

SUNSTYLE

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Keillor's advice: Write about your own life



GARRISON KEILLOR
Visits Gettysburg College

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Evening Sun Reporter

GETTYSBURG—It seems a professor who drapes a winter scarf over a sports jacket and lectures in tennis shoes is fiction fodder, like the men in Lake Wobegon with bellies big enough to be introduced.

Best-selling author Garrison Keillor recently advised Gettysburg College creative writing students to invent their reality into stories.

Keillor spent two days as a writer-in-residence at the college this week, meeting with creative writing and theater arts classes. Keillor is a contributing editor of *The Gettysburg Review*, the quarterly college journal.

The author of *Lake Wobegon Days*, *Leaving Home*, and *We Are Still Married* also performed at the college Tuesday.

During a press conference Tuesday, Keillor said he wanted to talk to the writing students about their sto-

ries, which he said he had been reading over the last week.

"I just want to give them a little bit of good advice," Keillor said. "Because I think writing, whether or not they ever publish anything, is the basis of education. The most valuable and fundamental discipline they can pick up in college is the ability to tell us what happened to them today."

Keillor said when he first started writing fiction at the University of Minnesota, he wrote about jazz musicians living in Greenwich Village, New York. The Minnesota native has since become famous for tales of small town Americana, of places where "smart don't count for much."

He said the Gettysburg College students seem to be making the same mistake, missing out on the vignettes inherent in places like "Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility," the mythical church in the mystical town of Lake Wobegon, Minnesota.

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Writer and humorist

had grown up among," Keillor said. "The difference (between his stories of New York musicians and his stories of Dorothy of the Chatterbox Cafe) was amazing."

Short of doing research, students have to write about what they know, Keillor said.

"If you're going to sit in a room and write, you have to write about your father and your mother," Keillor said. "You have to start with them and move on to your brothers and sisters."

He said his mother and aunts were endless sources for stories.

"The world of the women I grew

up among is an endless field," Keillor said. "It is filled with mystery, humor and surprise."

Peter Stitt, editor of *The Gettysburg Review* who attended the University of Minnesota with Keillor, said he wanted the students to see that best-selling authors are people too. The students might get a new perspective on themselves and think they too might become a successful writer, Stitt said.

"Having the presence of a great writer is always good for students," Keillor said. "They see that writers are real people and they need haircuts too."

Keillor said he likes to write at 3:30 or 4 a.m., with the morning fuzz as his muse.

He said he loses all desire to write after reading *The New York Times*, which he called a "great neurotic newspaper," even though, or maybe because, "it is written by deaf people."

It seems international crises, like age, authority, and "guardians of truth and virtue" kill humor.

Keillor said he likes reading Miami Herald syndicated columnist Dave Barry because he "makes you laugh out loud."

Asked about the literary inheritance left to young people today, Keillor cited John Updike, Anne Tyler, and Sharon Olds as writers with staying power.

"We've left them (young people) a long shelf of books that have been written in the last 20 years that I think will be around for a long time," Keillor said.