

# Q&A with Erika Slezak

## August 2018

Erika Slezak  
Official Fan Club  
[erikaslezakfc@yahoo.com](mailto:erikaslezakfc@yahoo.com)

Website  
[www.erikaslezak.com](http://www.erikaslezak.com)

## Erika's World Staff

Honorary President  
Erika Slezak

President & Publisher  
Walter Miller, Jr.

Editor  
AJ

Assistant Editor  
Kathryn [Kit] Williams

## Founded

January, 1972

© 2018 Erika's World

All rights reserved. No text  
may be reproduced without  
written permission.

I had the opportunity to catch up with Erika on August 10, and we had a delightful chat! Hope all of you enjoy catching up with Erika as well!

Walter Miller

WM You and Brian celebrated 40 years of marriage on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, and you also celebrated your birthday on the 5<sup>th</sup>. How did you celebrate?

ES We had a wonderful weekend. Let's see...on the 4<sup>th</sup> we went out to dinner at one of my favorite restaurants, The Inn at Pound Ridge, in Pound Ridge, NY, which is about 10 minutes away from here and we had a lovely dinner. And then on my birthday, we went out to dinner at my other favorite restaurant, The Roger Sherman Inn, in New Canaan. So there was a lot of eating out, which was nice, and I didn't have to cook, which made it kind of special!

WM It's a commonly asked question of couples who have had long marriages...to what do you attribute its success?

ES Wow! I don't know...too lazy to get divorced (chuckle)? Priorities! When Brian and I got married, we said to each other that our priority was to each other and to our family, and we made that important in order to keep everything together – to love each other and be kind. He always has been, and I certainly have always tried to be.

WM And here you are 40 years later!

ES Yes, 40 years later, and there are still people at One Life to Live who are stunned because there were people who said "that will never work," but it did.

WM I can't believe people would even say that to a couple who just got married.

ES They didn't necessarily say it to me, but I certainly heard about it.

WM Did you have any free time in Atlanta when you shot The Resident?

ES I did, actually. On the Sunday that we didn't shoot, I went to the Four Seasons Hotel and treated myself to a really nice brunch/lunch about 3 or 4 blocks away from where I was staying, as my place didn't have a restaurant, so I thought that would be nice. Then I had one afternoon off and I went to the High Museum, which is a fabulous place. Actually, all of the hospital exteriors and some interior corridors are shot at the High Museum, but the rest are not. We shot at the museum on the Monday that I was there, as it is closed on Mondays. It is a beautiful Museum and it's an entire art complex with a theater, which they were renovating, and a lot of other things. Outside in front they have a Rodin sculpture that they have to hide with fake bushes every time they shoot. I also went to the Atlanta Aquarium; a really fabulous place.

WM [They have the picture of Bruce Greenwood \(Dr. Randolph Bell\) on the side of the building.](#)

ES Yes, there's a huge poster of him looking kind of smug and smarmy (like the character he portrays). He's such a nice man but I never got to work with him. I met him during a wardrobe fitting as he showed up after me. We were chatting just for a few minutes, but is a lovely guy. The entire cast and crew were terrific. My scenes were primarily with Matt Czuchy (Conrad Hawkins) and Shaunette Renee Wilson (Mina Okafor). Both of them are totally focused actors, which I so appreciate, and Manish Dayal (Devon Pravesh) was as well. Emily VanCamp (Nicolette Nevin) could not have been nicer, and she went out of her way to welcome me. That is what I tried to do when new actors would join One Life to Live...welcome them to the show and tell them little helpful things, like the schedule, where the bathrooms are! I didn't see Melina Kanakaredes (Dr. Lane Hunter), however she did ask someone to say hello. I haven't seen Melina in years, so it was very kind of her to do that.

WM [Your scenes were fabulous, Erika. You said they cut some, but they cut some of everyone's scenes, right?](#)

ES Yes, well they shoot a lot and David Crabtree, the director, is also an editor, and apparently a very good editor. He was a wonderful director, I'll tell you that. He really gets actors and he knows what to say and what not to say. If he wants something done differently, all he does is make a suggestion. Then, you pick it up from there. Because he's an editor, he wanted an awful lot of choices. So, each scene was shot over and over again so that he had different angles on everyone. As a result, it takes a long time, but he has to cut it because they have to make it fit into an hour.

