

FICTION

Garrison Keillor's 'Wobegon Boy' his first book in 10 years

■ Title character facing midlife crisis; returns home

By Scott Williams
New York Daily News



Keillor

It has been a quiet decade in Lake Wobegon. Too quiet.

Happily, America's tallest radio comedian, Garrison Keillor, has penned a new book. *Wobegon Boy* (Viking, \$24.95) revisits the hamlet immortal-

REVIEW

Wobegon Boy by Garrison Keillor.
(Viking, \$24.95)

ized on radio's *A Prairie Home Companion* and in Keillor's books *Lake Wobegon Days* and *Leaving Home*, the last published a long 10 years ago.

Wobegon Boy chronicles the midlife crisis of native son John Tollefson, a decent, intelligent, polite man who manages a college radio station in upstate New York. John frets that his life lacks a certain grand design.

While he isn't looking, his life arrives in the long, attractive form of Alida, an Ivy League historian with whom he falls helplessly in love.

He must also cope with his idea of starting a restaurant devoted to fresh produce, and with the sinister actions of a college dean, humorless liberals, a zoned-out New Age carpenter and a member of Wounded Daughters of Distant Fathers.

What saves *Wobegon Boy* from being merely a funny campus novel are the holidays and other family crises that take John back to Lake Wobegon:

■ The Chatterbox Cafe.

■ Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery.

■ The warm, earthy aroma of Norwegian bachelor farmers unwinding in the Sidetrack Tap.

There, dodging through the whirling solar system of his relatives, immersed in the lore of his ancestors' hilariously unquiet lives, John confronts the fundamental schism of Lake Wobegon: The dour, Dark Lutherans vs. the Happy Lutherans. Life and its grand design catch up with him.

This dark night of the happy Lutheran soul, spun out in Keillor's clean, elegant prose, makes *Wobegon Boy* a midlife crisis well worth living.