

*Conducted by Christopher Newgent*

Nate Pritts lives like an optimistic omelette, seeing opportunity in the great messy, cheesy mix of us all. He seems to never leave a question behind, which is perhaps the most honorable thing an interviewee can believe in. A loquacious fellow, I can't wait to hear what he has to say at Vouched Presents on March 26th!

**Should I call you Nate or Nathan? Sometimes I introduce myself as Christopher and people call me Chris, and I punch their mouths. I have hard punches.**

Oh boy. My given name is Nathan & when I first started writing poems & stories, I was calling myself Nathan. However, no one called me Nathan in real life – everyone called me Nate, everyone has always called me Nate. The poems I was writing (1994, 1995?) were heavily dependent on the reading I was doing at the time – the Deep Image poets – & the name “Nathan” seemed like it had the right center of gravity, the proper level of careful diction & studious energy. Nathan Pritts wrote poems about the moon, or about deer running through field grass. As I was beginning my MFA program (Warren Wilson, starting in January of 1998), I perfected & played out the Nathan Pritts poem. I was writing about canals & driftwood. James Wright loved my poems. Robert Bly had me over for dinner. Lonely dogs whimpered in the cloudy night while each star sparkled like eternity. Poems were things that guys named Nathan wrote in their barn or somewhere out on the far reaches of their property while contemplating the majesty of a spotted owl.

But I started to have a sense that it was really difficult to write a poem about a spotted owl if, in fact, you had never seen a spotted owl.

So I started writing poems that were more about me – a guy named Nate who grew up in Syracuse NY & had spent most of his life reading comic books. I started to understand that a poem was a dynamic system that depended on a connection to the vital & coursing elements of my own actual life as it had been lived & as I was currently living it. So Nathan Pritts retired – from writing poems, for sure, & mostly retired from life as well. He's lying in a hammock on William Duffy's farm, very happy & smug & knowing & soulful. Nate Pritts is still alive & writing poems that reflect his complete & utter confusion about being alive in language that struggles to pin down exact & emotional statements about a world that is constantly forcing him to THINK rather than FEEL.

So: call me Nate.

**Whoa. I-...Well. Do I even need to ask you anything else? You seemed to have covered pretty much everything without me even asking.**

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

**INTERVIEW :: Vouched Books, March 2011**

There's a guy I work with, who I've known for a long time, who seems incapable of forming a real personal connection with anyone. Whenever I hear him in conversation with anyone, even his students, all he does is spout out cliches & soundbites. I think he's incredibly intelligent but he seems to be suffering from a kind of failure to engage. So maybe I suffer from an overeager willingness to engage! You asked me a sort of innocuous question but it was a good one, one with lots behind it if truly considered. I think if a person is going to live in this world – which is something we didn't really get a choice about, & are all agreeing to keep doing with every breath we take – that person then owes it to the world, to themselves, to other people, to live on fire – to be HOT as Charles Olson says. To bust our asses. To work really hard. To meet our experiences head on & give of ourselves almost to a fault.

To shift back to poetry, it seems to me that a lot of what I read these days is only too happy to turn away from the world. I'm not interested in that. I read pieces that present undigested experience, that simply blurt out a list of strange happenings or events, successively more sensationalized. They appear to be completely unconcerned with understanding anything, or with trying to embark upon a process that could lead to revelation. Poetry reality shows. Gregory Corso says "I love poetry because poetry makes me love." When I come to the page, as a writer or as a teacher or as a reader, I'm looking to find or create an experience (not the musty record of an experience) that will engage me, awaken my love.

Even with these questions here. We need to be alive to the possibilities of every moment. We need to rise up, instead of slouch down. We need to worry less about seeming cool & appropriately disconnected. We need to risk being HOT, we need to err on the side of sentimentality, feeling, & grand extension. So you don't need to ask me anything else. But I want you to because everything you ask creates an opportunity to 1) fold & give up, or 2) defer & be ironic, or 3) embrace & run. I want to keep choosing 3!

