

Memories and Melodies

By Pete Clark

Near the turn of the century Norma and I traveled to Laramie and stopped at one of the hotels on Grand Avenue, east of the Wyoming campus. It was too early to check in, so we waited, in the hotel lobby, for my daughter Lori to arrive from Lyman. We drank coffee and chatted during the short interlude before she came in the door. After hellos and hugs, we piled into Lori's SUV and drove to a parking lot near the Arts & Sciences Building.

I was disappointed when I saw that all vehicular traffic into Prexy's Pasture had been blocked, but I managed to limp over the slight rise and down past Prexy's Pasture, to the A&S Building. We were there to see a live performance of *A Prairie Home Companion*, presented by Garrison Keillor and his cast of actors and musicians. While we waited for admission to the building and its auditorium, I rested on the Matthew Shepard Memorial Bench, located on the concrete apron, before the A&S entry way.

The memorial plaque reminded me of a Saturday in October 1998. *We were in Laramie for the Homecoming game the weekend after Shepard had been so viciously beaten. We saw the TV news vans grouped around the Albany County Court House and wondered what had happened. When we joined the crowd in the old Safeway parking lot, we found out. A group of Gays and Lesbians marched in the Homecoming parade, I believe, to both honor Shepard and to show that they cared and would not be marginalized. When they came down Grand Avenue, I removed my cap and went to parade rest. They invited me to walk with them, but with my left hip acting up, I knew I could neither keep up with them, nor go the distance, so I declined to join their march.*

The A&S doors were opened, and we went in and found our seats, which gave us a good view of the stage. The stage was set up with a piano, chairs, musical instruments and a centerstage microphone. Garrison Keillor came out and gave us his list of *Don'ts*, such as don't leave the auditorium for any reason during the performance, no children were allowed in, and other things. Then the musicians came onto the stage. The pianist began tapping the piano's keys and others joined in to create the theme for *A Prairie Home Companion*. That is when the piano and all the other musical instruments became, for me, magic wands.

I have never been able to carry a tune, even in a tote-bag, I am blown away whenever I am in the presence of people who can use the breath of life, the strength of arms and hands, often soaked in gentleness, to create melodic sounds, ranging from calming softness to raucous urgency. They are a wondrous boon to my life.