

CALIFORNIA KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

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Sir Knight

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**“If I could save time in a bottle,
the first thing that I'd like to do, ...”**

Jim Croce, Time in Bottle (1973)

by SK David W. Studley

Fellow Travelers on the Level of Time: How many of us have thought, “if I just had a little more time,” or perhaps, “if I had to do it over. ...” Most of us, I’m guessing. But that musing got me to wondering about the meaning of time. Likely too metaphysical a topic for this brief monograph, but a curiosity of mine and one that I hoped my casual thoughts might pique your interest in too.

St. Augustine, an early Christian philosopher, observed in Confessions that time is ephemeral: the past is no longer; the future is not yet; the present is, but lasts a fleeting moment. To Augustine, time was an irreversible succession of linear events, progressing inexorably from the past, through the present, to the future.

Time as a linear concept was accepted dogma from the first awareness of seasons. But as so often happens, philosophers, science-fiction writers, and literary pundits began speculating about “what if.” What if we could travel back in time, whom would you visit? What if we could see the future, what would our lives be like? One notable author, H.G. Wells, penned a serial novella in 1895, entitled, The Time Machine. (I guess these days we’d call a serial novella either a comic book or a graphic novel. The Victorians are to be admired in many res-



pects.) Most of us remember the story from High School English class: Wells' protagonist ventures forward thousands of years to a time when gentle, childlike creatures called Eloi live in pastoral innocence but are hunted at night for food by the fearsome, underground-dwelling Morlocks. Although societal commentary was surely behind Wells' plot, readers were fascinated by the concept of time travel.

Newtonian ideas about the relationship of material properties were questioned by theoretical physicists in the early 20th Century. Most importantly, Albert Einstein published his paper regarding the special theory of relativity in 1905. There he asserted that time was not constant but rather a relative. Einstein proposed that light traveling in a vacuum unaffected by gravity would alter time depending on the relative position of the observer. Thus, if a person were to board a spaceship traveling at near the speed of light and not subject to gravitational forces, the astronaut might complete the journey in what to him was but a few years. To an observer on earth, however, the trip would take decades. Thus, the 30-year-old friends who remained behind would then be 80. Einstein called this concept the spacetime continuum, time being relative to the position and circumstances of the observer.

Einstein expanded his treatise with his general theory of relativity in 1915 to incorporate the effect of gravity. An explanation of this is well beyond the scope of my limited intellect but is fascinating reading for those of you with physics and/or math-

ematics curiosity. Subsequent astronomical observations have confirmed the presence of black holes as Einstein postulated, which raises the possibility of actual time-travel (I'm suggesting that you try this before me). The linear concept of time, evolving from past to future, is no longer the stuff of settled science.

My practice has been to try to tie my monthly columns to our faith. In that regard, September's message was prompted by a recent First Degree. At one point, the Master recites: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light." Genesis 1:1-3. To have a beginning, time must exist. Augustine argued that God created time at the conception of the Universe and that questions about what happened before creation are meaningless because "before" didn't exist. Try wrapping your head around the implications of that!

But to answer the question I first posed: what would I do if I could capture time? I think of my wonderful, recently departed wife Hallie, as you yourselves may think of your own families, and reflect on the remainder of Jim Croce's lyrics:

**If I could save time in a bottle
The first thing that I'd like to do
Is to save everyday 'til eternity
passes away
Just to spend it with you.**



Courteously,

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