



CAN GENERAL HOSPITAL BE A VIABLE AND COMPETITIVE SOAP OPERA?
Character Integrity, Historical Integrity and Storyline Continuity Needed
to Improve Quality and Regain the Trust of Viewers

For the week of August 3-7, 2009, in the 18-49 demographic, General Hospital's (GH) numbers declined for the second week in a row to 767,000 viewers, just 2% above its all time low of 751,000 viewers (the week of June 22-26, 2009), 26% below its high this year of 1,030,000 viewers (the week of January 26-30, 2009) and 34% below its 2008 high (the week of January 21-25, 2008).

For the past eight weeks in the ratings race, GH has averaged 789,000 viewers in this demographic compared to 1,080,000 viewers for top-rated soap *The Young & the Restless* (Y&R). Y&R has almost 300,000 more viewers in this important demographic, which is 37% more viewers than GH. Over the same period last year, Y&R averaged 1,073,000 viewers, more than holding their targeted audience, whereas GH averaged 910,000 viewers and lost 121,000 viewers (13%) on average vs. last year in this important demographic.

For GH to be a truly viable and competitive program in the soap arena, management needs to assess why viewers are tuning out in droves and use that data to get back on track. One of the top complaints from many viewers is that many of the lead characters are no longer acting true to character, but instead have undergone 180-degree transformations since the early part of 2009.

Characters like Nikolas Cassadine, Jaspers Jacks, Kate Howard and even Olivia Falconeri are all keeping the secret about Claudia's involvement in Michael's shooting, yet viewers are confused as to why any would want to protect Claudia. Of course the writers have tried to explain each of their motivations, but none of them ring true to the character. Nikolas would have no reason to keep the secret that Claudia was culpable of the shooting that left the nephew of the woman he loved, whose death actually had him ready to commit suicide and leave his own son orphaned, in a coma. Jax keeping the secret for Jerry was completely out-of-character, especially considering he at first had reason to believe Jerry was dead and Jerry himself had left DVDs all over Sonny's home stating his level of involvement with Claudia, which is still confusing since he adamantly refused to have anything to do with the hit, which ultimately was the reason for Ian Devlin being involved in the first place. Kate had no reason not to tell Sonny other than she no longer had proof, but her simply telling him would have caused enough doubt on his part and that of Jason's to have them searching for evidence much sooner. Her desire for revenge changed to a desire to not cause him pain or have him get into trouble for retribution against Claudia, yet she did not change her mind about telling Sonny nor did she turn Claudia in to the authorities, but rather still kept the secret. Olivia's reason for keeping the secret has been a mystery to many, though because it is apparent that the writers like to try to simulate her to be like Kate, the most recent explanation is that she wants to protect Sonny by not having him kill Claudia, but then again her 'behavior and characteristics' seem to change almost weekly.

Another example of the ridiculous character flip is Robin's behavior during the PPD storyline. It was completely realistic for Robin to have resisted the diagnosis and resisted the medication since she is a strong, independent, and often stubborn character. However, to have her running off to another town and basically having an emotional affair and kissing another man is not something Robin would do. Her history with Stone, Jason, and now Patrick shows her as being very monogamous and extremely vocal about her beliefs on cheating and betrayals, therefore believing she would go so far out-of-character is a reach many in the audience simply cannot and will not make.

Likewise, the sons of Luke Spencer, Ethan and Lucky have both shown completely unbelievable behavior characteristics. While Ethan is still a new character, and one whose very presence as Luke's son has wreaked havoc upon the history of GH, he was quickly established as a younger version of Luke. He was supposed to be a charming con man who was only out for himself, using whatever wiles and personal flirtations necessary. However, all of a sudden, he is simply in love with Rebecca, his partner in crime and one reason for coming to Port Charles, and is willing to give up everything, the con included, to be with her. Additionally, Lucky has been against Ethan since his arrival in town, immediately noting his criminal tendencies

and untrustworthiness. He has resisted having any kind of relationship with him and has always been a “by the book” detective, for the most part, his period of drug abuse notwithstanding. However, because they suddenly see 'their' sister with someone they do not approve of, they both start beating the guy up. They are now bonding as siblings and Lucky is completely willing to beat someone up simply because he works for Sonny Corinthos. If that were the case, Lucky and Jason would have had many fights a long time ago. Neither of these behaviors makes sense and neither of the characters even remotely resembles the one the audience has been familiar with.

