

The Sentinel for Health Awards



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CENTER

An edited transcript of the awards ceremony
Writers Guild of America, West | September 23, 2009



THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER

The Norman Lear Center is a nonpartisan research and public policy center that studies the social, political, economic and cultural impact of entertainment on the world. The Lear Center translates its findings into action through testimony, journalism, strategic research and innovative public outreach campaigns. On campus, from its base in the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, the Lear Center builds bridges between schools and disciplines whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through scholarship and research; through its conferences, public events and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice in the field.

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Hollywood, Health & Society (HH&S), a program of the Norman Lear Center, provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for health storylines. Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The California Endowment and the National Institutes of Health, HH&S recognizes the profound impact that entertainment media have on individual knowledge and behavior. HH&S supplies writers and producers with accurate health information through individual consultations, tip sheets, group briefings, a technical assistance hotline, panel discussions at the Writers Guild of America, West, a quarterly newsletter and Web links to health information and public service announcements. The program also conducts extensive evaluations on the content and impact of TV health storylines.

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The 2009 Sentinel for Health Awards Presentation and Panel Discussion can be viewed in its entirety online at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYDbJwljY5Q

2009 SENTINEL FOR HEALTH AWARD WINNERS

DAYTIME DRAMA

FIRST PLACE: “Carly’s Alcohol Story,” *As The World Turns* (CBS). Writers: Leah Laiman, Peter Brash, Jean Passanante, David A. Levinson, Susan Dansby, Gordon Rayfield, Cheryl L. Davis, Courtney Simon

SECOND PLACE: “Living with Autism,” *Days of our Lives* (NBC). Writers: Dena Higley, Christopher Whitesell, Fran Myers, Victor Gialanella, Rick Draughon, Renee Godelia, Jeanne Marie Ford, Lisa Seidman, Jodie Scholz, Cydney Kelley, John Newman, Clem Egan, Linda Poindexter-Brown, Ryan Quan, Richard Culliton, David Cherrill

CHILDREN’S PROGRAMMING

FIRST PLACE: “Coming Home: Military Families Cope with Change,” produced by *Sesame Street* in association with Worldwide Pants Inc. on PBS. Writer: Chrissy Ferraro

SECOND PLACE: “The Day Before Tomorrow,” *Lincoln Heights* (ABC Family). Writer: Anthony Sparks

GLOBAL HEALTH STORYLINE

FIRST PLACE: “Retro,” *Law & Order: SVU* (NBC). Writers: Jonathan Greene, Joshua Kotcheff

PRIMETIME COMEDY

FIRST PLACE: “You’re Gonna Love Tomorrow,” *Desperate Housewives* (ABC). Writer: Marc Cherry

PRIMETIME MINOR STORYLINE

FIRST PLACE: “Old Times,” *ER* (NBC). Writer: John Wells

SECOND PLACE: “Worlds Apart,” *Private Practice* (ABC). Writer: Steve Blackman

Primetime Drama

FIRST PLACE: “Old Times,” *ER* (NBC). Writer: John Wells

SECOND PLACE: “Falling,” *Law & Order* (NBC). Writers: Stephanie SenGupta, Keith Eisner

THIRD PLACE: “Selfish,” *Law & Order: SVU* (NBC). Writer: Mick Betancourt

EVERETT M. ROGERS AWARD FOR FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN ENTERTAINMENT EDUCATION 2009 RECIPIENT



Garth Japhet

Garth Japhet is chief executive officer of Heartlines, an organization that aims to achieve positive social change by promoting lived values, strong relationships and civic action in southern Africa. Trained as a physician with a specialty in maternal/child health, he previously created the pioneering multimedia edutainment platform, *Soul City*, which now reaches 35 million people in eight southern African countries through entertainment programming, community mobilization and advocacy. He has been a Fulbright scholar, a fellow of the World Economic Forum, a Bishop Tutu Andrew Murray Prize for Media recipient, a member of the World Economic Forums Global agenda council, and a Senior Ashoka fellow.

PANEL DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS

MODERATORS

Neal Baer,
Sandra de Castro Buffington, director,
Hollywood, Health & Society

Dena Higley, head writer
As The World Turns (CBS)

Susan Dansby, script writer and alternative
editor
Days of Our Lives (NBC)

Bob Daily, executive producer
Desperate Housewives (ABC)

Keith Eisner, co-executive producer
Law & Order (NBC)

Mick Betancourt, co-producer
Law & Order (NBC)

Joe Sachs, executive producer
ER (NBC)

Moira McMahon, director of medical
research
Private Practice (ABC)

Anthony Sparks, executive story editor
and writer
Lincoln Heights (ABC Family)

Dr. Jeanette Betancourt, vice president,
Outreach and Educational Practices
Sesame Street in association with
Worldwide Pants Inc. on PBS

Jonathan Greene, co-executive producer
Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (NBC)

2009 SENTINEL AWARDS

John Wells: Welcome all to our annual Sentinel for Health Awards ceremony and panel discussion. This is the 10th annual Sentinel for Health Awards and I can't believe it's been 10 years. That's 10 years of honoring shows that probe the depths of health issues.

