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Stories of Eureka Springs: A Multimedia Package

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“Stories of Eureka Springs: A Multimedia Package”

written by

Mattie Alexander

and submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for completion of

the Carl Goodson Honors Program

meets the criteria for acceptance

and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

thesis director

second reader

third reader

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program director

Date *May 15, 2018*

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For the online publication, go to <https://storiesofeurekaspr.wixsite.com/website>

Thesis Statement

Through an online medium, I will self-publish original content focusing on aspects of life and history of Eureka Springs, Arkansas. The content will be diversified through both written and visual media, in efforts to showcase journalistic ability and provide the most practical means of story-telling for each piece.

Research Methods

I first came through Eureka Springs when I was about 10 years old. My family used to have a class-C RV that, for the most part, we never used except for one or two times a year, when we would take it for a short vacation before parking it in its storage shed where it belonged. Nevertheless, I had so many great memories on that RV. The main attraction of this particular excursion was Branson, Missouri, but on the way home, we parked the Big Dog (our affectionate name for our mobile living space) in Eureka Springs near the Passion Play. Our stay was barely longer than two nights, but something about the town made me beg my parents to return there any time we considered a weekend trip.

There were several things that drew me to the Springs. I liked how close together everything was and how all of the houses looked like something from a deep-south movie. I liked going into the stores on Main Street and talking with the always-friendly shop owners. I liked looking through the galleries of fine art that, though expensive, made me feel like I was welcomed and encouraged to gawk over the work rather than excluded because I was wearing jeans and tennis shoes. I liked how the old buildings seemed to hide secrets within the walls from the buildings past and while part of that

also creeped me out, I was intrigued to know more of the history. All in all, I liked the small town feel that still retained the activity of a city.

As I got older, I began to notice more about Eureka Springs that I liked. I noticed that a rainbow flag and a confederate flag could decorate two different store fronts right beside each other, and pleasant words could still be exchanged between the owners. I saw churches and new age stores. I even heard rumors that Eureka Springs hosted plenty of satanic and wiccan worship. I saw true Arkansas hillbillies sit in the same cafes as old hippies. Eureka Springs truly is a place of harmony. It has its problems, but as I looked at the rest of the United States and Eureka Springs, I noticed that the Eureka Springs had one thing different: tolerance.

Though I hail from Oklahoma City, I have found a home in Arkansas. I have fallen in love with the land and the people. While I feel I could write about any town in Arkansas and it could hold my interest, Eureka Springs attracted me from the time I was a child and has continued to draw me as a college senior. As a mass communications major who wants to pursue written journalism, I wanted to create material that would grow my writing, interview and story creating skills. While taking Online Media at OBU, I was introduced to the idea of a multimedia package as a way to tell a story from many different angles. The class offered growth in design, writing, video and photography. A multimedia package is the perfect way for a future journalist to display a variety of skills. Though I was able to do this through taking the class, I wanted to take the idea a level further by making another. This time, I wanted to focus on Eureka Springs.

I couldn't create this for the class due to the extensive hours I would need to spend in Eureka Springs, but I was still interested in approaching a place I had grown to adore through the eyes of a journalist. I wanted to, for the first time, assign myself my own stories and interact with people as a professional rather than a student. I wanted to allow myself the freedom to find stories within the town rather than deciding on the story I would tell before I even came in contact with the town. In the end, I wanted the experience of being a journalist outside of school so I could discover the town rather than plan for it. I discovered quite a bit.

My first step was to do prior research on the town. I wanted to understand the basics of what the town was and how it came to be. Though thousands of tourists travel to Eureka Springs each year, the town is a permanent home to only 2,073 people. Eureka is known for its steep hills, quaint shops and political diversity, as portrayed in *Peace in the Valley*, a 2016 short documentary of conservative and liberal residents preparing for a major vote concerning LGBT rights. The town has a reputation for a rich history and diversity while maintaining a small-town Arkansas environment.