**You're making this interview really unawful. In fact, it's becoming quite a joy. I mean, these are really fantastic answers. So you're the editor of H \_ NGM \_ N. Tell me more about that journal. Also, let's start on this puzzle: \_ \_ \_ \_ \_**

Thanks – this interview is one of the most unawful things I've done in a while! In fact, I have to say, when you asked me to do this I was guarded. Why embark upon something with the intention of being awful? Or: why draw attention to the current (& maybe internet driven, content-hungry) trend toward awful interviews by joining the pack? But I did some research, saw they were awfully fun, & not awfully vapid, & I'm always glad to be proven wrong. Here we are getting a chance to actually communicate without being crushed by the weight of being weighty, while striving to be more than another forgettable noise in a crowded soundscape.

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

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These are also the conditions under which I started H\_NGM\_N. I want to be involved with Poetry, & sometimes for me that involvement takes the form of writing a poem. But any involvement with Poetry can & should be wider & broader & more inextricable than that. So I embarked upon starting a journal, & I did it because I didn't know I couldn't do it. I just mimeographed it, & stapled it, & handed it out (or mailed it out) for free. This was in 2001. With no expectations, no rules, no pressure, I set about carving a space for the kinds of Poetry that matter to me – vital & vivid language, invested in feeling, equally aware of its hearts & its smarts.

H\_NGM\_N has grown, & will continue to. Issue #12 will be out in April. We're also publishing full-length books, with a growing catalog. My poems are my attempts to articulate & demonstrate my consciousness at work on a series of problems, obstacles & dilemmas. H\_NGM\_N is pretty much the same thing, but in a different (but related) field.

As to your puzzle, I have no idea. I'm horrible at actually playing H\_NGM\_N. It looks like the word **VOUCHED** could be first. But what comes next?

**It's been interesting to me how the format of asking kind of vapid questions and letting the interviewees do what they will with them actually creates a lot of space for authenticity. Matt Bell for example said after his interview that he was perhaps the most honest representation of himself in that interview than any other he's done.**

**And that was a pretty impressive guess actually, for being admittedly horrible at H\_NGM\_N. I'll give it to you: **VOUCHED \_ \_ \_ \_ \_**. Give me a letter. Do you have a favorite letter?**

I just did a mammoth conversation-style interview with Matt Bell that's going to be posted up soon at Del Sol Review where we cover pretty much everything there is to cover. It was casual, but (I love Matt Bell) there's a slight edge of competition in those kind of interviews. I feel like the dynamic was fueled by being genuinely interested in what the other person was going to say, but then sort of made manic & frantic by trying to ensure that I'd covered my own ground well, & extended it to ask the next question. A satisfying experience, & one that was really beneficial to me & I hope to him as well. I've also done some interviews where I get sort of paralyzed – that I don't properly understand the question, that I might sound dumb.

This has been a great process, because it's dynamic – we're being truly responsive, which is something I prize, & as a result you're getting the everyday Nate Pritts. The one who has time to research his answers, or pepper them with fancy quotes, or revise them until they sound perfect – that's me too. But this is me most unabashedly.

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

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My favorite letter is probably A – it kicks things off, it seems solid & earnest. I used to have a thing for M, because I have this memory of learning letters in kindergarten & there was an M song I really liked. I'm partial to the letter J as well.

But if you're giving it to me, perhaps it's a gift? PRESENTS would fit in as the second word.

**I like what you say there, about being most unabashedly you here. One thing I love highlighting is how accessible emerging writers and the small press community is. I've actually, while talking to a potential customer about a book, called the author of the book and said, "Hey, this person is thinking about buying your book. Tell them why they should, or maybe why they should buy someone else's book." The buyee is always floored, that they're now having a conversation with this person who just a second ago was just a book to them. No one really thinks of writers as accessible people, and hell, a lot of people don't even know whether a given writer is alive or dead. So I like tearing down that wall when I can.**

**Man, you didn't even get a head or a stick body. And you even slid a pun in there. Exceedingly clever, you are. So yes, Vouched Presents! To bring it full circle as a wrap up, do you have anything you'd like to say to the people reading this interview, perhaps the people unsure about whether they want to go to the reading on the 26th?**

Hmm. I'm excited to hear the other readers, to hang out a bit & talk – it's going to be a fun night. But maybe I'll take a page from the Christopher Newgent song book. Since I dislike talking on the phone, maybe people who need a reason to come to the reading could just shoot me an email – nate [at] natepritts dot com. I'll be happy to explain.

*link:*

*<http://vouchedbooks.com/2011/03/17/awful-interview-nate-pritts/>*