



Then and Now
poems and images

By Timothy Collins

Then and Now: Poems and Images

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*For anyone
who struggles
with sadness
and depression*

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Then and Now

Dawning

Light eases slowly
into eastern sky.
Black trees brighten
into daylight green.
Insect sounds
change.
Birds twitter.
Air remains cool.
Moist.
Fog thickens
for moment,
brushes crest
of hill across river.

Tired old moon
fades silently
in face of
greater power.

Sun tickles leaves.

Timothy Collins

Past Time

Drip by drip,
future reveals itself:
Reflecting.
Refracting.
Magnifying.

Each drop
builds to critical mass, then falls:
Swiftly.
Silently.
Gently splashing on mirror of present.

Concentric ripples edge outward:
Constant.
Cyclical.
Ever-expanding links to past.

Then and Now



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Motherhood Days

Motherhood days were endless then.
Four sons and husband kept her on the go.
 Squabbles over toys.
 Scrambling for places at dinner.
 Dust and noise of remodeling.
 Husband building a career.
Vignettes, cherished and remembered.

The days weren't all easy then.
Four sons and husband kept her on the go.
 Child in hospital.
 Times of unemployment.
 Giving up a life and moving.
 Turbulent, troubled marriage.
Vignettes challenge faith and leave her wondering.

Sons are grown, doing well.
They've got lives of their own.
Husband is retired, too often underfoot.
What's left for motherhood?

Is it just
 vignettes,
 cherished and remembered?
Vignettes
 that challenge faith and leave her wondering?

Questions unanswered keep her on the go:
 Remembering the past.
 Worried about the present.
 Wondering about the future.

Things are just as they were.
Motherhood days are endless now.

Then and Now

Measles

Waiting for fever to break,
concerned mother hovers around
sick child, who frets and whines
and gets tangled in bedclothes.

Afternoon light filters through
screens and curtains,
passing time in changing hues
on measled face of 6-year-old.

Mother's night is lonely, sleepless,
as are all nights when
child is full of fever
and in need of love.

Twilight next evening
finds child full of fire
as teacher at private school
for very bright stuffed animals.

Timothy Collins

War by Night

Helmeted soldier
sneaks out of darkness
and charges into battle
with bayonet drawn.

Furtive soldier plunges back and forth,
running, jumping
all night long.

Frightened child, hypnotized
by movement in shadowy window,
waits tearfully for slaughter,
only to fall asleep
and trick windblown tree branch
by playing dead.

Then and Now



Timothy Collins

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage,
a journey into questions
within questions
within
and without
answers,
without stopping
a sojourn around
and through
the infinitesimal
and the infinite.

Pilgrimage,
a journey into learning
and unlearning
with others
and without,
but always
asking
the questions
within questions....

Pilgrimage,
a journey into choices
I've made,
choices made for me,
questions within,
questions without
the infinitesimal
and the infinite.

Then and Now

Path

Wandering on
light and dark
path
through bright
and shadow
and bright
rocky and smooth
wet and dry
up and down.

Walking along
light and dark
path
others share
shadow
and bright
canopy of trees
breezy grasslands
streams with waterfalls.

Wondering about
light and dark
path,
traveling with
all of the others
sampling
and savoring
but seldom
standing still.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Early Spring

Rare sunny day in February
brings out
not-so-latent naturalist in me.

I sit on dry rock ledge
as stream waters drop
noisily from step to step.

Water catches sunlight,
plays with it,
leaving jagged lines
on limestone bed,
smoothed,
fractured,
cut deeply
by ceaseless years
of flowing.

Childhood memories can be found here.

Curiosity not yet satisfied:

Thoughts and wonder about life.

First peak at drop of water under microscope.

Picking up autumn leaves for first-grade class.

Watching southeastern Ohio hills rise, fold, and fall
in warmth of light only passing years can add.

Two early water striders
ease out of shadows
under rocky shelves
to glide across stillness of pool.
Their shadows contrast with pale bottom.

Tomorrow, it's supposed to snow.

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Transitivity

Colors flash,
feast for eyes.
Leaves die,
gently drift to Earth.

Baptismal rain sprinkles,
transforms.
It nurtures life,
washes death away.

In life there's death.
In death there's life.
Leaves, soil, and water
are proof enough.

Then and Now



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Promise

Water

splashes
 down
through tunnels
 of light,
misty orange
 with setting sun.

Pungent hemlock

oozes
 into humid air
that shimmers
 and sways.

Mountain spring

is promise
 of life,
ancient,
 but not
 ageless.

Then and Now



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Sanctuary

Memories of cool, soft grass and crunchy elm leaves
piled high surround me this afternoon.

Sky is bright, with sun, low on horizon,
arching over already-darkened woods sanctuary.

It is time of escape, warmth, safety, and solitude,
satisfaction for demands of child hiding within.