My next step was to formulate my questions and stories. I created a list of story ideas that interested me and narrowed it down to five stories: the underground, the life of a shop owner, the history of Eureka through the eyes of a long-term resident, the religious harmony and the art culture. In the end, I had three stories instead of five, with two of them being original story ideas: the history and the art culture. My third story came to me in my second visit to Eureka Springs as I was exploring the Crescent Hotel. I became curious as to how such an old hotel still managed to keep rooms filled and

how modernization takes place in historic buildings. The other stories never materialized due to a variety of reasons. In the story of Eureka's underground, the contact never got back to me. I merged the life of a shop owner with the art culture story, as it became much larger than what was originally anticipated. I was disappointed to let go of my story on the religious harmony of Eureka Springs as that was the story I was most excited about. Unfortunately, my contacts for the non-Christian sides of the story did not get back to me, and in the interest of a non-biased story, I decided to simply try it again at another time.

Before I went on the excursion, I made one contact to ensure a worthwhile trip to Eureka Springs. I contacted the local library and asked the historical resource center for any generational residents who were closely tied to the town, knowledgeable about its history and willing to do an interview. They put me in touch with a charming elderly woman named June. After getting in touch with June, we set up a time to meet for an interview.

Then, I needed to experience the town, once again, for myself. Though I had been several times before, this was my first opportunity to experience the town as a journalist. Over spring break 2017, I brought my boyfriend and my parents with me to Eureka Springs.

On my first day, I walked up and down Main Street. Though excited by the project, I was both overwhelmed and intimidated. I had a lot of possibilities for a story, and honestly, I was terrified of the prospect of rejection. Soon though, I would find that this fear was completely unnecessary. I entered a shop called the Eureka Springs Fine

Arts Gallery to have a look around. I was warmly greeted by a woman named Barbara Thompson who explained to me a little about the gallery. Mustering up my courage, I explained to Barbara who I was and what I was in town to do and if she would be interested in being interviewed for the art culture section of my project. Not only was Barbara completely willing to be interviewed, but she called her fellow artists who displayed work in that gallery to come be interviewed as well. At the end of the day, I had interviewed six artists, all coming from different backgrounds who all ended up in a small town in Arkansas. The interviews were conducted in a video format as to allow for visual representation of their art work.

The next day, I interviewed June. I visited her one-room cabin home just outside of town. At the door, my boyfriend, Will, and I were greeted by an aggressively affectionate cat named Topaz, who insisted that he was to be the center of attention for the morning. Will assisted me by making sure Topaz was happy while I interviewed Miss June (which resulted in an allergic reaction, prompting our discovery that he is allergic to cats). The interview consisted of me asking one question of Miss June, and her talking about her family and the history of Eureka Springs for the remaining hour and a half.

The remainder of the trip was a combination of me chasing down leads that led to nowhere and, of course, enjoying the break as a vacation. I was dissatisfied at the conclusion of the trip with my material. I had been given great interviews that I was excited about, but I still felt it wouldn't be enough to make a project. Therefore, at the end of the summer, I took another trip to Eureka Springs to look for another story lead. I

experienced the ever-dreaded writer's block that seemed difficult to overcome, so I decided to spend the day exploring Eureka, taking pictures and looking for inspiration for my next piece.

After walking up what seemed to be the tallest hill in the Ozarks, I happened upon the Crescent Hotel. I had visited the hotel previously, but I had not remembered how to get to it, so it was by my wandering that I was able to come across the historic site. The hotel had always piqued my interest with the professed ghosts that haunted the halls and the expansive and intriguing history. I decided then that I wanted to do a piece over the hotel so I asked the front desk to provide me with the contact information of the director of marketing.

Bill Ott returned to me within the day. By the time he reached out to me, I decided that the spin I wanted to take for the story was related to my own field of study: how do you market an old hotel? Bill walked me through the history of the hotel and gave me an inside look into the hotel's industry and secrets of the trade. At the interview's conclusion, he made sure to thank me, or rather my school, for an alma mater that taught him how to spell Ouachita.

One key aspect about my Eureka Springs connections is the way I formed a relationship with them. As a journalist, I wanted my subjects to feel that they could speak freely with me, and wanted to be a part of the project. To do this, I knew I had to offer something in return. Because I planned to publish my work online, I had a unique opportunity to offer to link with their own sites as a way of promoting, while not necessarily advertising, their name or brand. This was also beneficial to me because

linking between sites helps to pull websites up on popular search engines. By forming a mutually beneficial relationship, I was able to get the material I needed while providing a simple service.

