

Gilbert, now 58, famously played Laura Ingalls Wilder in the 1974 series when she was just a child alongside Landon, who starred as her father, Charles Ingalls. Now, she remembered 'one of the most influential people in her life,' 31 years after tragically passing away from pancreatic cancer at age 54. The actress said his 'cruel and brutal' death left 'a hole' in her life, as well as many others who 'knew him personally' and 'who simply admired his work.' Gilbert said that she was 'aching' for her 'mentor, acting partner, favorite director, father figure, friend, boss, and Pa.' She explained that she was 'grieving his loss' more than ever, during 'these difficult times' when his 'voice and talent' would have brought so much 'comfort.' 'It doesn't care what you do for a living or what color or gender you are,' she said of the disease. 'It is a brutal and vicious killer and it robbed me of a beloved one.'

Little House on the Prairie star Melissa Gilbert honored her former costar Michael Landon on the 31st anniversary of his death, sharing an emotional tribute to the man who played her 'Pa' for nine years on the Western show.

Gilbert, now 58 - who famously played Laura Ingalls Wilder in the 1974 series when she was just a child - said she was 'so sad' while remembering 'one of the most influential people in her life,' 31 years after Landon - who starred as her father, Charles Ingalls - tragically passed away from pancreatic cancer at age 54.

The actress said his 'cruel and brutal' death left 'an enormous hole' in her life, as well as many others who 'knew him personally' and 'who simply admired his work.'

'Today is the 31st anniversary of the death of one of the most influential people in my life and I am so, so sad,' she wrote in an essay for PanCAN, a charity dedicated to researching treatment for the disease.

Gilbert said that she was 'aching' for her 'mentor, acting partner, favorite director, father figure, friend, boss, and Pa,' who she described as a 'a principled, honorable man' who passionately supported 'human rights.'

'Today I am missing Michael Landon. So much so, I can feel it in my chest, in my heart. I am aching for him,' she continued.

'Mike was a principled, honorable man who believed, first and foremost in the power of love, tolerance, compassion and understanding.'

'He was a fierce warrior for human rights, and he was just that magical bit better at telling those stories than anyone else.'

The show, which aired in 1974 and went on for nine seasons before it concluded in 1983, followed the Ingalls family, who lived on a farm in Minnesota in the 1870s, '80s, and '90s.

Created by Landon, it was based off Laura Ingall Wilder's best-selling novel of the same name. It also starred Karen Grassle, Melissa Sue Anderson, Lindsay and Sidney Greenbush, Katherine MacGregor, Alison Arngrim, and Jonathan Gilbert - among others.

Landon, who was married three times and was the father to nine children when he died, complained of severe headaches while on a ski vacation in Utah in 1991. He was then diagnosed with pancreatic cancer days later, and died on July 1 of that year.

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According to Cancer.org, about 62,210 people (32,970 men and 29,240 women) will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer this year, and about 49,830 of them will die.

'He was my mentor and one of the greatest influences on my life,' Gilbert continued. 'Mike was also a husband, brother, father, grandfather, and friend when he died those 31 years ago.'

'His death left an enormous hole in the lives of those of us who knew him personally as well those who simply admired his work.'

Gilbert explained that she was 'grieving his loss' more than ever, during 'these difficult times' when his 'voice and talent' would have brought so much 'comfort.'

'I am grieving his loss, his death, as, I'm sure many, many others are,' she continued. 'Especially now, because it seems like the world is on fire.'

'I know Mike's voice and talent would have brought us all comfort during these difficult times.'

'The lessons he would have shared with us through his films would have shed light on injustice as it did for so many decades before his passing.'

She described his death as 'cruel and brutal' and called pancreatic cancer 'vicious, pernicious, and horrendous.'

'It doesn't care who you are, where you live, what you do for a living, how old you are, what religion, nationality, color or gender you are,' she said of the disease.

'It is a brutal and vicious killer and it robbed me of a beloved one. I was raised not to hate. I was raised to love and accept all, but I am telling you I hate pancreatic cancer with a passion that is volcanic. I want to wipe this disease out completely. I want it obliterated, globally.'

She concluded her emotional message by asking others to help contribute to finding the cure for pancreatic cancer.

'I'm asking you today, on this anniversary of the death of my Pa, Michael Landon, to please make a contribution to PanCAN,' she wrote.

Pancreatic cancer statistics

The pancreas is an organ that sits behind the stomach. The most common type of pancreatic cancer, adenocarcinoma of the pancreas, starts when exocrine cells in the pancreas start to grow out of control. According to Cancer.org, about 62,210 people (32,970 men and 29,240 women) will be diagnosed with pancreatic cancer this year, and about 49,830 of them will die. It is still unknown what causes pancreatic cancer but certain risk factors can make your prognosis worse, including tobacco use, being overweight, and other conditions like diabetes. Treatment includes surgery, ablation or embolization, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy.

'Do it in Mike's name. You can help end this disease and its horrid, indiscriminate destruction today. Please, please help in whatever way you can.'

After his success as Charles in *Little House*, Landon produced the western drama series *Father Murphy*. He then went on to star in *Highway to Heaven* from 1984 to 1989.

His other acting credits include NBC's *Love is Forever*, coming-of-age movie *Sam's Son*, PBS series *The Electric Company*, and *Where Do Pigeons Go To Die*. He also appeared on the game show *Match Game*.

On top of his work as an actor, director, and producer, Landon also launched a major singing career. He released a few songs over the years, and embarked on numerous world tours throughout his career.

He and his first wife, Dodie Levy-Fraser, wed in 1956 and divorced in 1962. They adopted two sons, named Mark and Josh.

He then wed Marjorie Lynn Noe in 1963, and together they welcomed four children - two daughters named Leslie and Shawna, and two sons named Michael Jr. and Christopher. He also adopted Noe's daughter from her first marriage, Cheryl, however, they split in 1982.

After that, he tied the knot with *Little House on the Prairie* makeup artist Cindy Clerico in 1983. Their relationship caused media backlash since it started while he was still married to Noe.

They had a daughter, named Jennifer, and a son, named Sean, and were together until his death.

While Gilbert had nothing but nice things to say about Landon, his former on-screen wife, Grassle, accused him of bullying her on-set years after his death.

In her recent memoir, Grassle recalled the 'disgusting' jokes that Landon would tell on set - boasting about his 'revived libido' after he began taking supplements - how he'd mock the way she looked, and claimed he 'insulted' her by insisting she shouldn't be paid more than the child actors on the show.

'Mike began to arrive jubilant at the makeup table, crowing about the benefits of bee pollen for the aging male,' she wrote in the book, adding that the R-rated chatter was unwelcome because, 'I didn't want to think about his penis.'

Grassle, who earned \$2,000 to \$4,000 a week at the height of her fame, claimed that she once asked Landon

for a raise before the second season. But Landon reportedly said no, and after that, she claimed he began cutting her scenes and leaving her out of storylines altogether.

She also said he could also be cruel to her on set, mocking her body and facial expressions to crew members - but Grassle added in the book that she didn't feel like she could call him out.

'It was almost like I was frozen,' she said. 'But, as a woman in the 1970s film industry, I was so accustomed to these putdowns, it never occurred to me to sharply rebuke him. I kept up the professionalism. I'd be the good girl, play the part and hope.'

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