Then and Now

Sunspot

As sun burns through dreary fog,
a bright spot begins to glow on my desk,
and the page I'm reading fades into glare.

My eyelids droop.
I tiptoe to the door, shut it gently,
and lock it.

I am a lizard.
My desk is a warm rock,
and it's time for my nap.

Timothy Collins

Rainbow

I am child of swirling mist
 and caressing sun,
conceived in fleeting union
 as deft beams of light
 lovingly probe softness of raindrops.

My colors grow brighter—
 gleaming, dazzling promise
 in lingering moment of embrace—
only to fade and die with waning day.

Then and Now



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Scrubbing Up

Dark, scampering clouds
flee washcloth of sun
like dirty children
running from bath.

Radiant light scours sky,
scrubbing it brilliant blue.

Then and Now

Horizons

Shapes
of things to come
in hills
that fold
into distance.

Clouds
puff up,
break apart.

Wind
tousles hair
as I stand
by gate.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Summer...

Stewing by day, steaming by night.
Trapped by this ever-present, cloying summer
that festers into resentment, then anger.

Thunderheads build to west
and over eastern mountains.
They hurl constant lightning
and subtle thunder,
scaring restless, sweaty sleepers.

Ceaseless summer drains energy, chars spirit.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

. . . restless

Days of wandering
without writing.

Not wanting to sit down
and deal with discipline
of mind and pen
and blank page.

Word games not played,
snatches of phrases lost
between head and hand
along ragged nerves
that cry out for rest.

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. . . retreat

Out in desert,

dry land is awash

in golds, reds, browns.

Devoid

of greens.

Desolate.

Alone.

Lonely.

Abandoned.

There is time to ponder.

Dream.

Wonder.

No longer lonely

or abandoned,

but sifting

through wind-borne sands,

looking

for patterns

and cool waters below.

Then and Now

Brooding Mountains

Brooding
 mountains,
not
 angry,
loom
 dark
 across valley.

Distant
 mountains,
windswept,
 draw
 lowering clouds
 to hide
autumn nakedness.

Rolling
 mountains,
stripped
 bare,
 cannot hide
changes
 of seasons and times.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

October, 1996.

Black and blue sky
 outside my window.
Red of dogwood,
 green of hemlock.
Distant place comes to mind,
 rolling mountains,
 roaring streams,
 rich mountain forest soil,
 lush with mosses and ferns,
 littered with decaying
 past.

Another season of dying
for another season of living.

Somewhere outside my window,
 I am hiking
 on long trail of change.
Moldering leaves
 cover loose stones
 and boulders that nudge
 surface,
slowly building more soil
 to support the forest
 and the life I hold
 so dear.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Soul Searching

In the archeology of my soul,
the ruins,
the buildings,
what is left
to be built.

Not only past, but future.

Ruins from storms,
surviving edifices,
promises and hopes.

The archeology of my soul
is layered into memories
of myself and others.
It is my past, and theirs.
It is my future, and theirs.

I can dig deeply into my soul,
or stay close
to the surface.
It does not matter.

The longer I live,
the more there is
to understand;
the more there is
to puzzle me,
to keep me
in wondrous
awe at the mystery
of it all
as it passes by me,
as it passes through me,
as it passes beyond me.

Timothy Collins

Passages

Stops here and there
along the way.
Some filled with the
beauties of constant,
consistent ritual.
Some filled with
surprises and chaos.

These are learning places,
brief passages with others,
in dream spaces
of friends lost
and now found
in nether regions.

Remembered

unconsciousness
just before
foggy dawns
in this landscape
I am coming
to love even more.

I see their faces
again and yet again
over dream-filled nights
in situations
I never knew,
and I wonder
if they ever know
what I am learning now.

Then and Now

The admissions of hurt
and happiness,
sharing the thought
that the long-gone
friendships
were not in vain.

It is a rite of passage,
a time of yet
another
change
whose meaning
I am only now
beginning
to understand.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Old Friend

Growing old.

Shifting.

Sighing.

Hands quivering.

Sitting quietly.

With eyes that see only shadows.

With ears that muffle sound.

Cut off.

From a world

With so much to see

And so much to say.

Tied.

To glimpses and glimmerings

Of past by mind

That remembers so clearly.

Waiting.

For certain future.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Helen

The couch where Helen lay is empty now.
She spent her final, listless years on it
 as mind wandered aimlessly to who knows where.
Paintings, sculptures, and carvings remain now.
She brought back many gifts in vibrant years
 as mind wandered creatively to who knows where.

Mike

The world has lost
 his twinkling eyes,
 his joyous laugh,
 his love of music,
 his marvelous storytelling,
 his generous heart.

I am sad,
 but all the better
 for having shared
 his time,
 his wise words,
 his friendship.

