



# The Schmooze

## Stories with a Yiddish Twist

**GARRISON KEILLOR IS ABOUT TO “TSURIKTSIEN ZIKH”-- RETIRE,  
AND THAT’S “A SHEYN GELEKHTER”--NOTHING TO LAUGH ABOUT!**

*by*  
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**Syosset, New York**

GARRISON KEILLOR is America’s favorite storyteller. Born in 1942 In Anoka, MN, he attended the University of Minnesota, and in 1969, began writing for the New Yorker. Later, Keillor appeared on the stage (“di bine”) in the World Theater in downtown St. Paul.

Keillor is the creator and host of the popular, “A Prairie Home Companion,” and has just announced that he’s retiring next year. His final show as host will be in July 2016, from the Tanglewood outdoor music venue in Massachusetts, one of his favorite locations for broadcasts.

The show is heard by 4 “milyon” listeners nationwide.

Oh, how I’ll miss his folksy comedy sketches about his mythical Minnesota hometown, Lake Wobegon, MN. Its location is believed to be north of St. Cloud and is claimed to be the town of Holding Ford.

Why I can just picture Lake Wobegon: We have Bertha’s Kitty Boutique (“for persons who care about cats”), The Chatterbox Cafe (“the place to go that’s just like home”), Buck’s Renta Tux, and the Co-Op Hardware (formerly Bigger Hammer Hardware, from the joke: “If at first you don’t succeed (‘matsliakh zayn’), try using a bigger hammer (‘hamer’).” And then there’s the Curl Up and Dye beauty parlor (‘sheynkayt-salon) Bob’s bank, in the green (‘grin’) mobile home, Tentative Point (AKA “Lovers Lane”), and Sons of Pitches, a men’s chorus, the Powdermilk Biscuit Plant, and the Whippets baseball team, “We’ll Whipya, whipya good!”

The motto in the Lake Wobegon incorporated town is described as “sumus quod ubi” (Latin for “We’re here...Where are we?”)

And then we have the Lake Wobegon Effect, where all or nearly all of a group claim to be above average. This has been observed by high school students' appraisal of their leadership, driver' assessments of their driving skill, and cancer patients expectations of survival. Note: The Yiddish words meaning "to survive" are "blaybn lebn."

Keillor grew up in a fundamentalist Protestant family. They strongly stressed one's separation ("tsesheydung") from the world ("di velt"), that we were so select people, selected by God to receive the revelation of his truth through the word and that we should conform not to this world, but renew our minds constantly through the faith ("di emune"). We were isolated, I think, just as much as the Hasidim or other religious ('religyez') minorities..."

(Source: The Paris Review, "Garrison Keillor, The ARt of Humor No. 2," interview with George Plimpton)

Shown below is a Yiddish Guide to Garrison Keillor:

"di shpayzkrom" (the food store)

The show was "sponsored" by Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery Store. ("If you can't find it at Ralph's, you can probably get along without it.")

"di klayder" (the clothing)

Keillor usually appears in a tuxedo, red suspenders ("di shleykes"), and jogging sneakers.

"der kompyuter" (the computer)

Keillor uses a laptop "kompyuter".. "It's a fluid tool and you lose some of the concentration hat a percussive tool like a typewriter ("di shraybmashin") gives you."  
(Keillor quote)

"der tsug" (the train)

"di ban" (the railroad)

Keillor's father worked on the railroad, sorting mail in the mail car. Trains were very romantic to him as a boy. He could hear the whistles from miles away when he was a teenager ("tsenerlingn").

"barimt" (famous)

"There are no famous people in Minnesota and no good murder trials. Nothing there to interest her [Tina Brown]."

(Keillor quote)

"haynttsaytik" (conemporary)

When Keillor was asked which of his contemporaries make him laugh out loud, he replied: Ian Frazier, and Nora Ephron, Veronica Geng, Roy Blount, Calvin Trillin, and Dave Barry. "But Blount is the best."

"farfeln" (to fail)

When Keillor was asked, "What should failed humorists do?" he replied, "Well, they

should go into the ministry.”

“kave tish” (coffee table)

“pistoyl” (pistol)

“A girl in a bikini is like having a loaded pistol on your coffee table - There’s nothing wrong with them, but it’s hard to stop thinking about it.”

(Keillor quote)

“der bagazh” (luggage)

“Humor is not about airline luggage or foreign taxicabs (‘taksi’) drivers. It’s about our lives in America today (‘haynt’), the ends of our lives, and everything that happened before and after.”

(Keillor quote)

“komish” (funny)

“When I am funny, I hope to be funny about Republicans, not about Pakistani taxi drivers.”

