

COVER STORY

Keillor still not comfortable on TV

NEW YORK (AP) — Last month, Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion: The Second Annual Farewell Performance" came to television from that most cosmopolitan of places, Radio City Music Hall.

The setting was symbolic of Keillor's new life in New York. After 13 years of radio shows, several television appearances and two best-sellers filled with wry tales from the quintessential small Midwestern town, Keillor said that Lake Wobegon, as well as real-life Minnesota, had become part of the past.

"Lake Wobegon is really my childhood and perhaps I'm supposed to walk away from it at some point and leave it," Keillor said somewhat sadly. "I've been back twice since I left there last fall, and realized both times that . . . it's not my home. Strange feeling. Not pleasant."

In New York, he said, "I think that our life is, if anything, more domestic than it was in St. Paul, and much quieter and much more private. Some people might go to the Midwest for peace and stability, but life in St. Paul and in the Midwest was crazy, and life in New York is eminently sane."

Leaving Lake Wobegon doesn't mean an end to the folksy stories and dry wit that have made Keillor famous. They'll just move to Manhattan.

"There are a lot of people like me in New York," Keillor said. "Midwestern people, church-going people, not that I set church-going people aside as a separate class, but white, sort of unremarkably liberal, ordinary people who enjoy all of the fascinations and foreignness of the city and the excitement without themselves being changed so

much. I think I could talk about those people in New York."

Such adventures might turn up on radio in the not-too-distant future, Keillor said.

"I think I owe myself two years' sabbatical, and it's half up. But I really feel that, (since) I did the show for 13 years at the biblical rate of one per seven, I'm entitled to a year and 10 months or something. Then I could decide on it. But New York is our home for as far ahead as I can see."

Keillor says he hasn't gotten used to seeing himself on television.

"If I had guests, they'd sometimes turn the show on, and I'd stand and watch part of it, but when I came on the screen I always felt unbearable and went and cooked something," he said.