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Pier 54

A General Hospital Fan Podcast

by Natalie Boero

Kids today will never know the joy of wasting summer days watching soap operas or rushing home from school just in time to catch a Friday cliffhanger or, even better, getting home to pop a well-worn VHS tape out of the VCR and discover that the hour and a half trying to figure out how to set the machine to record your favorite soap actually worked for once! The heyday of the network soap opera has given way to streaming video, online games, and social media. BUT, according Amanda and Shannon, creators and co-hosts of Pier 54, A General Hospital Podcast, soaps may be down, but they are not out, especially their favorite soap, ABC's "General Hospital". "General Hospital" premiered in 1963 and is currently in its fifty-ninth season and Amanda and Shannon, currently in the third year of their podcast, are helping bring the fictional town of Port Charles and its denizens into the twenty first century!

Friends for 10 years, Amanda and Shannon first met in a girl scout meeting. Shannon casually mentioned needing to get home to watch "General Hospital" and according to Amanda, "I almost attacked her". They went on to discover they had each been watching "General Hospital" since they were kids, and thus began an epic "General Hospital" text thread between new friends.

As their "General Hospital" text thread grew, Shannon and Amanda joked about starting a podcast. Indeed, Shannon, whose husband has a wrestling podcast, knew something about the podcasting process and was also an avid podcast listener (Amanda, on the other hand, had never even listened to a podcast!). The friends joked about how much fun they would recording a "General Hospital" podcast, but both women doubted anyone would listen to it. They decided to do it anyway...just for fun. They were definitely wrong about finding an audience; soaps may have moved from the mainstream to the niche and nostalgic, but there were plenty of people who were excited to keep current on, rehash, and overanalyze "General Hospital" with two super fans.



Amanda and Shannon chose to name the podcast, Pier 54 after the fictional waterfront setting in the fictional town of Port Charles. As anyone familiar with the genre will know, every soap opera has a waterfront setting much of the show's action goes down... In addition to a carefully chosen name, Shannon and Amanda were also intentional about the release date of their first episode. Shannon recalls, "When we decided to do the podcast, it was March 2019 and because I'm kind of a really big dork I realized that April 1st 1963 was the date 'General Hospital' first premiered, so we really gunned it and coordinated the launch of our podcast to coincide with the date 'General Hospital' debuted."

The first episode of *Pier 54* was a “recap” episode in which the hosts recap that week’s ‘General Hospital’ episodes. Soon, Shannon began to feel like they should add another weekly episode in the style of her favorite podcast *My Favorite Murder*. As “General Hospital” has been on the air for close to sixty years, Shannon and Amanda decided to add a second weekly episode they call the “Port Charles 411” to, as Shannon put it, “talk about storyline backgrounds and the evolution of characters.” Shannon and Amanda manage an episode schedule most podcasters would find daunting (especially those like Shannon and Amanda who are also parents and working regular jobs!) The *Pier 54* ladies release two episodes every week...over 300 episodes so far, recording both of their weekly episodes on Sundays. Amanda explains, “We record every Sunday, and we try to do everything at once. Both of our families know that Sunday is our day for recording and we aren’t as available to them.” Shannon and Amanda then release their weekly “recap” episode Mondays and, on Thursdays they release “Port Charles 411”.

The biggest change in starting the podcast is that the hosts no longer text or talk about “General Hospital” episodes during the week so that they talk about them for the first time during their recordings. Shannon explains, “I think our biggest thing for the recap is that we stopped talking about the show during the week. We don’t script our episodes, every bit of our conversation regarding the recap is 100% unplanned.” They do work together to prepare for their “Port Charles 411” episodes, often doing their research for those episodes on YouTube (where many “General Hospital” super fans have posted old VHS recordings of episodes), and mining social media groups for information. There is enough information out there that the *Pier 54* ladies were able to do a 12-part episode on a single character! Shannon and Amanda take notes as they watch “General Hospital” throughout the week, but both agree Shannon takes the most copious and detailed episode notes (something Amanda sometimes lovingly teases her for). Shannon takes the gentle ribbing in stride, telling Amanda, “Well, not just you, a lot of people make fun of me for being so organized. And it’s because I know if I wasn’t and if I didn’t have my notebooks, my binders, or whatever, things wouldn’t get done.” Both ladies also agree that Shannon is the more organized of the pair and, given her greater familiarity with podcasts and podcasting, Shannon also handles the production and editing work for the podcast.

One of the most surprising things about having a podcast that grew out of their being “General Hospital” fans is that now they have fans! Amanda explains, “I think we still have a hard time accepting that we have fans. We’ll often ask for fan input, because some people have watched “General Hospital” longer than us or they remember different things. Then when we meet fans, and they’re like, ‘oh my gosh, I’m so excited to talk to you!’ Its’ pretty wild.” For Amanda, all she and Shannon are looking to do is meet other fans and, “have a conversation about ‘General Hospital’ and then, they go on and give us these wonderful compliments and talk about how much they love the podcast.” Shannon adds that, “...the biggest compliment that we get is that

people listen and they feel like they’re listening to friends. Which is true, I mean, we legit just sit on my couch and do this, you know? It is really two friends sitting on the couch talking about ‘General Hospital.’



Most episodes of *Pier 54* are just Shannon and Amanda, but they also do interview episodes where they interview fans, or even “General Hospital” cast members. While many actors tend to be difficult to access, soap actors have a reputation for being responsive to

fans and the hosts have had success reaching out to cast members. One highlight for Amanda came when, unbeknownst to her, Shannon contacted Cari Shayne, who played Karen Wexler, one of Amanda's favorite characters in the early 1990s. Shannon reached out to Cari and surprised Amanda on her birthday by telling her that they would be interviewing Cari. According to Amanda, she was stunned and thrilled, but, "I think that was probably my worst interview because I was totally starstruck the entire time!"

Shannon and Amanda are part of the "General Hospital" community, but Shannon in particular is interested in becoming more a part of the podcast community and would like the chance to meet other podcasters in person. One thing Shannon is also interested in is helping new podcasters get their podcasts up and running. This interest really stemmed from helping out a couple of friends who recently started podcasts. Shannon explains, "I have two friends who started their own podcasts fairly recently and I was able to be a guest on both of their shows because they both just wanted to pick my brain about podcasting stuff." She also sees feeling more a part of a podcast community as a way to process and learn from mistakes. For example, Shannon says, "I like having support and just knowing that it's not just me or us struggling with some element of podcasting." She also expressed that she would like to see more support for women podcasters because "we [women] are most of the podcast listeners, but the most well-known podcasters are men, we need more visibility, more community."

Asked what advice they would give women interested in podcasting, Shannon and Amanda recommend just diving in. Amanda suggests, "I think that you just have to go for it no matter what other people think. I know that when I first started doing it [the podcast], even my own family was like, 'you're going to do what?', and 'you're going to talk about what?'" Amanda recalls getting questions about who would actually listen to the podcast, and if it would be worth the time of making a podcast no one listened to. On the other hand, she also recalls having some very encouraging friends who helped her shut out the negative voices, "I had a couple of friends, that thought it was a great idea, they told me, 'Yeah, that sounds like something you could do. You've always talked about and loved soaps. So why not try it and see what happens?'" Amanda adds, "if you make 10 episodes and it doesn't go anywhere, you wasted a couple hours of your life, who cares? But if it does, imagine what you can accomplish." Shannon pipes up in agreement, "Yup, look at us, we've now done 312 episodes." Like "General Hospital" itself, Amanda and Shannon show no signs of slowing down with *Pier 54*. Keep your eyes peeled for them as someday they might show up at the Daytime Emmys to do red carpet interviews!



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