



## GENERAL HOSPITAL STILL INCONSISTENT IN RATINGS VIEWERS CRAVE STORIES OF LIFE, LOVE AND FAMILY

The ratings for General Hospital (GH) for the week ending October 30, 2009, continue to be disappointing. Although GH barely beat out All My Children (AMC) for fourth place in total viewers, AMC, in fact, had a higher market share of 7 vs. GH's 6, which GH shared with the two worst performing soaps—One Life to Live (OLTL) and As the World Turns (ATWT).

When compared to last year, GH (-181,000), along with two other soaps, The Bold & the Beautiful (B&B) and OLTL (-67,000 and -121,000 respectively), had fewer viewers while the other four soaps, The Young & the Restless (Y&R) (+298,000), Days of Our Lives (DOOL) (+252,000), AMC (+141,000) and ATWT (+37,000) actually gained over last year. Additionally, in daily ratings for GH, two of the most heavily promoted incidents to occur last week, the return of Jonathon Jackson as Lucky Spencer and the beginning of Sarah Joy Brown's characters suspenseful exit were the two lowest-rated days of the week.

Not since early February 2009 has GH had more than one day consecutively with over 3 million viewers. Since before that time, fans have been voicing their concerns about GH and several emotionally unbelievable storylines by calling the ABC and GH comment lines, e-mailing the ABC/Disney executives, writing letters, filling out ABC comment forms, voting in polls in *ABC Soaps in Depth* (an ABC publication), and posting on ABC Insider Access (an ABC/Disney affiliated message board), yet these emotionally unbelievable stories are still showcased and allowed to drag on for months while stories that viewers want to see developed are dropped.

Jill Farren Phelps, in her interview entitled "James Franco's Upcoming General Hospital Appearance Explained" with Michelle Kung of *Speakeasy* in the Wall Street Journal, stated when asked about the cancellation of *Guiding Light*, that "...if people have been watching something for 70 years, it has value. Stories of love and life and family will go on forever." Viewers of GH have been longing for exactly that, a return to a GH with love and life and family--a return to a soap opera that is historically fluid and correct, that includes characters whose behaviors make sense and are in keeping with their history that involves multiple characters and evolves into multi-layered, entertaining, romantic, creative, exciting storylines. Sadly, very little of that has occurred over the past year and it has been even more evident recently. One fan stated, "It would have been great to see Anna and Robert come back to celebrate Emma's first birthday (Patrick and Robin's child). Add Matt and Maxie to that guest list and that would have been a nice family moment." However, the day of Emma Scorpio-Drake's birthday was also the day that a young Michael Corinthos killed his step-mother shortly after his mother, whom his step-mother had kidnapped, delivered his baby sister. Where is the example of love and life and family here?

Apparently, viewers have become disgruntled to the point of not even watching GH, as evidenced by the falling ratings. Unfortunately, while Ms. Phelps seems to understand that these viewers want a soap opera with love and life and family, she is either unwilling or unable to fulfill those desires. Viewers are tired of watching characters they have grown up with, or watched grow up, written as complete strangers or with no emotional depth or growth. The Sonny Corinthos character is consistently and mundanely written as dark, depressed and self-destructive, aside from the small amount of time he was paired with Kate Howard, his first love. At that time, Sonny seemed brighter and more hopeful; many viewers thought after 15 years of virtually the same Sonny, fresh, new stories with growth and development were on the horizon. They were sadly mistaken.

Elizabeth Webber is another example of a character that has become completely unrecognizable to many viewers. After watching the recent GH promo featuring Liz, Nik and Lucky, one viewer stated, "Will someone explain to me when Liz has ever done something as vile/degrading/disgusting as this? I have watched every second Liz has been on this show and there is no way she would be doing this." To have Elizabeth once again falling into the comfortable, easy, emotionally obligation-riddled, non-romantic relationship with Lucky after the courthouse scene with Jason is not out-of-character. To have Elizabeth suddenly, and for no reason and with no romantic emotion, become so entranced with the brother of her ex-

and now soon to be again- husband that she sleeps with him, while leaving her injured son at the hospital, then repeatedly daydream about him is not only unbelievable, but it is demeaning to the many long-time fans of GH that 'know' Elizabeth Webber. Another fan observed, "If the writers have to twist a character this much just to tell a story, then either they are completely incompetent or they simply aren't doing their job."

Not only are the characters stagnant and/or completely out of character, but the storylines themselves have virtually no emotional believability or substance. One specific example features one of the male leads, Jason Morgan. This character has gone from being a beloved mobster, an enforcer with a heart of gold, which many fans endowed with integrity, honor, loyalty, methodical/logical intelligence, and an ability to have a specific, proportionate response to most events to becoming a simplistic, irrational, reprehensible, emotionally erratic hypocrite.

