

# Erika's World

## Off the Cuff

August 2, 2008

**Erika Slezak**  
**Official Fan Club**

erikaslezakfc@yahoo.com

### Website

www.erikaslezak.com

## Erika's World Staff

### Honorary President

Erika Slezak

### President & Publisher

Walter Miller, Jr.

### Editor

AJ

### Assistant Editor

Kathryn [Kit] Williams

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Dear Friends:

Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary One Life to Live!! As a twelve year old in July of 1968, I vaguely remember watching the very first episode of OLTL, (someone falling down a flight of stairs and Larry Wolek being charged with pushing him!) which aired right before my very favorite spook-soap, "Dark Shadows." I remember Gillian Spencer (the original Viki), and the characters of Meredith, Anna, Jim, Cathy, the Siegel's, etc., but it wasn't until Erika joined the show in March of 1971 that I became a regular viewer, and my interest truly soared. And here we are forty years later! I thought that Frank Valentini, Ron Carlivati and his writing staff, and Jill Mitwell, who directed both shows, truly paid homage to the show with the two special anniversary episodes.



It certainly brought back memories hearing the original "One Life to Live" theme, and seeing the familiar blazing fire in the background. I'm enjoying the 1968 shows with Bo and Rex – time travel was a mainstay on "Dark Shadows," so I guess my interest in "back-in-time" started there. While I like Jessica Tuck, who was truly fabulous as Viki's "forgotten" daughter, Megan, and who was originally asked to be Viki's escort in heaven, I think the pairing of Erin Torpey and Erika worked beautifully. They most certainly share a connection, and that definitely came through on screen. Their last scene together in heaven was reminiscent of Erika's & Erin's last scene at the airport when Erin departed the show several years ago. How great it was seeing Phil Carey, whom I felt looked remarkably well after a bout with cancer! And of course seeing Mark Derwin was a real treat – he and Erika still have that magic! The montage sequence was a nice farewell to Ben and Blondie, and what can be said of Niki Smith – I loved the outfit that Erika wore, and of course Niki could *only* have Elvis as a boyfriend in heaven!

I think I enjoyed the scenes with legendary Agnes Nixon and Erika the most. Obviously, if it weren't for this lady, there would be no OLTL nor Viki. How grand it was watching both ladies – Agnes, the creator, and Erika, the heart and essence of OLTL – thanking the audience, and wishing "One Life to Live" a Happy 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Here's to many more...and many happy returns!



Walter

Many thanks to:

- AJ for conducting the interview with Erika for this newsletter. AJ assisted on a last-minute basis and I'm very grateful.
- Stephen Schofield for his piece on the seminar that was held at The Paley Center celebrating "One Life to Live's" 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
- Steven Bergman for use of his photos at The Paley Center. <http://www.digitalrailroad.net/StevenBergman/Default.aspx>

## online fanclub

To become an online member of the Erika Slezak Fan Club, please send your email address to: [erikaslezakfc@yahoo.com](mailto:erikaslezakfc@yahoo.com) There are NO dues to become a member, but by supplying us with your email address, you will be notified when newsletters have been posted to the website, and you will receive emails about any pertinent Erika-related news. Please note that if you have already submitted your name to the above email address, it is not necessary to do so again.

Telephone interview July 24, 2008

**Let's start off by saying, CONGRATULATIONS on the 40th Anniversary of the show!** Thank you, it is quite an achievement. And we are, all of us at OLTL, unbelievably proud -- obnoxiously proud I should say! We are really very proud. It was a particular delight and honor, not just to have Agnes [Nixon] on the panel at the Museum of Television and Radio, which is now called the Paley Center -- but to have her join us on the 40th Anniversary Show. It was fantastic! She was as wonderful, charming and delightful as she has always been. She is a remarkable lady, and I was kind of amused because she was nervous! I thought, 'This is your show! You don't need to be nervous!'

**Of all people to be nervous!** She was lovely. She had a lot of her family with her. One of her daughters, her son, and two grandchildren were there. They were very sweet. They were there all day and I think the kids got kind of bored with it by the end of the day -- but they were very nice -- nice children!

**How did it feel to work with the person who created your character?** I was petrified! I really was. You know, I thought, 'She could still fire me!' That she'd say, 'You know what, I don't think you're very good -- get out!' She was so delightful and so charming. I must have thanked her about a thousand times, as I kept saying, 'Thank you for my job, thank you for hiring me.' And she was just wonderful! I guess it helped that she was nervous as I didn't have to be so petrified.

