt]

KRISTIN: The thing about *West Wing* that made me so happy was, no it's not a comedy, but it's people being people, and in life that's funny.

JOSH: Mhm.

KRISTIN: It was like he delivered all this jargon, and I delivered all this jargon back. And oh I was just so happy. You know that I re-watched it the other night.

JOSH: Oh did you, I was going to ask when do you generally, was it the first time you'd seen any *West Wing* in years?

KRISTIN: No, about every couple of years I'd say [cross talk] I watch it.

JOSH: [cross talk] That's nice.

KRISTIN: Because, first of all I go, actually you know I did alright! I want to make sure that, well it also makes me miss the time that we were living in, you know. And it was a great memory...

JOSH: Yeah.

KRISTIN: ...a great memory and in a role that not a lot of people would have put me in. So I watch it and then I watch the relationships that I developed with you know, you, and John, and Martin, who knew I was scared to fly, and on the weekends I would go and sing concerts and he brought me back a rosary [cross talk] from the Vatican.

JOSH: [cross talk] Ohhh.

KRISTIN: He said, 'this has been blessed by the pope'. I was like, [gasps] 'Well I've never met him, but I'll take that. Give me that, right now.'

JOSH & HRISHI: [laughs]

KRISTIN: But those kinds of moments you know...

JOSH: They're special!

KRISTIN: Special! And Stockard, one of the first scenes I had her, again I had to talk a lot, and I was nervous cos it's Rizzo in *Grease*, you know?

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*ABBEY: Are you the one that's gonna teach me proper speedway decorum?*

*ANNABETH: How to win friends and influence yokels? Yes ma'am.*

[end excerpt]

KRISTIN: I had to have constant conversations with myself, to say, 'Calm down, don't let your nervousness with who you're working with', which to me all of them were legends by this point, 'get in the way of your craft'. And so I think that's the only way I got through it.

HRISHI: I want to talk a little bit more about that idea though, that because of your demeanor and your appearance that you don't get to play roles very often like Annabeth...

KRISTIN: Right.

HRISHI: ...and that Annabeth gets to, in the show, sort of up-end people's expectations.

KRISTIN: I loved it.

HRISHI: And I'm sure that must happen to you in real life as well, I mean you have a master's degree, you're no slouch, is that something you end up encountering in real life as well?

KRISTIN: I encounter it on a daily and what's so funny is, you know like I was just at the Denver Symphony, and those people obviously know, you know, my ability, but in life just in general, at the bank let's say, if I go in and I'm like 'Hi', the counter's past my nose, I can't see, because I'm petite. 'Can I have, like put this in, a deposit', or whatever, it's almost like, 'Yeah little girl, you can wait'.

JOSH: Oof.

KRISTIN: Or it's almost a dismissive thing, I know it's also like my size, you know, I'm not, for the people listening who don't know I'm only 4'11" and I'm not I never thought of myself as a little person but I am tiny! That is also people don't always take you seriously when you're from the Bible Belt, and you talk like this. People think you're maybe missing a chromosome. And I have to remind people on- and I like surprising people a lot, it's fun to watch people's face show expressions change, when I actually can actually speak, and have an opinion, and you know, I'm well educated, I worked hard for my degrees, and I still study, and I read, I just think that people think I'm like glitter and rainbows all the time.



JOSH: Ha ha ha.

KRISTIN: It's not that way!

HRISHI: Well after the *West Wing* did it change for you the kind of roles that you were offered because you got to have this role where those kinds of stereotypes were disproven?

KRISTIN: Yes, I got a great role on *Pushing Daisies*, I got a great role on *Glee*, though a lot of people I mean I played a drunk has-been singer high school star, and that trust me, that ain't me, but I did get to use music. In *Pushing Daisies* it was such a unique look.

HRISHI: I loved that show so much.

KRISTIN: I did too, and to play the underdog in and just getting opportunity to kind of represent the audience, she's the one that was sort of questioning everything. I did a movie that not many people saw, that one of my most proud, it's called *Into Temptation*. It's about a woman who has been abused, sexually abused by her father her whole life, and grew up Catholic, and decides she wants to end her life. But before she does so she goes to the priest to say, 'I'd like to be forgiven in advance', and then her journey of him, it's his journey finding her, cause he wants to make it ok. Those kinds of roles, and they're independent movies, and I've loved them and of course I've done the RVs and the 'Four Christmases' and you know I've got a Netflix movie coming up this spring that's very, very funny...

