



GENERAL HOSPITAL'S RATINGS CONTINUE TO SLUMP STUNT CASTING AND STORY-DRIVEN CHARACTERS TAKE THE PLACE OF CHARACTER-DRIVEN STORIES

For the ratings week of January 11-15, 2010, General Hospital (GH) once again showed the all too unfortunate pattern of a spike for a major event where viewers are led to believe a character might be killed off, then a collapse when things return to the status quo. The continuation of this pattern shows the fundamental weaknesses of stunt casting, plot-points masquerading as storylines and the fact that Creative Consultant/ABC Daytime President Brian Frons' pairings have been rejected by viewers.

The ratings week scored a 2.2 HH on Monday, January 11, but ended the week with a 1.8 – an 18% decline. This mirrors the week of July 20-24, 2009, when Claudia's car crash scored a 2.2 but ended the week at 1.7--a 22% decline. Last year, for this same week, GH had a 2.1 rating vs. 1.9 this year, while DOOL had a 2.1 last year vs. 2.2 this year. Since the week of July 20-24, 2009, GH's ratings have been stagnant at best, while Days of Our Lives' (DOOL) HH ratings are up 22%.

One of the major causes of this drop in ratings over last year, and virtual stagnation over the last several months, could be that the General Hospital that most long-time viewers and fans used to watch has been replaced by what appears to be a bland version from the Twilight Zone interspersed with stunt casting. Many of the characters have been changed so much, they are unrecognizable or now share so many of the same characteristics that they could be interchangeable. What was once a show of complex characters whose interactions were dynamic and complementary has become a show full of out-of-character, humdrum, mundane, 'vanilla' characters whose actions could be interchanged with any other character on the canvas and make no difference whatsoever. Sadly, what used to be an enjoyable escape that was enjoyed much like a rich chocolate mousse has become more like vanilla yogurt; it can be enjoyable to some, but there is nothing special about it.

Not only are main characters Jason Morgan, Sonny Corinthos, and Elizabeth Webber completely out of character and unrecognizable, but many feel that they could close their eyes and practically interchange them with some other characters on the canvas. Sonny Corinthos has always been passionate yet cautious. He was always one to show intense care for his family and his friends, but has become nothing more than a selfish, self-absorbed womanizer who trusts easily. Jason Morgan, who has always been insightful, blatantly logical, and had a certain level of integrity, is now doubtful, unreasonable, and lacks the moral compass those around him have always counted on. He has always been the one to know whom to trust and from whom he needs to protect those he loves, but now he seems perfectly comfortable trusting those who have betrayed him or those under his protection and care. Elizabeth Webber was an independent, strong-willed, and loyal female character who provided an example of how one could rise from a bad situation and overcome it. Now, she is written as nothing more than a timid, withdrawn, unsure woman/mother of two without direction. **The writers have taken the freedom of changing the personalities of the characters on whims, without truly showing the journey the characters have taken to get to where they are.**

Another example is Carly Benson Quartermaine Corinthos Alcazar Corinthos Jax who came to Port Charles as a conniving girl who wanted revenge for her mother giving her up for adoption. She had no

problem pursuing a relationship with Jason Morgan while being the mother of his brother's child when her relationship with AJ went south. She used Jason's best friend, Sonny Corinthos, for sex when she caught Jason dancing with Elizabeth Webber in Kelly's Diner. She has always been concerned with her own needs above others and her own wants above the wants of others, even when it involves their lives. She has very few friends, is antagonistic to most females, rarely listens to anyone, and is overly protective of the men in her life. Since marrying Jasper Jax, Carly has shown some growth and maturity, has become slightly more concerned with the needs of others above her own and has at times tried to put the wants of her husband into consideration before acting. Sadly, of late, Carly has become mundane, agreeable, impassionate, and uninteresting. Her character has always been, for many, a character that they love to hate. Many fans agree that she is a character who behaves horribly, yet she is completely necessary and wanted in Port Charles. Sadly, she has lost her unique, edgy personality.

Mariah Maximilliana "Maxie" Jones has lived with her uncle, Mac Scorpio, most of her life, has always been a bit of a wild child and has never followed the rules. Her character has actually slept with more male characters than any other character currently on the show. She had a relationship with a cop when she was still a teenager. She hid one of the MetroCourt Crisis terrorists, and then had a relationship with him. She stole drugs from the hospital to continue her affair with Lucky Spencer while he was married to Elizabeth Webber. In short, Maxie was adept at lying, scheming and manipulating situations, and rarely felt regret for her actions. Currently, however, as they have matured her character, they have also taken away all of the characteristics that made her "Maxie". In the current storyline, she holds a secret that Sonny Corinthos and Jason Morgan are worried she may spill if interrogated by the police. This is the girl who grew up with the Police Commissioner as her 'father', who kept a relationship with a cop and a terrorist from him for some time, and stole drugs for an addicted, married cop she was sleeping with. It is beyond comprehension that this character is now so changed that the fans are to believe that she cannot tell a lie to the very person she has been lying to her entire life.