Something Old, Something New: A Look at the Crescent Hotel

The Crescent Hotel, built in 1886, continues to be an escape for travelers from around the nation. With 95 percent of weekends sold out, the historic hotel thrives in the remote Ozark mountains of Eureka Springs, Arkansas. So how does an old-limestone hotel find business in a modern world dominated by iPhones and Netflix? Does the history of the Crescent drive the consumers away, or entice them to be a part of the narrative? Bill Ott, director of marketing and communications, leans toward the latter.

“There are so many people who come to see us who are generational,” Ott explained. “Their parents brought them here. Their grandparents brought them here. We make lifetime memories for the new guests just like they heard about, or for the older guests as they remember it. It’s easy to be traveling down the highway and see a sign for a king double for \$59. Our rooms don’t rent for that, but they get a whole lot more than just a cinder block room with a bed, shower and clean towels. They get to stay in a historic monument.”

Those lifetime memories come at the cost of preservation. In 1997, two bids battled for the vacant pile of limestone after the hotel faced foreclosure in 1992. One bid

had hopes of renovating the hotel and restoring its former glory, and the other had hopes of turning it into a chicken coop. Fortunately, the hotel went to Marty and Elise Roenigk, who were preservationists first and hotel owners second. They laid down about \$7 million for refurbishment and sought out a staff who shared a common goal: to protect the irreplaceable. Marty Roenigk, who passed away in 2009 in an automobile accident, set a goal that within five years of beginning renovations, the Crescent would be returned to its glory days. He accomplished this with time to spare.

“Unfortunately, many historic hotel owners will take the money they make and put it in their pockets,” Ott said. “ But Mrs. Roenigk puts that money back into the hotel. The first thing she did was put together a team of like-minded people who appreciate the historic aspect of the property and are willing to live up to its creed.”

The dedication not only to preservation, but also to excellent service, propelled the Crescent to the reputation it has today. The hotel was recently chosen as Southern Living’s Best Hotel in Arkansas. Ott attributes this honor to the Crescent’s commitment to making sure the hotel guests have an enjoyable and pleasant experience with the hotel.

With any business, it is critical to always be innovating to better the product. For a historic hotel, innovation may not be the best way to do business. The Crescent continues to draw in travelers not because it creates something new, but rather dusts off and shines the things that are old.

“Before the Roenigks bought the hotel, the previous owners had heard stories of possible paranormal activity,” Ott explained. They were scared to tell those stories, but

when the Roenigks bought it, their attitude was if it was a story about our history, let's tell people those stories. So they started conducting ghost tours."

If you were to walk into the Crescent Hotel today and ask a staff member if the hotel is haunted, they won't give you the answer you're looking for, whether that's yes or no. They will simply say that they have enough reports from guests who say they have had a paranormal experience which might lead one to believe that the hotel is haunted.

"We never want to say 'yes it is' or 'no it isn't' because that is up to the individual," Ott said.

As the Crescent continued to dive into the history within its walls, they decided to uncover history deep beneath itself: the morgue. In 2013, the morgue that brought the hotel infamy for the paranormal was reopened to the public.

"Yes, our hotel has a morgue," laughed Ott. "Doesn't everyone?"

For a small period of time between 1937 and 1939, the Crescent was referred to as "The Baker Cancer Curing Hospital, 'Where Sick Folks Get Well.'" Tragically, the sick would be far from well at the hospital. Norman Baker, the founder of the hospital, had previously had attempts in theatre, education and radio businesses. It is safe to say he had no medical experience. Baker's emphasis on business and neglect of ethical medicinal practices led to the deaths of many patients. Fortunately, it also led to Baker's arrest in 1939.

In the meantime, the morgue was used to study cancer in the patients who had passed. A large walk-in cooler acted as a place to store cadavers and body parts to be studied. Years later, the morgue would host what The Atlantic Paranormal Society

(TAPS) called "the holy grail of ghost hunting." The moment was caught for a Syfy Network "Ghost Hunters" feature episode when the thermal imaging camera picked up a full-body apparition in front of a locker labeled "2".

While the morgue was always included in the ghost tour at the Crescent, until 2013 it had doubled as maintenance storage. Now it serves to entertain guests curious about the paranormal world within the Crescent Hotel.

"One of the neat things about the paranormal aspect of our hotel is that we don't market it that way," explained Ott. "I know we have a ghost tour and we have americasmosthauntedhotel.com, but we market our hotel as a mountain top spa resort."

