

Erika's World

Off the Cuff

June 29, 2009

Erika Slezak

Official Fan Club

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Founded

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Dear Friends,

The club's website has been deluged with e-mails from fans asking about Erika's future on "One Life to Live." Don't know how these rumors even got started. I'm thinking that it has something to do with the pay cuts that the actors have been asked to take throughout ABC (and at all the other networks)! And with Erika's contract up for renewal (hopefully) in August, people begin to "assume" certain things. I have been blown away by the unsolicited campaign that the fans have responded to with letters, e-mails, phone calls, sponsor letters, etc. As president of Erika's club for the past thirty-seven years, I've never seen action taken like this before. Since the club has gone online, it's amazing to see how large Erika's fan base is. All of us here thank all of you most sincerely for all your efforts.

What an upbeat and fun interview I had with Erika this past Thursday for our summer online newsletter! Erika was quite happy when she discussed an upcoming storyline. As usual, Erika didn't give details, and for as long as I've been president of her fan club, Erika has always been a firm believer that it's better to be surprised rather than to "spill the beans." (I, of course, would rather that she spills the beans!) It sounds for sure that Viki will once again be a driving force on the canvas at OLTL, and I couldn't be happier. I've become quite disenchanted with the show as of late, but I'm thinking that's about to change.

Erika will have her annual month-long summer vacation in August, however, the studio will be "dark" for one of those weeks in August, so we won't be missing Viki that long on air, which makes me quite happy!

Have a wonderful and safe summer!

Walter

Telephone interview June 25, 9009

There have been a lot of rumors about your status with the show, online and in the magazines (recurring, being dropped altogether, etc.). Can you clear this up and put our minds at ease, hopefully? So far, I can't clear it up. Nobody has said to me that I am leaving the show. My contract is up for renegotiation, and they have indicated a willingness to renegotiate, so in other words, they want me to stay. So we'll see what happens. But I believe I am going to stay unless they want otherwise — but I don't know — all I know is that we are going to negotiate.

So, when you know something, you'll let me know? I certainly will.

With all the rumors regarding soap operas being cancelled, in what direction do you think soaps need to go, in order to survive and maintain today's audience? I think that probably they need to go as they are. Obviously they don't have the same audience that they had 30 years ago because we now have what, 500+ channels, and in those days we had four. You didn't have much choice. As long as you have interesting characters and good stories, people are going to want to watch.

Now what are your thoughts about the cancellation of Guiding Light? Oh, I was sorry about that. The thing is, they haven't had much of a shot recently because they are in a bad time slot — they don't have the same type of audience in the morning as you have in the afternoon or around lunch time. I have always thought it was a very good show. I hadn't watched it in a long time, quite frankly because of the time. I am sorry to see it go after all those years, but at the same time it had a great run.

75 years including radio is unbelievable! Yes it is.

If OLTL would be cancelled or the powers-that-be would be ignorant enough to let you go, would you be interested in staying in the daytime TV industry? (Walt: Do you think that far in the future?) I haven't thought that far, but yes, it's a great job. I don't work everyday and it keeps me busy. And that's the most important thing — I like to be busy. So yes, of course I would.

I have been watching the show since my college days in the 60's! I just love your work and think you are a terrific actress. PLEASE don't ever retire — I hope that is not in your vocabulary. No it is not, and thank you.

Do you feel that Dr. Larry Wolek (Michael Storm) should be on the show, perhaps as a recurring character? He just vanished 5 years ago with no reason given. Would he be happy to appear every so often? I don't know. I do understand when they get rid of characters — Michael and Sally moved to California a hundred years ago. They enjoy their life out

there, and for Michael to commute back and forth is a little difficult — and so now OLTL has different doctors that actually live in New York. I miss him. I love Michael. But I don't know that he would even want to.

They never officially wrote him off right? He's just floating around somewhere. He wasn't written off — he's probably specializing in something else now.

What is tape day like, and how far in advance do you get your scripts? You only have your scripts a week, or a little bit less sometimes, in advance. We don't tape one show a day anymore — we tape many scenes from many different shows. Last Thursday I taped scenes from five different shows, simply because the set was up. They shoot it much more for that

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convenience now, as to what is available, so that they don't have to take sets up and down. It's a cost saving method — so last Thursday, I taped scenes and kept changing clothes all day.

