

# Keillor returns to the stage

With songs and humor, he reflected on “the beauty of being disgraced” before a friendly crowd in Arizona.

By RON DUNGAN  
Special to the Star Tribune

PRESCOTT, ARIZ. — Spinning tales and singing old songs, Garrison Keillor confronted allegations of inappropriate behavior with gentle wit at his first public show since Minnesota Public Radio cut ties with him three months ago.

“I don’t know how they managed to fire a retired person, but they did,” he told a friendly crowd of more than 700 Wednesday night at Yavapai College in Prescott.

At age 75, with a prostate like a “hockey puck,” Keillor said he recently got a call from an obituary writer. He knows that the controversy will probably be in paragraph two of his obit, though it may slide down to paragraph three if he wins a National Book Award or “shoots somebody.”

“So there you are, you make the best of it, and you go to Prescott, Arizona, where God bless them they welcome you,” he said to a round of applause.

Most people in the crowd seemed untroubled by the allegations, which

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• **KEILLOR** from El came to light in November amid a storm of accusations against entertainers and politicians.

"It just seems like they were jumping on the bandwagon," said Craig Hunter, 75, of Prescott Valley. "We used to listen to 'A Prairie Home Companion' all the time. Everybody makes a mistake. ... Nobody's perfect."

His wife, Mary, also said she was unconcerned about the accusations, some tied to incidents that took place years ago.

"If he did it 40 years ago I don't care," she said. "We're not that easily offended."

## Arizona's Wobegon

Keillor hadn't performed a show since Nov. 28, the night before MPR announced the allegations against him. He subsequently canceled all of his public appearances.

It seemed fitting that he resurfaced in Prescott, a city sometimes called "everybody's hometown," located in the pines high above the Arizona desert, between the Bradshaw and Mingus Mountain ranges. Folks here pronounce it "Press-kit," not "Pres-scott," as Keillor noted.

"People have told me 18 times since I arrived here how to pronounce the name of the town," he said. Snow that had fallen the day before had for the most part melted — "it's kind of a designer snowfall" —



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Garrison Keillor performed one of his last "Prairie Home Companion" shows in 2016.

he said as he began the one-man show.

Keillor sang when he took the stage, and the crowd did, too. He talked about old girlfriends and rhubarb pie, his uncles and cousins and Lutherans and Boy Scouts and cold Minnesota winters.

He talked about going to the high school prom wearing a suit handed down by a cousin who went water skiing, but could not swim. The touch of a back came up a time or two — an allusion to one of the incidents that led to the complaint against Keillor.

He talked about sex, God and mortality, and found a silver lining in all of it.

"Should this come up in your own life, and maybe it will — it can happen to anybody, believe me — the beauty of being disgraced is that you realize that this person you've

been married to for 25 years is the most wonderful person in the world."

## 'This is my legacy'

He said he had bought a plot in the cemetery where his parents and grandparents are buried, not far from where

he was born in Anoka. An old girlfriend is buried just 14 feet away from his plot.

"To have your beginning and end, within 12 miles of each other, and to know all of the people around you, is such a comfort, such an odd comfort. I know you think this is odd, but I'm telling you the truth, why else would I come? Once you've been disgraced you may as well be honest about these things."

He told a few limericks, one about Viagra in a nursing home that brought the house down.

"This is my legacy," he said. "I was hoping it would be something else. ... of a small town, where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking and all children are above average."

Oh, yes, Lake Wobegon. He eventually got around to that. He told a tale about his uncle who lived in a hunting shack across the lake with his dogs, the town's one parking meter, his deceased aunt's ashes, a canceled wedding, a pontoon boat with 24 Lutheran pastors and a hot-air balloon, which catches fire, and rambled on back around to his cemetery plot. Somehow, "it all just comes together," he said.

There was more singing, and a round of applause as he left the stage.

Ron Dungan is an Arizona-based journalist.