Though the Crescent does draw in paranormal enthusiasts, it also draws in those just looking for a resort get away. In fact, the Crescent's number one market is weddings. The hotel hosts about 300 weddings per year with many brides following in the steps of their mothers who also married at the Crescent. The second biggest market is romantic weekends for couples, followed by families, groups, and meetings. While the paranormal may not be for everyone, the ghosts don't seem to scare away any of the other patrons.

The message is clear: the Crescent Hotel is for everyone. Advertising that message, however, is a little more complicated.

"I started working here just after the Roenigks bought the hotel," explained Ott, "so we've gone from print, TV, radio and other old advertising and marketing techniques to forming an online presence. We have somewhere between 36 to 39 websites all leading to the front doors of our hotel. We still do some traditional

advertising, but our emphasis is electronic media. We have stayed in front of the trends so we don't have to catch up. We embrace new technology and new ways to market online. Its a modern way to market a historic hotel."

Ott partners with a director of digital marketing to form the whole hotel marketing department. They collaborate to not only tell the story of the Crescent, but entice travelers to find their escape in the hotel. Staying ahead of the constantly changing trends keeps both the small marketing department and the check-in desk busy. Associating with Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism and Historic Hotels of America has also helped direct the Crescent to target markets.

While it may be a challenge to expand an old hotel, the Crescent has battled stagnation through obtaining more properties to increase occupancy such as the Crescent Cottages and the Lookout Cottages. The Roenigks also transformed a beer joint into the New Moon Spa to improve guests' experiences. Like any good business, the Crescent continues to push for quality for the guests and quantity for the hotel.

"In five to ten years," mused Ott, "our goal is to consistently have full occupancy seven days a week. When that happens, we will smile and we keep working to keep that up."

The Artists of Eureka Springs: Video Transcripts

1. Barbara Thompson

I think a lot of people call me the tree person, but I love to do trees, and I do mostly birch and aspen trees. I've been in Eureka Springs since 1998 from Minnesota. We moved here because of the weather, but we also moved here because of the art. I was really starting to get very much more into my art. I did art in Minnesota, but I wasn't selling my work and then when we moved here I went into my art professionally full-time, and I did shows throughout the country. Then I was at the art colony that we had here in Eureka Springs for four years, and then four years ago we started this gallery together. We were all in other galleries, but they wanted us to be exclusive. This is a small town, and we needed to have more. We couldn't sell enough at that one gallery so we opened our own gallery. We got together, we're all friends; we knew each other, and we wanted to see what would work. So here it is now, three-and-a-half years later. We're all still together and we're doing quite well.

I call it a Soulful Painter. That's the name of my website. When I went to school, I got a psychology degree late in life. I took lots and lots of art classes, but I didn't get a major in it. I got in my major in Psychology because I was going to be an art therapist,

and you need a master's degree to do anything in art therapy. I like art part whole lot better than psychology part. But I still like to paint that way. I don't like to call it birch tree with yellow or something. Some of my paintings are called aloof. Whisper. Imagine. So I name my paintings after a feeling and how I feel about that painting.

And... I like color. So I have a lot of red paintings. Red is cool. I like red. I like yellow. I like fall. I'm not a realist. I don't really love the word representational, but I'm more of an abstract landscape artist.

Being around other artists is what inspires me. We help each other. We critique each other's works, and it's just good to be together because we just learn so much. Most of us teach by the way. I do teach at Eureka Springs School of the Arts. This will be my fourth year teaching. I teach acrylics and oil but with a palette knife. I forgot to mention that, but most of my paintings are done with a knife. I like that texture. It's just a really good group of people. There's wonderful people that live here in Eureka Springs, and there's a benefits almost every week. We try to help each other out. I just love the community. The community is just really cohesive. I don't know... it's about love. It wasn't like that and then bigger cities. You didn't go to the grocery store and run into your friends. I love living in a small community and walk down the street. When somebody comes to town, I bring them to all the stores and it's all, "Hi, Barb! How are you?" That's never happened to me before. I just love being here.

2. John Rankine

Love will take you to strange places. I'm originally from Toronto, Canada. I moved to Key West, Florida, and then I met my partner, now my husband. He had lived here before so he said, "You need to come visit this great little place called Eureka Springs." I started as a photojournalist for a newspaper that was started back in 1999, and I was doing a lot of found objects of assemblage pieces.

