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Garrison Keillor autographed copies of his book after attending the Farm Women Luncheon in Fergus Falls, where he asked for help in "getting to know" a new character for his next story.

Keillor solicits women's ideas for new character on radio show

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Fergus Falls, Minn.

She's in her 40s, a liberated farm wife and mother of seven. And according to a group of farm women, she's just the character that author and humorist Garrison Keillor needs for his next story.

Keillor accepted an invitation to speak during the 13th annual Farm Women Luncheon in Fergus Falls Tuesday, but only on the condition that the women help him gather material for his radio program — specifically, ideas for a new character.

"I'm unclear about who she is, who I want her to be," said the creator of "A Prairie Home Companion" and author of the book "Lake Wobegon Days."

Imagine, Keillor instructed as he got the discussion started, a woman named Marilyn in her mid-

40s. Married to Darrell Tollerud, the mother of six, who adopted a Korean child last February. The family lives in a small farmhouse near the new, larger home of Darrell's parents.

Somebody suggested that she is a former teacher. The two met and married after a quick romance, Keillor and audience decided.

Perhaps a crisis could confront the Tolleruds, something to challenge them, put them to the test, Keillor said. A woman suggested, "Have them get hailed out."

"Has this happened to you?" Keillor asked.

"Oh yes," the woman said, "about 25 years ago."

"Were there tears?" Keillor asked.

"No, she answered. "No, we just went on."

The idea to have Keillor address the farm women came from Sandy Kolstad, who operates a dairy farm with her husband near Underwood and regularly listens to the show in her barn.

Farm women stick by their husbands, no matter what happens, and get their satisfaction from helping them, a woman said.

Keillor said his audience includes feminists who might have problems with that philosophy.

Another woman disagreed. Farm wives are partners with their husbands, she pointed out, and share in the running of the family business. "We're the original liberated women," she said, and got applause.

The notion seemed to appeal to Keillor, who said: "The original liberated women. That would be an interesting story."