One of the more obvious character degradations, and one that has been spoken about often by fans, is that of Jason Morgan. The shift in his personality began sometime ago as evidenced by the fact that he would walk away from his family in the first place. Then he allowed the woman he loved, along with her two children, one of which is his son, to be taken to a cabin in the woods with only Lucky Spencer, who he has never thought highly of, and Sam McCall, the woman who betrayed him by putting his son in danger, twice, to protect them instead of having them go to the safehouse he had already set up with guards. The continued sacrificing of his family for safety purposes does not ring true either. After Jake was recovered from his second kidnapping, that he had not been around to protect him from, Jason would have immediately put guards on his family and made sure they were together so that he could protect them. The fact that Jake was supposedly kidnapped due to Jason's relationship with Elizabeth does not in anyway logically lead to Jason distancing himself from them. If the connection is already established and his enemies know, the 'real' Jason would be more determined than ever to keep them closer and protect them himself. Otherwise, why would Carly still need protection now that she is with Jax? Her family, the sons she and Sonny share, whom he renounced legally, should need no other protection if that were the case. Jason's behavior continues to defy logic as he associates with Sam, whom he threatened at one point. She may have saved Jake, but Jason would not have let that erase all the damage done by her when she allowed him to be kidnapped the first time or actually hired thugs to hold him at gunpoint along with his mother and brother simply to prove a point.

Currently the writers are trying to get viewers to believe that Jason would have romantic feelings for Sam after all she has done, and after his repeated declarations of love for Elizabeth and that he would rather be alone if not with her. Many fans who are mothers are not buying that a parent would ever forgive someone who put their child in harm's way so much as to have a relationship with them again--ever. Fans of Jason Morgan, the real Jason Morgan, know that he would not do that either, so they are left to watch this cheap and distasteful imitation on screen all the while wondering what happened to one of their favorite characters and how those in charge could let one of the leading men on GH be so absolutely destroyed.

The character of Sonny Corinthos is also one of the lead male figures of the show. The character has now been part of the canvas for sixteen years. Interestingly his character showed the most growth during the last three-year period, during which he was diagnosed as being bipolar, was re-introduced to his feelings of love for Kate and realized that he wanted to be a better man, the man he wanted to be when he was a teenager still facing his future with his first love, Connie. The character had hit rock bottom in 2008 when his son, Michael, was shot and ended up in what was possibly a permanent coma. With the support of Kate, Sonny made it through some very challenging times, and after making several mistakes that almost cost him a life with Kate, he asked her to marry him.

When Kate was shot at their wedding, Sonny vowed to find Kate's shooter, going so far as to marrying Claudia Zacchara, a woman he hated, to try to find out the identity of the shooter. Instead of creating an intriguing game of cat-and-mouse with Sonny maintaining a clear goal, the writing for the character clouded the reason for Sonny's willingness to marry Claudia. At times, he said it was about business, at times he said it was about finding Kate's shooter, though there seemed to be little follow-through for a while in the investigation, and at times he seemed to be more concerned about whether Claudia knew more about the person responsible for Michael's shooting. He was very suspicious of her on many occasions, but at other times seemed to forget he was suspicious. The character of Sonny and the story lacked focus.

When Claudia told Sonny that Anthony was responsible for Kate's shooting, Sonny did not shoot Anthony, but rather let him go so that Jason could turn him in to the feds. This is exactly what Kate had wanted Sonny to do—let the authorities handle the case. At that point, a dumbed-down Sonny must have decided that all the times Claudia had been searching for something in his house above the mantel and behind the curtains, she must have been searching for Anthony. Suddenly Sonny decided he did not deserve to be with Kate, though he was ultimately able to do the very thing she had requested (not kill Anthony) and decided he deserved to be with someone like Claudia.

Viewers were left to wonder what suddenly caused Sonny to want to punish himself when things were starting to look up for him. Why would Sonny suddenly undergo this 180-degree back flip in his character when Kate was willing to be with him, even though he was back in the mob, and he was able to do the very thing that would make her proud of him? Viewers have had to watch a dark Sonny for months doing things that are totally out-of-character. He has not only regressed in his actions and decisions, but is acting much like he did before he was diagnosed as being bipolar. Many viewers are left to wonder if

Claudia is tampering with his meds, like she did his condoms, or if he has quit taking them. Adding to the confusion was that Sonny would NEVER sleep with a woman whom he suspected of being culpable for Michael's shooting, and had slept with his brother under his own roof and may have been the father of her child. Sonny's behavior has become unwatchable to many viewers, even those who have considered him their favorite character.

