



**GENERAL HOSPITAL AND DAYS OF OUR LIVES—
SOAP OPERAS GOING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS
WILL ABC/DISNEY MAKE CHANGES AT GENERAL HOSPITAL BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE?**

Soap Opera viewers know the importance of the November Sweeps Period and for years they have been able to count on interesting and exciting storylines in November. Just two years ago, General Hospital (GH) was riding high with its Black and White Ball storyline while Days Of Our Lives (DOOL) was in the ratings basement. When the November 2007 sweeps period began, DOOL ranked 8th out of 8 soap operas in total viewers and was on the verge of cancellation. Additionally, DOOL had a 2.0 HH rating while GH averaged a 2.5 rating in HH.

For the 2009 sweeps period, which ended November 28th, DOOL has now effectively traded places with GH by leading HH with a 2.2 rating compared to a 2.0 rating for GH. DOOL has consistently been in 3rd place in total viewers, up from their 8th ranking in November 2007, and has even tied The Bold & The Beautiful (B&B) for 2nd place in HH ratings once. During this same sweeps period, GH had fallen to 4th place among the 7 remaining soap operas with DOOL beating GH in the important women 18-49 demographic for two of those weeks. In 2007, GH averaged 1,071,000 viewers or a 1.6 rating for the 18-49 demographic vs. 908,000 viewers and a 1.4 rating representing a 15% drop for 2009. During the same period, DOOL has increased its standing in this demographic.

What has caused the change from 2007 to now? Why does GH languish with lower ratings despite the constant stunt-driven storylines, including the current, heavily promoted story featuring movie star James Franco? Many fans feel the answer is fairly obvious. Throughout 2007 and into the November sweeps, GH maintained higher ratings by incorporating the writing principles appreciated by viewers. Storylines were written utilizing an ensemble cast rather than writing for short-term, stunt casting. Storylines moved in a forward direction, were connected, and contained elements of excitement, intrigue, danger, angst and romance.

The Black and White ball gave viewers the opportunity to see a romantic setting that drew on the elements of man and nature for suspense and adventure. With the Text Message Serial Killer and Anthony Zacchara on the loose, along with the dangerous storm that knocked out the power on the secluded island, the ball was able to draw on several suspenseful opportunities and perilous medical situations while using a majority of GH's own cast.

Fans were treated to numerous examples of romance with Nikolas throwing a romantic bacchanalia ball to announce his engagement to Emily. Sonny and Kate reunited after he came back, alive, from Puerto Rico and said their first "I love you" as adults; Elizabeth and Jason reminisced about their first meeting and she admitted she believes that she has loved him since then; and Jason, without hesitation, took Elizabeth's hand to stand next to her on the parapet when Anthony asked him if he was willing to die for love.

There were believable moments of angst and intrigue incorporated into the story due to the dual threats present, the mystery of the Text Message Killer and the suspense of Anthony Zacchara being on the loose, attempting to do away with Lulu, the woman to whom his son was attracted. Carly Jacks was certain she knew who the Text Message Killer was and wanted to flush him out at the ball, however, she was almost killed herself. Anthony ran into Luke while looking for Lulu, the object of Johnny's affection, and literally

taunted him into a heart attack and purposely left him to die. It was only by Tracy Quartermaine's opportune arrival that Luke was found in time. It was during a heated conversation full of veiled threats between Sam and Elizabeth that Lucky found out he was not the father of 'their' baby, but Jason was, which led to Lucky running off and actually disappearing for the rest of the night.

The level of drama during the story was greatly enhanced by the use of almost complete cast integration. Cooper's disappearance for a while only intensified Carly's belief that he was the Text Message Killer. Ric was impaled and needed a blood transfusion, which caused Trevor to beg Sonny, the one man he hated most, to help. Kate encouraged Sonny to help his estranged brother, which he did with the assistance of Patrick, Robin and Leyla, all medical professionals who, as friends of Nik and Emily, were attending the ball. Skye remained in the room with Ric while he was being assisted. At the same time, Alexis was having an appendicitis attack and Jax was trying to get her to the hospital despite the horrendous storm. Additionally, once he found out about Carly's near death, Jax enlisted his brother Jerry to assist in trying to help keep her safe.

At one point, Anthony ran across Patrick, Robin and Leyla. Anthony, who thought Leyla looked like his dead wife, began ranting about women and their eventual infidelities, thereby becoming incensed by Patrick. Before anyone knew what happened, Leyla had been shot, taking a bullet for Patrick.