JOSH: What's that called?

KRISTIN: It's called *Holidate*...

JOSH: Oh yeah, that's got a great cast...

KRISTIN: Yeah, it's got a great cast, and I just did a Hallmark movie, that's very different kind of role for me. So I do believe that *West Wing* was the beginning, or the forefront, for me to start doing those. To be seen in a different light.

JOSH: You and I almost did a David Kelley series. We did a David Kelley pilot. That you starred in, I had a small role in. [cross talk] Oh I wanted that to go! Oh I wanted that one to go!

KRISTIN: [cross talk] No but why, I wanted that to go!

KRISTIN: Me too. I'm never over it. I played a lawyer who had a tic, a tic! He would give me all this dialogue, and she had like a weird tic!

JOSH: [laughs]

KRISTIN: I mean when do you ever get to play a role like that?

JOSH: It was a very cool- am I wrong, was her name Skippy? [laughs]

KRISTIN: Her name was Skippy. Skippy Pylon.

JOSH: Skippy Pylon, exactly [laughs] That was a crazy, I mean maybe it was just too weird, but it was a pretty wild David Kelley script, there was music involved...

KRISTIN: Oh yeah!

JOSH: ...Hugh Bonneville was in it, [cross talk], Tom Hollander [cross talk] was in it, Kurt Fuller, Cheno starring, aaah!

KRISTIN: [cross talk] Hugh Bonneville!

KRISTIN: [cross talk] Yes!

KRISTIN: We had a great time. I think, if I may, I think it could have been ahead of its time.

JOSH: I think so too.

HRISHI: It seems like it's perfectly of its time, honestly, I mean you've got the other master of high-speed dialogue, and I don't know, it just seems...

KRISTIN: I know....

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah.

KRISTIN: We thought no way could we be this lucky, you know, to get to do it again

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. But that's the business.

HRISHI: Yeah.

KRISTIN: That is the business.

HRISHI: Right now we're in season 7, so, you know, we're half way through season 7 actually, and I wanted to ask you about this shift within the story of Annabeth and Leo being sort of paired together.

KRISTIN: Yes.

HRISHI: Do you remember when you found out that that was going to be, kind of, the new arc for your character?

KRISTIN: Do I!

JOSH: Ha.

KRISTIN: Because John and I giggle, well first of all we were very close. Just in life.

JOSH: Your chemistry on screen, [cross talk] You can tell, it's just there.

KRISTIN: [cross talk] We had it.

KRISTIN: It was there. We were at a table read and John Wells had told me to put on my seatbelt. And I was like, 'Gulp', what does that mean? And John and I usually sat next to each other at the table reads. And our characters had started to develop this repartee, which was very fun to play, sort of like, I would tease him, not in a laughing way but just, you know,

push his buttons, and he would look at me like, 'Listen, you might be smart but...', you know, that was our character.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: We laughed about a scene where you literally manhandled his face, trying to get him to stop smirking.

KRISTIN: I did, it was the fun....

JOSH: It was very cute.

KRISTIN: It was so fun and he was like, 'Manhandle me'. I mean he literally was like, 'Go for it Kristin'. So we sat down to read the table read, and there was a line in parentheses, that said, 'Is he falling for her?' And I looked at John, he looked at me, and I grabbed his thigh, and of course now I'd be carted off to show business jail, but we had that relationship.

JOSH: It was a different time...

KRISTIN: It was a different time! I grabbed his thigh and was like, 'What is h-h-happening?' He goes, 'Kristin I think they see us like a burgeoning romantic couple'. And we started laughing so hard, so hard, I mean so hard, I was like choking, and so he gives me a Jolly Rancher, and the Jolly Rancher plays a very important part in the story because he always had them. Anyway, we would laugh, we would go do our scenes and then we would laugh, we would meet in the alley and we would laugh, and we would eat lunch and we would laugh. But I said to him at one point I said, 'You know, I can see, don't take this in an inappropriate way, but I can see how Annabeth is falling for Leo and I can see how Leo is-', and I said, because in life we love each other. And maybe not that way, but we did have a thing.

JOSH: Yeah

KRISTIN: We just had a thing. I don't know what I even mean. But yeah, we cracked up.

HRISHI: Yeah. I was talking to Eli Attie about the dynamic between the two characters and I said something like, that it was kind of like Spencer Tracey and Katherine Hepburn.

KRISTIN: Yes!