Now viewers are more confused by his persistent stalking of Kate's cousin, Olivia. He has told Olivia that she matters and that she mattered when they were younger, even though he made it clear to her back in 2008 that his feelings had only been for Connie and that Connie was the only girl who would have made him want to run away and be out of the mob. He has told Olivia that Kate deserves better than him, which implies that Olivia does not and that he will settle for her. This desire for him to try to "be with" Olivia while Kate, the woman he loves, lives next door and Claudia, his wife who just miscarried his baby, is still living in his home makes Sonny look like a pathetic cad. Viewers know that if he were to decide to leave Claudia, the "real" Sonny would run to Kate's house. Making Sonny look even more ridiculous is that, while stalking Olivia, Sonny has two children on the run and he is not personally out looking for them. Viewers want characters they can root for, but right now, Sonny is a mess and this triangle puts him between two unrootworthy women.

In addition to their favorite characters, couples are a significant draw for many viewers, and since many have admitted that issues with or break-ups of their favorite couples are reasons that they have quit watching, it is only fair to address the issues with couples on GH. Since November of 2008, several viable couples were broken apart due to the 180-degree transformations of one or both of the characters involved. Since the transformations made no sense, the break-ups made no sense. When the characters were true to themselves while paired with certain people, and are now acting totally out-of-character while paired with others, viewers have the right to take exception to the new pairings.

The SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign believes the following couples are viable couples whom many fans have expressed interest in seeing together on-screen. Two of the following couples were split apart but have reunited since November of 2008, one is currently engaged, and others have experienced nonsensical break-ups due to unexplained character transformations while the individual characters within those pairings are suddenly not even allowed to have scenes together.

Carly and Jax have become a prime example of a married couple that works together through their problems. Both characters can carry a story aside from them being part of a couple. Jax is a corporate raider whose storyline opportunities can expand on an international level. Carly is a businesswoman and a mother, and is the daughter of a legacy character, Bobbie Spencer. They are currently working on expanding their family with the impending birth of their first baby. Carly has shown much growth while married to Jax and Carly brings out the romantic in Jax. Hopefully the secret that Jax has kept regarding Claudia will not break them apart.

Patrick and Robin are another example of a married couple, with a family that supports one another. They are two married doctors who work at the hospital for which the show is named. They work together, and argue together, over medical cases, and have a baby together. Patrick is the son of legacy character Noah Drake and Robin is the daughter of legacy characters Robert Scorpio and Anna Devane. Fortunately, while many fans were upset by Robin's completely out-of-character behavior while experiencing the extreme, and in some cases unbelievable, symptoms of PPD, they were not torn apart and remain a couple that the audience can root for.

A unique couple on the canvas is Spinelli and Maxie, who are currently engaged. Many movies have been based on the premise, and been successful, because viewers love to see a story where the "geek" gets the "it" girl. Maxie has grown as a character and has fallen in love with her best friend. Both were raised by surrogate family members--Spinelli by his grandmother and Maxie by her Uncle Mac. Maxie has gone from begrudgingly volunteering in the hospital to embracing her job with Kate at Crimson, which has resulted in her being promoted due to her passion and talent for her job. Spinelli came on the scene as a computer hacker working for Mob Boss Louis Alcazar, who's speech patter was barely understandable to being saved and befriended by Jason Morgan, whom he has helped in saving countless Port Charles residents, and now has a PI license and is partner in his own PI firm.

These characters came together through stressful circumstances and could barely stand to be in the same room, much less have any feelings for one another. They were both reeling from the death of Maxie's sister, Georgie Jones (who's death much of the audience still does not understand), and decided to work together, albeit begrudgingly, to find the killer. Their relationship is unique in that it does not follow the usual good guy/bad girl rule because Spinelli is/was for all intents and purposes a "bad guy" because he worked for Jason Morgan. They are also not the usual bad guy/bad girl/self-destructive couple. Their pairing embodies what many fans want in a soap opera couple--humor, differences that challenge the other and themselves, personal history that is similar but not entirely the same, growth as characters and as a couple, and friendship and love. Does the audience dare hope that they will remain together or is it more likely that one or both of them will suddenly

change in some way that makes no sense and therefore tears them apart for no apparent reason?

