



Rediscovering the original wound

by Rick Belden

“What you wanted, you still want.” — Robert Bly

1. Wound

I’ve been blessed during the last couple of months with another very fruitful phase of deep and intense creativity, soon to end when I return to the world of “real” work, i.e., work that is “real” in the sense that it’s perceived by others as having financial value. I love doing my creative work and know that it has tremendous value, but unfortunately that doesn’t translate into any sort of income for me, at least not so far.

It is, as always, terribly difficult for me to accept the hard reality that the work I love so much, that moves me so deeply and comes so naturally to me, doesn’t provide me with any material support. I know that there are many other writers, artists, guides, healers, and teachers out there (some of whom, in my estimation, have far less to offer than I do) who are successfully supporting themselves doing their work. I don’t know why I’m not one of them, and it eats at me all the time.

The work I do, my real work, is a birthright once lost that I’ve fought long and hard to reclaim for about a quarter century now, nearly half my life. The battle has not been without its rewards, but I’ve also made some unexpected discoveries that have left me with painful questions I can’t answer, as expressed in the poem that follows.

original wound

many years ago
I heard a man say
 your gift to the world
 is in your wound
I found this idea very appealing
I ran with it
and I've been running with it
ever since.

in the last twenty-five years
I've discovered many gifts
 most long forgotten
 or never known to me at all
in many wounds.

many of the wounds had been
 forgotten as well
or not so much forgotten as buried
 deep in my dreams
beneath my skin
 in muscle and bone
under a series of identities
 I'd been forced to assume
 throughout my life
in order to survive.

so what I was told
 was not wrong
there truly is treasure to be found
 under the scars
but I've also learned something else.

my gifts
much like my wounds
are for the most part
unseen and unwanted by the world.

needed they may be
wanted they are not.

I wasn't prepared for such a discovery
and I also wasn't prepared for the fact
that the land of wounds seems to stretch out
 into infinity
in every direction.

every wound I tend and heal
seems to be an entry point into several more
they cover one another like bandages
they're nested inside one another like
 a set of chinese boxes

each of which contains
another set of chinese boxes
and every wound I tend and heal
yields yet more gifts
that the world does not want.

perhaps that is the original wound
the mother of them all
the point of origin
the first and deepest cut
and the ultimate rejection:

*the world does not want me
and it does not want
what I have to offer.*

if I could talk to the man who sent me
down this path twenty-five years ago
I'd love to ask him
*how am I to live
and what am I to do
with so many gifts
the world does not want.*

2. Reflection

I sat with this poem for several days after writing it. One of the core themes, that “the world” does not want my gifts, felt a little off to me. I know of many people who value my work and there are probably many others who do so of whom I’m unaware, so it struck me as an overstatement of the facts to say that “the world” does not want my gifts. And yet it still felt true to me at some fundamental level.

In terms of dollars and cents, I could still make the argument that a world that associates no financial value with my work doesn’t want it, and I think that was a lot of what was motivating what I was feeling when I wrote the poem, at least on the surface. But as I sat with what I’d written, I was reminded of something I’d heard someone (I can’t recall who) say years ago: When we speak in absolutes (always, never, etc.) about things that are upsetting us, there’s a good possibility that we’re actually expressing the pain of a wound that goes all the way back to childhood, when we were so very little, our needs were so very big, and everything that affected us deeply felt so very absolute.

I was then reminded of the following comments made by Robert Bly to Bill Moyers during the excellent but now largely forgotten documentary [A Gathering of Men](#), first televised over twenty years ago:

Alice Miller says a wonderful thing. She says, “When you were young you needed something you did not receive. And you will never receive it. And the proper

attitude is mourning." Mourning is the proper attitude, not blame, mourning. And she says another thing that's so wonderful. She says, "You know, when you came into the world, you brought this fantastic thing with you, coming from centuries, and eons, and you brought this amazing energy in from animal life, reptile life, other planets, everything. And this incredible energy you brought in ... your parents didn't want it. They wanted a nice boy. They wanted a nice girl."

