

Erika's World

Off the Cuff

Nov 23, 2009

Erika Slezak
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Founded

January 1972

Dear Friends,

What can I say – I agree with everyone who thought that the Mayoral storyline was a gigantic bust! There was practically no story for Erika to speak about, and I felt it was brought to an abrupt end, almost as if they didn't know what to do with this story. And my gosh – this story, with two characters like Viki and Dorian, had endless possibilities! In any event, I'm glad Roscoe Born is back on the show. He is such a terrific villain, and I'm hoping that we get some scenes with Viki and Mitch.

Erika did a fabulously candid interview with Michael Fairman, who has been a huge supporter of Erika for years. Please pass this on to your fellow Erika fans, as it is the most insightful chat with Erika that I've seen in a long time! Here's what Michael has to say:

FYI – Advocate.com just posted live my new interview with One Life to Live's Erika Slezak.

She discusses: Viki and Dorian's election outcome; Jared's death and Charlie's falling apart; gay rights; Viki's DID; and the Kish (Kyle and Fish) storyline as well.

http://advocate.com/Arts_and_Entertainment/Television/Viki_Victorious/

There's not much more to report, but let's hope Erika's airtime picks up really soon!

Talk to you around the holidays!

Walter

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Telephone Interview November 16, 2009

The last time we talked for the newsletter was in June and so much has happened. First, how are you doing? I seem to be ok, thank you!

What did you do over your vacation? We sort of hung around and didn't go anywhere, and then Michael went back to England in September, so we didn't go anywhere.

Was that for schooling? No, he's looking for work there.

Is he still there? Yes, he is still there.

Any luck? And will he be home for Thanksgiving? No job so far, but you know, the economy is just starting to pick up everywhere, so we have good thoughts. And no, he will not be home for Thanksgiving because it is too expensive, but he will be home for Christmas.

Did you get a chance to go to Vermont? Yes, we spent some time there, but not a lot. The summer kind of vanished – and we had weird weather too.

Let's start with the big news that All My Children is moving to Los Angeles – how did you hear about that and what were your thoughts? Well actually, Frank Valentini, our producer, called me after Brian Frons had made the announcement and said, "I just want to let you know that All My Children is moving to California, and we are moving to their studio." And I thought, "Well that is very nice because it is a much bigger studio and there are many more dressing rooms so people will not have to share, although that is not a hardship, but it is nice to have privacy. And there are windows there, as opposed to our building." And then I thought,

"I'm a little sad because I really like our building. It's been home for 20 some odd years, and I like it."

It's a homey feeling. We're a small group and we are not very spread out. Everybody sees everybody down in the hallways and in the dressing room corridors, and I think the bigger studio is not quite that warm, although I must say, I've only ever been there twice, and that was a long time ago – you know I might be completely mistaken about that.

a viki moment to remember



Viki and Mitch 2009

They did The View there – was that when you were there? That's a different studio. They are in the same building but in a different studio.

That's where – on the West End? It's beyond the West End and over by Riverside Boulevard and the gorgeous Trump Place buildings.

Oh sure, nice area. Yes, it is down by the river, so it's going to be cold there!

Now when will you guys be moving? They don't know yet – the end of January or early February is what we have been told. There is no specific date yet for us, but Children I know is moving December 11th – their last shoot date. I think that is a Friday. They have apparently already started moving some things out to California.

What would you have done if One Life to Live had moved out there? Oh, I would have gone. I like California – it's warm! I know you can fall into the ocean and stuff like that, but it's warm. I would have gone, and besides you don't really have a choice – when you have a contract, they

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say you will go wherever the show is produced, and I understand that. You know they have to do it that way, and that is OK. (Asst. Editor's Note: Yep, nice and warm and no chunks have fallen into the ocean!!)

Now there was a big rumor about One Life to Live being cancelled. It was a rumor, and as far as I know it's still just a rumor, although I haven't heard it recently. And my feelings are that they would not spend the money to move us (because it is not going to be inexpensive to do so), if they were just going to cancel us. What's the point of spending all of the money to move us and then say, "OK you are off of the air."

I have no idea, as nobody talks about it, and nobody gives us any specific answers, which makes sense because it's probably not true.

Well Frank denied the rumors didn't he? I haven't spoken to him about it, but I'm sure he did, because I don't think they are true.

Initially we were told that the studio would be fitted for HD filming. Has that been scrapped? Yes that has been scrapped because that is very expensive to do, and ABC doesn't want to cough up that kind of money right now. And that makes sense, because they've cut everybody's salaries trying to save money, so there you go.

