

# Storyteller woos the Midwest with tales of everyday life

## Keillor to appear at UP's Hancher

By Linda Hartmann  
The Press-Citizen

Midwesterners are a bit different.

At least that's what Garrison Keillor thinks.

Compared to New Yorkers, for example, Midwesterners are more apt to look beyond their own lives and enjoy the world outside, Keillor says.

"New Yorkers are performers at heart and Midwesterners are spectators and witnesses," he says. "We come from that flat country, you know, so our instinct is to look far off."

Staying true to this philosophy, the native Minnesotan returns to the Midwest this weekend to do another farewell performance of his highly acclaimed live radio show, *A Prairie Home Companion*. The show will air live from Hancher Auditorium on Saturday afternoon.

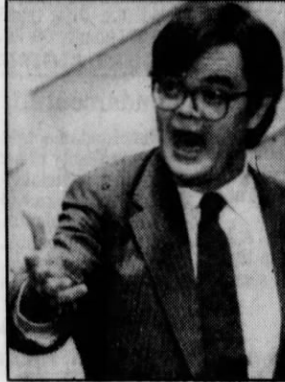
This philosophy also guided him to a career as a professional storyteller, through songs, books, monologues, magazine articles and poems.

The Midwest seems to produce more great writers than the East Coast, Keillor says. New York just attracts them.

The desire to tell stories is central to his everyday life, Keillor says from his New York City home.

"I would find life unbearable if I did not," he says. "I think a person who does not tell stories has not lived."

"I assume that everybody has told stories. If we are able to tell stories of our lives, we don't need therapy, we don't need counseling."



Garrison Keillor

### Iowa Citizens take part/1B

Keillor, 48, has carried on his part of the story-telling tradition over the air waves.

In 1974 he began broadcasting a public radio entertainment show named after the Prairie Home Cemetery in Moorhead, Minn.

Eventually, it became the audio companion for millions of people from 5 to 7 every Saturday night. The show included a stage production for radio of a variety of music, skits, commercials for fictitious products and other humorous tibits.

Toward the end of every show, Keillor would amble on stage and stand in the spotlight without notes to tell news from Lake Wobegon, his imaginary home town.

He would tell of the people: Norwegian bachelor farmers or Harold Starr, editor of the *Herald-Star* newspaper.

The sights and sounds: "The moon rose over the frozen lake;

## Sweet vice

"Sweet corn was our family's weakness. We were prepared to resist atheistic Communism, immoral Hollywood, hard liquor, gambling and dancing, smoking, fornication, but if Satan had come around with sweet corn, we at least would have listened to what he had to sell. We might not have bought it, but we would've had him in and given him a cup of coffee.

"It was not amazing to learn in eighth-grade science that corn is sexual, each plant containing both genders, male tassel and female flower, propagating in our garden after dark. Sweet corn was so delicious, what could have produced it except sex?"

"Sunday after church, when the pot roast was done and the potatoes were boiled and mashed and a pot of water was boiling — only then would Dad run out with a bushel basket and pick thirty ears of corn. We shucked it clean in five seconds per ear and popped it in the pot for a few minutes. A quick prayer, a little butter and salt, and that is as good as it gets."

— Excerpt from *Leaving Home: A Collection of Lake Wobegon Stories*.

the light seemed to come out of the snow."

Growing up in a strict Christian family: "We don't have air

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## NATION

# Keillor

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conditioning, of course. 'If you'd work up a little sweat out there, the shade ought to feel good enough for you,' is Dad's thinking. Air-conditioning is for the weak and indolent."

Many characters and stories came from his own past and his childhood in Anoka, Minn., a suburb of Minneapolis.

In 1987, Keillor ended the show's 13-year run, citing a lack of privacy and a need to rejuvenate his creative spirit.

Last year he returned to the airwaves with a new show from New York in a similar format called *American Radio Company of the Air*.

Near the end of each performance, Keillor tells more news from Lake Wobegon. He denies that he has a gift for spotting details that make people identify with his stories.

His voice takes on a quiet, modest tone, and he chuckles:

"The art of telling these stories on the radio is that they're so broad and they're so clumsily told that the listener is forced to fill in all the details.

"My great achievement in radio is to not tell it nearly as well as I could."

Thus people outside the Midwest or from big cities identify with his stories of tuna casserole and Sunday pot roast, of July Fourth parades and lunch conversations in the Chatterbox Cafe.

"It somehow reminds people of real people and places that they've known and seen, and I have no idea why," Keillor says.

But why bring a reunion of the show to Iowa?

It's that Midwest thing again.

"I'm wondering why everyone in Iowa asks me why I chose Iowa," Keillor says. The previous reunion shows were in Las Angeles and New York. People there think playing host is their due, he says.

"I feel: Of course, it's in Iowa."