



*Rank by rank they stand
Silent rows of sentinels,
Until the wind blows.*



*My
Ozark
Home*

by Karen GoatKeeper

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This book is available in print and as a pdf ebook. More information can be found at the author's website: <http://www.karengoatkeeper.com>.

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*Down an Ozark road,
A leafy tunnel of trees,
The sunrise beckons.*

The Road

I first saw my road in early October. The black walnuts were mostly bare of leaves, but the other trees and bushes were filled with color. The color glowed and swept up overhead.

The next time I saw my road was from the cab of a moving van in early May. Wildflowers were blooming along the edges. The trees were green and lush making parts of the road into a green tunnel.

One of the great charms of living here in the rural Ozarks is my road. The gravel road itself stays much the same. The changes are along it as the seasons wax and wane through the year.

Over the winter road verges are dry and brown with a green paint on the ground. Warm weather coaxes the green into growing and blooming in whites, reds, yellows, oranges, blues and purples, so many colors.

Gravel roads do have drawbacks, especially this one with its many springs and seeps. Water digs potholes or spreads sheets of ice or stands in puddles. After big rains, water digs ditches across and along the road and skims off the surface to leave loose, rough, fist-sized gravel.

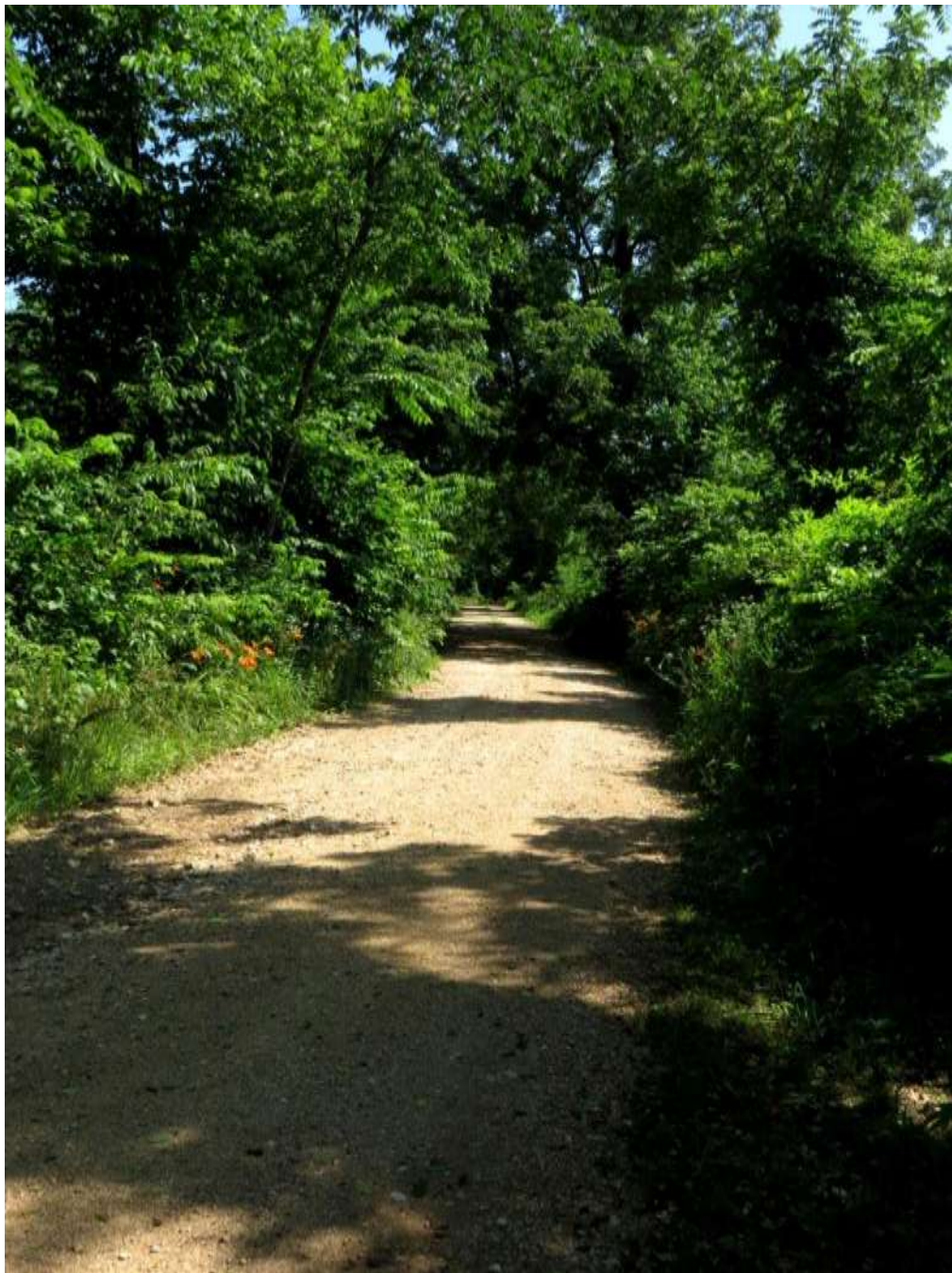
The road department sends a grader down to smooth off the rough spots and fill in the holes. Otherwise, the road just is. It has wide spots, narrow spots, blind curves, hills and valleys.

