Andrew Clark: Hello, hello, thank you, welcome to Primetime. Today we've got a great guest, someone I've known for many, many years who started out doing comedy here in Toronto as part of a duo called Ellis and White, and we'll talk a little bit about that. He is one of Canada's top writers and top producers. He's worked and helped create shows such as *Insecurity* and *Dan for Mayor*. He started out writing at *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* with another guy from the comedy scene who is in charge of that show, Mark Farrell, and we'll talk about making that transition today as well. He's a co-executive producer on *Schitt's Creek*, and an executive producer on *Kim's Convenience*, which is actually in the middle of writing its new episodes. It's a new series that's gonna be on CBC, and is based on a great play by Ins Choi. So we've got a lot to talk about, and let's bring him out. He's a really funny guy, and a brilliant writer. Please welcome Kevin White. *(applause)*

Kevin White: Hello.

AC: We have our kind of 1964 set here. So I did mention the duo of Ellis and White, and I keep saying that because I feel like I'm, not one of the few, but I like to remind people that great writing always starts from the stage and from comedy. How did you end up getting into doing comedy at the Rivoli? Just so we can sort of let everyone know, the Rivoli at this time is not what it is now, which is kind of an established alternative venue for standup and sketch. The Rivoli is still kind of a music venue that The Kids in the Hall made famous for comedy, and alternative comedy in Canada was just kind of percolating, and you guys were a great duo. Mark Ellis, who went on to create *Flashpoint*, and is now

working on *X Company* in Hungary. So how'd that duo happen, and how did you get into comedy?

KW: I guess it started at Ryerson. I went to Ryerson. Sorry. *(laughter)* There was a comedy revue there every year that the school puts on, so I auditioned. I almost didn't go to my audition, I was so nervous, but I went, I got in. And then I met a bunch of people, and we did it for two years in the school program, so second and third year I was part of the cast, as a mini kind of Second City-style show, just sketches, and we wrote and performed them for about three nights in the spring. And then we all liked doing it, and we all thought we were pretty good, so a huge group of us, there were seven or eight, we formed a sketch troupe and performed at some funny venues that don't exist anymore. Mark Breslin from Yuk-Yuk's fame wanted to try and build a sketch version of Yuk's. It was called The Sketch Pad, and it lasted, I don't know, three months?

AC: Yeah, about that. *(laughter)*

KW: And our group was enormous. It also featured Tyler Stewart from Barenaked Ladies, the drummer for Barenaked Ladies. He was in our program. *(laughter)* But we soon disbanded. It was unwieldy. It was a huge number of people doing bad sketches that we thought…you know, it's one thing to do sketches for your friends, it's cool. It's another to go out in the world and actually try to make strangers laugh. So we quickly pared it down to two guys, me and Mark Ellis, we seemed to enjoy performing together and liked the same kinds of things, so we tried to take it on the road. We lasted about two

years, and then we flamed out. We went to the Edmonton Fringe. Has anyone done the Edmonton Fringe here? Anyway, if you've ever done a Fringe Festival, Edmonton's very competitive, and we got there not really knowing what we were doing, and got blown away by a lot of really talented people. And then Mark wanted to do drama, and I wanted to do comedy, so I went and did standup while he went and acted, and then he became a dramatic writer, and I became a comedic writer.

AC: And the standup you did, was that mostly at The Laugh Resort, and the alternative circuit too?

KW: Yeah. Again, another venue that doesn't exist anymore.

AC: Yeah, they came and went, although the Resort lasted for about another decade, I guess. But it was known for…there was a rift, which we study in History of Comedy, between Yuk-Yuk's and a lot of comedians who didn't like the exclusivity there: Brent Butt, who you ended up working with, of course, and Mark Farrell, Brian Hartt, and so there was a kind of divide, and I guess you could say maybe The Laugh Resort was known for being a little less in-your-face or harsh, a little bit. Eric Tunney kind of epitomized that with his kind of sleek, smooth stuff.

KW: Yes. It was less about grime in a way. They didn't have the same Yuk's program of sending their comics out on the road. That was a big part of it. So Yuk's was more of a machine. Anyway, I did do some standup at Laugh Resort, toured a little bit. My big tour

was to Hamilton. I wasn't very accomplished in the world of standup. I liked it, and I really enjoyed writing for it, and I was lucky enough to get an episode of *Comics* on CBC, but as soon as I started to get more writing work, that's when I just sort of said, "OK, I don't need to do that." I liked doing it, but it's a lot harder. Writing's very hard too, but standup, as I'm sure many of you know, is harder in a different way.

AC: I remember interviewing Lorne Michaels, and he said that when he was in Hart and Lorne, he would find himself looking at the lighting and doing all this producer stuff, and he just kind of knew, "I gotta stop performing." Did you have a moment like that doing standup, where you just thought, "It's not for me, performing, I just want to get behind the scenes"?

KW: No, I never did. Thankfully, a writing job came along and saved me, and saved audiences everywhere. *(laughter)* It's a hard way to make a living, and it takes a long time to develop your voice, develop your material, and then I think it takes even longer for an audience to find you, and for you to find them, through just bar after bar, night after night. So having the chance to write for a TV show, which has a built-in audience of, at the time, over a million people, it was just like, "Uh, I'll do this, and I don't have to go out at night."

AC: But your first job was in kid's television, right? TVO Kids? How did you get that, and how did you approach that? I think a lot of people start working in kids' television. I also think you can make your whole career in it, obviously, and a lot of people, talented

people, do. How did you get that first gig, and how did you transition from doing nightclubs, for lack of a better word, to doing TVO Kids?

KW: *Polka Dot Shorts* was the first script I was ever paid to write. *(applause*) One of the courses I took at Ryerson was a joint course between Radio and Television and Early Childhood Education, and one of the women that I went to school with, she was in that program. She's very smart, she got hired at TVO, and she brought me in, and we started TVO Kids. And then I sort of stayed at TVO too long, because I did my episode of *Comics* while I was still a producer in Children's. That's the kind of thing that certainly happens. I kept expecting, once I did my *Comics*, I thought, "Oh yeah, money's gonna roll in, the calls are gonna roll in." Nothing happened, and I stayed at TVO for another four or five years.

And then I got another chance to work in comedy television as a producer, not as a writer, but I ended up writing on an ill-fated show called *Chez Carla* on the Comedy Network starring Carla Collins, who probably is not a name, not a household name, in this day and age, anyway. She was a radio host, and she'd done some comedy, and we did a show. Anyway, that was my progression in and out of TV Ontario.

AC: Do you have any lessons from kids' TV that you carried through into comedy? Was your next position at *22 Minutes*?

