

*The
Old Dirt Road*



The Old Dirt Road

*By
M. C. Russell*

The Old Dirt Road



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the stream enters the river,
the river flows to the sea;
so The Old Dirt Road goes
to its predestined end.*

When I was a child I visited my aunt who lived in the Ozarks of southwestern Missouri. These visits continued until I was in my twenties when she died but my memories live on. I was born and raised in the city but never enjoyed urban life; for me, life in the city was stressful, tumultuous and impersonal. Cities are not friendly places; everything is so rushed and chaotic. I always looked forward to the times I could leave the city and find sanctuary with my aunt in the Ozarks.

It was a long trip and just getting out of the city into open country was a relief. It was a breath of fresh air and a calming effect on a stressful life. After about a hundred miles was a large town where the highway was left behind and the journey turned east on a paved two lane road. A village was soon reached where the trip resumed its southerly direction; however, on this road the true nature of the Ozarks became evident.

Wild life became a common sight and the smell of fresh mown Alfalfa filled the air.

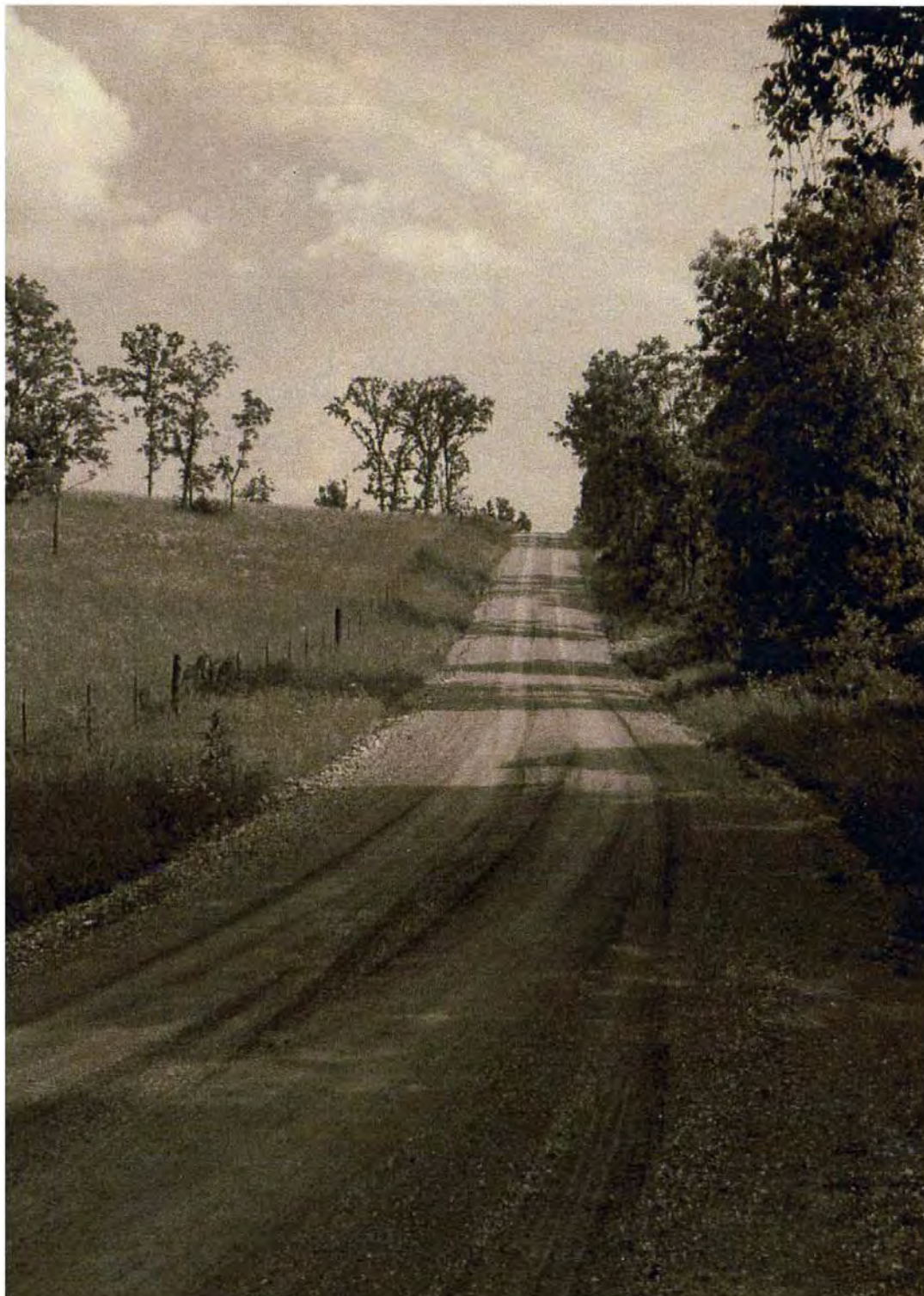
Many babbling brooks were crossed over on quaint old bridges. The people were different too; every time someone was met on the road, they waved and smiled. Along this road one could see many old dirt roads wandering off into the distance. Some of these old dirt roads were actual thoroughfares while others ended up at someone's farmhouse. Every mile along the rolling hills of southwestern Missouri carried sights, sounds and odors that brought peace, serenity and calm to a troubled heart.