HRISHI: And Eli countered with it's like Spencer Tracy and Ginger Rogers, [cross talk] which I thought was pretty good!

KRISTIN: [cross talk] Oh my gosh, he did?

KRISTIN: I'll take it. I'll take it because people also forget, and I can't believe I'm bringing this up about Ginger Rogers, what a great actress she was, because of the way she looked and seemed....

JOSH: There you go.

KRISTIN: Right? But that is such a compliment. Thank you, Eli! That's so nice!

[Ad break]

HRISHI: We're in a strange place right now in the podcast, because we've come to the episode in the timeline of when the episodes aired, John Spencer has passed away. The last episode that we discussed, Martin Sheen prefaces it, and says 'He's gone but we can think of no better tribute than to show you the final episodes that he's worked on.'

KRISTIN: [whispers] Yeah.

HRISHI: What did you sing at his memorial, did you choose that?

KRISTIN: It's so weird, I can't believe this is actually happened, when I say weird I mean wonderful weird. He had, obviously he had seen me in different shows, but he had seen me in *Wicked*, and he wanted, he said 'If I ever die before you', and he made a joke, 'I want you to sing *For Good* at my funeral.' And I was like, 'Well that is not gonna happen and stop talking'. You know, just stop talking. Well, I get the call, and I just you know, like everybody, and they had all worked with him remember, this is a family that I had joined, I was not in the original, they had all been together. But I knew John, aside, and one of his very good friends called, she was kind of putting it together and she said, 'This is what he would have wanted, and he told me', and I was like, 'He told me too'.

[*Wicked* excerpt, 'For Good']

*Well, I don't know if I believe that's true  
But I know I'm who I am today  
Because I knew you  
Like a comet...*

[end excerpt]

KRISTIN: So, that's how it happened.

JOSH: That's remarkable. That he himself told you.

KRISTIN: He did. And again that's not a story I tell, But it did happen, and I almost feel like, again, and before I got up there I was like, 'I don't want to do this!' And I'm such a perfectionist and I wanted to sing good, but I was like, 'I can't sing good, my larynx is in my brain', but I thought who cares? This is about John. Just sing, and if it sucks it sucks, but who cares? It's his tribute. And that's, I don't remember it very well, I just remember doing it. For him, you know?

HRISHI: Mmhm. Do you have a favorite Annabeth Leo scene?

KRISTIN: Well, I mean the smirking one is the one that immediately comes to mind, it's great that you brought that up Josh, because we just had fun. I had a scene in the elevator too, where [laughs] we're in there, and it's almost like we're flirting. The flirting, I call it the flirting scene. And right as the doors close he looks at me, it was just so fun.....

[West Wing Episode 7.04 excerpt]

*ANNABETH: I just think it's better while we're spending so much time together that we try and keep our distance whenever possible.*

*LEO: Keep our distance.*

*ANNABETH: Cause of the tension.*

LEO: *What tension?*

[end excerpt]

KRISTIN: And we actually were flirting, not to say that we were, we were such good friends, but we slid easily into the flirting thing.

HRISHI: The thing that's so remarkable for me about that scene, is that Annabeth is the one to sort of shut down the idea of the two of them romantically, but in so doing, actually like ramps up the heat of what was actually happening. Like when Leo is speaking, it's seems like, is it flirting or is it not?

KRISTIN: Mmhm.

HRISHI: But then the way you played it, and the script really shows us that Annabeth is the one who sees it, and is gonna...

KRISTIN: Shut it down.

HRISHI: Yeah, shut it down by acknowledging it.

KRISTIN: Well, and I thought, because I wanted to know what was going to happen, and I'm sure, I'm positive that I bugged the writers. And they said, well, just let us, we're going to play this out. And I thought, ok if I'm a woman, and I'm in a professional experience, and I'm attracted to somebody that is my boss, or somebody that I'm working with very closely. I'm going to try to be appropriate.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right, right.

JOSH: [cross talk] Mmm.

KRISTIN: But there is a thing that women can do, and each woman out there listening out there listening to me, you know of what I speak. Where we can shut it down, and it makes the person kind of enquire more. In their heart. And also, it's the forbidden, especially then, you don't date people you date with right? But yeah, I just decided in my mind and heart I hoped that they, I think it was leading there, that's my opinion. I've never been told that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

KRISTIN: I think it was leading there, I think it was going to be a really fun thing to discover. But I thought, she's going to try to be professional, but still lead him on in her shutting down-ness, does that even make sense?