I'm John Wells, co-chair of the board of Hollywood, Health & Society. We have a great program tonight because it's our evening to honor the writers of some of the best shows on television today, with no actor-presenters. It's just writers, so don't look for any actors here. This is for writers only.

I'd like to introduce Sandra de Castro Buffington, who is director extraordinaire of Hollywood, Health & Society, a program at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center.

Here's Sandra.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Welcome everyone to this special evening. I'd like to start by recognizing some very important people. First I'd like to recognize Mary Ganikos, one of our favorite donors. She's with the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Department of Transplantation. And we'd like to recognize our Sentinel judges and our subject matter experts, the physicians, researchers and other technical experts who make our work possible. Thank you for coming. And finally, I'd like to recognize the Hollywood, Health & Society and the Norman Lear Center staff, especially Kathy Le who is standing in the doorway. Now let's give everybody a round of applause.



Michael Taylor and
Sandra de Castro Buffington



Arvind Singhal, Sandra de Castro
Buffington and Garth Japhet



Marty Kaplan is not able to be with us tonight, but we're delighted that in his place we're joined by Michael Taylor, chair of Film & Television Production at the USC School of Cinematic Arts.

Before we present the 2009 Sentinel Awards, there's another award I'm honored to introduce. This is an award named for the late Everett Rogers. Ev was a pioneer in the field of entertainment education, as well as a former associate dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism. I first had the privilege of working with Ev in 1989 when together we coordinated the first ever International Entertainment Education Conference for Social Change here in Los Angeles.

It's a very special honor for me tonight to introduce the Ev Rogers award winner of 2009, Dr. Garth Japhet – who has come all the way from South Africa to receive this award. Garth Japhet is a trained physician specializing in maternal and child health, but what he has achieved in health education through entertainment media is nothing short of groundbreaking.

He created *Soul City*, a compelling TV drama that is one of the most popular in southern Africa. Not only is it a compelling drama, but it was created for the social good. It uses a multimedia platform that reaches 35 million viewers in eight southern African countries. Garth is currently CEO of Heartlines, a new company that uses TV and film to tell stories that encourage the nation to live by values such as acceptance, responsibility and forgiveness. Heartlines focuses on the power of relationships for positive social transformation.

Garth has been a Fulbright scholar, a fellow of the World Economic Forum and a recipient of the Bishop Tutu Andrew Murray Prize for Media.

To present the award tonight is Arvind Singhal, the winner of the 2005 Rogers Award.



Arvind is a noted communications scholar, author and a professor at the University of Texas, El Paso, who had the privilege to both study and work with Ev Rogers.

Arvind Singhal: Please join me in celebrating and congratulating Garth Japhet for the Everett Rogers Award.

Garth Japhet: Good evening and thank you all very, very much for this honor. To the Writers Guild, to the Norman Lear Center and Hollywood, Health & Society, thank you. It is a great honor to be recognized in this way and also to be at an event like this. I'm not sure if you really realize the impact that your story lines have on the world, not just on America, and the lasting impact that it has on millions of lives, particularly in the part of the world that I come from.

I had the opportunity to have a look at some of the names here. All of these are household names in South Africa. The work that you do, the stories you tell, profoundly impact many, many lives beyond the realm of your own experience. So thank you very much for this honor, for this award and for the work you do. Thank you.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Congratulations, Garth, on receiving this award for your visionary work. Now it's time to announce the finalists for the 2009 Sentinel Awards. I love this event because it gives us a chance to honor TV writers who give new meaning to the word storyteller, writers who not only tell a great story, but also change the hearts and minds of their viewers in the process. These master storytellers have the ability to capture the attention of millions of viewers around the world and teach them something important in the process.



Garth Japhet

“They can hold viewers in the thrall of a story and simultaneously make inroads in reducing disease and stigma in our society as a whole.”

-Sandra de Castro Buffington

But it's not just about unique storylines or strong well-developed characters; these script writers show us how well-crafted TV shows can entertain viewers so completely that they learn almost by osmosis. They can hold viewers in the thrall of a story and simultaneously make inroads in reducing disease and stigma in our society as a whole.

Tonight is all about you. It's our chance to honor your strong storytelling and the positive and powerful effects of your work on society. Bravo!

Immediately following the award ceremony, the award winning writers and producers will take the stage. They'll address the highs and lows of writing about health issues for network and public television. We look forward to hearing from them.

And now the awards. Topic experts reviewed a total of 30 storylines before 11 were selected as finalists in six categories, which are Daytime Drama, Children's Programming, Global Health Storyline – a new category this year – Primetime Comedy, Primetime Minor Storyline and Primetime Drama.

Now I'm going to invite Michael Taylor to the podium to announce the winners in Daytime Drama and Children's Programming.

Michael Taylor: Thank you Sandra. Let's begin with Daytime Drama. There were two very strong finalists in this category. The first is from *Days of our Lives* and is called "Living with Autism." The storyline centers on a child named Theo who has autism. Theo's disease is seen through the eyes of his parents, Lexie and Abe Carver. Let's watch the clip.

(clip plays)



Michael Taylor: The next finalist is from *As The World Turns* and is called “Carly’s Alcohol Story.” In this storyline, we watch as Carly abuses alcohol and experiences the repeated pattern of denial, remorse and relapse. Let’s take a look.

