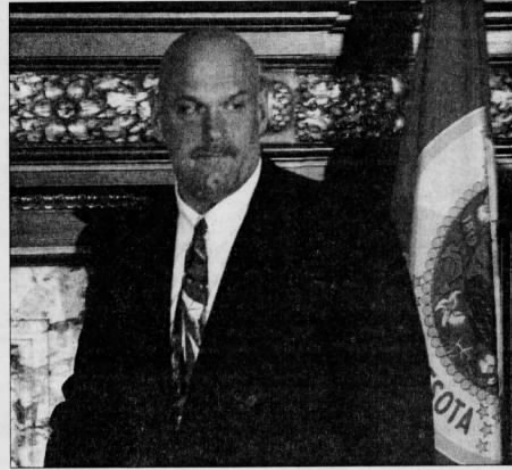




Garrison Keillor is a self-described "tired old hack with a gecko face and thinning hair and a body like a six-foot stack of marshmallows."



Jesse Ventura is a "great big honking bullet-headed shovel-faced mutha," who didn't run for governor under his real name, says Keillor.

KEILLOR VS. VENTURA

Their little spat is getting rather nasty now that the founder of Lake Wobegon has skewered the Minnesota governor in a new book.

By MARY CHALLENGER
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

When Jesse Ventura crossed paths with fellow son of Minnesota Garrison Keillor, creator of the placid community of Lake Wobegon, everyone knew it was just a matter of time before feathered boas started to fly.

But no one predicted it would be Keillor, a self-described "tired old hack with a gecko face and thinning hair and a body like a six-foot stack of marshmallows," doing most of the body-slammung.

Keillor's twisting toehold on Ventura started with a November article in Time Magazine in which he called the newly elected Minnesota governor a "great big honking bullet-headed shovel-faced mutha" and noted bemusedly that Ventura didn't even run under his legal name, James Janos — a

small detail," Keillor wrote, "but Minnesotans had never elected a pseudonym before."

Ventura responded with what could be viewed as the political version of ramming an opponent's head into the turnbuckle — he suggested cutting off funds to Minnesota Public Radio, which produces Keillor's show "A Prairie Home Companion."

Although fans across the nation listen to the show for Keillor's continuing tales of the fictional town of Lake Wobegon, Minn., Ventura denies his budget-cutting idea was related to Keillor.

It was Keillor, however, who cracked his opponent with what in the literary world passes for a folding chair across the cranium — he wrote a book.

Although "Me, by Jimmy (Big Boy) Valente, as told to



"Me, by Jimmy (Big Boy) Valente, as told to Garrison Keillor" is in no way about Ventura, says Keillor.

Garrison Keillor" is about a bullet-headed former professional wrestler who was elected governor of Minnesota, an author's note makes it clear the book "should not be construed in any way as an

autobiography of an actual governor of Minnesota, God bless him."

There are, however, some frightening similarities. Ventura was a Navy Seal; Valente is a WALRUS (Water Air Land Rising Up Suddenly). Ventura's professional wrestling career contained stints when he dressed up in feather boas and tights; Valente wrestles as "The Flower Child" with a pink boa and long blond hair and dangling earrings.

Ventura runs for governor of Minnesota as a candidate for Ross Perot's Reform Party; Valente runs for governor of Minnesota as a candidate for the Ethical Party, "a grab bag of bikers and bird-watchers and disgruntled dishwashers and surly seniors and people who call in to talk shows to bitch about the mailman."

In reality, it's doubtful that "Big Boy" Valente bears any closer resemblance to Ventura than the mild, good-humored citizens of Keillor's Lake Wobegon do to real Minnesotans. Both are caricatures, with Keillor as the artist who takes

his subject's actual features then wildly exaggerates them.

Like any good caricaturist, Keillor strives to be funny rather than mean. In "Me," he succeeds more often than not, especially with Valente

"quotes" like "I never promised the good people of Minnesota a one-thousand-dollar tax refund for every man, woman, and child. I only promised the refund if the money was actually there. It wasn't. Had I known the money wasn't there, I wouldn't have promised it. It's just that simple."

He also pokes a good deal of fun at himself, the book's "ghostwriter." In one exchange between Valente and his "ghost," Valente notes with displeasure that his biographer isn't taking many notes.

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KEILLOR Turn to Page 8M

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Keillor book gets under Ventura skin

KEILLOR

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Valente: You are not a writer, only a ghost. This is my story. We use my words. I don't want to find words like "pellucid" in here.

Ghost: Check.

But a few notes in "Me" seemed a little sour, especially Keillor's use of a stereotypical Asian character known as the Rodent to parody Ventura's preoccupation with security matters (he created a stir recently when he applied for a permit to carry a concealed gun.)

Ventura's first reaction to the publication of "Me" was to accuse Keillor of "cheating" him by writing a book based on him without his permission or involvement. But after Keillor responded with a public defense of the freedom of the press, Ventura bowed out of the conflict, saying through his spokesman that he wishes Keillor "all the luck in the world."

There are still a few lingering ripples of hostility in the Land of 10,000 Lakes, however.

A recent storyline in the "Doonesbury" comic strip had Ventura-employee Duke storming Keillor's home to seek revenge for his boss.

Ventura will get a chance to tell his own story in June when his autobiography "I Ain't Got Time to Bleed" is scheduled for release.

No word yet on whether there's a chapter on Garrison "The Marshmallow" Keillor.

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