



Response to 6.29.09 SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Press Release
By The Heart & the Hope: A Sonny and Kate Fan Forum

GENERAL HOSPITAL RATINGS COLLAPSE
Time for ABC/Disney to Improve Product Before It Is Too Late

For the week ending June 19, 2009, the ratings for General Hospital (GH) plummeted to all-time lows. Many fans are not surprised due to what has been appearing on-screen for the past several months. The Heart & the Hope: A Sonny and Kate Fan Forum supports the efforts of the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign. For several months, viewers have been disheartened with the continual destruction of the integrity of the Sonny character, the inconsistent writing of both the Sonny and Kate characters, and the absence of the Kate character except for occasional mentions of her name by her employees at Crimson. It is more than disappointing to watch the years of work that Maurice Benard has put into his character on GH be completely discounted and dismissed, while at the same time, Megan Ward is virtually pushed aside for newcomers and her storylines are taken over by other characters. We truly believe that GH cannot continue with the status quo and still remain a viable program for ABC/Disney.

In March of 2008, Sonny told Kate, when she was concerned about Claudia and her power, that Kate gave him hope and why would he throw that away for Claudia Zacharra? **Viewers wonder the same thing.**

Several months later, a marriage of convenience between Sonny and Claudia began as Sonny's quest to bring the person who shot Kate at their wedding to justice, then, in the blink of an eye it became about him not deserving Kate and punishing himself for his past by living with and staying married to the woman whom he now suspects set up the hit that put his son in a coma, and may also be carrying his brother's child after sleeping with him under Sonny's roof. The writers constantly have Sonny refer to Claudia as a despicable whore that he hates and does not trust, yet they ruin his character by having him have sex with the wife/whore he claims to detest. Every time Sonny has sex with Claudia, he looks physically ill and often states that he does not know why he did it (except for the time he impatiently pushed his way into her bedroom and said, "Don't take long...cause I need it right now!"). Recently he stated he did not want it to happen again (because of his suspicions), but then stated it had happened again because she jumped him, so in essence he made it her fault. In that one statement, Sonny Corinthos, supposedly a powerful mobster, indicated that he had no real power or sense of self-control and that she held all of the power over him. **Is this supposed to be a strong leading male character on GH that women want to watch?**

In years past, Sonny has always been portrayed as a smart man, yet he is now written, more often than not, as clueless and foolish. His point-of-view throughout the last six months has shifted on an almost daily basis. He sometimes says he married Claudia to find Kate's shooter, sometimes says he married Claudia to give him more power in the Zachara Organization after he took over (though she held no power within the family's organization, so he gained no more power by remaining married to her), and at other times says he married her for several reasons and/or because she is what he deserves. **As one fan stated, "Sonny now feels the need to punish himself, so we viewers have to be punished as well with this storyline."**

If the hypocrisy of Sonny remaining with Claudia isn't enough, he is now caught between TWO manipulative, hypocritical, lying females, further alienating the viewers. His jealousy over Olivia, Kate's cousin (a character Robert Guza said in published articles would never be explored since she was a creation of the writers during the writer's strike) is unfounded. After spending fifteen months developing and eloquently telling the teenage love story of Sonny and Kate, including taking them back to Bensonhurst for several scenes that included a marriage proposal, the writers clumsily introduced the character of Olivia, Kate's cousin, who shared a short-term, volatile, dysfunctional, teen relationship with Sonny, resulting in her getting pregnant before he fell in love with his first-love, Connie (Kate). Since the day Olivia arrived in Port Charles, Sonny has not shown any romantic interest in her, yet suddenly viewers are supposed to believe he is insanely jealous of her burgeoning relationship with Johnny Zacchara.

Olivia has repeatedly told Kate that it is dangerous for her to be with or around Sonny, has told Sonny he needs to keep Kate safe by letting her go, threw the DVD that Kate was desperately trying to give to Sonny with the information about Claudia's role in Michael's shooting into the hospital fire, discouraged Jax from letting Carly or Sonny know that Claudia is culpable in Michael's shooting, and is keeping that same secret herself from Sonny, *all while keeping a secret of her own*. Her big secret is that Sonny is her son's biological father and she feels that Sonny's life is too dangerous for him to know about his son and for his son to know about him. Her manipulative, hypocritical, lying ways in no way make her a more suitable candidate for the audience to root for to have a relationship with Sonny.

According to quotes by Robert Guza, Sonny will become more involved with and pursue Olivia. By manipulating the Sonny/Kate/Olivia backstory, showcasing the character of Olivia, and keeping Kate off-screen, it appears that Management wants viewers to forget that the Sonny and Kate romance ever happened. Insulting viewers by rewriting or completely disregarding history seems to be a trend on GH right now, as evidenced by the destruction of the Luke and Laura story, with the addition of the Ethan character as Luke's son from an extra-marital affair. Ratings show that viewers are not happy with the trend and are not buying into the changes in the backstories of the characters.