(clip plays)

Michael Taylor: And now for the second-place winner. Please give a round of applause to *Days of Our Lives* for “Living with Autism” and here to accept the award is head writer Dena Higley. Congratulations.

Dena Higley: Thank you very much.

Michael Taylor: And next I’m pleased to honor *As the World Turns*, “Carly’s Alcohol Story” as the first-place winner in our Daytime Drama category. And here to accept this award is Susan Dansby, the scriptwriter. Congratulations.

Next is the Children’s Programming category. There were two impressive finalists in this category and I’d like to start with finalist number one, from the series *Lincoln Heights* with an episode called “The Day Before Tomorrow.” Here, a female character finds herself in a physically abusive relationship and realizes the hard way that nothing will change unless she takes action. Let’s watch the clip.

(clip plays)

Michael Taylor: Our second finalist for Children’s Programming was produced by *Sesame Street* in association with Worldwide Pants; it’s called “Coming Home: Military Families Cope with Change.” The story explores the challenges faced by service members and their families as the soldiers return home with injuries, some



Michael Taylor and Susan Dansby

obvious and others invisible. Let's watch.

(clip plays)

Michael Taylor: Let's first recognize the second-place prizewinner. Please give a round of applause to *Lincoln Heights*, "The Day Before Tomorrow." And here to accept the award is Anthony Sparks, executive story editor and writer. Congratulations.



Anthony Sparks

Anthony Sparks: On behalf of *Lincoln Heights*, my executive producer, Kathleen McGee Anderson and the writing staff, we'd like to say thank you for acknowledging us and acknowledging some of the work that we try to do.

Lincoln Heights is a really unique animal, we think, in the primetime television world in that we are a primetime cop show, we are a family show and we are also a teen drama, all at the same time. I speak for all of us when I say thank you for finding a way to acknowledge some of the work that we endeavor to do. Thank you so very much.

Michael Taylor: And now I'm pleased to honor *Sesame Street's* "Coming Home: Military Families Cope With Change" as the first-place winner in our Children's Programming category. And here to accept the award is Dr. Jeanette Bettencourt, vice president of Outreach and Educational Practices and Christina Delfico, executive producer. Congratulations.

Christina Delfico: Thank you very much. This is quite an honor and it's interesting to see all the other work that everyone has been doing as well. We'd like to thank our funders, the





Jonathan Greene

Iraq Afghanistan Defense Impact Fund and the Department of Defense, as well as American Greetings. If we don't live near a military installation, we may not know what's going on with the families of our service members. So ours was a unique perspective of young children and young parents coming back and dealing with changes. Thank you very much to everyone here; we're really honored. Thank you.

Michael Taylor: Now I'm going to invite Sandra back to the podium to announce the winners in the Global Health Storyline and Primetime Comedy categories. Sandra?

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Next is our new category for Global Health Storyline. We have one finalist. It's an episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* called "Retro." This episode deals with the controversial topic of AIDS deniers. These are people in the U.S. and overseas who don't believe that HIV causes AIDS, a denial that often leads to tragic results. Let's look at the clip.

(clip plays)

Sandra de Castro Buffington: I am very pleased to present the award for Excellence in a Global Health Storyline to *Law & Order: SVU* for the episode "Retro." To accept the award, we have Jonathan Greene, co-executive producer. Jonathan, please come up to accept the award. Congratulations.

Jonathan Greene: Thank you on behalf of everybody at *SVU* for bestowing this on us. These kinds of stories are our bread and butter. I've had the privilege

for almost 10 years of being able to tell stories like this. We get paid to entertain, but we have such an opportunity to inform that I feel privileged to be able to use what we do to teach people things in addition to entertaining them. Finally I want to thank Hollywood, Health & Society for being such a huge resource to us in being able to tell stories like this. Thank you all.



Sandra de Castro Buffington: Next I'm pleased to present the Primetime Comedy category. This year we have one finalist from the popular television show *Desperate Housewives*. The entry for this year is "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow," which explores the problem of childhood obesity. Let's watch the clip.

(clip plays)

Sandra de Castro Buffington: I'm very pleased to present the first-place award for Primetime Comedy to *Desperate Housewives* for "You're Gonna Love Tomorrow." And here to accept the award is Executive Producer Bob Daily. Congratulations.

Bob Daily: Thank you. Thank you very much. This is a wonderful honor. It's nice for us to be honored for educating people and saving lives because at *Desperate Housewives* the thing we're best at is killing people. I think we've killed over 40 people in five seasons. We've strangled people, burned people, crushed people, run them over. Someone was impaled on a picket fence during a tornado. So it's nice to be honored for something a little more positive than that.

I want to especially thank the Lear Center because on the few occasions that we have allowed people to live and have had questions about health issues, the people at the Lear Center have been amazing, provided us tons of research and information including the storyline that you saw tonight. So on behalf of all the writers, the directors and the actors, especially Madison De La Garza, who is that little girl that you just saw and is a great kid and

...we have such an opportunity to inform that I feel privileged to be able to use what we do to teach people things in addition to entertaining them.

-Jonathan Greene

a wonderful sport – thank you.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: I'd like to invite Michael back up to present the awards for Primetime Drama Minor Storyline.

