

Crossroads Corner Transcript:
S1E01 Julian Foster

Interviewee - Julian Foster

Interviewers - Alex Ellis & Mak Baker

[Intro Music - "Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me)" " by The Temptations]

ALEX ELLIS: Hello and welcome to the *Crossroads Corners* podcast. My name is Alex Ellis and I am here with my counterpart -

MAK BAKER: Mak Baker

ALEX ELLIS: - and we'll be interviewing Julian Foster today for his submission to the August 2018 issue. How are you doing today Julian?

JULIAN FOSTER: Doing okay. I've had better days I've had worse.

ALEX ELLIS: Oh, good. Well, I'm glad we caught you on a day, good or bad.

MAK BAKER: Yeah, it's so hot out but today Julian will be reading, "A Trifle Harder to Stand When Everyone Else is Lying Down," which is part of the latest issue of *Crossroads*. If you want to go ahead and give it a read.

JULIAN FOSTER: "A Trifle Harder To Stand When Everyone Else is Lying Down"

[See Poem]

ALEX ELLIS: Thank you very much; that's beautiful. Can you tell us a little bit about, perhaps, the inspiration behind the poem or just tell us a little bit about what got you thinking about the kind of themes that we find in the poem?

JULIAN FOSTER: Sure. Well, I wrote the poem while I was in a classroom in Vietnam this past fall where I was on a study abroad program with a group of twenty-eight other American students and our traveling professor was giving this really boring lecture as he was prone to doing -

[Laughter]

- and so, you know, circumstances like that generally are an ideal environment to write some crazy shit. And it's just sort of a reaction to general confusion of, uh, people who will try to tell you, you know, what's worth standing for or, you know, then turn around and criticize others for standing for something else. And, you know, when it comes down to it there is just about a million things worth standing for and sometimes it can be so many things, you know, it's like - well yeah, I want to stand for that but I'm too busy

standing for this - you know, like how can I, how can I do both at once. But the most important thing is just standing at all and even if you're standing for, you know, the wrong thing, you know, I almost feel like that's better than just, just lying down and not doing anything, you know, but figuring out something that you do feel like is worth putting your head in the air for.

ALEX ELLIS: Stand for something?

JULIAN FOSTER: Stand for something.

ALEX ELLIS: Yeah, take an active choice, an active role.

MAK BAKER: Yeah, I think even now it's so important to be able to identify what it is that you stand by because I feel like a lot of times people have opinions that they don't really understand, they just are subject to what is around them and then sort of regurgitate it without really thinking about it.

JULIAN FOSTER: Right, and that's true too, and that sort of goes into the title which is, you know, a lot harder to stand when everyone else is lying down because, you know, often times like if you're in a crowd and everyone starts standing up, you know, you just naturally start to stand up because it's what everyone else is doing. But, yeah, as Mak was saying like that's just as dangerous, but like deciding for yourself and, you know, really feeling what you want to stand for apart from what anyone else is doing.

ALEX ELLIS: I love this break about a third of the way through the poem, this line, "Sometimes I do stand when there is nothing better to do," which is the only line in the whole poem that doesn't begin with "I stand." Can you speak to the intentional break there? What is the function of this?

JULIAN FOSTER: Well, you know, it's always nice when there's absurdity thrown in there. The general gist of the poem is more or less semi serious, whatnot. There is also certain lines that are, you know, meant to be more playful, sort of, not like super bitter commentary but more just sarcastically sort of encouraging people to stand for no reason at all sometimes -

ALEX ELLIS: A little humor?

JULIAN FOSTER: - even though that's not actually what I want you to do -

ALEX ELLIS: Right.

JULIAN FOSTER: - but sometimes it's worthwhile.

ALEX ELLIS: Absolutely. I mean it's almost a call to action, even, you know, when I read the poem the first thoughts that strike me are: do something.

MAK BAKER: Yeah.

ALEX ELLIS: Take a role. Don't be a bystander. Take an active role, and, even if you're perhaps, what you stand for isn't necessarily what we collectively might agree is a good thing, at least you stand for something and if you have a dialogue with another person, perhaps, you guys can kind of sort out why you might hold that value.

MAK BAKER: I mean to be fair, apathy is the ultimate enemy, you know? I think that all of these poems in this issue and what *Crossroads* stands for is to refuse apathy.

JULIAN FOSTER: Yeah, if you have an opinion just put it out there, you know? Let it get shot down.

MAK BAKER: Yeah, exactly. Another thing and then we can move on to your process, but this poem, there is a lot of rhythmicity to it, even the way that you present it. Do you see that with how you write your lyrics and your songs?

JULIAN FOSTER: Yeah, rhythm has an extremely important foundation in all sort of sonic arts. Of course, if you're reading it silently it's harder to sort of get the rhythm but you know I tried with this one to sort of make that rhythm as apparent as possible just because there is a certain power in rhythm that goes deeper than any intellectual processing.