Sonny and Kate are an example of a couple that has great potential if reunited. Not only do they have a shared history of teenage first love, they have shown that they can make it through some very tough and troubling times. Sonny and Kate bring out the best in each other. Kate brings out the lighter side of Sonny, and Sonny tears down the walls that Kate has built up around her heart and brings out her warmer side. When together, she brings him hope. They are fiery, flirty, classy, comedic, sexy and dramatic. They have shown that they love each other unconditionally and have shown each other forgiveness, a trait that was not always easy for Sonny. Not only do these two have great potential as a couple, they have great potential as individual characters with Sonny's family and mob-related business issues, and Kate's career aspirations and Crimson. Sonny Corinthos is now a sixteen-year veteran character and Kate's history with him helps to give these a two a solid foundation on the canvas. Many viewers feel that this is a pairing to root for, yet these two characters are not even allowed to have scenes together. Instead Sonny is written out-of-character and caught between two unrootworthy women and Kate gets very little screen time. Many viewers are hoping that the writers will let Sonny and Kate jump this hurdle by seeing the potential in not only exploring more of their backstory, but also their present and future.

Lucky and Sam are two lost souls that had both made huge mistakes, alienating family members in the process, but who had grown together and have now reconnected with their families. These two have great potential as a couple and would be a great force together as a PI and a detective on the police force. Sam is the PI that is willing to go on the outside of the law if necessary to get the job done, while Lucky is the detective who prefers to stay within the confines of the legal system due to his youth spent on the run with his parents, Luke and Laura, who were generally investigating something on their own, often outside of the law. Lucky and Sam both share certain childhood characteristics that help them understand one another, empathize with one another, and obviously helped them work together successfully when trying to find Luke in Mexico. As a couple, it is a given that at times their investigations might conflict, and fans want that. Fans want characters that challenge one another, but support one another at the same time. They have shown they can be fun and charismatic in adventures together as well as passionate and loving. However, and for reasons unknown, their pairing was abruptly torn apart. It was like a wild ball into left field and fans are now left wondering what happened to the tenderness they shared when, on the rare instances they do run into each other in Port Charles, they act as if they were ever barely more than acquaintances. Add to that the fact that Lucky is a member of the legacy Spencer family and Sam is a member of the historic Cassadine family, whose two families have traditionally been at war with one another, along with the fact that Lucky is the brother of Sam's cousin, Nikolas Cassadine, and you have a couple with many possibilities. There are multiple opportunities for outside forces to cause problems for them to overcome together while their very nature and careers would inspire passionate differences for fans to become engaged and invested in.

Johnny and Lulu are a young couple that has been broken apart for reasons unknown. Both characters were unsure of themselves when they met, but matured significantly through circumstances they went through together and are now both maturing even more as individuals. Lulu Spencer is the daughter of Luke and Laura Spencer. She grew up much of her life feeling that she was unwanted by the father she idolized and was virtually in the middle of many the Spencer-Cassadine conflicts since Nikolas Cassadine is her brother, who's grandmother, Helena, has a long-standing disgust for the Spencers. Johnny is the younger child of Anthony Zacchara, who grew up feeling suffocated by the love his monster of a father had for him and the knowledge that his mother was killed while protecting him from his father. They both had difficult childhoods and, as a result, dealt with those conflicts in unhealthy and self-destructive ways, that is, until they met one another. They were immediately drawn to one another and, while they tried to resist their attraction, they could not.

Now, Johnny is really working at leaving or at least distancing himself from the mob family he grew up in, while Lulu is taking her job at Crimson more seriously and dressing the part. These two, who were on their way to becoming mature adults in an impassioned relationship, showed great potential but were suddenly torn apart. Johnny has suddenly become enamored with an older woman who is not only old enough to be his mother, but by her own admission, does not want anything to do with the mob and therefore offers no possibility of a future with him. Many fans find this to be completely uncharacteristic of Johnny and a foul on the part of the writing staff. Lulu seems to be developing an attraction for newcomer Dante, who is in fact the son of the woman with which Johnny is teaming up. Many fans are simply crying foul at the destruction of not only a couple with great possibilities who have already been through so much together, but also at the complete about-face these characters themselves seem to have taken.