KW: Well, kind of. It was the *Chez Carla* show, and then several months of unemployment. I don't remember taking anything with me from TVO. I liked it, they

were good people…OK, there's one thing. I got to manage people. And in comedy, there's not a lot of management. And in show running, shows are up quickly and down quickly. So there aren't a lot of people who actually know how to hire and fire and manage people and get the most out of a room, so I feel like that was something that helped. A lot of people are just suddenly vaulted from doing standup or sketch, and they're expected to manage a staff and get things done on time, and meet budgets. So that was an experience I got at TVO that was helpful down the road, but probably not for ten years, because I was too junior within the comedy writing jobs that I had to be overseeing budgets or anything.

AC: How did you get hooked up on *22 Minutes*?

KW: I went to the Writer's Guild Awards in, I don't know, around '99 or 2000, and I ran into Mark Farrell. Because I'd been doing standup, Mark was a very seasoned headliner, and he'd seen me do my amateur night stuff, and my sort of opening and middle, those sets. He liked what I was doing. Not many other people did, but that was good, that he liked it. And I ran into him at the awards, and he said, "I'm looking for writers." They had just sort of cleaned house that year. A bunch of people had left. So he said, "I need writers, I really need desk jokes." I don't know if you know the show, but they do sketches obviously, but they'll also do little jokes about headlines that anyone on the desk will read. So he said he really needed people for that, so I wrote a sample. I was really proud of myself. I sent him a ton of jokes, and he read them and said, "Yeah, could you send me another sample?" And I said, "Yeah, sure, yeah, sure." So I sent even more

jokes, and they were worse than the first sample, and he phoned and said, “Yeah, you don’t need to send me anything more. I’m good. Thanks anyway.”

I was pretty disappointed, and a mutual friend of ours said, “You know what, send him another sample.” I was like, “I don’t think he wants to see another sample.” “Send him another sample.” So I did, but I took time to sort of think about what he’d told me, and the notes he’d given me, and instead of this scattershot (approach), with a million bad jokes, I decided to write seventeen decent ones. It took me a lot longer, but that’s what I submitted, and I got on for a three-week trial, and I spent the next seven years there. So it was good. It was really good. For Canada, obviously something like *SNL* or *MADtv*, they’re machines, and even *22*, you have to start from scratch every week. You write a lot of material. It’s incredible. You may or may not like the show, and what you see sometimes, you go, “Huh, really?” But to think of all the shit that was written just to produce those four sketches and all that material, a lot worse was written. So it’s a great discipline-teaching kind of environment.

AC: I think, I’ve got a quote here from an interview you did where you said that your first weeks on the show were unremarkable: “Most of what I wrote was shit, and then I came to understand the tone of the show and get closer to hitting the target.” So for a new writer, a lot of these guys, if they catch on at a show, they’re gonna go through that weird period of being the new person. What did you learn about how to gauge the temper of a show, or what Mark wanted as the show runner? Is there a trick to that? Is it listening, is it paying attention to what the other writers are doing? How do you find your way in a

room? A lot of people are talented, but if they can't find their way or their place in the room, they're not in the room for long.

KW: Well, there's a bunch of things. First, again that room, and the show at that time, Mark was just starting, I think it was his second season as show runner. But I went in and I made a mistake, not a mistake, but I don't know how else you get around it, but being a young, inexperienced writer, I just wrote what I thought was funny, and quickly realized no one else did. And certainly not Mark. Mark just kept looking at these scripts going, "Uh, OK, well…try writing something else." *(laughter)* I only had three weeks, so I started spending every moment that I could watching the previous season, and I watched as many old episodes as I could. They had them in the library, so I went up and I watched them. The surprising thing, the first thing I noticed was how many times they repeat themselves. They'd actually done some sketches that were almost the same. But I also got a sense of what they were looking for, and how I think it was different than what I was writing. So I tried to bend it a little more, and come to the show.

I think that's a big thing that I notice when I'm working with young writers in the room. They expect the show to come to them. They expect the show to bend to their sensibility, and to have storylines that reflect the kind of stories they're interested in. And it goes the other way. You have to figure out what the show runner wants, what the voice of the show is, and mimic that. And that's where listening comes in, because you have to learn…any time you're writing scripted (comedy), you have to emulate the voice of the show runner or creator, and you have to emulate the voice of all the actors as they adopt these roles and personify these characters. So listening is probably the biggest thing, and

your voice doesn't matter. It's your ability to hear other people's voices and know how they sound and know how you can then channel what you wanna say through that voice.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about what a show runner does? I think for most of us, it's still kind of an amorphous job. Even the job itself, because each show runner has their own style. Like on *Seinfeld*, sort of an iconic show, the show runners were Larry (David) and Jerry Seinfeld, and they would just let writers kind of go off in pairs and then come back, and they would just give notes. Completely different from a lot of other shows where everyone's in the room. So can you explain to us a bit about what a show runner is supposed to be, or what its general responsibilities are, or his or her, I should say, not its, because they're people? What their responsibilities are when they're running a room?

KW: It varies on the person, it varies on the show, it varies on the culture of the show, all that kind of stuff. What I've tried to do over the years, I think the job of the show runner is to oversee the creation of scripts, so that means writing them, hiring the writers, making sure that the scripts are good, and as good as they can be, and then ensuring that every aspect of production honors what the script is about. So you're making sure that the wardrobe department, sets, production design, casting, everything is as the writers intended. And that's a big job, and you have to stay on it and you have to go to all these production meetings and make sure that the props aren't too goofy, and that the house looks like the kind of house that you expect the scene to unfold in, and all that stuff. So that's why the show runner is running the show. They're getting the script written, and then they're just making sure that everyone follows the script, and it sounds like an easy

enough job description, but it's very, very hard, because things go off the rails at every meeting, every opportunity, because everyone has different ideas about what's gonna work and what's funny.

AC: What was your first job as a show runner? Was it *22 Minutes*?

KW: Uh, maybe. I think it was *Corner Gas*. *Corner Gas* was a six-season run. Mark started it, Mark Farrell, who we've talked about, and then Paul Mather took over, and then I ran it into the ground. I finished it off, the last two years. *(laughter)* And that was a bit of a baptism of fire. I'd seen Paul, and I worked very closely with Paul and Mark over the years, so I emulated a lot of what they did, but also wanted to try some different things a little bit.

AC: And when you're stepping into a show, I think that would surprise a lot of people, the idea that the show runner isn't there the whole time. They can almost be hired like a head coach of a hockey or basketball team. The show *Corner Gas* is like the team, and you're putting in someone else who's in charge to keep pace. But you'd known Brent, but still, stepping into a show that's established and running, that has a star with his voice, was that a challenge, that kind of thing, stepping into that scenario?

