

C. D. Albin, Editor  
Leigh Adams, Assistant Editor

**Editorial Advisory Board**

Drew Beisswinger  
Missouri State University-Springfield

Howard Marshall  
University of Missouri-Columbia

Brooks Blevins  
Missouri State University-Springfield

Gordon McCann  
Independent Scholar

Erika Brady  
Western Kentucky University

Lynn Morrow  
Missouri State Archives

Rachel Gholson  
Missouri State University-Springfield

Bonnie Steppenoff  
Southeast Missouri State University

Gene Hyde  
Radford University

Terrell Tebbetts  
Lyon College

Tom Williams  
University of Houston-Victoria

Cover Design by Kelli Albin  
Mat Crouse

Layout by Leigh Adams  
Back Cover Photograph by Barbara Williams

*Elder Mountain: A Journal of Ozarks Studies* is published once a year by the Department of English at Missouri State University-West Plains. The editor invites year-round submissions of fiction, poetry, creative non-fiction, scholarly articles, and artwork. Queries and subscription inquiries may be sent to the same address. Regular post submissions and subscription requests may be made to C. D. Albin, *Elder Mountain*, Missouri State University-West Plains, 128 Garfield, West Plains, MO 65775. Submissions should include SASE for reply.

Subscriptions: \$10.00 for one year, \$18.00 for two years.



Financial Assistance for this project has been provided by the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency.

# *Elder Mountain: A Journal of Ozarks Studies*

Volume I  
Fall 2009

Missouri State University-West Plains

ISSN 1946-0511

## Editorial Board

C. D. Albin  
Leigh Adams  
Cathy Proffitt Boys  
John H. Fohn II

E. D. McKinney  
Matt Meacham  
Connie Morgan  
Kathleen Morrissey

## Call for Submissions

*Elder Mountain: A Journal of Ozarks Studies* invites scholarly and creative submissions for Volume II, to be published in 2010. A juried journal, *Elder Mountain* seeks Ozarks-focused manuscripts from all disciplinary perspectives, (particularly anthropology, economics, folklore, geography, geology, history, literature, music, and political science), as well as interdisciplinary approaches. In addition, high-quality, Ozarks-oriented short stories, poems, and works of creative nonfiction are of keen interest, as is visual art that explores the Ozarks. To be considered for this Volume II, manuscripts must be emailed or postmarked by **January 31, 2010**.

Electronic submissions are preferred and may be sent as a Word attachment to [ElderMountain@MissouriState.edu](mailto:ElderMountain@MissouriState.edu). Queries may also be sent to this address. Regular post submissions are acceptable and may be made to:

C. D. Albin, Editor  
*Elder Mountain: A Journal of Ozarks Studies*  
Missouri State University – West Plains  
128 Garfield  
West Plains, Mo. 65775

Manuscripts will be recycled rather than returned. Please include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply.

## Guidelines for Submissions

--Well-crafted, thesis-driven **articles** free of discipline-specific jargon have the greatest likelihood of acceptance. Articles should be between fifteen and twenty-five double-spaced pages, and may be submitted using the documentation style appropriate to the discipline. In order to facilitate the blind review process, the author should omit name and university affiliation from the manuscript and should place this information on a separate cover page instead.

--Carefully wrought **short stories** and **essays** free of common Ozark stereotypes will receive appreciative consideration. Creative prose pieces should be a maximum of 5000 words.

--**Poems** may range in style from formal to free verse. Strong imagery and intelligently rendered content are attractive qualities.

--**Creative work** may be submitted simultaneously if noted at the time of submission.

Immediate notification is required if the work is accepted elsewhere.

## Table of Contents

Editor's Note / 5

## Poetry

Andrea Hollander Budy

After the Tornado / 29

Mr. Hill / 31

February / 32

September / 33

Jane Hoogestraat

Advice to the Newcomer / 35

Matt Brennan

Biking in the Ozarks / 65

Remembering the River / 66

Dave Malone

Lucille and the Old Hotel / 73

Gary Guinn

Sinners in the Hand / 86

What We Touch / 87

Billy Clem

For Jade, My Niece / 88

## Fiction

Katie Estill

The Three Beauties / 37

Jo Van Arkel

Floodwater / 67

## Floodwater

Jo Van Arkel

Think of a humid day in late spring. A day in the almost South. There are hills around, but they are off in the distance—gathered like low clouds on the horizon but not. Rain keeps coming and going. The river has been flooding for days on end. In low places upstream, the river spills through the doors, floods the kitchens and living rooms so that sofas rise up and float out over the thresholds. No one has enough insurance to cover this.

My kid, my wife, my dog. Everyone else has gone on ahead. It's just me with my house on the levee. I am supposed to take a few hours and tie things up. Move as much as I can upstairs to the second floor, so it doesn't get damaged by the floods we know are coming. In town, a few people are still sand bagging the riverfront. Mostly the business owners trying to save their historic buildings. We've been told by the radio that the Mississippi hasn't seen flooding like this since nineteen-o-something-or-other.

So I am moving everything up to the second floor. Bit by bit. I notice it's hard to make myself move fast. Like I'm already underwater. Like the whole house is already submerged. I pick a dining room chair and carry it up the stairs. Then another. Then another until I have the whole dining room set up on the landing except the table and it's too big to fit between the railing and the wall. Donna, my wife, warned me about the legs, said if they got wet they'd have water marks forever and we'd never get them out. They'd be ruined. It'd all be ruined she said. She did a lot of the work

herself before she left. As much as she could. Then the Red Cross drove up and down the street and ordered people to start evacuation. Couldn't guarantee our safety.