Jason and Elizabeth are a couple that share a ten-year history and who's characters have a much longer and richer history than many left on the screen. They have been together as friends and as lovers. Jason, who is the youngest son of Alan Quartermaine and Monica Quartermaine, who is his adoptive mother but has loved him as her own almost since their first meeting when he was a baby, is definitely a legacy character and one of the leading men on General Hospital. He has gone from being the "Golden Boy of the Quartermaine clan" to the "Mob Enforcer with a heart of gold." Through all of his transformations, he's remained steadfast in his characteristics and beliefs. If you're his friend, he will support you

completely. If you betray him, it is not forgiven, but on the rare occasion when it is, the prior relationship is never the same. Evidence of this is in his histories with Robin and Carly.

Elizabeth Webber is the youngest daughter of Jeff Webber and the granddaughter of Steve and Audrey Hardy, again unequivocally a legacy character. She came to Port Charles twelve years ago as a troubled teen who was literally dumped on her grandmother's doorstep as her parents abandoned her to be doctors in another part of the world, went through some horrible and life changing events and came out an independent, mature adult with a career. Through it all she has been strong and fiercely supportive and loyal to those she cares about, sometimes to her own detriment. Evidence of this are her second marriages to Ric Lansing and Lucky Spencer. Elizabeth and Jason met as simply a girl who was the best friend of his sister and the boy who was brother of her best friend. Their relationship became more when Elizabeth was one of the few people the often silent Jason Morgan felt comfortable talking with about having given up 'his son', Michael, so he could be with his father, and Jason's brother AJ, without putting the child through all the turmoil of family fighting. They grew when Jason saved Elizabeth after a particularly self-destructive night at Jake's bar after the love of her life, Lucky Spencer, had died, and became 'more than friends' when Elizabeth found Jason shot in the snow and against his wishes got him help and took him back to her studio to nurse him back to health and keep him away from those he did not want near. She vehemently protected him and their friendship from everyone that challenged her. Over the years their relationship grew to more than either of them could or would admit. There were often times when they were on the very edge of admitting their feelings and giving in to their fears of those feelings only to be pulled back by outside forces and circumstances, sometimes to the extent of almost being enemies. But, through it all, they were supportive of one another when it was necessary. When Elizabeth was in the hospital, Jason was at her side. When Emily was dying from cancer, Elizabeth was with Jason. Regardless of whatever current animosities there may have been, their underlying connection was never broken.

After years of the push and pull and life circumstances that kept them apart, they finally admitted their feelings for one another and even had a child together. There were more hurdles for them to get over and hoops for them to get through, but once again, their connection was always there and their love was never wavering. Just as they were on the verge of becoming a family, another horrific incident occurred to tear them apart but they eventually, again, worked their way back to one another. However, in November of 2008, both characters suddenly changed into unrecognizable and poor imitations of those fans have grown to know over the 10+ years they each been on-screen. Elizabeth suddenly became meek and no longer fought for herself or her children. She let others make decisions that impacted their safety and then settled for a loveless yet, and this is arguable, "safer" relationship with the man she admitted she no longer loved.

Jason also allowed others to make decisions that he would have never agreed to with regard to the safety of his family which then caused him to second guess his ability to protect them and eventually sacrifice his happiness for their own, all while suddenly becoming friends again with the woman who betrayed him worse than anyone in his past. This pair has the potential to not only bring together two legacy families and further the rich and beloved history of General Hospital, but they embody the wishes of many fans who want family and couples with long histories and foundations to build upon. They have an undeniable connection and loyalty to one another, a love that neither has shown with anyone else, and when together Elizabeth makes Jason believe he deserves to be happy and have a family and Jason unconditionally supports Elizabeth and reinforces her strength. This is what many fans have been clamoring for.

Each of these couples has great storyline potential based on their unique dynamics, their ties to each other and to legacy families, and the fact that, as individual characters, they can also be showcased in storylines of their own. Each of them has the potential to go the distance if the writers would simply write character-driven storylines for them. The roar of the crowd would be deafening and ratings would rebound faster, higher and stronger than they have in many months.

Viewers have noticed that, not only are their favorite veteran characters often acting out-of-character and that their favorite couples have been separated, but many of their favorite characters are getting less screen time. Many new characters have taken over the canvas.