MAK BAKER: I really love the way that you read it. I think that really drives the point home.

ALEX ELLIS: To speak to your process: is there a particular setting that you like to put yourself in to get these things going? I know that this happened while you were in the classroom; is it more, perhaps, that you're actively writing as you're walking around or do you ever find a specific place or setting that helps you with your process?

MAK BAKER: Yeah, I actually wanted to mention, some of my best poems I've written in lectures that have not captured my attention and I've been frustrated because of that and then I'm like - alright, screw this I'm gonna write an awesome poem - and do that with my time.

JULIAN FOSTER: Yeah, I mean, I sort of just find the openings when they present themselves. I've always found it very difficult, you know, to make that place for myself, you know, that's a whole different challenge. But for me, you know, when a certain opportunity arises its just about seizing that opportunity as long as you have just a grain of an idea and just rolling with it as far as it will take you.

MAK BAKER: Yeah, an old friend of mine, an artist, used to say that, "You need to strike the iron when it's hot."

ALEX ELLIS: Is there anything that you think that folks who might be listening to this podcast should be reading that you're reading right now? Is there anything that's helped to inspire you recently either in your songwriting or your poetical compositions?

MAK BAKER: Yeah, even something that you're listening to?

JULIAN FOSTER: Oh man, I mean, sure there's a lot of things. I mean, I find that just talking to people, like when you try to look for things yourself or when you try to, I don't know, follow any sort of like - oh, this is the way to find things - it's really easy to get lost in the ocean of what's available, but I always find my most valuable either music or book experiences just come from the people who I'm closest with who have a recommendation. I know that like my father always had all these Stephen King books around and, you know, forever I just sort of looked at them and then eventually I decided maybe I should start reading some of them and recently I have really been in love with Stephen King's writing style. It's just very crude and off the cuff, you know, absurd in all the right places but clearly there's a deeper sort of truth in what he's trying to say. But, you know, I mean when you find a great piece of art you know it.

MAK BAKER: I really like the way that he uses his darkness and the horror aspects of his books as like a poetic device and less as like an end goal, you know?

JULIAN FOSTER: Right. Yeah. Sometimes, I don't know, there's a certain sort of conceptual element to things that I think people can either get lost in or it can power them forward. You know, often times with pieces of art it'll feel like someone has this concept and that's like the only thing that they have and you know what they're actually trying to say gets lost because they're not really feeling the substance as much but when you find something that has both, you know, the substance in every word as well as the concept at the end that brings it all together, that's when you know you've found something.

ALEX ELLIS: I have a good friend who's gotten me into the habit of asking folks who do write poetry just a quick question which is: what is poetry to you? If you had to give a definition to somebody, you know, what it means to you, I am sure people would love to hear your perspective on it.

JULIAN FOSTER: Well, I can't say I've thought about that one before -

ALEX ELLIS: Oh great, a surprise question!

[Laughter]

JULIAN FOSTER: - but, oh you know, I mean words with rhyme or reason or without any rhyme or reason at all.

ALEX ELLIS: Equally valuable.

MAK BAKER: Yeah, I think it's important to think of poetry or writing in general as having a purpose but then so much of my writing and the writers that I've been inspired

by like Hunter S. Thompson and Allen Ginsberg are very against that, you know, like this is for me and I'm gonna be absurd to spite you and entertain you. The first time that I actually met you Julian, you wrote this song about mopping the floor and I just loved that sort of mundane aspect of just mopping the floor but you were being so reflective on the passive aspects of life and there was a story but the chorus was: "and I'm mopping the floor."

[Laughter]

JULIAN FOSTER: Well there's always this paradox with art that you want to push yourself, you know, you want to be productive, you want to create, you know, because it's fun when you have material for yourself so you can share it with others but at the same time I feel like art can really loses all its meaning when you try too hard to make something and that the things that you're making should want to be made, you know, like for whatever they mean unto themselves. And striking that balance between sort of pushing yourself but also letting things happen as they do is sort of the key, the key trick.

MAK BAKER: It's the trick and it's also the challenge and sort of what separates a good writer from a really good writer.

ALEX ELLIS: This was wonderful.

MAK BAKER: Yeah, thank you.

ALEX ELLIS: Thank you so much for coming on and we hope to continue to share in your wonderful artistic work in all the different mediums that you work.

JULIAN FOSTER: Thank you guys so much for putting this together and having me on.

MAK BAKER: Absolutely. If you would like to stay connected to Crossroads and up and coming issues be sure to follow us on Facebook as well as on Instagram. Crossroadsmag is our Instagram and feel free to reach out to us through our email: crossroads.magazine.uvm@gmail.com for any submissions that you'd like to have for future issues. Thank you all for listening.

ALEX ELLIS: Have a wonderful day.

[Outro Music - "Just My Imagination (Running Away with Me)" By The Temptations]

