

# Philip Levine

## Quotes

*Writing, Poet, Voice, Father, Son, Home, Young, Mother, Intensity, Years,  
People, Reconstruction, Ordinary, Dramatic, Irony, Novelists, Lucky, Elegance,  
Ambition, Thinking*

Some things you know all your life. They are so simple and true they must be said without elegance, meter and rhyme...they must be naked and alone, they must stand for themselves.

~Philip Levine

The irony is, going to work every day became the subject of probably my best poetry.

~Philip Levine

I write what's given me to write.

~Philip Levine

My earliest poems were a way of talking to somebody. I suppose to myself.

~Philip Levine

I still believe in this country, that it can fulfill the destiny Blake and Whitman envisioned. I still believe in American poetry.

~Philip Levine

How weightless/ words are when nothing will do.

~Philip Levine

You have begun to separate the dark from the dark.

~Philip Levine

I realized poetry's the thing that I can do 'cause I can stick at it and work with tremendous intensity.

~Philip Levine

Now I think poetry will save nothing from oblivion, but I keep writing about the ordinary because for me it's the home of the extraordinary, the only home.

~Philip Levine

My sense of a poem - my notion of how you revise - is: you get yourself into a state where what you are intensely conscious of is not why you wrote it or how you wrote it, but what you wrote.

~Philip Levine

There'll always be working people in my poems because I grew up with them, and I am a poet of memory.

~Philip Levine

Meet some people who care about poetry the way you do. You'll have that readership. Keep going until you know you're doing work that's worthy. And then see what happens. That's my advice.

~Philip Levine

Now I must wait and be still and say nothing I don't know, nothing I haven't lived over and over, and that's everything.

~Philip Levine

I have a sense that many Americans, especially those like me with European or foreign parents, feel they have to invent their families just as they have to invent themselves.

~Philip Levine

I find you in these tears, few, useless and here at last. Don't come back.

~Philip Levine

No one can write like Vallejo and not sound like a fraud. He's just too much himself and not you.

~Philip Levine

I'm afraid we live at the mercy of a power, maybe a God, without mercy. And yet we find it, as I have, from others.

~Philip Levine

Listen to these young poets and you'll discover the voice of the present and hear the voice of the future before the future is even here.

~Philip Levine

My mother carried on and supported us; her ambition had been to write poetry and songs.

~Philip Levine

For sure I once thought of myself as the poet who would save the ordinary from oblivion.

~Philip Levine

It's ironic that while I was a worker in Detroit, which I left when I was twenty six, my sense was that the thing that's going to stop me from being a poet is the fact that I'm doing this crummy work.

~Philip Levine

My father died when I was five, but I grew up in a strong family.

~Philip Levine

Back then, I couldn't have left a poem a year and gone back to it.

~Philip Levine

But I'm too old to be written about as a young poet.

~Philip Levine

I listen to jazz about three hours a day. I love Louis Armstrong.

~Philip Levine

I was very lucky to have a mother who encouraged me to become a poet.

~Philip Levine

I'm seventy-one now, so it's hard to imagine a dramatic change.

~Philip Levine

But most commonly, it's one poem that I work on with a lot of intensity.

~Philip Levine

I started listening to music when I wrote when I had three sons at home.

~Philip Levine

My temperament is not geared to that of a novelist.

~Philip Levine

I say, Father, the years have brought me here, still your son, they have brought me to a life I cannot understand.

~Philip Levine

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