For seven years, Alison Arngrim played a wretched, scheming, selfish, lying, manipulative brat on one of TV historys most beloved series. Though millions of Little House on the Prairie viewers hated Nellie Oleson and her evil antics, Arngrim grew to love her character—and the freedom and confidence Nellie inspired in her.

In Confessions of a Prairie Bitch, Arngrim describes growing up in Hollywood with her eccentric parents: Thor Arngrim, a talent manager to Liberace and others, whose appetite for publicity was insatiable, and legendary voice actress Norma MacMillan, who played both Gumby and Casper the Friendly Ghost. She recalls her most cherished and often wickedly funny moments behind the scenes of Little House: Michael Landons unsaintly habit of not wearing underwear; how she and Melissa Gilbert (who played her TV nemesis, Laura Ingalls) became best friends and accidentally got drunk on rum cakes at 7-Eleven; and the only time she and Katherine MacGregor (who played Nellies mom) appeared in public in costume, provoking a posse of elementary schoolgirls to attack them.

Arngrim relays all this and more with biting wit, but she also bravely recounts her lifes challenges: her struggle to survive a history of traumatic abuse, depression, and paralyzing shyness; the secret her father kept from her for twenty years; and the devastating loss of her Little House husband and best friend, Steve Tracy, to AIDS, which inspired her second career in social and political activism. Arngrim describes how Nellie Oleson taught her to be bold, daring, and determined, and how she is eternally grateful to have had the biggest little bitch on the prairie to show her the way.
My Personal Review:

As with many, I went through the list of Prairie books as they were released. As a reader, I do not necessarily look to relate to the authors life, because we are all clearly different, even though I have spent my life in the entertainment business and my work is still in it. What I do look for is the authors honesty in the details they do choose to share. I also like it if the author realizes that not all their readers have shared in their experiences. It is almost like wanting my doctor to talk to me in terms I can understand and relate, rather than in medical jargon. And even me having been in the business for most of my life, I can still read an actors autobiography and go: What in the world is he or she talking about?!

First came Gilberts Prairie Tale. I liked the book, but the author failed to realize that her readers are, for the most part, completely removed from her reality. She relates to the reader as a peer, failing to realize that they will mostly have little clue as to what it is like to be in her shoes (i.e. not everyone can run up to Montreal to find out what their boyfriends are up to). Many readers will also like to know what was it like being in the Little House ambience. Gilbert goes through her Little House years rather fast, so if you blink, you may miss it. This is understandable, because she grew up there, so it became, for her, daily routine, but her audience may be wanting a bit more since this was not their routine, and may be hungry to know more. And it seemed that her book was more a therapeutic catharsis rather than sharing one on one with her readers. Again, understandably so, and the approach she chose, so I took it as that and went with it.

Then came Melissa Sue Andersons book, which in my view was pretty much a waste of paper. She remains as aloof in her accounts as she was with her co-stars in her years working in Little House. What Arngrim would later explain about Anderson in her own book is clearly what I perceived about her reading it. Cold, removed and basically I am not going to tell you much about me, so do not bother me by asking.

Finally, after much waiting, came Alisons book. Since what I knew of her was that she was witty, honest, open and just totally delightful, I could not wait to read her accounts. Yes, unlike some people, I do not hold the actor accountable for what their character does! As soon as the book arrived, I started glancing through it and immediately realized this was going to be an even better ride than I expected! Having finished the book, I have to say that it was even more so. I did not want it to end! She is charming, funny and completely open. She holds little back. But what I liked most is that she talks to her readers not only as friends, but also knowing that their experience is not like hers. Therefore, she makes it clear to understand and relate to. In doing this, the gap that could be there between her and her readers is eliminated and she comes across as a person, rather than a celebrity many cannot relate to. Now, Alison could have easily followed in Melissa Gilberts path, since both her and Melissa G. were pretty much
raised in the business, making it hard to see life from the outside, but she did not. This is an enormous credit to her, because it is not easy to do. What this means to me is that she can relate to the business outsiders as with the insiders and does not talk down to, but on equal terms. Clearly, she not only appreciates her fans, but also completely understands their curiosity and aims at placating it. To someone in the business, it becomes pretty much run of the mill what a set looks like, what the crew does and what others in the cast are like. They tend to disregard that fans may be craving to know every detail, because to the actor, it is a daily reality they have stopped being in awe of. Alison seems to understand this and speaks to her readers with the same awe they have. Her attitude is pretty much, you and I are not much different, let me share about my life with you and how wonderful my Little House behind the scenes years were. Alison also shares about her own child abuse, and does so handling a very delicate subject in quite a remarkable way. She is indeed quite a woman.

I have to add this as well: Alison’s wit is phenomenal! There are times in reading her book in which she has you laughing so hard you literally start crying. Her matter of fact look at life in Hollywood, Simi Valley and the 1800s prairie is just hilarious.

If you are even a remotely interested fan of Little House on the Prairie, you HAVE to get this book!

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