**This week we have seen the two anniversary shows, which I have really enjoyed.** Good, thank you.

**How did the show celebrate behind the scenes?** On the actual anniversary day, July 15th, we just had a luncheon celebration on the floor. But that morning, I was particularly honored to

have been invited, along with Frank Valentini and Brian Frons, to ring the bell at the New York Stock Exchange.



And that's how we celebrated. We have a wonderful medallion -- it says "40th Anniversary OLTL Congratulations Opening Bell -- Stock Exchange." And it was incredibly exciting. It is shown only on a few cable channels, MSNBC, Bloomberg, and various people actually saw it, which I was surprised at. It was a real honor. Not too many people get to do that.

### a viki moment to remember



*The Doctor, David and the Deal*

They first led us into this incredibly beautiful boardroom which was the original trading floor of the stock exchange. After years, they turned it into a boardroom and they moved to a much bigger trading floor. My husband, Brian, was with me and a lot of the execs at ABC were there. Then they took Brian Frons, myself and Frank up to the podium and explained very carefully what we had to do. And initially we

were all three going to put a finger on the button -- you know -- stack three fingers. And Brian Frons said, 'No, that's kind of stupid. We won't do that.' And he was right. It would have looked silly and so they said, 'No you do it.' And I said, 'No, you should do it -- you are President of ABC Daytime!' And we went back and forth for awhile and they finally said no, no, no you are going to do it. So I did -- I pushed the button. I got to start the stock market and that particular day, the market did not go up but it went down only a little bit and the next day it started to go up. And let's keep our fingers crossed that it is going up ever since!

**Definitely! Did you have to go through security?** Oh my God, YES! I was telling somebody else about it and they said, 'Oh, that must have been terrific -- do they still do school

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tours!' And I said, 'No, I don't think they do ANY tours since 911.' Security is extraordinary – obviously our names were on a list, but even from outside, you can't get in. There is a long cordoned-off area with police and security people. You have to give your name, and your name has to be on a list, and you have to go through that, and then you go inside and you go through a metal detector. It was very cute though, as the security guard outside saw my name. There was a long line of people who work there, waiting to get in but somebody said, 'These are the bell ringers.' So he said, 'Come up! We've got to have the bell ringers up front!' So we went up front, and he saw my name and he said, 'Hey – how's WALTER!' Obviously, he meant my father, who has been gone for 25 years, but I wasn't going to say anything, so I said, 'He's fine!'

**On TV, he lives forever!** Yes!

**When you walk on to the room is it a huge room or relatively small?** The actual trading floor is quite large. It's hard to see the entire whole scope of it because there are all of these podiums and pedestals and screens – you can't really get an idea of the size of the room because there are so many things going on and in the way. From the podium, you are up above, and in front of you, you are looking down at the floor – it's not closed off. You hear all of the noise and everything. From the podium you see a large time clock that is going and TV cameras that are there as they do record it for you. And you can see from the podium that nothing could happen until I rang the bell. Everyone was kind of standing there thinking, 'Come on, ring the bell, ring the bell so we can get started...' And as soon as the bell rings, it all bursts into action! People start running around and the computer screens start going crazy and the woman who was in charge of the whole thing, who was with us, said that they were opening up all of the



*Ring the bell at the NYSE*

stocks – so you'll see the numbers going like mad. It was very interesting! Years ago, we had been invited by our banker to come there, but we were only on the floor, and it was different then. I think it was busier, in terms of more people running around, as much is done on computers now – but there are still a bunch of people running around with hand held computers, trading and counting – doing whatever else they do. It was wonderful!

**With Michael working on his MBA -- what was Michael's reaction when you told him?** He wasn't there – he's flying home today – but he did call and ask, 'How was it!' And I said, 'For somebody my age it was unbelievably cool!' It really was – it was so cool to do that!

**And you were also on The View!** Yes,

that was on Wednesday, the day after the stock exchange and the luncheon to which Agnes came. It was so lovely to have her there! There were a lot of people at the luncheon – ABC people and some press were there. And then Wednesday, Bobby Woods [Bo] and I were on The View. That was very nice! It all goes by in such a flash. It's quick! They do pre-interviews where they ask you a thousand questions and you think there's no way we can get through all of that and they are right! It's all sort of, 'in case of'. I had never met Barbara Walters before so that was kind of fun. She was very nice. Sherri Shepperd is a big fan of the show and I love her. We had done the interviews down at Super Soap at Disney in the fall. We had a long time that we sat in the green room and she and I chatted. She's a wonderful woman who is smart and funny and terrific, so she was kind of in charge of that



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interview. And Joy was there – Joy Behar – whom I have known for a couple of years, and she is always funny. And it ended up being a good interview. Bobby was funny – he is always funny!

