March 22, 2020

Sinking ships

He's a horse of a man carrying unkempt hair and bushy eyebrows. Standing in front of and quite below this towering legend was oddly surreal. Not necessarily because of who he is, but because of what he is and was. He was a radioman with an empathetic personality and tells tales that speak of days gone by with a soft and concerned voice. You can believe what he says for its so close to home being at once comforting and relatable. His stories ignite memories of days far forgotten when everything was less complicated and far easier to understand.

His delivery was deliberate and folksy while being seemingly always distracted by something from the past. While poetically chanting a little ditty, he made up about some long-lost love, he pivots to remind us that those were the days of innocence and are gone forever – another sinking ship in his mind.

The evening was full of sinking ships delivered in such a melancholy way that those events long ago in his life are now of little consequence and not truly sad.

I listened intently and was shocked as my mind equated his tales of sinking ships with my days in the insurance business – not the marine business, but in the sense that what we did to attract, bind and service business was in many ways vastly different from the way the business is conducted today.

I won't bore some of you with how we used to do it for it is water over the dam. Today, using updated models, analytics, artificial intelligence, and the digitalization of almost everything to name a few, the insurance business has transformed itself from a sinking ship. Lloyd's, the original ship insurer, has also seen the light and implemented an action plan to drive long-term culture change in the Lloyd's market.

This mountain of a man Garrison Keillor makes me think anything is possible. His stories scattered with limericks (some off-color) made me think he must also paint because his ramblings were so markedly artistic so I asked him. "No! The world doesn't need another mediocre artist." And that was that and out into the cold night I went in search of another sinking ship.