

The Artist's Almanac

January 2020

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Isaac Watts

If you ask me what time it is, I can tell you; if you ask me what time is, I can't.
We make it, save it, waste it, and yet we can't say what it is.
We have it, but we don't know how much, until we don't.

This New Year is the time to consider time. Is it rushing by us like the banks of a stream, or are we the stream rushing by the banks? Whichever, this beginning of a new year, of a new decade, is a time to consider how we have used or wasted it and how we intend to use it in the future



This lad might well be me, as I spent the happiest days of my life playing in this creek, wading, catching crawdads, studying simmering schools of minnows climbing the currents. The creek is the perfect playground for a boy, always moving, changing, with a new view round every bend a perfect metaphor for time. Here a youngster has found a bottle filled with water, and pours it out,

Time spent in the Creek – Bill Puryear

wasting it like time. Why he does, he knows not, and knows not where it goes, anymore than we know where goes the time that we waste.

I found other treasures in the creek. Here were strange shells, named brachiopods, and fragments of coral. I learned in Geology that *Indian Money*, as we called it, was sections of crinoid stems, which lived here in shallow seas here 300 million years before dinosaurs. Suddenly I had a new concept of time. My life was but a tiny sliver of it.

Our most brilliant scientist, Albert Einstein, who chose the right time to escape Nazi Germany just before The Holocaust, said of time

"The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once. Time and space are modes by which we think and not conditions in which we live. The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion."

If time is only an illusion, it seems real enough as we brave the more turbulent passages of our lifetimes. Here son David nears a spill in the rapids below the millpond where my ancestor John Branham once ground corn at his mill for Andrew Jackson two centuries past. At the same time David spills the thermos at the family picnic on the rocks, an image of bilocation, possible only in illusory time, or in art. William Faulkner once wrote *"The past is never dead. It's not even past."*



A Spill At the Millpond – Bill Puryear, Artist

If the past is no longer and the future is not yet, neither does time exist, for it is merely the junction of past and future. We plan each day and the first phone call or visitor snaps our carefully planned chain of causality and we are off the track and in the weeds. If things get too tangled in these days of consternation and tribulation, we might try finding a bridge over a creek on a clear winter day and look down into its waters as last years' dreams drift away like fallen leaves. Then return to the present refreshed.

Our Lord called himself by many names – none more than I AM. He is eternally present to us if we but live in his presence.



Reflections – Bill Puryear