

Garrison Keillor (transcribed from the audio CD by Jaqueline Jones 2008, Chris Ridenour)

[Topic] Pontoon: A Lake Wobegon Story (book sale and signing)

[Date] 17 Sept 2007

[Time] ca 6:30pm -8:00pm

[Place] FHF at Northeastern University, Blackman Auditorium, Boston, MA

It is a great honor to come and address the Ford Hall Forum, which is a hallowed institution here in Boston in the order of the Left Field Wall at Fenway and the Swan Boats and the Maclean Hospital and a great place to lecture. Your series that I listen to as a child on the University of Minnesota radio station on days when I stayed home sick; which I never did unless I was actually sick. My mother was very watchful, or on days when we had gymnastics in gym which was not a time you wanted to be in school if you were six foot three and you weighed a hundred and thirty-eight pounds and you were near sighted; it was not a pretty thing. I always associated the Ford Hall Forum with speakers with three names; people like Harry Emerson Fosdick, or William Ellery Channing, Donald Culross Peattie, Donald Ogden Stewart; that sort of thing. But it certainly was a series of great quality. The fact that it came from Boston, immediately set it, you know, higher than what we were used to in the Midwest as far as lectures went, and the alliteration of "Ford" and "Forum" gave it a kind of a ring, a ring of authority. Just as it does in the case of Presidents. Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover; sound like better Presidents than they were. William Henry Harrison might have been a great President, but he spoke too long for his inaugural address, it went on for hours and he caught pneumonia and he died.

The Ford Hall Forum is distinguished platform from which to discuss great ideas and I have to admit that I came to Boston not expressly for the purpose of speaking at the Forum but to promote a book of mine, which is a tawdry business, and we should discuss it right up front here. Great authors did not do this; just so you know. William Faulkner did not go on TV and talk about *As I Lay Dying*. He did not have to sit and listen to some TV host with great hair ask him, "Where do you get your ideas Mr. Faulkner?" "Where did you come up with that Yokdepodolf County? That is quite a place. Snopes family; are they based on anybody?" He did not have to do any of that. Robert Frost did not go out to promote his books and stand around and autograph his *Collected Poems*, or *North of Boston*, or *A Boys Will*, or any of his books, "to Ed and Rachel, congratulations on your fiftieth anniversary." Nobody came up to Robert Frost in a bookstore and said, "My mother loves stopping by woods on snowy evenings. She is on my cell phone right here, would you mind reciting it?" But so many books are published now a days that a writer, you know, who has you know spent weeks, months working on a book has to do what he can to draw attention to it, otherwise it will disappear. You have to jump up and down and wave your hands. Alan Greenspan's book came out today, so now there is competition out there in the field of fiction and comedy. Justice Clarence Thomas has his memoir coming out in a couple of weeks and so I just have to do what I can to try and stay even.

I have been trying since late last night to think of what I should talk about here today, and I have a number of ideas. I thought about proposing that we have a cut off age for voting around sixty, but I didn't have that quite all worked out, and then it dawned on me that I could address a subject that I don't believe I ever heard anybody address at the Ford Hall Forum, and that is the subject of cheerfulness. So, rather than talk about globalization or the need for investment and infrastructure or to talk about signs of progress in Iraq, I thought I would take that on. I would like to talk about cheerfulness because yesterday was such a lousy day for me. It really brought me down; starting with my drive to the airport in St. Paul. I am driving on the freeway and an enormous vehicle, a Hummer of some kind, a super Hummer, come

