

KEILLOR TAKES ON VENTURA

Radio host lampoons Minnesota governor

By Gwen Gibson
Third Age News Service

It would be hard to invent a character more incredible than the real Jesse ("The Body") Ventura, the hulking former pro wrestler recently elected governor of Minnesota.

Unless, of course, you're Garrison Keillor.

Keillor, host of the popular public radio show "A Prairie Home Companion," created a comic-strip version of Ventura in his latest book, "Me," published by Viking (\$15.95).

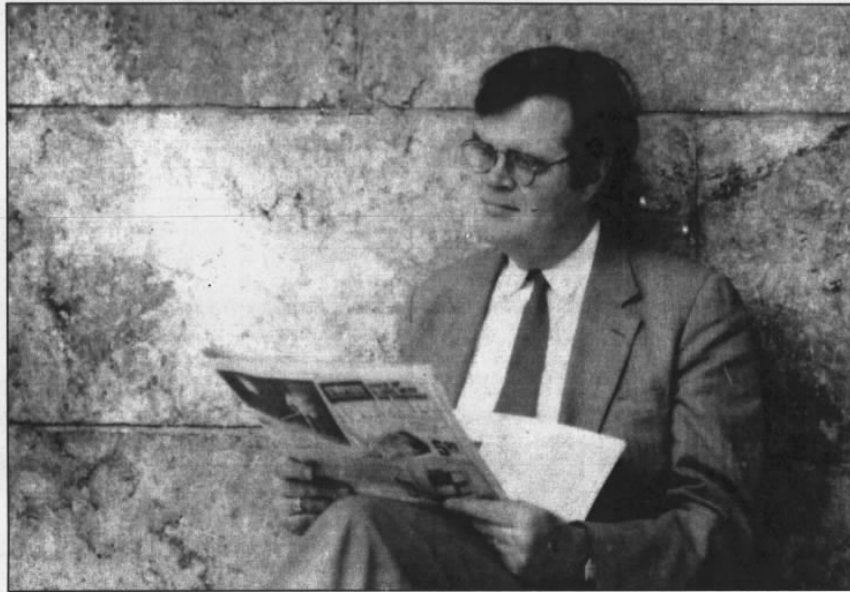
"Me" is the "raw, explosive, steamy" autobiography of the fictitious Jimmy (Big Boy) Valente as told to Garrison Keillor, a release says.

Keillor uses Big Boy as Ventura's alter ego — then proceeds to satirize the "real" Ventura who, in his uncommon career, has been the bad guy on the wrestling circuit, a U.S. Navy SEAL, a motorcycle gang member, a movie star, talk show host, rock band bodyguard, promoter of Pig's Eye Beer and Reform Party politician.

A caricature of Ventura — head shaved, teeth clenched in a devilish grin — adorns the cover of "Me."

Keillor works from a few facts, embellishing them mercilessly. Big Boy, for instance, joins the Navy's exclusive WALRUS program (Water Air Land Rising Up Suddenly) and performs exceedingly dangerous feats in Vietnam.

As a pro wrestler, Big Boy becomes head of the International World Wrestling organization and introduces live music, killer sound systems, strobe



TANS photo

'A Prairie Home Companion' creator and host Garrison Keillor scans a newspaper's headlines

lights and sweat-seeking cruise missiles to the ring.

His favorite meal is "a hamburger, very rare. Cool in the middle. With raw onion. Washed down with a glass of gin and a raw egg yolk in a china cup."

Big Boy's decision to enter Minnesota's gubernatorial race is made when he sees a Democratic candidate "eating tofu at a fund-raiser and wearing a T-shirt bearing the phrase, 'I could use a hug right now.'"

Once elected governor, Big Boy hires Keillor to write his autobiography and correct the "many cruel lies the press tosses about."

Keillor attributes many quotes

to his fictional governor.

Like when Big Boy assesses his chances in the year 2000 presidential race, saying, "if you don't think Big Boy is presidential then you have got your head where the sun don't shine."

"The votes of truck drivers count as much as those of people who read The New York Times. Politicians forget that. They think getting elected makes them wise and elegant . . . and they forget about the heavyset folks in the taverns knocking back beer and bitching about . . . those lying, cheating, butt-kissing, back-stabbing bozos they elected to office."

Big Boy does not run as a Democrat because "the Demo-

crats are run by yuppie liberals trying to remake American society into a day-care center for adults."

And he does not run as a Republican because this is "the S---- You party" that "squeezes the maximum profit out of everything and lays off the 20-year guys and hires cheap replacements."

Keillor has been promoting "Me," his 11th book, on his radio show and through public appearances. Ventura, who is taking the high road these days and trying to change his image from "The Body" to "The Mind," has not commented.

He has, however, proposed cutting state funding for Minne-

sota Public Radio. "It's time for public radio to get off the public trough," Ventura said in a recent speech.

Even if approved by the state legislature, such cuts would have little impact on Keillor's show, which is distributed to some 450 public radio stations by Public Radio International and supported primarily by private funds.

Ventura may still have the last word, however. His authorized autobiography, as told to another ghost writer, is due out in June. And while he doesn't discuss the book's contents, Ventura frequently repeats his old Navy SEAL motto: "We don't get mad, we get even."