

## Christmas 2009

Dear Family and Friends:

*A Prairie Home Companion* is a live radio variety program created and hosted by Garrison Keillor. The show originates in St. Paul, Minnesota, but frequently Keillor takes his gig on the road and about once a year it stops at the Wolf Trap Center for the Performing Arts just west of Washington, D.C. We have thoroughly enjoyed several of these performances. We go for the music—folk music of various genres, country, blues, bluegrass, and gospel, with a splash of classical thrown in for good measure. We never tire of listening to the Guys All-Star Shoe Band, especially when they get going on the Powder Milk Biscuits ad. We love the tongue-in-cheek radio drama, *Guy Noir*, *Private Eye*. But the highlight for us is when the tall guy decked out in a suit deftly complimented by his high-top red sneakers, settles in with that velvet voice and tells us that it has been a quiet week in Lake Wobegone.

Keillor's monologue does not have a set structure. It just wanders through a cast of recurring characters and places—the Chatterbox Café, the Sidetrack Tap, Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery (if you can't get it at Ralph's, you can probably do without), Pastor Inqvist and his congregation at the local Lutheran Church, Father Emil of Our Lady of Perpetual Responsibility Catholic Church, various members of the Bunsen and Krebsbach families, and, of course, that curious assortment of Norwegian bachelor farmers. For ten minutes or so, through sighs, chuckles, and (sometimes) side-splitting laughter, a master storyteller mesmerizes us. It feels like we just kicked up our feet and got lost reminiscing while staring at the dying embers in the fireplace.

Well, it has been a quiet year in Arnold and that has been a most welcome development. While our recurring cast of characters and places lack some of the wackiness of Lake Wobegone, we love them, nonetheless. After last year's health issues, they are all the more precious to us.

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It has been a quiet year for which we are most thankful. In the New Testament, the verb rendered "thank" often translates the term *eucharisteo*. We get our English word "Eucharist" from this verb. That word is a compound built around *charis*, the word for grace. Conceptually and linguistically, thanksgiving grows out of the grace of God. What better time to appreciate that wonderful grace than at Christmas when we celebrate His ultimate gift of grace to us—His own Son. We hope this Yuletide finds you well and will be for you a most joyous season. From our home to yours: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.