I like finding little items and putting them all together to make some stuff up. I started using the found objects and photographing them. I like to breathe symbolic life into inanimate objects by staging them and putting them together. This was a series of baby head lamps is called Headlights. I think there was thirty in the series. It started with a dolls head and it kind of expanded from there. These are cast-porcelain heads that I have made. Another artist friend of mine had casted them, and then I would hand paint them and do different looks. So basically I was looking for anything with a hole in it, and it became just another series of sculptures I was working on.

It's called Super Love. It has two Superman dolls that I found at a yard sale. I just thought I liked the sort of the homoerotic element, and, you know, I was just playing around with the dolls, and I settled on this Photograph just because it was a really sweet. They are exactly the same doll, but with the way they are positioned and lit, they look like two separate sort of people.

Well, Eureka Springs is definitely a progressive pocket in Arkansas I mean that's the absolute truth. I could not get away with doing anything like this in Berryville, which is across the river, or Green Forest. People come here and they're not too shocked by the stuff. I'll get some looks with some of my work, but for the most part people are fairly

sophisticated. Some of the things I do are supposed to have a little bit of a shock factor. They should have a little edge to them. I like that edge and I go for that edge. I wouldn't be living here in Eureka Springs if it wasn't such a progressive, creative community. I wouldn't be in Arkansas if it wasn't for Eureka Springs. There is other progressive pockets, like Fayetteville which is about an hour away. I wouldn't be doing this anywhere in a conservative environment.

3. Larry Mansker

I have thought a lot about this. I can write a long long long chapter about it so I'm going to try to keep it quick. I was living in California. California got crazy. This was 1990. California got too crazy for me. I wanted to move to somewhere quieter. I grew up in Missouri. I wanted to get back to the Midwest cause I lived on either coast and I wanted it a little quieter. I spent a year searching the Midwest, and I was in the process of buying a big hotel to convert into a studio near Kansas City. I happened to come down here after going across the country. Washington, Oregon, North Carolina, Kentucky, Louisiana. Well, I knew I didn't want to be in Louisiana, but and then I came to Eureka. I was here 10 minutes and that was it. I saw the artists. I talked to some of the galleries. The town was fantastic. Ten minutes after a year. Six months later start building a house or a studio.

I like to paint what's in style. I think those were done when those colors were in style in the 90s. You end up meeting everybody. After awhile you meet everybody, and being an artist, there's a certain you know comradery. I've known them all for forever.

About three years ago, we thought it would be a good idea to start a gallery so we started a gallery.

Back before the recession, all of us made a lot of money. There was money floating everywhere. After the recession, it kind of quieted it down. They stop building buildings. They stopped buying art. So it got a little slower. The society has changed. It's more of a casual society, now. I see casual work is kind of popular now. Our artwork kind of matches are music style. We all made a living by being non casual, kind of more little more sophisticated. Well, that's speaking for me. I made a living being a little more sophisticated. Sophistication is not popular now. We hope that somebody sophisticated drops by let's put it that way. We have a lot of people that aren't drop by. That's the society.

It's quiet here, and the people are fantastic. The people that moved here are very successful people. They've done very well. They're tired of the Rat Race, so they moved here and they're very pleasant to be around. That's what Eureka means to me, and plus there are lots and lots of artists, but not only artists, but people who own companies and people who've been very successful in the world and just tired of the Rat Race and they want to move here and have her quieter life. So I that's the main thing about Eureka plus their lots and lots and lots and lots of artists.

4. Drew Gentle

I actually came down here in the early 70s. I spent the summer on a commune. Fairly near here and kind of fell in love with the country. I always thought that when I got older, I would like to move there. Which is kind of what I did.

Both of my parents worked for Disney. I grew up in the business. If you Google me, it's like three pages long. It's like I'm a dead person. I was never heart and soul into animation, though I was surrounded by people who loved it. I was, for the most part, better than them. I had a high level of talent that got me through. I was looking for a community. In spite of a fifty year career, I could count my friends on one hand. So I moved here, happily. I moved in 2007, and in 2009, I started painting these babies.

My drawings I think of people literally turned inside out. It has less to do with what we look like than our emotional content inside. I'm trying to put all the emotions. Something about working in animation, I have multiple views going on at one time, showing different aspects of a person's character.