Michael Taylor: We have two finalists in this category. The first finalist is from *ER*, a series that ran for an amazing 15 years. The storyline is one from the final episodes of *ER* and is called "Old Times." In this episode, Noah Wyle's character, Dr. John Carter, undergoes a complex kidney transplant operation and a public health intervention called the Surgical Safety Checklist ends up saving his life. Let's watch the clip.

(clip plays)

Michael Taylor: The second contender comes from the series *Private Practice*. It's titled "Worlds Apart." This episode deals with a young diabetic boy who seeks help for an infection around the tube used to deliver insulin to his body. Let's take a look.

(clip plays)

Michael Taylor: Now I'd like to recognize the second-place finalist in the Primetime Minor Storyline category, *Private Practice*, "Worlds Apart." To accept the award is Moira McMahon, director of medical research for the show. Please come up and accept the award.

Moira McMahon: Thank you very much. This is terrific. I want to thank Hollywood, Health & Society. I call them every single day. I email them at least three times a day and almost everyday I talk to a doctor and learn something new



Bob Daily

“
 We try our very best to be as accurate as possible. It’s challenging but very rewarding when we can put great messages out there.”

-Moirah McMahon

because of them. So, thank you all very much, particularly Kathy, who at this point is getting texts from me.

We try our very best to be as accurate as possible. It’s challenging but very rewarding when we can put great messages out there. Diabetes is a big epidemic right now in children and I’m really glad that we were able to do the storyline. Tune in next season. The premier is pretty soon. Thank you.

Michael Taylor: Next, it’s my pleasure to present the first-place award to *ER*’s “Old Times.” Accepting this award is Dr. Joe Sachs, executive producer.

Joe Sachs: On behalf of John Wells and all the writers of *ER*, thank you very much for honoring us. We too are blessed by Hollywood, Health & Society, who was always there when we needed them.

This particular story has a very interesting origin. I read about the Surgical Safety Checklist a year and a half ago in an article in *The New Yorker* about Dr. Atul Gawande – a professor of medicine at Harvard, and a big advocate of the procedure. We were waiting for the right time for a dramatic story to be able to highlight it and what better way for an old doctor, Peter Benton, to come back and save a life of a dear old friend by such a simple intervention.

It’s just an example of how we started with the drama and the storyline. We wanted Peter Benton, without himself operating on John Carter, to have a tremendous impact. The power of this checklist was demonstrated; and this particular clip is being shown all over the world now to get ministers of health onboard with the checklist.

So thank you again. It was a great 15 years. We had a lot of help from Hollywood, Health & Society and we appreciate your recognition.



Michael Taylor: Congratulations to all of our winners. And now, back to you Sandra.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Our final category this evening is Primetime Drama. We have three extraordinary finalists. We'll start with *Law & Order* and its storyline, "Falling." In this episode, Assistant District Attorney Michael Cutter struggles to find a way to help a disabled child avoid an ethically questionable surgery. Let's watch.

(clip plays)

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Our second finalist in this category is *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, with the episode "Selfish." In "Selfish" the writers explore the controversial topic of childhood vaccinations and the consequences for many if one child remains unvaccinated and gets sick. Let's take a look.

(clip plays)

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Our third finalist is once again the *ER* episode "Old Times." This major storyline revolves around a grandmother's difficult decision to allow her grandson's organs to be donated, give meaning to his tragic death and offer a second chance at life to others. Let's see the clip.

(clip plays)

Sandra de Castro Buffington: First, it's my pleasure to announce the third-place winner in Primetime Drama category. Please give a round of applause to *Law*



Joe Sachs

& Order: SVU's "Selfish." Here to accept the award is Co-Producer, Mick Betancourt. Would you please come up to accept the award? Congratulations.



Mick Betancourt: Thank you. Thank you very much for the award. I'd like to accept this on behalf of the whole staff of *Law & Order: SVU* and I would also like to thank Hollywood, Health & Society for your accessibility and being so wonderful every time I call. The staff was definitely a tremendous asset to us in our telling of this story. Tonight is an incredible reminder of what really powerful and great storytelling can accomplish. I am truly honored to be a part of it. Thank you.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Next I'd like to announce the second-place winner. The second-place prize goes to the *Law & Order* episode "Falling." Here to accept the award is Keith Eisner, co-executive producer. Will you please come up to accept the award? Congratulations.

Keith Eisner: Thank you. On behalf of my co-writers, Stephanie Sengupta and the staff of *Law & Order*, I'd like to thank Hollywood, Health & Society for this honor. As you know, *Law & Order* frequently traffics in ethical issues. Those issues don't always involve health topics. This time the show did and we're very privileged and honored to be able to bring it to the public's attention. Thank you.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Finally, the 2009 Sentinel for Health Awards first-place winner in Primetime Drama is *ER* for "Old Times." Here to accept the award is Joe Sachs, executive producer. Congratulations.

Joe Sachs: Thank you. Wow. I would like to make the promise that I won't be back next year to accept any other awards. No. Again on behalf of John Wells and the writing staff – the writing is a great collaboration – we would just like to say thank you.

Tonight is an incredible reminder of what really powerful and great storytelling can accomplish.

