

TV GUIDE SOAPS Q&A

BRIAN GASKILL

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One conversation with BRIAN GASKILL who plays *Port Charles'* angelic Rafe, quickly reveals that his own characteristics are synonymous with the role he portrays. Gaskill, who first left the daytime realm in 1997, has discovered what is important to his life and his craft. The actor is beyond achieving superstardom. Instead, Gaskill is pursuing roles he loves and of which he can be truly proud: That includes returning to daytime this fall as *Port Charles'* heavenly presence and starring in the short film *Higher Ground*, currently making the rounds in the film festival circuit.

A soap opera veteran, Gaskill starred on Aaron Spelling's primetime sudser *Models, Inc.* and spent two years playing Bobby Warner on *All My Children*. TV Guide Online caught up with Gaskill to discuss the human characteristics he brings to his ethereal counterpart, life beyond daytime, and why playing an angel has become second nature. -- **Delaina Dixon**

How did the *Port Charles* role come about?

I went to [ABC's casting director] Mark Teschner and read. The executive producer who hired me on *All My Children* is now one of the executives for ABC, and she was familiar with my work. I grew up with my mother watching soaps, and she watched ABC. So the tone of the ABC soaps, in general, is something I'm familiar with.

Does your mom watch *Port Charles*?

She does now! But when I was growing up, she watched *All My Children*. It was weird when I joined *AMC*. I pretty much knew [the history] of the show from watching it on sick days and over the summer.

Were you interested in returning to soaps?

I was interested in *Port Charles* and what they were doing, and the supernatural bent they were getting into. I was lucky that the show continued Rafe [past the book "Tainted Love"]. I'm really enjoying the character a lot.

Are you interested in the supernatural?

Yeah. Being a young boy in the age of *Star Wars* and science fiction and fantasy, and growing up watching lots of monster movies, I was always interested. I was growing up with that whole fantasy world. Not so much with the vampires, but they were interesting.

Did that influence your decision to take the role of Rafe?

When I heard about the possibility of going for it, I turned on the show. I watched a couple of episodes and saw what they were doing with it and was sort of taken by surprise. I really liked the storyline; the actors were really committing to it, even though it's sometimes tongue in cheek. But it's not a joke to them. They really try to make it as real as they can, and I really appreciate that.

You play Rafe, an angel. What type of research do you do to play an angel?

For me, it's more of an internal thing, to connect to my own spirituality. I think the success of the character is that I didn't go in with any preconceived notions of what being an angel means. A

good actor will go in without any preconceived notions of what their character is supposed to be, and bring something original to it. They trust me, and I'm allowed the freedom to bring all of myself to the character, all the sides of my humanity to a character that's not even human. He has his quirks, and that's very human.

Why is Rafe so committed to making "Miracles Happen?"

He's always had up till the clock strikes twelve on Christmas Eve to take care of Caleb and clean up the mess Caleb left behind. That's his job and his mission. And now it's become personal. He's been living in Port Charles and getting very connected to these people. Before it was just something he had to do. But seeing that he was taken off this earth before his time, he's probably missing the feeling of family and friends. That's the impetus to solve everything.

So what are some of Rafe's plans to get the lovers in Port Charles back together?

He's got a lot of tricks up his sleeve. One of the major misconceptions about Rafe is that people think, "Well, he's an angel. Why can't he just fix everything? This is a worthless angel!" It's very subtle. I want to get people to understand this, and I really appreciate this about the character, that no angel is going to save you. They can inspire and lead you in the right direction, but the final choice is always yours. It's not about Rafe saving the day, but inspiring others to save their own day.

Is Rafe getting a love life?

In the course of this book, he's definitely missing that, and he's dealing with his own attractions and frustrations. The connection that Rafe develops with the person he has an attraction for, it sort of ties it all together. He's no longer this disconnected angel who's helping everybody. I think it's the same thing that happened with Caleb in "Tainted Love;" the love he had for Livvie connected his reason for being in Port Charles.

Unlike your days on *All My Children*, *Port Charles* is taped like a telenovela. What are some of the biggest differences between shooting *All My Children*, a traditional hour-long soap, and *Port Charles*, a half-hour show made up of self-contained books?