Now it seems most everyone has these huge TV screens where so much more detail is seen on tape. Have they switched to different makeup or filming techniques to improve the end product? Not in our studio because we are not in HD yet. If we were in HD, I think they would have to change a lot of the makeup. It would be much lighter because you would see everything, and it would have to be less obvious.

What is the largest TV screen you have seen yourself on? Probably 110 inches.

I remember that those screens at Super Soap at Disney World were big. Yes, I think the screen where they do the interviews would have to be the biggest.

It was really surprising to see the broader news organizations reporting on the breakdown in contract negotiations between Eric Braeden and The Young and the Restless. Did you keep up with any of it? No, I didn't at all.

It seems like he is back again. Well yes, Paul Rauch is one of the executive producers of that show and Paul is a very smart man – I think that he was not going to let Eric Braeden go if he needed him, and apparently he needed him. There you go.

I'll tell you, Eric Braeden is very important to that show. Is he?

Yes, he has been off for almost a month now and you can tell a huge difference in story and direction and the whole bit. OK.

We just saw scenes of yours that were taped outside. You find the car, talk to Jessica, and then run to the greenhouse to see Mitch. How do they go about taping those scenes? Did you take a bus together to get there? We shot it in a very pretty nursery in New Jersey, actually. We met in the afternoon and it was all shot at night with lighting – and it was brilliantly done by Larry Carpenter and Bob Bessoir and our assistant directors and everybody. It was really a well-done remote, and I was out of there at 11 o'clock at night, but others stayed until about 2 in the morning because they had to continue shooting. They all went on a big bus from the city, but because I was coming from Connecticut, I asked if I could just meet them

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there, and they were fine with that, so I just drove myself.

What part of Jersey? Hmm...I don't know, some part of New Jersey – somewhere in the middle I think – about an hour outside of New York City. It's kind of a well-known name – I don't know, I can't remember...somewhere out there.

There was a casting change this summer with the character of Carlotta. Have you worked with the new Carlotta (Sandra Santiago), and have you talked to Patricia Mauceri? I have not talked to Patricia, but I have worked with Sandra, who is absolutely wonderful and delightful and happy to be here, which is always a good thing. Patricia had very strong feelings about a certain subject matter, and frankly when you sign a contract to do a show, you can't put your own opinions on that. She was playing a character, and even though she said that she had created the character because she was the original person who played her, the writers actually created "Carlotta" and ABC owns the character, so they essentially can make you do, or ask you to do anything they want you to do. Her personal beliefs about certain subjects really cannot enter into it if she wants to keep her job. Patricia is missed, obviously, but I think she knew what she was doing when she chose to leave rather than play something that she personally didn't believe in.

Gina Tognoni is coming back to the show! I hear that she will be playing Kelly again, and I'm very excited!

Have you talked to her? Has she started taping yet? No, she hasn't started taping yet, but I think she does in January.

Also, Dan Gauthier (Kevin) was back for a few episodes. I know, and I didn't see him –

not once! I wasn't involved in those scenes and he was shooting at a different time than I was.

It sounds like they may be bringing him back permanently? I would love that but I have not heard that – I would love it – I love that man. And besides that, he is a splendid actor. I think he is missed and I think his presence on the show is important

It is – I mean you have 2 sons that should be back on the canvas. There you go – hello?

There has been an interesting twist...it seems like this new character Kim (the stripper from Vegas) is going to hook up with Clint – like Asa did with Mimi and Alex. Have you taped much with them? I have never even met her. I know she is on the show and her name is Amanda Setton, but I have not even met her because we have not been in the building at the same time. I don't know where they are going with this story, but apparently she is going to have something to do with Clint. I think that she is a good-bad girl or a bad-good girl and she is going to be involved with Clint somehow.

I realize this is not really a question Erika can answer, and it's probably not appropriate for the newsletter, but I just wanted to express my disgust with the non-campaign for Mayor that OLTL didn't write for Erika. It was a storyline rife with possibilities of tension and dredging up the past between Viki and Dorian and they never once even appeared in public together to have it out. Why bother to put the two of them in a race against each other if they don't have any scenes together? And why can they write story after story for Dorian and only have Viki wringing her hands over her daughters' lives? I am so fed up. I honestly have only been watching this show for years now because of my loyalty to Viki

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and Erika. But it gets tougher and tougher to hang on. Your thoughts? I can't answer that – I don't write the show – they do. And they decided that I would run for Mayor and that's how they handled it.

Was it originally planned differently? No.

When Mitch came in, or when they knew he was coming back, then they sort of wrapped this thing up very fast. At least, from watching, that's how I'm taking it. I don't actually know what was planned. I think they always knew that they were bringing Mitch in so maybe the whole thing was planned to be wrapped up right around when Mitch was there. I don't know, I can't answer that question because I am not the writer.

