



SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign

GENERAL HOSPITAL RATINGS DECLINE TO A NEW LOW ABC Daytime TV Rejects Viewers' Requests for Greater Integrity and Less Sleaze

As reported by the A.C. Nielsen Ratings Corporation for the week ending June 26, 2009, ratings for General Hospital (GH) fell yet again to a new record low. GH lost more viewers vs. last year than any other soap opera, while other soap operas like the Young & the Restless (Y&R) and Days of Our Lives (DOOL) gained viewers vs. last year.

GH has become a shell of its former self in the all-important women 18-49 demographic, which is highly valued by advertisers. For the corresponding week in 2008, GH ranked #1 in the women 18-34 demographic and was a very close second to Y&R in the women 18-49 demographic (Y&R had 1,024,000 viewers vs. 985,000 viewers for GH), while DOOL was a distant third in the rankings with 729,000 viewers. Versus last year, GH has dropped 27% in the women 18-49 demographic and 33% in the women 18-34 demographic. GH is now a distant third to both Y&R and DOOL (by 273,000 viewers and 80,000 viewers, respectively in the 18-49 demographic) in these two important demographics.

For months viewers have been begging GH to write character-driven story lines, maintain historical integrity, and write less sleaze and more romance. However, ABC Daytime TV continues to deliver stories that focus on the complete opposite--plot-points and more sleaze.

The week prior (June 15- 19, 2009), GH ended Friday's episode with more rough/hate sex between Sonny and Claudia. That "cliffhanger Friday" garnered a low 1.8 rating. The following Monday (June 22, 2009), GH resumed the show with the rough/hate sex between Sonny and Claudia. That scene helped that episode of GH drop to a 1.7 rating.

Compare those ratings to the romantic comedy scenes between Sonny and Kate when Kate took the wrong pill out of Warren's coat pocket and ended up conversing with Sonny about Bensonhurst and Coney Island, finally resulting in her pulling Sonny into a kiss. That "cliffhanger Friday" (July 20, 2007) drew a 2.5 rating with 3,392,000 viewers. The following Monday (July 23, 2007), the scene resumed and led to several more romantic comedy scenes resulting in them having sex, helping that episode spike to a 2.7 rating with 3,613,000 viewers!

Notably, on a "cliffhanger Friday" (September 12, 2008), an angst filled discussion led to an *almost love scene* with Jason and Elizabeth. That episode garnered a 2.4 rating. That scene carried over to the following Monday (September 15, 2008), helping that episode earn an even higher 2.5 rating! Though the scenes were angst-ridden, many viewers had an emotional investment in the romance between these two characters. Obviously, viewers prefer romantic comedy, love and romance to the hate and anger sex that is currently being so highly promoted.

Viewers watch soaps because they are part of a unique genre, one that allows viewers to get to know the characters on a daily basis. Unlike nighttime dramas, or even sitcoms that are televised once a week, soap operas air daily, allowing viewers to become intimately familiar with the characters and their behaviors, personalities, relationships and characteristics over the years that they are watched. When the core of a character, or his or her behavior, is suddenly shifted to a polar opposite, the inconsistency is immediately noticed. Many fans of soap operas have watched since they were much younger, often as long as 20-30

years, therefore, when the integrity of a character is diminished due to inconsistent writing and skewed behaviors, it is immediately recognized. GH's current ratings suggest that viewers are unhappy with the blatant character disintegration and assassination taking place to characters they feel as close to as members of their own families.

When the history of characters and storylines has to be manipulated to tell a new story or make it plausible, then it is not a story that should be told. Viewers of GH, as well as other soap operas, understand that surprises about a character's history will be revealed to garner interest in a storyline. They understand that, sometimes, those surprises change the way one feels about the character or his or her current behavior. However, the current viewers of GH have been subjected to too many rewrites of long- and short-term history to accommodate the acceptance of the vile, immoral characters and/or the new characters being introduced.