In a sea of "newbie" characters that seem to be receiving mixed reviews at best, one new character that stands out in a positive way is Dante. His ability to create a stir and his quick wit through the dialogue and story he is given remind many people of Sonny and...Kate! Many viewers are now speculating that perhaps there will be an interesting twist in which it will be revealed that Kate is actually the mother of Dante, rather than this just being a standard, predictable "boy gets girl pregnant" storyline with Sonny and Olivia.

Are the writers on their game and creating a twist based on the established history of Sonny and Kate, and on the clues and cues given throughout 2007 and early 2008 that suggested Kate may have had a child and some dark years in her past, instead of the predictable story based on some of the rewrites that have caused many viewers to be confused and bored and finally tune out? If the story were written where Kate thought her baby had died and Olivia ended up raising the child, both Sonny

and Kate would be dealing with learning they had a living son together. Since Olivia keeps showing that she wants to be more like Kate by moving out of the old neighborhood to Port Charles and has been manipulating Kate away from Sonny and Sonny away from Kate, it would not be shocking to find out that she was so obsessed about having Sonny's child that she was willing to raise the one that Kate had with Sonny and had kept it a secret from her. If Sonny and Kate were to find out that they were both the parents of Dante, Megan Ward and Maurice Benard would hit those scenes out of the park. Sonny, Kate and Dante would all get to be in interesting scenes showing how they feel about Olivia's deceit and how they feel about each other.

Another newer character that many enjoy is Matt Hunter. He is the half-brother of Patrick Drake and a neurosurgeon, like his half-brother and father, legacy character Noah Drake. It was invigorating to see a new character that appeared to be significant actually be involved with the very hospital for which the show is named. It was intriguing to watch the relationship between Matt and Patrick grow and see how Matt's arrival in Port Charles affected the often-strained relationship between Patrick and Noah. Once the brothers accepted one another as individuals and then finally as family, viewers were thrilled to see the camaraderie and affection that grew between not only the two brothers, but between Matt and Robin as well. It was refreshing to see the hardened, arrogant neurosurgeon become a softer, loving uncle when Emma was born and then a concerned and supportive brother and brother-in-law when Robin was going through the PPD. However, the administration of ABC Daytime and GH has apparently forgotten about Matt, or has developed tunnel-vision by giving screen-time to the same four or five actors, not even realizing that the murder mystery storyline currently going on originally had Matt placed so decidedly in its forefront. He was the principle reason for Patrick and Robin's involvement in suddenly becoming amateur PIs, yet he has not been seen since he was absolved of any wrongdoing.

Unfortunately, there are other new characters that have not been so well received and much of that has to do with the fact that the writers of GH have made rewriting history par for the course. Two current and on-going examples are storylines that include the characters Ethan and Olivia. The addition of Ethan has created havoc on the histories of Luke and Laura and Robert and Holly and the stories surrounding them. The addition of Olivia has created a tear in the backstory of Sonny as an individual, the backstory of Kate as an individual and the backstory of Sonny and Kate as a couple.

The introduction of Rebecca Shaw has also not been received as favorably as one would assume management had hoped. Having yet another character that is the 'unknown twin sister' of a dead character is unimaginative and simply annoying. Why kill off the character in the first place to only bring the actor or actress back as an unknown twin later? Fans do not want new characters played by the same actor when its obvious the executives made a mistake by getting rid of the 'character' in the first place. The writers should simply let the character grow in a different direction or have an incident cause the change, much like the horrible accident that occurred to Jason Quartermaine that resulted in the birth of Jason Morgan. Additionally, to make Rebecca's storyline plausible, the history of Emily and between Emily's mother and Monica has been re-written, thereby once again proving to fans that the writers either do not remember the history or simply do not hold historical integrity to the same importance as a gold medal that should be respected.

The blatant rewrites and shifts in characterization have caused many viewers to cry foul. Instead of writing interesting twists within real stories, the writing feels more like a vicious attack on the characters and on the viewers who have been invested, who now feel frustrated and betrayed by the writing on the show. Most viewers will invest if something is added to the past of a character, but for a story or character to make a total 180-degree turn-around is confusing and often unacceptable to viewers, causing many to finally tune out. They do not want to watch as the writers randomly change the characters and their storylines. **If the writers have to change the core of a character or the history of a character to accommodate a new storyline or new character, then this form of cheating should make the point that the story is not meant to be told.**

Viewers want to be able to relate to the characters and understand their motivations, so when these 180-degree transformations are made, viewers no longer feel connected and are no longer invested in the outcome. As one fan noted, "With all the rewrites and the 180-degree changes in several of the characters, I feel like I am playing on the higher scoring team in a basketball game where the teams go to the locker room at half-time and the referee comes to say that the rules have now changed and the team with the lower number of points will now win at the end of the game. It is frustrating and confusing. At that point, why bother watching and becoming invested? I don't enjoy watching the show anymore."

