

Last week, in an interview at Starbucks, Charlotte Stewart and Andy Demsky talked about "Little House in the Hollywood Hills: A Bad Girl's Guide to Becoming Miss Beadle, Mary X, and Me," the book they co-wrote.

Stewart's memoir, published by BearManor Media and released this month, is a no-holds-barred account chronicling Stewart's personal life both on and off camera over a 50-year television and film career. With humor and compassion, it portrays her initial successes and eventual losses in Hollywood.

Though she has been in many shows and films over the years, including the popular "Twin Peaks," Stewart is best known by millions of fans worldwide for her role as Miss Beadle, the beloved schoolteacher from "Little House on the Prairie."

With the show currently broadcast in syndication in more than 100 countries, Miss Beadle, long cherished by "Little House" viewers, is gaining a new generation of fans.

Stewart, now 75, is still recognized wherever she goes as Miss Beadle, a part she played 40 years ago. Even in France, fans tell her that seeing her in the show was a big part of their childhood.

She attributes the show's abiding popularity to the wholesome values it portrays as well as Michael Landon's genius.

"What I found even more compelling than the Hollywood stuff," Demsky said, "was the funny, rich, and sometimes heartbreaking story of her actual life – getting chewed up by feelings of I'm-not-good-enough, divorces, addiction, cancer, death of a spouse, and much, much more."

"It just happens that her life's highs and lows were combined with people such as Jimmy Stewart, Elvis Presley, Neil Young, Jim Morrison, Michael Landon and Kevin Bacon popping in and out of her life."

Growing up on a 320-acre peach farm in Yuba City, Stewart said she was initially starstruck when she began getting acting roles and meeting famous actors, but after a while "they were just co-workers."

"I had a crush on Tim Considine," Stewart said. "I'd seen him on the 'Spin and Marty Show.'"

She and Considine were married with much fanfare in the teen magazines, and although the union ended in divorce, they have remained good friends.

Throughout the book Stewart provides poignant insights into legends from the music and entertainment industry.

"Elvis Presley made me feel comfortable. He apologized for the B-movie he was making. He knew it was terrible," she said. "He was a sensitive man."

Joni Mitchell, the iconic folk singer, was a friend and neighbor.

"Joni wasn't famous yet and she didn't drive, so I took her everywhere. We'd go to little coffeehouses," Stewart said. "Joni cut my bangs. I wanted to look like her. I still wear bangs. I've worn them ever since as a tribute to her."

"In Joni's kitchen I'd find words on her bulletin board that would eventually make it into her songs. Tim (Stewart's first husband) was a photographer and did the photo of Joni on her album 'Blue.'"

"Joni was the inspiration for my clothing store, Liquid Butterfly. I copied her peasant style and made hundreds of peasant blouses and dresses," she said. Years later, Stewart continues to sew and sell her creations.

The idea of writing a book together came after Stewart and Demsky met while rehearsing for Napa Regional Dance Company's annual "The Nutcracker" performance. With non-dance roles as the mother and father in the production, they had lots of time to talk as they watched the young ballet students rehearse.

Demsky was involved with the ballet because his children were in it. Stewart was seeking ways to connect with her new community. She had left Los Angeles to care for her husband when he was ill, and was drawn to Napa, where her niece lives.

As he discovered more about Stewart's life, Demsky became convinced that she should share her story with a larger audience.

"My initial sense that Charlotte had a great story came first when I realized that in 1974 she'd been filming her role as Miss Beadle on Little House during the day and at night was filming her Mary X character in 'Eraserhead,' David Lynch's classic cult film," Demsky said.

"We're talking about incredible artistic extremes – it's completely different ends of the acting spectrum," he continued. "It would be as if Florence Henderson had been filming 'The Brady Bunch' and at the same time appearing in 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show.'"

When Demsky urged her to write a book, Stewart told him she wasn't a writer. Demsky didn't see that as a problem since he was a writer and a journalist, whose work had appeared in numerous publications. He also co-wrote Doug Shafer's critically acclaimed memoir, "A Vineyard in Napa."

Stewart had kept records of every appointment, audition and date since 1960, which enabled greater accuracy. Demsky admits that he came to the project both as a fan and as "a total movie/TV nerd."

"A project like this is really collaborative, you spend a lot of time together – it takes a couple of years to gather up all of the raw material in order to pull a book together," he said.

"You have to really like each other and there has to be a lot of trust, you're dealing with very personal stuff. Which is why this worked. Charlotte is just flat-out fun to hang out with. She's a great storyteller, completely honest and authentic, and very funny," he continued. "We'd be sitting at Starbucks, she'd tell some totally over-the-top story – like how mortified she was going on a first date to a sex club in Topanga Canyon – and I'd be laughing so hard I'd have to just put my head on the table."

Demsky and Stewart met once a week at the Starbucks on Solano to work on the book.

"I'd talk and Andy would write and then he'd show it to me. Sometimes I'd email him," Stewart said "He pushed and pulled to get me to talk about what I was reluctant to talk about. I've never really shared these things."

It took courage to share her darkest secrets but Stewart said she is glad she did — it was cathartic. She survived divorce, drug use, cancer, financial ruin, the death of a spouse and alcoholism, but she never lost her humanity or her rich sense of humor.

And her story is not over. Stewart is set to reprise her role of Betty Briggs in the new "Twin Peaks" series to be seen on Showtime in 2017. She is a featured celebrity in fan events and festivals for "Little House on the Prairie" and "Twin Peaks" both in the U.S. and abroad.

She is happily married and enjoying life in Napa, her home for the last nine years. Unless she is traveling, Stewart creates one-of-a-kind patchwork Beadle handbags from 10 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon every day. A portion of the proceeds go to Queen of the Valley's Wellness Center to help cancer survivors.

A celebration for the book will be held at The Q Restaurant, 3900 Bel Aire Plaza in Napa, on Wednesday, June 22, from 6-9 p.m. It will include questions and answers, and book signings. People can bring their own copies or purchase the book there.