Donna grabbed stuff and put it in a bag. She packed up our two year old son and the dog in the car and headed inland fifty miles to stay with her mother. She was giving me instructions all the way out the door and beyond. *Take the towels and bedclothes out of the hall closet. Get the baby pictures from the bottom dresser drawer.*

I have the radio on in the kitchen. It sounds far off, like it's also under water. Sometimes I can't quite make out the words but I can tell by the sounds that come out whether music is playing or there's an urgent weather report.

So I am in a bind about the dining room table. I don't know what to do and I wonder if I should ask Stan next door if he could help. Stan doesn't have a family like me. And his house is a rental, so he doesn't stand to lose everything. But I notice through the windows he's still over there. I see him pass from one room to the next with boxes in his arms. I wonder where he's putting his things since he doesn't have an upstairs.

Stan has only been our neighbor for three months. He moved in last February, when winter was still hanging on in the form of long icicles and blackened piles of plowed snow. Donna has always hated winter and she and Stan hit it off right away. Because he hated winter too or so he said when he came over for dinner. Donna fixed spaghetti, thawed out some frozen pre-made meatballs and tossed a salad. We opened two bottles of wine, although I stuck to beer. It was a good night. We built a fire and played classy music, jazz. And our baby walked around the room humming and playing with the dog until the baby got tired and fell and hit his head on the edge of a table and wouldn't stop crying. I walked him up and down the hallway trying to get him to stop while Donna and Stan talked: Stan was a teacher. Stan

played the guitar. Stan liked to build things with his bare hands. I stayed at the far end of the hall after a while, and held my kid's head close against my shoulder, because he had finally stopped crying, only shook once in a while the way babies do when they've been wailing a long time. I didn't want the baby waking up with the sound of their voices talking so much, talking about everything from movies to music to living by the river. It was her idea to have him over.

I'm thinking about all this while I'm staring at the dining room table trying to decide what to do, when the warning sirens go off. They're designed to warn about disasters, like tornados and, in this case, floods. I look out the front window and see the water has already come. Just like that the river has swelled up over the levee and now the street is a foot high with brown rushing water. It doesn't look fast from up in the house, but I know river water well enough to know if you went down and stood in it, it could knock you over and carry you off with the logs and other debris. The radio is warning me too, telling me if I'm still near the river I better move to higher ground. But saying at the same time that a person shouldn't try to drive into a flooded area no matter what because the force of the water could pick you and your car right up and sweep you downstream. The announcer sounds like he's gurgling as he speaks. Or maybe I just imagine that.

The announcer says the river has been sweeping things up and carrying them away all week. Might see cars float by, or lawn furniture. Even caskets have popped up out of the saturated ground and are floating downstream at this very minute. I step out onto the porch, because I'm thinking, Now this I have to see. Vis-a-vis the caskets, I mean. If there's a casket floating by my house I want to see that with my own eyes. From my vantage point on the porch, I don't see any debris, nothing but the rushing brown water. But I can see some activity next door. Stan—in the corner of my

eye again. He's moved outside and is sloshing his way to the garage. In fact he's been in my periphery for a long time: Stan always just leaving my house when I come home from work. Stan borrowing a yard tool. I decide to not ask him for any help.

The wind is wet with a new wave of rain. And the sky is so dark and blurred that a person can't tell when the sky ends and the river begins. I look back out at the water in the street and the swelling river and I see for the first time the magnitude of it all. Feel it—a fear that hits me like a pain in my chest: How easy it is to be swept away.

Once, when I was a boy, I was riding my bike through a parking lot, taking a short cut and right when I biked between two parking cars, another pulled out, one that I never saw coming and slammed into me. The impact threw me up on the car hood, so I was spread-eagle and staring straight into the eyes of the driver. I jumped off the car just as the driver opened the door, looking sick, looking like he might puke right there for hitting a kid on a bike. But I swore I was okay, grabbed my bike even though it was bent and twisted, even though my ears were ringing and it hurt to breathe and I saw two of everything just like in the cartoons which I didn't think really happens but now know it does. I might've been bleeding on the inside or who knows what. But I didn't tell anyone because I was afraid it would be my fault.

And just last week, I was driving home in the middle of the day which I never do, but I'd forgotten something, like a receipt or ticket stub, something—I don't know what or maybe nothing, but I came home in the middle of the day and I saw them, I'm sure of it. They were facing each other, his arms around her waist on the porch where I'm standing now. When I looked again they were standing apart like nothing happened but I know what I saw. I pulled in the driveway, got what I came for and left. My wife Donna was yelling at

me from the porch, "Joe? Joe!" she yelled. Her voice floated away from me as I drove down the street. And same as before, my ears were ringing and it hurt to breathe.

Now I see Stan from the corner of my eyes again. This time he's floating by my house in a boat. He's waving his arms real big and seems to be yelling something at me through sheets of rain. He paddles towards me, but I wave him on. I cup my hands over my mouth and yell the words *Go on!* The water carries him away and before he has a chance to fight back his boat turns a corner with the current and is gone.

There's a porch swing at the other end of the porch, swinging by itself because the wind is coming up. So I sit in it. Because I can't think of what else to do. Because the water keeps coming. I know there is something beautiful about all this disaster lapping up against the foundations of my house.

The lawn is gone. The first three porch steps are gone too. If I close my eyes I can almost feel the house begin to rock with the floodwaters, like a boat about to break.