right up on my tail and just hanging on my tail as if attached by magnets and then it honked and then it passed me and sitting at the wheel of this car was a beautiful woman. She was so lovely, she had long blond hair in a big ponytail and she gave me a look of such anger and disdain; it just ruined my day. The anger of women; I find almost unbearable. I am of that generation of men. Then it was a crowded flight to New York that arrived very late, and then the taxi line outside LaGuardia was stretched almost to the end of the terminal, so I made the mistake of getting on a bus going down to the Port Authority and it took forever. And the Port Authority terminal on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street has always been depressing to me ever since I had to ride the bus and then get on the Eighth Avenue subway; not my favorite subway in New York, the C train, and then a pan handler came through the car and needed money so that he could go see his mother in Philadelphia and it was just one thing after another. And then I had dinner last night in New York with friends who are my age. God help them, and for some reason they wanted to talk about retirement and about Medicare and about pension benefits and about calcium supplements. I remember a time when friends of mine and I sat around and told giddy stories about adventures we had had; including some with women, but there was none of this last night. I had dinner with a twenty-three year old a few weeks ago and that was nothing but fun. She is an actress and she had just won a part in a horror movie that was to be shot in the woods in Connecticut where she would spend weeks running around smeared with gore, chased by evil children. Now that was the sort evening I relish, but these people last night were tedious beyond words. They're wonderful people, but it is starting to depress me to hang out with people my own age. I went to my high school class reunion in July and it was disheartening to see women whom I once lusted after who have now turned into their mothers; whom I did not lust after. I turned sixty-five about a month ago and it was about as festive as walking into a brick wall; it was hard. I spent most of the day by myself just thinking my own thoughts, nothing I would care to tell anybody else about. A couple of nights later my wife and I, my wife is younger, went to a movie and she pointed out the fact that I now qualified for the discount; not a nice thing to say. I didn't ask for the discount; the ticket lady didn't offer it to me. I simply am not ready to be sixty-five, but here I am, and I have become historic and ancient without intending to. I remember Harry Truman, I am sorry but I do. When I was a kid we were fighting in Korea; the neighbor's boy Jack Kratchy was fighting in Korea. I remember all of this. I remember the mimeograph, I remember the hectograph, which none of you do, obviously. I remember a time before, we were aware of Ralph Nader, before there were seat belts. When you drove and your little boy stood on the seat next to daddy, as we drove sixty-five miles an hour, up to visit the in-laws in North Dakota. Nowadays you would be arrested for this. You would be put through some sort of a treatment program for this. I remember the LP record; so I feel odd about being sixty-five. I feel this mortality reaching down towards me. You will feel the same way some day so I am telling you about it. Mortality places its hand lightly on your shoulder, when you turn sixty-five, you start to read the obituaries more closely. There are people in there who are not that much older than yourself, and you take a keen interest in them. I used to be immortal when I was your age, and I am not anymore. When the flight attendant said yesterday as we are making our descent, referred to New York as being possibly our final destination, I did not want to hear that. I don't like that phrase, "final destination." I have big plans beyond New York, including Boston and back to Minnesota, and when she said we would be on the ground shortly; this touched a strain with me that it wouldn't with you. See, to me, being sixty-five, being "on the ground" means lying prostate on the ground and people in uniforms are ripping your shirt open and are putting electric paddles on your chest. I do not want to be "on the ground," my feet could be on the ground, but I do not care to be "on the ground" myself. But, as you think about mortality you remind yourself, you must keep reminding yourself, "this is not an interesting subject. Getting old is not interesting, so lighten up, be cheerful, cheerfulness, don't complain about getting old, this is not interesting, you are not the first person to whom this happened, so do not take

this personally, and getting old has been your purpose for a long time now, actually since you were a child, and you would be so disappointed if you did not make it. So here you are, so enjoy it and be cheerful." And also, I have a cell phone, and when I open my cell phone there is a picture of this little girl who is sitting there, this beautiful little girl with her chin on her hands and she is grinning at me when ever I open my cell phone, which I do many times every day, she is nine years old, and she is my child, she's mine, she is the "cheerfulest" person I have ever known. Her life is full of things that she loves. She loves swimming. She can do the breaststroke. She can even do the butterfly. She loves swimming that much. She loves it almost as much as she loves to eat. She loves every kind of food, except oysters, and onions. She loves to shout "basket." She loves to swing a bat, and hit a ball. She often just jumps up and down and squeals, just for the practice. She likes to put her fist in the air and say, "yes, yes," sometimes two fists, "yes." First time she came to Boston, she was two years old. We came to visit relatives. We ate at some seafood joint. She stood on the banquet next to me and we discovered that she loved calamari, deep friend calamari. They brought a whole basket of appetizers. She ate most of it and then she got a strange look on her face and she sorta leaned forward, and instinctively as parents will do, I cupped my hands and put them under her chin and I caught this whole flow of food, and I put it back into the basket and I put the napkin over it and the waiter took it away and brought us a fresh batch. The relatives we were eating lunch with got a little white around the gills and weren't so hungry for seafood after that. But my little girl, she just paused for about fifteen seconds and then she got cheerful again. Vomiting was nothing to her whatsoever. She went right on and she ate a hearty meal. She comes to my show sometimes and sits back there. I can see here head, this little indentation where her head is in the row of grown-up people. And sometimes she is awake during the news for Lake Woebegone and sometimes she is not. But she always has a beautiful time, sometimes she is cast down in despair, usually just before bed time, but it is very brief; she is a person resounding cheerfulness, and when I look back on my life, on my life before this child, I was fifty-five when she was born. I look back on all of the failures and the wrong turns that I took and the entanglements that I regret and yet when you consider the existence of this child you cannot regret any thing in this whole chain of events that led to this child's existence and that is why a man has a child at the age of fifty-five, to justify all of the rest of your life and also to give you a stake in the future and also to learn about cheerfulness.

