



## GENERAL HOSPITAL STILL LOOKING FOR A RATINGS CURE DECLINE IN 18-49 YEAR OLD FEMALE VIEWERS FOR THE LAST THREE WEEKS

General Hospital (GH) continues to lose viewers and, when ranked among its competitor soap operas, remains very weak. For the past three weeks, viewers in the important 18-49 female demographic have declined with GH remaining in fifth place among soap operas for total viewers. In fact, on the last cliff-hanger Friday (October 23, 2009), GH was in seventh place among all seven soap operas and, interestingly, all three ABC daytime soaps finished in the fifth, sixth and seventh places. Sadly, GH, OLTL and AMC are apparently all patients desperately needing emergency care.

GH's decline in ratings has been steep since just over a year ago (September 2008) when Sonny and Kate and Jason and Liz not only broke up, but in the subsequent months, shared few, if any, scenes together. For the ratings season that ended September 2008, GH was third in total viewers but is now fifth; where GH was in a solid second in the 18-49 demographic, it is now third.

It does appear that management at ABC/Disney may finally be showing some concern regarding the falling ratings plaguing GH and have decided to take GH on as a patient, but unless the creative team treats the disease rather than just trying to ease the symptoms, GH will remain in the same condition in which it has been suffering for months. Efforts have been made to include more of the cast at times, but rather than truly integrating the cast into storylines, many favorite and veteran characters have been brought on simply as guests at special events or to minimally support the handful of characters that get most of the screen time. Lead characters/contract players such as Patrick and Robin are only on occasionally, but have no real storylines, though they are part of the hospital scene for which the show is named. Established characters who should be integral parts of major storylines are rarely seen, while newer characters are on-screen almost daily. The mob has become central to the show, named for a hospital, but the dialogue and stories suggest a one-dimensional, almost cartoon-type of mob with a lot of posturing by the lead characters.

Based on ratings and the promos that have aired during the period in which the ratings have fallen, one of GH's biggest ailments is having its main male leads go through 180-degree transformations without explanation and the out-of-character behavior that has followed.

A specific example is the character of Sonny Corinthos, one of the male leads who is a central figure in many storylines. The destruction of this character is astounding. The character of Sonny had shown major growth after being diagnosed as bi-polar and after reconnecting with Kate (his teenage sweetheart and professed first love) and renewing their love, and wanting to try to live outside of the mob. That growth, however, has been taken over by a cancer of sorts as evidenced by his recent behavior. At a time when Kate would have been proud that Sonny did not shoot Anthony Zacchara for shooting her at their wedding, but instead allowed Anthony to live so that Jason could turn him in to the authorities, he suddenly decided that he did not deserve her without any explanation. He had married Claudia, Anthony's daughter, to find out who was responsible for Kate's shooting, and then decided he did not deserve Kate once the truth was exposed and remained married to Claudia. Ratings have fallen steadily since.

Adding to the destruction of the Sonny character is the storyline that fails completely in the logic department involving Olivia, Johnny, and Sonny. It is very hard to believe in a storyline that began with a woman who begrudgingly came to town for her cousin, Kate's, wedding. She tirelessly tried to dissuade her cousin from marrying Sonny because of his ties to the mob, attempted to dissuade Sonny from being with

Kate because of him being in the mob and, as viewers have learned, all the while has kept the secret that Sonny is her twenty-something year old son's father because 'he is in the mob'. Now we are to believe that she is in a relationship with someone in the mob who is younger than her own son while her son is now romantically interested in the ex-girlfriend of the boy/man, Johnny, with whom Olivia is involved. The lack of logic or believability is truly astounding.

Olivia's actions have earned her the title "Queen of Hypocrites" by many fans. Olivia now seems more interested in her mobster boy toy than in protecting her son and Sonny from potentially harming or killing each other. As a mother, she has meddled in her son's police business to the point she may be putting him in greater danger, yet she remains in Port Charles, compromising his case against his father and his safety. While the reveal of Dante, Olivia and Sonny's secret child, has yet to happen, it is difficult to care or invest in it because the foundation of the story is very weak due to Olivia's constantly changing backstory and the effect it has had on other characters' backstories. The storyline is now so convoluted that one cannot keep track of why the secret is being kept. It appears that Olivia is now more concerned about how upset her son and his father will be with her than in doing what is needed to prevent a catastrophe in the making, a point made to her in one of the few scenes she has had with her cousin, Kate. Meanwhile the relationship between Olivia and Kate, who apparently knew of Dante's parentage, has all but disappeared along with Kate, who was the reason for Olivia coming to town in the first place. Sadly, for many viewers, the emotional investment in the Dante reveal is based on Kate, and how the reveal would impact her relationship with Sonny, but she has been pushed out of her own story.

Add to that the fact that Sonny made it clear to Olivia when she arrived in Port Charles that his feelings had always been for Connie/Kate, but suddenly, now that Johnny is interested in Olivia, Sonny declares he has feelings for Olivia that stem from their younger years, and the mind reels. This sudden irrational jealousy and desperation to get into Olivia's pants makes Sonny look like a pathetic man going through a mid-life crisis. His statement that 'Kate deserves better, so he wants Olivia' makes him sound even more like a cad. This is but one more sign of the malignant mutation that this character has undergone.