You couldn't believe it. That's your first rejection. It's pre-verbal. That's why encounter groups won't get to that. That's your first rejection. It's profound. They didn't want the energy you brought. They wanted a nice boy or a nice girl.

So when you're small, you realize you can't fight against that stuff your parents want ... so you make up a kind of a false personality ... You invent a false personality, and you survive.

And then Alice Miller says, "Now, please, you've got to forgive yourself for that, because you did it to survive, and you did the right thing. You did the right thing." And the proof of it is that you're alive right now.

I've watched *A Gathering of Men* many, many times over the years. Bly's comments above, while they've always made complete sense to me, have never resonated more strongly with me than they do now, and I believe that's the core truth I express near the end of my poem:

perhaps that is the original wound
the mother of them all
the point of origin
the first and deepest cut
and the ultimate rejection:

*the world does not want me
and it does not want
what I have to offer.*

"The world", especially when we are very young children, is home and family, and we construct our internal model of the world, the one we will carry forward into adulthood, accordingly. A large chunk of that model is developed in response to interactions with our parents. My mother wanted me to be someone else and did her best to make me into what she needed until I was no longer young enough, malleable enough, and helpless enough to be controlled and manipulated. My father didn't want me at all and did his best to destroy and, ultimately, to eliminate me. I formed my identity living in the shadow of two giants too blinded by their own damage and their own unmet needs to see who I was. I wanted to fix both of them, even if it meant sacrificing and forgetting myself, and I tried for many years. Tried, failed, and lost myself in the process.

That was the world, as I experienced it, not only from the moment I was born, but from the moment I was *conceived*. That was, and is, my original wound: I was not wanted as I was, what I had to offer had no value, and I had to make myself into what “the world” wanted me to be in order to survive.

Now I’m about to do it again.

3. Process

I’m good for about ten hours of productive work on an average day, assuming I’m feeling my best. I need about eight hours of sleep nightly. That leaves six hours for everything else: self-care, social activities, exercising, shopping, preparing and eating meals, etc. And down time.

Down time, doing nothing in all its forms (resting, daydreaming, allowing my thoughts to wander, etc.), is incredibly important for me, and not only because it’s the source of so much of my creative insight. It’s also vital, as I am [a Highly Sensitive Person \(HSP\)](#), to my health and well-being. Additional down time is necessary for HSPs because of the high amount of information we perceive and receive, and the depth and thoroughness with which we need to process it. Without at least two to three hours of down time every day, my edges begin to fray and I can lose my center pretty quickly.

Any so-called “9 to 5” job I get is going to consume my ten productive hours a day (at least) leaving me with nothing for my deep creative work, my real work, the work that gives my life meaning and keeps me alive: the work of my soul. Even worse, it’ll consume my mornings, which are the keystone of my entire creative process.

For almost eight months now, I’ve been off the chain. A lot of people might assume that not having a job would equate to not working. Not so. I’ve been working about ten hours a day most days, sometimes more. No one has been making me do it. It’s natural. I wake up every morning with ideas. The process begins while I’m sleeping, in my dreams. My most productive hours, as a writer, generally come before noon. What happens in the morning determines the creative course of my day, and it happens every day, of its own accord, provided that I’m available to it.

There’s a wonderful sequence in the movie [Pollock](#) (one of my absolute favorite films). It begins with painter Jackson Pollock waking up in the morning. He dresses and stumbles half-asleep into the kitchen, where his wife hands him a cup of coffee as he lights his first cigarette of the day. She helps him put on his heavy coat, hat, and scarf and sends him off with a wordless pat. He steps outside into a cold winter day and trudges the short path through the snow to his studio in the barn. Once inside, he stokes the wood stove, gets a fire going, and starts his work for the day, which will last into the evening.

