



ABC DAYTIME PROMISES THAT ALL MY CHILDREN WILL RETURN TO THE SHOW'S ROOTS WHY NOT THE SAME FOR GENERAL HOSPITAL?

The cover of the March 22, 2010 issue of ABC Soaps in Depth touts that big changes will rock Pine Valley and that All My Children (AMC) will reveal its master plan to give fans what they want. The magazine then states that "ABC Daytime Vice President Sue Johnson promises that longtime viewers of AMC soon will have something to cheer about" because the show will be returning to its roots. A big concern of many longtime fans of AMC has been that favorite characters were becoming unrecognizable. According to Johnson, rather than just looking at story, AMC is "looking at characters and how we can make each of those people be who they've always been and really redefine them, especially for new viewers or returning viewers." The idea is that when these characters "act as they were intended to be...the storylines they are involved in will work." AMC wants to "get back to the people we love, the people we hate, the rivalries we enjoy, the heart in the family and home."

These same concerns have troubled viewers of General Hospital (GH). Many longtime viewers have complained that the characters they have loved, or loved to hate, for years have become unrecognizable. Ratings have continued to decline over the last few weeks, as viewers have obviously not been happy with the writing for many of their favorite characters.

In January 2008, 95% of the ratings were 2.3 or above. In January 2009, only 25% of the ratings were 2.3 or higher and by January 2010 there were no days when GH achieved a 2.3 rating in total households despite the ending of the highly promoted James Franco story. The same can be said about the targeted 18-49 female demographic, since this group has declined 12% from 2010 to 2009 and 17% from 2010 to 2008.

The Franco story once again showed that once the stunt story climax was completed, longtime and newer viewers, who tuned in temporarily hoping to see that positive changes have been made, tuned out once again when GH predictably returned to being a show written for plot points and stunts vs. character integrity and development. GH viewers hope that ABC Daytime Vice President Sue Johnson's objective for AMC to "look at characters and how we can make each of those people who they've always been and really redefine them" will take hold at GH soon as well.

Recently, GH has improved on certain fronts, which has caused certain ratings to spike and even hold for a couple of weeks in February. The writers have increased the time the show focuses on the hospital and its staff. There have been more incidents of characters either being at the hospital or of characters whose main focus is storylines involving the hospital. Fans have been requesting for months that the hospital, for which the show is named, be more of a focus of the show. Likewise, the inclusion of the always-intriguing Helena Cassadine character onto the canvas has pointed toward a focus on the historically popular storyline of the Spencer-Cassadine conflict.

Another hit with fans has been that a couple, Carly and Jax, has been shown to be working on holding their marriage and family together. Although neither of them is perfect, and in general one of them is usually hiding something from the other, it is usually in the name of good intentions. Carly has done things knowing Jax would not approve in the name of helping family, and Jax has done things believing, in his own mind, they would be best for Carly and/or his family. Even though these two have had many obstacles in their relationship, fans appreciate that they are one couple that is actually working on their relationship

and not simply throwing it away or giving up on it due to some misguided sense of obligation, danger or comfort.

Another positive change has been that lead character, Sonny Corinthos, is no longer involved in pairings that are not believable and make no storyline sense, such as his pairings in 2009 and early 2010 with Claudia and Olivia. He has become the focus of more compelling, highly promoted, family-oriented storylines. For example, he has been protecting his son, Michael, to keep him from going to jail while also trying to come to grips with the fact that Dante is his son, which he learned after having shot him. There are many interesting components at play within these storylines for not only Sonny, but also for Dante, Morgan, Michael, Lulu, Olivia and Johnny, Carly and Jax, Jason, Jake, Elizabeth and Cameron, as well as many others in Port Charles. The effects of Sonny's actions impact many of Port Charles' residents either directly or indirectly.

Another storyline that has impacted the ratings has been the culmination of the Elizabeth, Nikolas, Lucky triangle. In January 2010, a number of the lowest-rated days included scenes when Elizabeth and Nikolas were together in some 'semi-romantic' manner. Conversely, some of the highest-rated days included scenes when Elizabeth was 'having her breakdown' or when 'Lucky walked in on Elizabeth and Nikolas'. This would seem to indicate that fans were more interested in the ending of this storyline than in the continuation of it, as well as in the more dramatic performances of Rebecca Herbst, Jonathan Jackson, and Tyler Christopher.

While there have been some improvements, GH is still lacking in many areas. In general, soap opera viewers want romance. While the GH of old used to have very popular "supercouples", the current GH focuses more on quirky or odd couples involved in occasional semi-romantic or sleazy scenarios. Viewers want to see rootable romantic couples in sweeping or epic romantic storylines who have happy, humorous, loving moments amidst their daily lives with interesting conflicts. GH would do well to not only focus on their current married couples Patrick and Robin and Jax and Carly, but also on couples who have the potential for compelling storylines and who helped to draw the highest ratings of the last three years, such as Sonny and Kate and Jason and Elizabeth. In January 2008, Sonny's proposal to Kate and the Liz/Jason angst over whether Jason should publicly accept Jake as his son drew the highest ratings for the year and significantly higher than any storyline in 2009 and 2010. In September 2008, the episodes when Kate learned of Sonny's limo sex with Carly and then Sonny won her back and Liz and Jason were reunited as a couple were the highest rated days of the second half of 2008 and 20% to 30% higher than 2009-2010 ratings.

