

## Garrison Keillor on being fired: 'I think I have to leave the country,'

Minneapolis Star Tribune

MINNEAPOLIS — Citing "inappropriate behavior with an individual who worked with him," Minnesota Public Radio said Wednesday it has terminated its relationship with Garrison Keillor, the former host of "A Prairie Home Companion" who helped build MPR into a national powerhouse.

On Wednesday night, Keillor posted on Facebook before deleting it an hour later: "It's astonishing that fifty years of hard work can be trashed in a morning by an accusation."

He added: "I always believed in hard work and now it feels sort of meaningless. Only a friend can hurt you this badly."

Keillor finished: "I think I have to leave the country in order to walk around in public and not feel accusing glances."

Earlier in an email to The Minneapolis Star Tribune on Wednesday, Keillor said, "I put my hand on a woman's bare

back. I meant to pat her back after she told me about her unhappiness and her shirt was open and my hand went up it about 6 inches. She recoiled. I apologized. I sent her an email of apology later and she replied that she had forgiven me and not to think about it. We were friends. We continued to be friendly right up until her lawyer called."

Keillor even managed a joke of sorts: "Getting fired is a real distinction in broadcasting and I've waited fifty years for the honor. All of my heroes got fired. I only wish it could've been for something more heroic."

Then he turned more serious: "Anyone who ever was around my show can tell you that I was the least physically affectionate person in the building. Actors hug, musicians hug, people were embracing every Saturday night left and right, and I stood off in the corner like a stone statue."

"If I had a dollar for every

woman who asked to take a selfie with me and who slipped an arm around me and let it drift down below the neckline, I'd have at least a hundred dollars. So this is poetic irony of a high order. But I'm just fine. I had a good long run and am grateful for it and for everything else."

Keillor, 75, retired last year from his longtime radio show, but still produced "The Writer's Almanac" for syndication by MPR's parent company, St. Paul-based American Public Media, or APM.

Officials at MPR said they would not speak beyond a statement that said officials were notified last month of the allegations, "which relate to Mr. Keillor's conduct while he was responsible for the production of 'A Prairie Home Companion.'"

MPR said it will:

- Change the name of "Prairie Home," now hosted by Chris Thile.
- End distribution and

broadcast of "Writer's Almanac" and rebroadcasts of old Keillor-hosted "Prairie Home" shows.

• Separate itself from the Pretty Good Goods online catalog, which sells Keillor merchandise, and the PrairieHome.org website.

"I'm in shock," Thile said on Twitter. "I know nothing beyond what's contained in the MPR statement but I trust that the proper steps are being taken."

The show's production team is in New York City for three weekends of live broadcasts beginning Saturday. Representatives refused to comment beyond the MPR statement.

"Based on what we currently know, there are no similar allegations involving other staff," MPR said. "The attorney leading the independent investigation has been conducting interviews and reviewing documents, and the investigation is still ongoing. We encourage anyone with additional infor-

mation to call our confidential hotline 1-877-767-7781."

In an email to MPR members, the network's president, Jon McTaggart, said, "While we appreciate the contributions Garrison has made to MPR and to all of public radio, we believe this decision is the right thing to do and is necessary to continue to earn your trust and that of our employees and other supporters so vital to our public service."

Keillor later posted a statement on his web site.

"I've been fired over a story that I think is more interesting and more complicated than the version MPR heard," it said in part. "Most stories are. It's some sort of poetic irony to be knocked off the air by a story, having told so many of them myself, but I'm 75 and don't have any interest in arguing about this. And I cannot in conscience bring danger to a great organization I've worked hard for since 1969."