

V NOW WE'RE TALKIN

By Helen Marketti

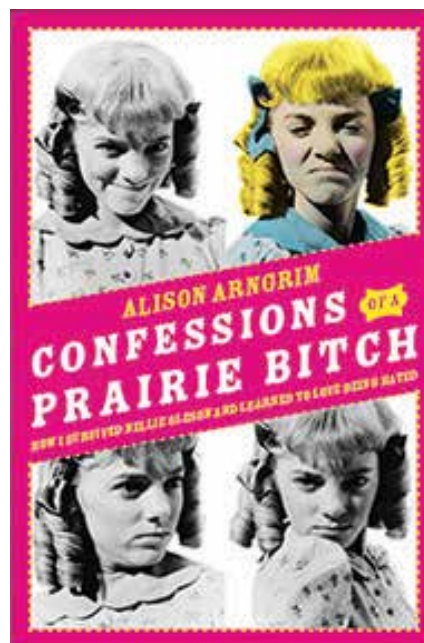
A chat with Alison Arngrim from Little House on the Prairie

She is most remembered as the mean-spirited brat Nellie Oleson on the TV show, Little House on the Prairie. Alison Arngrim is involved with many projects and has become creative in the midst of the pandemic, to keep working and to keep fans interested.

"I grew up in a show biz family so we knew everybody. My mom did the voice for Casper The Friendly Ghost, and my dad managed famous piano player, Liberace. I remember when I was eight years old, we rented a house in the Hollywood Hills to live closer to Liberace, in case he needed anything. So naturally I grew up thinking that this was a normal way to live and that everyone was in show business," recalls Alison. "I always enjoyed watching characters on TV and in movies that were villains. I adored Vincent Price! I thought Captain Hook was a genius in Peter Pan. (laughs) I thought villain characters were cool."

"I started working when I was really young. I did commercials here and there. I had the

same agent as Adam West so I like telling people I had the same agent as Batman," laughs Alison. "When I was 12 years old, I auditioned for the part of Laura Ingalls for Little House on the Prairie which of course I did not get, but I was called back to audition for Nellie. I remember looking at the script and telling my father that this character was awful, that Nellie was a bitch. My dad laughed and loved how I read the lines and told me to read them just like I did for him when



I go in for my audition. When I auditioned for Nellie, Michael Landon and the producers were sitting together and they loved it. I remember they laughed so hard and asked me to read the lines again because they enjoyed it. They hired me on the spot."

She continues, "Nellie's character was mean, nasty and dreadful and yet I loved it. She made a complete fool of herself. The show went on for nearly ten years and I was on the show for the first seven years (1974 – 1981). When they asked me to extend my contract, I decided not to return. My dad said that I would end up like Ms. Kitty on Gunsmoke." (laughs).

Playing the role of Nellie Oleson was not always easy and fun for Alison. "I actually had more trouble with adults than my peers," she said. "I remember adults saying that I must behave that way for real, which wasn't true. I was actually shy but played a role that made people afraid of me. I remember being in a Christmas parade and someone threw a cup of orange soda at my face. Thank God it wasn't a beer bottle. People threw stuff at me all the time. They would become incensed at the sight of me."

Little House on the Prairie reruns are still being shown all over the world. "It's unbelievable that it still draws fans. I think it's because the show dealt with real problems. Viewers could relate to the story lines. We didn't live in a mansion and have servants," said Alison. "Michael Landon was a fantastic human being. He was actually very funny in addition to being gorgeous, being a great actor and writer. Many crew members on Little House worked with him on Bonanza, so they followed him when he started Little House because they loved working with him."

"Hollywood has changed quite a bit over the

years. Everything is digital now, which has minimized the need for big cameras and lights. There used to be smoking and drinking on the sets because many workers were old school from the 50s and that still carried over into the 70s. In those days, that was considered normal. Even the food choices have changed. Once upon a time you could load up on donuts during breaks but now everything is gluten free or fat free. And with sexual harassment, there was no number to call or office to visit, it wasn't even talked about like it is now. Some changes have been made for the better," said Alison.

Alison has many irons in the fire at once. She sometimes finds it hard to keep up with herself. "I love all of the projects I am involved with but I get tired sometimes. Every day at 1:30 pm (PST) I go on Facebook Live and read to fans. At first, I was reading Little House books and now I am reading The Wizard of Oz. We have had to get creative during this pandemic. Tuesdays at 5:00 pm (PST) I do the Alison Arngrim Show on internet radio which is accessible through my Facebook page. I conduct celebrity interviews via Zoom. I always open the show with what makes you feel good."

Several years ago, Alison wrote the book, "Confessions of a Prairie Bitch: How I Survived Nellie Oleson and Learned to Love Being Hated" (HarperCollins, 2010). "The book actually came about when I was doing a stand-up comedy show called Confessions of a Prairie Bitch, and a literary agent happened to be in the audience and asked me if there was a book to go with it. That's how the book happened. It made the New York Times best seller list, much to my total shock and amazement. People still love it. Whenever I read from books on Facebook Live, I wear a bonnet reminiscent of Little House. I called the Walnut Grove Museum to order bonnets and then the fans wanted them, too. The bonnets have become a hit."

"More than half of what I do has moved over to the internet. I am busier now than before the pandemic. Everything is done from my living room. It does feel like we are living in an apocalyptic science fiction movie. It feels surreal. The Facebook Live events have helped me stay grounded. I find it relaxing and the fans do, too. We are all trying to make due and survive," explains Alison.

Alison's husband Bob is from the Akron area. Through him she is now a faithful fan of Ghouardi. "I follow the Ghouardi fan page. I have been to Cleveland for the Ghouardi Fest. I love it. I have also been to the Rock Hall. Cleveland is great. I love Big Chuck and Little John! The Ghouardi Fest is usually in the fall of the year. If it's possible that it will take place this year and safe to do so, I hope to return."

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