The drama continued as Sonny and Kate became more of a team when Anthony found Kate and Sonny was shot saving her, weakening Sonny even more after having just given Ric the transfusion. All the while, Jason and Johnny were working together to find Anthony and take people such as Lulu, Elizabeth, Spinelli, Nadine, and Emily to safety outside of the house. At the same time, the rest of the guests, including Georgie, Maxie, Logan, Bobbie and Scotty were trying to remain calm in the ballroom, worried about those who were missing and the storm and its effects on the evening. The evening culminated with the brutal murder of Emily at her own engagement ball, creating a wide range of reactions and reflections by many of the characters.

Beginning in 2008 and continuing into 2009, the elements of romance, mystery, intrigue, adventure and medical opportunities outside of the mob have become increasingly less evident. There are virtually no pairings on the canvas that actually illustrate romance; instead, sleazy, unexplained, pointless, guilt-ridden sexual relationships are promoted. Storylines are written as separate stories with characters in bubbles as opposed to those that carry over to include other characters in more encompassing, full-bodied tales. Characters are regularly written out-of-character, creating much confusion for many viewers. Intrigue has been replaced by predictability, or worse, loss of interest. All too often, whatever facet of a storyline that could have been exciting or intriguing is stretched on for longer than viewers can remain invested, while other storylines are rushed or dropped all together. The integrity of the history of the show has been corrupted to create new characters and storylines that make little sense.

The current plot-driven storyline involving movie star James Franco is yet another example of GH's propensity for not listening to fans. Stunt-casting is not the solution to drawing viewers. Viewers have been clamoring to see more of their favorite characters, including Matt, Diane, Alexis, Kate, Monica, Edward, and Bobbie, and to have them integrated into actual storylines. The writers of GH seem to think having the characters that are not involved in major storylines get drunk and hang out at Jake's to sing karaoke rather than have them involved in real stories is acceptable. While karaoke scenes are enjoyable to watch on occasion, the ratings show that viewers crave real storylines. The Wednesday "Thanksgiving" episode during sweeps of 2009 that used several of the underused characters in non-mob/family stories and settings spiked the ratings.

Currently, on the other side of the fence is the concerted effort by the writers of DOOL to incorporate more of its own cast in their storylines, to bring in historical elements into current storylines, and to maintain a level of character integrity that fans obviously appreciate. The stories have been interesting and well developed and have been written for an ensemble cast, not for numerous sets of small groups of cast members that rarely if ever interact.

Interestingly, by using the basic principles that esteemed soap writers, including Doug Marland, have expounded, DOOL has shown major improvement in the ratings. On the other hand, GH has shown a dramatic decline since turning away from these basic principles.

What is confusing to GH viewers is that the current creative team has shown that it is capable of writing well. GH won the Daytime EMMY Award for Best Show for 2007. Many fans have noted that the character-driven storylines at that time helped to maintain continuity in the writing and their interest in the show. Sadly, this same creative writing team is now writing many characters out-of-character, concentrating on sleaze rather than romance, dropping storylines in which viewers express interest, dragging out storylines and reveals that are causing viewers to tune out, and ignoring the rich history of the show. Sudden spikes for stunts show that viewers are ready to come back to viewing GH, but the lack of well-crafted, compelling storylines causes viewers to tune back out. When one compares the November sweeps of both GH and DOOL from 2007 and 2009, one can see that the shows are moving in opposite directions, and may be trading places if changes are not made at GH soon. Sadly, due to the lack of compelling storylines for many viewers, even having James Franco guest star does not seem to be enough to save sweeps or GH.

The cancellation of Guiding Light and the recent announcement regarding the cancellation of As The World Turns should be a wake-up call for ABC Daytime. GH viewers are asking ABC/Disney to make the changes needed quickly to not only bring back former viewers and maintain the current viewership, but bring in new viewers. Many soaps that have been cancelled often improve, but sometimes the improvement happens too late. GH needs to work to not only retain the viewers it has, but also bring back its former fans and bring in some of those fans who are now virtually orphaned by losing their soap operas due to cancellation.

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. All share in a common goal of asking ABC/Disney to listen to the viewers and make changes by delivering character-driven storylines, being true to the characters, respecting the rich history of the show, creating an emotional balance for the characters, focusing on families, promoting enduring couples that viewers can root for, heightening romance while minimizing sleaze, and creating an enjoyable escape. For more information or to comment on the campaign, contact Dana L. Meyer or Kecia K. Picard at 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.