

# A love letter to Minnesota

**NONFICTION:** In his memoir, Garrison Keillor waxes nostalgic for heroes of the past but saves his vitriol for his former employer.

By NEAL JUSTIN  
neal.justin@startribune.com

Garrison Keillor has been holed up in Manhattan during the pandemic, but he left his heart in the Twin Cities. His first memoir, "That Time of Year: A Minnesota Life," has its fair share of juicy tidbits about the often reclusive author, but he's more passionate about honoring his homeland than looking inward.

Keillor is at his breeziest when honoring his childhood heroes: sharing an elevator with Cedric Adams, channeling Steve Cannon's brashness while working as a parking attendant, listening to Herb Carneal broadcast Twins games, savoring a steak dinner with Irv Letofsky.

He makes local landmarks like Al's Breakfast and Northrop auditorium seem as Americana as Mount Rushmore. His descriptions of biking past Victory Memorial Drive or gawking at Penguin Boy during the Minnesota State Fair as a wide-eyed youth are so affectionate that the state's tourism bureau might want to adopt those passages for their brochures.

Reflections on fellow Minnesotans aren't always kind. As he did in his book of limericks, released last year, he takes a swipe at Bob Dylan, attacking his lyrics as "gaseous emanations of sensibility." He saves his sharpest attacks for his former employer, Minnesota Public Radio.

He labels MPR reporters as members of the sleepest newsroom in town, jealous of the success of "A Prairie Home Companion."

"We lived among stone-faced people who

wished we would die in a plane crash so they could write it up," he says.

His bitterness clearly stems from the way MPR management and the press handled accusations that he had behaved inappropriately at work, which led to a dismissal and his reputation taking a major hit.

Keillor sees the incident as being "hung out to dry for a mutual e-mail flirtation" and doesn't go into much more detail than that.

He's much more open about his two previous marriages, taking his fair share of blame for their failures. But self-analysis has never been Keillor's forte.

"I'm an escape artist," he writes. "Avoidance is my specialty."

In one of his most telling excerpts, he admits that laughter doesn't come easily to him: "It's like bouncing a meatball. Strangers walk up to me and ask, 'Is something wrong?' No, I'm a happy man but I come in a thick husk, like sweet corn."

You may not catch Keillor in many giggling fits, but readers may laugh aloud when "That Time of Year" looks

back at the early days of the radio show, peculiar fan encounters and the making of the Robert Altman film (check out his mixed feelings about Lindsay Lohan).

Are those tales as amusing as the best of the "Lake Wobegon" novels? Probably not, but die-hard fans will treasure stories with Keillor as the central character, rather than trying to discover him behind that Guy Noir mask.



## That Time of Year

By: Garrison Keillor.

Publisher: Arcade Publishing, 372 pages, \$30.

Neal Justin is a critic for the Star Tribune. • 612-673-7431.  
@nealjustin