Jason Morgan has always been the bad boy that one could not help but love. He was on the wrong side of the law, but always seemed to 'do the right thing' when it counted. Sometimes those good intentions were in fact the right thing, such as helping a young Elizabeth Webber one night at Jake's bar after her boyfriend Lucky Spencer died in a fire. Sometimes those good intentions may not have been necessarily the right thing to do, such as keeping a young Michael away from his brother AJ, who was in fact Michael's father. The constants about the character were that he was methodical in his thinking, in part largely due to the brain damage he received from the car accident he was in with AJ, and that he owned his choices and tried to let others make their own choices.

The audience has not seen that Jason Morgan for quite some time on GH. Since the accidental shooting of Michael Corinthos, which he feels disproportionately guilty for, the character has steadily become unrecognizable to long-time fans. His first reaction was to push away all those he was close to because his life was too dangerous. He pushed away the woman he loved and mother of his son, Elizabeth Webber, both of her children, as well as his best friend, Carly, her children and anyone else he thought could be hurt. This reaction was not out of the norm for the character, however, the continuation and specific focus of it toward only specific persons has been extremely out-of-character and has been flagrantly displayed all over the canvas.

For a while, Jason reneged on this decision and began interacting with those he cared for again--his family and loved ones. In November of 2008, however, a sudden shift in the canvas occurred and his character became the Jason that exists now, the one that is described by viewers as currently unwatchable, ridiculous, obsessive, hypocritical and unrecognizable. At that time, there was a threat of danger and Elizabeth and her two sons went to a cabin in the woods along with Sam McCall and Lucky Spencer, although Jason had setup a safehouse with guards for them. Lucky left the women alone and baby Jake was kidnapped for the second time in his young life, making fans wonder if GH's management is "anti-child" or if the creative team simply cannot come up with another problem for characters to face. Jason went to the cabin and found his son had been kidnapped and, in an effort to perpetuate the redemption of Sam McCall, the woman who had purposely and with lucid thought endangered his son twice, the storyline had them go after the kidnappers, leaving Liz and her other son alone. The emotional believability was virtually non-existent for many viewers. Many who are mothers stated that, as a last resort, they would have gone with Jason to find their son and entrusted Sam with the safety of their other child, if they could not all go together.

Once baby Jake was found and rescued by Sam, all crimes she had committed against Jason and his son, the woman he loved, her other son and others in his life were suddenly called even. This is not the Jason Morgan long time viewers know. This is not the Jason Morgan who hunted down and never forgave Faith Roscoe after her misdeeds toward his 'nephews'. This is not the Jason Morgan who never forgave Ric Lansing his crimes against his best friend Carly, even after Ric saved her life from drowning. Liz also suddenly 'absolved' Sam for her crimes against her child at this time, resulting in yet another character inconsistency and aspect of the storyline lacking credibility.

The hypocrisy of Jason Morgan does not end there; it increases. He has completely re-inserted himself into the lives of all those women and children he could not and would not be around due to his life being 'too dangerous', as he has said so many times over the years, all of them except for his son and his son's mother. Oddly, he has spent much time practically babysitting Alexis' and Sonny's daughter, Kristina. Some may say that she is already 'in the danger' since she is Sonny's child, but Alexis has always made sure her daughters were kept very far away from the mob, so that argument is about as effective as an antibiotic on a virus. Jason has spent time in public with Michael and Morgan, the very children he forced Sonny to give up legal rights to after Michael was accidentally shot in the head due to the danger of their lifestyle. He has been around Robin Scorpio-Drake and her baby in public, yet his life is too dangerous for him to be anywhere near his son and/or the woman to whom he said "he couldn't take it if something happened to her." Adding insult to injury, in the most recent storyline, Carly, Jason's best friend, recently gave birth under dire circumstances yet again. After being rescued, she asked Jason to be the Godfather as he held baby Josslyn. How does Jason Morgan, whose life is 'too dangerous to be with his own son', being a Godfather to a new baby girl exemplify love and life and family and not hypocrisy?

During these months of hypocrisy and reprehensible behavior, this character has also been used to redeem the character of Sam McCall. This character was brought on as a pirate/treasure hunter/con woman. There was no doubt that she was not a heroine. Her character's behaviors during the Black & White Ball were perfect examples of the lows she would sink to and much of the audience accepted that. It was expected behavior; it was consistent. Suddenly, she is supposed to be forgiven for purposely endangering a child on more than one occasion, along with his mother and brother, for maliciously taunting and plotting against both Jason and Elizabeth, and for many other 'lies' that Jason uncovered during his incarceration/trial period simply because she helped rescue Jake when he was kidnapped while she was supposedly helping to protect him.