-Mick Betancourt



I'd also like to acknowledge the history and tradition of staying current and accurate with the medical information on *ER* – a history that went all the way back to 1993 when the pilot was first developed by Michael Crichton from a script that he wrote. And I'd also like to acknowledge Neal Baer, who was such an important part of *ER* in the early years. We set the bar very high. It's always been our effort to tell great dramatic stories, but those dramatic stories are supported by medical information that's current and accurate. And as a side effect, people learn. And we know that. So thank you again, it's really a great honor.

2009 SENTINEL PANEL DISCUSSION

It's always been our effort to tell great dramatic stories, but those dramatic stories are supported by medical information that's current and accurate.

-Joe Sachs

Sandra de Castro Buffington: We're so impressed by the work of these fine writers and especially delighted by the entries from new contenders like *Sesame Street*. You are all winners and I applaud you in your efforts to tell compelling and important stories that educate and enlighten audiences. Please keep up the good work.

I know we're all waiting to hear from the writers, so let's move on to our panel discussion. At this point, I'd like to invite the panelists representing the shows honored tonight to take a seat at the tables. We have the next 20 to 30 minutes to hear from them about their experiences working on these storylines and to take any questions you may have for them.

I'd also like to invite Neal Baer back to the stage to moderate with me tonight's panel. Neal is co-chair of the Hollywood, Health & Society Advisory Board and



executive producer of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, a winner tonight. Please take your seats.

Neal Baer: Congratulations to all of you. Thank you, Joe, for your nice comments. *ER* really did epitomize great medical storytelling so I was thrilled. But Joe was on the show since the very beginning. So, I really congratulate you, Joe, and *ER* for all the many stories that you told over those years.

Before we start, we didn't hear from the Daytime Drama winners. So first, Dena, please say a word on accepting your award.



Neal Baer

Dena Higley: I was kind of glad we skipped that part. I have worked in television in daytime drama for 24 years and I've lived with autism for 21. And this was a story I never thought I would be emotionally strong enough to tell. My son, Connor, was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder when he was almost four years old and that was a long, long time ago. It's a different world now, and I am so grateful that it is.

I didn't pitch this story. Bruce Evans, senior vice president of daytime programming at NBC, is an impossible man to say no to. I'm so glad. I want to thank Bruce so much for raising the bar and challenging me to tell Connor's story. It was such a personal story for me. The clip of the program that we just saw: that was me and that was Connor. I totally pulled it out of my own life. My husband is sitting here in tears because he doesn't watch the show and he'd never seen that clip before. Thank you to Jim and Renee and Terrell. It's like watching good-looking versions of Mark and me living out our lives. And Rebecca McGill, thank you so much for pushing this issue with me.

“...this was a story I never thought I would be emotionally strong enough to tell.”

-Dena Higley

And you know, autism is an epidemic in this country. One out of 150 births now are



documented cases of autism spectrum disorder and it's such a spectrum. You can live anywhere on the spectrum. My son is now 21 and is going to college. He goes to Azusa Pacific University. He couldn't be here tonight because he had too much homework. It's a good thing.

I think about all the kids that he went to preschool with who maybe are living a different kind of life than what you or I would call normal. But we champion them and we speak for those who can't speak. I love these kids. They're special and wonderful and we, as a society, need to embrace them and find the glory in them. So thanks Mark, my husband. Thanks.

Neal Baer: Thank you Dena. Now I'll ask a question of each of the panelists pertaining to their experiences doing their shows. I'll continue with Dena for one more moment. There are so many people who have children with autism. What was the audience response?

Dena Higley: Oh gosh! I got emails from hundreds of parents. Many of them weren't necessarily parents of autistic kids, but their kids went to school with autistic kids and they had questions that were answered by watching *Days of Our Lives*. They had concerns that were assuaged. Parents of kids who had just gotten a diagnosis would email me. It was an overwhelming response. It was beautiful and heartfelt. I'm sure Bruce and Rebecca could tell you stories, too. Renee and Jim hear things all the time that are very positive and glowing. We couldn't be more touched by the outpouring of response and love.

Neal Baer: So the stories make a difference.

Dena Higley: Absolutely, absolutely. It's the fun part of my job.



Dena Higley

Neal Baer: Great. Thank you. Thank you very much. Susan, and *As The World Turns*. Congratulations.

Susan Dansby: Thank you. I was looking at the list of possible questions and the one that hit me was the one I couldn't answer. How did this story start? So I called our head writer, Jean Passanante. She explained, as happens so often in daytime, that somebody got pregnant. Our actor, Maura West, got pregnant and we had to write her out for a certain number of weeks. That's exactly how this story got started.



The fallout of all of that, which also happens a lot in daytime, is that we had a character named Carly whose father was an alcoholic, who owned a bar, who was going through a major life crisis. This was her way to cope. On a personal level, my father was an alcoholic. I had this story land in my lap and had the opportunity to say in scripts what I couldn't say to him – certainly no longer can say to him because he's passed away. Being able to go through our own catharses is so wonderful, because through us the audience also gets to do that.

So I do though want to recognize Chris Goutman, our executive producer; as well as Jean Passanante, Leah Laiman and Barbara Bloom from CBS, who all really pulled this story together.

I had this story land in my lap, and had the opportunity to say in scripts what I couldn't say to [my dad].