KW: Yeah, it was. It was more of a challenge in the first season, when Mark brought me on and I didn't know Brent, and you go into meetings with Brent, and don't know what to say, and you make a suggestion and he doesn't really acknowledge it. So you're like,

"OK, OK, no no, I'll wait." And you're trying to figure out what the show's about. So four years into it, or I guess the fifth year, when I was asked, I'd gotten to know Brent pretty well at that point, we got along well, and I really liked working with him on those last two seasons. And with Brent there, I mean, it makes it slightly different. It's not like it was the show I created. The creator was still there, and Brent definitely, throughout the six years, it always went through him last, the script, the cut, whatever. And he would ensure that it had his voice and his take on things.

AC: Now you're in the middle of doing the scripts for *Kim's Convenience*. Can you kind of walk us through how a show gets made, how the scripts are sort of created, the stories, and then how long it takes, and the things that the writers go through?

KW: Yeah, this show's a little different. It's based on a play. It's on this December, I recommend it. It's a great play, it's funny, it's touching. It's written by Ins in, I don't know, 2011, maybe earlier, for the Fringe, and then it just got picked up, bigger and bigger, Soulpepper has been touring it around the country. So we had a play to work with, and Ins and I developed it for a year. We wrote two scripts. We worked with a production company called Thunderbird. Soulpepper's also involved, and CBC is the broadcaster. So we basically looked at the play. The play sort of happens at a specific time for a family. It's a Korean-Canadian family that runs a convenience store. And it's about the reconciliation between the father and the son.

So writing the series, we thought, "Well, we don't want them to reconcile right away. We need to delay that. Do we want to move it back in time a little bit, so we have

time to get to the stories in the play?" So that's what we did. We made everyone about five years younger, sort of took everyone back. In the play, someone's been a photographer for five years now, they're just starting off at OCAD, taking photography, so those kinds of things. But we spent a year writing two scripts, just trying to write the two funniest. We didn't have a pilot in mind, we just wanted to get the green light. And so we just chose the funniest scripts and the funniest ideas that we had and developed those. And it worked. We got the green light. And so then, I think in the spring, we got the go-ahead for thirteen (episodes).

I was still on *Schitt's Creek*, which I'm also doing at the same time, so it's a little busy, but in the spring, in June, Ins and I sort of sat down, and we read 75 writers. So we read samples, a lot of samples, because sometimes we'd read more than one sample per writer. And then we interviewed probably ten, hired six. We ran a room for two months, September and October. We showed them the two scripts we'd written. And then we kind of just slowly mapped out a season of what would happen, and slowly broke story from Labor Day until the end of October. Came up with thirteen pretty detailed synopses, about four or five pages long, pretty much a scene-by-scene breakdown of what happens. And then we converted those into outlines. Those are before the network, most have been approved. And some writers have been assigned drafts now, and will write thirteen episodes between now and June, when we start shooting. Now that's a very long lead time. Normally, you wouldn't have that kind of time. But because I'm doing *Schitt's* for the CBC as well, it's unfortunately slowing it down for *Kim's*, but at the same time, you have more time, which will hopefully make for better scripts, but not always.

AC: So you read 75 samples. Are they all coming from agents? What kind of a net do you cast when you're looking for writers, and what's in a package normally? Because they're gonna all look for agents, those who want to pursue writing when they get out of here.

KW: Yeah, we were in touch with about six agencies, maybe seven. We'd probably get six to eight writers per agency who they thought were a good fit, or the right kind of match for us based on the tone of the play. And we get a CV and one sample, and it could be, in most cases, it was a standard U.S. sitcom, lots of *Mindy*s, lots of *Modern Family*s, and then there are some originals people had written. Some had written plays, some had written screenplays, some had original pilots. Original pilots I like a lot, but everyone's different. It doesn't matter. There's no point in reading an original pilot. Well, not *no* point, but if the premise of the pilot is very different from the show you're trying to make, it's sometimes hard to gauge the fit. But if someone does write a *Modern Family*, and you're doing a show that's centered around a family, then you get a sense of, "Can they write for an older voice, can they write for siblings, can they figure out what family stories are at their core?"

AC: What you're referring to is the idea of a spec script, where someone would do their version of a *Modern Family*. You mentioned those two. Are there any other shows that are sort of hot for people to spec write now? Writers sort of agonize about what script they should spec, and is that gonna be dated, are people sick of reading one kind? Do you have a preference or anything that you'd point to?

KW: I don't. I've written a bunch of different things in my career. Personally, my taste, if you're gonna send something to me, I don't care, I want it to be something that you like the best, and that you're proudest of, and that you think is funniest. You can see pretty quickly whether someone can write, whether they can write in different voices, if they can structure a story. Those are the most important things. And do they have something interesting to say, something that I haven't seen before, in a tone I haven't heard before? That sort of transcends whatever the script is about. I was gonna say something else about…oh yeah. So I also write samples to try and get work.

I wrote a script that my agent thought was so-so, and I wasn't sure, you never are. You write this thing and you go, "I don't know, it's kind of funny," and as I wrote it it got less and less funny. But I wrote this thing, and I liked it, and he thought, "Everyone sounds the same, and I'm not sure." So I said, "OK." We sat on it for a while, and I reread it, and I said, "I don't know, I think this is funny. Can we send it? I like it." So he went, "OK." And it didn't get me any work. Good story, thank you. *(laughter)* Except in August, I'd written that, and you'd have to know all the timelines in my head that I'm not telling you. I wrote it in the fall, and so the next August, I got a call saying Eugene Levy wanted to meet me, and it was based on that script. So you never know. It didn't do any business when I wrote it, but eight months later, Eugene was interested, and it led to the *Schitt's Creek* gig.

AC: Are there any things where, when you're reading a writer's sample, there are red flags where you automatically write somebody off? I sort of harp on spelling mistakes, but maybe they don't really matter. Maybe we should make lots of them…

KW: I don't love spelling mistakes, but I forgive spelling mistakes. I'm not a great speller myself. In your urge and rush to get it out, I spell "there" wrong and "its" wrong occasionally. If it's all over the place, yes. You think, "OK, you gotta do something there, some work on learning the language that we're working in." *(laughter)* But red flags for me…I guess when I feel like there's nothing being said. There might be a lot of movement, or a lot of exclamation marks, I'll be honest. That's a big red flag. And then a lot of description. Anytime I see a script with a ton of description, especially comedy, I just go, "Ugh, this is gonna be a long haul." Because it's really about the dialogue. It's about what's happening, and things should be dramatized. I want to see what they're saying, I want to see what they're doing, I don't want this long description of what's about to happen.

AC: Are you big on character description in a script?

KW: Like separate from the script? No.

