



WILLIE NELSON: SONGWRITER OUT OF NEED

Willie Nelson is one of country music’s trailblazing singers and musicians. When he was young, he wanted so badly to make his career in music that he was willing to do anything. He first enjoyed success as a songwriter and, for a while, was among the most successful in Nashville.

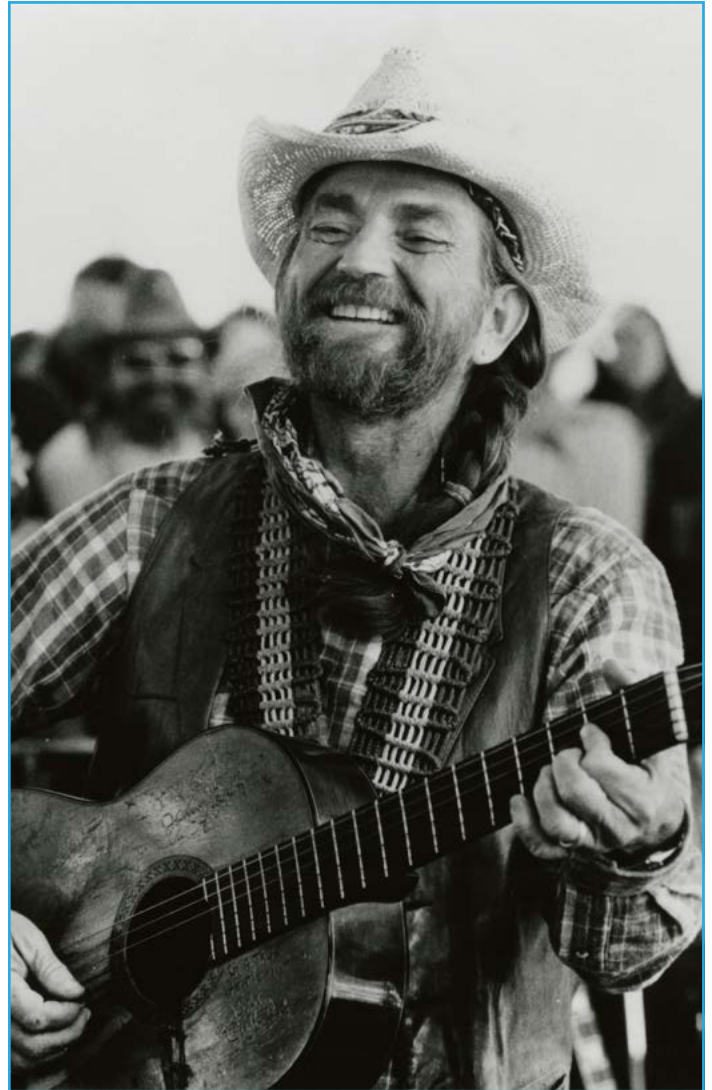
From the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, Nelson wrote more than two thousand songs. Among them were songs that would become classics, including “Crazy,” “Night Life,” and “Funny How Time Slips Away.”

Nelson knew poverty from his earliest days. Born in 1933, during the Great Depression, in tiny Abbott, Texas, he was raised by his paternal grandparents. His grandfather gave him a guitar at age seven, and he immediately started writing songs.

“Melodies are the easiest part for me,” Nelson said, “because the air is full of melodies. I hear them all the time, around me everywhere, night and day.”

In his early days, Nelson scraped by as a radio disc jockey (DJ) and a door-to-door salesman while trying to break into the Texas music scene. In 1960, as his songwriting began to attract attention, he moved to Nashville and was hired for \$50 a week as a songwriter while he struggled to develop a recording career.

Nelson wrote hit after hit for other artists, but his bluesy singing was different from the pop-country styles of the 1960s. After his home burned down in



1970, he moved back to Texas, where he hoped to pursue a performing career. Instead, musical tastes changed, and he was among a group of artists called

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LISTEN

“On the Road Again,” “Angel Flying Too Close to the Ground,” “Crazy” (Patsy Cline), “Hello Walls” (Faron Young), “Funny How Time Slips Away” (Billy Walker)



WILLIE NELSON: SONGWRITER OUT OF NEED (CONTINUED)

“Outlaws,” who attracted a national following with a raw country style.

Many of Nelson’s recordings since the 1970s have been written by other writers. A 1993 inductee into the Country Music Hall of Fame, Nelson has called himself “a lazy songwriter.”

“Oh, I don’t really get up saying, ‘I’ve got to write a song today,’ you know,” he explained, “and that’s really what a good professional songwriter should do.”



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. When did Nelson begin writing songs? What inspired him to do so?

2. In paragraph six, the “Outlaws” are described as having a “raw country style.” What do you think this means?

3. How did Nelson achieve success in Nashville compared to in Texas?