These old timers have been doing art work for forty years. I've only started in the last ten, so in a lot of ways I'm like a young kid.

I choose this place to live because it's a great place to live, and it's absolutely beautiful here. After living in Los Angeles all my life... oh my God. Had to get out of LA for another reason. It is the home of entertainment, and being able to differentiate between entertainment and art in the town where everyone feels everything has a price was difficult. So I came here on purpose to get away from that. I needed a good peaceful place with good people.

I did Scooby Doo and Yogi Bear which started in 1965 as a 17 year old. Even when I came here they still wanted me. I am doing Curious George right now. I have a skill set that is rare. If they keep paying me, I'll keep doing it. Unless I can start selling these well. Then I can stop doing the animation. Which would be nice.

5. Denise Ryan

Well my family has been in Eureka Springs since the early 1880s. I've always had living relatives here. I still have living relatives here, although I did not grow up here. My great-great-uncle was the builder of the railroad here. He was one of the builders involved with a group of townsmen who built the city basically. The Crescent Hotel, St. Elizabeth's Church and a number of homes and other buildings.

I liked the area, I was ready for a move and I was tired of the big city. I had always lived in the round big cities most of my life. So this seemed like a nice change of life.

I've painted in nearly all media. I've painted in watercolor, atemporal, acrylic, pen and ink, oils and pastels. Pastels were an important medium for me for years, but the dust started to affect my health, so I stopped doing pastels. No I primarily paint in oils.

Troll dolls came into fashion again, and my daughter was a big collector of troll dolls. Needless to say, I've got quite a few of them at my house. So I just started inserting them into situations, so there is humor in all the paintings with the troll dolls.

I primarily did figurative work. Figures portraits for years and years, and although I always did still lifes, occasionally about 10-15 years ago, I started to enjoy the still lifes more. But I didn't want to do a traditional still life in the sense that the one bottle of

fruit, but and I didn't want to stop the eye from going into the space of the painting, so I created skies and landscapes. Although I generally simplify them somewhat because it's not a landscape per se like Ernie's are, you know where the landscape is the subject the background basically is a backdrop for the objects in painting. Sometimes they're symbolic. Sometimes they're just chosen because they're like jewels. The colors and the shapes. I just think they're lovely, but the larger ones with a landscape and the sky backgrounds tend to be more a little more surreal. I let things float or exist in midair. I don't necessarily feel that gravity is a necessity in a painting.

We want to have variety. We wanted to show the various ways art can be made. We would love to have more three-dimensional art, but we don't have space for it. We do have guest shows bring in artists with smaller pieces three-dimensional sculptural or ceramic or crafts so since we're all two-dimensional artists. It was important to have the variety.

It's a quiet life here. We don't have a rat race. I like being an artist at this point. Especially at this point in my life because kids are grown up and out. I just devote my life to the things I want to do which mainly is art.

6. John Willer

I'm from Rochester New York, so I turned left at Cleveland. Actually I was in the south for quite a while and found out about the Eureka Springs. I won't go into the whole story. just living down south in Alabama and Memphis and sooner or later I found out

about the school of Memphis. I went there for four years of college and then came to Eureka Springs.

Well it's a girl. I met my wife at the Art Academy in Memphis, and we decided to come here that's that. Part of the story is of a military service and redstone for three years.

Oh we're friends we decided to open up a gallery a few years ago, and this is our second location, but we're keeping our heads above water here in Eureka Springs. It's not easy right now.

I like to create things. It's not always with paint, but I'm in such a limited space right now that I have to refrain from going too big or too crazy. I love acrylic art colors. I like to paint more of an abstract idea Maybe even if there's a scene there, kind of make it a little more fancy than what's really there. I'm not a realist.

It's just the pace is different here. I've been in the South a long time. We're having kind of a slump. We're still selling and doing all right. People take on commissions and things like that. We're trying to have a gallery, a step above just a flea market. Right now, it's location. It's getting more people up here. You could be located 20 feet from one building that's doing gangbusters and you're doing nothing. It's a strange place. So we're working on keeping the galley open. A lot of us a little older and in retirement age. I know I am. I don't have to do this, but I want to do it, and I think

everybody in here is doing it because they want to do it. I couldn't do anything else. I'm too old to change, anyway, and I'm just gonna see it out to the end and enjoy.