It further damages the character of Sonny since Kate, the woman he loves, lives next door to him, yet we have not seen him in a scene where he tells her Michael has awakened from his year-long coma, though she was present when the boy was shot. This has been duly noted in a recent issue of *Soap Opera Digest/Thumbs Down* (July 7, 2009). There appears to be a blatant effort by the writers to play "keep away" with the characters of Sonny and Kate. If written true to character, when Sonny loves someone, he loves her wholly and completely, therefore it is confusing to viewers that he no longer even acknowledges her existence. The lack of interaction between two people who have never once stated on-screen that they fell out of love is infuriating and completely unbelievable for long-time viewers and fans of General Hospital, Sonny Corinthos and Kate Howard. For him to now pursue the cousin of the woman he loves makes Sonny a total cad. **Continuing to destroy the integrity of the Sonny character at a time when ratings are collapsing is dangerous at best.**

No valid explanation has been given for the 180-degree turn in Sonny's behavior. Viewers are left to wonder, especially since he is bipolar, **is he taking his meds? Has Claudia tampered with his meds? Why has he been drinking so much?**

At the same time, the historical integrity of the backstory for Sonny, and that of Sonny and Kate, has been compromised to accommodate the character of Olivia. One of the most confusing aspects of this whole story is that Olivia made Kate keep her secret that her son, Dante, is Sonny's biological son. She also chastised Kate for moving away from Bensonhurst and away from her family to make a better life for herself. Now Olivia has moved from Bensonhurst to Port Charles, and after repeatedly telling Kate it was too dangerous for her to continue to be with or around Sonny, she is now cozying up to him as his best buddy. This is not a safe way to keep Dante a secret from Sonny. It would make more sense for her to go back home to Bensonhurst and take her secret with her. Instead, Olivia has been inserted into scenes that one would have expected Kate to be in, which has not only been noticed by viewers, but has been acknowledged by *ABC Soaps in Depth* (June 1, 2009). The question many viewers are asking is: Why is Olivia even in Port Charles? It truly makes no sense for her character to be in Port Charles, let alone take up so much screen time.

With the current storyline, there is nothing to root for. The viewer is left to choose between one manipulative, immoral female character or another, while the heroine of the story is nowhere to be seen. The sleazy, manipulative types are set up to “win” the man while the heroine of the story is ridiculed by other characters and made to be the foolish one, then disappears from the canvas for weeks at a time. Not only is this not an intelligent way to attract new viewers or maintain current viewership, it is not good soap opera storytelling. As one fan stated in the SOS Press Release, “women... resent being virtually banned from their TV screens by being forced to endure the degradation of strong, independent and professional female characters in favor of showcasing immoral, manipulative, lying female characters on a day-to-day basis.” Viewers are tired of the sleazy, manipulative, hypocritical, lying women being showcased while other favorite characters are given little screen time. The two actresses who play these characters are on-screen several days a week while Megan Ward (Kate), who received many accolades from the soap media, is off-screen for weeks at a time.

In addition, the integrity of many characters on the GH canvas has also been compromised and sacrificed to accommodate the character of Claudia. Several characters are keeping the secret that Claudia is culpable in Michael’s shooting, including Kate, who, being angry that Sonny chose to remain married to Claudia, decided to not tell him that Claudia was responsible for Michael’s shooting as a form of revenge. Later she realized she still loves Sonny and, because she did not want to cause him any more pain than he had already experienced in his life, decided to **still** not tell him! It appears that all of these characters are keeping Claudia’s secret for no real reason except that the writers want them to keep it!

It is no wonder that ratings have collapsed. Viewers want romance along with angst and conflict between couples, not a sexually confused and debased leading male character. Some viewers have complained to ABC's Management that Sonny is depraved or has become a sexual deviant and, as a result, many female viewers have quit watching GH. Sonny’s Bensonhurst marriage proposal to Kate drew a 2.7 rating with 3,491,000 viewers. In the latest ratings week, GH drew a 1.8, or a 33% decline. When will Management take notice and return to what was working before the ratings collapsed by reuniting Sonny and Kate?

As stated in the SOS Press Release, many viewers feel that after six months of complaints, ABC/Disney has not taken steps to improve its product. Many viewers, including members of The Heart & the Hope: A Sonny and Kate Fan Forum, are frustrated. They feel that though they call the ABC and GH Comment Lines, e-mail the ABC/Disney executives, write letters, fill out ABC comment forms, vote in polls in *ABC Soaps in Depth* (an ABC publication), and post on ABC Insider (an ABC/Disney affiliated message board), their pleas are falling on deaf ears. As one viewer stated, “Many viewers are no longer watching the show because they feel insulted by the lack of integrity in storytelling, the lack of respect for long- and short-term history, and a general feeling that those in charge do not respect the viewers.” Many hope that a company with the reputation of ABC/Disney will listen to the plea expressed in the SOS campaign and take action to regain the trust of its viewers.

Viewers who support the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign want GH to be successful. Sonny and Kate not only helped draw higher ratings, but, when the couple was promoted, they helped ratings spike. Viewers want ABC/Disney to improve its product by reuniting Sonny and Kate, while also improving the integrity of the Sonny character and the integrity in the writing of both characters. Fans of Maurice Benard are disappointed and disheartened to see his 16 years of work on GH held in obvious disregard day-after-day at the whims of the current management and writing regime. Additionally, we urge GH to put Megan Ward back on contract and back into HER storyline, rather than giving contracts to untested new characters and more screen time to other recurring characters.

As a board, The Heart & the Hope: A Sonny and Kate Fan Forum supports the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign with its members being part of the number of fans who wish to work with ABC/Disney to make GH successful and rise to the top again. For more information, please contact Michelle Bronson, Admin of The Heart & the Hope: A Sonny and Kate Fan Forum, at info@sonnyandkategh.com.