

Garrison Keillor returns to Gettysburg College

By ROBERT HOLT
Times Staff Writer

People need to drink six glasses of water each and every day. Television is a blight. Young people do display humor but not around adults. Writing is the basis of education.

And by the way, where can a guy from New York get a good haircut around here?

...Welcome to the world of Garrison Keillor — at least for Tuesday.

It's a fast-paced and eclectic morning conversation at Gettysburg College among a dozen journalists and the writer/humorist.

The 48-year-old satirist literally breezes into the campus faculty lounge, Glatfelter Lodge, his hair disheveled by the wind, he sits on a sofa and sums up the situation in a few phrases.

"I don't want to beat around the bush," said the 6-foot-3-inch man with dark, bushy eyebrows. "I want to say who I am and why I'm here."

"I'm here because I'm a writer," Keillor said. "I'm a working writer who works just about every day of the week, except today, and who sits down and writes fiction."

Keillor is the guest of the college literary magazine, *Gettysburg Review*, and is expected to conclude today a two-day stay at the campus as writer-in-residence.

The man who won acclaim for the American Public Radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion," and continues that tradition with his new program, "American Radio Company," fidgets with his horn-rimmed glasses and seems indifferent that ink stains on his shirt are visible to the group.

He says:

"So I want to come talk to these young people who are not aware of things that I have written in the past; which I find merciful, and which draws me towards them, is the fact they have not read my books, and they have no idea who I am. And they are more interested, as I am, in what I may write tomorrow and the day after that."

Keillor also admits that he is partial to Gettysburg College, since it is one of three in the United States that have granted him an honorary degree.

He claims his visits to the college are a pilgrimage during times when he feels "less than smart."

"It's a small area, where my Ph.D. is in effect, but it means a lot to me," says Keillor, now hunched on the edge of a couch and his glasses perched atop his head.



Times photos by Dan Shoemaker

INTERVIEWED — Humorist Garrison Keillor discusses his two-day writer-in-

residence status at Gettysburg College during a Glatfelter Lodge interview Wednesday.

"I like to look up at these big white porticoes, and this sort of Pennsylvania-Georgian architecture, and it makes me feel smart again so that I'm ready to go back to New York, and back to being a writer," the Minnesota native adds.

The wit and satire of Garrison Keillor has emerged for a 90-minute spree — hold on tight and if you get a little dizzy, hop off when he pauses.

"I'm also here to get a haircut, which I've never had a good one in New York and it's been three years..."

Then Keillor announces to the group of serious-minded journalists that he has been working in recent months on a new crusade, the "Hydration Movement" or "Six-A-Day Movement," to persuade people to drink more water.

His eyebrows curled over an expression of concern, the humorist says the press ignores the fact that most Americans live in a condition of "borderline dehydration." He claims dehydration affects a person's mental abilities, and goes on to say his message is one everyone has heard as youths, but they have chosen to ignore it.

"Six-A-Day. Six large glasses, and that's for a one

hundred and sixty pound person. And that's in this kind of weather. Not in the summertime."

There is no laughter, only silence in the room. Then someone asks what kind of water the storyteller drinks — tap, bottled? The bait has been swallowed, the trap is sprung, and Keillor is reeling them in.

"New York tap water is some of the best water in the country. It's what really draws people to New York. People come from all over the country to stay in hotels in New York and drink water out of the tap," he says.

According to Keillor, hotel patrons pay a surtax for the water in New York — something like 9 or 10 percent on the hotel bill just for the water.

"People come from all over the country, and bring large plastic containers that fill up the trunks of their cars. It's an amazing, an amazing thing," he claims.

There are a few chuckles, and then another person asks when hydration became a concern for Keillor.

He relates that he became ill during the summer with a respiratory virus, and he was required to take large quantities of costly pills, having to drink a large glass of water with each pill.

"And after a couple of weeks of drinking six large

glasses of water a day, I, uh...How can I say it and not brag. I, uh, I became as brilliant as I had been in my early twenties. And here I am," Keillor says.

The group realizes that Keillor is toying with them, but he rejects an attempt to instill a little reality into the story when it is suggested that his campaign could keep a lot of people indisposed.

"Do we want to get into this subject...I was talking about hydration, and now you're talking about mic-tur-bion," he replies with his trademark dry humor.

His next work due for publication is a novel about the "the death of radio and the advent of television."

"My hero in this novel turns out to be a television news guy. I can't believe that I did that. I just don't know how it happened," he says.

Yet the writer adds it was inevitable that the television newsman becomes the hero in a story about the sudden, unexpected collapse of the radio broadcasting industry in the 1940s.

"And people didn't see it coming. And my character is a hero because he makes a lucky leap, because he was unsuccessful in radio and he walks across the street," he says.

(See KEILLOR on 3A)

Keillor

(From page 1A)

The protagonist in the story is surprising for Keillor, because he claims not to like television.

"I consider television...television is a diuretic, I think. Television is kind of a blight, I think, and the people who invented it have a lot to answer for," he adds.

Keillor says he has been reading stories written by creative writing and dramatic arts students that he is meeting.

"It seems to me that they're doing something similar to what I did when I was 19," he says.

He recalls writing about places and things that were far removed from Minnesota, where he grew up and attended college. He notes particularly stories about jazz musicians leading strange and tragic lives in Greenwich Village because they were not appreciated by the world.

Over the years, Keillor says he began to write more about Minnesota and people with whom he had been raised.

"The difference was really amazing. It's extremely hard to write about things you don't know anything about. It's just really hard work, especially if you're making it up. That's harder than going out and doing research," he says.

Keillor says young people are subtle and very funny in their humor.

"When they're with each other. But when they are with us, they become solemn and humorless," he says and laughs "We seem to have this effect on them. I don't think this is their fault."

The humorist says he does not ask young people to display humor on demand.

"I just want to give them a little bit of good advice. Because I think that writing, whether or not they should ever publish anything in their life, is the basis of education. The most fundamental and valuable discipline that they can pick up in college is the ability to say what has happened to us," he says

aker

Lisa
nda
nee
and

nt in
nger
kies
es to
On
ople
doll,
nci.

?