

Erika's World

Off the Cuff

November 28, 2011

Erika Slezak
Official Fan Club

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Dear Friends,

And here we are at the end of an era! As of November 18th, our beloved "One Life to Live" finished shooting its last episode, and from what I hear, (although I'm not sure that it has been confirmed) ABC will air its final episode on, oddly enough, Friday, the 13th of January 2012. I'm greatly disappointed that the Prospect Park deal has fallen through and that OLTL will not be moving online. I can't say that I'm terribly surprised, because we had heard very few updates from them over the last several weeks. Although I think their intentions were in the right place, unfortunately they didn't do enough research as to what went into putting on a soap! It was great while it lasted, and knowing Erika and being part of this fan club, has indeed changed my life. I loved the Thanksgiving Day episode when Viki toasted her family and friends at Llanfair. I'm thinking those were not Viki's tears but Erika's.



And now our fan club is entering its 40th year this coming January! I remember after Dark Shadows went off the air in April of 1971, that this fifteen-year-old would take a bus from home in NJ to visit the OLTL studios – at times cutting school mid-day! When Erika took over the role of Victoria Lord, I was immediately taken by her beauty, and her acting was so fresh and natural. Class is the first word that came to mind. I knew I wanted to meet the actress who played Viki, and sure enough, one day in the spring of 1971, I met Erika Slezak. After visiting the studio numerous times, I asked Erika if I could start a fan club for her – and here we are today, 40 years later, with a boatload of cherished memories. First and foremost, I want to thank AJ and Kit Williams for being such wonderful team players who help publish our newsletters. Their contribution to this fan club cannot be underestimated!

The club has afforded me the opportunity to make long-lasting and enduring friendships, not only with Erika, Kit, and AJ, but also with other club officers throughout the years as well. Thanks go to former fan club officers including: Arlyne Zinstein, Kathy Hontz, Louis Serpe, Nadine Shanfeld, Martina Schade, and Debi Fielden. And there is also a group of significant others who have assisted us over the years, and some whom I have remained good friends with, including Martha R. Julian, Vivian Mora, Stephen Schofield, Steven Bergman, Carolyn Waltz, Connie Passalacqua Hayman, Mitch Lopatin, Maria Smith, Christina Hunter, Marge Cash, Bonny J. Schroeder, and Pat Austin. There are a few people with whom I have lost contact, but their contributions to the club were welcomed: Janet Perkins, Joyce Waybright, Kathleen Harding, Renee Arbanas, Jan Wall, Ilene Pachman, and Rita Rose. And there are some special folks who are no longer with us whom I'd like to mention: Maryann Raymond, Anne Klenovich, Sister Leonarda, Margie Mintz, Dorothy Panza, and of course my dad, Walter Miller, Sr. who always said that *HE* was Erika's biggest fan! Please forgive me if I may have left out a name here and there, but please know that your contribution to this fan club is most appreciated. It is amazing how many lives Erika has touched and has brought together through the years.

Although the show is ending, our fan club is for Erika and we shall continue with our website and update all of you as needed. Newsletters will continue for the time being.

I liked the quote that Erika shared at the last day of taping with the cast and crew: *"Why bother saying goodbye? I see this as just closing a chapter. We will see each other again – someplace, somehow, somewhere."*

What a grand adventure it has been...

Until next time,

Walter

Editor's note: We collected questions and interviewed Erika prior to hearing the devastating news that Prospect Park has halted plans to put One Life to Live on the internet. We have been in touch with her several times since and she graciously continued to answer our questions about the changes. The questions and answers will bounce between current time and a time one week before the end of the show.

The last time that we spoke, the show had just been cancelled, Brian Kerwin was leaving the show, and your special multiples episode aired.

We have just learned that Frank Valentini and Ron Carlivati will be moving to General Hospital. I am absolutely delighted for Frank and Ron and I'm sure that they will do a brilliant job for GH. I spoke with both Frank and Ron this afternoon and told them how very pleased I am for them both and wished them all the best and offered my congratulations.

From the beginning were you confident Prospect Park would be moving forward or did you have suspicions that, while it sounded great and they were certainly innovative, that this wouldn't happen? I had great hopes that this would happen. In the beginning, after they announced that they were licensing the shows, they seemed to have everything in place. They were moving forward, they had money, and they were making deals with the actors, and had wonderful hopes for the show. Unfortunately, as time went by, they were unable to reach speedy agreements with the necessary parties and I believe their financing fell apart and that was the end. No money, no show! I feel that they were overly ambitious, because they really had no sense of what it takes to produce a daytime drama, 5 days a week, fifty two weeks a year. It is far more complicated than producing a night time show, where you are dealing with possibly

13 or 26 episodes.