JOSH: Ha ha ha.

HRISHI: Yes! You're hanging a closed sign on the door, but also not blocking it.

KRISTIN: [laughs] That's exactly right!

JOSH: May I ask you this, you may not want to talk about it, but when though you joined the show in the post-Sorkin years, you and Aaron did become good friends....

KRISTIN: [laughs] We knew each other, yes we did! Yes we dated for some time, on and off, it was just one of those relationships that I will always cherish because how I met Aaron. I saw him of course when he won the Emmy, I was watching, I think I was doing a Broadway

show and I was watching him. I was like, that man just won for *West Wing* oh gosh that's so cool! And then *Music Man* aired and I got a fan letter, a beautiful letter that I still have to this day, that said, 'The bridge scene that you did, when you sang *'Till there was you'* was one of the most beautiful, cinematic, well-sung, congratulations'; and I thought, 'I will never throw this away!' I had never met Aaron, and then when I went to LA to do *Bewitched*, and I got the call to do *West Wing*. I knew John who, I still love John, I mean John is the reason I was on the show ultimately. But Aaron sent me flowers and said, 'Just my luck I'm not on the show anymore but you are'. That's another card I kept. I'm kind of a hopeless romantic that way...

JOSH: As is he.

KRISTIN: As is he. That's exactly right. But I didn't think he was, I thought he was just being nice. So my publicist said he wants to get your number, and I thought, 'Oh that's so nice, and I need to thank him for the flowers', so I called, they gave me his number. I called, I left a message, and I sang, '[singing] There were bells on the hill, but I never heard them ringing, [speaks] thank you so much for the flowers Mr. Sorkin. I hope to meet you in person one day', that's so sweet.

JOSH: Oh wow.

KRISTIN: So then he called me back like very quickly, and then we had dinner, and again, I'm just thinking he's just being, you know he's just being nice. And you know, sparks flew, and you know, I look back on that time that we were together not together, together not together, together not together, as some of the most growing, evolving, learning times, and some of the most romantic, sweet, precious times; and I'm sorry Aaron, I know you don't talk about your romantic life, but I don't talk about mine much either. But I will always say that I loved him so much, I still do. I'm so proud of him, they talk about someone who, when you think about it, the *West Wing* was really in some ways just the beginning for him, I mean he had so much more to do, to give the world, and he continues to do it. I'm just proud of him. I just don't talk to him much, just cause of life, really, but I'm proud of him.

JOSH: Those are lovely memories. You're two of my favorite people so I love that you had each other for that time. That's great. And I'm guessing that's a voicemail that he still has.

KRISTIN: Oh I don't know! [cross talk] I still have his letters!

JOSH: [cross talk, laughs] Oh I suspect so.

KRISTIN: Like, I'm not throwing these letters from a genius away, are you kidding?

HRISHI: That's how I feel about my voicemails from Josh.

KRISTIN: [laughs] Well there you go! See?

JOSH: [laughs]

KRISTIN: Now I want one Josh!

JOSH: Your on-and-offedness coincided with your being on the show...

KRISTIN: Uh huh.

JOSH: Did you talk shop at all, or did he really not want to hear about it?

KRISTIN: You know, he wanted to hear, I think he had, as I recall, gosh has it been a second, as I recall he wanted to talk about it but he also, it was hard, because that was his baby,

JOSH: That's right.

KRISTIN: And he was writing something else at the time, and just because he left didn't mean that he didn't miss everybody. And I think I was able to take him laugh too, and say 'guess what happened today?', but I know that it was probably a little bit like, 'I miss everybody.' And one time, he came on the set, to finish a discussion that we were having, and I just remember everybody stopping and practically bowing you know, and I'm like 'It's just Aaron!'

JOSH & HRISHI: [laugh]

KRISTIN: But I mean, I was bowing, I've always bowed to him. But yeah, I think he'll always, that's his baby.

JOSH: Oh sure.

KRISTIN: That's his baby. He has quite a few, and just like I have music and songs, there are some children I'm more proud of than others, but I imagine that *West Wing* is one of his.

JOSH: I've got two and there's some that I'm more proud of than others.

HRISHI & KRISTIN: [laugh]

JOSH: And I think they know. I think they know their order.

KRISTIN: Hilarious [laughs].

JOSH: Just kidding. [cross talk] I kind of like you both.