AC: Or someone will say, "So and so in their mid-thirties," but then others will say, "He enters, jet-blue whatever…"

KW: No, I'd rather just get mid-thirties. Their name and their age, and if something else is important about them, that they're missing a leg or whatever, whatever I need to know for the story to make sense. But other than that, I'm not interested in bibles, I'm not

interested in anything except what's on the page, personally, because I think that's where you make or break the story.

AC: I'm glad you brought up the…

KW: The bible? Yes.

AC: Because the second years will be looking at doing sort of mini-bibles…

KW: They're inevitable. You have to do them.

AC: They're a necessary evil. The process of writing a show bible is generally to say, "Here's how the show would work," or "Here's how it might run," and I guess for the writer it can help, for certain writers, for them to firm up what the show is in their minds as they go forward. Do you ever do a bible as part of your creative process, or is it basically there to show the network that the show can be thirteen episodes, that it's not just a feature or whatever?

KW: In my experience, I've always felt like there's only one way I'm gonna know whether it can be a show, and that's to write the script and see where it goes. Now, not everyone wants to do that for free, and you might not have the time, who knows. But I feel like that's the only test of a script, is to write it and see. In the absence of that, if you can get a green light off five pages, or three pages, or twenty-five pages of bible-type

description of the show, great. It won't answer the question of whether it's gonna yield good scripts or not. So I feel like, in my experience, writing a great script, that's the anxiety everyone wants to be relieved of. Everyone wants to see something, like "Oh, I like these people, I understand what this is." It takes out all the guess work. They'll want supportive documentation, they'll want five pages that sort of say what the script already told you. That's my favorite thing to do, is to write the scripts and then do a five-page or four-page thing after that gives you an idea of where it's going. So based on this script, what's the story around it, and where are subsequent episodes gonna go? I've seen some huge bibles, and they tell you nothing, because it's all theoretical. It's like, "Great, write me a script and we'll see."

AC: Do you think there are mistakes people make when they approach comedy? Especially people coming out of drama can always do that. I feel like comedy writers can do drama a little bit, and sometimes the dramatic struggle a little bit. Are there things that people can do when they're trying to do comedy? Especially if they're used to getting laughs onstage. I'm thinking about the transition, say, that The Kids in the Hall had from being onstage at the Rivoli to having their own show. It's a big learning curve to go from this to being onscreen. Are there any sort of tricks or things that people should keep in mind when they're going to try to write for television versus say doing standup or sketch in a club, in terms of writing a script? I know in print, I'm going on and on, *(laughter)* if you feel like a writer is trying or pressing too hard, that's a bad sign. Because print's so deadpan, it's pretty dry. But in terms of writing, say, a sitcom, are there sort of cardinal errors neophyte writers maybe make when they're first trying to be funny onscreen?

KW: Yeah, I would say two things. One, if you've done a lot of standup, you've worked a singular voice. And so the question is, can you write for a variety of other voices who aren't you, who aren't like you? Because you will need to populate, in my opinion, if the show's gonna work, you're gonna need to populate your cast with people who aren't like you so that your material can stand out. So I think the first thing is learning to write for other voices, either people in your life that you picture, a parent, a sibling, a friend who doesn't talk like you, who doesn't think like you, who offers a contrast, so that it's not just one guy yelling for twenty minutes. So that's a big thing, in my opinion. And then…what were we talking about? Rookie mistakes…

AC: Yeah, rookie mistakes in writing comedy for TV, say.

KW: Lack of story. The biggest thing, but it's something we all do, I still do it on a first draft, is everyone's intentions are announced in their dialogue. Have you guys read the David Mamet notes? Have you ever seen those? It's really great. It's a note to his writing staff about what not to do. And one of them is to try and write the scene without dialogue. What would happen? How are they moving? What are they looking at? What are they reading? What are they thinking about? What are all the things on their mind? How do they communicate that with other people? You still write the scene, but they just don't say anything. What would you be forced to think about instead of just the words that come out of your mouth or other people's mouths on the page? It's not what they're saying which is interesting, it's usually what they're doing.

AC: And do you find that, as you've written it, it's gotten easier for you to adopt people's voices? For instance, writing for Eugene Levy, he's so unique, and he's a guy who knows exactly what his take is, his comedy is, I'm guessing. He very much knows that. How do you then make that reach? He's probably someone, I know for me I grew up watching *SCTV*, and now you're writing for Eugene Levy, or "Gene," I guess, as those who know him…

KW: I don't call him Gene. *(laughter)* One guy in the room calls him Gene.

AC: Who's that?

KW: That's Mike Short, Martin's brother, Martin's older brother. They've been friends for a long time, and they're the same age.

AC: Does everyone else call him Mr. Levy?

KW: No, Eugene. *(laughter)* And then some people call him Dad, but that's not me. *(laughter)* So yeah, I met Eugene, he interviewed me, he was the only person who interviewed me for the job, and I was a huge fan of *SCTV*, and I had imitated many of his characters when I was in high school. So it was exciting and nerve-wracking, to be sure. But you spend some time around him, and you see what he likes to think about, and how he approaches things, and you start to adopt that. In private, when I'm writing, I try and

speak like them, like any actor that I'm trying to write for. And I try and think, if I was trying to do an impression of them, what would I do? So it helps.

AC: We'll see if there's a question. We've talked for a little while. There may or may not be. *(to audience)* Yes, sir. Great.

Audience member: I was just wondering: when you were working on *Corner Gas*, you were there for the final two seasons. Is writing a show that you know is gonna end—and I'm assuming it was his decision—is that different than just generally writing a sitcom?

KW: Probably not that one, particularly. Brent was always reset at zero for each episode. There were no arcs. It was just the same gang doing the same stuff. It's like an Archie comic, literally and figuratively sometimes. You know, Brent didn't have any grand design for the end. In fact, he wanted to go the other way, because we'd kind of done, I think it was season five, "Go For It," is that the one? I can't remember. Hank has a fantasy about the gas station being sold and all this stuff. It turns out it's kind of a dream. That's sort of what you expect the series finale to be about, and we wanted to move away and make it much smaller. So that's what we did in the series finale.

AC: When did you find out that that was it, that there wasn't gonna be another season after that?

KW: Well, it was Brent's decision. He wanted to call it. He was living in Vancouver, and we were shooting in Regina, so he wanted to be in Vancouver again. And that was a lot of work for him. So I think it was after season five, I think we knew sort of just going into the last season.