During February sweeps of 2010, the storyline most highly promoted was the Sonny/Dante reveal. While the scenes created compelling drama and were superbly acted by Maurice Benard and Dominic Zamprogna, there were major components of the story missing. Kate, the first Falconeri introduced to the canvas, had a believable love story with Sonny, resulting in a wedding ceremony which introduced her cousin, Olivia, and eventually Dante, to the canvas. The emotional investment for many viewers is not only how the reveal that Dante is Sonny's son would affect them, but also how the revelation that Kate knew Sonny had a son with Olivia would affect their relationship. Rather than adding more layers and depth to the story for Sonny, who is a romantic lead for GH, the Sonny and Kate relationship became non-existent. Rather than drawing in more viewers, the story seemed to be written with obvious disregard for some viewers. Oddly, rather than being part of the Sonny/Dante/Falconeri storyline, Kate is repeatedly mentioned in several episodes a week but is rarely seen on-screen. Since a lead character like Sonny is rarely without a romantic love interest, GH needs to bring back the credibility to his character and the storyline by reuniting him with Kate.

Many viewers have asked for months to see more of their favorite characters who are already part of the GH cast and show's families, including Kate, Matt, Bobbie, and Mike. Kate should be interacting with Olivia and Dante, but to date has not even gone to see Olivia since Sonny found out that Dante is his son, or to see Dante since he was shot by Sonny. Matt, played by a contract actor, has rarely been seen, though he is a doctor at the hospital, the brother of Patrick Drake, and son of veteran character Noah Drake. Bobbie only finally appeared briefly on-screen during the Christening of her granddaughter, having been completely absent during the kidnapping of her daughter and birth of Josslyn. Recently, Mike, Sonny's

father and Michael's grandfather, was beaten, taken to the hospital, and had surgery, but viewers never saw Sonny visit him nor have they seen him in scenes regarding Michael's troubles or Dante's introduction as Sonny's son. These are only some of the omissions of family moments that have been acutely noticed by viewers who value the familial scenes that should be basic on a soap opera.

At the same time that GH has been taking some steps in the positive direction, the show has been seemingly making fun of itself. For example, Sam McCall was supposed to be self-sufficient, have self-respect and be a woman on her own and now she's basically a hypocrite. First she tells her younger sister to not change for any boy, then she tells Kristina that one of the reasons she wears black so much is so that she can assist Jason with his 'breaking and entering' activities. She then warns Ethan away from Kristina, stating that she is the kind of young girl that will change herself to impress a boy she has a crush on. In the very next scene, she tells Jason, whom she waited up all night for, because he never came back to his penthouse, that she will do anything he needs, anytime, no matter what. This after the writers made it clear that she was 'never going to be dependent upon anyone' and 'she had gotten her self-respect back.' The fans of Sam McCall should be outraged by the way that character has been reduced to a needy, clingy, waiting at home for her man, female who's life revolves around Jason's yet again.

Many viewers have also noted that it stretches the credibility of many of the characters to have them frequent an establishment like the dive bar, Jake's, on a regular basis. Professional people have been shown hanging out at the bar. One scene highlighted Dr. Lisa having shots poured into her mouth. What patron and possible patient of GH would want to see the person who could be their surgeon acting like a college freshman? Recently, after finding Patrick spending a little too much time at Jake's, Robin finally said to him that "a little bit of Jake's goes a long way."

For as long as most fans can remember, Lucky Spencer and Jason Morgan have barely tolerated one another on their best days. While Lucky has agreed to be the father of record for Jason's son, Jake, for safety's sake, they have never been close or friendly. However, viewers are suddenly to believe that Lucky will share confidential legal information with Jason regarding cases he is working on or will go out of his way to keep Jason from doing something that might land him in jail. When did this sudden protective friendship occur between Jason and the man who repeatedly reminds him that he is only acting as his son's father, and not so happily at that?

Since June of 2009, the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign and its supporters have shared in the 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. All of these are basic soap staples presented by time-honored soap scribes. According to Sue Johnson, many of these principles are being considered in the revitalization efforts of AMC. Will GH finally do the same for its viewers by going back to its roots and following these basic principles, or will ABC/Disney focus on AMC and ignore months of viewer complaints and declining ratings with regard to GH?

The pattern of ratings peaks and valleys show that there is much potential for growth in the viewing audience of GH and potential in the show itself. Longtime viewers who have quit watching appear to want to return to their regular viewing habits if GH will make the changes needed to portray the characters in a believable and consistent manner. While viewers are willing to occasionally suspend believability or reality, they want real stories that make sense with the characters that are involved. Sadly, plot points and stunts serve only to create a "revolving door" for viewers rather than captivate them on a daily basis.

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 fans of GH by going back to its roots by writing storylines with recognizable characters that new and longtime viewers love to watch, while honoring the history of the characters and the show. 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.