



Caught between the road and the sky

by Rick Belden

*When we come to the place where the road and the sky collide
Throw me over the edge and let my spirit glide
They told me I was going to have to work for a living
But all I want to do is ride*

— [*“The Road and the Sky”*](#), Jackson Browne

I was seventeen when I first heard the song that began with these lyrics, but I wasn't hearing what I thought I was hearing. I was close, but one word made all the difference for me:

*They told me I was going to have to work for a living
But all I want to do is **write***

There was much I didn't know, and [had forgotten](#), about myself at age seventeen, but one thing I knew for certain was that I wanted to write. Another thing I knew for certain, given my broken blue collar family origins, was that I was going to have to work for a living. And I didn't see how I'd ever be able to reconcile the two. I still can't.

Now I find myself once again at “the place where the road and the sky collide,” the road being the very real earthbound necessities of working for a living and the sky being the equally real work of actualizing my creative and expressive aspirations as a writer.

These two realities have collided in my life many times before and I've made numerous attempts for nearly 25 years now to merge them into a single, unified path, but without success. The time I spend in the sky always comes at the price of far more time on the road. And now the road, the necessity to work for a living, is calling me back once more.

I don't know how much writing I'll be doing going forward. The road always takes a big toll on that part of my life. I could write something every day, given the opportunity, but my writing process is typically far more time and labor intensive, and far more dependent on relatively short-lived little windows of inspiration, than the average work week can accommodate.

I often think, sometimes quite seriously, about giving up the writing. The costs of keeping at it, both financial and personal, seem far too great for me to continue to bear at times, especially as the years pile on. Then I hear from someone like [Steve Spitzer](#). Steve is a Professor of Sociology at Suffolk University and founder of the [Jericho Circle Project](#), a non-profit organization that runs men's support groups in correctional facilities in Massachusetts. Steve sent me a message last week to tell me that he's been using my poem "[little iron man](#)" in his course at Suffolk University as well as in some of the Jericho Circle prison groups.

Or I see a comment here on the blog like this one, posted yesterday:

*I can't thank you enough for the joy I just felt reading your kind words. I had fallen into a bad place again, and your encouragement and your writings have helped to remind me how to get out of that place. I really love how your writing gets behind my barriers and makes me 'feel'. Words can't describe how comforting it is to connect with someone who can relate to these emotions.
Much love x*

Or I get a phone call like the one I received recently from a young man in Florida who wanted to thank me personally for my first book, [Iron Man Family Outing](#).

And then I think: *How can I quit?*

Those are just a few examples from recent experience right off the top of my head. There are many others, and probably still others of which I'm not even aware. This tells me that I've been right all along: that I really am on to something, that what I've been doing has value, and that people need it.

If I could only find some way to make a living doing this work, I'd never even think about quitting. *Ever*. I love it more than anything. But the road is what pays the bills, and now it's time for me to come down out of the sky again.

On days like this, I'm torn between the desire, the need, to keep moving forward with the work that moves me (and others) and the absolute necessity to provide for myself and for my well-being. This is the place where the road and the sky collide in my life, the place where I've spent so much of my adult life trapped, like some ancient cursed mythological figure, in tormented suspension between the one and the other.

Originally posted at [poetry, dreams, and the body](#) on Feb 27 2013.

Image: [Road and Sky](#) by [David Jewell](#). Used by permission.



Caught between the road and the sky by Rick Belden, unless otherwise expressly stated, is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](#).

Rick Belden is a respected explorer and chronicler of the psychology and inner lives of men. His book, [Iron Man Family Outing: Poems about Transition into a More Conscious Manhood](#), is widely used in the United States and internationally by therapists, counselors, and men's groups as an aid in the exploration of masculine psychology and men's issues, and as a resource for men who grew up in dysfunctional, abusive, or neglectful family systems. His second book, [Scapegoat's Cross: Poems about Finding and Reclaiming the Lost Man Within](#), is currently awaiting publication. He lives in Austin, Texas.

More information, including excerpts from Rick's books, is available on his [website](#) and [blog](#). You can also find him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).