Through the Eyes of a Native

If you were to walk around Eureka Springs today, you would be greeted by charming old houses painted every color in the rainbow, a moving, but not quite busy, Main Street lined with small-local businesses selling art, food and other goods. You would see many local people and many people from all over the United States and even the world. You would sit in the park and enjoy the songs of an old man playing an acoustic guitar. He isn't playing because he needs the money from tips, but because he loves making the sound. The gentle strums of the guitar are only interrupted by the roars of motorcycles as they cruise into town for a lunch break before continuing on the winding roads of the Ozarks.

Visitors surround you, meeting up with other family members and wrestling novelties out of shopping bags to boast in their finds. The pure-fresh air is only artificially sweetened slightly by a bakery across the street. It doesn't matter if it is hot because you have plenty of shade from the trees on the hill. A slight chill won't bother you either. It's nothing a light denim jacket can't fix.

The only problem in your future is deciding on a good local eatery to sample for lunch. Are you up for a juicy burger at The Balcony Bar & Restaurant? Maybe just a chicken salad from Nibbles Eatery will do. Either way, there isn't a bad decision.

Eureka Springs evokes an idea of escaping. Getting far-far away from the busyness of the metros or the mundaneness of the suburbs. The idea of the Springs is to flee from whatever is hurting, restraining, hindering, attacking or depressing you and find refuge in the water.

Today, Eureka Springs is rarely recognized for its natural spring water other than a local bath house and of course the town's name. But in 1879, the natural springs caused a sensation. A year later, the word about a new spring in the Ozark mountains drew the attention of a family by the name of Johnson. Almost 140 years later, a charming and joyful woman named June Johnson still tells the story of not only her family, but of the people who came to build the quirky refuge that would come to be known as Eureka Spring, Arkansas.

"I was born in Greenwood Hollow," Miss June began. "You may not have noticed, but just back up the road toward town, there is a street that turns off to the right called Greenwood Hollow Road. If you drive or hike about a mile up the road, you end up in Greenwood Hollow. It's a very special tightly closed-in, rocky, tree-laden hollows that are so common in the Ozark region. Another mile up Greenwood Creek runs into Kings River which is our watershed area. My dad built a log cabin. They had five sons and a daughter by the time I was born late in the depression. I was born in that log cabin."

She was born Bonnie June Johnson. She has been a treasure in the Eureka Springs community her whole life. Everyone from the public library to the Eureka Springs touring facilities will tell you: If you are looking for information about the town, Miss June is the lady to see.

"I worked in tourism since I was 20 years old," Miss June stated proudly. "I have a lot of fun telling tourists about what it's like being here in the Ozark region and how important it is to all of us. I moved into town because it was necessary to give up our place in Greenwood Hollow so that we could go to Eureka Springs schools to complete our education. I have never had any desire to be any place else in the world. I never went to college. I became involved in educating myself as much as possible about my own part of the world," she said. "The first job I ever had was working for the Chamber of Commerce office. There was a wonderful old gentleman who had come to Eureka Springs in 1893. He road horseback back then. He would take people on horseback and wow them with the pristine wilderness we have here. His name was Samuel Alexander Leath. He was Mr. Eureka Springs. He had spent his entire life telling people why they should be in Eureka Springs instead of wherever they were in the rest of the world."

Mr. Leath served as a fine mentor to Miss June. He taught her a lot (but not everything) she knows of Eureka Springs. The Chamber of Commerce office was wallpapered with photos of the area Mr. Leath had taken, inspiring her love for the land and the town daily. But Miss June's hunger for knowledge outgrew even that of Mr. Leath. She decided to pursue her own family's history with the town, which led to a deeper understanding of why people were drawn to Eureka Springs. In fact, much of her

mother's side has been in the area since the early territorial days, before Eureka Springs was even an idea.

"When the Civil War began," Miss June explained, "it was unusually difficult, because families and neighbors could be totally divided. I know a family who lives just on the other side of the river, where the only two sons the parents had got on their horses and rode off when the war began. One rode north, and one rode south. They both survived and put the whole thing behind them. They lived side by side until the day they died."

"My great-great grandfathers and their family were unionists. They truly believed that if we lost the Union, it was all over for everybody. It was not a big question of slavery, because that was so little a part of our lives in this region. Most of my kinfolk who fought in the war were union soldiers," she said.

