

# 'Little House,' big crush

## Whatever happened to Melissa Sue Anderson? An inquiring (and smitten) reporter wants to know.

By GREG HARDESTY  
The Orange County Register

It was her eyes – an impossibly light blue.

No, her hair – perfectly, wonderfully straight, and golden blonde.

Skin like cream – an angel in a prairie dress, matching bonnet, and long white apron.

I've never been a stalker, but I've always been crazy about Melissa Sue Anderson.

I was three weeks shy of my 12th birthday when I met her – when she kissed me on the cheek.

Was it a dream?

I was smitten, like many boys my age, with the actress who played Mary Ingalls on TV's "Little House on the Prairie" (1974-1983).

I joined her fan club – but that wasn't enough.

Using money I earned from my paper route in Ontario, I sent the actress a silver bracelet with her name on it – a gift for her 12th birthday (Sept. 26, 1974).

For this bold gesture, I was appointed president of the Southern California Chapter of the Official Melissa Sue Anderson Fan Club.

As fate would have it, the all-American actress soon visited nearby Pomona for a "Laura Ingalls Wilder Sociable" at the city library. I was there, of course – along with hundreds of other "Little House" fans, for her visit on Feb. 22, 1975.

The emcee called my name and asked me to come to the stage. Petrified, it took me several seconds to get moving. My sister and mom practically pushed me up there. I finally made it.

Melissa Sue Anderson shook my hand.

In the version of the story that I would tell countless times over the years, she also kissed me on the cheek. I doubt it really happened, but I like to think it did.

Then, as suddenly as it had happened, it was over.

Like all childhood crushes, my flame for the actress continued to burn but got safely tucked away as the years passed.

Last year, her angelic face popped into my head again, as it has so many times – forever as a 12-year-old. Forever Mary.

I decided to see if I could track her down – a reporter, of course, on a legitimate story. ...

I wondered: What has Melissa Sue Anderson been up to all these years?

Does she remember that day, more than 34 years ago at the Pomona Public Library, when we met?

I Googled her and found several fan Web sites, but no obvious way to contact her.

The Internet Movie Database lists her most recent credited role in the 2006 TV miniseries “10.5 Apocalypse,” about a massive earthquake that threatens two nuclear reactors.

Hmm, missed that one.

For advice I turned to the Register’s Barry Koltnow, who covers Hollywood.

After laughing in my face for several seconds, he suggested that I find her manager or press agent. An official at a talent agency that listed her as a client said they no longer represented her.

I called the production company responsible for “10.5 Apocalypse.” Nobody called me back.

After a few other fits and starts, I put my quest aside.

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Several months passed. Something kept nagging at me.

I went back online and scoured [www.melissasueandersonfan.com](http://www.melissasueandersonfan.com). I found out she was married and living in Montreal. She had two kids, 11 and 17.

In recent publicity photos, she still had that magical prairie dust sheen about her.

I e-mailed site director Mike Purdy for advice.

“I don’t think she takes fan mail,” he said. “One possible way to contact her is through her eBay membership.”

I wrote an e-mail to the account he provided.

A few weeks passed.

Nothing.

Then, on April 3, I got an e-mail from Michael Sloan – Melissa Sue Anderson’s husband.

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He said she’d be happy to call me.

A rush of warmth rippled through my 45-year-body, soon followed by horror at the realization that my two children now are older than when I first fell for Melissa Sue Anderson.

Where had all the years gone?

Then, I felt panic:

What the heck would I ask her?

Melissa Sue Anderson called me from her home in Canada, where she has lived since 2002 after moving from Brentwood. She married Sloan, a writer and producer, in 1990.

The conversation flowed smoothly – there were no awkward pauses. I was able to keep in check the besotted, prepubescent boy that threatened to erupt like an ill-timed zit.

She talked like the native Californian she is, generously tossing out “anyway” and “really cool” as we discussed family, Hollywood – and Orange County.

Her father, Jim Anderson, 80, a retired salesman, has lived in Cypress for years. She and her kids visited him last summer.

We mostly talked about the challenges and joys of parenthood.

She retired from acting to raise her kids, saying she didn’t want them to take a back seat to her fame.

She remembers the late Michael Landon being hounded for autographs at a birthday party for one of his children, and said she didn’t want to put her kids through that.

She also didn't encourage her kids to go into acting.

"There was a lot of life I didn't live," she said. "Not that I'm not grateful for what I had. I look back, and it's all happy memories. But no matter how good you have it, there's a lot of making up you have to do."

With daughter Piper ready to head off to college soon and son Griffin almost 12, Melissa Anderson (she dropped the "Sue," officially, when she was 19) is starting to consider more aggressively pursuing acting roles.

She's in no hurry, though – still loving the role of mom.

I asked her about visiting the Pomona Public Library on Feb. 22, 1975.

"I remember that," she said. Being one of the first stops on a publicity tour for books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, the visit stuck in her mind.

She was too polite to say she didn't remember me.

She also was too polite to say she didn't recall the bracelet.

"I'm sure I wore it, though!" she said cheerfully, and for a second I heard her as a 12-year-old girl – as Mary.

I never recruited any members to her fan club – for a while, I felt I was the only member who mattered.

After 45 minutes, it was time to say goodbye.

I didn't know how.

The smooth reporter had suddenly disintegrated. I was 11 years old again, struggling to find the right thing to say.

She must have sensed this.

"I used to have a huge crush on David Cassidy," Melissa said. "I always wondered what would have happened if I met him. I would have died."

No you wouldn't, I wanted to tell her. You would have never forgotten the moment, and you would have done what I did – what we all do:

Grow up.