At last The Old Dirt Road appeared that would eventually end up at my aunt's farm. Five miles and hour was top speed on The Old Dirt Road which was narrow, rutted and rough. In those days it didn't take much of a rain to cause a car to get bogged down on The Old Dirt Road. Horses or a tractor were then called upon to pull the car to the end of its journey. There were no bridges on The Old Dirt Road and the two streams it traversed were driven through, not over. After crossing through a creek I was on my

aunt's property at last. One final hill to climb and I would be there.

It was a Norman Rockwell setting. The quaint house with two front doors was built in the classic T shape and sat within a neatly mowed fenced in yard. In the yard laid a Golden Retriever. Farther out in the yard was a well with an old oaken bucket hanging from a rope. A bicycle was usually found leaning upon a tree. My aunt had six grandsons as one could see from all the toys scattered over the yard. Outside the fenced-in area was the great red barn, the chicken house, the smoke house and - - the privy.

My aunt always came rushing out of the house to greet me with open arms and I could already smell the meal she was preparing. Everything was home made, even the noodles. One of the most striking things about the place was the quietness. It was possible to hear the gentle gurgling of the creek a mile away.





The first thing that comes with southern hospitality is eating and it didn't matter what the arrival time was it was time to eat. Everything was home grown; cows and pigs were butchered and cured right there on the farm. There were barnyard chickens that made great chicken dinners and all the fresh eggs one could eat. A large garden produced wonderful fresh vegetables that lasted all winter because my aunt did - -canning. Food such as that was grander than any found in today's gourmet restaurants.

My aunt lived a primitive life like everyone else in the area. After her husband died she ran the farm herself. All of her so-called "civilized" siblings who lived in the city fretted that she would die in a fire because she had no electricity. The cook stove was a Kerosene six burner. The lamps were Kerosene and two pot bellied stoves furnished wood heat in the cold of winter. She even used real candles on the Christmas Tree. When "civilization" finally reached my aunt and she got electricity her beautiful old house burned flat from a

power surge caused by a faulty transformer on the pole outside. My aunt died three years later.

My trips to the Ozarks became less frequent after that but occasionally I visited some cousins. On one such trip I went to see my aunt's old farm. The Old Dirt Road was impassable to a vehicle by then because it had fallen into disrepair from lack of use. I walked The Old Dirt Road and after wading through the creek I climbed the hill where a scene opened up onto a heart wrenching vista. Nothing was left of the house except some of the foundation, however, the great barn remained standing in remarkably good condition. The other buildings were still there but would soon crumble into dust. The gateway that led into the yard was still in its familiar place.

I stayed in that hallowed spot for hours recalling the wonderful times I'd spent there. As I sat in the middle of what was left of The Old Dirt Road I recalled memories of a time long gone. The quiet