Timothy Collins

Jazz Naturally
Backyard
cool jazz
July night of
polyphony
polyrhythms
squeeks
and clicks
and chirps
wailing solo
of firetruck sirens
raucous applause
from starlings

Then and Now

Orion

Huntsman prowls winter night sky.
Man and dogs pursue the bull,
 moving south, moving north
 to check each season's hunting ground.

Age after age, stars chase stars.
They track mythical prey,
 moving by night, moving by day
 through thousands and thousands of light years.

Huntsman carries sword on his belt.
He is seeking then and now,
 moving through time, moving through seasons,
 frozen in celestial pattern, poised for the kill.

Timothy Collins

Autumn

Shorter days
cooler air
tug of wind
rustle
and
fly
leap
and
dance
tumble
and
bounce
leaves
laid to rest.

Then and Now

Night Walk

Road

crunches

gravelly

dusty

tonight.

It embraces

Rockcastle

Valley

gently

as it

curves

along

steep

hillsides

underneath

shadowy

trees where

whippoorwills

call and

owls hoot.

Thousands

of stars

pulsate

on stroll

through

Milky

Way.

Timothy Collins

October 5, 1998

Now the harvest moon
rising golden above the mountain,
beaming into genesis of mists
below.

Even though it is not spring,
I feel lately
like a salmon spawning,
straining to rise
along a brick road.
I leave letters
as I swim
butterfly-style
over the rough
pavement,
silver scales
in my moonlit
wake.

I must reach
some imagined
goal,
and the key
to that goal
is in the letters
I paint
with my strokes
as I flail
across the pavement.

Then and Now

I try to remember
 the order
 of these
 calligraphic letters
 as I struggle
 up the road,
 now through pounding water
in the pale darkness,
but I cannot
keep them
 all straight.
Even so, I move onward,
driven by forces
 I only recognize
once the fisher's net
 pulls me
from the struggle.
It is all but dark,
and I know someone
will celebrate
 my goodness
tonight as harvest moon rises.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Listening to Speak

I am searching for
a new inner voice
to keep me company,
to speak out
in my poems.

It's time for renewal
and change,
new places,

new thoughts
and ideas,
maybe even new ways
of living this
life.

Now it's time
to listen critically
to the drips and drops
of letters that form
the syllables
that form
the words,
that slowly
spill out,
and sometimes
grow into
a torrent of sentences
that flood
the richly folded
frontiers that are
the magic of my mind.

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There is so much to hear
 in this endless-flowing,
 babbling trickle
of musings and mental
 meanderings,
out there on the frontiers,
out there where the magic
 smiles sweetly.

Then and Now



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Survivors

Jumping fish breaks
through smoothness
of warm river
to snare some bugs
at dusk.

It lands
with noisy splash.

Bat skitters overhead,
blindly following
sound waves
to eat its fill
of bugs.

It squeaks
and chitters away.

Water is peaceful.

Then and Now

Stragglers

Tattered daisies wave
in overgrown cemetery
as October fades.

They stand against frost.
They stand against insects.
Weary stragglers,
enduring
and beautiful.

Timothy Collins

Gift

Giver of life,
but not God,
is stored
in rocks and soil,
water and plants.

Given to life,
flowing still,
sun builds
over time,
through space
in places
we see
and cannot see.

Then and Now

Planting

Soil is broken up, pulverized,
 opened for light and water.
Life-giving life churns silently.
It cradles precious seeds.

Tendrils sprout, seeking, searching,
 roots to soil, leaves to light.
Basic processes are understood,
 yet remain mysterious.

Energy spills out, reaches out
 to light, water, and minerals.
Growing, flowering, bearing fruit,
 using energy to make energy.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Lincoln Highway

Iowa land rolls, plowed brown, once prairie.
Ditches of green, pastures of green.
Corn shoots sprout in new season.
Scattered homesteads, some abandoned.
Broken windmills. Barns – many need paint.

Iowa air smells of rain-damp earth,
Beef and dairy cattle and hog smells.
Workers tar and sand cracks in Lincoln Highway,
Passing through farms and farm towns,
Rising westward toward high plains and mountains.

Iowa U.S. 30 stretches east and west,
Through the bread basket, cornucopia.
Fertile land. Well-watered land.
Farms for farmers. Business. Way of life.
Hawk drifts silently overhead.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Agri-mining

Season tells,
farmers till,
with buttermilk light
oozing
over black soil.

Rite of spring planting
goes beyond memory.
Foundation
for civilization.

Farmers.
Their numbers
are in decline.

Fewer
feed more.
High technology.
Powerful tractors.
Clouds of dust.
Mining soil
for all it's worth.

Timothy Collins



Then and Now

Abandoned House

House near Summerford
Has been abandoned
 for so long.
I have passed it
 for more than 15 years
 and watched it
 crumble gracefully,
if such a thing
 is possible.