AC: Mm-hm. When *Corner Gas* came out, some people were surprised, because there had been, up until that time, certainly in the press, lots written about how Canadians aren't doing situation comedy, or they can't do situational comedy, and *Corner Gas* sort of changed that sort of thinking, certainly at the network level. But one thing people latched onto was the idea that it was a comedy that took place in a rural setting. And there had been a bit of a history in Canada, with *Beachcombers*, *The Red Green Show*, there's always been that streak. Is that a sort of go-to? If someone's writing the next rural sitcom, do you think they're on the right track, or is that just kind of of-its-time and very much modeled on Brent, who's kind of down-home?

KW: I think it was more having a show that was authentic to the creator and his voice. It was timely. I think it was a good setting, but Brent's take on rural Saskatchewan life wasn't particularly rural, actually. And I think that's what was kind of sneaky about it, and popular. Because you had sort of urban ideas being filtered through this little small town. But I do think you're right. Canada has, in the past, enjoyed a certain amount of folksy shows. But I think there's also a big appetite for non-folksy shows. *The Kids in the Hall* was not folksy, and I think there'll be more coming. I think the important thing is an authentic, original voice, and someone who really knows what they want to do and why.

AC: When you were writing, obviously *Corner Gas* but even now, do you do an approach where it's the A, B and C plots? Do you go that route, where there's gonna be a main plot and two others that are gonna intersect and drive things forward? Or do you take a different tack with it? That's sort of the perceived wisdom, anyway…

KW: Depends on the show. *Corner Gas* was quite mathematical. We wanted to serve all the cast. And so we'd have three stories, and we'd break down, and the first story would have about nine beats, and the other two would have about four or five, and that would be our show, and three acts. Whereas *Schitt's* and *Kim's*, they're a little more flexible. We have one main story, usually two, because we've got a family of four in both cases, so we usually have two to cover off the whole family doing something. And then there might be a little runner, or there might just be one biggish story that involves everybody, and then a little something else on the side. I think it really ends up being driven by the size of your cast, and the premise: is it a family, or is it five people who work in an office? Also, as the show develops, and you start to see, "Oh, these two really work well together, and these three are great, and this guy's no good," you start to write to those strengths, and so that will also inform how many stories you feel you need to tell. Sometimes you're just told to, I guess. The network could conceivably say, "We want more stories for this person."

AC: Have you gotten the proverbial network notes that people complain about? I remember, I guess it was at the Toronto Screenwriting Conference, where Graham Yost

talked about the note for *Speed* from the studio was, “Could the bus stop at some point?” And he said, “No, it can’t.” Have you had that kind of note from the network, where you have to, not do it, but you can’t just say no, generally speaking, you have to sort of give them their due?

KW: Sometimes. I feel like you’re always trying to decipher what it is that they’re after? Is it just that they feel they haven’t had input for a while, so you have to say, “Yeah, we could look at that.” That’s a great answer, by the way. It solves a lot of problems. “Yeah, we’ll definitely look at that.” You don’t have to do anything, but you at least have heard them. I feel like I’ve been lucky. I’ve worked with some pretty reasonable network executives who aren’t asking for ridiculous things. I think if you’re honest with them and say, “This is why,” so far it’s worked. But yeah, they’ll ask goofy things, and sometimes all you can say is, “We’ll try it.” I haven’t had anyone really, really press for something. Occasionally they’ll say, “We don’t want this.” It might be language, they might think the character just shouldn’t do that. And sometimes you need someone to give you a sober second thought, and you go, “Oh yeah, we’re getting pretty goofy as of late.” “OK, fair enough, yeah. We thought it was funny, but in the harsh light of day, we’ll rethink this.” I haven’t had any crazy ones yet.

AC: Can you talk a little bit about the relationship of the director and the show runner? Because I think most people here, when you think of a director, would imagine it’s like in a feature where they tend to have a real position of power and authority, but they don’t in television. But they’re hired, not as a hired gun proverbially, but there’s a different

relationship between the director and the show runner. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

KW: Again, like the other things, the director is hired to serve the vision of the show runner and the show. So you meet with directors, and you interview them, and you think, "Who gets this, who's gonna shoot it in the style that we want it shot in," and then you don't wanna interfere on the floor, but really the director is the hire of the show runner and the writing staff. They're there, again, to realize the ideas that were written in the script. So if the director isn't getting that, sometimes we'll go to the floor and we'll say, "Hey, can I just have a quick word?" And we'll say, usually we'll have lots of meetings beforehand where we'll say, "This is the tone, this is the way we were thinking this should be shot." They might have a suggestion that's way better, and we'll say, "Thank you, that's way better, that's why we hired you." Sometimes they won't see the joke, and that's totally normal. Even within writing staffs, we often don't see the joke. I remember Brent doing a pass on a script, and there were these line changes, and I just thought, "Why'd he change that? He changed one word. Stupid." And then you hear it read, and you go, "Oh, oh yeah, I get it now, that's a lot funnier." So you miss them. Writers miss other writer's jokes. So that's totally normal.

But yeah, you're working with a director to make sure that the actors understand the intentions of the script. You've gone over it with the director, so hopefully you don't have to do anything. Hopefully the director goes through the blocking, the rehearsals, and the shooting, and sort of has a good sense of what you were going for. But you have to stay on top of it, because everyone can lose their way in a day. There's just a lot going

on, and you get punchy, or you lose focus, or whatever, and suddenly you've got a bunch of takes, and an actor has gone a certain way that's like, "No, that's not gonna work."

AC: You mentioned story earlier. What to you are the essential…Oh, sorry, let's take another question. Go ahead, Austin.

Audience member: You mentioned earlier that working in a room with other writers can get quite arduous.

KW: Did I say that? It's true.

Audience member: How do you work on one script and deal with that, with people saying, "I don't want this" and "I want this in"? What's the finished product, how do you finish…

KW: How do you work the room, essentially? I'm happy to address that. So have you guys had any sample rooms?

AC: The second year class, each section is developing and writing a sitcom with Anne Fenn as the sort of show runner.

KW: Ah, yeah. It can go a lot of different ways. In my experience, the best room has probably about six to eight people in it. Once you go beyond that, it's really hard

managing voices and just people talking. If you have too many people in the room, someone's gonna get bored, because they're just like, "Ah, sorry, too many people for me to get my two cents in." So you need someone who's managing all that, being a good traffic cop and saying, "Oh, you wanted to say something, what was it?" Or "You had an idea, that sounds a bit like this idea." And you want to keep things open, but you don't want to go down too many blind alleys with people just to make people feel good. Someone has to be sort of making executive decisions on the call, going "I like that, I'm not crazy about that for this reason, let's move in, I want to stay in this area."

