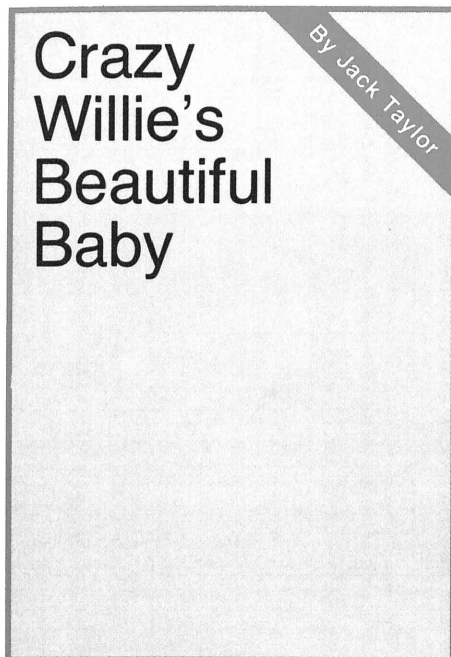




To reach the editorial quarters of *Missouri Life*, a bold venture in quality magazine publishing, one descends the carpeted stairs of Bill Nunn's home in Jefferson City to two small basement rooms. This space also accommodates the publication's business and circulation department. The mailing room is upstairs—in the dining area.

Emerging from this tiny area six times a year is a slick and attractive magazine portraying Missouri's colorful past and present. How this bi-monthly happening continues to materialize still baffles Bill Nunn's friends, some of whom are seasoned in publishing and all of whom coun-



seled him against what they considered a foolhardy project.

"I give him two, maybe three, issues," was the pronouncement of one of these friendly oracles. Long-time associate Jim Keefe, editor of *Missouri Conservationist*, promptly dubbed Nunn "Crazy Willie" and has called him that ever since.

Just how "crazy" is Willie Nunn, who in manner and appearance is a tall and slender Bob Newhart? Some of the evidence is not overwhelming in his favor. To Bill, the demise of *Life* and *Look* mag-

azines was an excellent argument for the birth of *Missouri Life*. And when he took the plunge—barely six months after getting the idea—his timing was less than perfect: the clouds of recession were darkening even then. Also, his operating capital was whatever he and his wife could scrape up in a hurry. The sudden venture left in mid-air a nearly-completed redecorating job for the Nunn home. As Bill explains, "The drapes went into the magazine."

The notion of starting a state magazine to reinforce the pride of Missourians everywhere began to surface in the fall of 1972, when Bill and his wife—he calls her Pete—made a business trip to New England. They kept coming across copies of *Yankee* and *Down East*, and were impressed with their healthy volume of advertising. As Bill remembered the prosperity of other periodicals such as *Arizona Highways*, *Southern Living*, and *Sunset*, he became convinced that regional or special interest magazines enjoyed greater support than those seeking national appeal. Not only did the failure of *Life* and *Look* leave him undaunted, it bolstered his theory.

"That's all we talked about on the way home," Bill recalls.

"I also made the stupid statement several times that I could do it all myself—everything involved in putting out a magazine, the writing, the editing, and taking pictures. I soon learned better, of course. But for the rest of the year we thought about starting a state magazine for Missouri and finally decided to go ahead in January 1973."

At that time Bill, a 1950 graduate of Mizzou's J-School, was public information director for the Missouri State Highway Commission and editor of *Missouri Highways*. The magazine, distributed free and becoming quite expensive, was soon to be discontinued.

After making his decision, the determined publisher began moonlighting efforts to relieve his suddenly-developed birth pains. Within two months he had resigned his job and had introduced his new baby.

Since that first issue, March-April 1973, *Missouri Life* has held to the pattern set for it by Bill Nunn, native Missourian and a reporter-newsman-editor-photographer whose fine sense of the artistic clearly shows in his product. As he wrote at the time:

"Missouri is different, and this new magazine is dedicated to showing, in a quality way, that difference. Its scope will be all of Missouri. . ."

A tall order, but the strong Missouri flavor remains undiluted throughout the

magazine in photographs, paintings and text. There is a mixture of history, nostalgia, as well as present-day attractions of the state. Bridges, float trips, famous eating places, colorful communities, pioneer crafts, streams, flowers, trees—all are natural subjects for the magazine, and all are treated affectionately in type and pictures. People, too, are featured in each issue, both the famous and the unknown. Nunn slipped in touching tributes to his mother and his father, in separate features, without identifying them as his parents.

Six full-time and three part-time employees make up the staff for *Missouri Life*. In addition to Nunn as editor and publisher, Mrs. Nunn serves as assistant publisher and Paul A. Watkins Jr., another alumnus (BJ '67), is associate editor.

Today, paid subscriptions are above 11,000. Newsstand and other sales bring total circulation to around 18,000 copies. When renewal notes go out, the response is remarkable—an 80 percent favorable return. On the basis of a survey of readers, Nunn believes his publication is seen by nearly 100,000 persons.

Back issues of the magazine are becoming something of a collector's item. Nunn was sufficiently daring, or forward-looking, to print a sizeable overrun each issue, and now he can meet a lively market for sets of back numbers. One bank in Columbia offered a set to each new customer.

Another supporter is a prime mover for a proposed auction of photos and art work that have appeared in the magazine. Any profits from this project will go toward securing adequate offices for the publication. No more basements for *Missouri Life*, and maybe new drapes for the Nunn living room. □