I believe in cheerfulness and I believe that cheerfulness is the true sign of intelligence and when I say cheerfulness I don't mean to be happy, we can't always be happy, I don't mean euphoria, I don't mean silliness, I don't mean satisfaction, we are not satisfied, but we none the less can be, can be cheerful, and we can put the best face possible on it. The great philosopher of cheerfulness was Ralph Waldo Emerson, a man with three names, who may have addressed the Ford Hall Forum, I don't know. Ralph Waldo Emerson of Boston, who defined cheerfulness, he said, who ever is open, loyal, true, of humane and affable demeanor, honorable himself and in his judgment of others, faithful to his word. Ralph Waldo Emerson, when he sailed for the first time across the Atlantic, sailed off to England to give a lectures there, experienced sea sickness and nausea and vomiting for the first time in his life, and excited by it; it was an experience, it was meant to be grasped and could not wait for it to be over so that he could go to his journal and describe what this felt like. He was the first in a long parade of American optimists that included others less distinguished than himself; Dale Carnegie and Norman Vincent Peal and Wayne Dyer, and the current occupant George W. Bush, but you shouldn't let that discourage you. I speak of cheerfulness because I feel this every Fall, because I loved school as a child and so I feel this eagerness when the weather turns, which it has now in Minnesota and the leaves are just on the verge of turning and we get this beautiful, crisp, dry, clean smell of Fall in the air. Some people feel the excitement in the Spring, I feel it in the Fall. It is a smell that is

forever connected in my mind with vivid colors and with fresh apples and with cool grass and beads of dew on a Fall morning when you walk out the door of your house. This kid with a fresh pencil box and fresh tablet walking to Benson School and Ms. Molenbach's classroom back when Harry Truman was president and we were fighting for freedom in Korea, and back when on Saturdays we listened to the radio and we yearned for the University of Minnesota's Golden Gophers Football Team to be triumphant; which they seldom were, and I'd loved school. I excelled in school, briefly. In spelling in particular and sometimes in arithmetic. I don't excel anymore and I don't really care about excellence, people who do not excel and not suppose to care about excellence, and I don't care about football anymore, but every Fall I still feel that eagerness, that sort of leaning forward on your tiptoes that I felt as a child; this heightened sense of possibility. It was so gorgeous in St. Paul on Saturday I drove down to the Fitzgerald Theatre to do the show and I felt so wonderful; I passed a bar on Solby Avenue called, Costello's, with about fifteen Harleys parked out in front and I felt the urge to walk in and just throw the door open like you walk into a saloon and find the guys in the black leather pants and just grab one of them by the jacket and say which one of you fairies wants to take on a sixty-five year old public radio announcer? Here I am, come at me! High spirits, autumn days of just so golden and so beautiful, you know that if there were a whole month or two months of them a million Americans would quit their jobs and they would form dance companies; the man who delivers your mail, the woman who cleans your teeth would form their own dance companies and you would be obliged to go and watch them dance; some work with the word metamorphosis in the title and it would look sorta like Tai Chi except not quite as coordinated and afterward you would have to go back stage and tell them how wonderful it was. Cheerfulness, a sense of readiness, a leaning forward and eagerness for what ever the day may bring. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the preacher of that. I believe that the true purpose of education is to cheer us up by drawing us out of ourselves and out of our own fears and our own fantasies into a common body of knowledge and into a community of scholars, dead and living scholars, with whom we can converse, the purpose of education is conversation; I think of the boy back in Ms. Mullinbrock's classroom, in the third grade who believed that it was the Chinese who had bombed Pearl Harbor and the more vehemently the rest of us argued for the Japanese, the more he stuck with the Chinese. He just got really stubborn and dug into his position until finally Ms. Mullinbrock showed him pictures in a book that showed that it was the Japanese who bombed Pearl Harbor and it came as a relief to him that he would not have to spend the rest of his life in this lonely position. He wouldn't have to spend the rest of his life being yelled at by other people. Education brings us together into commonality in the same way I believe that the purpose of great art is to cheer us up, to give us courage to encourage us which should be cheering to us. This is not the prevailing view in criticism. American literature has taken some wrong turns and one was back in the 1920s, when it swerved toward the "incomprehensible" and thereby lost a good deal of its voluntary leadership. What killed poetry for million of Americans was being forced to read T. S. Eliot in school. Especially The Wasteland but also The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and not only to read it but to have to discuss it and to have to write papers about this, this small dark cloud of a poem, this "mope fest" about whether or not he dares to eat a peach or wear his trousers rolled. What you need to know about T. S. Eliot which your high school teacher might not have pointed out to you is that he had no friends at all. He was a nervous unhappy man without social skills, and so he left this country and he went to England where he married a ballet dancer whom he barely knew and he had a nervous breakdown, worrying about you-know-what, and so they slept in separate bedrooms for years and after three years, the man took a vow of chastity, as if that were necessary, in his case, and then his wife had the nervous breakdown; he was tremendously unhappy until very late in his life; he met his second wife Valerie, who was much younger, and he had sex. T. S. Eliot had sex and it cheered him up. And he started to like jokes and he loved to play scrabble and he became Groucho Marx's pen pal. If only