Miss June's family, like many others, felt the pain of a land torn apart by war. The invasion of troops who represented their own country, the loss of loved ones and the tension between friends and neighbors created a people in need of an escape.

"It all had to do with the fact that this was a period of time when people suffered greatly," Miss June explained.

In fact, she partially attributes the success of Eureka Springs to the effects of the war.

"You could die from almost anything back then because there was no real medical care or the kind of treatment that we know about today. It was a very difficult

time and you add to that the trauma of the Civil War, which had been lived out by the first pioneer settlers in this region.”

“They were people who had a great deal of faith in God and the way that God cares for his people,” Miss June said with a soft smile. “They were also constantly on the lookout for something that will help them more immediately. It was common for people who were seeking healing to go to a place where there was water, such as a spring. The area was still a wilderness in April of 1879, when suddenly people began to hear stories of a place with a number of cold water springs,” she said. “They heard about it from word of mouth of men who were there in hunting parties. There was one main spring and a whole bunch of other springs. To find the main spring, you looked for where the Osage Indians had carved out basins in the rocks to catch the water when it came off the hillside.”

Judge Saunders and Dr. Jackson, as Miss June identified them, were two of Eureka Springs’ best advertisers. Dr. Jackson recommended the spring to Judge Saunders, as he knew of no other way to help him to better health. So Judge Saunders took his son and went camping around the springs. When Judge Saunders, who was well known and respected in the region for his role in the state court system, began to talk about the healing he received from the spring water, people began to turn their attention to the spring.

As word began to spread, the people began to gather. People came from all over to drink and bathe in the healing waters. The colorful houses that decorate Eureka Springs today were substituted for small tents or even clothes lines with quilts dropped

over to create some illusion of privacy. You would wake up every day and go to the spring basins to fill a pail with the water. You would drink the water, bathe in it, soak pained areas of the body in it and just about anything else to relieve pain or bring about healing both physically and emotionally. Sure enough, miracles began to happen.

"They really believed that that were going to find something in this place that would help them," Miss June explained. "They were sure that others were finding healing and that they were going to find healing, too. You can call them miracle cures because they really happened. There is no doubt about that."

Was it something in the water? The word "eureka" translates into "I have found it." And that's exactly what these visitors believed. Many people did see benefits from the spring water and left the area better than they did when they arrived. However, health improvement was less to do with the contents of the water and more to do with the lifestyles the visitors had adopted. They thought the water had healing properties, so they began drinking lots of it. They walked up and down hills several times per day. They camped outside for long periods of time, and when they weren't getting more water, they were resting. Water, exercise, fresh air and rest all seem like health practices any doctor would recommend. And that is what the patients of Eureka Springs were getting.

It wasn't too long after people began to gather at the springs that entrepreneurs began to see business opportunities.

"Some very enterprising gentlemen started stage coach lines. They were from all four directions and they ran on a regular schedule, bringing people in large numbers to

the camp. The first businesses were built from simple things such as a man from a nearby town called Berryville. His name was Mr. Thornton and he decided to bring in wagon loads of canned goods, dry staple groceries, coffee, sugar and other things that people need. It was sort of the first general store that he just had in the back of his wagon. By 1882, a railroad to Eureka Springs was started, so people really began to plan for a great future for Eureka Springs.”

“The second business that was opened was a crude bathhouse,” Miss June said. “That provided probably wooden tubs, which we have some at the museum. There really were waterproof tubs that were made out of wood. They are as heavy as can be. The water was brought and heated to certain temperatures. There were all kinds of different opinions as to what temperatures were good for different kinds of treatment.”

The rest is history. The town kept growing and people kept coming. Today, visitors are still drawn to Eureka Springs as a means of escape, though perhaps rather than escaping from turmoil of a civil war or a serious illness they are escaping from high stress levels from work, family drama, depression or any other struggles to seek refuge from.

“When you get so down and out,” Miss June mused, “and this country was very down and out after the Civil War, you have one thing absolutely left. That’s your faith.”

As good and bad have continued through the century, visitors still have the faith that they can find revival in the hills of the Ozarks. Though most of the springs may be closed, people still seem to go where there is water. What actually revives them, seems to be more up to what they believe, than any other cure.