

Humorist Garrison Keillor will be in central Iowa Saturday to talk about his newest book, 'Wobegon Boy.'

"Storytelling is a primitive art at the heart of it," says Garrison Keillor.

# Wobegon revisited

**BOOK SIGNING:**  
**Garrison Keillor**  
Keillor will read from his new book, "Wobegon Boy" (Viking, \$24.95), and sign copies at 10 a.m. Saturday at Borders Books & Music, 4100 University, West Des Moines.

By **KYLE MUNSON**  
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

Most folks don't feel sorry for Garrison Keillor, the successful humorist, writer and radio personality behind "A Prairie Home Companion" and "Lake Wobegon Days," and he doesn't waste precious time feeling sorry for himself.

It's a Midwestern value, Keillor said, that was instilled in him by his parents early on, as a child growing up in Anoka, Minn.

"We [Midwesterners] accept only a certain amount of moaning and complaining from people, and then we lose interest," he said during a telephone interview from New York. "We are meant to be stoical."

Keillor has demonstrated a unique brand of stoic wit for 23 years as radio host of "A Prairie Home Companion." The latest example of his humor is his new book, "Wobegon Boy," the first full "Lake Wobegon" tome since "Leaving Home," published a decade ago.

Keillor will be in Iowa Saturday, reading selections from his new book and signing

copies at Borders Books & Music in West Des Moines.

"Wobegon Boy" is a "story about a Wobegonian who got away," Keillor said, the "story of a young man who had to leave Minnesota because a young woman was expecting him to marry her, and he could not."

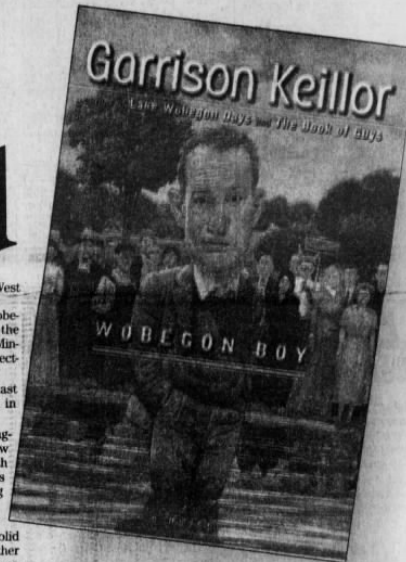
The young man is John Tollefson, last seen trying to escape his hometown in "Lake Wobegon Days."

In "Wobegon Boy" Tollefson is managing a public radio station in upstate New York while falling in love, dealing with death and haggling over money. He's another Lake Wobegon export making his way in the wider world.

"We ship them out at the age of 18," Keillor said. "We inculcate them with solid values, and then we send them off, and other people get the benefit of them. That's been the situation in the Midwest for a long time."

The publication in 1985 of "Lake Wobegon Days," the first book set in the fictional town that "time forgot and that decades

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"Wobegon Boy" is about John Tollefson, a Wobegonian making his way in the wider world, managing a public radio station in upstate New York.

# Lake Wobegon revisited

**KEILLOR**

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cannot improve," was an instant bestseller that secured Keillor national fame.

Despite his easygoing radio persona, Keillor is often described as a relentless worker — a solid work ethic is another oft-mentioned Midwestern trait.

In the spring of 1987, he closed down "A Prairie Home Companion" and moved with his then-wife, Ulla Skaerved, to Denmark. Basically, like Michael Jordan, Keillor retired.

"I didn't play baseball, and I didn't retire my uniform," he said. And, like Michael Jordan, Keillor soon returned from retirement to the work he loved best, calling the period "just one of those tunnels that a person has to go through."

"You go through a long period of struggle and figure out what it is you want to do and things start to happen," Keillor said. "People notice you, and you have all of these opportunities you never had before. But you find your-

self burning out, and you start to feel stale, and you start to lose some of your slight original inspiration. If I were a smarter person I simply would've asked for three months off and gone to Italy. But instead I retired."

Keillor's current work schedule revolves around his favorite pastime — writing. His workweek begins Thursday morning, when he starts preparing for that Saturday's broadcast of "A Prairie Home Companion."

## Records Rehearsals

He works through Friday afternoon and then rehearses with his band and cast of actors that night. He records the rehearsal on a cassette tape and listens to it during the drive home, a process that inevitably leads to rewrites.

And on Saturday morning he wakes up and "thinks about Lake Wobegon," writing notes to guide him through his 20-minute monologue that always begins with, "Well, it's been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon, my hometown," and ends with, "That's the news from Lake Wobegon, where all the women are strong and all the men

are good-looking and all the children are above average."

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday he simply writes; "Wobegon Boy," for instance, is mostly a product of those three days. Keillor also records a week's worth of "The Writer's Almanac" on Tuesdays, a five-minute radio program dedicated to his poetry and to the history of literature and the arts.

"A Prairie Home Companion" is now broadcast to more than 2 million listeners weekly through Public Radio International. (WOL in Ames broadcasts the program in central Iowa.)

Talking in a voice he describes as "slow Midwestern," Keillor captivates radio audiences with his tales about Lake Wobegon, a geographically ambiguous town located somewhere on the plains of Minnesota.

Keillor the storyteller is always the focus of "A Prairie Home Companion."

"Storytelling is a primitive art at the heart of it," he said. "Everybody knows this who sits in a dim light and tells a story to all the people."

Keillor contrasts his style to that of

another famous Minnesotan, the Hibbing-born Bob Dylan. Through the years the singer has developed an inscrutable image, Keillor said, by singing unintelligible lyrics in concert and not allowing his hometown of Hibbing to personally honor him, among other means.

## Comedian In Slow Motion

"I'm at the opposite end from Bob Dylan," he said. "I am a humorist, kind of a comedian in slow motion. . . . Comedians cannot afford to be misunderstood. Nobody laughs at things they don't understand."

Judged by how long people have been laughing beside their radios and over the pages of Keillor's books, this humorist has been well understood for years. And while there's certainly an audience to support a TV show or movie adaptation of Lake Wobegon and its citizens, Keillor said that any such project has always died in its infancy because showing instead of telling about Lake Wobegon ruins the "mythic qualities that enable other people to imagine themselves into it."

"Lake Wobegon belongs in people's imaginations," Keillor said.