It is unfathomable that Olivia is the same woman that Sonny knew little about during an early conversation with Kate and thought Kate would appreciate having at their wedding. The true character of Sonny Corinthos would not have the poor taste to invite someone to their wedding that he had harbored strong feelings for, knowing it would make Kate feel insecure.

Now that the reveal has taken place that Claudia is responsible for Michael's shooting, it would make sense for Kate's concerns about Claudia to resonate in Sonny's mind. Sonny had turned away from a hope-filled, happy life with Kate to a self-destructive, hopeless one by remaining married to Claudia. By minimizing Sonny's deep feelings for Kate by not having him think or speak of her, especially considering she was present during Michael's shooting, and having him carry on a flirtation with her cousin, Sonny's credibility as a romantic lead becomes questionable. Olivia's comment that Sonny is "better than that" in regard to how he outed Claudia publicly, and her comment that she "had the best of him" when they had sex as teenagers after only dating for a short time make this story point all the more unbelievable. Emotionally unbelievable scenes like these cause viewers to tune out.

Sadly, the art of timing and reveal seems to be lost on GH. Many storylines that viewers have been intrigued by have been dropped, but stories that viewers have shown to have little interest in due to ratings and response to promos drag on for months. Claudia's role in Michael's shooting was suspected by Sonny and has been revealed over and over through different characters for months, so there was little suspense for the audience once the reveal to Sonny, and to the rest of Port Charles, took place. After months of what feels like punishment, and sadly for the talented actress portraying Claudia Zacchara, many viewers have indicated that they simply want the storyline to be over. Many viewers also worry about the writing issues and are concerned that the characters who had more noble reasons for keeping the secret will have more backlash while those that kept the secret for more selfish reasons will get a "free pass."

While many viewers agree that the public outing of Claudia by Sonny created some exciting verbal scenes for Sonny, the inconsistencies in the dialogue caused some of the delivery to fall flat. Viewers are well aware that Claudia stepped over Kate's bleeding body on the docks, though Sonny did not, so many were

left to wonder whether Sonny's comment about Claudia stepping over Michael's bleeding body was supposed be figurative or was a mixed-up error on the part of the writers and continuity director. Viewers are also aware that Sonny went into the marriage of convenience with Claudia to find out who shot Kate, but the dialogue suggested it was simply a business agreement and nothing more, infuriating viewers in the process.

Maurice Benard had definitely earned the right to verbally express his feelings and those of his character, but his public rant when outing Claudia seemed inappropriate for a mob boss who would logically want to handle the situation privately. Later, in a scene that made little sense to have been shared with Olivia, not only did the writers have Sonny mention several of the women in his life, but they actually had him say he loved one most, thereby diminishing the importance of those other female characters and their place in Sonny's life and removing any and all sentimentality on his part, cutting away what little credibility he had left. Many fans were outraged by the blatant dismissal of so much history of the character, of the various couples, and of the show.

Further causing the condition of his character to deteriorate, throughout the past year, his 'Mr. Claudia Zacchara' storyline has robbed his character of his brain and his heart, while also emasculating him in the process. Many Sonny fans cringed when Claudia pulled out a gun in the "city" of Puerto Rico (yes, on GH Puerto Rico is a city) to save him and had to watch Sonny thank her for emasculating him. One has to wonder if management asked the writers to create a story more like "The Sopranos," so Sonny was castrated in an effort to make him a "soprano." The writers would do well to give an explanation for the sudden 180-degree transformation in Sonny's behavior months ago and work hard to resuscitate his now diminished character.

Many are concerned that the Dante reveal will drag on for months as well. Two newer characters, Dante and Olivia, have been on-screen almost daily since the beginning of August, causing a loss of interest in the characters and the stories in which they are involved. Viewers simply want the reveal to be over. The writers would do well to develop a heightened sense of timing and deliver the reveal with surgical precision before more viewers tune out.

It is obvious by the spikes in ratings when big events are aired that viewers want to return to viewing GH and are hoping that real changes in storyline direction with strong character development, balance and a sense of timing will be made. When the returning viewers find that the major issues are not being dealt with, they simply tune back out. The disease needs to be treated and extensive therapy needs to be done to rebuild trust with the viewership and bring the show back to health again. Current viewers that have stayed the course and former viewers who want to see change want their voices to be heard and want management to know that they are truly concerned for the future of GH.

These fans and former viewers have joined together with fans of Sonny and Kate, Jason and Elizabeth, Patrick and Robin, and Jax and Carly as part of the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign to ask ABC/Disney to listen to viewers and help save this ailing show by using more of the established characters in actual storylines and writing for the lead characters so that their actions and dialogue are credible. For more information regarding the campaign, contact Dana L. Meyer or Kecia K. Picard at [saveoursoapgh@gmail.com](mailto:saveoursoapgh@gmail.com), visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital page on Facebook, follow on twitter @SOS\_GH or visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital website at [www.saveoursoapgh.com](http://www.saveoursoapgh.com).