I drive up and down my road several times a week. Although the speed limit is 55 MPH, and some drivers try to do that, I drift along at 25 MPH taking mental notes about what is in bloom or what creatures are out and about. I often stop along the road to take pictures.

Other times, I walk along my road covering about a mile and a half of it each way. So many plants and flowers are small and easily overlooked driving by. Walking gives time to really look and enjoy not only the roadside, but the vistas stretching out from the road as well.

A gravel road seems to have a magnetism. The attraction for both creatures and me about the road is its openness. It provides a hard surface clear of undergrowth with its attendant ticks, thorns and burs. For snakes and lizards, the road surface is warm. For squirrels, it is a repository of nuts. For many creatures, it is an easy path from one place to another.

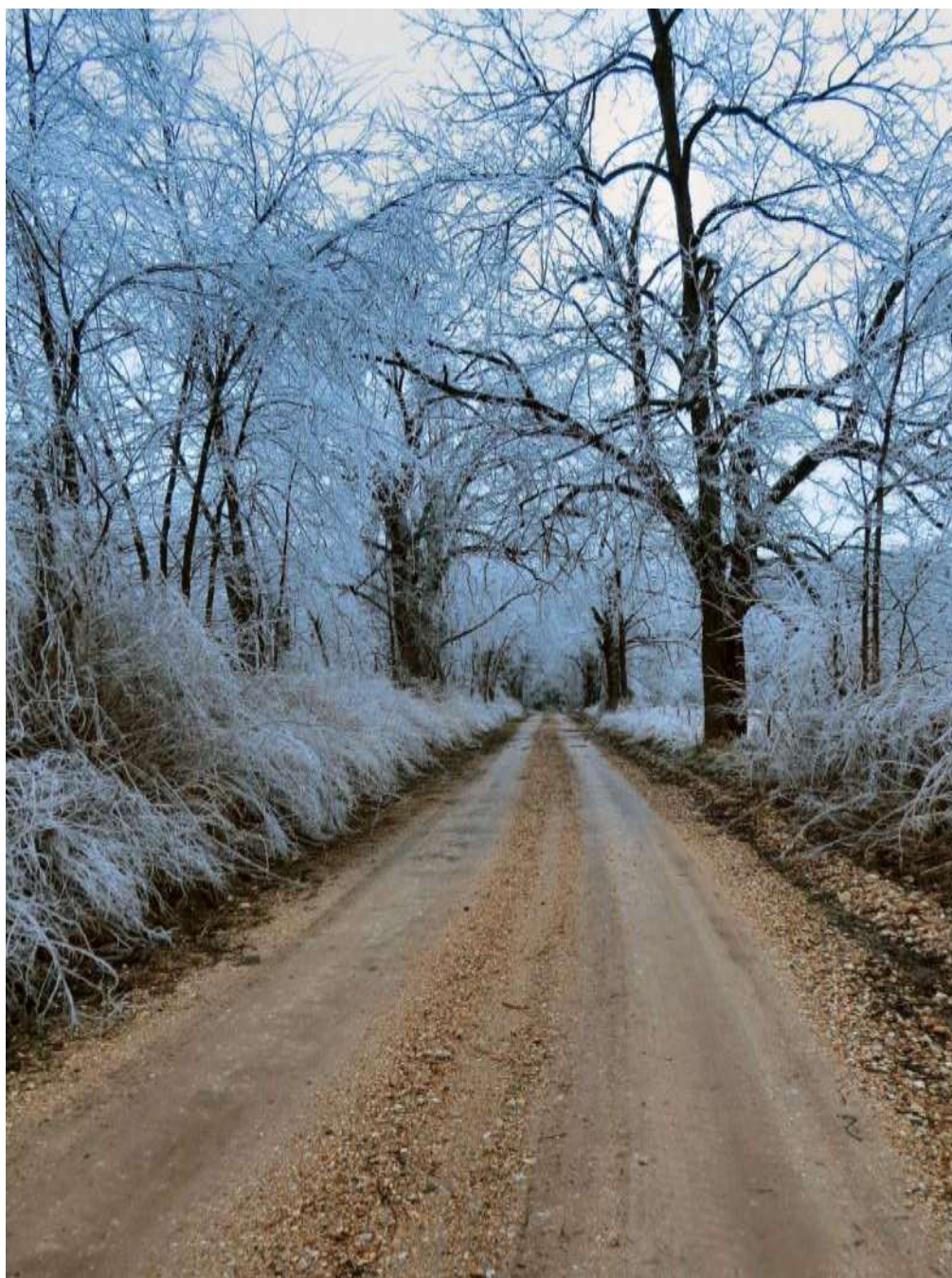
Are other Ozark roads like my road? So many are paved now and drivers fly down them ignoring everything around them. Even other gravel roads I've driven on have lacked the charm of mine. My road is a lucky choice for me and I hope to savor its charm for many years to come.