KRISTIN: [cross talk] I love it.

KRISTIN: I just can't believe that they're both grown-up.

JOSH: [sighs] Neither can I.

KRISTIN: Time, where does it go?

HRISHI: One of the things that Aaron was so, you know, famous for, was writing his characters towards the actor. And shaping them as he sort of got more information, watching them interpret his lines. And even though he wasn't on the show when you were, I feel like all the writing staff around him really absorbed that, and it feels like that's something that continued as new people were added in later seasons. Were you conscious of that, that slowly the character of Annabeth was being modeled in ways that resembled you?

KRISTIN: Yes. I felt like the writers and this is a testament to Mr. Sorkin as well, and the people that he hired and trusted, and believed in. They've followed his legacy perfectly with his vision, and John was also the perfect person to basically take over that show. He honoured- they all honoured what Aaron has started, and yes, I felt like they were beginning to write for Annabeth. I'm sure that they saw me and John Spencer laughing our butts off, I'm sure that they saw me try to hug Richard Schiff on many occasions, and ask him if he liked my hairdo, I'm sure that they paid attention and also, back then, you know I still have a

very, I used to have a photographic memory, I think they started understanding too that not only could I talk but I can memorize it, and understand it, and if I don't understand it I'll figure it out. You know, and that show, again, it's so smart and clever, but with all the cleverness, and the smartness there is an element of heart and true life, when someone trips on camera, or papers go flying which I know became, like on *SNL* they did a whole thing about it, but it was the first of its kind. Now I'll be doing a movie or a tv show and a person will say to me, 'Well we're going to do a walk and talk now,' and I'm like, 'Yeah, that was invented on a little show [cross talk] called *The West Wing*. Ever heard of it? Tommy Schlamme might have had a little something to do with that!'

JOSH: [cross talk, laughs]

KRISTIN: So, when you get started in a monologue and you've gotta walk the halls, and you've got Brad Whitford behind you, who is making farting noises, and trying to unlace, now remember we were jokesters, so I realize-

JOSH: Oh you took those as farting noises. Interesting.

KRISTIN: [laughs] It wasn't actually him, I mean he was constantly doing...

JOSH: That's a lovely way to put it.

KRISTIN: I know right? [laughs] Lovely. And I've still stayed friendly with him as well, but I just think, you know, they saw us. And the real testament is to those of us who joined later, Jimmy Smits, I mean he was like, they got him. And then maybe people were starting to kind of root for, I mean, how do you not root for Bartlet? But there was the beginnings of a different regime.

HRISHI: Mmhm.

KRISTIN: That maybe someone could like, wow, what must that be like. Anyway we're not going to go there, but I'm just so proud I was a part of it.

JOSH: You have such an impressive and vast career. Where does it fall for you, do people [cross talk] stop you?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Depends which podcast she's doing.

JOSH: Yeah I guess, fair enough!

KRISTIN: [laughs]

HRISHI: [cross talk] This week....

JOSH: [cross talk] Diplomacy aside....! Obviously there's a special place in your memory. Do you have fans, *West Wing* fans? Or do most people...

KRISTIN: Oh my gosh, yes Josh!

JOSH: I mean I know you do, because people have been very eager for us to get you onto the podcast.

KRISTIN: Makes me feel so good, cause you know, coming in again at the last two years, I always felt like I was accepted and people you know, once I kinda proved myself if you will, they took me in. Y'all all took me in. But that is an original family that can't be beaten and



has not, in my opinion, I mean *Veep* is pretty close, but that is a special, special once in a lifetime cast that was together. When I'm at a concert, singing a concert, oh it happens every week, people will come up and when I sign things, always *West Wing* is there. And that makes me very proud. And I mean yeah, a lot of times. I will get stopped in airports, I don't really live anywhere I live in an airport, different ones all over the country and the world and they will say, *The West Wing*, *The West Wing* that always makes me so happy. And then they'll say, so you don't really wear glasses? And I'm like, well I do now! But I didn't then!

HRISHI: Can we ask you about what you've got there's...

JOSH: You mentioned *Holidate*, Netflix, you have a Hallmark movie....

KRISTIN: Yes.

HRISHI: And you have an album coming out.

KRISTIN: Yes.

HRISHI: Can you tell us about that?

