

God bless you, Garrison

Here I am at the computer late on Wednesday night. My deadline for this column is Thursday noon.

Somewhere on this floppy disk is my completed column about this week's stunning election results.

It is all ready to be turned in, but it is going to have to wait until next week ... tonight I must write about Garrison Keillor.

For tonight, along with my wife and son, we were treated to one of life's wonderful experiences. Thanks to the Lutheran Campus Ministry, Garrison Keillor came to Winona.

He was accompanied by High and Outside, an excellent bluegrass group, and the Wild Goose Chase Cloggers, who entertained us marvelously with their dancing.

The bluegrass music and the dancers would have been worth twice the \$5 admission ... but when you add in Keillor, no amount is a fair price for the memories we obtained.

We arrived at Somsen Auditorium at 6:30 to make sure we would get a good seat. The doors opened at 6:50 and we sat in the third row.

Armed with the recent issue of Time magazine with Garrison's picture on the cover and our copy of "Lake Wobegon Days," I secretly hoped to meet Keillor. My son, Tad, wanted to meet him and get his autograph so badly that he could hardly sit still.

As we sat and waited for the show to start, I knew that Keillor

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had to be back stage.

The longer we sat there the more anxious Tad got. He said to me, "Boy I wish I could meet him or get his autograph!"

I replied, "Well, if you go out in the hall and double back behind the stage, I'll bet you will find him."

But Tad wouldn't do it ... not by himself. Ten-year-old boys aren't that bold. We sat for a few minutes.

But time was running out ... the show would soon start. The longer I sat there, the more restless I got.

In my heart I knew I would have to take Tad back and at least try for an autograph.

Out of our seats we bolted, with magazine and book in hand. We got to the rear stage entrance.

There were a handful of people standing around in the hall. I paid them no heed and immediately tucked my head in to see if Garrison was back stage.

He wasn't. We came back out into the hall and I looked for the first time at the people I had just ignored.

There he was, bigger than life, wearing jeans and a plain blue shirt.

He was standing alone, so we approached him. I felt so clumsy and stupid, I didn't know what to say.

I asked if he would autograph the issue of Time magazine for Tad. But he wasn't looking at me ... he was already talking to Tad.

Garrison's eyes lit up with glee as he looked at the little fellow. He commented on Tad's red tennis shoes and said that he had a pair of red socks, but didn't yet have a pair of red tennis shoes.

He grinned at Tad and kidded him a bit about the appropriate spot on the cover to write his autograph. Tad was overwhelmed.

I was awestruck. Adults are supposed to be more composed.

People with Ph.Ds should be able to be sociable and clever at times like these ... instead, I found myself clumsily making small talk with a man who was much more at ease than myself.

After autographing the book, we left him and went back to our seats.

The show was tremendous. This man is more than a Minnesota legend ... he is a national treasure.

To see him live was like meeting an old friend ... one who comes into our home every Saturday night for supper. Via Minnesota Public Radio's "Prairie Home Companion," Garrison makes us laugh, cry, reflect, and dream.

He is the supreme storyteller. And he opened his heart to us this night, telling of his love for his wonderful Ulla Strange, of Copenhagen, Denmark, whom Garrison will marry this winter.

What a night! What an experience!

Only afterward did I read what Garrison wrote on Tad's Time magazine: "Hi, Tad — when your picture is on Time, will you sign it for me? Garrison Keillor."

How clever and how sensitive!

This man who has received more national acclaim in the past few weeks than most of us could even imagine, a man who has every reason in the world to be aloof and stuck up, took a few precious moments to stand with my son, kid around with him, and comment about his tennis shoes.

In the final analysis, that's what makes Garrison Keillor so special. There can be only one source for such magnificent benevolence.

I've come to the conclusion that Garrison's ability to touch our hearts in such a divine way is only a reflection of his gigantic capacity to love.

God bless you, Garrison. May your upcoming marriage bring you and Ulla the happiness you deserve.

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