Well, we know Viki wins and then I guess she hands it over to Dorian – but it really seems like it had good potential and then they lost it. It did, and I think they wrapped it up very quickly and glossed over a lot of it, but that was in the interest of touting a bigger story

Another fan writes, I was disappointed in the mayoral race, as I thought this was going to be a great story for you, and OLTL really dropped the ball. Why did Viki and Dorian not have more story together, more interaction, more scenes, more use of history? Viki was like a nonentity in this race..... [Walt - well again, you are not the writer.] That's the answer – I am not the writer.

Well people were and are upset – I'm not going to read anymore of these questions and there were a lot of them Yes, I understand, but there's nothing I can do about it.

What's with the bait and switch all the time regarding Viki and Charlie. With great fanfare in the magazines both Ron Carlivati and Frank Valentini touted this wonderful story

for BOTH Dorian and Viki [Walt – a lot of people are upset Erika!] and we hoped Charlie would have played a major part in this. Do you think Frank and Ron realize that fans get pissed off and they turn off with what they do to your character? I'm sure they are aware of audience reaction. I can't tell them what to write or how to write it.

I know that these are not easy to discuss, and it puts you in an uncomfortable position, but do you think you'll be getting some sort of story? Will I be getting a story? You got me. I'm afraid I really don't know. I know that I am not working a lot these days but that doesn't mean anything because then you come in and do six shows in one day. So, I really don't know.

How do you think OLTL can win back fans? [Walt – well you know what I would say, give you more stuff to do!] But you know you are biased. I think they should do what they are doing – you can't have everybody front and center all of the time. Apparently the audience is enjoying what is going on because the numbers are pretty good. I don't know, see, I'm not a writer.

I know – but you sense our frustration. Yes.

With Jared claiming that his father had murdered someone, will Jared's death have a big impact on Viki/Charlie? Will Charlie turn to the bottle for comfort or Viki? (HOPEFULLY Viki?!?!) You are going to have this big reaction to it and I'm not going to tell you what it is. There is a very huge reaction.

There were rumors that they were writing Charlie out – is that true? No – well, not that I've heard – I don't think so.

Well, you guys have a lot of fans together.

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I love the dynamic between you and Roscoe, and your scenes are electrifying. Does Viki have more story with Mitch? I've only had a couple of scenes with him, but I think there will be more in the future.

I'm sure everyone is thinking this one, but how does Erika feel about having Roscoe Born back as Mitch? I love him – he's a wonderful actor, he's a delightful man, and I enjoy working with him as it's very creative and very interesting. And he's just the best villain ever! He's just a very creepy, evil villain.

He's wonderful – he's almost spooky to watch! That's how good he is. He is and that is what makes him such a good villain.

Is Niki Smith coming back? No – but you know I must tell you I have not had any kind of conversation with Ron in awhile – you know, we see each other and say hello – he's busy and I've been busy so I don't know what they are doing or where they are going -- I haven't read anything -- I haven't heard anything – but you never know.

We can hope!

We love your hair long – are you going to keep it that way? Yes, I like it longer.

Do you watch the finished (aired) episodes that you and Mr. Kerwin have done? It seems like your scenes (together or separately) are shorter than the EP gives to day players. Several times, bits of your work together are shown on OLTL's ABC Daytime's "More One Life To Live" even when the finished scenes ended up being extremely short. Did you know that? No, I didn't know.

What would be your reaction if you were to find out that they were getting rid of Charlie

in order to force a reunion with Clint? Most online fans and their offline friends have been very upset that this might happen. Viki and Charlie are a very popular, and beloved couple. Do you think this would ever happen? You are asking me all of the wrong questions (laughs). I can't answer that – I don't see anything like that happening in the near future. But again, I don't write the show, so I don't know. I don't know where they are going. Frankly, I adore Brian Kerwin and I adore Jerry Ver Dorn so I would not want to lose one in favor of the other – I want to keep them both.

Does OLTL still have a continuity person? I don't know.

[Ed. Note: Walt thinks Margo Husin is still continuity script supervisor.]

You are, without a doubt, the most talented performer in daytime. I have been a fan of yours for over 30 years, and it saddens me that those who write for OLTL can't seem to keep you in the forefront where you belong. I always look forward to the episodes where you are featured, especially those shows where you offer your children some advice or a shoulder. How do you feel about Jessica and Natalie each being widowed in less than a year and a half? It's a soap opera. I was sorry that John Brotherton (Jared) had to go.