As you develop the early stages, once you have outlines or scripts that aren't working, you hear from people, you ask for feedback from your writers, like, "Does everyone agree that it goes off the rails here? What is it?" Or "Network said this, do we agree with network, or is it something else?" And you hash it out, and you try to figure out a solution. And then I find it can be really tough and tiring having eight people at a table. If you've ever been in a meeting, it's an all-day meeting, and you can't go anywhere. So it's hard. And so what I do sometimes is I'll break the room up into two rooms of three or four, or people can go off into pairs and I'll say, "For the next 45 minutes, just come up with three stories for so-and-so and so-and-so, two characters." And they don't have to be really developed, but just something that we haven't heard already. Sometimes we did it on *Kim's* this year. We said, "OK, quiet time. Everyone's got an hour, an hour-and-a-half to come up with ideas." And everyone just sat and worked on their computer, or came up with ideas on a notepad, and then we shared them. So then you have a deadline to work to, and everyone's gotta pitch something.

So pitching is a big deal, and then the hardest thing I think in a room is keeping people on track, because everyone wants to talk, and people feel good when they're contributing ideas. But you've gotta contribute…collectively, you're trying to solve a problem. So you gotta know what the problem is, and work on solving that, and the tendency is to say, "Well, I don't know how to fix that." So you suggest something else, something completely different, a different story. And it's like, "OK, that's good, but we still haven't fixed that thing." So it can derail pretty quickly, and just while this is on my mind, the other piece of advice I'll give to anyone going into a room: when you start in a room, it really depends on the culture of the room, but for me, listen more than you talk at first. Because I know you'll be keen to share ideas, and you want to prove yourself, but it's really hard to think when people are talking. So what I find is that people talk too much. I get ideas knocked out of my head by the talkers, and it's like, "Fuck, I can't even remember what I was saying." And I get annoyed, and I want the talkers to shut up. And so, don't talk too much. *(laughs)*

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, yeah.

Audience member: This is gonna sound like a very elementary question, but is it people just yelling their ideas, or is there hand-raising or whatever?

KW: It really depends. I've seen a lot of different things. I like a pretty calm, civilized room. Yeah, it can be. It depends who's in charge, and sometimes a very brilliant performer or standup or whatever will be the creator. And if they're not teamed up with a

show runner who's really gonna manage the room, sometimes you can just be waiting for them to stop doing their e-mails, or watching videos, and all the writers are going, *(whispering)* "I don't know what to do. Let's wait." *(laughter)*

So it can be very unsystematic. So I think everyone likes to know, "OK, what are we doing? What are we working on? What's the goal for today, or this morning?" So I try and set that out with everybody and say, "This is what I think is important, this is what we'll work on, and let's do that until noon." And then people know, "OK." I feel like that helps, because there's a million things to be talking about and thinking about, and so you've gotta keep it pretty focused, I think.

AC: *(to audience)* Uh, Robbie?

Audience member: Hi. When you're working on a show for a lot of years, do you find that it gets more challenging to come up with ideas, and if so, how do you combat that and keep it fresh?

KW: Yeah, it gets harder and harder, no question. The more stories you tell, the harder you've gotta think for the next one. How do you combat that? It just takes a little longer, probably to break certain stories. At the same time, there's a plus side, which is you get to know the characters more. And you've gotten deeper into the history and the world. So you can draw more stuff out to make stories about. You know it better, so there's more stuff. "Oh, this person's been working at this job now, so we can do that. We can talk about stories there which we couldn't in the first season, because they didn't have that

job.” So it’s probably even, actually. I do think it’s harder the further you go, but there’s more to mine, usually. If the world has developed, I mean *Corner Gas* was a little unique, because the world didn’t change much, so that was tough by the sixth season, when you’re going,” What about…oh yeah, we did that.” So there’s a lot of that.

AC: Uh, Spencer, did you…?

Audience member: When you’re writing a script in the writing room, how do you… is it everyone sitting around saying, “Oh, this person can say this line,” or is it that each person gets to write the script together? How does it happen?

KW: A lot of different ways, at least in my experience. So we’ll break the story together. We’ll have whiteboards, and we’ll have cards, and we’ll talk, and we’ll ask, “OK, what are all the things that could happen in this episode?” And then we’ll slowly boil it down, we’ll say, “OK, I like this story about so-and-so going to the bakery, I think that’s funny. What are the beats of the bakery story? What are the beats of the hacky-sack story?” I tell you, I’m not a very good writer. *(laughter)* And then you’ll have these stories, so let’s say two or three stories in the episode. Collectively we’ll say, “OK, what’s the first beat? Should we start at the bakery or the hacky-sack? Oh, we’ll start at the bakery, that’ll set a bunch of things going.” Then we’ll do a hacky-sack scene, and go back to the bakery. So we try and figure it out. “Does it all fit? Oh no, the bakery story only takes place over one day. The hacky-sack story takes place over a week! Fuck!”

So we try and sort that all out, and either adjust timelines or throw a story out, trying to get an outline, some kind of beat sheet. We'll get the outline approved, and then once we have the outline, a writer will write the outline based on the room notes about the episode, and these beats that we have. And then usually the same writer will go away then once the outline's approved with adjustments, and write the draft. So you would go home for a week, or you'd have time to write that draft based on the outline that we all agreed on. So then we'd have a draft, and scenes, and dialogue, and all that kind of stuff, and we'd read that, and we'd say, "What works, what doesn't work? This A-story's really working well, this C-story isn't holding together," and it's not your fault, we just didn't see, when we expanded it, that there's just not a lot there. We have to adjust that.

So we'll do that. We'll have collective notes, then we'll probably send a second draft to the writer again to make those adjustments. Then, when you get to the late stages of the script…I personally like working with projectors. Some people like a daisy chain of multiple screens, but I like the projector, so we'll put the script up, and sometimes we'll go line-by-line, and we'll look at something. That's at the very end, where we try and go through and figure out, do we need this line, does this make sense, can we cut this, do we have a funnier line here? That's another thing we've done on a lot of shows. You go through and identify a bunch of lines, and we'll just give them to writers and say, "Make this funnier. Same intention, but just make this funnier." Then we'll see if we have funnier buttons for scenes, but that's at the very end, when we're about to shoot it. Does that help? OK.

AC: *(to audience)* Did you have another question?

Audience member: Yeah, just to go off that: After you establish the beats, does one person go and write an entire draft themselves, or is it split up evenly among the writers, where everybody writes a scene?

KW: One person or a team. So if we've hired two people, or two people want to co-write a script, then we'll…

Audience member: So what are the rest of the writers doing at this point?

KW: They're writing other scripts, they're breaking other story

Audience member: Oh, they're working on other scripts? OK.

AC: So for *Kim's*, once you've got the outlines approved, you'll go, "You do this episode, you do that episode"?

Audience member: So when you're writing an episode, you already have a rough idea of what you want to have happen in it?

