

*Conducted by Traci Brimhall*

*answers written in collaboration, or not, with Matt Hart*

### **How did your collaboration begin?**

I hope it doesn't sound coy to say that the collaboration began with words.

To be first logistical and then aesthetical about this: about five years ago, we started a blog together that remains hidden from the public, a sandbox protected by fences and passwords. Originally, we thought to just conduct the longest interview ever, to annotate our lives and our "careers" as they were lived in their careening. At some point that changed to include the practice of posting poems, along with prose annotations about what we were up to in them.

We don't remember the prime mover but we remember the motion; before long, we were frenetically posting poems back and forth on the blog all without ever really saying what we were doing. Aesthetically, we two have been buddies for years; I think it's safe to say we don't always love each poem the other person writes but we are always always engaged by that activity, by the process, by the fact that we two are two people doing the same thing (sometimes in quietly different ways, sometimes in wildly similar ways).

I will note that the collaboration we're referring to is a chapbook by Matt Hart and Nate Pritts called *FEELINGS, Assoc.* The poems are culled from the blog mentioned above. There are plenty more. It continues to this day.

### **What were the rules or parameters for the collaboration?**

Our collaboration, unlike a lot of collaborative efforts (and certainly unlike ones I've been involved in before), didn't have a lot of parameters. One of us would send the other a poem, and the receiver would get so charged-up reading it that the only thing that made sense was to respond with another poem. And although often we would appropriate lines from the poem we were responding to, this was sort of an unspoken aspect of what we were doing. The truth is: it wasn't clear what we were doing, but the activity was generative and energizing. The formalizing force was responsive rather than prescriptive. It was more like a conversation over ever-shifting common ground than a typical collaboration. Or, put another way, it was a correspondence (in both senses—in and of)—poem to poem, but also poet to poet. That is, it defined the connections between us in the moment—common concerns, ways of being.

Certainly, there was also an atmosphere and a sensibility at play—for example, we were both reading Lyrical Ballads and thinking a lot about Coleridge and Wordsworth's

Nate Pritts // <http://www.natepritts.com>

**INTERVIEW :: We Are Homer, June 2010**

project. We liked the idea of tackling the same material, but from different poetic points of view. And yet, unlike the Lyrical Ballads' authors, we never delineated those different viewpoints, instead trusting that our own differences and similarities as people and poets would necessitate (especially in conversation) resonance: elaboration on, and divergence from, whatever themes presented themselves. It was autumn, and outside of the poetry we were both dealing with some heavy-duty life stuff. The leaves were floating off the trees. The birds were disappearing. I think The Hold Steady was the soundtrack for both of us. At any rate, there was something melancholy, but also electrical about filtering the conversations through poetry and the poetry through the conversations. Each individual poem and the correspondence itself, became a mainline between us. Sometimes it was difficult to know who was Batman and who was Commissioner Gordon. Abbott and Costello. Coleridge and Wordsworth. Hart and Pritts.

In short, the process was collaborative, even though the poems themselves were written individually—by one or the other of us. We made the process a discussion, where give and take were crucial, not only for coming to some kind of mutual understanding, but for pointing off into the Vast and the Void, the endless possibilities inherent in the human condition.

Two clouds colliding in a mosh-pit: discuss.

**Have you collaborated before? How was this experience different than other collaborations?**

Both of us have been lucky enough to collaborate in any number of ways. Though each of us have written a number of openly collaborative poems, I think it's true that the production of all art (poetry) is collaborative to a certain degree. Everything you write is in conversation with the poets/poems/people/etc. that you love. If you're responsive to the life you're living, you'll notice that it's different from second to second, it's characterized by remarkable shifts and dips and loops.

What made this process different is that it seemed seamless. I'll never tell which of us is the dip and which is the loop, but (see above) at some points the poems wrote themselves. There was an energy that charged the air electrical between us – or the air was condensed and at times there was nothing between us. There were icicles glinting in sunlight.

I would read a poem on the blog and could barely open a new window fast enough because I had so much to say and what I had to say was urgent. One of us – I forget who – likes to say “collaboration is always a matter of finding one's own voice in someone else's mouth.”

Open up and say ahhhh.

Nate Pritts // <http://www.natepritts.com>

## **INTERVIEW :: We Are Homer, June 2010**

Perhaps that is part of what marked this collaboration – the sense of tension developed through urgency. We were aware that what we were saying was of immediate interest to someone else, and was in fact necessary to their survival. I hope that doesn't sound too melodramatic. Or, rather, I hope that sounds intensely melodramatic. The icicles I mentioned? They were melting all around us.