**Yes, you both played well off each other.** Yes, thank you.

**Earlier, a few weeks prior to this, you mentioned The Paley Center round-table discussion. Any comments on that?** It was once again, a very intelligent and nice event. They have people there who are members of The Paley Center and they come because they really are interested – they want to know and they have very good questions. Donna Hanover was the moderator. Donna was on the show, as you remember, [playing Viki's doctor during the breast cancer diagnosis storyline]. She's very quick and very good. So she kept it moving, and then there were a lot of very good questions – for everyone on the panel, which was nice. Those who participated were Ron [Carlivati], Frank [Valentini], Kristen [Alderson], John-Paul [Lavoisier], Hillary [Smith], Bobby [Woods], Robin [Strasser], Agnes [Nixon] and I. It was good because everybody was asked questions and everybody had a chance to answer – and be smart or funny or whatever. And as usual, Robin was the best! She always is!



Photo by: Steven Bergman

After it was over, they took us all to dinner at this really nice place just a block or so away – of course, I can't remember the name of the place right now, but it was fabulous. There were so many of us because a lot of the ABC brass was there and ABC was inviting us to dinner – Sue

Johnson was the one in charge. Unfortunately they had to break us into two tables. Each table was really good – I sat next to Agnes. I must say in all of the years that I have known Agnes I have never really had a chance to sit and talk with her. It's usually at some sort of function where there are a lot of people around and you can't get into a discussion. I sat next to Agnes and talked to her for a half an hour and I was just fascinated by how smart she is and how interesting and interested in so many different things. And it was a wonderful, wonderful evening! And we all said we should do it at least once a week!

**You weren't able to attend the Emmys this year. Were you able to watch the program?**

Yes, I did watch it and I was so excited for our writers and our directors. I was sitting there cheering, screaming, hooting and hollering and I really, really thought that if the directors win, and the writers win – well the show is going to win! But we didn't. But you know, General Hospital is good too! I was a little disappointed that we didn't win.

**What did you think about the new format – with the tables and meal?**

Not so good. I felt that the whole show was a little frenetic, because you never really got a chance to see anybody. And half of the fun of being there is the people watching, to see the clothes. They want to see the women walk in [on the red carpet and on stage], and see these wonderful entrances with the big dresses, and that was not possible because people didn't make entrances, and they didn't really pan the audience well.

I was happy that Brian Kerwin was nominated but I was really disappointed that he didn't win.

**How is Michael doing at school?** Michael is doing extremely well, thank you! As I said, he is actually in the air right now flying home. He has a few weeks off, and then he will go back and finish up at the end of September. I cannot believe how quickly this time has gone this year! He has enjoyed it more than I can possibly tell you. It has been a wonderful experience. He has made

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so many wonderful new friends and connections. And I think he is going to be sorry that it is all over, although anxious to get back to work. And he needs to find a job now. Is there anyone out there that needs someone with a master's degree?

**I'm sure there is someone – tell him that the job market doesn't look too bad – companies are hiring.** No it doesn't now, it is getting a little bit better I think.

**You recently visited him, how was your trip there? Did you get any sightseeing in?** We spent some time with him, as we went to England for two weeks. We started in the Cotswold's area and met up with Michael, but then he went back to Oxford, where we picked him up, and the three of us flew to Prague. We spent five days in Prague and then drove to Munich and spent five days. It was a lovely trip. He went off to meet his friends in Krakow – and they have been sort of really roughing it up and down Eastern Europe. He just got back to England two days ago and today he is flying home.

**How's Amanda doing?** Amanda is doing OK. She's still working the same job – there's not a lot going on. But she is coming home tomorrow which will be great!

**How's your husband, Brian?** Brian is terrific, very, very well – thank you. We have an anniversary coming up on August 4th – our 30th anniversary!

