

University of Missouri

The Magazine of the Mizzou Alumni Association

MIZZOU

University's Uncovered Past

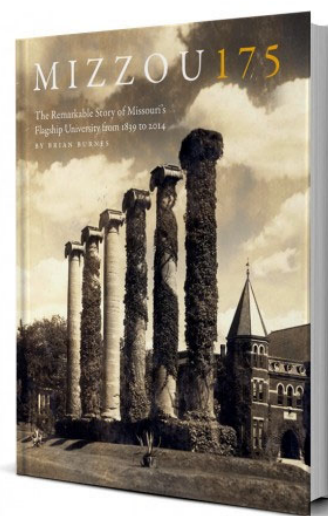
Kansas City alumni chapter will sponsor *Mizzou 175* event.

Story by Kelsey Allen

Published Nov. 11, 2014

Brian Burnes has written eight books, including *Walt Disney's Missouri: The Roots of a Creative Genius* (Kansas City Star Books, 2002), *Harry S. Truman: His Life and Times* (Kansas City Star Books, 2003), and *The Ike Files: Mementos of the Man and His Era from the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum* (Kansas City Star Books, 2008).

His most recent endeavor was a little more personal. Burnes, BJ '76, has been a staff writer at *The Kansas City Star* since 1978. When the University of Missouri commissioned a book in honor of its 175th anniversary, Burnes says he "couldn't imagine" turning down his alma mater.



Mizzou 175: The Remarkable Story of Missouri's Flagship University from 1839 to 2014 (Kansas City Star Books, 2014) is written by Brian Burnes.

After months of reporting and wading through 175 years of documents, Burnes wrote *Mizzou 175: The Remarkable Story of Missouri's Flagship University from 1839 to 2014* (Kansas City Star Books, 2014). The Kansas City chapter of the Mizzou Alumni Association is sponsoring an event featuring Burnes at 6:30 p.m. Dec. 9, 2014, at the Kansas City Public Library, 14 W. 10th St. At the event, Burnes will share some of his favorite archival images, discuss “interesting personalities” he came across during his research and answer questions.

For those unable to attend, here's a preview.

Q: Where did you begin your work? How did you organize all of the information?

A: It was definitely daunting and intimidating. I spent a few days walking around trying to wrap my head around it. It makes sense with huge topics like this to go forward chronologically. Various themes seemed to emerge, a lot of them having to do with adversity the school had to deal with.

When I got there in 1972, the place was so huge I assumed it had always been that way when, in fact, it had not. If certain things hadn't gone exactly so at several points in the past, it's quite likely we wouldn't have the university that we do today.

Q: What was your writing process?

A: Instead of thinking about it as one vast task or

assignment, I did my best to break it down into smaller pieces that I could deal with. Sidebars were definitely my friend because I knew there were specific individuals I would need to give space to, and there were so many compelling stories. [My editors and I] recognized one challenge was going to be proportion — what would be discussed and how long and who we had to get in there. [After that was established], I was able to go forward: It's Tuesday night. I'm going to write about Don Faurot. Then it was on to the next one every night for several months.

Q: What were some of the best little-known-facts that you stumbled upon while reporting?

A: There's a lot in the book about the student unrest during the late 1960s. It was such a tumultuous time. I asked University Archives to pull files for me to document the dialogue between the president and the chancellor. I was startled to learn they were making contingency plans for actual damage that might be done to the university in some civil scenario. It surprised me. The University of Kansas Union was burned down in 1970. The administration had to be thinking about that kind of thing.

I was also surprised to learn about the rules governing dorm visitation. I got to campus in 1972. I was in Hatch Hall. I remember it being explained to me by the upperclassmen about how I was going to sign petitions to have guests on Friday and Saturday night. There were members of the Board of Curators who were truly worried

about what might happen when students would be able to visit in dorm rooms.

It's too easy to look back and smirk at what worried people in the 1960s. But if you look at the correspondence, there were student leaders writing letters to the Board of Curators explaining they were capable of handling it, but the board chose to not allow it. It took several years to evolve. It's hard to believe.

Another guy I wanted to find out more about was [the late Dean of Students] Jack Matthews. He was the university's name-taker-in-chief. He served during a very tumultuous time. He was present for this huge change in student decorum and habits, going from things that were pretty innocent like a panty raid to being worried about if the university might be burned down [during student protests]. That guy had to evolve and adjust, and I had to admire him from a distance for being able to deal with that.

Q: How did writing this book change your relationship with the university?

A: I feel much more informed and appreciative of the administrators today. I was not aware of the effort to make the school more sustainable. I applaud that.

I'm also impressed with the amount of careful consideration done by people like [former MU President] Elmer Ellis. He realized that there was going to be this wave of young people descending

on the campus. There were years in the early 1960s that students who applied and were accepted to MU had to leave because there was no room for them.

He went around the state and told people that the university had to prepare for those young people and that the state legislature had to support the university and help the university prepare for the huge wave of students who were headed their way.

Because I got there in 1972, I was a direct beneficiary of the vision of Ellis. It was Ellis' vision that made it possible for folks like me and my friends to have a place to go. I'm full of admiration for that guy.

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Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916 | Email: mizzou@missouri.edu

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