he had met Valerie when he was twenty-five instead of when he was sixty-five, it would have changed the course of American literature. We have been paying a heavy price for T. S. Eliot's unhappiness, but instead The Wasteland put in front of us in school the way you would put a plastic dry cleaning bag in front of a small child. If they had taught rock-roll in high school; they would have killed it off back in the early 1960s. It would have been all dead; they would have been no Bruce Springsteen whatsoever; he might have become a poet. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was the great preacher of cheerfulness, of positivism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said every great and commanding moments in annals of the world if the triumph of some enthusiasm. This is the one remedy for all ills; the panacea of nature; we must be lovers and instantly the impossible becomes possible. He said live in the sunshine, swim in the sea, drink the wild air; good advice for any young person. And Emerson said that while he was working hard, not swimming in the ocean, he was riding stage coaches and riding trains to give his lectures to earn money, running his business, earning money so that he could be generous to a lay-about like Henry David Thoreau, who did live in the sunshine and who did breathe the wild air, though he was not particularly cheerful about it. Thoreau was a puritan at heart, he was a separatist, he had a very accusatory intelligence, he had no social skills at all. A woman who knew him as a contemporary said she would rather put her arm around an oak tree than put her arm around Henry David Thoreau. He was much more at home with plants and with birds than with people. He had no social skills so he made isolation into a virtue and he said the mass of men lead quiet desperation. How did he know? He didn't, but that thought gave him some comfort as he sat out there in his little cabin at Walden Pond writing in his journal, great thoughts about independence, even as his mom was doing his laundry, and bringing him food. He went into town which was not that far away to get cookies. He didn't write about that, but it is nonetheless true. You don't learn that reading Walden, but the author of Walden is living in isolated splendor, a stones throw from home, and he goes back there regularly for tea and cookies and for clean clothes. It was Thoreau who gave the worst possible advice to young people, which has been repeated six billion times in graduation speeches, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer, let him step to the music which he hears." In other words if you have no sense of rhythm, if you are clueless, if you are oblivious to other people, more power to you. The pleasure of being in unison with others, the pleasure of being synchronized with other, the pleasures of communal life lost on this man, and yet it was this man no Emerson, who became a hero to my generation; especially, his essay on Civil Disobedience, when he refused to pay his poll tax, and spent one night in the Concord jail. Big deal! And who paid his fine? Ralph Waldo Emerson! I grew up with people like Henry David Thoreau, puritans, people who were judgmental about other people, "sanctified brethren." I know the type, they were dark people, they were not particularly cheerful at all; they believed it was bad luck to speak positively. If you praised children, you will corrupt them, so nothing you ever did as a child was quite good enough for them. If you celebrate your good fortune, people will think you are bragging; if you agree with somebody, they will think that you are a push over. You befriend a stranger and they are just going to ask you for money, so, say something good about the weather, it is apt to turn cold and rainy. So they complained. They complained about politicians, they complained about the schools, and the newspapers; most of all they complained about their own children, and about modern art, and about modern literature. They complained about their health on a regular basis, until they died in their late eighties, or early nineties. If you had offered them a drug with no side affects, that would make them happy every single day, they would have turned it down. I don't know why; I have no explanation. I've telling stories about them for thirty years and I don't understand them any better than you do. They believe that if every thing is coming your way; it means that you are in the wrong lane. The greatest compliment about anything was that it was "not that bad," it was not that bad; it could have been worst, and so when your mother put dinner on the table; the moment she set the