You know, it really bothered me. It kicks off a whole other story but I was very sorry to see him go. He is just a delightful young man and very good. And I think Missy [Natalie] was very sad about that. That's the second husband she's had die on her.

Well I think they want to get her and John back together. Oh, I don't know.

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Do you go to church on Sundays? I do, every Sunday.

With the holidays coming up, do you have a favorite cookie recipe, and do you bake? No, I don't make cookies. It's the one thing I don't do. I love to cook – I do not bake.

What is the funniest rumor that you've ever heard about yourself? I don't hear a lot of rumors about myself – I hear rumors about other things. Last summer there were all of these rumors that I was leaving show and I have to wonder where they come from because I never said it, ABC never said it, and no one ever said it! I am just stunned sometimes at the things that appear, and how they spread, and it was total nonsense, and there was no question that I was leaving. Never. It's absurd.

Well, we're glad to hear that it wasn't true. No.

What is the strangest thing that you've ever had to do as Viki? The strangest was when I was in the coffin on my way into the crematorium...did not like that at all.

Yes, I remember that – you were so closed in. Yes, fortunately our stage manager at the time, Ray Hoesten, was incredibly sensitive to that. I'm not claustrophobic like Robin is (Robin is personally very claustrophobic.), but the idea of being in a coffin with the lid down – not nice. So Ray would literally hold it open until the very last second – he would have two or three fingers in there – then he would drop it and they would have just the briefest, shortest little scenes, and as soon as the scene was over he would fling it open. It was never locked or anything like that. I think the longest I was in there was when I was screaming, "Let me out, let me out."

I think they would take the lock off to prevent anything from happening. Yes, I think the

longest I was in there was when I was knocking on the inside saying, "Let me out, let me out." But yes, that's probably the creepiest thing I've ever had to do.

You know, he was a good villain – Jamie Sanders (played by Mark Philpot in the mid-80's). They should bring him back. Yes he was.

How long does it take you to read your fan mail? (laughs) – It depends on how much fan mail I get. I read all of the letters.

Have you ever gotten one of the "Hallmark" cards that sing? Yes – and they are very cute.

What's your favorite winter food or winter-themed adult beverage? Winter adult beverage? Not necessarily for winter – I'm not big on Hot Toddlies and stuff like that.

Do you like the coffee drinks? Yes, I guess Irish Coffee. I've not had it a lot – but yes they are good.

In the 70's you did an off-Broadway show with Brian, called The Circle. In that play was Natalie Schafer who was famous for her role as Mrs. Howell in Gilligan's Island. What was it like working with Natalie? She was a hoot! She was totally charming, funny, delightful and just lovely. And I didn't have much work within the show with her – Brian did. And she would periodically just go sky high on stage – just dry completely – and not know a word – and it was always up to Brian to sort of save her and he was very good at that. (laughs)

I no longer watch OLTL but was thinking about Erika Slezak and tried to remember the names of all her husband's. Can you repeat them all in the order in which the marriages occurred? Roger Gordon, Joe Riley, Steve

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Burke, Clint Buchanan, Sloan Carpenter, Ben Davidson, Charlie Banks

Have you been in touch with your younger kids on the show – Ryan Janis or John Paul Learn (who played little Kevin and Joey from 1982-1990)? No. John Paul’s father, John Learn, wrote me a note without a return address, unfortunately, when he heard that Phil had passed away. He wondered if it was true, but I never had a return address from him so I couldn’t respond. And I actually saw Ryan years ago when he came by the studio, and he was grown up. Those kids were so cute!

And Marilyn Chris [Wanda] are you in touch with her? No. I used to send Marilyn cards but we sort of lost touch, so I don’t know where she is. I think she might be in New York, and I doubt that she’s gone back to California because she hates driving. But no, I haven’t seen Marilyn in years.

Years ago, your husband, Brian, played Rolf Gruber in the Broadway version of The Sound of Music? Yes he did.

The New York Times just published an article about a reunion held with the original cast mates where online, they have an audio clip of Brian talking about the show. Also there is a picture included of Brian. Did you go? It was a wonderful event and a lot of fun!



Courtesy of The Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization
Brian Davies in the “The Sound of Music”



Chad Batka for The New York Times

“The Sound of Music” reunited: From left, Theodore Bikel, Lauri Peters, Brian Davies and Sam von Trapp.

<http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/11/19/the-sound-of-music-turns-50/#comment-159837>

at the studio

Club photographer, Steven Bergman, recently visited the studio and took these great pictures of Erika.

Thank you Steven for sharing your work with us!

<http://www.stevenbergmanphotography.com/>



Steven Bergman

Erika and Melissa Archer



Steven Bergman

Erika and Roscoe Born