It's clear from the presentation of this sequence in the film that this is his daily pattern, and I resonate with it so strongly because it is, in my own way, my daily pattern as well, that is, when financial circumstances allow it. I've often wondered how Jackson Pollock would've tolerated losing his mornings five days a week in exchange for sitting in a cubicle somewhere. My guess is: not well.

Doing creative work, in the way I do it, requires a certain amount of open time and space. In a lot of ways, I'm a channeler. Most of what I write (and all of what I draw) comes to me without any specific conscious intention. I never "try" to write a poem or an essay about anything. Words and ideas simply start coming. Sometimes, as in the case of most of my poetry, the bulk of the thing comes to me quickly and it's all I can do to keep up. Essays can take a bit longer to germinate, beginning with a general idea or feeling which then develops in the background of my mind over a period of days, weeks, or even months until suddenly, one day, it's time to write.

Whatever the case, whether it's a poem that started as I was waking up or an essay that's been incubating for a couple of weeks, when it's time to write, I have to be there for it because, if I'm not, that transient energy that's attempting to coalesce into something more solid will be lost, and lost forever.

I never know where a poem or an essay is going when it begins, and I never know how long it's going to take for the process to complete itself. My most recently finished poem ("[shelter](#)") began when the first several lines came to me completely unplanned (as usual) as I was sitting in my truck in the parking lot of the neighborhood grocery store. I was supposed to be on my way to be drug tested for my upcoming job, but took the time to follow the thread those first lines offered as far as I could before hitting the road. After a short drive, I sat outside in the parking lot of the drug testing facility and worked on the poem until the place was about to close, at which point I set down my pen and pad and went in.

By then, the poem was nearly complete, but I still wasn't satisfied with the ending. The last three lines finally came to me (again, unexpectedly) about half a mile into my evening walk. I didn't have anything with me to write them down, so I had to repeat them to myself for a mile like an ad hoc mantra so I wouldn't forget them before I made it home. I continued to poke at what I'd written for several hours though the evening until I felt satisfied, more or less. I never know if anything's really done until I've slept on it.

All in all, from the moment the first couple of lines came to me until I felt comfortable enough with what I had to call the poem done, the process took about five hours. Five hours. Nineteen lines. Ninety-five words (including the one-word title, which also had to be dug out of the word stream). That's what I mean when I say open time and space is required to do this work. If I'm unable to give those five hours to that poem when I did, there is no poem, period.

4. Survival

I start the new job in a couple of days, and I can already feel my creative engines shutting down. The same part of me that generates all the ideas and insights also knows when the required window of open time and space is closing. Shutting the process down, as bad as it feels (and it feels like death itself), is a necessary and largely involuntary form of protection for me. Not being able to roll out of bed, trudge out to my workshop, fire up the stove, and get to my work every morning means that insights and ideas, if they come, will have no opportunity for development, realization, and expression.

Imagine that if every time you started having sex you were forced to stop before you were finished. Imagine having that experience every morning, day after day, week after week. Before long you might not even want to start having sex, or even want to *feel* sexual at all, but that underlying, undeniable life energy would still be there in you nonetheless, looking for a way out, and you'd feel it. That's how I'm going to be feeling when the circumstances of making a living force my most vital energies underground once again.

Money is an unfortunate necessity, and from that standpoint, I'm grateful to have this new job. Grateful, but not happy. It's possible to feel one without feeling the other; gratitude and happiness are not the same thing. I'll go forward, mindful of my original wound and its influence on how I see and experience "the world", and I'll try to keep Robert Bly's comments paraphrasing Alice Miller in mind:

"Now, please, you've got to forgive yourself for that, because you did it to survive, and you did the right thing. You did the right thing." And the proof of it is that you're alive right now.

What I wanted, I still want. But once again, I'll do what I have to do to survive, and I'll forgive myself, as best I can, for doing it.

Originally posted at [poetry, dreams, and the body](#) on Apr 28 2013.

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



Rediscovering the original wound 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](#).