platters down on the hot pad; she began to denigrate her own cooking and how it wasn't the way she had intended and the pot roast was over cooked and the gravy was too thin and the potatoes were dry and so forth. Just to head off any possible compliments that you might have paid her. They were good people, good people in the worst sense of the word. They were country people, who were used to deprivation; they were country people who got up in the morning and they emptied their chamber pot into the outhouse and they washed their faces in cold water and they sat down to breakfast of flap jacks in a kitchen that smelled of smoke; they ate breakfast in silence avoiding eye contact and before they went to work doing their chores, except for milking of course, which came first, before they went to work, they knelt down on a hard wood floor and they prayed and they prayed at great length with specific references to some of us who are in the room and they read from the word of God and not the comforting passages either, but the harsh passages that had to do with smiting. They were big on smiting. And then they went out and they did their work and they came back in in the evening to have supper and went to bed early. They had no electricity, they pumped water from the cistern. They lit the house with kerosene lamps. They didn't feel cheated or deprived by any of this. This was the life that was given to them to lead; this was God's will, and they followed his word as best they could; they did not care about your opinion or the opinion of the world or about fashion, or about what was in the news. My people were the last evangelical fundamentalists to refuse to vote or take any interest in politics. They were a hard bunch but one thing they were missing a few notes towards the top of the octave. They were missing cheerfulness, amiability. I hang out with people in their twenties, now and then, which they allow me to do, because I often pick up the tab. And they seem so much more cheerful than we were when we their age. We meaning myself, I am using the royal we here, not including any of you. They just seem so much more poised, funnier, make fun of themselves, more than we ever did, and also they take better care of themselves, which is apt to improve your mood. We did not know this, back in the 1960s we chained smoked unfiltered cigarettes because we felt this was the true characteristic of an intellectual, to smoke and to drink in excess. If you were a serious writer, you were suppose to get drunk; this was required of you. We all smoked back then, parties, the air was blue with smoke, the ash trays were heaping and sometimes they were hand rolled joints that were as big as your thumb, every body getting liquored-up, no body was on a diet, no body was following an exercise program, we were listening to Janis Joplin at high volume on speakers that sat on the floor in these smoky rooms and Janis was screeching and whaling the blues. And no body every imagined that Janis Joplin was going to come to Jesus someday or marry and have children, take up a regular exercise program; this was just not a part of, she was a genius and therefore she was self-destructive; there was an equation here between artistry and self-destructiveness. It was expected, we cherished the darkness, the tragedy of Janis Joplin. Thank God that time is over. I wish for better for you young people and the principle; is cheerfulness. We were gloomy and "mopey" (mopish) enough as teenagers. Lighten up, get a grip! There is a lot of darkness in the world, on the freeway, the other morning in St. Paul, the Goths and the Visi-Goths out there on the freeway, barbarians who just seem to resent your very presence on the highway. This woman as she passed she mouthed words at me; I couldn't believe I was seeing a beautiful woman say. People shrieking at you; angry out on the road. Why, I don't understand, why? You drive downtown and you park your car, downtown St. Paul, deserted after five-thirty in the evening and you come around a corner and there is a cubby of evil teenagers walking towards you; hair an unnatural shade of black; their clothing ripped and torn; their trousers down just above their knees; their shoe laces untied; metal glittering from their faces as if they have fallen face first into the tackle box. Looking at you with loathing and contempt and then you walk into a restaurant and you can tell from the dim lights that this is going to be very expensive. You are their to meet your wife for dinner; you order the special, which is pork medallions, which weigh about a half ounce a piece; there are five of them, on a white plate about thirty-six inches across;

swirls of green foam that may be avocado, might be moss, who knows. Little caramelized rice cost twenty-eight dollars; eat it in about forty-five seconds. And your wife looks at you and she says the words that every husband dreads; she says, we need to talk and you think what happened, what happened to that old joie-de-vive, where did that go?