AFTRA has stated they were working with Prospect Park and then hadn't heard from them in some time. It seems to a lot of us that perhaps PP didn't do enough homework before committing to saving both shows. Do you agree, and do you think it was really the lack of funding that killed the deal? See my previous answer.

Without giving any spoilers away, with the ending that was shot, does it leave the viewers with a cliffhanger or were alternate endings taped for complete closure, just in case the show was not continuing? No, I don't think alternate endings were taped, except one, which in this case now, will apply.

Do you think there is any way ABC would allow Frank Valentini and the writers and cast to come together one more time to tape another ending if necessary? No! We are done with ABC – the studio

has been emptied, the sets are stored, the lights are gone, the cameras are gone, and the studio is being refurbished for another show – I heard Millionaire, but don't know if that's true.

More than anyone, you have been associated with OLTL the longest. How did you get through the last few days of taping? It must have been a range of emotions. No – I was fine, because I still believed we were going on, and besides, I don't like wallowing in misery.

How was the wrap party? The wrap party was fabulous. We didn't stay too long but I got to see a lot of people and since we were still thinking that we were going on to the internet, there were no big good byes – which are always difficult and unpleasant. It was actually easier this way for me. I will always have my wonderful memories of my co-workers, cast and crew, and that's far

(Continued on page 3)

a viki moment to remember



Oh Brother(s)!

(Continued from page 2)

more satisfying and healthier than sad goodbyes.

Would you be open to returning to the stage?

Absolutely! I told my agent, I'll play the maid – as long as I get a nice costume.

Would you and Brian consider relocating to CA or do you just want to take an extended, deserved time off for a bit?

We would certainly consider LA – if there is work there – but not to just hang about in hopes. I'm too old for that and have had too much fun in my wonderful years at OLTL to be unhappy if I'm not working.

A number of people have left the show already. Robin Strasser (Dorian) was one.

I was very sad when Robin left, but that was Robin's choice. Robin was not well as she had a lot of back problems, and she just said, "I can't do this anymore on a day to day basis," and so she chose to leave. I was very sorry because I loved working with her and I'm very fond of Robin. I think she is going to move to California. She has a house there and the weather is kinder.

Gina Tognoni (Kelly) and Tom Degnan (Joey) also left around the same time.

Oh, I'm hoping that they will come back, obviously. I don't know what the situation is, however.

It's been fun seeing Andrea Evans (Tina) and John Loprieno (Cord).

Yes. That was terrific – great fun.

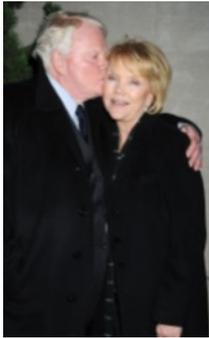
Are they done taping? Yes, we've taped way out of sequence.

And we have heard that several actors from the past will be appearing between now and the end of the show.

Yes, they are bringing back a lot of people that are involved in a lot of stuff, and I'm not going to spoil it, so you'll have to wait to see.

Who did you really enjoy catching up with?

Johnny and Andrea – I hadn't seen Andrea in a couple of years, but I hadn't seen John in a long



Erika and Brian
at Wrap Party

Robin Platzer/Twin Images

time and I love John Loprieno. John's a great guy.

Both of them wrote such nice comments for your 40th Anniversary book. I know they did.

How have the last few weeks been at the studio with the last taping coming near? Have you been feeling overwhelmed?

No, I go to work and I do my job. A lot of people are kind of crazy because of the uncertainty of everything. But, no, I'm taking it day by day.

Will you be working all next week or taping on the last day with ABC? I'll be working Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

When the news was announced about the cancellation, did you hear from anyone on the other soaps saying that they were sorry to hear the news?

I think Susan Flannery emailed me. She is really a terrific woman – she's awesome. She's an absolutely awesome human being. I love her, she's just terrific.

How did you find out that OLTL was canceled by ABC? Were you surprised by the news?

Brian Frons called me. He made the announcement at 1:00 and he called me at 11:00 that morning. I was actually in my car pulling into the driveway and his secretary called and asked if I could take a call from Brian Frons. And I thought, "I don't think I want to do this in the car." So I said I would call right back. I went to the house and my husband and Michael were there. Brian Frons was very nice. He said, "I'm sorry, it's bad news." And I said, "Yes, I figured because you don't call to just say hello." But he was very nice and said it was a question of money and, "Thank you for everything you have done." And I asked if he was staying and he said yes. And that was it. And then I called Amanda and I told her and I called my agent and I said, "Get me a job."