**Congratulations!** Thank you!

**It goes by fast, huh!** Boy does it ever! You'll see it creeps up on you!

**What are your plans for July and August?** We are probably going to spend some time at home in Connecticut and spend some time in Vermont. We were actually in Vermont and came back yesterday because we had some stuff to do, and Michael is coming home tonight. And the weather is not very nice up and down the east coast, but as soon as the sun comes out, we will head back

to Vermont and spend some time up there.

**When do you start back taping again?** I don't have a start date but I have already seen evidence of Viki reappearing and I think I will start taping sometime the last week in August. And I guess I appear, well I haven't left yet, but on the air again early October.

**Did they do any pre-tapes ... any post tapes planned?** No. They didn't pre-tape this time.

**Walter wanted to know where Viki goes this year?** Oddly enough, they sent me to Africa – sub-Saharan Africa to promote heart health and talk about organ donation and see if I can get some of the Africans to give us their organs.

**You're kidding. No way!** Yes, seriously. I can understand promoting heart health and stuff but asking for organ donations from that far away is little different. But that is where Viki is.

**Have they taped a bumper of you yet – the shots shown in the middle of the show...** No. They did it last summer on a Saturday while I was on vacation.

**What was it like to work with Mark Derwin and Erin Torpey again?**

That was a joy! That was just a pleasure! Mark is as silly and sweet and funny as he ever was. And Erin is just a gloriously beautiful girl now – you know, she always was! I kind of looked at her like a child because she was a baby when she started – 7 or 8 years old. And all of a sudden to see her as this marvelous grown woman is terrific! And it was a delight and a pleasure to having them there.



**For me, it was nice to see her – very mature!** Yes, she is – very mature. She's all grown up.

**Mark is on a new ABC Family show, The Secret Life of an American Teen, which first aired on**

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**July 1. Have you seen the show?** No I have not.

**Is there any way possible that Mark could return on more permanent basis?** Given that he doesn't have a heart – and I'm not giving this one up – I don't know. You know, I think Frank calls him every couple of months and says 'want to come back?' But Mark is happy in California and he's working and busy, so he probably wouldn't come back.

**How was Phil Carey when you saw him?**

Bobby and I were the only ones that worked with him. He was terrific – you know he had lung cancer, and he had beaten it and then I think it had come back, so he was having more chemo. And that's rough. But he was in good spirits and he said that he was feeling good and it was wonderful to have him there.



**On camera, he looked healthier than the last time we saw him.** Yes, he does. He looks a lot better.

**Is Brian Kerwin on Contract?** Oh, yes!

**The reason fans are asking is that he is not in the opening credits – his face does not appear.** That's impossible – you know they have two whole separate openings.

**Right, he's not in either one of them. So there was concern that he might not be on contract, or if he was, that it was a short-term contract.** That's bizarre. Well, that's not really my business but I assume he is under contract.

**Thanks for all the great Viki and Charlie storyline going on – I hope we get a lot more.** Yes, I hope so too.

**Will Viki be back working at the Banner soon,**

**and what about Viki and Tina –any story there?** I'm sure there will be masses of story. On my last air show, I'm at the airport on my way to Africa, and who walks in but Tina. And that's when I see her for the first time. But I'm leaving and she is arriving and we have very brief but cute scenes. Then I have to go, so I will see her when I get back. But I know that she moves into Llanfair while I am away.

**Oh, does she redecorate like the last time?** (laughs) God I hope not – the last time it was not such a good idea.

**During the writer's strike, Gary did not write much for Viki and Charlie – one of the questions they had was did Ron leave outlines for the couple or was that Gary's decision?** I can't answer that question because I do not know. I'm sure that Ron could have left outlines but it was Gary's decision as to what he did, but I don't know if that was intentional or whether there was just too much other stuff going on.

**We were so excited to hear that Andrea Evans was coming back! But there haven't been scenes with Viki and Tina!** We don't have a scene until I leave town – at the airport.

**Had you kept in touch with Andrea over the years?** Yes and no. She would come to New York every once in awhile and she would stop by the studio and I would see her then, but other than that we hadn't really kept in touch. But it is lovely to see her. She looks fabulous! She has got the most beautiful little girl. I think her name is Kylie Lyn – just this gorgeous child who is 3 or 4 years old.

**Why does Viki maintain a friendly relationship with Clint since he basically treated her like an insufferable jerk by choosing Dorian and then rubbing her face in it?** I don't know – ask Ron! Viki has a tolerance for all kinds of mistakes, and she'll always be fond of Clint.

