

# Garrison Keillor is modern day Mark Twain

Garrison Keillor must certainly be this generation's Mark Twain. He's a gifted writer - a real humorist. Mark Twain said he was once introduced as "a humorist who really is funny, a very rare creature, indeed." Garrison Keillor is such a rarity. His radio scripts and books are truly funny. His fictional accounts of the lives of the people of Lake Wobegone are very much in the spirit of "Tom Sawyer" or "Huckleberry Finn." They are warm, funny, earthy tales of real down-home folks. He writes wonderfully witty, topical skits for "A Prairie Home Companion" and includes some great word plays. For example, at the end of each show, he lists the fictional crew which he credits with writing it: Sarah Bellum, Natalie Drest, Norman Conquest, Xavier Onassis, Ellis Mentry, Pete Moss and Warren Peace. He adds new ones each week, so it's hard to keep up. And there are no other writers; it's just Garrison.

Well, anyway, my reason for bringing it up is that on the very day that I wrote about words in this column, we were listening to "A Prairie Home Companion" and one of Garrison's alter egos - the great private eye, Guy Noir - had a discussion with a man in which they argue about what to call a piece of furniture. The man calls it an "armoire," but Guy thinks it's a chest of drawers, and the discussion goes on through a variety of names and distinctions: chiffoniere, chifforobe, clothespress, dresser, bureau, commode, highboy, etc. It was very funny. Another of my "serendipitous moments," right?

It struck me again that words are much more important (and interesting) than we sometimes give them credit for. The Guy Noir skit was a very funny bit and it got me thinking again about the power of words. And my "vocabulary" column must have struck a chord with a lot of people because I got a tremendous amount of feedback.

Ellen Sunderland, who teaches fourth grade at Van Brunt school in Horicon, told me about a vocabulary activity which she does with her class which sounded fascinating to me. She insisted it was not a game, but it sounds like too much fun to be "regular" school stuff. She calls it "sighting," and I hope I have this right. She starts out by introducing the kids to a short list of curriculum-based, practical words, and then divides the class into small groups who have to research the words. They must identify parts of speech, find three synonyms (which means that if you start with four words, you're now learning 12, right?), write definitions in the kids' own words, create sample sentences, and then illustrate them somehow. They make posters, montages, collages, etc. Then they have to make use of the words in some sort of class activity. So the activity is not only cognitive, it's also kinetic. Cool! After that, they watch for the words to be used in their own environments (watching TV, reading, class discussions, etc.) and when they hear or see the words being used, they yell "sighting" and record the sighting in their logs. So there's constant reinforcement. What a terrific way to bring vocabulary to life. It sounds like fun. Ellen says her kids love it and incorporate the words into their lives. Great idea!

Bob Dott sent me a joke in which a person used "meetricious" when he meant "meritorious." Whoops! He also reminded me of a Mark Twain line. "It's a mighty poor speller who can think of only one way to spell a word."

Gimny Seaholm of Horicon told she was inspired to get out a list of "100 words everyone should know" which a niece (or some other relative) had given her.

Elaine Possin sent me a funny article from the Farm Journal in which the author bemoaned the modern tendency to "verb" words - using nouns as verbs. For example, "dialogue" has been a noun for



ROGER VAN HAREN  
BACKSTAGE

Dries even suggested I should make vocabulary-building a regular feature of the column by throwing out a new word each week. I probably won't do it every week, but I heard Matt Lauer use this one last week and I had to look it up. Show of hands: How many know "gravitas"?

## Upcoming events

The Beaver Dam Area Arts Association is holding its Holiday Tour of Homes today from noon to 5 p.m. Five area homes will be opened to visitors. Tour tickets were \$10 if you'd gotten them in advance, but they're \$12 today. You can purchase tickets at the Seppel Center. There'll also be a silent auction held at the center in conjunction with the tour. Here's a chance to see some interesting homes and help the Arts Association at the same time.

Also today is "Bows and Holy," Beaver Dam Area Community Theatre's annual holiday variety show. The show is filled with music, dance, readings of the season and of course comedy! There are three shows: 3, 6 and 8:15 p.m. Tickets are \$5 each for general admission seating. Tomorrow is Wayland's 38th annual "Festival of Lessons and Carols," one of Beaver Dam's long Advent traditions. This program, based on the Anglican tradition

of mixing Biblical "lessons" with seasonal music, is a wonderful way to inaugurate the Christmas season. The public performance will be at 4 p.m. at the Wayland Chapel, but there'll be a prelude concert preceding the program. Come early to hear that. The organ in the chapel is a marvelous instrument and Eli Seighman is a wonderful organist. There'll also be other instrumental music. Admission is free and the public is cordially invited.

On Monday night, Wayland presents its Winter Studio Recital at 7:30 in Memorial Chapel. Music students will perform instrumental and vocal selections as the culmination of their first semester's work. Admission is free.

Monday is also the Beaver Dam High School Chorus Holiday Concert at BDHS at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium.

There are a couple of Beaver Dam elementary school concerts next week, both at 6:30 and both at the high school auditorium. On Tuesday night, it's Washington School, and on Thursday, it's Jefferson.

Next Saturday night, the Beaver Dam Area Orchestra will be in concert at the high school auditorium at 7:30. The Grace Presbyterian vocal and handbell choirs will be performing their Christmas concert twice next Sunday, at 10:45 a.m. and 7 p.m. at Grace church, 215 Gould St. in Beaver Dam. The choirs are directed by Cheryl Zeman and accompanied by Thomas Waegli. Cheryl said that the following instrumentalists will also accompany the choir: Lori Vanden Houten, Tracy Probst, John McDonald, Tom Stoffel, Patrick Zeman, Rich Zeman, Maria Noorhof, Anna Alvin, Nikki Bird, Katie Sanders and Janelle Zeman. This is another wonderful seasonal tradition in Beaver Dam.

The public is invited to attend Beaver Dam's Trinity Church-United Methodist Advent Cantata at their 4 and 10:45 services next Sunday morning (Dec. 15). The pro-

gram is titled "The Rose" and includes a collection of Advent anthems and scripture readings which focus on peace and salvation. Participating in the cantata will be the Handbell Choir, Women's Choir, Chancel Choir, A Cappella Praise and the Trinity Orchestra. Tom Patterson, Nancy Van Brunt, Joanne Tyjoski, and Kit Ulman make up the music staff at Trinity.

Here's a great idea: Beaver Dam Area Community Theatre gift certificates as holiday gifts! To purchase them, contact Donna Rochwite, 586-0254. The gift certificates can be for any amount and cover tickets for any of our three season shows.

And speaking of holiday gifts: the gift gallery at the Seppel Center is open daily until Christmas Eve, from noon to 5 p.m. There are hundreds of unique items, all original works, to choose from. Even if you don't buy anything, it's still a cool place to visit!

**Spotlight**  
After 20 years at the helm of the Beaver Dam Area Chamber of Commerce, Myrtle Clifton has decided to retire in the spring. In her 20 years, Myrtle has had a real impact on the community, both at the Chamber and in a variety of other contexts as well. She has been involved in a number of organizations and activities and has been a real cheerleader for the local area.

The biennial Business and Industry on Parade was her brainchild and its success is a testimony to her zeal and drive. The restoration of the old depot which houses the Chamber offices, the city's sesquicentennial celebration - there's a long list. She's been a backer of the arts, too.

So, Myrtle, I know you'll be asked to take a number of curtain calls before next May, but take a bow now! Congratulations!

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