KW: Yeah. So we have four writers who've been assigned scripts, so they're at home. We're not in a room together anymore. One's in Vancouver, one's in Duntroon. Anyway,

so they're writing their scripts, and they'll hand them in either next Tuesday or before, we've asked for it. And we'll go through it, we'll have network read, give notes, then we'll get back to them with notes, and they'll write a second draft, hopefully in December or January.

AC: Before I forget, just a quick question: if you're sending in a sample that's an original show, should it be a pilot for that series, or is that a no-no? Should it be an episode that takes place somewhere in the series, do you think, for a writer who's trying to get, say, an agent or work?

KW: I think funniest thing first. If it makes sense, if you have no trouble following it, and it's really funny and it happens to be episode seven, I wouldn't care. I think as long as people are laughing and can follow it, that's all that matters. I tend to start with the pilot, because I don't really know, it sets up a lot of things. And so it's helpful to me, and then I think it's helpful to them to understand the world. But you might not. And sometimes you might want to write both. The pilots sometimes are really good, and often they're not, because they're sort of weighed down with some exposition.

AC: *(to audience)* Joey, yeah.

Audience member: I had a question about *Kim's Convenience*. In the play, the main guy, he's almost like an Archie Bunker-type character. He's very offensive, and he has that big speech where he talks about all the people who would steal from his store. So do you

feel like you've had any problems from the executives at CBC about what he can't say? Is this a tough show to make in this day and age?

KW: No, not yet. It's been great. And it's because the play works. I think we'd have that problem if it wasn't a play. I think everyone would be scared shitless about the character. But because they've seen the play, they've seen this guy, they love this guy, you know his heart's in the right place, everyone's been great, there's been no blowback on that, and we're trying to see how far we can push it.

AC: Most writers are gonna be in a position at some point of taking notes that they don't necessarily want to get, and giving them. I remember an editor giving a note to a writer in our newsroom, and the note—this is back when there was paper and stuff-the note was, he picked up their story, went like this *(makes gesture)* and dropped it in the garbage can. *(laughter)* That's not constructive…

KW: No. "How to Motivate Your Writer." *(laughter)*

AC: No. Is there a way to give notes to someone so it doesn't kill their creativity and enthusiasm, and vice versa—how do you take a note and not get gutted?

KW: So, I've had the good fortune to work for 15 years on a lot of shows, got a lot of notes, and I still get really mad *(laughter)* whenever I hear notes. The only thing that's changed is that I don't tell anyone that I'm really mad, and I keep it to myself. I read the

note, and I just go away quietly, and I go, “Fuck them, they’ve never written anything, what do they fuckin’ know, that’s fuckin’ bullshit.” *(laughter)* And so I do that for a few minutes. and then I go, “Oh yeah, they’re right, they’re right, oh shit, they’re right, that’s a good note too.” So you do that. And you get better at it. Again, it’s trying to figure out what people are saying. The hard thing that Andrew is mentioning is giving the notes. Because if you want to do it quickly, you won’t do it diplomatically. It’s hard to do it in a way that keeps your writer buoyed and encouraged. Now, you don’t always have to do that. I’ve seen some very rough styles of management, where it’s just like, “You’re fired.” And that’s your note. *(laughter)* So I don’t know.

I feel like I work hard, like this morning I was giving notes on a script, and it took a long time. I was hoping to do a lot more this morning than go through this, but to think about, OK, I don’t want to be prescriptive, I don’t want to say, “Change this to this,” because then I’m rewriting through them, which I may end up having to do anyway, but hopefully I’m saying, “Think about this. Going into a scene, think of the scene differently.” And hopefully that gets them to see, “Oh, OK, I could write this whole scene differently,” rather than going line by line and having them see me write it.

So it’s hard. It’s very similar to giving actors notes. I don’t know if that’s a part of the training in this program particularly, but when you go on set and you’ve got actors, sometimes you just want to say, “Say it like this because it’s a lot funnier.” And they get really annoyed, because they don’t know what that means, they don’t know how to internalize it, they don’t know what their motivation is, where it’s coming from, so you’re trying to give them notes in a way that allows them to see the intention of the line and the character at that moment. So it’s very tempting just to be blunt with people, and

maybe it's that you built a working relationship with certain writers. It pays to be diplomatic, but it takes a lot of time and energy and restraint.

AC: You mentioned story. What do you think are the fundamentals to a good story? There are a ton of books written about it. I think most people agree you don't have anything without it, especially in a situation comedy. What are your sort of big three, four, "This is what a story has to have?" Or can you even do that?

KW: I brought my little book. **(***laughs)* This is a book that I write little notes in, and they're not story notes at all, and it's not super full. It's reminder questions from me, and it's just that. It's like, what should a story be? I find there are some writers who have read *Story* by Robert McKee, they've read all these books, and so have I. And there's a point where, A, it gets really tiresome listening to someone say, "What's the hero's journey?" *(laughter)* So you have to temper that.

AC: I say that a lot. *(laughter)*

KW: Fuck.

AC: *(to audience)* You haven't heard it for ten years! You've never heard it before now! *(laughter)* You've only heard it for three months.

KW: Sorry. *(laughter)* I mean, it's a good question, but it's not the only question. There are a lot of questions, and this David Mamet thing that I like, I was reviewing it this morning, because I had notes for this writer, and I thought, "What would the Mamet thing say, because maybe there's something in there I can give that's constructive for this writer." But he says, "Don't worry about having the right answers. Ask the right questions." And I think that's a really important thing, and I think, in a story, it's better to be honest than it is to be right. It's probably better to be honest than it is to be funny. You want to get to the funny. Funny's always more or less possible if you have a real human situation that's tricky, that's challenging. I want to care for the people in the story, and part of that is making a story that everyone can relate to. And that's a hard thing to figure out, because most of my life, I've gone through thinking, "Well, everyone goes through this. I'm like everybody." And I'm not. And there are a lot of things that I think are funny or stupid or sad that other people don't.

So you have to think hard about what it is you're trying to tell, and will anyone else think, "Yeah, I get this, this makes sense, this problem makes sense to me." And so they care about what you're setting up the problem to be. And then I guess the other thing is, I've heard a lot of people say, I'll say, "Why are we doing this?" And they'll say, "Because it's funny." OK. I get that it's funny to you. But if you're running a show, or you've been on a lot of shows, you have more voices informing your head about what the show needs to be. There's network, there's other people, you've been through this before, so it's trying to make sure your story is gonna be meaningful to people who are maybe not just like you. So you might have to show them why this story is important to you. So I don't know if that quite answered the question of the hallmarks of a good story, but the

classic things I do think, I made fun of the hero's journey, but you do need someone you care about, and you need to know what they want, and I know people say that, but it also has to be something that you want. And it has to be something that a lot of people…that it makes sense to want, for some reason. It's a deceptively simple question, but it's very, very hard to answer.

