

It's inevitable that playing one of the most famous villains in TV history will leave you with plenty of stories to tell. Alison Arngrim doesn't disappoint with her new memoir, "Confessions of a Prairie Bitch: How I Survived Nellie Oleson and Learned to Love Being Hated" (\$25.99; !T/HarperCollins). It's a must-read for "Little House on the Prairie" fans.

Arngrim, who played the lying and manipulative brat Nellie Oleson more than 30 years ago on the popular show, reveals a nice mix of details from the "Little House" set -- such as an inside look at the "wheelchair" episode, in which Nellie fakes being paralyzed just to torture her nemesis, Laura Ingalls (played by her good friend Melissa Gilbert) -- along with insight into her tumultuous family life that included a father who would plant stories about her in the tabloids and a brother who was sexually abusive. She's currently a spokesperson for Protect, the national association to protect children.

"Returning to the scene of the crime," jokes Arngrim, when she mentions Minnesota, where she'll be Monday to sign copies of her book at Mall of America. We caught up with the 48-year-old earlier this week on the phone from her home in Los Angeles, just hours after she returned from hosting a country music festival in the south of France (they love "Little House" overseas).

Q. Growing up, your dad planted stories about you in the tabloids, got you into all the hot Hollywood parties and even asked you to get nose and boob jobs, which you said "no" to. How have you managed not to end up a train wreck on some VH1 reality show?

A. Why am I not being followed around by live news crews today as I get taken to jail? (She laughs). I don't know. I had a long think about things. I did that a couple times. Maybe more people need to say, "Can I have a moment? Can I have an afternoon and get back to you on this?" Take a deep breath and back up and look at the big picture. This sounds like a great idea this week, but will this be a great idea in 30 years? It's sort of like why I don't have any tattoos.

Q. You were harassed as a kid because you played mean girl Nellie Oleson. What was the worst thing that happened to you because of the character you played?

A. Somebody threw a cup of McDonald's orange soda at my head during a Christmas parade. Yeah, I would have preferred that I not had orange soda on my clothes, but on the other hand, I went, "Whoa, what did I do to cause such an emotional reaction?" Isn't this what actors sit up all night wishing they could do? To make people believe that it is so real they have huge emotional reactions to the point that they can't even control themselves? They're not standing at the parade going, "Oh, I thought she gave a fine performance." They're going, "Oh my god, it's her, and it's real and I have to hurt her." (She laughs.)

Q. In the book, you write, "Someone I never did get to take a swing at (and would have liked to) was Melissa Sue Anderson" (who played Mary Ingalls).

A. I think she feels quite the same about me. (She laughs) She's already said in interviews she's not into remembering the show with Michael [Landon] gone and doesn't see the point in going to reunions. She didn't want to go to the musical. And we all went to see Melissa in the musical.

Q. Did you see the "Little House" musical when it was at the Guthrie Theater?

A. I did. I came to the Guthrie right before it opened. I called Melissa and said, "I want to come see previews. When should I come?" And she said, "Immediately." I wound up sitting in the theater by myself watching the first dress rehearsal, and I'm glad I was alone. I ended up crying all over the place. I liked it -- it got to me -- it was like we were passing the big "Prairie" torch to the new generation -- it's their "Prairie" now.

Who: Alison Arngrim reading from her book, "Confessions of a Prairie Bitch: How I Survived Nellie Oleson and Learned To Love Being Hated""

When: 6 p.m. Monday

Where: Mall of America, Interstate 494 and Cedar Avenue, Bloomington

Information: 952-883-8800 or mallofamerica.com

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