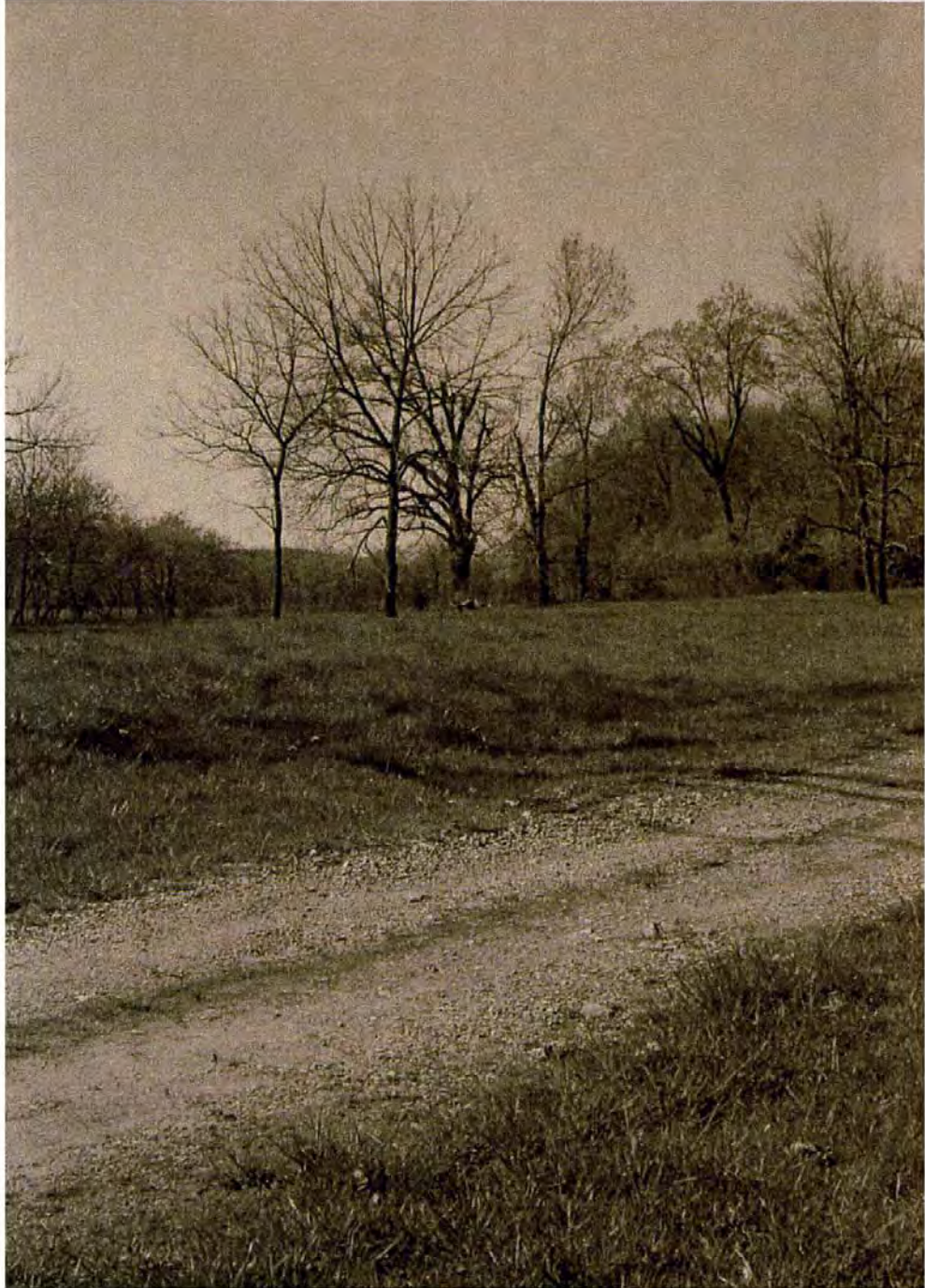
was impenetrable. It was a shrine to a time long gone never to return. I left my sacred grounds with a heavy heart knowing that such times were lost to the past never to be experienced by anyone ever again.