### **What did you learn from your fellow collaborator?**

In some ways, I think we both sort of learned to trust our visceral re-activity more, to be human beings and poets in equal measure, to play for chrissakes. Some of what's in FEELINGS is really direct—really matter-of-(poetic)fact and talky—while other moments are hammered to the astronaut flamingo in the earthwork.

That said, I think we were also reminded at every turn that poems are blast sites both for lingering and getting the hell out into the world of what the poem points to. That is, reading (and responding to) a poem isn't about page turning. It's about finding some place to land or a mechanism for taking off, something to latch onto or alternately, something to chase—the sparks, for example, as they fly off the page—out of the particular language into the world and back into Language, a conceptual framework. The idea that someone could sit down and read a poem (much less a book of them) in one sitting is sort of ridiculous, given that poetry is in some sense the art of employing and deploying the meaning/FULL multiplicity of language at every level (from the composition and big idea overall down to the tiniest article or preposition). To respond to one another as we did in these poems, we had to slow down and take stock of the poems themselves, but also of how we felt about them (and each other), where they pointed beyond themselves (and us). We had to LISTEN to RESPOND.

Happily, collaboration is always a matter of finding one's own voice in someone else's mouth. But to FIND anything (even one's own voice) one has to look, one has to pay attention, one has to be open to the possibility that what one is looking for isn't what one is looking for. One has to look with open eyes and an open heart, and even in sadness with full-throttle joy.

### **Did the collaboration affect your own work?**

Yes.

Though people have commented on similarities in our work, we're both most struck by the differences. Without going into details (which I think would risk limiting what both of us are currently doing, or have done in these poems), both of us are readier than we've ever been. We're more amped up. We're more attuned to the process of writing and responsiveness. Throughout this, we were implicitly asking the other person to be always counting down, ready to detonate.

Existing in a state of pending katastrophē (from the Greeks - not apostrophe, where you're talking to something/one else, but where instead you're turning away, overturning, veering off from something) prepares you to respond most explosively.

**Did anything happen during the collaborative process that surprised you?**

In some ways, all of it was surprising. Every new poem was a surprise. And that was built into the process, where the only expectation was an enlivened poetic response—whatever form that might take. I'd wake up in the morning and there waiting for me in my email or on the blog was a brand new message to ME about both the message I'd sent previously, and also something bigger than me and the message. This was comforting somehow and also galvanizing. Think Frankenstein's monster. Think winning the lottery.

So much of what we do as writers happens in solitude, and one has to wait until either a work is published (where often it flies off into the darkness never to be heard from again) or until one gives a reading (which is its own sort of darkness) to see how/where/if it sticks. Is anybody out there? Who's calling?

—Hello? —Big Bright Sun, this is Werewolf Face, can you hear me...?

There was something so immediate about this process, about saying/demonstrating something and receiving back an echo, which itself said and demonstrated something related and relevant to the larger noise-making, but that was also different and full of new, tangible life... Everyday was a holiday. There were fireworks and presents, things with bat wings, puzzle pieces, feelings associated and others mismanaged. SURPRISE!

**In your chapbook, images such as the icicles in sunlight recur, and the titles often play off each other (In Memory of My Feelings/In Memory of Somebody Else's Feelings). One poem ends: "Your friend, wolf face" and another poem is titled "Werewolf Face." Is one of you more responsible for the interplay between poems? Or did you both consciously integrate the images and themes of the other person's poems into your own?**

The interplay of imagery and themes was implicit and unspoken and part of the conversation that developed as it developed. Neither of us was more responsible than the other and it's probably fair to say that we're both fairly irresponsible as writers! In that: we use words in ways that are both sloppy and necessary; we slosh them around and hope that a few of them mean something more than they mean singly. We were both conscious, certainly, of writing together and so it only made sense to be responsive to the deployment of words that were marshaled against us by the other. It made sense that when singing we'd be charged up with the other person's song. But that's just it – it

Nate Pritts // <http://www.natepritts.com>

**INTERVIEW :: We Are Homer, June 2010**

wasn't any kind of strategy. It happened like that because that's how it happened. It was fun, and functional, because it shackled our impulses to the process overall; it was something that made us both happy – happy to do it, happy to have it done to us. In it, in the integration you point out, we got about as close as two mixed up souls can get and that's what we wanted.

**How do you feel about the finished product?**

I love having the chapbook as documentation of a small portion of the collaboration, but ultimately it's up to other people to decide whether it has merit beyond what it is to the two of us. Certainly, we believe it does, which is why we put it out there, but for me it's a reminder of a friendship in poetry, something no book could ever contain. I guess, too, it would be great if other people were inspired to collaborate as a result of reading it. Let us know, won't you? We'd love to talk with you about it.

*link:*

*<http://wearehomer.blogspot.com/2010/06/nate-pritts-matt-hart.html>*