**Without saying too much, does Viki have**

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**some storyline coming up after you return?** I assume so, but I do not know because I have not talked to Ron.

**You have worked with a number of very handsome, talented, and interesting onscreen romantic interests over the years! I have, for the most part, really enjoyed the performances by these actors and what they have brought to their scenes with you, and I wondered what might be some of their similarities and differences in the way that they rehearse with you or perform opposite of you? How does their performance impact your performance or does their performance impact your performance in any way?** Oh, absolutely – anybody you work with will impact your performance. It depends entirely on what the other person is doing. I've been fortunate in that they have all been – how do I put this – extremely responsible and hard working actors. They come knowing their lines and they enjoy working, and like being here. You know, they are happy to be here, which makes it very easy to work with these people.

Similarities? You know everybody works a little differently. Some people like to rehearse all of the time and some people like to rehearse a little bit, but you know, you get used to that and as I say, I've been fortunate.

**From Detroit, a fan writes, I've been a fan for about 35 years and have always loved your work.**

**My question: Is there someone on another network that you would like to work with but haven't? I remember Peter Bergman once said in an interview, several years ago, how much he would like to work with you.** Thank you. I would love to work with Peter. The thing is, I think of Peter when he played Cliff on All My Children, when he was a nice guy, and of course now he plays a rotten guy on The Young and the Restless – but Peter is a lovely, delightful fellow – I'd love to work with him. I've always wanted to work with Jane Elliott, from General Hospital, because I think she is a marvelous actress. There

are lots of people with whom I'd love to work – Justin Deas and Ricky Goldin [who now plays Jake on All My Children], to name a few, as they are very interesting actors – very interesting. But I can't complain because I've got my own share of really interesting actors.

**What is Viki's most annoying trait?** (laughs) Oh, my God – I don't have enough time to answer that question! Let's see – the audience would have to say what her most annoying trait is. I think for Viki, probably her most annoying trait is her honesty, which gets her in trouble sometimes – and is not always appreciated -- that's what she would think was the worst thing about her.

**How long do you think Tess will be out?** Oh, God – not long I hope. You know, the problem is – in spite of how incredibly well Bree plays it – it's so obvious when she is not Jessica, and it makes everyone else look a little stupid. So, I'm kind of hoping this goes away fast. When I left it was so obvious that she wasn't acting like Jessica, but we justified it because she'd just lost her husband, and she's acting weird. I do hope that when I come back, it is discovered quickly because if I have to play scenes and not know that she is Tess, it's hard.

**The “heaven anniversary” shows were so much fun to watch. Have you been able to see those yet?** I have seen half of them but they are TiVo'd.

**Have you liked what you have seen so far?** Yes, I've thought it was fun.

**How long did it take to tape all the scenes?** You don't want to know. We started at 7:30 in the morning and we ended at 1:00 in the morning. And that was just the heaven scenes.

**Oh my goodness.** So everything else – the scenes with Mel and Dorian were done on a different day with the car crash and other stuff and that took a whole day. There was a whole day spent solely on the 1968 scenes and a separate day for the Mendorra story which was shot on location outside NYC. It was a long time. A lot of

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work!

**But you did have comfortable shoes?** I had comfortable shoes – that was my one request that I please have flat shoes.

**While Mel and Dorian had their scenes where you are in the car dead—did you have to be there for all of those scenes or remain motionless throughout their entire dialog?**

No I did not have to be there because in watching it, you saw that they did not shoot the car all of the time. They pulled away from the car and their scenes were held primarily over on the rock. So I was not in the car for all of that. I was around because I had to be there at the end and lie down on the ground. But I was only in the scenes where you actually saw me.

**We loved seeing Erin back on the show. Did it sort of feel like déjà vu and that Erin had never left at all?**

Absolutely – when she walked in and I gave her such a hug, I thought – it's old home week – it's wonderful! It's as if she had never gone away.



**We read that Jessica Tuck was originally going to be back as Megan.** As Frank said, Jessie had the incredible good fortune to have like 6 jobs that she was juggling and there was just no way she could come to New York. They were even going to shoot on a Saturday and she couldn't do that. It was unfortunate because it would have been nice to have had her there too.

**It was reported online that Roy Thinnes (ex-Sloan) and the character of Victor Lord were going to be in heaven.** If it is true, I didn't know anything about it. I never heard that – but that's not to say it wasn't a possibility at some point. I mean, my husband, my real husband actually said, 'Why don't they have all of your husbands in heaven?' And I said, 'It would be a little awkward!'