Recently the character of Ethan has been added to the canvas and has damaged the historical integrity of the iconic soap couples Luke and Laura and Robert and Holly. Long-time viewers know that Ethan's conception by Luke and Holly does not fit into the timeline of the stories that were presented back then. Additionally it completely disrespects *the most highly rated episode in daytime history* by reducing the love Luke had for Laura by his casual admission to the affair with Holly that led to Ethan's birth.

The rewrite that Alexis slept with the mayor the night she saw Ric and Sam having sex to accommodate a murder mystery for the mayor and his wife does not fit with the timeline of that evening. It is impossible for her to have seen them having sex, leave with Jason to go to the hospital because she was in the throws of lung cancer, go to the Metro Court and be with Sonny and Kristina while eating ice cream during the blackout, then take Kristina back to their hotel room. It simply is not possible or plausible and the viewers know it.

The character of Olivia has damaged the historical integrity of the backstory of Sonny as well as the backstory of Sonny and Kate. When Olivia was first introduced to the canvas, her story seemed to change anywhere from every three days to every several weeks, causing viewers (and it seemed, even the characters) to be confused about her role in Sonny's and Kate's lives. The writers keep trying to make Olivia sound more important to Sonny with each rewrite, though it had been drilled into viewers' heads for a year-and-a-half that Connie/Kate was Sonny's first love and the one he focused his attention on. Even Olivia stated when she first arrived in town that "he was all about Connie back then." (To see commercials that promote Sonny being uncharacteristically jealous of Olivia being with Johnny during the week of these all-time low ratings was a turn-off for many fans.)

Having Elizabeth Webber recently apologize to Lucky Spencer for 'cheating' on him during the night she found him sleeping in their bed, in their apartment, with Maxie Jones completely disputes the months of conversations she had with Lucky, Jason, Sam, Audrey, and even Emily about what happened that evening. She repeatedly told everyone that she believed her marriage was over and that she had no regrets for what ultimately had happened that night between her and Jason (and therefore did not need to apologize for *cheating* on Lucky).

Jason Morgan's character has always been steadfastly clear when it came to those who betrayed him or those he loved. When Robin told AJ about Michael being his son, Jason couldn't forgive her for years. When Ric almost killed Elizabeth and then kidnapped Carly, he never forgave him and has, in fact, harbored an intense hatred for him. When he found out Sam had purposely slept with Ric, he was devastated and, when later he found out she watched his son being kidnapped and then hired men to hold guns on Elizabeth and the boys in the park, he actually threatened her life. To now, merely months later, have him working with her and considering her a friend, goes completely against Jason Morgan's history. Long-time viewers and fans cannot reconcile the completely contradictory behavior with the character.

Additional illustrations of the desecration of historical integrity include the addition of Rebecca as Emily's twin, the introduction of Logan as Scott Baldwin's son, and the illogical revelation that Diego Alcazar was

the text message killer. The overly used method of simply rewriting history to make a storyline's direction more plausible is *anything but* plausible to the viewers and fans of GH.

All of these characters, aside from those who have been killed off, were on-screen the week of June 22-26, 2009. These characters or storylines have become symbols to many viewers of the lack of integrity in the writing, and lack of respect for the show's history and for the viewers themselves who are invested in that history. Every time these characters are on-screen, viewers are reminded that GH does not value its history or its viewers. **Is it any wonder that viewers are tuning out?**

Many viewers who have stopped or reduced their viewing of GH are wondering when ABC/Disney is going to recognize that it is in the business of supplying a product for its customers' enjoyment and the importance of those loyal customers. Viewers have been voicing their concerns about GH 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 writing issues have been allowed to continue. **Why is ABC/Disney allowing an inferior product to continue to be produced and shown on-air?**

Many fans of GH are now 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. The number of fans joining the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign continues to grow every week in support of working for a better General Hospital. For more information on the campaign, contact Dana L. Meyer or Kecia K. Picard at saveoursoapgh@gmail.com or visit the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital page on Facebook.