KRISTIN: It comes out, right away, and I'm so proud of it, it's very different for me, in a very different direction. Of course women are having a renaissance if you will, but I have always felt like a strong woman, and I've been lucky to have strong women influences in my life, and music obviously is a big part of that for me, and I didn't set out to make a female empowerment record, that's not what happened. It's called *For the Girls*. But it's not, I didn't know that was what is was gonna be. I just simply wrote down a list of [chuckles] 313 songs that I wanted to sing. [cross talk] Part 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. And I started seeing that it was Dolly, and it was Doris Day, and it was Judy, and it was Eva Cassidy, and it was Linda Ronstadt and it was Eydie Gormé, and Lesley Gore, and Carole King cause my mom wore the "Tapestry" record out. And I thought I need to do this with some of my favourite female, in tribute to them. In celebration really of them. And that's how *For the Girls* evolved. And I've got some of, I think, some of the best music ever on it. I've collaborated with Jennifer Hudson and Reba McEntire in "I'm a Woman" we do that, and you were very, all three very different artists. If you recall Dolly, a long time ago did a, two records actually with Emmylou Harris and Linda Ronstadt and I thought how could they all be on a record, and then it killed! And I thought why can't, this is music, why can't we all three- and it really is just awesome. And then I asked, I still can't believe she said yes, I asked Dolly Parton to join me...

JOSH: [cross talk] Let's narrow it down.

JOSH: Wow.

KRISTIN: ...on the record, and we sang "I Will Always Love You" together.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: Ohhh! I'm gonna hear that!

KRISTIN: And then I asked Ariana Grande, yeah you're gonna like it, Ariana Grande to sing, I've known her since she was about 7 or 8 so. She sings, the Lesley Gore "You Don't Own Me." Well I say Lesley Gore, many people have done it, but that's my, I always go, I have a tendency to go back to the original source.

HRISHI: Right.

KRISTIN: And for me, it was Lesley's version so. Those are the guests stars that I've had and then there's "Desperado" on there which I know Glenn Frey wrote, but first time I heard it Linda sang it, and I've, as a young child thought why can't a girl sing that?

HRISHI: Mmhm.

KRISTIN: Do I had it fully orchestrated in my style, and that's how it came together.

JOSH: You know which song of yours that gets heavy rotation both in my house and in my car, and always when I'm with my daughter Isabel is your cover of "Taylor the Latte Boy."

KRISTIN: [laughs] I'm so sorry!

JOSH: [laughs] We love that song!

KRISTIN: [cross talk] I bet you know every...

JOSH: [cross talk] We cannot, cannot play it enough.

KRISTIN: My brother said to me when his kids were growing up, they said, 'Kristin I love you, I can't hear "Taylor the Latte Boy" anymore!'

JOSH: I can!

KRISTIN: Thank you Josh, I'm very, I keep asking the female, Zina and Marcy who wrote it, I've sung that song or 17 years and when I don't sing it people get mad,

JOSH: It's fantastic.

["Taylor the Latte Boy" excerpt]

*Taylor the Latte Boy,  
Bring me java, bring me joy!  
Oh Taylor the Latte Boy,  
I love him, I love him, I love him...*

[end excerpt]

KRISTIN: I said would you please write the sequel. So, Taylor's now, they've gotten together.

JOSH: That's right it's a brilliant story song. I would like to hear what happened.

KRISTIN: Let's put it into the universe.

JOSH: Yes, Yes! Ohhh!

KRISTIN: We could, right?

JOSH: Isabelle and I would be very excited to hear part 2.

HRISHI: [laughs]

KRISTIN: I'm gonna do it just for y'all. I'm gonna actually call Marcy and Zina when we leave here and say girls, write it!

JOSH: Please. I heartily endorse that plan.

KRISTIN: Thank you.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

KRISTIN: Thank you guys.

JOSH: It was awesome, we finally got you. [cross talk] Cheno, Cheno in the booth.

KRISTIN: [cross talk] Thank you for having me. It was awesome.

JOSH: Thank you for doing this.

KRISTIN: Of course.

HRISHI: Alright.

JOSH: Fantastic, I think that does it for another episode of the *West Wing Weekly*.

HRISHI: Our thanks to the delightful Kristin Chenoweth for joining us. You can follow her on instagram or twitter @ KChenoweth. Thanks to Nick Song, Margaret Miller and Zach McNeas for helping us make this episode.

JOSH: And thanks to Radiotopia and PRX for including us in their exclusive collection of forward thinking podcasts about which you can find out more at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm)

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

KRISTIN: [sings] What's next?

[Outro Music]