

Garrison Keillor's sister has stories of her own

GREENVILLE (AP) — For one Greenville resident, the inhabitants of Garrison Keillor's tales of Lake Wobegon, Minn., take on a special meaning and familiarity.

Judy Locke, who teaches third grade at Gateway Elementary School in Travelers Rest, says she knows many of these people. In fact, she's in some of the stories herself.

She's Garrison Keillor's sister, but true to her Minnesota background, it's not something she makes a big deal about.

"It's nice to get to know people for a while and then spring it on them," she says.

While for some a famous relative can be trying, Mrs. Locke said she never felt overshadowed, something she credits in part to her upbringing in a tight-knit family near Anoka, Minn., a small town about 12 miles from Minneapolis where the kids had "plenty of room to roam."

"We really have a good background, and a lot of kids don't have that. We've got Christians and preachers going way back," she said.

And her own accomplishments, though not as well-publicized as those of her brother "Gary," are just as impressive in their own way.

A determined single mother of four, she left Florida eight years ago to attend Bob Jones University at the age of 42 to get a college education. She is now working toward a master's degree in early childhood education at Furman University.

"When we drove up to the school I asked my mother to tell me that this was the craziest thing I'd ever done. She said 'no.' I ended up with a B average," Mrs. Locke said.

"I have practical, common sense. I have to study a lot and pray a lot, but the Lord doesn't call you do do something you can't do."

Religious faith is something

that has always sustained Mrs. Locke and her family.

"A big influence was my grandmother. She didn't preach at us, but she was a real example. She really lived it. My aunts and uncles and cousins still go to (worship in) the meeting hall near the old homestead. They all pitched in to build it.

"We had a family reunion there two years ago for my parents 50th wedding anniversary and there was a lot of crazy fun."

The Keillor children numbered four boys and two girls. Judy calls herself, jokingly, "a rose among thorns."

In addition to Judy and Garrison, among the children are an oceanographer, a lawyer, and a historian who recently finished a book on a governor of Minnesota.

"Gary wasn't the scholar in the family, but I was the only one without a college degree," until she attended Bob Jones University, she said.

Teaching, she said, is her calling.

"I've taken a writing class, but I've never had much of a desire to write fiction. I'd probably write a Christian book and it probably wouldn't sell much," she laughs.

But in a writing course at

Furman, she decided to put a twist on one of her brother's anecdotes, a story of her as a youth running riot in a vegetable patch that ended with Judy spattered with a tomato.

"We were to write about 'the flipside of the story.' Well, after that he (Garrison) used to call me 'tomato butt,' which is not real dignified. When he called me that, I thought it was terrible. He deserved a spanking," which she decided to use as the twist ending to the tale.

Mrs. Locke said her classmates were unaware that she was Garrison Keillor's sister until she sprung the news on them after reading her story in class.

"It blew them away," she said, adding the class gave her an A-plus.

Garrison Keillor often refers to himself as a shy person, a character trait Mrs. Locke said is for real.

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