So continuity is really important. Yes, it is. You have to remember not just what you are wearing — wardrobe department does that — you have to remember at whom you are mad, to whom you are speaking, and to whom are you married — and all those things, because we don't shoot scenes consecutively. Sometimes you shoot shows that are 6-7 shows ahead, and then 5 shows backwards. So you have to be very aware of your place in the sequence of things.

Your tape day starts around 7? Yes, 7 or 7:15 am. I leave at different times, because it depends on how much I have to do. Last Thursday I was there until 5:00 pm and they still had an awful lot of stuff to do after I left. On a normal day, if I have 7 or 8 scenes, I can be out of there by noon. I'm up first.

That's a nice arrangement I think. That's what I enjoy — getting up early, getting the work done and beating the traffic home.

Though I am happy about Viki and Charlie's relationship, I would like to see more of it. Where on earth, even from a historical prospective, would Viki ever consider having a double wedding with her ex-husband? Are not Viki and Charlie important enough to have their own special day? Well, we all raised that question and Ron — for many reasons — decided to do a double wedding. And when the wedding occurs you'll see why. It's going to be funny and delightful. We all questioned it too. We said, "Hello? A double wedding with Clint?" And he said there are reasons for it and you'll see why.

How long did that show take to tape? We shot all of the wedding stuff and then stuff from another show. We shot the reception first, actually. That was 2 or 3 weeks ago. Because of sets, they shoot whatever occurs in that set.

So you can go to Carlotta's diner and then go to the reception, just change clothes and change your hairdo and that's it. You know, it's kind of fun — it keeps you on your toes. And you never go to work saying OK I know exactly what I am going to do — because you don't know.

Did you get a special wedding dress? Oh absolutely — Hillary (Nora) and I both did.

I like your scenes with Hillary. Yes, she's a *wonderful* actress.

What happened to the relationship between Dorian and Viki? There only seem to be occasional scenes when the characters are needed to be together as plot points. OLTL has forgotten that Viki and Dorian's relationship is an important element for the show.

No they have not. You will see in upcoming stories — that relationship is very much alive (chuckles). And it gets more so. I think we are going to have fun with this next story that is coming up.

Which leads to the next question... will you be getting a story? Yes — absolutely. We have started shooting it and let's see, what we are doing now will appear in August I think. So yes, there is a story. A good story.

How will this be affected with your vacation coming up? I'm actually only going to be gone 4 weeks — and we do have a dark week in there, so I won't be gone that long. I'm not sure what they are planning for that yet because we haven't reached that point yet. But I'm not going to be gone that long and they can pre or post tape.

Just wanted to know if Erika will be making any visits to Connecticut. I would like to see her. I'm in Connecticut frequently — but do not have any public appearances coming up.

What storyline would you like to see Viki involved in next? Well, there is going to be a

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good storyline with Dorian.

Now, is Charlie going to be involved? Because there are a LOT of Viki and Charlie fans out there. Yes, he is going to be involved.

A frequent question we get over the years is...Whom do you consider was/is the Love of Viki's life? I think that had Joe Riley lived, she would still be married to him. But of the great loves — Ben, because he was so different, unusual — of the last 5 marriages — I think it would be Ben.

But that doesn't mean you don't love Charlie. No, she loves Charlie very much. Ben was kind of dangerous...

It was the first time any of Viki's husbands was dangerous or that Viki was involved in danger. I remember those scenes in Viki's attic — I loved those scenes. Yes, it was a lot of fun.

Did you like or dislike the undoing of Jessica as Clint's daughter? Oh, yes, I never liked that. I keep hoping they will change that and maybe hopefully they will. Although it is feasible to have twins from two different fathers — but it was a story....I was hoping they would change it back, maybe they will...you never know.

Talk about changing things, I would change when Niki took Jessica to the bars. That was such a turn off for me. If they could change anything, I wish that could be changed. That was the whole reason for her (Jessica's) breakdown and her personalities.

Thank you for all the wonderful work with the DID story. That's an incredible quality acting that I love to see, and hope for more. My question is about Charlie and Viki. Do you think the show will delve into Charlie's past more, as to why he started drinking, and if that will be a future issue for Charlie and Viki? Or, if Charlie has more family/kids, and how that would affect Viki. I'm sure

that will happen — I don't see it happening in the next couple of weeks. But I think that is an area they can definitely dive into because that is one place that has not been touched is Charlie's past. And it is like they are saving that to do.

