James Schaap Tells Stories From the Past

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We call people ‘senile’ when they don’t know the past anymore. Sometimes I think as a culture we’re approaching a kind of senility.” Emeritus Professor of English James C. Schaap’s latest venture with a local radio station is helping provide an antidote through stories of local people and events mostly lost from memory.

KWIT radio, NPR's Sioux City, Iowa, affiliate, has partnered with Schaap to broadcast a weekly radio show called Small Wonders. Addressing an audience of listeners across Siouxland, Schaap shares stories he’s written about the region’s past and people, bringing to life an earlier era.

“Siouxland is my adopted home. Sometimes I think we don’t appreciate the lively history of the region as much as we might,” says Schaap, a Wisconsin native. “Making that history a joy to the listener is a great deal of fun.”

In one of his favorite pieces, “Music of the Spheres,” Schaap shares a piece of history with a hint of imaginative embellishment. Peaking out at the world through the memoir of a young schoolteacher who traveled west to teach in a tiny sod hut in Iowa, Schaap reveals her sense of isolation on the prairie. “It must have been really lonely out there in those days, and I could feel her loneliness in the way she talked about the children,” Schaap says.

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— Dr. James C. Schaap, emeritus English professor