Ralph Waldo Emerson come help me here, but this Fall; the Fall that I turned sixty-five, I felt this great burst of ambition, on behalf of my generation; we listened to Thoreau and we should not have and so we went off on our little individual journeys that amounted to not all that much. We had a lot of promise at one time and now we are old and we are about to become a burden. Healthcare is driving our country into debt; the high cost of keeping geezers going; providing an MRI every gramps has a headache and meanwhile the schools are struggling and here you have the political problems in a nut shell. A dwindling number of wage earners supporting a growing population of people who have retired as soon as possible so that they can go and add to their sea shell collection and write bad poetry and take videos of the Grand Canyon. Have you not been to the Grand Canon? Have you not seen people my age standing on the rim with video cameras slowing panning from right to left and then from left to right? They are there. Healthcare is now a bigger item in state budgets than education. We spend forty-three thousand dollars in the last year of a man's life to keep him breathing. Just to prolong some old three pack-a-day-smoker's life, and to pay for it, we cut music out of the schools, and French and Latin and German. A woman called me up a week and a half ago to ask if I would speak at a party for a classmate of mine who is retiring and who is moving to Santa Fe, she said. And I thought yes, I'll say a word. I'll say a word at her party; I'll say you get your butt back here Liz, the world needs you you're not done yet, don't leave until your job is done. She is an editor, she is a good editor and the world needs more of those. Retirement is fine if you are dead wood, but competence is in short supply, so let's hang on to the good ones. Let the President retire, let him retire next week. He could retire tomorrow, that's fine. But my friend is a competent person and she should take a week off, take a week off, do some yoga, get some sleep, you know, and take a little trip, read some books, and then come back to work. You don't belong in New Mexico, you are in St. Paul, Minnesota, you are a northern person, you are not a desert person. What are you going to do in New Mexico? What do you think is going to happen to you? You think the Hopi Indians are going to adopt you somehow and gonna take you in and teach you the mystery of the earth, the wind, the fire and son on; no they are not. You are going to live in an air-conditioned nightmare down there on the desert. You are gonna start watching the classic movie channel at nine o'clock in the morning, watching old Jimmy Stewart movies and you're gonna join a class for people who need a excuse to create bad art, and you are gonna develop a serious Kaluah problem. Sixty-five is a delicate age, you start to hear this still small voice saying, "you are over the hill," "you are dead wood." Golden years - nature doesn't care about your golden years; nature is not interested in that, nature is interested in young people, you and the people your age are a bunch of wounded buffalo; that is who you are, you are all huddled together, noses in and the walls are circling around and they are going to bite your bite; they are gonna take you down, so that your carcasses can fertilize; the prairie, that's the fact of the matter, sorry if it hurts your feelings; that's what the still small voice says, and that's why I've started writing a new book, now I am out promoting this one, whatever it's name might be; just to justify my being here. I've canceled my plans for retirement. The readers whom I covet seem more fixated on screens than on paper, but all right, that's the challenge, that's the challenge of it, cut to the chase, cut out the big introductions, when in doubt, write something funny. I don't care to retire. The world needs some old people on the radio, some people who remember the typewriter, some people who have sat in an upstairs bedroom and pounded away on an Underwood typewriter unto yellow copy paper with carbon and a second sheet and who have written stories and then rewritten them and rewritten them and retyped the whole damn thing

and then got in a car, without a seat belt and drove to town to mail the story off. Somebody who remembers back when we canned vegetables, we canned them, and we put them into glass jars. Ball canning jars, with Kerr lids and we ate of them all winter and we did not go down to the grocery and buy fresh tomatoes at a dollar a piece, raised in Mexico that taste like styrofoam. We canned tomatoes. I miss the old country that I grew up in; the country where the druggist owned the drug store and the radio station was not programmed by computers and everybody knew the same songs and we sang them despite what Thoreau said we sang them in tempo with each other; we sang about the Rock Island Line, which was a mighty good line and Dina was in the kitchen and about the Bye-Bye Blackbird and praise God from whom all blessings flow and then out schools started encouraging creativity under the influence of Henry David Thoreau and his secret drummer. We encourage children to write their own songs and we had to pretend that their songs were wonderful, which they were not, and meanwhile the old songs got lost; the ones that we all sang together in harmony. Cheerfulness, nothing cheers you up, like singing a song with other people all together no matter what Thoreau said. Community life, "communal life" is the source of great happiness. We have now finished yet another commemoration of September the 11<sup>th</sup>, another reading of the names of the dead of six years ago, and solemn speeches and sermons and more authors writing about how this event changed our world which will never again be the same. And odd way that we have of dealing with a disaster. To walk in it, over and over again, is not how the British remembered the bombings of London in the Blitz. It is not how our parents dealt with Pearl Harbor, they moved on. But we are fascinated by terror and that is why small-town southern fundamentalists are fascinated by Rudy Guillian, a thrice married, pro-choice, non-observant catholic New Yorker, who could not be more different from them than if he wore a dress and high heels, simply because he has the magic of terror about him. It has been four years since Richard Reed tried to set fire to his shoes aboard that flight from Paris to Miami and we are still doing in his honor, the little dance, through airport security. The elderly wives of Iowa soybean farmers are removing their orthopedic shoes in honor of Richard Reed. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said our distrust is very expensive since 2002 sixteen billion dollars in security "pork" dolled out by the Department of Homeland Security to the states of which the states have only spend eleven billion; ninety million dollars to Vermont, ninety-two million to North Dakota. What are they going to blow up in North Dakota? How many concrete barriers can you possible put up in public places? How many surveillance cameras? How many crisis command centers do you need in Fargo? Lighten up, get a grip. Ralph Waldo Emerson, I'll leave you with his words... "this time like all times," said Emerson, "is a very good one if we but no what to do with it, finish each day and be done with it, you've done what you could, some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in forget them as soon as you can, tomorrow is a new day begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense." In other words, cheer up! Thank you. Thank you so much, thank you so much.

Thank you so much, that was really wonderful. It is the question and answer time and I reserve the right to ask the first questions, while we wait for other people to show up at these microphones.