The fan ends, thanks for all of your wonderful acting — it's really amazing work and riveting to watch. That was nice — thank you.

I have been a fan of yours for many years, and have always wondered what your favorite storyline or moment has been on OLTL? (I think mine was the wedding to Ben!) You know I've done 38 years of stuff — a lot I can't even remember — I have a lot of favorite moments — I loved the scenes with Ben, they were fun and different — I loved the Heaven storyline — I loved playing all of the multiples — I loved all of the waitress and Paris stuff. I guess I don't have a favorite moment but a lot of favorites.

I am a big fan of yours and have been since your first day on the show. I met Roy Thinnes (ex-Sloan) at the OLTL luncheon and was wondering how and what he is doing. I haven't seen Roy in a while — I ran into him on Amsterdam Avenue about a year ago. He looks well. He lives up in Westchester I think, and he has been doing a lot of painting, which he loves. I'm not sure what else he is up to. I think he is well.

Do you think Viki is integrated? Yes — until they need her to not be integrated. All of the secrets are out now.

You know what I wish they would go back to — years ago there was a strong box in the secret room at Llanfair that Tina, Dorian, and Viki found. It was never opened because the three thought that whatever was in there was best left unknown. No, I didn't remember that.

The recent scenes where Viki made Jessica realize her baby was gone were phenomenal. To what extent do you

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rehearse scenes like that? Do you have to go all out in rehearsal? No, you don't do that because you have to essentially try to do it in one take. And especially for Bree's sake, you've got to kind of save it. She is amazing, and she can do it in one or two takes, but it is hard, so I kind of mark it through rehearsal, and then do it as many times as they need to, but you try to save it for tape.

How are you? I just wanted to say that I am a big fan of OLTL and Viki. It has been great to watch you and I am looking forward to seeing more of Viki/Jess scenes as Viki helps her deal with losing the baby. Thank you, and actually I'm doing very well, and I appreciate everything that was said.

When do Viki and Charlie get married (It's about time.) Please tell us it isn't a double wedding! I think it airs at the end of July. I'm not sure of the day because of preemptions and it being shot out of sequence. I'm not sure of the day but it is the end of July.

Are you being forced to take off 2 months off? No.

So basically you'll be working through the end of July. Yes, I leave I think starting on the 27th of July and we are going to be dark one week in there so, I'm going to be gone 4 weeks but only off the show for 3 weeks.

And who knows with pre-tapes and post-tapes, it may not appear to be that much at all. Exactly.

I simply adore Viki (and Erika) and have watched One Life to Live for many years. My question is: What are your thoughts on acting, i.e. talent and charisma versus hard work and training. Erika clearly has a HUGE talent and gift; when she's on screen, it seems so effortless and so natural; I'm wondering, however, what else goes into it?

A great deal of thought and preparation go into it. There's also a lot of experience involved — obviously, I've been doing this a long time. And

every day, you learn a little something more about the character and how to do it and how to make it effortless. I don't really know how to answer the question. Obviously, you know some people say that if you are just lucky then it works, but I think in order to keep a job you have to work very hard at it. It's a very odd question to answer without sounding very self serving.

She goes on to say, It seems like many younger characters on the soaps today are selected for reasons OTHER than talent or "acting chops." I'm not necessarily asking what Erika's thoughts are on that, (She's too much of a lady!), but I'm wondering what she thinks is optimal in terms of being an effective, skilled actor, what does it take, in her opinion? Thank you for the opportunity to ask this question of such a talented, classy lady! Oh, I think a lot of talent and a lot of technique — that would be my answer. I agree with her that people are hired for lots of different reasons; I would like to think that they hired the best person for the job, which is a combination of talent and looks, now days.

What is the one question you have never been asked, that you would like to answer & what would the answer be? Oh, please! (laughs) I haven't a clue. Not a clue! I've been asked so many different kinds of questions — I actually do not know.

Have you ever purchased anything from a television shopping channel? No. I don't shop on television like that.

What would you say is your one best personality trait & your one worst personality trait? The worst one would be that I am certainly impatient — I'm not just slightly impatient — I'm incredibly impatient. And my best personality trait is... (long pause)....I try very hard to be understanding and to accept other people for what they are without constantly trying to change them or whatever — it's what I try to do.