There are several problems with this 'doomed from the start' style of redemption. For one, most of the audience is in the coveted 18-49 women demographic and many are mothers, sisters, and aunts who will not forgive any person, male or female, for putting their child purposely in danger. Secondly, Sam's character was established as a "non-heroine" or "bad girl." In general, the audience prefers and expects character consistency, so 180-degree changes do not work well. Also, it does not work well to redeem characters, no matter who they are or what the sex may be, by putting them in storylines that directly involve the characters who were their 'victims'. Every time the audience sees them in scenes together, they remember what the 'evil doer' did and simply cannot understand how the other character can forgive her/him. For example, every time Ric Lansing was in a scene with Carly, the audience remembered that he had chained her to the wall. When he was with Elizabeth, the audience remembered he had almost killed her by slipping her birth control pills. Therefore, the idea of Carly or Liz being friends with Ric never really worked. Having Jason illogically and uncharacteristically paired with Sam, either as friends or anything more, was poor judgment on the part of the creative team and management of GH. Obviously, much of the audience agrees since they have been 'paired' for almost a year now and ratings have declined.

GH's writing staff has not only created a hypocritical Jason Morgan, they have also taken away his well-known methodical and logical thought processes and any intelligence he may have had. As Jason and Sam were on their way to Mexico to find Michael and Kristina, who had run away, Jason's SUV broke down on the side of the road. After several attempts, Jason, who was a mechanic, had owned his own mechanic shop, and even given Lucky Spencer a job when he was younger, could not repair the vehicle. In a matter of moments, however, Sam had it running. This left the audience wondering when and how Jason had lost his mechanical skills. While they were in Mexico, Jason pulled a gun on a teenager who was roughing up his nephew. The 'real' Jason Morgan would never have done such a vile act. He would have used his demeanor, intellect, and voice to put a stop to the situation. Once back in Port Charles, Jason attended the town carnival, which the audience still finds confusing, since his life 'is so dangerous'. How can Jason go to a carnival, which is certain to be full of children and families, if his life is so dangerous that he cannot be around his own son or the mother of his son? While there, Jason actually pulled his gun out to shoot at a carnival game when he could not win a stuffed animal with the game's toy gun. To fans of Jason Morgan, this was a completely irrational and overly emotional reaction.

Lastly, with the long, drawn out, and somewhat anti-climatic reveal that Claudia Zacchara was inadvertently responsible for the shooting that caused Michael to be in a coma for a year, the character destruction of Jason Morgan was fully displayed. As one fan put into words, "He hates Claudia because, while exacting retaliation for Sonny's attack on Johnny, she set into motion the actions that hurt a child while he was working with the very woman who purposely endangered Jake twice." Jason's obsession with making Claudia pay not only prevented him from getting out of jail sooner so he could find his kidnapped best friend simply because Johnny would not promise to not help his sister, but when he did get out and went looking for them, he barged into a cabin without so much as a glance through the window, with his gun drawn, and horrified a mother and her two small children. This one segment exemplified the complete destruction of Jason Morgan. Jason was not only hypocritically and obsessively working to make Claudia pay for a crime she was inadvertently responsible for, but he was doing so while working with Sam, who purposely committed a similar crime against his own child. He then literally re-enacted the scene from almost a year ago when his own son and his mother and brother were in a cabin in the woods and were attacked by a gunman. Not only was there little sympathy for Jason when he said he had 'become what he hated most,' but once again, the audience is curious if management at GH really does know the meaning of 'love and life and family'?

Ms. Phelps, in her interview with Michelle Kung of *Speakeasy*, stated that "we certainly pay attention to what the fans say. There was once an old-timer in the business who said, "If they're mad, that's good, they're watching." Sometimes you have to take into account that the thing that people say they don't like, is the same thing that's keeping them glued to the set."

Sadly, GH has gone well beyond the point of creating stories that have people mad, but glued to the set. With the dramatic fall in the ratings, long-time fans, some who have watched GH for 20 years or more, have been letting management know that they have quit watching, why, and what it would take for GH to get them back as regular viewers. These very fans are not mad while they continue to watch, they are apathetic and have quit watching. Obviously, this is **not** good. They have become apathetic due to the lack of compelling storylines and the out-of-character behavior of beloved characters. Gone are

the days when management can say that viewership is high and any buzz is good buzz. Jill Farren Phelps, along with the rest of management, needs to pay attention to what the viewers are truly saying.

Every week, more fans and former viewers of GH are joining 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, asking for ABC/Disney to bring back the elements of love, life and family to this once great soap opera. 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).