Many argue that the genre itself is simply losing viewers and therefore poorer ratings are, for lack of a better term, par for the course. However, while the viewing audience has decreased, as recently as November of 2008, Y&R scored a 4.1 for a single episode. Likewise, they have basically held their targeted women 18-49 audience numbers in the past 8 week period as shown by comparing the 2008 numbers to the 2009 numbers (1,073,00 and 1,080,000 on average, respectively) This strongly suggests that the audience is there. Either they simply are no longer watching GH, or they have switched to Y&R to make up for any losses Y&R had, or Y&R simply has not had the losses in the first place.

One of the reasons for this could be the stark difference in the points-of-view between the 'Creative Consultants' responsible for both shows, Mr. Brian Frons (GH/ABC) and Ms. Maria Arena Bell (Y&R/CBS). Each of them recently granted interviews and it was astounding to read the differences between the two. Mr. Frons' interview with the Wall Street Journal came across as detached and unfeeling with regard to the soap genre as a whole and to the downfall of the longest running soap opera, Guiding Light, specifically. Many of the comments left online by readers of the article, and fans of General Hospital and ABC's soap operas in general, related their disbelief and displeasure. A large number remarked that they were surprised that someone with what appears to be such a cold and cavalier attitude toward the genre upon which his career is based is not only employed by a company with the perception of customer loyalty and happiness, but is actually entrusted with running a division specifically designed to bring in profit for ABC and Disney.

Conversely, the article by Ms. Bell with Nelson Branco of TV Guide Canada, was refreshing and warm in her concern over the industry and the other shows within the genre. She evoked a feeling of real sadness for the loss of Guiding Light. Her statements reflecting the ideology that soap operas should tell good stories all year and not reduce themselves to stunts and short-term storylines for sweeps ratings periods echoes the sentiments of many supporters of the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign. She reiterated the rules of Douglas Marland that those in charge of the show should listen to the audience and to the actors when writing and planning the storylines and to do what works without personal agendas involved. Basically, she spoke what many fans wish were the sentiments of executives at ABC/Disney, ABC Daytime and, more specifically, at General Hospital.

GH needs someone at the helm who has a passion for the soap genre and sees the potential of the show. ABC/Disney has always had a reputation among its consumers for creating a quality product. Viewers have to wonder why Disney is willing to let GH be presented below the Disney standard. Simply put, viewers will tune in if a show is well-written with characters they can enjoy and relate to. Sadly, GH is missing the mark. Viewers are left to wonder why, at a time when more viewers are home and crave the type of escape that soap operas can offer, management is setting GH up for the possibility of cancellation while possibly helping set the entire soap genre up for extinction.

At this stage of the game, the writers need to tackle the real issues by making strides to regain the trust of the viewers by writing the characters true to themselves with plausible explanations within the stories as to why these characters were so off the mark and focusing on the historical integrity of the show. Viewers want to see characters and couples they can root for and relate to within storylines that are not dropped, but maintain a sense of continuity. GH needs to showcase many different types of characters, not just the sleazier ones. Management needs to raise the bar by creating a quality product by emphasizing character-driven storylines, character growth and development, historical continuity/integrity, respect for the characters, emotional balance for characters and storylines, focus on families, enduring couples that viewers can root for, less sleaze, more romance and humor, and an overall enjoyable escape. These principles would help to get GH back on track and help to make GH not only a viable, but competitive program. In the long run, not only would the viewers win, but the advertisers, the actors, the crew, GH and ABC/Disney would win.

It is sad that viewers have to fight for what was once good about GH. Fans contact ABC and Disney 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). Many are jumping on board the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital Campaign because they are frustrated and want to see GH be successful and become the quality show it once was.

Every week, more and more fans 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 break GH of its losing streak by making the changes needed to make GH the quality show it once was and can become again, as well as making it a viable show that is not only competitive, but a winner in the ratings and rankings! For more information regarding 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 or visit the new the SOS/Save Our Soap! General Hospital website at www.saveoursoapgh.com.