Q.: Over the years we've talked at the Ford Hall Forum about having a panel discussion about humor in broadcasting 1946 2007, 8, 6 whatever, and I grew up with Ernie Kovacks and Steve Allen and Jonathan Winters and that's kind of where my wits got sharpened and I wonder if you have something to say about humor in broadcast then versus now, which may not be quite as PG rated?

GK: John Stewart, Steven Colbert and Harry Shimmer.



Q.: Who saw Garrison Keillor on Steven Colbert? What a hard show to do, he is acting and you're being you. Yes, your question.

Q.: Some perceptive thinker may have been Ralph Waldo Emerson said "there is something of November in the soul of Massachusetts" and now there is a battle for the soul of Massachusetts. Our Governor Deval Patrick thinks we need three gambling casinos with slot machines. Would you comment about gambling, particularly in Massachusetts?

GK: Far be it for me to ever tell people of Massachusetts what they should do. In Minnesota, gambling of course has been a...through no bodies clear design, has come to be an instrument of justice for Native Americans, and most of the tribes that I am familiar with in Minnesota have, to my way of thinking, invested this money very responsibly in schools and libraries and so forth, so it is hard for me to criticize gambling. My people of course were dead set against it and didn't cotton to it, but it is a fact of life that people my age retired people with far too much disposable income like to get on buses and play slot machines, so, it keeps them off the streets.

Sir.

Q.: Hi there, my name is John and this is an honor, Mr. Keillor, after every thing you said during your speech about cheerfulness. Is there any advice you would give to incoming or new freshman students who might be feeling a bit of a lack of cheerfulness after starting college and leaving high school behind? Especially if you are one of the teenagers who actually liked high school?

GK.: High school can't have been that good for you, really, it just can't. Adult life awaits you and with all of the freedom, a terrifying thing, you know, but nonetheless a wonderful thing that really, really ought to cheer you up and not frighten you. You are now on the verge of being able to do all sorts of things that no body else need know about. And that's the beginning of adult life. You know you can go to the library and bear down hard, which I hope you will, but on the other hand you are going to the library and bearing down hard and taking notes on legal pads and using your time wisely, is made richer and deeper by the fact that it is voluntary, and by the fact that you know that you could get in a car and just drive west. You could and who would stop you, you could Minnesota, you could drive out across the Dakotas and you could write on the road and on a continuous stream of paper, you could meet all sorts of people that your family doesn't approve of. You could do wonderful things, so. This will pass, this feeling of nostalgia for high school, this will pass.

Thank you very much, that was amazing.

GK. Thank you very much, good luck.

Q.: I am Dale Stoepy from Northern Wisconsin, Scandinavian like yourself, and I was just wondering, about "Lake Wobegone Summer of 1956," and I wondered how much of this was your own personal life when you were a kid and did you know somebody like Mr. Jim Dandy in there?

GK: The radio guy, right?

Q:Yes. He was the guy on the radio announcer in the baseball stadium in the book

GK: Yes, right, right. I got to sit in the score keeper's booth in the announcer's booth at high school football games, because I was writing up the games for our high school newspaper, so I got to hangout with radio people and they were just really dazzling and charming to me. I thought they were just the most worldly people I'd ever met, you know, they smoked up there and they were drinking things that they tried to conceal from me and so I... that was the big time to me. A lot of that book is based loosely on my growing up, but you develop the ability to disguise people and events, so that I don't think that anybody I grew up with necessarily recognize that. My childhood friend William Lance Patterson, does recognize a good deal of what is in that book, he has a photographic memory of when we were children together, but he is the only one, really. You should really ask William Lance Patterson.

Q.: Yes, Jonathan Berg from Melrose, Massachusetts. I just want to remind you Mr. Keillor, that they two great literary figures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; Charles Dickens and Mark Twain, who did also sing for their supper. So I just want to remind you of that and I wanted to explore with you just a little bit about your sort of aversion to Henry David Thoreau, you kept referring to him in a negative way through your talk tonight and could you expand a little, what is it about Thoreau and Thoreauism that you find... have such an averse feeling for?

GK: Overrated. Only in comparison to Ralph Waldo Emerson, who to me is a much more profound writer and a better writer and whom just has a lot more to, to say. In addition, to which, I think, Emerson was a more admirable person, he worked hard, establishing literature as a business in American, really more than Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who was a successful writer. Emerson went out and traveled and sold himself, sold his own books, advertised his own lectures. Was an industrious man and affable out on the road and thereby he paved the way for other writers, not Thoreau, Thoreau didn't want to leave Concord. Thoreau came to New York City once and disapproved of it and went back home. He paved the way for other authors and for the profession of literature. Not academics who might write a book on the side, but for people to earn a living from writing and to me that is just truly, truly admirable, beyond that I am making fun, I am making fun of Thoreau. I sort of came under his way when I was in high school, when I was seventeen and you know, I felt that he was speaking to me and that big long last passage of Walden, you know, only the day, you know to bra bra bra bra... you know. "Only that day is awake to which we dream," and so forth, and the life in us is greater than the rivers and so forth, which now I read and just seems to me sorta claptrap(sp), but overrated and that one saying usually misquoted about "marching to your own drummer." Nothing you should tell a seventeen year old... no.

