

Springhouse Ink

Winter relaxed its greedy grip on southern Illinois slowly in 2018, but finally let go of it. The daffodils pushed their stalks above ground and exerted real effort to pull their blooms open while enduring freezing nights and snow as late as April 16. Those earliest flowers seemed to be in a state of cryogenic freeze, blooming for what seemed to be months before running their course.

Spring became the true season on one dramatic mid-April day. A torrential rainfall filled the ditches, swamped the driveway and turned Level Hill Road into a creek. When the rain quit I went outside and splashed through the road's water draining off the hill. At the foot of the hill water was squirting into the air. The tunnels of ground moles had created drainage systems under such heavy pressure from the saturated soil that the new season was literally springing up out of the ground.

So dreary was calendar spring that sunshine blinded the eyes and even limited exposure to it created a sense of drowsiness. From early March the fields slowly filled with Ohio River backwater. The Ohio's tributaries turned cropland into lakes, devoured roads and even closed state Route 1 for a few days. Springhouse was not totally isolated even though we were technically on an island. Though the highway barricade indicated the road was closed, vehicles could still pass through. This came with risk because, though a person could leave the island, there was no assurance of safe return. The water would probably not rise remarkably over a period of a couple of hours, but debris was hanging up on the shallowest water at the road's centerline. Should a wind have blown up there was no telling what obstacles might be piled up in the path. Of particular concern was an old electric pole left to lay at the highway's edge. Should the water have become deep enough to cause the pole to become buoyant and should that floating pole have swung out across the highway, travelers would have been faced with a formidable barrier. Even the cornstalks and small wooden debris that did settle on the road posed a problem. Who knew what nails or other pointy objects might be hiding in the pile?

As it turned out, the only problem posed by the flooded highway was indignity at being seen driving around town with cornstalks protruding from the undercarriage. In fact I would tell people I would prefer the water never drain away. I had the perfect excuse for not getting out to do the things I didn't feel like doing, yet could still get out to do the ones I did.

We began to get adjusted to our new lakefront property and so did the wildlife. Ducks, gulls and wading birds moved into the backyard. The dogs became more eager for their

walks because they enjoyed wading in the floodwater. On one such walk I spotted a large fish jump and splash only a few yards from the back fence.

Rain continued throughout the flood. Daily online checks of the Ohio River's predicted crest at Shawneetown showed the crest being pushed back day after day. It began to seem as though we were living in a sleepy resort community instead of in a farming valley. My thoughts drifted to potential side businesses like Springhouse Bait & Tackle. Maybe Leavell Hill Lakeside Bar and Grill. The farmers would no doubt be disappointed by the loss of crop income, but they could make up for it with boat rental businesses. With enough tourist dollars we might even be able to support a gas and convenience store again since the last one at the crossroads of Illinois Routes 1 and 13 closed a few months ago. Maybe we wouldn't have to drive 8 miles either to Ridgway or Shawneetown just to get fuel for the lawnmower.

Finally, the Ohio began draining away and with some regret we watched our lake shrink and fields return. Then more rain came and everything filled back up again, but our cheers were short-lived as the second mini-flood drained in a few days. All that remains of the flood are a few houses still surrounded by sandbag blockades and large trees left in fields like bones of ancient beasts.

The flood went, but the cold and rain and wind and overcast skies remained into the tail end of April. Now the cherry tree blossoms are wilting, the irises are bursting purple, the wasps buzz in the sunlight and the whippoorwills call at twilight. The ground squirts water. And...

The adventure continues.

This was Illinois Route 1 about 2 miles south of the crossroads with Illinois Route 13 on March 5.