WM [Was your character based on anyone in particular?](#)

ES Yes, it was. David Crabtree actually emailed me the day I arrived in Atlanta. He said, "I thought I'd let you know that if you are interested, your character is based on a real person. He's a neurosurgeon named Dr. Henry Marsh. He's written two books about his life and work that are two of the most interesting books I've read in years! I immediately downloaded them onto my kindle and I read them both. They are wonderful books. The first one is Do No Harm, and the second one is Admissions. He's a very interesting man. I'm sure he's retired now but he's a very well known neurosurgeon in England. He also did a lot of work in the Middle East and Russia and he spent a lot of time in Nepal with an old friend who is also a neurosurgeon. They are fabulous books!

WM [Did reading the books help you to understand him more?](#)

ES Yes, it helped. Of course, by the time I had finished reading the second book, I was done shooting and I was home. It helps you to understand their lives so now I know just a little bit about doctors and how they have to separate themselves from their patients. My character, Dr. Jacoby, obviously, had some trouble doing that, as she was so upset about the patients she couldn't save, and that's why the episode was called Haunted.

WM [I've watched the episode four times already, that's how much I enjoyed it. The fan reaction was positive to your character. Do you think there is any possibility of a return for the character?](#)

ES I have no idea. I know they liked my performance. The producer and the writer both wrote to me afterwards and said, "We showed your work to the executives at Fox and they liked you." That's all I care about. I'm glad they enjoyed it and that they thought I did a good job. I have no idea whether they will bring that character back.

WM [They certainly could, obviously, because she is still with us and she seems to be OK now. She's not seeing visions anymore. They could even bring her back to be on the Board. Oh, there was a medical consultant, correct?](#)

ES Yes, a super guy named Dr. Christian Strong. He's a very handsome doctor who works up at a Children's Hospital in Boston; he's a fifth year resident at Berkeley. He was the consultant and he came down to Atlanta one day. Andrew Chapman, one of the producers, and the writer of that episode as well, said, "I think you should meet

him.” Of course, I was eager to meet him, and he was so nice and so charming. Actually, I said to him, “If I needed a neurosurgeon and walked into your office, I would walk right back out again...I would not believe that someone as handsome as you could be a good doctor.” He was delightful. It turns out he had watched *One Life to Live* with his grandmother as a child but he didn’t recognize me at first. He kept saying, “You look familiar, you look familiar.” He was very helpful. It’s interesting to talk to people about their field when you really have questions. He was a great resource.

WM [Can you talk a little about Guest Artist? I understand it’s currently in post-production and is based on the life of American playwright, Lanford Wilson.](#)

ES Yes, right at the end of December or early January, I got a call from Paul Martino, my agent for many years, and who is now my Manager. He said that one of his clients is Jeff Daniels, that he’d shot a movie called *Guest Artist*, but he needed a little extra something in the beginning, so he wanted someone to play his agent. When he asked if I’d be interested, I dropped the phone and said, “You bet!” It was a lovely scene of three or four pages, just with Jeff. He is a very nice man and a very good actor, and Timothy Busfield directed it. Timothy Busfield is one of the most adorable human beings on earth I think, and so cute and positive. We were to shoot this on Saturday morning in NYC in a little restaurant/bar on 49<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup>. It was the coldest morning of the winter... zero degrees! I had to be there at 7am in hair and makeup, ready to go. I showed up and when they arrived a few minutes later they had already been downtown shooting something else, like at 5:30 am! We shot for five hours in the freezing restaurant. They couldn’t turn the heat on because it made too much noise. At the time, I was sick with a terrible cold and cough but I was downing the cough syrup so I wouldn’t interrupt the scenes. You know, it’s interesting when you are sick...your adrenaline somehow kicks in and you get through it. The only thing was the cough, but I took a big dose of cough medicine before we started and fortunately it worked.

WM [You shot around 5 hours’ worth?](#)

ES We had to finish at 12 because the restaurant opened at 12, and then I went home.

WM [So, it was just you and Jeff there?](#)

ES No. Jeff, and Timothy Busfield, and his son, Willie, who was the director of photography and the lighting designer, an Assistant Director and a hair and make-up person, were there. The owner of the restaurant played the waiter and there were a few extras walking in and out of the restaurant door letting all the cold air in.

WM [What was your character’s name?](#)

ES Helen.

WM [I’m assuming you didn’t get to meet Timothy’s wife, Melissa Gilbert?](#)

ES Unfortunately not, and I would have loved to have met her, but she was elsewhere doing other things since she is also a producer on the project. I said to Timothy that I was really sorry I didn’t get to meet Melissa because I think she is just awesome. They are in post-production now. I think they’re hoping to submit it to some festivals.