Robert Frost was a speaker at Ford Hall Forum.

GK: He was? Okay.

Moderator: We have it on tape.

GK: Robert Channing Frost.

Moderator: And I think he is signing books afterwards.

Q. Hi, Mr. Keillor, my name is Sam, from Maine. I go to Emerson College here, and I've been listening you probably since I was ten. I discovered you when I got your "Joke" show on audio tape from the library and I've always really appreciated your intelligent sense of humor and I'd like to know where or from whom you've drawn influence, like, in that humor over the years?

GK: Wow, that's an awfully good question. I mean, I could name some writers but that would seem bragging because they really are... I've given up trying to write like them. When I was your age I read the New Yorker Magazine religiously and you know I tried to sound like those people, namely E. B. White, F. J. Pearlman, James Thurber, to some extent, but there

comes a point when you just are kind of, you know, left to tread water on your own, and those models don't serve you very well, you know, if I stop now and try to think what would they say or how would they write about this or how would they write this book it leads me into some sort of echo chamber, that I really don't want to go there. I think they are very important to launch you, get you launched, and then you just have to, you know, make yourself a stiff cup of coffee and you are on your own.

Q: Thank you.

GK. Yes, sir.

Q.: Hi, my name is Aaron Goldstein. I wanted to ask you a question about a little passage in one of your early books called Homegrown Democrat, you take President Bush to task for not having accepted the slightest bit of responsibility for 911. My question to you, when you made your dislike of the President obvious, and you are entitled to that. I know you want him to retire, he will be retired in 491 days, so that's encouraging to you.

GK. I lost count.

Q.: If you are unhappy with Bush not having accepted responsibility for 911 do you therefore believe FDR bares some responsibility for Pearl Harbor?

GK. A good question. I have to think back on what I have read about Pearl Harbor. I grew up among people who were staunchly anti- FDR and who also are of the conspiratorial mind and they believed that FDR had arranged Pearl Harbor. That he had left, at the very least, that he had left the door wide open for the Japanese fleet to come in. I don't, I don't read it that way, but the answer to your question in the end is yes, of course, yes, of course, he was President after all. He was charged with the responsibility of defending the United States of America and to some degree, yes. The case against the "current occupant" will be made by historians and President Clinton has testified most recently in the current issue of *The Atlantic* that he warned the incoming administration extensively about Osama Bin Laden and so forth. Historians will come to that decision, and it will take them a good long time, because this is an administration that is really truly devoted to secrecy. We have not had a tell-all book yet, and we may never get one.

Moderator: On that cheerful note, next question?

Q.: Thank you. My name is Sara and I've been listening to your show, along with my roommate who is sitting in the balcony, for as long as we both can remember and we've never actually seen you in person before, so we were just wondering if there was any kind of deliberate methodology to your suspenders, ties, socks and shoes?

GK: Any methodology?

Q.: Is there a reason behind the coordination?

GK: I don't think I've got the whole gist of your question. I must be missing some of it here. Between the socks and the shoes and these?.

Q.: It is all nicely put together, we were just we were wondering.

GK: Nobody your age has ever complimented me on this. I used to wear, I used to wear wing tips. I put in many years wearing wing tips. When I was your age I, for some reason, I thought that if you were hip you were supposed to wear boots, so we wore boots back then. Some people wore Redwing work boots, that kind of laced up, that kind of high top shoes that came up to here, but for while it was considered even more hip. In addition to chain smoking, you know, and drinking tumblers of whisky, you wore boots, enormous boots that were hand made, and so that was supposed to lend them even greater appeal and they were hand made leather, which meant that they weighed about twelve pounds a piece. They

were as heavy as bowling balls and they bit your foot every step you took, they bit you back here in your achilles tendon. They were painful but you suffered with them, because you were a writer and you wanted to be a writer and you, you know, they went with everything and they went with the leather vest with the fringe and so forth, and the vest that looked as if were made from a carpet, and they went with the hair that was you know down to your shoulders. You wore these, these were comfortable you see? These were comfortable and they are very inexpensive, you buy them online and you can usually find them in the closet. And the red socks are just a little flash of color, you know? If you come from the Midwest and you are a sixty-five year old male and you come from Fundamentalist people and you have this radio face, you need some color to show that you are cheerful, cheerfulness.

Moderator: Thank you all for coming. We hope we'll see you again.