With all of this, I feel sorry for All My Children. They really got screwed – I mean, Brian Frons moved the show across the country, families relocated, and then he cancels the show. Regarding Brian Frons –

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

this was not his decision. Ok, he is the head of daytime, but he answers to a lot of people – he answers to Anne Sweeney, and Anne answers to Bob Iger. So, whereas he may have been in favor of it, this was not his decision entirely. (Ed. Note: Just announced at press time, Brian Frons is leaving ABC in January.)

If he fought it – do you think the decision would still be made? Oh, yes, totally. He could not have saved it, and saw that the wise thing to do was to go along with what the network wanted.

But the show was still making money. Yes, but not the kind of money they were looking for. It was costing them more every year, and they were not getting the returns.

What do you think the reason was that Agnes was kind of married to All My Children and got away from One Life to Live for a long time? After she created One Life, she owned it for five years, and she wrote it during that period. But in the meantime she created All My Children and I think she felt a closer affinity to that, in terms of what she wanted to write, and the characters she developed, and so she set One Life to Live free. She also freed All My Children after five years, but she stayed on as a consultant. You know, that's kind of hard to be head writer for two shows 24/7.

Oh for sure, without a doubt. I think what she did was finish up both shows and sold them to ABC and just stayed on as a consultant to one show.

I know the soap uses great make up but still Erika does have beautiful skin. All women have a routine and a “swear by” beauty arsenal – for some it's Noxzema or Dove. What is her beauty routine? What is her “must have” in her beauty arsenal? Thank you. I have used the same creams for 40 some odd years. I'm going to go ahead and say it is Estee Lauder creams. I take off my makeup with Ponds Cold Cream and wash my face with soap and water, and then I use a moisturizer. And that's my routine. But I was

blessed with good skin thanks to my mother, who was Dutch, and they live in a very wet country where they all have great skin.

I'm wanting Viki to marry Clint. Any spoilers?? No spoilers – stay tuned.

Who did the voices of baby Liam and the dog David Vickers???? Andrea did the dog and I'm not sure who did baby Liam. (Ed. Note: Michael Easton provided the voice of Liam.)

Could Erika please share with us any memories of working with the late Doris Belack (Anna Wolek Craig)? Doris was a wonderful actress. I was not very close to her because we had no interconnecting stories, but I liked her. I thought she was a wonderful actress. You know, she was never nominated for an Emmy and I thought this was the kind of person that should win an Emmy because she did excellent work every single day with very normal material. She was a very good actress.



Doris Belack

She was very natural – you truly believed everything she said when she spoke her lines. Totally. You know she used to rescue animals. Once during the gas rationing in the 70's, she called me and said, “Do you have gas in your car?” And I did. She said, “There is an animal in Brooklyn and he needs a home and I said I would come and get him but I can't get any gas.” So I said, “Yes, I'll take you.” So we went out together to Brooklyn and rescued the animal.

That's a really nice memory. Yes, it is.

There was also a memorial service for David Pressman – he was a good friend to you – any thoughts to share? Listen, you can't complain. David was 97, he had a wonderful life. He had some illnesses. He fought in the war – he was wounded twice. He was a wonderful director and an enormous help to

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

me. I was one of many that spoke at his memorial service. The memorial was very nice. Yes, I'm sorry he is gone. But he had a great life and lived for a very long time, and I think that is the most any of us can expect.

And his wife, Sasha, is still with us. Yes, very much so.

How was that first day working with Roger Howarth (Todd) again? It was great – absolutely brilliant. I love that guy. He's a wonderful actor and he's interesting. He's a really interesting human being too, and I had missed him, a lot. So I was very pleased when he came back. We had a bunch of scenes together so it was good.

Did you ever imagine that they would bring back Irene Manning? No – when they said Irene Manning, I said, "She's dead!" And they said, "No, not really."

Did you enjoy doing scenes with the actress playing Irene?

I did, I loved her. Barbara Rhoades is her name. She is a very interesting woman, and I thought she was terrific as Irene – very cold and evil. I thought she was awesome.



Barbara Rhoades

It is sort of like the Manchurian Candidate that they are doing a take off of. Yes.

She's one evil lady. I think the original actress had passed.

I don't remember the original actress' name – I remember sort of what she looked like. (Ed.

Note: The original actress was Kate McKeown. She died in 1996 at age 57.)



