



It only makes sense in the moment

by Rick Belden

When you get a great idea for a lyric, just push people out of the way, throw yourself on the floor, and write it down, because it only makes sense in the moment.

— Joe Strummer, from [Joe Strummer: The Future is Unwritten](#)

I don't feel the need to write a song. It's not like that. It's almost like the song feels the need for me to write it and I'm just there.

— Neil Young, from [Shakey: Neil Young's Biography](#)

Each of the above quotes articulates important elements of my own experience as a writer, especially as a writer of poetry. Joe Strummer expresses the immediacy, the fragility, the almost brutal ephemerality of the moment, and the urgent need to try to capture whatever is coming before it slips back into the unconscious, like a forgotten dream. Neil Young describes writing as serving a process that seems to have its own life and its own needs. Taken together, these two remarks provide a pretty good summary of what the writing process is like for me.

I've completed three major writing projects in my life. In all three cases, I didn't plan or expect the writing to come. It started all by itself. Something inside me, or something somewhere, or some combination of both, began to express itself and I simply went along for the ride. When I'm in that state, I can't do anything else. I have to devote myself completely to whatever is coming, whenever it wants to come, or the process doesn't work. When the writing comes, it comes in waves, and I have to stop whatever I'm doing to attend to it, or it's lost forever.

For that reason, I need a lot of open time and open space in my life in order to write effectively and develop material properly. I'm not one of those folks who can sit down and write for an hour a day and produce something worthwhile. It's like trying to get an airplane off the ground by pushing it down the runway a couple of feet every day. It's never gonna work.

The necessary time and space are both crucial, but there's an X factor that's also critical for me. My writing (when it happens) is truly the result of a whole life experience. There's something very *organic* (to use an abused and overused word) about it, some sort of union of inner and outer worlds over which I have no control.

There's a mystery element to the writing process for me, and when it begins, I have to serve it or I have to let it pass, because if I choose to serve that process, everything else has to stop. Writing really is a sort of altered state for me, I believe, and I have to make a broad, deep, sacred space for it, or it just can't happen.

Originally posted at [poetry, dreams, and the body](#) on Sep 14 2008.

Image: [Transient Moment](#) by [David Jewell](#) (original photo) and Rick Belden (processed image). Used by permission.



"It only makes sense in the moment" 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](#).