

PEOPLE



CRAIG T. MATHEW, MATHEW IMAGING

Garrison Keillor gives a final wave before walking off the Hollywood Bowl stage after his last *Prairie Home Companion* Friday.

GARRISON KEILLOR RETIREMENT WAS A 'SIMPLE DECISION'

LOS ANGELES Garrison Keillor stepped down as host of *A Prairie Home Companion* after 42 years with a final show Friday night at the Hollywood Bowl in front of 18,000 fans. The show aired Saturday. "Suddenly, the day becomes the past," Keillor sang to the crowd. "It went by so fast." During a rehearsal break, Keillor, 73, spoke with USA TODAY's Bryan Alexander about his next chapter.

Q WHAT'S NEXT AFTER THIS FINAL SHOW?

A: I planned this party, taking off on a train out of this gorgeous Union Station (in L.A.) and going up the coast to Seattle, then taking the Empire Builder across the country. To me, this is just an ideal, dreamlike way to end.

I don't intend to sit around and brood about this. It's a very happy decision. People my age, they give congratulations. Young people look at it as unemployment. But it's far from it.

Q PLEASE EXPLAIN THE DECISION TO RETIRE.

A: I was working on my memoir (and) it dawned on me that I needed this book to be good and also the screenplay for a movie set in Lake Wobegon. I'm a fast writer who meets deadlines, but these two works demand more devotion than that. The memoir is about gratitude and the screenplay about loyalty, neither of which are natural to me. To do them right, I needed to put the radio show behind me. It's the sort of simple decision that the moment you arrive at it, you know it's right.

Q YOU'VE WORKED SATURDAYS FOR MANY YEARS. HOW WILL YOU FILL SATURDAYS NOW?

A: I write every day, usually from early in the morning until early afternoon. The events I have missed on weekends have been weddings and funerals. I haven't been to a wedding in my family, and I have missed a lot of funerals.

Q HOW DO YOU THINK PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER YOU ON THIS SHOW?

A: I don't think radio is memorable. I can remember radio voices, old baseball announcers, old newscasters. But what they specifically said, I cannot remember. People might remember a few jokes. They'll remember, "Where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking and all the children are above-average."

People have quoted limericks that I did. But eventually, limericks become anonymous. You don't remember who wrote them,

like "There once was an old man from Nantucket ..." So it's not exactly a legacy. It's anonymity.

Q WITH WHOM ARE YOU WORKING ON YOUR SCREEN PROJECT?

A: Bill Pohlad, who directed *Love & Mercy* and produced *Brokeback Mountain*. When you find someone who has experience and who likes your idea and who you can also bear to have meetings with, then you have found the right person.

Q TALK ABOUT WORKING WITH THE LATE ROBERT ALTMAN ON THE MOVIE 'A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION.'

A: He was an old sick man (during filming), but he had no intention of ever retiring. He loved talking about movies. And that is what he did on the set. Woody Harrelson and Meryl Streep loved to hear him reminisce about his early days making movies.