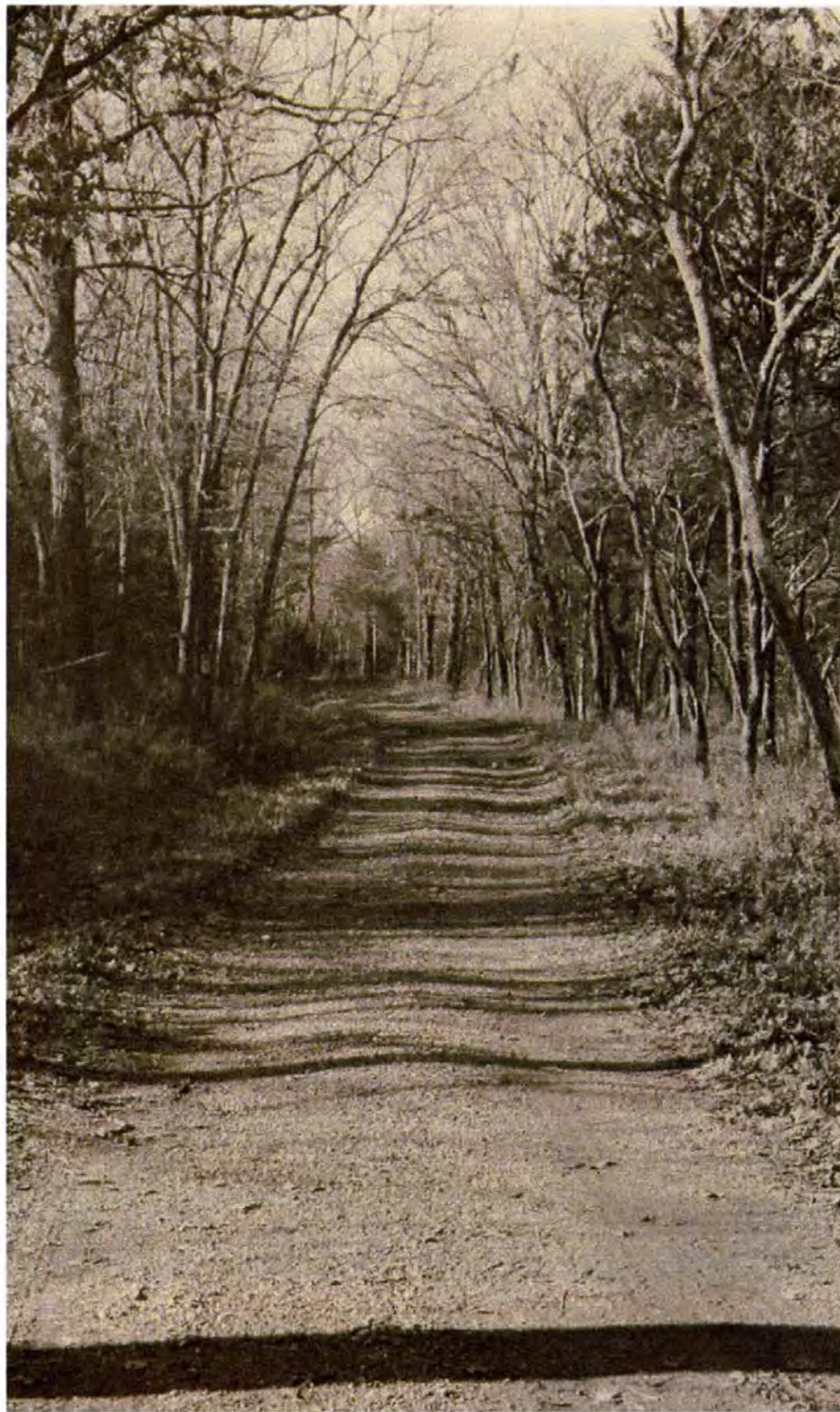
Dirt roads build character. I feel sorry for the person who has never walked barefoot along an old dirt road or waded through a creek to get across. What an opportunity to commune with the earth upon which we live. A dirt road teaches patience. A dirt road takes its time. A dirt road is a joy to the senses because there is so much to be seen with each step taken. A dirt road is honest, because it can't be cheated, lied to or taken advantage of by anyone. A dirt road broadens the mind because it is a path to awareness that reveals how grand The Universe is and where a human being fits into its scheme of things. That is a humbling experience. A dirt road mellows the temper with the slow deliberate pace it demands. A dirt road teaches one how to be alone. People have become afraid to be

alone - afraid of silence. People look upon dirt roads with disdain thinking they portray poverty, ignorance and backward living. Those who have lived along these roads were, perhaps, not the most formally educated people in the world; however, they were among the wisest. Hillbilly wisdom is nothing to be sneered at - -or tampered with.

Walking along a dirt road in silence gives one more to hear, see and learn than in all the clamor urban life produces. In the wind are messages, lessons and lore that can't be learned in a classroom or from a book. Listen to the wind and it will talk to you because this wind can only be heard along The Old Dirt Road.

The Old Dirt Road at night is an awesome experience. People nowadays would be horrified to be left alone on such a road on a moonless night. Little do they know they would be in a place of safety, peace and serenity. Along The Old Dirt Road every-





thing has its place in the scheme of things day or night and that order is respected by all who traverse or live along its way.

The Old Dirt Road did not go from point A to point B in the shortest way possible. It was a considerate road that meandered from one place to another where it was needed and useful. The Old Dirt Road was compassionate and never bulldozed a home or a garden to make its way through the countryside. The Old Dirt Road detoured around such things and left them undisturbed. The Old Dirt Road never used the law of eminent domain to take somebody's property and home away from them. The Old Dirt Road existed to serve, not to be served.

I am old now and my days are numbered. Today I live on The Old Dirt Road. I've been back here for nearly a dozen years now. The Old Dirt Road's days are numbered also. Dirt roads are no longer considered things of beauty, serenity and wonder. Now, they are considered blights

on civilization- -dirty- -unsophisticated. Developers are approaching from two directions. In developments dirt roads are totally unacceptable. Even giant trees are bulldozed away so a multi-thousand dollar house can sit on a bare acre with manicured grass and bought flowers. Things of beauty such as wild flowers, wild animals and common folk are the scourge of developments- -things to be eliminated as soon as possible.

Soon The Old Dirt Road will be gone forever along with its kind that have stretched over the land for many years. No more will children grow up playing in the dust and rocks that make them up because children are hermitically sealed nowadays. They are kept as far away from nature as possible never to know what it feels like to pet a cow, feed the chickens or ride a horse. They will never know the sights, sounds and wonders that can only be experienced along an old dirt road. Nevertheless The Old Dirt Road

still whispers to all who will listen. If you listen you can hear its call saying, "come to me; walk my way and find peace in the pathless woods, and rapture by a lonely stream. Come to me and know the joy of life as it is meant to be".

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The Old Dirt Road Series
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