

EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW

CHARLOTTE STEWART

## Sobriety Saved My Life

*The Little House teacher  
on her big life lessons  
and famous men!*



Charlotte with  
Melissa Sue  
Anderson and  
Melissa Gilbert  
on *Little House  
on the Prairie*  
in 1974



David Lynch  
directed her in  
1977's *Eraserhead*,  
1990–1991's  
*Twin Peaks* and its  
1992 movie sequel.

**Y**ou may know her as sweet schoolmistress Eva Beadle on the first four seasons of *Little House on the Prairie*, or loving military wife Betty Briggs on *Twin Peaks*. But in real life, Charlotte Stewart was anything but prim and proper. “The late ‘60s and early ‘70s in Hollywood was a carefree time of free love and rock ‘n’ roll,” she confesses to *Closer*. “Every place you

went, somebody had some drugs.” Charlotte admits she partook in her fair share of partying, and even dated some of Hollywood’s baddest boys. Now the actress — who has now been sober for more than 30 years — is recounting many of her wildest memories in her new memoir, *Little House in the Hollywood Hills*. “I’m 75 and have gone through a lot of life events,” says Charlotte. “So I thought maybe it was time to share!”

— Gregg Goldstein

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE STEWART; GETTY IMAGES



# HEART to heart



**“I’m 75 and the luckiest person! I’ve survived alcoholism, cancer, the death of a spouse and the rock ‘n’ roll scene.”**

## **Before we get into the racy stuff, how did you get on *Little House*?**

I’d done three episodes of *Bonanza*, I think, that Michael Landon had seen. I didn’t even know about the [Laura Ingalls Wilder] books. In the interview, I said, “Can I sit behind the desk?” I wanted to show them I could be a teacher. I think they were taken aback, but it might’ve had something to do with getting the part.

## **You’re very different. What inspired you?**

I started reading the books, which I adore to this day. There’s very little in them about Miss Beadle, but my dear older sister, Barbara Jean, had seven children. I looked at her as a role model. She handled everything with such patience and love.

## **Just before the show, you guest-starred on *The Waltons* and met Ralph Waite.**

While I was on the show for one episode, we wound up hooking up. It didn’t last long.

## **You “hooked up” with Pa Walton?!**

Years later, he changed his life drastically — he got sober, became a minister — but at the time, we were both single and free. When they did a *Waltons* reunion, I saw him and gave him a big hug. I was in a business with a lot of eligible, interesting men.

## **Like Jim Morrison...**

I had a clothing store called The Liquid Butterfly. Jim had an office in the same building and used to come in. He was a drinking buddy with benefits, I’ll say,

because I didn’t want anything from him. We weren’t in love, but we were the kind of friends we could count on. So when he needed to get out of town, he’d say, “You want to go?” We’d get in the car and off we’d go. One time he was trying to get away from the media. He’d been arrested in Florida for indecent exposure onstage, which I asked him about — he said he didn’t remember. I was 30, he was 27. It was just before he died.

## **Was Jim romantic?**

He would tell funny stories, but it had nothing to do with romance, and I never expected any. It had to do with having a comfort zone. Sometimes I would kind of rescue him: He’d be at a bar, so drunk, and wouldn’t be able to get home, so I’d take him to my place. He wasn’t a good drinker at all.

## **You lasted six months. Who ended it?**

He left for France, and one day I heard on the news that he had died. I was devastated. I didn’t think he was going to have a long life because he’d had rheumatic fever as a child, which I believe affected his heart. I never saw him do drugs. I think he died of a massive heart attack.

## **Later on you dated Richard Dreyfuss...**

One of the funniest people you’d ever meet. We used to play backgammon a lot at an LA restaurant. It wasn’t love — it was fun! We were just, once again, friends with benefits. I had been married and it was very restricting. I didn’t want to be exclusive with anybody.

### **LITTLE HOUSE, BIG LIFE**



**FARM GIRL** Charlotte (center) and her siblings, Barbara Jean and Lewis, grew up on a 320-acre peach orchard in Yuba City, Calif., where she “rode tractors and enjoyed big adventures.”

**FANGIRL** “Elvis was as handsome and gracious as I’d always imagined” on the set of the 1968 bomb *Speedway*. “One afternoon he called me over, took my hand and apologized for the movie!”



**SALOON GAL** Jimmy Stewart (no relation) “would sit on the steps of his trailer playing the accordion” when they made the 1970 Western *The Cheyenne Social Club*.



## AT HER PEAK

Charlotte will star in Showtime's 2017 *Twin Peaks* reboot: "I play the same character and Dana Ashbrook plays my son again, but I can't tell you anything else. I'm under oath!"

"Life is full of surprises. Be ready for them!"

### Any exceptions?

I fell in love a couple of times — once with [West Side Story star] Richard Beymer, who I later worked with on *Twin Peaks*, and [Barbarella hunk] John Phillip Law.

### How about Bill Murray?

He was a one-night stand. I was with a girlfriend — he swooped in and said, "You girls want to go to this club?" We didn't think we could get in, and he said, "Nah, we'll get in." I didn't even know who he was! He danced all night and ended up going home with me — and I think the next day he went to her house!

### Ha! How'd you work with all the partying?

I never drank at work. In the mid to late '70s, everywhere you went, there was some cocaine. I wasn't one to turn it down, but I didn't get that involved in drugs. My drinking got a little out of control when I left *Little House* [in 1978] because I didn't have a commitment. My health deteriorated. In 1984, I hit rock bottom, and my doctor suggested a recovery facility in Beverly Hills. Sobriety saved my life.

### That's wonderful! Have you stayed in touch with anyone on *Little House*?

Karen Grassle [Ma] and I became very good friends — and Alison Arnglim [Nellie Oleson] and I are best friends today!

— Reporting by Ilyssa Panitz



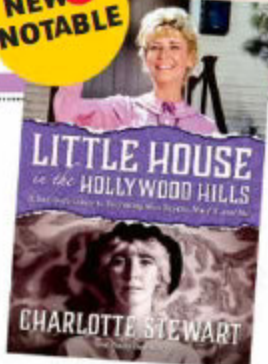
NEW & NOTABLE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: HUICHIMS; SPLASH; &R; EVERETT; S; COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE STEWART; MGR; COURTESY OF CHARLOTTE STEWART



**OH, DADDY!** She met Ralph Waite on *The Waltons*' first episode in 1972. "Once when Ralph spent the night, he left his wallet. I drove it to [the set] — to the amusement of a few on the show."

**ONCE REMOVED** Charlotte is only one degree away from Kevin Bacon. She co-starred with him and Ariana Richards in the 1990 cult classic *Tremors* and called the actor "a real pro."



**AUTHOR, AUTHOR!** Why write *Little House in the Hollywood Hills* now? "My co-author, Andy Demsky, convinced me I had a lot of stories to tell," she reveals. "Somebody might benefit from them!"