AC: Do you think a lot of people who are naturally funny…you talked about, in another interview, about comedies laughing at weakness or failure, evil, all that kind of stuff. Do you find that those writers aren't as drawn, necessarily, to emotional stuff? They like to be up in their heads a little bit, and you have to kind of pull them towards sentimental or emotional material that you often find in a sitcom, where most situation comedies have a kind of warm core to them? *Arrested Development,* as out there as it was, still had the family. Is that something that you help them do, if in fact you find that, or do you think you can train yourself to connect with that? I think a lot of naturally funny standups can be good at the mechanics of it, or the mathematics, but when they write the scene about the family or whatever, it has a kind of coldness to it, almost.

KW: It can, and I think that's writing for other voices, and trying to find yourself in the voice of the mother, trying to find yourself in the voice of the father, whatever it is. People talk about warmth and heart, but I think there just has to be compassion, and I don't think that necessarily has to be warm and fuzzy. I think one of the things you're talking about in *Kim's* is that the main character, while he's kind of hard, old-school Korean, he's a compassionate person, but it's tough love. But there's love. And he does

sort of see other people's point of view from time to time with enough prodding. And I think that's something we identify with. We go, "OK, he's not a monster, he's not a jerk." He's tough, and he says some things that you shouldn't say, but his heart's in the right place. So I don't think it has to be sentimental, I don't think it has to be overly warm and fuzzy. If you're thinking about other people, or your characters are thinking about other people in the stories sometimes, then that's what it needs for people to care about it.

AC: Great. Might have time for another couple of questions. I'm scanning the room.

KW: I've silenced you all with my boredom.

AC: Ultimate silence. Can you talk a little bit… *(to audience)* Just a second, you had your chance! *(laughter)* No, go ahead, Chili, and then we'll get back to me shooting my mouth off. Go ahead.

Audience member: I'm just curious about what it's like working with Eugene Levy and how easy he is to write for, because as Andrew said, he has a very distinct voice. Is he very accepting of criticism…

KW: Oh, criticism? I don't know. I try not to criticize my bosses. Also, I have no need to. I really like his work. He's very open to ideas. I think if you pitch him an idea, he'll start to think about it, and he's a performer and he likes to think, "Oh yeah, and then this could happen, and so then this would happen." He likes to chew it through. So that's fun

from a point of view of someone who's willing to sort of entertain anything. There's a downside to that too, which is he'll entertain *anything*. *(laughter)* And so if you pitch something inadvertently, you can spend a lot of time going down these alleys, and you're like, "No, I was just kidding," and he's like, "No, let's think this through." So you're going to eat up a little part of the day, doing that. But he's great. He's a very thoughtful person. He's very good with people, and the crew, and the cast. He's very generous.

AC: It's funny that he came up again, because I remember interviewing him in '96, and he was saying, "I want to stay in Toronto." He had a company here, and he was trying to stay in Toronto. "I want to stay in Canada." And he just said, "I can't," so then he left, and he ended up doing a lot of stuff, and of course eventually *American Pie* and stuff made him well-known in the States, and now he's back, which is an interesting circle. But can you talk about any sort of differences between the Canadian approach, if you will, to doing TV, and the American? Do you think there's much of a difference, and if so, what is that?

KW: I think there's some big differences. I'll just give you a quick history. I'd worked on a couple shows here, and they went down after two seasons. They weren't terrific shows, and I thought, "Well, I'll go down to the U.S., I'll see what that market's like." And it seemed like a good time, since I didn't have work here. So I spent quite a bit of time in Los Angeles over the last three or four years. I was pitching one show. I pitched a couple shows. But I feel like, it's just a much bigger market, so the biggest difference is math and money.

You were talking earlier about, “Oh, Canada can’t do single-camera comedies, or half-hour sitcoms,” or whatever it is, but it’s just numbers. When you’ve got the number of shows, the number of pilots that are being written, and the number of pilots that are being shot, in my experience, 1 in 10 things works. It doesn’t matter what it is. One in ten sketches, one in ten jokes, one in ten shows. So if you only put up two shows a year, which is something that’s not unusual in Canada, you’re gonna wait five years for a hit. And that’s the way it’s gonna go. If you’re lucky, because there isn’t that same momentum of lots of shows and lots of competition. So you’ve got a much more competitive market in the U.S. that produces a lot more material, and out of that you’re gonna get more hits, but as a percentage.

So I think there’s that. I think it just depends project to project. I had some good experiences pitching in the U.S., and I had some less than good experiences, and I’ve had the same here. I think it’s just a slightly bigger scale. There’s more money, more executives, more going on, but really, it’s the same process. And at the end of the day, if you want to work in that, you have to like sitting in a room by yourself writing. And some people think, “Oh, it’ll be fun once I get in the room. I’m really good once I’m in the room.” A lot of the work is not in the room, and a lot of the work is not with funny people in the same room. You are working with funny people, but at a distance. So you have to like that solitary process of writing, because that ultimately is what the job is.

AC: *(to audience)* I guess one final question, maybe two. *(To Kevin)* Often in TV, they’ll talk about what they are looking for. There’s always something that they, being the networks or production company, are looking for. I think the joke one year was, although

I think it was actually true, the hottest idea was werewolves on the moon, because it's always a full moon on the moon. *(laughter)* That was literally some film in development. What do you think, should people pay attention, particularly writers starting out, to what the perceived wisdom is that they're looking for, or should they just ignore that and do whatever it is they're interested in?

KW: I think the latter. Focus on what you like to think about, what you want to say, and hopefully, to some extent, the less time you spend hearing about what they think is hot or current, the more chance you'll have of producing something that is the next thing, because I feel like if everyone's chasing the same target, then everyone's gonna get sick of it pretty quickly. When people are saying that, everyone wants to minimize the risk. So if something's working, and it happens to be a werewolf-on-the-moon show, it's like, "Well, those seem to work." That's how people think. They don't think, "Well, we've got that. Let's move on." And we've seen lots of different derivatives. We've seen lots of cop shows, hospital shows, and they do work. So you just have to ask yourself, "What do I want to work on? Am I cool with that?" Some people are really motivated by money, so if you're more commercial, that can be good. If you're prepared to be a little more independent, then the yield can be big sometimes, if you come up with a thing that no one's been thinking about.

AC: Great. Kevin, this has been terrific. Thank you very much.

KW: I hope it was helpful. *(applause)*

AC: For you!

KW: Oh, wow!

AC: Some Humber swag!

KW: Thank you very much! Well, good luck with everything.

AC: Thank you.

END