WM [How different is film from TV?](#)

ES It’s not that different from nighttime TV in that they shoot a lot and they shoot different angles. We had one camera for my scene on *Guest Artist*. I’m sure for the rest of it, which was mostly shot in Michigan where Jeff has a theater and where he, Timothy and Melissa all live, there was probably more than one camera. On *The Resident* we had 7 or 8 cameras. Most of them were handheld, tiny little things for close ups, and one on

wheels which was for the long, tracking shots. That was it. It's very different from daytime where you have four or five cameras shooting one scene, and there is no going back. They shoot the scene, and move on, on daytime.

WM [And it has to be a major mess in order to decide to reshoot on daytime?](#)

ES No, it can be a tiny mess, but they don't like to do that because it costs money and time. They've got to shoot 85-90 pages and get it done in one day.

WM [Remember when One Life to Live was "live on tape" way back when?](#)

ES Oh yes! Absolutely!

WM [So, you and Brian enjoyed The Boys in the Band with Tuc Watkins \(David Vickers on OLTL\)?](#)

ES Yes, it was a very good production and Tuc was wonderful, really, really good. Jim Parsons (Sheldon Cooper on The Big Bang Theory) was also very good and he carries the whole show.

WM [Besides his work in the play, what is Tuc up to?](#)

ES About 1½ years ago he and his kids moved back to someplace in Kansas, which is where his family is. I know he worked at the theater there. We chatted afterwards but I didn't really ask him what his plans were. It was just nice to see him, and he looks terrific! His twins are 5 ½ now...that went fast! I think he really enjoyed doing this production.

WM [Are you still interested in doing stage work as well?](#)

ES Yes, but obviously it depends on what it is.

WM [But you might be interested in a short-term role of four to six months? I assume you wouldn't want anything longer than that?](#)

ES No, I don't want it longer than that.

WM [Have you been offered work on any of the remaining soaps? Would you consider a long-term role, and, lastly what about relocating to California?](#)

ES The answer is no to each of those three questions. I was offered a role on Days of Our Lives maybe three or four years ago, and they wanted me to come for one day. But they were not willing to pay for transportation or a hotel or anything, except for a tiny little amount of money. It just wouldn't have been worth it, as it would have cost me money to go and do it.

WM [Did you enjoy your family vacation in Antigua?](#)

ES Oh, we had a great time at a lovely place called Carlisle Bay. It was an awful lot of, "I'll be there on the beach reading my book if you need me," and that's it. Unfortunately, we did not get to fly back on the day that we were supposed to because of the Nor'easters up in New York, so we had to stay an extra night, which was not a hardship, believe me! Other than that, we just had a good time with lots of good food and lying around on the beach and swimming and reading. It was fun!

WM [Is there one particular thing you like to do when you spend time at your home in Vermont?](#)

ES We enjoy the place! We often go to our pond where Brian feeds his fish, and we have trails where we walk a lot, and then, of course, there is always work to be done.

WM [How long did it take you to adjust to not working on a regular basis?](#)

ES Oh gosh, it took me at least a year, because the routine had been so normal for me for so long. You know, when I worked I'd get up at 5 am and if I had a day off, I'd get up at 6 am. It took a while. I found myself wondering, "What will I do today?" and then all of a sudden it was 6 pm! So I got used to it, and I was quite enjoying it. Then, last September, I got a new agent, which was nice, because the agents I had had really did not know what to do with me. I just adore these new agents. They're Nicolosi & Co, and they're wonderful, lovely, charming, nice, smart, clever people!

WM [Did they get a reel together for you? What do they actually do with that?](#)

ES Yes, they did. For instance, when I did the audition for *The Resident*, I was in Vermont. Michael shot it for me on a little camera that we had; not a phone but a camera. He was terrific! He sent it off and two days later I got a call from the agent who said, "You got the job and we're waiting on network approval." Apparently the network had to do their homework to be sure I didn't reflect badly on the network or the show and my agent had to submit some scenes of mine from the last couple of years of *One Life to Live*, to show them what I could do. And then they approved me. Afterwards, my agent said he needed to put together a proper reel, so I made some suggestions and he used some stuff from *The Resident* as well, but I haven't seen the reel yet.

WM [Where are you most recognized when you are out? The market? The movies?](#)

ES At the market a lot, although pretty much all over. People in this town are really very nice. There are a lot of incredibly famous people who live here, so I'm nothing special, but a lot of people did watch the show. They are very respectful and say, "Oh, I enjoy your work," or something to that effect. Some say, "We miss you and what fun it was."

WM [Lastly, how was \*Mission Impossible Fallout\*?](#)

ES It was terrific fun, absolutely terrific fun! I love movies, and I even enjoy the bad movies, but this was just one wonderful adventure after the next. Tom Cruise is wonderful. He's also very charming in person as well. Brian once met him and said that he was delightful; not at all, "I am a movie star." The movie was wonderful and you just leave the theater smiling!