Samantha McCall came to town as the owner of her own salvage boat, basically a treasure hunter. She was independent, tough, and feisty and could handle herself in any situation. She went through a number of relationships with various men, some married and some not, and delved into some unscrupulous behaviors. She has since been 'converted' into a more subdued, amenable character who is now a PI and, supposedly, still able to handle herself. However, she is consistently getting caught/kidnapped, put in situations where she has to be saved and has admitted that she looks for excuses to go to Jason Morgan's penthouse. She has become needy, without her own identity, and hyper-agreeable to the point of having no opinion of her own. She has lost all independence and individuality she once had and is now simply another 'girlfriend' character.

Kate Howard, the "Devil Wears Prada"-esque, powerful business woman who worked hard to maintain a respectable public image and reputation and exuded class in her business and social circles, now has two young protégés running her business and frequents the same seedy bar in the bad part of town in which her cousin, Olivia, picked up Johnny Zacchara, simply to meet the bartender. Kate was judged by her cousin for leaving Bensonhurst to have a better life and for considering a life with Sonny Corinthos, due to his dangerous lifestyle, yet Olivia is now working and living in Port Charles and finds reasons to be in Sonny's proximity when she is not with her mobster boy-toy, Johnny. The writers have tried to make Olivia a "Kate replacement" on the canvas and have increased her importance in the business world and in Sonny's back-story and current story, while simultaneously diminishing Kate's importance in the overall storyline and on the canvas. Rather than writing them as being the antithesis of one another as they were originally, the characters and their traits have become virtually interchangeable. This has only served to make Kate a prop for Olivia when she is on-screen and Olivia emotionally unbelievable, causing confusion, disappointment and the inability to be emotionally invested in the current storyline for many viewers.

Other characters who have become 'vanilla' or unrecognizable and unbelievable include Lulu Spencer, who was manipulative, deceitful, yet full of anxieties, but is now judgmental and calm and uninteresting, much like her Aunt Carly. Jasper Jax, who was an intelligent, authoritative corporate raider, is now a deceitful, guilt-ridden push-over. Lucky Spencer, the son of anti-law Luke Spencer, was a cop who has always been slightly arrogant, possessive, and untrusting, but is now a whiny, self-pitying man who seems to be willing

to share private police investigation information with the one character he has always been wary of, Jason Morgan.

Mitchell Coleman, the disreputable bartender who pays protection to the mob and has had his own criminal dealings that led up to him purchasing Jake's, is now written as the sensitive bar owner who is used for comic-relief and hangs out with Patrick Drake and Police Commissioner Mac Scorpio. Even Jake's Bar, a long time, dirty dive located in one of the seediest parts of town, with a history of being the place where people held clandestine meetings and went to hide from the rest of the world, has lost its identity. Where characters used to go slumming or engage in dirty dealings has now become the "in place" for hospital personnel, law enforcement, and even under-age children to frequent instead of other reputable businesses in town. In essence, Jake's is as much a "character" as the hospital. While Karaoke nights have been highly entertaining to many viewers, it stretches the credibility of many of the characters to have them all frequent such an establishment on a regular basis.

What makes the soap opera genre unique compared to other genres is the long-running history and opportunities for character development. Instead of celebrating and embracing its history, the writers of GH seem to have "wiped the slates clean" in the brains of the characters and instead are writing the characters in "story bubbles" that do not carry over character growth or recollection of past events into newer story arcs. Instead of folding the diverse traits of the characters into the richness of future storylines by crafting character-driven storylines, the writers of GH now write story-driven (plot-driven) characters with little substantial storyline direction. What makes current storylines and pairings confusing is that viewers have not been privy to the reasons behind why characters' personalities or actions are different or have been completely re-written. Characters are now written to fit story plot-points as if they were ingredients in a mass-produced recipe instead of being written to behave based on their individual personalities or characteristics as someone would when making a heartfelt gourmet meal for someone they wish to impress and engage. **The bottom line is that GH's writers are no longer writing for the genre or their audience.**

These complaints or concerns are not new or unshared. ABC/Disney used to have a forum, ABC Insider Access, where viewers of all three daytime dramas could share their feelings regarding current and upcoming storylines, characters, pairings, etc. The premise was that this information was directed to management at ABC Daytime. Viewers felt empowered because they had a direct channel for their thoughts, complaints, concerns, and compliments to be heard by those in charge. Unfortunately on December 23, 2009, that forum was abruptly closed. ABC sent a message stating that this phase, or round, of research was coming to an end. Many unhappy fans were looking for a sounding board that would have results shared with ABC, thus the SOS/Save Our Soaps! ABC message board was created. It has been learned that ABC Insider Access is back up and running, but by invitation only. Through research of various online message boards, it has been surmised that the population being invited is significantly smaller and much narrower in scope. One wonders why ABC/Disney, given the current ratings decline, would want to hear from a much smaller and more narrowly focused audience.

The writers of GH need to respect the history of the show, the characters and the audience, write character-driven storylines that let the characters grow and develop over time and make use of the plethora of current talent that is already part of the canvas. Moving favorite characters to the backburner while creating sudden changes in the personalities of many others only serves to confuse and alienate viewers who have often watched for many years, which has become evident when examining the ratings.

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 using veteran and favorite characters that are already part of the canvas, delivering character-driven storylines, being true to the characters and respecting the rich history of the show to create 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.