-Susan Dansby

Neal Baer: Thank you. I also noticed that you incorporated the CAGE questionnaire. These are the questions that we as medical students are taught to ask and are a widely used method of screening for alcoholism. So it was pretty impressive. I appreciated that.

Susan Dansby: It was a challenge to make it sound conversational. My hat is off to everybody who was involved. But it was so important to hold up a mirror to Carly and to other people out there who might be going through this same situation. So that people

do have some criteria with which to say, “I’m not imagining this, this really is happening. This really is what’s going on here.”



Neal Baer: It’s a tough thing to do – as we all know – to write material that is “educational” in a non-expositional way. So it’s a true accomplishment and something that is not easy to do. Everyone certainly showed that tonight in their work.

Bob, this is a parent’s nightmare, to have an obese child in this culture. Yet you captured it so well, the mother’s desperation to make her child thin. What inspired this storyline?

Bob Daily: I would be lying if I said it came from an educational objective originally. We had taken a five-year jump with our characters from one season to the next, and Gabrielle – the character played by Eva Longoria – was herself in the storyline struggling with weight issues. Although Eva Longoria does not struggle with weight issues personally, trust me. Through the use of padding and baggy clothes, her character did.

We thought it might be an interesting counterpart for her to deal with her issues through her child. As a former model and former size double-zero, her character has to deal with the idea comedically, and grapple with the thought of having a child who was so different from her.

It was very controversial. We got a lot of criticism. The difficult thing about doing a storyline like that is that you have actors playing those characters. Madison, who is the young girl who plays Juanita, is a wonderful kid. But we were concerned about



Susan Dansby

how was this going to affect her. Her mom was great at dealing with that and Madison thankfully seems to have no issues or hang-ups at all and is just a delightful kid. So that was not a problem on set, but that was something we were definitely worried about going into it.



Neal Baer: I think you bring up a critical point when you said that it wasn't meant to be educational. For me personally, I appreciate that because it was a great story and yet it had elements that we can really relate to as parents or even just as viewers. So I try never to think about educating; I always try to consider whether it is a good story and hopefully try to be accurate at the same time. What were the criticisms?

Bob Daily: People felt that Gabrielle was not handling this problem in the best possible way and our answer to that was: clearly! She is playing a flawed character who is not supposed to handle it the right way. Besides mining the comedic side of that issue, we felt that it was more interesting dramatically to portray a flawed character as opposed to someone who goes out and does everything by the book. It is interesting dramatically and we knew we were wading into a very thorny issue. I think people overall were pleased.



Keith Eisner

Neal Baer: I thought it was wonderful. Forty percent of the kids in Los Angeles County are obese. To be able to do a storyline in a comedy or a dramedy is really great, because we often think about portraying health issues either in daytime or in primetime dramas. So to do it in children's shows and in a comedy like *Desperate Housewives* was really wonderful. Thanks.

Keith, you ripped a very controversial story from the headlines for this storyline for *Law & Order*. What pushed you to do this story? What did you find in it that captured your imagination?

Keith Eisner: It was the ethical considerations involved. The more you dig into the topic,



the more difficult it becomes. The individual rights of a child who can't make decisions for herself, versus the well-intended desires of parents who do love the child and want to care for the child in the way they think is best suited to their family.

For those who don't know, the story was taken from the headlines. There's a child named Ashley from Washington whose parents went ahead with this controversial surgery and then began to blog about it so they couldn't sort of be criticized beforehand. It really convulsed certain sections of the internet community and there were very angry blogs written about this. They called her their "pillow angel" and were very interested in doing what they thought was best for their child. But many, many people don't feel they made the proper decision.

All we did through our characters was have a debate about it. That's what the episode tried to accomplish.

Neal Baer: Just in the short clips that were shown, you saw the sides, both the parents' and certainly the lawyer's, the prosecutor's side.

Moira, you work on a medical series. How do you develop a storyline or a topic in general and then childhood diabetes in particular?

Moira McMahon: Sure. I probably should also clarify that I am the medical researcher for *Private Practice* and Steve Blackman wrote the episode that we were honored for. It was interesting because I was thinking the diabetes story is a perfect example of how we break the medical stories.

We had a guest of Hollywood, Health & Society come and speak to us. It was a pediatric diabetes and human growth hormone specialist, a wonderful woman who



Moira McMahon

spoke to us at length about the challenge of controlling diabetes in children. It's a family affair. It's too complicated for a child to take care of on his or her own, to measure how much insulin they need. You need to have a parent who knows what they're eating for every single meal, who's able to calculate the carbohydrates of every single meal, and that can be very hard to do, and to really drill into the child the responsibility of such a disease.



We knew it was going to be a great pediatric story. The question we came to was, "Okay, so that's fine, but where is the conflict? What's gonna be the problem?" The problem can lie in kids who, especially children of lower income or unstable households, don't have a primary parent who can keep up with the disease. We tried to think of what would be the highest stakes kind of situation, which turned into a kidnapping story, and then into a custody story.

The day after that episode aired, doctors at various hospitals were forced by administrators to watch the segment. It's had a huge impact on doctors.