And after knowing you all of these years, you do that very well!

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Have you ever told your hairdresser, "Do whatever you think will look good." Yes, I said that to Laurie just the other day. (laughs)

So what is it now, longer or shorter? Longer.

Oh good, I like it when it is longer and slips behind your ear. That looks real good. Well, I've decided to let it grow. And Laurie said the other day, "I don't know what to do?" And I said, "Do whatever you want."

Wow, I like that. Laurie is so good — very creative and I love her to death. We have such a nice relationship. So I said, "Do whatever you feel like doing." I mean, I want to look good but I'm not so specific.

Remember when they cut your hair really short for your last Emmy win? Yes, that was too short.

What is the most obsessive, compulsive thing you do? What is the most obsessive, compulsive thing that I do....I pay my bills as they come in. I like to get it done. I'm very, very thorough about things like that — literally, a bill comes and I pay it immediately because I hate owing people money. I know that it's just bills — it's not like I think the phone company is going to get mad with me — I just think it is a good thing to get things done. And, what else do I do that is kind of...I don't know....I'd have to think about it. I mean, I change the sheets on the bed once a week. It makes me crazy when they are not changed. And I want everybody else's sheets in the house changed. I'm very big on order. Order in my life; order in work and in my home.

Order...that's not actually ultra compulsive? Yes, it is a little bit.

Because maybe if your mate, husband is not as much... No, he's not as compulsive as I am. He's compulsive about other things, and that's good.

Which do you find more rejuvenating, a quiet night at home or a night out with friends? Oh, a quiet night at home!

Do you miss Long Island? No. Not one teeny tiny bit.

Although it has been good to you in many ways? Oh, when I was there I loved living there. But no I don't miss it. The commute is easier frankly to get here, to Connecticut, because I don't have to go across town. And I like our house and life up here. There are things about Long Island that I do miss — I miss the people.

You look marvelous, how do you do it? Any special diet or exercise program? No. (laughs) I try not to eat fattening stuff.

Oh, hey, by the way, how did Steven Bergman look? He looks awesome. I saw him the other day. He has lost like 44 pounds! He looks, really, really good, and he says he feels good and he has a lot of energy.

Oh, I'm so glad. So, do you diet? Yes, I diet all of the time.

Do you exercise? No, I hate exercising. I make excuses because I have a bad back.

Well you look wonderful, so not exercising is pretty impressive. I mean, I never really sit down. If that is called exercising — I do that. I'm always doing something.

What kind of shampoo do you use? I use something by Nexus. I don't even know what it is called I just know what the bottle looks like — that and the conditioner.

What type of cell phone do you have? I have an iPhone. My son gave it to me for my birthday last year. I LOVE it. It is so easy to use.

If you could write a letter now to yourself at age 18 what would you say? If I could write a letter now to myself at age 18...(laughs)...I would tell myself not to do a lot of things that I did. But you know, you only learn by doing — so it wouldn't have any effect.

What is something about yourself that your fans would be surprised to know? Oh, how

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incredibly normal I am. My life is just so normal, I mean, I go to the grocery store, I go to the dry cleaners, I pick up after my dog, I wander around in my bathrobe in the morning — you know I live a very normal life and I do everything that I want to do. When we go up to our place in Vermont — I am out in the muck and the mud doing everything — loading wood — you know, I just lead a completely normal life.

I think that is what has kept you grounded all of these years. Yes - just being on television doesn't make you special. It makes you a little more visible, that's all. But the rest of your life is lived the same way. You can't have any airs about yourself or pretension about yourself because then you get into trouble thinking you are better or different than you actually are — because you are not. What's that saying — I still put my socks and shoes on one foot at a time.

Do you have any special plans for your upcoming vacation? Temporarily no. We are toying with the idea of a trip, but nothing has been finalized yet.

What does your family usually do on Mother's Day and Father's Day? We go out to dinner together as a family.

So the kids are always around. If they can be. Fortunately, for this year, they were for both days. So we got dressed up and we went out to dinner.

What is your favorite thing to do to relax? I like to read. I like to sit alone in a room someplace and just read quietly — which very rarely happens.