(Keillor quote)

“shtetl” (town)

Lake Wobegon is occasionally said to be near St. Olaf, Minnesota, another fictional town referenced in The Golden Girls TV series.

“di luftkilung” (the air conditioning)

“It was luxuries like air conditioning that brought down the Roman Empire. With air conditioning their windows were shut, they couldn’t hear the barbarians coming.”

(Keillor quote)

“bir” (beer) There are about 800 residents in Lake Wobegon; many of them drink Wendy’s beer.”

“hiskhayvis” (obligation)

Keillor said, “...I think that past the age of thirty there is no obligation to be clever at all. Cleverness is a burden after that. You are supposed to settle down and be a good person, raise your children, and be good to your friends, which you may not have been when you were clever.”

“lakhn” (laugh)

“mestn” (to measure)

Keillor never appears to laugh, even at his most hilarious. His replies are slow (“pamelekh”) and measured.

“farnumen” (busy)

“I’m not busy...a woman with three children under the age of 10 wouldn’t think my schedule looked so busy.”

(Keillor quote)

“shemevdik” (shy)

“I want to resume the life of a shy person.”

(Keillor quote)

“bamerkn” (to notice)

“Nothing you do for children is ever wasted. They seem not to notice us, hovering, averting our eyes (‘oygn’), and they seldom offer thanks, but what we do for them is never wasted.”

(Keillor quote)

“di tsaytung” (the newspaper)

“A good newspaper is never nearly good enough but a lousy newspaper is a joy forever.”

(Keillor quote)

“dershlogn” (depressed/mentally)

“When you’re in your 20s, your 30s, even, you have - at least, I had - vast ambitions, and you sit around mooning about these things, and you’re depressed, because you haven’t done them. And it takes you a long (‘lang’) time to come to the realization that if you can’t be John Updike, well, then, you can’t.”

(Keillor quote)

“der orevnik” (the hostage)

“di puter” (the butter)

“tate” (father)

“The father of a daughter (‘tokhter’) is nothing but a high-class hostage. A father turns a stony face to his sons, berates them, shakes his antlers, paws the ground, snorts, runs them off into the underbrush, but when his daughter puts her arm over his shoulder and says, ‘Daddy, I need to ask you something,’ he is a pat of butter in a hot frying pan.”

(Keillor quote)

“di noz” (the nose)

“The highlight of my childhood (‘kindhayt’) was making my brother (‘bruder’) laugh so hard that food came out of his nose.”

(Keillor quote)

“di levaye” (the funeral)

“They say such nice things about people at their funerals that it makes me sad (‘umetik’) that I’m going to miss mine by just a few days.”

(Keillor quote)

“mazi” (luck)

“klug” (smart)

“Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have, which once you have got it you may be smart enough to see is what you would have wanted had you known.”

(Keillor quote)

“der gram” (rhyme)

“I hear a little firecracker go off when you come up with a good rhyme.”

(Keillor quote)

“di matone” (the gift/present)  
“A book is a gift you can open again and again.”  
(Keillor quote)

“shabes” (Saturday)  
“fraytik” (Friday)

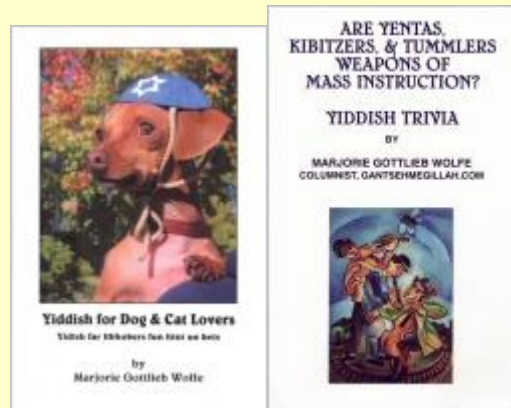
“I write for a radio (‘radyo’) show that, no matter what, will go on the air Saturday at five o’clock central time. You learn to write toward that deadline, to let the adrenaline pick you up on Friday morning and carry you through, to cook up a monologue about Lake Wobegon and get to the theater on time.”  
(Keillor quote)

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MARJORIE WOLFE has a well-thumbed copy of “Lake Wobegon Days.”

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**Marjorie Gottlieb Wolfe is the author of two books:**



**"Yiddish for Dog & Cat Lovers" and "Are Yentas, Kibitzers, & Tumblers Weapons of Mass Instruction? Yiddish Trivia." To order a copy, go to her website: [MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com](http://MarjorieGottliebWolfe.com)**

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