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He's tired of fame

'A Prairie Home Companion's' Garrison Keillor thinking about retiring

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Knight News Service

LOS ANGELES — When Garrison Keillor chatted, via satellite from Minneapolis, with reporters at last weekend's Disney Channel news conference, the purpose was to promote Keillor's July 4 special, *A Prairie Home Companion: Lake Wobegon Comes to Disney*.

Instead, the major news to emerge from that conference was the very strong indication that Keillor, and his *A Prairie Home Companion* radio show, would not be around much longer.

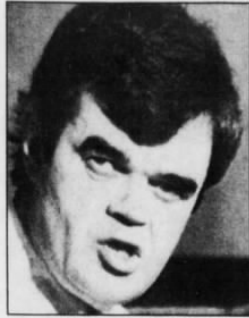
Keillor said he had become tired of his fame, and he spoke of the strain of putting out a show every week. He dwelt on the attraction of the homeland of his new Danish wife, where he is anonymous and, since he doesn't speak the language, it is unlikely that he would be asked to go on the radio.

He referred wistfully to the airplane that leaves daily from Chicago for Copenhagen, and he mentioned the need to leave soon before his wife's children become too acclimated to the United States. He stopped short several times, however, of stating unequivocally that he would be quitting.

Captured on camera

The subject arose when Keillor explained why he had permitted cameras to capture the performance of a *A Prairie Home Companion* radio broadcast — the one seen this season on PBS, which, in edited form, will be presented on the Disney Channel on July 4 (6:30 p.m.), along with 15 minutes of new footage about Keillor.

"I'm interested in television as a way of getting scared again," Keillor said, speaking calmly and quietly after having just completed that week's installment of public



Garrison Keillor
... marriage changed priorities

radio's *A Prairie Home Companion* (6 p.m. Saturdays on WGUC, 90.9 MHz).

"I've done radio, and this broadcast, for — how long has it been? — 12 years. It was exciting doing the PBS special, and I'm looking forward to the Disney."

The first time Keillor was asked if his interest in television might mean that he would lessen his participation in radio, he skillfully dodged the central issue.

"I'm intrigued by television," Keillor said, "and when I was asked to do this, I thought I ought to do it. People might not ask me again.

"I'm a shy person, and shy persons usually wait for an offer to be repeated twice."

Interested in relocating

It soon became apparent, though, that Keillor was intrigued by something other than television. Keillor, who married Ulla Skaerved on Dec. 29 in Holte, Denmark (near Copenhagen), is interested in relocating.

"Garrison," said one reporter, "there's a rumor that you're going to live in Denmark for a while. Is that true?"

"I hope it's true," Keillor said. "As soon as you hear more about that, you let me know."

More was heard about it shortly, when other reporters revived the subject, and that was when Keillor discussed it seriously. He told, essentially, of a shy person who wanted to go abroad to reclaim his anonymity and solitude.

"If I were to move to Denmark, my IQ would fall dramatically as a writer," Keillor said. "I suppose I could be a children's writer, but my command of Danish is awfully slight. I don't have much of a sense of humor in Danish."

That, it turns out, is more of an asset than a liability to Keillor. Asked about the growth of his show's cult following, Keillor joked again, then turned serious.

"I never knew what that phrase 'cult following' meant," Keillor said, starting things off lightly. "It almost suggested that after the radio show went off, that people killed chickens or something, or did strange things at home."

Show's future uncertain

But then, asked point-blank what would happen to *A Prairie Home Companion* if he indeed moved to Denmark, Keillor stopped joking.

"I don't know," he said hesitantly. "I don't know what I'll be doing for the next couple of years."

"It's a wonderful country," Keillor said about Denmark. "I'm planning on living there sometime soon."

Why Denmark?
"Well," he explained, "if you've ever been to a country where they

don't speak English as a rule, and if you have made your living all these years writing and talking in English, it's a great vacation to go and listen to a foreign language for a while.

"It just relieves you of any responsibility to be intelligent. You can just be handsome for a change."

Keillor then told about his arrival in Copenhagen last fall for his first extended visit.

"I got my luggage . . . and nobody recognized me," Keillor said. He said it in a tone that revealed gratitude, wonder and relief.

"I felt wonderful. I felt like I was 17. Then I walked out past customs, and nobody recognized me. I walked out to the curb. She (an obvious reference to Skaerved) was out there, and she recognized me, and I felt great about being there.

"I want to go back."

Denmark a possibility

Did he have any idea when?
"No, I really don't," Keillor said. "Everybody ought to have Denmark as a possibility out there in the future somewhere — wherever you think you might need it."

Would he want *A Prairie Home Companion* to go on without him? Could it?

"Well, I think the people of Lake Wobegon (the fictional town Keillor chronicles in each broadcast) own the rights to their own town. They're all property owners and they have title to that.

"Do I sound definite about going?" Keillor asked suddenly. "I can't hear myself, really."

When told that he had said he would be leaving sometime very soon, Keillor said, "Well, there's a plane that leaves Chicago every day at about 6 o'clock."