I was recently in Aruba and I thought I saw Erika Slezak with Jess Walton of The Young and the Restless walking down the beach. There was a man catching fish (mullets) to go fishing for bigger fish. The ladies were watching him and talking to him and I stopped and asked them what he was catching. When they looked up and we made eye contact, I thought for sure it was Jess

Walton and when she spoke, her voice was that deep voice that only she has. And when I looked at her friend, it looked like Erika. I didn't want to bother them on vacation, but I've been wondering since if it was really the two of them. Can you confirm if it was them? This was during the week of June 13th. It wasn't I.

We are calling and writing to keep Erika on OLTL. Yes, I know! It's so unbelievably persistent and thorough and I appreciate it enormously.

So it is not hurting you? I don't know if it is helping or hurting but everyday I come to work and there are stacks of letters.

Is there anything else they can do? No. They've been emailing as well because Frank tells me "Oh my God, I'm getting tons of emails." And I said, "Oh, good."

It sounds to me anyway that they are finally giving you something to do. Yes.

Does Brian Frons have a problem with, not with you per se, but with the character of Viki? No, I don't think so. I think that Brian is very focused on the future of the show, which he should be. You've got to bring on characters that can continue, while keeping the ones who are there. I think that is what his focus is, and I don't think it is a bad thing. If focus was just on those characters that have been there forever — there's not much future because eventually people are going to leave or die or whatever. So he wants to keep the show fresh without losing the other people. You know, everybody has a different method of keeping the show fresh and alive, and I think Brian's is a lot that. But he's very interested in keeping the existing characters as well. I actually had a terrific lunch with him about a month ago I guess — he's a very nice, very intelligent man. And you know, I'm talking about everything and I was totally impressed by that. I was very impressed by his knowledge and his intention and his take on things. And I found that a lot of it is exactly how I feel.

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Do you think he realizes your contribution to the show? I think he does. But he's dealing with the whole show — not just me. So he has to think of the whole show and what is good for the whole show and one character is never the whole show. But yes, he is, because we had a long talk about story and Viki and where we are going to go with this.

I'm very happy to hear that.

The Young and the Restless has been #1 for decades and does extremely well in the demos. Their focus for most of last year and part of this year has been on Jeanne Cooper's character (who just turned 80). They also feature their veteran characters on a regular basis. Do you think ABC has a different mindset about featuring their vets and long-time characters? I suppose so, but I don't know. Believe it or not, Paul Rauch is running Y & R! And Paul is very sharp, and has always been smart. So whatever he is doing is working. On our show, we have good weeks of ratings and bad weeks of ratings, and everything kind of goes up and down. Y&R has had an enormously loyal fan base for a very long time, so I think that is a big part of that — they'll watch through thick and thin.

Do you know if OLTL will be revamping their opening? Some opening photos have changed-but not yours. I don't know if they will or not. I know they did a lot of shots last summer but I was on vacation.

Any chance OLTL will go High Def? I suppose so — eventually.

What are your thoughts on method acting, and do you think it has changed the American theatre? No. I think that under any guise, acting is acting, whether you pull it from inside or just do it technically — you know, whatever works. And I think basically it is all the same. It depends on how you get there. There are method actors, people who call them method actors, that are brilliant actors, and there

are other brilliant actors who approach it from a different manor. I don't think it has changed the American theatre at all.

Will you be attending the Emmy telecast? I have no idea. I know it is in California, I think the end of August. If I am in town and if I am invited, maybe I will go.

If you are going to be presenting will you let me know so I can post it? Yes, I'll do that.

Have you seen Brian Kerwin's (Charlie) play?

Oh yes. We saw it ages ago, back when Brian first came on — I guess within a month of it opening. It's August Osage County. They are actually closing this Sunday, but it had almost a year and a half run — a lot longer than they thought it was going to run because it was supposed to be a limited engagement. And I think he is not too unhappy that he won't have to go to the theatre every night — eight performances a week. It will be nice for him to see his family for a change, because he has been working during the day and then also at night. He's been having a rough schedule.

One movie that you just can't get enough of?
No.

How about one movie of your father's that you enjoy seeing more than once. Oh there is a wonderful movie of his called "People Will Talk," and I have seen that many times.

Well, I think that is it. Thank you Erika for your time with us. My pleasure and thank you Walter.