

Sharing stories of life's bounces

Garrison Keillor comes to Tampa for a solo performance.

By PENNY CARNATHAN
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Garrison Keillor has had a story on his mind, which isn't so unusual. But this is one, he says, he hasn't yet told.

"It was 1966. I was engaged. I was about to be drafted, or thought I was about to be drafted, to go to Vietnam. I wanted to see if I could interest the *New Yorker* (magazine) in giving me a job."

Instead, he fell in love. With another woman.

"It's an interesting story," he says, "about how sometimes life takes a bounce without you having much to do with it. Looking back, it's the interruption of grace. I feel grateful for it."

Gratitude. That will be the theme of Keillor's pre-Thanksgiving one-man show in Tampa on Tuesday night.

Best known as the creator and host of public radio's long-running "A Prairie Home Companion," the storyteller, singer, actor and writer says he'll talk about a lot of things during the show, titled "Lake Wobegon Days."

"I'm going to talk about an interesting health event I suffered this fall," he says in a telephone interview from New York. "I'm going to talk about my cousin Kate,

who was the adventurous person in our family. And my Aunt Eva, whose farm we went to for Thanksgiving. It had no plumbing or electricity. Our mother wanted us to see the farm so we would appreciate what we had.

"We loved her farm."

Actually, he muses, it was probably Aunt Eva they loved. She was a great old lady, generous with the hugs that his mother, as a shaper and molder of young lives, held back.

"I'm going to talk about a stroke I suffered," he continues.

On a recent broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion," the 67-year-old said he was grateful the crisis in September didn't rob him of his speech, so often an effect of stroke.

That would have been an unfathomable loss to his fans, as well. Part of the magic of Keillor's tales is in the molasses-slow, hypnotizing telling.

Now he says, "We all have a sense of humor. That's how you get through it."

And on an advisory note: "If you have a stroke, a minor stroke is definitely the way to go."

He's back up to full speed, hosting the show, writing, touring. Though that's not what his "personal advisers" — wife Jenny Lind Nilsson, son Jason, 40; and daughter Maia, 11 — would like.

"I do not lack for advice," he says. "But



Associated Press file photo (2007)

Garrison Keillor, host of public radio's "A Prairie Home Companion," shares stories, songs and poetry in "Lake Wobegon Days," a one-man show.

I'm trying to maintain momentum. Once you slow down ... then what?"

He won't throw in references specific to the Tampa Bay area, localizing the show as he usually does when "Companion" travels. For solo performances, he says, he flies in just before his appear-

IF YOU GO

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Tuesday

WHERE: David A. Straz Jr. Center for the Performing Arts, 1010 N. W. C. McClines Place, Tampa; (813) 229-7827

ADMISSION: Tickets start at \$35.50

ance, which doesn't allow time for brushing up on a city.

He has never come here with *Guy Noir*, *Powdermilk Biscuits*, and the rest of his variety show staples, which presumably require a longer stay.

"I'm sure that we will," he says. "I'll put it on my list."

For this performance, though, his audience will hear many tales from Lake Wobegon, the mythical Minnesota town made famous in Keillor's "Companion" monologues.

"It's where I'm from," he says simply.

He'll talk about the bounces that life takes: those interruptions of grace that you don't steer, but instead steer you. Like a long-ago love, and an affectionate aunt. And the stroke that generously spared a remarkable gift.

"It's about all sorts of things," Keillor says of Tuesday's performance. "It's about Thanksgiving."

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