

## Cheerfulness

**Garrison Keillor**

Prairie Home Productions (May 13, 2023)

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*Cheerfulness is a charming memoir by a beloved humorist that reflects his unabashed, defiant happiness.*

Part memoir, part self-aware victory lap, Garrison Keillor's *Cheerfulness* points the spotlight of positive perspective on himself, as well as on anyone within ear- or eyesight of his optimistic influence.

Keillor's decades-long run as the voice for Middle America on the syndicated radio show *A Prairie Home Companion* acts as a cozy foundation for the octogenarian's outlook on his life, the ever-morphing zeitgeist of popular culture, and the choices people make along the way that help shape their collective moods. *Cheerfulness* is written through a series of self-reflective reminiscences, with Keillor's signature Minnesotan–cum–New Yorker charm and humor used to unpack the psychology of emotive presence through the prism of everyday gaiety. Herein, a person's reactive energy can be a salve for rotten moments.

Over the course of the book, Keillor recalls pivotal moments of his life, like the heart surgery that paired him with a porcine mitral valve and added many extra years, his abstention from drinking alcohol, and the cornerstone doctrines and sermons of his Christian upbringing. These stories become fodder for articulating a rosy disposition. His celebrity stature also engenders anecdotes about like-minded writers, including George Plimpton and Ralph Waldo Emerson, alongside cheery, slow-paced observational tidbits of self-help mined from personal peaks and valleys. Indeed, the book includes signposts for navigating life at all stages.

The prose is approachable, witty, and downright funny—a sign that Keillor's comedic engines remain in overdrive. It is riddled with limericks—welcome buffers of whimsy through which Keillor gives thanks to the memories and loved ones in his life that kept him from the brink of despair. Throughout, Keillor shoots down inherent negativity with the implicit, pervasive claim that cheerfulness is a choice: “Adopting cheerfulness as a strategy does not mean closing your eyes to evil; it means resisting our drift toward compulsive dread and despond.”

While there are moments of meandering as the book progresses, these stream-of-consciousness recollections are part and parcel of Keillor's oeuvre. His abilities as a writer and humorist impel the juggling of loose strings—here, knit together after a suitable number of tangential sojourns. Indeed, the often loose conversational style supports the book's center well, driving home the notion that the coalescing of every minor and major moment of one's life seems to demand such free-form ruminations.

*Cheerfulness* is a charming memoir by a beloved humorist that reflects unabashed happiness in defiance of age, loss, and the weight of life's unpredictability.

RYAN PRADO (November 30, 2023)

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