-Neal Baer

Our doctors in the show often push the limit. They do what's right to their hearts, over perhaps what's legal or what's correct and what's moral. We were able to give Cooper leeway to do the wrong thing, so he could eventually do the right thing. But along the way he tried very hard to educate the father and was able to spread a great message about diabetes control. It isn't just about taking a shot once a day or not eating sugar; it's a whole lifestyle that a child has to incorporate, and one that an entire family has to adhere to in order to help the child be healthy.

Neal Baer: I think that's a really good point. It's not just about injecting the insulin or having an insulin pump. It's about the whole family dynamics, the psychosocial issues, the complexities. You really captured that. Thanks.

Joe, you talked about the scene with Eriq La Salle using the Surgical Safety Checklist. Let's brag for a moment about what Joe accomplished by doing that. In this episode, you took an idea that was presented by the World Health Organization, the use of the Surgical Safety Checklist, and helped that idea spread around the world. The day after that episode aired, doctors at various hospitals were forced by administrators to watch the segment. It's had a huge impact on doctors.



Reflecting on these 15 years, can you tell us some of the moments that had a profound effect on other people? What was it about the storytelling of *ER* that really resonates in your memory, that really had an effect?

Joe Sachs: In 332 episodes, let's see. I'll take a step backwards and say how we develop storylines. We would always start with the dramatic needs of the character. So in this instance, we looked at the dramatic needs of Eriq La Salle's character, Peter Benton. Benton was a mentor and a conflict character to Noah Wyle's character, Carter, and was now coming back to support him. But we knew it would be ridiculous and corny to have him actually be the transplant surgeon. That would just be stupid. I had to say to myself, "How can Peter Benton have a meaningful impact on this guy's life?"



Joel Sachs

I went to the well. I call it the well because the well is the files and files of stories and articles we've collected over the years. This had been sitting around for a year-and-a-half. There's this great Surgical Safety Checklist, but how do you make that dramatic? Okay, a bunch of people go into the operating room and say, "What's your name? Do you have any allergies? Is everybody in the room?"

This spoke to the core of their existence. Benton would go to the mat and have conflict and confront the head of transplant surgery to support Carter – his mentor, his student, who he cared for tremendously. It was a great story. And it was current and accurate and, as Neal said, it was shown to health ministers around the world and is having an impact and millions of lives are gonna be saved now.

The stories that I remember the most are the ones where we started out by telling a simple story that was followed by an avalanche of impact. There was one a few

years ago – Hollywood, Health & Society was very influential in putting us together with the right people – about patient navigators.

Survival for inner city breast cancer in Harlem was about 10% – as opposed to 90% in Midtown Manhattan. There was a physician who used patient navigators – breast cancer survivors from the community who guided people through the process. It's a very complicated process. It's very complex and it's easy to get lost in the system.

It was a dramatic story for Mekhi Phifer's character, Greg Pratt, who grew up in inner city Chicago but became college student and doctor. The question for him was, "Did he still have a connection? Did he still feel a part of his community?"



His character couldn't get through to a woman who presented with advanced breast cancer. She felt that there was an urban myth that if you cut into cancer you'd die. She had let her cancer go beyond what anyone would have done because of her fear of the medical system. He could not convince this woman to have treatment. Then they brought in a patient navigator and things worked out.

That clip was shown to Congress and afterwards they passed a \$25 million Patient Navigator Act so people around the country now have access to this. It's stuff like that that makes me go, "Wow!"

I'll end with this, my favorite story. I had to dramatize the recurrence of Mark Greene's brain tumor. It was the first time he had a seizure, which was big and dramatic and indicated that the cancer came back. I wanted to do it in a clever way, so he bit his tongue. And his friend tells him, "Your tongue is bleeding, let me see." When he stuck his tongue out, it deviated to one side, which is a sign that the brain tumor is back and that it's picking off a cranial



Jeanette Bettencourt

nerve. Then there's a music queue and the doctor knew what was going on.

About six months later I got a letter from a young woman in Texas who was a mother of two small children. She'd been complaining of headaches to her doctor. They said it was stress. She saw that show and saw that her tongue was deviating to the side. She went to the emergency room and demanded a CAT scan. There was a huge tumor in her nasopharynx behind the nose – a millimeter from her spinal cord. She would have been dead in two weeks. She had surgery, she had chemotherapy, she's had a third child. She's alive and we stay in touch. That is probably the most meaningful life that I've ever saved. I am very very happy for that.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: That is so powerful. And going back to the Surgical Safety Checklist for a moment. I just wanted to add that the morning after that story aired for the first time, 150 surgeons gathered at a hospital in New York to watch the entire hour-long episode. They then took a vote and agreed to adopt the checklist for their orthopedics practice.

Three days later, we began to get a lot of press coverage on this. The head of quality control and quality assurance for the country of France sent us an email that said they must have the *ER* clip for their annual stakeholders meeting. We've been getting a lot of calls from local hospitals too wanting to use that clip for teaching purposes. It's really amazing. Life does imitate art. You're an amazing storyteller.

Neal Baer: Dr. Bettencourt, when I saw the clips from *Sesame Street*, I kept wondering how kids who were watching – both kids from military families and kids who aren't dealing with this issue – responded. Did you hear from families? What did you hear and what did you find out?

