

'CONFESSIONS OF A PRAIRIE BITCH'

- 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday

- Davenport's, 1383 N. Milwaukee

- \$20

- (773) 278-1830

Former child star and current political activist Alison Arngrim spent seven years playing the manipulative, selfish brat Nellie Oleson on the beloved family TV series "Little House on the Prairie."

And while her convincing performance yielded hate mail (even to this day), the 48-year-old says it was through playing one of television's greatest antagonists that she found both strength and confidence to live beyond the prairie.

Arngrim brings her one-woman show "Confessions of a Prairie Bitch" to Davenport's on Thursday and Friday. The title of the show is also the name of her recently released memoir (published by !T, \$25.99).

We spoke recently with the actress and author by phone from Provincetown, Mass.

Q. How much of Nellie was in the script and how much did you bring to her?

A. She was definitely worse in the script than she was in the books. How can you play a character like Nellie and not go all out, though? The Olesons had three sets of dishes: one for everyday, one for Sunday and a final set for when someone special comes to visit. Even today that strikes me as hysterically funny. This wealthy family thinks they will eventually have some VIP dinner that they need these set of dishes for. They live in freaking Walnut Grove, Minn. They don't know anybody, and nobody is going to visit them there. I think I got the job because I was the only 11-year-old who got the joke.

Q. Are you surprised by how much people love to hate your character, Nellie Oleson?

A. In general, there is something about the character of "the bitch" that tends to be more popular. Without Nellie Oleson, I'm not sure if you would have had a character like Sue Sylvester on "Glee." The bitchy character is more popular than it has ever been.

Q. In the book, you present a compelling case that the real bitch on the set was Melissa Sue Anderson (Mary Ingalls). What'd you think of her book?

A. She's still stuck up [laughs]. Have you read that thing? In the 300 pages of her book, she never mentions what her parents' names are. How do you do that? Her dad serves her a burger on Page 8 and then shows up at the end of the book to walk her down the aisle, and you have no idea what happened to the guy in between.

I think she's had a much more interesting life than she is letting on. She mentions she dated Frank Sinatra Jr. as if she went to dinner once. I'm sorry, I was there. They were in love. I was kind of hoping she would talk more about that. This wasn't just a date. They were talking about marriage! They spent a great deal of time together and he was very nice to her. If I was Frank Jr., I'd be miffed that she wrote it off like they just went on a couple of picnics.

Q. With so many TV shows getting big-screen remakes, who could you see doing justice to the role of Nellie?

A. I'm thinking Dakota Fanning, but she might be a bit too long in the tooth. Maybe her younger sister Elle Fanning? Or Sally Draper [Kiernan Shipka] from "Mad Men," but only if they were making a movie about my book. She's probably seen it all on that set.

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