[Ed. Note: After reviewing the anniversary shows, we believe that there was

a new Victor voiceover created for the opening scene of OLTL shown in the 1968 scenes. The scene shows a young Viki listening to Victor (off scene) when he says, "You are my daughter Victoria, you're heir to the Lord fortune, etc..." ]

**Were the bunny slippers yours?**

No they were not. I do have sloppy old slippers but my slippers were far too sloppy to be shown. So they used bunny slippers, which our director thought was funny.



**Niki is always so much fun to watch! And what a great outfit! Who would have thought we'd see Elvis in heaven. How long did those scenes take to tape, and is it usually the same person who plays the Viki double or do they use different actresses?**

Yes, it is the same person – they only shoot her over the shoulder.



**Did you contribute at all in the 40th OLTL Anniversary Trivia Book? In it, it is says that Bob Woods played a joke on you by posting for sale signs on items from your dressing room when you were cleaning it out. Was that true?**

No, I didn't contribute to the book, but the story with Bobby is true! (laughs) It was a long time ago – I was cleaning out my dressing room and I have junk, stacks of papers, and things that people hand you on the street – there was just a lot of stuff, and I was just cleaning out everything. And I didn't have a big garbage bag so I had spoken to the guy who was our janitor and I asked, 'Look if I put everything out in the hallway would you be able to collect it for me.' And he said, 'Oh sure, yes.' So that's what I did, I put all sorts of things out – old books that I had – and I went upstairs to work and when I came back downstairs, Woods has put "For Sale" signs on everything. (laughs)

**Well, did you make any money?** No!

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**Agnes Nixon states in the book, that the Lord family on OLTL was “christened” after the aristocratic Lord family of the play and film “The Philadelphia Story” (with Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant). And that Victoria Lord spells her nickname “Viki” to reflect the family’s Germanic roots.** It was based on “The Philadelphia Story to a certain extent – I mean she would certainly know, but a lot of it was based on her own family too.

**You actually played in “The Philadelphia Story” while in summer stock. Which role did you play?** Yes, when I was a very young actress I, spent a year at the Milwaukee Rep and I got a call from my agent that they were putting together a “package” – at the Ivanhoe Theatre in Chicago, which was not really a dinner theatre, the restaurant was next door and you could have dinner and go to the theatre. It’s a theatre in the round, and he asked if I was interested, and I said, “Of course – it’s a job!” Lee Bouvier, who is Jackie Kennedy’s sister, and who was married to Prince Stanislaus Radziwill at the time, played Tracy Lord, the Katherine Hepburn part, and I played Liz Imbrie who, in the musical, was played by Celeste Holm.

**They have added a dog named David Vickers?** Yes! It’s a little Shih Tzu, and her name is Tallulah. She is so cute. I think it is a very funny idea that Tina has a dog named David Vickers and when I ran into her at the airport, she was looking for her dog, and I said, ‘You have a dog named David Vickers?’ and she said, ‘Yes, it was such fun to say SIT, David Vickers, Roll over David Vickers.’

**Who was the most famous film actor and actress that you have met during your life?** Wow – wow, I met Rock Hudson when I was a kid and my father was in a movie with him – he was very famous. I haven’t met too many movie stars. I mean, a number of people I have worked with have become movie stars – Tommy Lee Jones is one.

**Over the course of thirty plus years, the nature of soap story telling has changed...** Yes, I think the writing has become very contemporary – it has moved along with the times and I think that is a good thing.

**I enjoyed Francesca James as Marcy Wade. I remember when she drugged Viki and impersonated Niki Smith. That particular episode (while it was supposed to be one day) Seemed like it ran for weeks. Do you recall that period, and did that particular “day in Llanview” go on for a long time?** It was supposed to be one full Llanview day, and it took the entire month of December and into January to shoot. So much happened that day. She was pretending to be Niki and she had drugged Viki because she was trying to get Viki put away so she could have Steve Burke for herself. And there was a lot of other stuff going on at the same time. It took all of December and somebody said to Agnes, as she was writing at the time, “It’s December – what about Christmas?” And Agnes said, “Cancel Christmas. That’s it – no time!”

**Well, I hope they dry cleaned the clothes a lot!** Oh, yes. Our wardrobe department is, and always has been, fantastic – they are very, very conscientious.

