

THE DESERT SUN

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Writer Garrison Keillor

A conversation with Garrison Keillor

Garrison Keillor is best known for his radio show, "A Prairie Home Companion," which he has produced since 1974. He is the author of 11 books and won a Grammy Award for his recording, "Lake Wobegon Days." Meeting with Opinion Page Editor

Cindy Uken at the Renaissance Emeraldale Resort in Indian Wells, Keillor displayed his trademark wit in answering questions about life in Lake Wobegon and what one thing

he would change about his life if he could. He also showed a more serious, contemplative side while discussing fatherhood, a possible invasion in Iraq and the 2004 presidential race. His comments have been edited for length and clarity.

QUESTION: How are things in Lake Wobegon?
ANSWER: Things are quiet in Lake Wobegon. Things are much under control. We are in the middle of the coldest part of winter, and so people are in their deep winter mood. People have returned to a kind of a pitiful mammal state, and our larger ideas about life and our dreams, our hopes, are on hold, and we are interested in food and warmth, shelter, a roof, clothing, a source of heat, the basic things. People do not question their marriage in February. Marriage breaks up in April and May, you know, along with ice cream, but not in February. It would be too much.

QUESTION: How are you doing in the Coconino Valley?
ANSWER: Just being here is special. Just being here is a privilege beyond what I deserve, so I am instead with guilt at the thought of having left. I was a well-brought-up person. I do not take these things for granted. Life does not come out a warm day.

QUESTION: How does the Coconino Valley differ from Lake Wobegon?
ANSWER: You know, I have only just arrived. I just arrived (chuckles), and I am in. What do you discover? You discover nothing. I am utterly ignorant, and I am being housed in splendor and comfort which makes me even more ignorant, you see. If I had come here with \$10 in my pocket, trying to get a job as a dishwasher, I would know more about this community than I do coming in here as a privileged person. I would have to kind of earn my way around a little bit. And if I was from another country, I would know even more. I would really have a handle on this place after 24 hours.

QUESTION: Why did you accept a speaking engagement here? Was it an invitation?
ANSWER: Because it scared me. The idea of talking to my audience is a scary thing. I don't know enough to be able to make it worth that while. So, I will have to improvise knowledge. I have to try and find them for 45 minutes. It is a matter of throwing an element of fear and danger into a life that is much too easy.

QUESTION: You suffer from stage fright?
ANSWER: I do. I do. Of course I do. Stage fright is a tough thing. I don't use a text, you see, I don't read a speech, so once you get around that head, it is like going up a life preserver or something. Then you feel stage fright. It kind of drowns. It can destroy your memory. You are just about to walk out on the stage, then suddenly you have the intelligence of an 8-year-old because you are all kind of wrought out about the danger you are yourself in.

QUESTION: What do you sit and write?
ANSWER: I write. I sit and write.

QUESTION: Anything else?
ANSWER: Well, I live my life. I have a 7-year-old daughter. She is a lot of fun, and I get things as anybody would. I love to go to see movies, plays. I love the opera. I read books to some extent — not as much as I used to. I don't have as much passion as I used to. I am less laughing of a book. I tend to read a book about it in the first two to three pages.

QUESTION: You really enjoy writing, don't you?
ANSWER: Yes. It is not nice. Writers do not write books for other reasons.

QUESTION: You mentioned your 5-year-old daughter. What advice do you give to her as a writer?
ANSWER: I don't give her any advice. My advice is: Try it for laughs. Take it as a comedy. Lighten up. But that doesn't mean that advice because she is already a comedian. She is a very funny kid. She loves to give wrong answers to questions. It is her favorite job. Kids nowadays have to audition for kindergarten, and she loves to give wrong answers. She is used by various people, show pictures, she likes to tell them something that is not there.

QUESTION: What are your hopes for her?
ANSWER: I hope she has a good life. I just hope she enjoys her life. I think it is always difficult to be the child of you know, of a parent who has done a lot of things, a



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“It is difficult for me to believe in an invasion (of Iraq), a preemptive invasion of a country that has not been shown to have attacked us.”

parent who has a name. So, I hope that she just develops a nice, easy sense of herself.

QUESTION: Do you think you are a good parent?
ANSWER: No, no, but I am trying to be. I am there most mornings. I work at home, and I am there most mornings when she wakes up. So I am the first person she sees when she comes downstairs. We have breakfast together. I am not always there on weekends but I work at home, so she gets to see me. Daddy sits there at a laptop computer and writes, and she sees the show. I think that is a good thing. Daddy's work is no mystery whatsoever.

QUESTION: Why do you think you are a good parent?
ANSWER: I think that I am kind of old to be a father. I am 60 and I, you know, I think I am a probably OK grandfather, but what does that take? Not all that much.

QUESTION: How do you discipline your children?
ANSWER: I have to exert some authority, but to give a child discipline and limit something in a child, that is difficult, and father has to be willing to be unpopular, and find that really difficult. I am much into my off-beat, and I don't want to be a rich kid, however, so...

QUESTION: How do you discipline your children?
ANSWER: I am a writer. A writer is a kind of neutral empty person. A writer is a receptor. I don't think a writer exactly correct. A writer takes in things.

QUESTION: You said you were a writer. What do you write?
ANSWER: I write. I sit and write.

QUESTION: What is the highest con-

cept someone could give you or has given you?
ANSWER: Oh, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord. Well, I come from the Midwest, and we distrust strangers, so I think the highest compliment would come from somebody who was good at what I am trying to do, whatever that is. And any sort of form of compliment from someone in my field of work would be the best.

QUESTION: How do you feel about your work?
ANSWER: I suppose, you know, I am not always there on weekends but I work at home, so she gets to see me. Daddy sits there at a laptop computer and writes, and she sees the show. I think that is a good thing. Daddy's work is no mystery whatsoever.

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