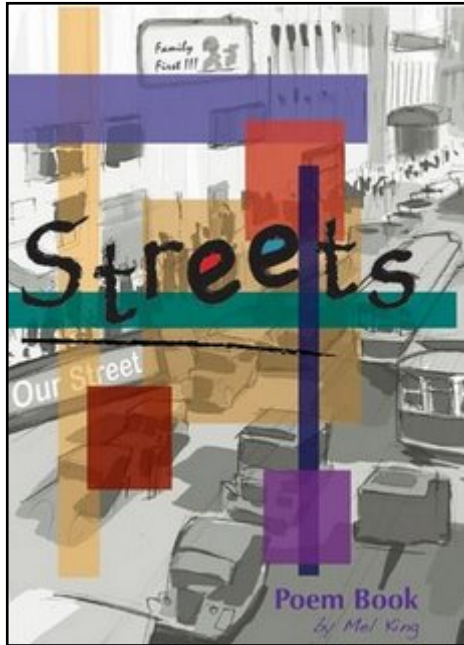


Streets. Poem Book by Mel King.



**Streets.** Poem Book by Mel King.  
( Sensations Publishing A Division of  
Sweetie's Books Silver Spring,  
Maryland)

review by Doug Holder/ Ibbetson  
Update

Mel King has been a presence on the  
Boston political scene for more years  
than most of us have been alive. I  
remember his unsuccessful run for  
mayor—this tall, dignified Blackman,

sporting a dashiki, amidst a sea of Brooks Brothers suits. King was born in Boston in 1928, and grew up in the “New York Streets” neighborhood of Boston, named after the towns served by the New York Central Railroad. For years he pounded the pavement, or the streets as a political activist, a gadfly in the status quo’s eye. When I lived in the North End of Boston in the 1980’s I used to see King walking down the winding, fragrant streets, sampling the colorful array of produce that decked the bins in the markets. Like the title of Alfred Kazin’s famous memoir, King is a “Walker in the City.”

King realizes the value of the “street”, thus this poetry collection’s titled “Streets.” With wonderful illustrations by Allan Crite, B.Z. Nunez, and other local artists, King tells the reader that streets have long been symbols of political action:” take it to the streets,” or “take the high road,” for instance, are common enough call to action phrases. King reflects:

“Streets are a major player in all aspects of our lives. Just look at the many ways they shape our songs, poems and stories. There are over 50 songs and thousands of stories and poems inspired by roads and streets. Streets are part of our social rhetoric, as in “street smart” or “hit the road, Jack.”

The poems here fit beautifully with Allan Crite's paintings. Crite was noted for his painting of street scenes in Boston in the 1930's and beyond. He portrayed a plethora of street activity, and included in this book is a picture of a parade on Hammond St. in the South End by the artist. King dedicates this book to Crite, who King describes as a "chronicler of life on the streets of Lower Roxbury."

And of course being a lover of everything that has to do with food, I loved King's description of the fare of the thoroughfare. Here are some mouthwatering descriptions:

"streets are a venue for prostitutes and hustlers/ hawkers and peddlers for rags and bottles/ fresh fish get your Porgies today/matzos and 'ranges as the words faded away/some came with goodies like roasted chestnuts/and popcorn waffles melted butter lemon slush/ and snow cones.... matzos kielbasa feta cheese rolled apricot sheets/delis with pickles and pastrami/pistachio and frozen pudding ice cream.../eel for the holiday wine whiskey beer..."

My word—what a tasteful riff!

There are many stories of the street in this book. On Seneca Street King gets a lesson from a homeless man about life, he remembers organ grinders with their monkeys (I remember a guy on the Commons in the 70's, the monkey tipped his hat and you put change in it—now that's what I call monkey business), the bastions of break dancers on the hot, cracked pavement and much more...

King has had a long, and varied life. He was a State Rep in Mass. for a number of years, taught at MIT, and to cap his career, what better way than a book of verse, a love letter to the streets of Boston, his home, the beginning and end of his journey.