It moves faster; they try to fit as much as they can into the half hour. The major difference is that, except for maybe a four-month period where things really took off, playing a teenager on *All My Children* was relatively backburner. I didn't work that much. But now, especially during the Christmas story, I'm working every day. At first it was overwhelming, but I got used to it, and it's so much more fun and so much more exciting, just to throw yourself into it every day.

Did it take you some time to get back up to the breakneck pace of soap opera production?

I started off doing seven episodes when the story took place in Transylvania. It was weird, because I had been focusing on one-camera film work for the last four years or so. In daytime, you just sort of shoot the scene in sequence, right through, and it's done, because you have three or four cameras. All of a sudden, you're moving on to the next scene, and you're thinking, "Okay, I'm sure that was good enough." But as you get to know the actors better, you develop a chemistry with them, and the scenes just start to pop. You trust more, you know you are working with someone you don't really have to worry about, and you just have fun playing in the moment. To me, that's when soap operas work the best. You don't have a lot of time for preparation, it just sort of happens real quickly. Things happen spontaneously, and because you are catching the actors doing something the first and maybe the only time, it's really special.

"Miracles Happen" wraps up at the end of December. Is there a possibility we'll see more of Rafe after that?

Well, as rules go, I have until the clock strikes midnight on Christmas Eve. As the rules go in *Port Charles*, it's a supernatural world, anything can happen.

Would you be interested in staying on the show longer?

As long as it's interesting, yes.

When you left *All My Children* in 1997, what type of projects were you interested in pursuing?

I was looking all over, and I did some different things and, in the process, learned a lot about myself and what I really wanted. I did more independent stuff that nobody knows about. [Chuckles] I did a short film, *Higher Ground*, that won an award at the Laguna Beach Film Festival. In it I play an angel. There's a woman who's about to commit suicide, and I help show her that it really is a wonderful life. It was a very quirky character; in my previous incarnation on earth I was actually a golden retriever. her dog. It sounds bizarre, but it's a sweet little film, and it was a ball to play that kind of character. You don't know why I have these dog-like characteristics until the end, and it was a happy ending.

So Rafe isn't your first experience playing a heavenly being.

When *Port Charles* came along, I didn't know I was playing an angel at first, but then they told me I was dead and an angel who had come back. I thought, "That makes sense, I only play angels now." [Chuckles] I guess there are worse things.

You also did an episode of *MTV's Undressed*, a show that can be pretty risqué. Was your role as such?

I wasn't really undressed in it. I wasn't a big fan, but sometimes you have to pay the rent. I didn't even audition for the role. I had auditioned for other roles on the show, and this was a smaller role they probably didn't even feel like having auditions for. Since they already knew my work, they called me up, and I went in to work for three or four days. Once you are over with the youthful anxiety of Hollywood, you just want to do your craft, and be a working actor for the rest of your life.

Do you have any interest in being behind the camera?

That's definitely something I will be pursuing in my life. Because of who I am naturally, I think I'd be more comfortable behind the camera. Sometimes, when you're an actor, unless you get to superstardom, you always feel like you're cattle and being there for other people. I want to be able to hold a script in my hand and say this is the story I want to tell. Since I left *All My Children* that's something I really learned about myself. It's not about being a famous star, I'm just really in love with the idea of telling stories. If it didn't happen as an actor, I was going to make it happen in another way. I think I'm still pretty young to produce and direct yet. Woody Allen didn't start his career until his late thirties. You've got to get some more life experience.

What are some of your favorite pastimes?

Lately, I've been so overwhelmed with the show, in a good way, I haven't really had time for pastimes, and I don't mind that so much, because I really like working. And I really like getting lost in this character.

You're really enjoying your return to daytime.

The two experiences I have had on daytime - with the exception of my own independent creative experiences with the theater - have been the only professional experiences where people have trusted me and let me be. They really seem to appreciate what I bring to the characters I play, and I'm able to grow more because of it. Sometimes daytime gets a bad rap, but my experiences have been nothing but good.

The holidays are coming up. What's your one wish for this season?

Everyone ends up saying world peace, which is what it feels like we need this year. We're a faulted people, but hopefully this whole conflict will come to an end. I hope, and it fits the theme of "Miracles Happen," that if you open yourself up to the moment, and you're not cynical about it, you can see the good in it, even in the worst situation. Then you can take a deep breath and move on with your life.