

Be Garrison's companion for a bookish experience

BY BOB
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Staff

Jennifer Howe, humorist Garrison Keillor's manager, had already laid down the ground rules for the telephone interview with her boss.

"You've got 10 minutes so you better have your questions ready because Mr. Keillor's leaving the country soon and he's really pressed for time," she said.

But when Keillor lifted the receiver in his New York office six seconds later, all that went out the proverbial window.

Keillor, whose whimsical yarns about his imaginary hometown of Lake Wobegon have endeared him to millions, was about as much in a hurry to get the interview out of the way as springtime is to get to the Minnesota north country where Keillor was born and raised.

He chewed every question like it was his first gourmet meal; expounded on every answer like maybe he was planning to make it a whole chapter in his next book or something.

Keillor's real-life Lake Wobegon, the community where he lived for the first 20 years of his life is Anoka, Minn., the place where he developed the homespun humor that has made him a successful radio-TV performer and author.

Keillor, who now lives in New York, will be in Dayton next Friday for the grand opening of a new Books & Co. store.

Good things have been happening to the University of Minnesota grad (Class of '66) since 1974, when he came up with the idea for a radio show called *A Prairie Home Companion*.

Over the next 13 years, the show gained a national audience on nearly 300 Public Radio stations and garnered all sorts of accolades for its creator.

Keillor's other credits include four books (One, *Lake Wobegon Days*, was on the *New York Times* Best Seller List for 44 weeks), a Grammy Award for his recording of excerpts from *Lake Wobegon Days* and concerts from coast to coast.

In November 1989, Keillor returned to Public Radio with a show called *The American Radio Company of the Air*.

He gives his wife, Ulla, a lot of the credit for helping him keep things in perspective during his rise to fame.

"I'm married to an Anoka girl, a girl I used to write poems to, so I've always felt at home wherever I have been," he said.

He said his move to New York three years ago was like a dream come true.

"I thought a lot about New York when I lived in Anoka. And I



HOW TO GO

- **WHAT:** Humorist Garrison Keillor.
- **WHEN:** 5-10 p.m. next Friday.
- **WHERE:** Books & Co., Town & Country Shopping Center, 316 E. Stroop Road, Kettering.
- **COST:** Free.
- **MORE INFO:** Call 298-6540.

imagined much of the life that I am now living. But despite all the things I'm doing, my life is relatively calm. I guess I was swept up in the whole show business thing in the mid-1980s, but it's over now."

Radio was a logical place for him to begin his career, he said.

"I grew up listening to radio. My family was religious and they saw TV as a profane medium, so we didn't even buy a TV until I was 16. Radio was my family's entertainment and we sat in the dark listening to radio shows until there weren't any more radio shows."

Keillor's goal is to revive the glory days of radio.

"I grew up at the tail end of the era when people wrote shows for radio. I like to see it that way again and I'm doing everything I can to make it possible."

He said his poignant-humorous-nostalgic tales of Lake Wobegon mirror real lives, real experiences.

"People hear and read my stories and they are reminded of someone they knew very well," he explained.

He said he'd like to pay tribute to the late James Wright, who taught humanities and English at the University of Minnesota, at the opening of the book store.

"James Wright, who died 10 years ago, is one of the greatest American poets to come along in the last 50 years," Keillor said.

"He was from Martins Ferry, Ohio and he wrote beautifully about his state. A book of his poems has been published and, hopefully, while I'm in Dayton they'll let me read some of the poems in that book."