For many years,
 house near Summerford
 was boarded up,
 waiting for family
 to return. But
 plywood disappeared
 long ago,
 and weeds began to take over.
Nature returning.

It must have been wonderful
 to live on farm
 near Summerford,
 where Central Ohio soil
 is deep and black and fertile.
Out past cemetery,
 reminder of death,
 near farm
 where life
 was cultivated
 only to be harvested
 to sustain life.

Timothy Collins

Now, quiet grows
on abandoned land
near Summerford,
where collapsed frame addition
is covered with fragrant
honeysuckle.

Bricks grow softer
with each rainfall,
and tree grows out of basement
through front door archway.

Now, house near Summerford is gone.
The dead lie where house
once sheltered life.
House is now a different kind of home.

Then and Now

Harvest

Sweet fragrance of grapes clings
to sultry late-summer day.
Bees and wasps drunkenly veer
from juicy banquet
to attack intruding hands.

Crickets keep cadence:
Pick fruit, put in basket.
Pick fruit, put in basket.
Dodge the drunken revelers.
Pick fruit, put in basket.

So it goes at harvest time,
with sweat and pain and labor.
Work to the rhythm of the season,
Spurred by the banquet to come.

Timothy Collins

Reconnoiter

Thoughts prowl
in early morning darkness.
They creep quickly
from deep in mind,
scattering ideas
that sprout
only in daylight.

They return slowly, knowing
harvest will be abundant.

Then and Now

Lover

Lover and stargazer,
you see me as I am –
 shadow and light –
traveling with you
 through fragile life.

We are galaxy
 spinning and pulsing.

Brightness
 flows from our depths.

Timothy Collins

Dirty Dishes

Dirty dishes.

Water is soapy and warm.

It foams and washes, sudsy and frothy.

Sunny curtains.

Light plays on sink and countertop.

It dances and flickers, dreamy and serene.

Wine was poured, bread broken, evening
meal shared.

Clean dishes on morning after.

Then and Now

Sleep Tight

She falls asleep so easily,
 nodding, then slipping away.

Easy-breathing, supple body
 brushes sheets with warmth.

She escapes from the joy and the pain
 just by closing her eyes.

Her mind opens wide to the darkness
 and fancies that roam by night.

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In Your Eyes

In your eyes, there is a world
of farms snuggled into hillsides
where horses and sheep graze,
with berries in thickets,
deer in forests,
and trout in cool, rocky streams.

In your eyes, there is a starlit sky
over the mountaintop,
where even darkness
cannot dispel the glow
of simple joys.

In your eyes, there is a softness
of candlelight that fills
the void of my darkness
with intimacy and warmth,
gently calling me into your life.

In your eyes, there is a dream fulfilled.
It is the gift that you are.

Then and Now



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Sign

There is a meadow
 near railroad tracks.
You showed it to me once.

I named it after you
 one summer evening
 while picking
 ironweed
 and goldenrod
 to surprise you.

Last night,
 I walked down there,
 saw the fence, locked gate,
 and "NO TRESPASSING" sign.

What I thought we shared
 really was your meadow after all.

Then and Now



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Separation

Tears flow easily at three in the morning.
They wash shards of broken marriage,
 preparing fragments for storage
 in distant back room of memory
where all pain is dulled.

Then and Now

Insomnia

Fitful night.

Mind alive

flickers and crackles.

It tosses

and turns

all of the fantasies,

tomorrow's plans,

a mantra

in bouncing,

gray gelatin

of electric salad bar

where there's every dream

but

no

sleep.

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Then and Now

Dreams

Dreams flutter from deepest present
across bright sun of now.

They rustle, ever so gently,
touching face of now with soft fingers.

They come and go,
ruffling surface of now with illusive
breezes.

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Then and Now

Keep Walking

I come back
to reclaim
my share
of light and dark path
with gushing torrent
of cold sunlit
waters
under hemlocks
damp soil smells
bird sounds
breezes
old familiar paths
and new ones
on Chestnut Ridge
with vistas
of other hills
too far away
for walking today
but certainly
within reach
tomorrow
or
some other time.

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Afterglow

Afterglow lingers at end of day,
memory in pale blues and pinks
captured on canvas-textured river.

Day flows easily into night
as colors blend into depths
of placid water and unfathomed sky.

Days and nights and days
hold on to one another.
They form a framework for life.

Then and Now





About the Author

Timothy Collins has been assistant director of the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University since 2005. His roles include research, policy, outreach, and sustainability. Collins has helped author more than 200 publications, reports, and essays on diverse rural issues, including environmental policy, economic development, sustainable land use, and education. He is a regular contributor to the Daily Yonder (www.dailyyonder.com).

Then and Now is his first book of poetry. He is also author of *Selling the State: Economic Development in Kentucky*.