**Did you ever smoke, or do you smoke???** I did smoke around or before I joined the show. I started smoking when I was like 18 or 19, the way everybody did. And I smoked until I was 23 or 24 – just before I started the show, because that is when they started saying that smoking was going to kill you. And I thought that I didn’t want to die that way, thank you very much, so I stopped smoking. And I have not had a cigarette since. And I thank God for it because it is nasty and filthy.

**What is the greatest compliment that you’ve ever received?** Wow, I really can’t answer that because I have had incredible people say remarkably nice things and I never remember things like that. I mean not specifically. I know

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that once I got a letter many, many years ago from a boy who had been in Vietnam and had been injured and was deaf – he lost his hearing. And he wrote to thank me because he said I was the only person whose lips he could read. My enunciation was so good that he read my lips and follow the show. And I thought that was terrific – that was really nice.

**If you were asked to participate in a celebrity reality TV show, like Big Brother, or Dancing with the Stars, would you?** Like, no!

**What was the last movie that you saw that made you cry?** Brian and I rented Schindler's List because I had never seen it, and that is just a remarkable movie. I cried all of the way through.

**I have been a great admirer of your work for a long time; you also strike me as a very genuine person who seems to have successfully balanced a career and home life. I have a very demanding job (not far from you actually at ABC News), and I've found it very challenging to find that balance. How have you been able to do it?? Can you offer any advice to someone who loves their job but wants to have a personal life too??** It is very hard to balance the two. I have been extremely lucky in that I have a wonderful husband who kept me very grounded and I had a very good upbringing. My parents set a very good example as to what you do with your life as opposed to what you do with your career. And I can tell you that at any given time in my life, the most important thing was always my family – my husband and my children. The job was fabulous and still is fabulous, but if it were a choice, I would obviously pick my family. It's very hard to balance the two, and you have to have a really good head on your shoulders and you have to have your priorities set up straight. You can love your job – and I imagine that working in news, the hours are crazy – but if you can find somebody to share that life, that's wonderful. I can't offer any advice because it is all very specific. Get your priorities straightened out, find out what is most

important for you in your life – if it's your life, then set that as a goal, and if it is your job, then you know, you are already on your way.

**What modern day technology really gets you frustrated?** Oh, God – remote controls for televisions! Geez, I can't turn on the bloody remote – there is always something going wrong and I don't know how to fix it. When Michael moved to England it was frustrating because I would call him saying, 'Michael, how do I fix this? I don't know how to turn the TV on.' We have this really complicated, wonderful sound system, and half of the time we can't turn it on.

**My husband always asks me to figure it out.** At least there is somebody in your house that can do it!

**What's your favorite word to use when you encounter idiot drivers?** (laughs) I can't say that in public!

**Who'd be your favorite fantasy choice for dinner at your home?** I don't know.

**We hope the word "retirement" is NOT in your vocabulary...** It's not now!

**Great! Have you ever thought, "My gosh it would be nice NOT to work any longer"??** Yes, I think that at times, and then I think what it would be like not to work and I ENJOY WORK – I LOVE work! I've talked a bunch of times with my husband saying, 'Should I stop?' And even he says, 'You love it – you would be very unhappy if you didn't have that.' So, it is not in the future now because I really like working, and they still write for me which is a miracle. But it is terrific.

**Well, we enjoy it and you immensely!**

**Thank you Erika for your time!**

**The questions asked were those submitted by fans – thank you all for your participation!**

By: Stephen Schofield

Last month I attended the panel event celebrating the 40th Anniversary of OLTL, at the Museum of Television and Broadcasting in New York City. (I have been a fan of Erika's and the show since I first tuned in on that day in 1972 when Viki married Steve Burke. There was no turning back for me when I saw how beautiful Erika looked on Viki's wedding day!) I have never been to a panel discussion at the Museum, and I can't imagine attending one that would mean more to me than one that celebrated a OLTL anniversary! So, I got in touch with my long time friend, Mitch, and we made plans to meet in the City and go to the panel event together.

We met up at the Museum in time to catch a couple of classic OLTL episodes prior to the event. At 6 pm, all the attendees were invited into the auditorium and the panel discussion began. The panelists represented a cross section of actors who have been major contributors to the show's history. They included John-Paul Lavoissier, Kristen Alderson, Robert Woods, Robin Strasser, Ron Carlivati, Frank Valentini, Agnes Nixon and our very own, Erika Slezak. In the audience was Bob Woods' wife, Loyita Chapel, whom we are currently enjoying on the show again, and Kristen's mother, Kathy Alderson.