Jeanette Bettencourt: We found out a couple of things. From civilian families, we found that it raised awareness of how frequently this occurs. There are over

800,000 children under the age of five who have a parent on active duty guard or reserve. We didn't get too much in terms of controversy. But because the issue of post traumatic stress disorder and of physical injuries is not just limited to the military, for the civilian community it gave an awareness of how to talk about these issues with their children.

The beautiful power of *Sesame Street*, which we noticed even as this crowd watched the clips, is that it brings a smile to your face. *Sesame Street* is able to deliver through the Muppets a safe message on a very difficult topic. That was the power of this special.

Sesame Street is able to deliver through the Muppets a safe message on a very difficult topic.

-Jeanette Bettencourt

Because we air for children and at the hour of 7 a.m., we have the opportunity to take unique topics that are often difficult to communicate, particularly from a child's point of view, and represent it safely through the Muppets. But we also model it for adults as well as children and allow them to have common words between one another to discuss difficult topics.

Neal Baer: Is there outreach with that particular episode so that kids who may not watch *Sesame Street* would see it?

Jeanette Bettencourt: Oh, everybody watches *Sesame Street*. Just kidding. You used the exact word, outreach. These are initiatives at the Sesame Workshop. They're very comprehensive and funded by many supporters.



They provide us with the opportunity to create a comprehensive initiative in which this is just one piece. This was the primetime special which goes to the general public as well as the military. But coupled with that are outreach materials, kits that go to every military family who's either deployed or returns home injured. We have a comprehensive website, almost like FaceBook for military families. This is created in English and in Spanish.



We've also created a partnership with the USO to do a live show the topic. We're also doing what we call "Sesamizing" rooms. When a deployed parent returns, they usually come into a very large airplane hangar that's not very friendly, especially for children. So we created "Sesame Rooms" where families and children can reunite. It's a comforting and nice space that is safe for both the children as well as the adults. Keep in mind that many of these children have not seen their parents for over a year. Our efforts are always research-based, but also driven by a desire to go directly into the community.

Neal Baer: Thanks. That is wonderful.

Anthony, you must've heard from some young women after *Lincoln Heights* aired, yes?

Anthony Sparks: We hear a lot of things from a lot of different communities who watch our show. We have a very loyal audience. Because our show has a landscape that is a bit more working class, it's a lot more diverse than one might see on television. Almost every week that our show is on, it becomes a tool for advocacy in particular areas.


That particular week and that particular episode happened to be about domestic violence. Domestic violence is something that has been touched on before a lot, almost to the point where one might say, "Oh, it's not, you know, a sexy story anymore." But it is still a topic that is very much with us. In this episode, we tried to show the complexities of domestic violence and the issues that come up for people who don't have a lot of economic choices.

One of the things that was important in the episode was that the fact that the

“...we tried to show the complexities of domestic violence and the issues that come up for people who don't have a lot of economic choices.

—Anthony Sparks”

abuse was coming from someone she was no longer in a relationship with. She said it was her ex. We also touched upon the economic bonds. She says in one scene that he brings all of his money home to her. So how does that complicate the issue? How do you find empowerment when you're not economically empowered and yet you still must get out?



It was really great to get an opportunity to do this story on domestic violence. We were initially working on a different story, but as often happens in television, we decided to take it into a different direction. For me personally and unfortunately, I have a couple of memories seared irretrievably into my seven-year-old mind of having witnessed certain instances of domestic abuse. So it's really great as a writer to be able to take that and do something that you hope is positive.

Neal Baer: Isn't the figure now that one out of three women who visit an emergency room are coming due to domestic violence? It's not something that's gone away at all. I appreciated the complexities of it, how she explained it away until she couldn't explain it away anymore, which probably resonated for many women who watch the show.

Anthony Sparks: When I've seen this issue handled in the past, it's handled in a way that implies that you're empowered automatically. It's a little bit harder than that. I think that's what we were going after.

Neal Baer: That's great, thanks.

Anthony Sparks: Thank you.

Neal Baer: You've seen through all of the various shows that we've honored, how the stories themselves can really touch people and change their lives. So, we have a few minutes for questions.



“The only way that you’re going to make your story different is by making it unique and you’re the most unique thing about it.”

-Dena Higley

Audience Member: I’m really struck by how many of you told personal stories through the medium of your writing. It reminds us all that good storytelling is very personal. My question is, how do you help writers, especially younger ones, get to their personal stories in a way that fits with storytelling, with entertainment? Is there any advice that you’d have for the younger members of your writing team or for any writer about how to access that material?

Dena Higley: I’ve done several writing workshops and talked about different writing problems: exposition, redundancy, etcetera. My advice to get yourself out of those situations is to go to what’s unique about you. The only way that you’re going to make your story different is by making it unique and you’re the most unique thing about it. It really helps young writers when they’re solving a problem. It encourages them to go internal in a way that they wouldn’t necessarily if they weren’t trying to solve the writing problem.

Jeanette Bettencourt: Every season, *Sesame Street* has a research period when we actually test our scripts in childcare programs. But what also happens while this testing is going on is that the writers come into these different environments. Our goal is to get the child’s point of view and how they would listen and what words they would use. This also helps writers put themselves in the child’s place and it develops and hones those writing skills.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: And with that, we’ll close. Thank you all for being with us tonight and congratulations to all of the winners.