



New York Times

Garrison Keillor brings Lake Wobegon to Sun City West.

Dip a toe in Lake Wo

By Kyle Lawson
The Arizona Republic

The folks in Lake Wobegon aren't ones for getting in a twit.

Sure, they're sorry for Elian Gonzales, but it's beyond them why someone doesn't use a little common sense in that over-hyped fracas. Same goes for the president's sexual peccadilloes. Who can argue that the guy didn't behave like a goober? Point is, what else did you expect from a Southern politician?

So reports Garrison Keillor, who for nearly 25 years has been letting us in on Lake Wobegon's state of mind.

On Saturday, he brings his radio show, *A Prairie Home*

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KEILLOR | Sharing the wisdom of Lake Wobegon

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Companion, to the stage of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts. But before he heads West, he's enjoying a little time in the big city, exposing himself to the temptations of New York.

We catch up with Keillor in his hotel room, where the sounds of clinking cutlery indicate a Lake Wobegon boy can never be too folksy or enjoy enough room service.

QUESTION: Exposing yourself to New York? That sounds further?

ANSWER: Probably not. My wife is with me. She keeps a firm hand on any exposing that I do.

Q: Pardon us for stereotyping, but you don't seem to be the Big Apple type.

A: Oh, I am. I grew up dreaming about the place. All those radio and TV shows and movies about Manhattan. The city is nothing but romantic to me. New York needs people from the Midwest. People who live in New York don't appreciate what they have. They barely see it.

Q: Thinking of a move?

A: Oh, heavens, no. I always look forward to getting back to Lake Wobegon. The clock is slower there, the calendar doesn't turn over as fast. There's time to appreciate the joys of life.

Q: Yeah, well, CNN reaches even Lake Wobegon.

A: Yes, but, do we watch it?

Q: Sure you do. Tell us the thinking on Elian Gonzalez.

A: That it's a small story that's become a huge story for no good reason. For those of us in Lake Wobegon, it's a fairly simple principle. You don't take a child away from his father for political reasons. You only do it if the father has been shown to be abusive.

Q: But it is politicized.

A: The whole thing is such an act of hypocrisy. The principle is very well understood by the people on the Right, except in this instance, where they think there's a political advantage to be had. Republicans don't seem to realize the terrible contradictions between their stand on the family in general and their position in the Gonzales case.

Q: It must have been easier to draw a distinction over

President Clinton's behavior.

A: Lake Wobegon is fairly conservative politically, but we also are fairly realistic about human nature. People have been doing that sort of thing since the beginning of time. I can't say that many of my neighbors approved of the president's behavior but, in Lake Wobegon, there's a sense of when enough is enough and the media coverage of that went way too far.

Q: Moving from Lake Wobegon to you, the *Washington Post* recently compared you to Mark Twain.

A: I think Twain is a good

deal darker — and 10 times the writer. At his best, he's utterly amazing. The first half of *Huckleberry Finn* and parts of *Innocents Abroad* and *Life on the Mississippi* are the finest things anybody ever wrote in English.

Q: Has the movement to ban *Huckleberry Finn* from library shelves reached Lake Wobegon?

A: I think we're a little smarter than that. We understand that things were different in the past and that just reading about them doesn't mean we're going to go out and do something racist.

Q: Was Huck a childhood hero?

A: Not really. I guess my big hero was Charles Lindbergh. He not only did a heroic deed, he wrote a really fine book about it, *The Spirit of St. Louis*. He didn't use a

natra was a star. In his day, nine out of 10 Americans recognized Sinatra's face or his voice. You take even a hit TV show. The percentage of people who watch is very small compared to the total population. There's a lot of places where Ally McBeal could go in this country and never get a second look.

Q: You still haven't answered our question about heroes.

A: As you get older, your definition of "hero" changes. A pretty face or the ability to hit a home run isn't as important as honesty and fidelity. If you number people with those qualities among your friends, you're a very lucky person.

Reach the reporter at (602) 444-8947 or Kyle.Lawson@ArizonaRepublic.com.

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