Some observations from the evening include how sweet Kristen seems. She appears to be completely untouched by her celebrity, while at the same time, appreciative of it. Whether she was answering questions during the panel interview, or saying hello to fans in the audience afterwards, she was every bit as lovely as she was a beautiful young lady. She and her mom seem to enjoy a very lovely relationship, as well.

I couldn't help but think that John-Paul and Bob Woods were buddies. They both came alive during the panel interview when they were reacting to each other's stories, and



Photo by: Steven Bergman

especially when John-Paul was encouraging Bob to share some of his more special memories, which everyone agreed had mostly to do with backstage jokes and tricks about how to remember all those lines!

To me, Robin Strasser seemed to be the panelist who would win the prize as being most unlike her character, Dorian, on the show. Robin seemed demure, gracious, and appreciative. At one time during the discussion, Erika pointed to Robin (They were sitting next to each other.) and told the audience in no uncertain terms that Robin was the best Dorian and the largest part of the reason that Viki and Dorian have been so successful as enemies over the years. (I think that Erika and Robin can receive equal credit for that powerful relationship, but it didn't surprise me that Erika would also be so gracious as to offer Robin the credit!)

It was a thrill to see and hear from Agnes during the evening. It seems her voice has been a bit quiet in recent years about her vision of the show. Perhaps it's because having created OLTL 40 years ago, and subsequently selling the show to ABC, she feels like she's said it all at one time or another over the years. For me, it was an absolute honor to hear from her, and for the cast to have an opportunity to recognize her in public for her part in their careers. Agnes did appear physically frail; however, she was as



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sharp as anyone else on the panel when it came to the history of the show and the reasons why she (and other writers) make the kinds of decisions they do when writing for daytime. I was particularly happy to hear about the partnership and love for the show that it seems Frank, Ron and Agnes share. I couldn't help but think how happy Agnes must be to know that OLTL is in such capable and loving hands as that of Frank Valentini and Ron Carlivati. They each spoke about how they have met together in order to understand Agnes' vision so that Ron can be sure to extend that vision to today's storylines.

Of course, I thoroughly enjoyed Erika during the discussion. Who better than Erika, along with Agnes, to capture the heart of the show - to share her memories. Bob encouraged Erika to share a little story about how, when Erika was relativey new to the show, she was looking for Lee Patterson (Joe Riley) on the set to run lines, and couldn't find him for quite awhile. Finally, she found him on the set in the car in which they would be taping a scene. Lee was scotch taping his lines to the dashboard so that he wouldn't forget them during the taping! Being a huge "Joe/Viki" fan, I so appreciated hearing her speak of him.

As you can imagine, Erika didn't miss an opportunity to help honor the contributions of everyone else who was on the panel that evening. She had sweet things to say about Kristen, and the expressed her highest regard for Frank, Ron, and all the others.

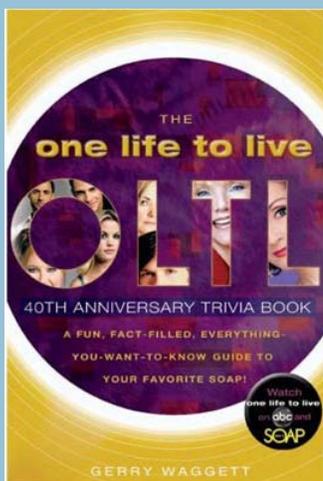
There was a Q&A part of the evening, and, unfortunately, I wasn't called upon to ask the question that Walter (Miller) requested that I ask if given the opportunity; specifically, was the character of Viki inspired by anyone in Agnes' life? While I was a bit disappointed that I wasn't called upon, I was so grateful to receive (as did all who attended) a complimentary copy of "The One Life to Live 40th Anniversary Trivia Book". Of course, I couldn't put it down during my 90 minute train ride back to New Haven. Lo and behold, as fate would have it, there was a nugget of history that touched on Walter's question. According to author Gerry Waggett, the Lord family was named after the family in "The Philadelphia Story." There's a bit more to that story and lots more for any history buff of OLTL! Pick it up if you haven't. You won't be sorry!

Stephen Schofield

The panel discussion can be viewed online at the following links:

<http://www.paleycenter.org/insidemediaindex.htm> or

<http://www.paleycenter.org/insidemediaindex/video/webcast-oltl.htm>



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