*A gravel ribbon
Swallowed by encroaching plants:
The road in summer.*



*Cool, crisp morning air,
Green becomes yellow and red,
Summer is shoved aside.*



*Ice covered branches
Clank, clatter in the breeze,
Nature's ice sculptures.*



*Snow descends softly,
Color fades to black and white,
The winter landscape.*



*An artist's palette
Pales beside the sun's colors
Heralding the dawn.*

Early Morning

There are night owls and early birds. I am an early bird. I love a bedroom window facing east.

Most mornings are routine. I get up, get dressed, feed the cats, make breakfast and start morning tasks. There are even mornings when I succumb to the desire to snuggle back under the covers for some extra snooze time.

Then there are the mornings I wake filled with longing to be outside. The hills have a siren call pulling me. This pull is physical, mental, like the pull of a magnet on an iron filing.

Covers are flung away. Clothes are tossed on. Cat food is dumped out. Camera is grabbed. I race out the door wanting to dance, to fly; indeed, my feet seem to fly me off across the bridge and out to the pastures and hills.

What makes a morning like this? I don't know. The morning may be warm or cold. It can be cloudy or clear. Something mysterious makes it a magical time.

Mist may shroud the pastures. Fog can obscure the hills. Sunrise may turn the world lemon yellow. Perhaps cloud streamers turn pink then salmon as the sky glows robin's egg blue.

Early mornings are usually quiet, empty of human noises. I stand silent. The air feels clear, surrounding and filling me. Woodpeckers drumming and bird songs break the silence.

Ecstasy, obsession fade into contentment. The walk back to morning chores is filled with quiet and peace.





*Cold winter winds join
Ground-covering, thick, white frost,
Defying the sun.*



*Long, white spikes of ice
Create feathers on twigs, grass;
Erased by the sun.*



*Sharp, icy fingers
Travel on the cold north wind,
Freezing all they touch.*



*Cold, wet mist shrouds all,
Adorning all with dew drops
To sparkle at dawn.*



*Remains of giants,
A pile of weathered gray stumps
Persists for decades.*



*Bird songs greet the sun.
Frozen dirt thaws and buds swell.
Spring lightens the air.*



*Windswept white sculptures
Soar above dark, quiet earth
Awaiting the dawn.*