Irene Clayton and Viki (1978)

Have you seen Farah Fath (Gigi) and JP (Rex) on Dirty Soap? No, I have not, though I think it

airs on Sundays.

Do you watch Dancing with the Stars? I usually do. I haven't watched this year at all because it interferes with so many other shows.

JR Martinez from AMC is on it. Apparently he is wonderful.

Have you watched any new shows this season? I love Person of Interest. I've seen a couple episodes of Revenge. We still watch House and The Big Bang Theory. We saw the first couple of episodes of Two and a Half Men. I thought the beginning was funny. I don't think it is so funny anymore. The relationships are not there.

Did you get much snow over weekend? And, did you lose electric? We did – we got about 6 inches here in Connecticut and we lost power for 4 days, but that was not as bad as Hurricane Irene when we lost power for 9 days. We were lucky because we got our power back on Wednesday and a lot of the town didn't get it back until the following week.

We heard that you have a new puppy...can you tell us how you got it and what his name is?

Yes. Harry, named after Henry V, is a Maltese. He came from Florida in an airplane. He came with a courier who brought him to me. He's adorable though right this minute he's causing trouble. He was born July 6th so he is just over 4 months old.

How is housebreaking going? Housebreaking is going pretty well. He has had a couple of mistakes but not bad. Housebreaking is up to us not him because he doesn't know anything. We are having issues with Harry and Molly being together.

Do they not get along? Well, Molly is an older lady and she is very jealous. If I give Harry something, she has to take it away from him. He wants to play with her and she tolerates him most of the time. But when it comes to food or chew toys, she gets very aggressive.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

What pets do you currently have? Teddy died last April. So we have the cats, Lucy and Emily, and the dogs, Harry and Molly.

How do the cats get along with Harry? They think Harry is wonderful. They think, “My God, it looks like a cat but smells like a dog.”

Have you read any good books? What are you reading now? I’m reading a wonderful biography, “Alexander Hamilton” by Ron Chernow. It’s a very fat book so it is taking me awhile. I did just finish a marvelous book, “The Buddha in the Attic” by Julie Otsuka.

Have you seen any movies or been to the theatre? No we haven’t been in awhile.

As a child, was your father approached much when you were in public? Oh, yes. I remember being very proud of that. We’d walk down the street with him in New York and the cab drivers would yell, “Hey Walter!” in the great New York accent.

You know TCM, Turner Classic Movie channel, did a good 6-7 hours of his movies. Somebody told me about it and of course, I didn’t know or I would have TiVo’d it because apparently they showed some movies that I’ve never seen.

When was the last time you were really nervous before a scene, unless it is too personal? For a scene? I think I was nervous the day they shot my special episode because it was so much work – well, it wasn’t the memorization that was hard; it was having to play the three characters separately, with other people playing the others. We did Viki first and I had 2 other ladies playing Jean and Niki. It’s very difficult to do that because I don’t want them to give a reading – I have to know what I’m going to say when I’m playing the character. It’s a very complicated and very difficult thing. And I think I was kind of nervous about that, but Larry Carpenter directed that and Larry is my Hero! Larry was brilliant.

Do you recall the longest speech you ever had on OLTL? No.

The most challenging scene? Probably that day I just described.

What was your favorite role in repertory? Henrik Ibsen's “Hedda Gabler”. I loved “Dulcy” a George S. Kaufman-Marc Connelly play we did. Noel Coward's “Design for Living” and “Amphitryon 38” – I loved those.

How many different plays did you do per season? I think it was 5 or 6.

So would you do one play for 2 to 3 weeks and move to another? No, you’d play it for 4-5 weeks. The season usually went from September to June. This was in Milwaukee, and on nights when we were dark, they did smaller productions. You did 6-8 productions a year, which is why I embraced television.

Do you keep in touch when any of the actors from your theatre days? Not really. No.

Charlie Kimbrough went on to do things beyond repertory. Charlie left Milwaukee to be in the original cast of “Company,” and then he was Jim Dial on Murphy Brown.

It has got to be satisfying to have held such high, consistent ratings this year. Congratulations! Thank you!

ABC will be hard pressed to find another actress with the loyalty you have shown over the past 40 years. Well done and thank you! Thank you very much but listen, it was a two way street. ABC was very good to me. Loyalty, yes – I loved working there, loved having a job, but they were very good to me. So it went both ways.

Any closing comments to your fans? I am so grateful for all the love and support over the years, for all the wonderful letters and comments and I am so sorry to disappoint you regarding the show going on. Hopefully we will all stay friends and stay in touch and I thank each and every one of you for your friendship and your support and your love of OLTL.