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## Arts

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### Mel King still uniting the South End with 'Streets'

by Bessie King  
 MySouthEnd.com Contributor  
 Thursday Feb 12, 2009



The magnanimous Mel King has offered the South End another chance to better understand itself with his new book of poems, "Streets," following a lifetime of work on behalf of residents.

"Streets are haven a haven, a host, a place to rest where there's a house with a light and one can be safe, where you learn lessons that shape your life."

Mel King, noted South End community activist, read these lines from his new poem book "Streets" at a book signing Thursday evening, Feb. 5, at the Harriet Tubman House, 566 Columbus Avenue.

"I know Mel and I also want to learn more about the artist for the book because the illustrations are outstanding," said Judith Felton, a South End resident. "I also thought the book was very nice, sharing memories from childhood and experiences of living in this neighborhood."

The book, as King humorously explained, became a project of his in 1928, the year he was born. As he involved himself with the community and focused on helping others, specifically young people, he collected thoughts on how urban neighborhoods and urban life function. While on a trip to Cairo, Egypt, Mumbai, India, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with a group of students, he asked them to notice the difference between a house and a home. Although many of the people they encountered lived in houses made of cardboard, wood panels, or metal sheets the quality of their relationships with others had little to do with their lodgings.

"What came out of it was looking at the lifestyles of the people we were visiting. As I thought of that, I looked back into my own life on these streets and how it impacted me," said King.

After finishing the poems King wanted illustrations that reflected the stories he told. He went to Arts for Humanity and asked young people to read or listen to his poems and share what they visualized because, he figured, if his image is similar to a young person's then the book has potential.

"If young people get it, you know you have something going," said the 80-year-old King.

The feedback was positive and a young artist from the group wanted to help King further with the book illustrations. Twenty-two-year-old Billy Nunez used his digital design skills to bring King's memories to life. Developing his talents by also using different media such as pencil, pen,

## Most Popular This Week

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2. Yoon enters the mayoral fray
3. 'Boston Bikes Annual Summary' brings more Mass. Ave. debate
4. The South End says goodbye to Christopher Hayes, neighborhood legend
5. Budget, snow paint bleak picture

## Upcoming Events

- 2.17- Evolution Revolution: 19 Back to the Future with Darwin
- 2.18 Artist chat with David E. Páez
- 2.19 Book reading and signing by Pamela Newkirk at Harriet Tubman House
- 2.20 Congressman Capuano's Staff Schedules Office Hours
- 2.21- South End Twisted Vines...A Gardener's Alliance!
- 2.21 Boston Prime Timers' February Meeting
- 2.21- Redux II
- 2.24 STANDING ON HIS PROMISES: FINDING COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF YOUR STORY
- 2.24 Wilderness Heals Pledge Hike Information Session
- 2.28 Bach, Beethoven and the Boys (Girls, Too)

## Quick Poll

Has the news of City Councilor Sam Yoon announcing his mayoral candidacy changed your voting plans?

- Nope, sticking with my candidate
- Absolutely, Yoon's my frontrunner
- Undecided, it's too early!
- No, I'm not enthused by any of the candidates

Vote!

## Columns

### Boston and Beyond

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### City Streets

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acrylic, oil and aerosol, Nunez created picturesque, detailed, and innovative images verging a little on the abstract.

"I speak with my artwork, and when Mel went to Artists for Humanity he wanted someone to illustrate his work and happened to like my designs. I was very lucky to get to work with him. I just want to thank him for the opportunity and please buy the book, buy as many as you want!" said a cheerful Nunez.

All of Nunez's illustrations for the book will be on exhibit at the Harriet Tubman House for the entire month of February in King's honor. The book, which costs \$19.95, will also be on sale there.

King has been a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, and a dedicated activist for human rights. He is most noted for his landmark race for Mayor of Boston in 1983 when he became the first African American in Boston's history to win a mayoral primary. At the book signing, State Representative Gloria Fox also presented King with an honorary citation from the City of Boston.

"The sense of family and togetherness that filled the room was overwhelming and reminded me why I love the South End-Lower Roxbury community so much," said Kevin Lee Hepner, President of United South End Settlements (USES). "This wonderful little book by Mel also reminds me of how important streets are to building a strong sense of community and why we need to be much more deliberate about creating people-friendly streetscapes so that people will prefer to be outside instead of inside. We here at USES are already thinking about how to use 'Streets' in our community building work."

King is perhaps most recognized for his efforts in forming Tent City, starting with protests in 1968. His fight for the establishment of fair housing resulted in the setting of tents for overnight protest and success in maintaining the housing of those the Boston Redevelopment Authority had attempted to oust. The area is still referred to as "Tent City" today.

King also has a fifteen-year track record with USES, where he has served as both a youth director and a community organizer. He also founded the Community Assembly for a United South End (C.A.U.S.E.) to give tenants and community residents a voice in their communities. Most recently, he helped launch the South End Technology Center, located at Tent City. It provides internet access, web and audiovisual training, and technical resources to residents of varying ages, incomes and cultures.

For more information on "Streets" visit [www.streetspoembook.com/](http://www.streetspoembook.com/)


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### Dog Lady

A tale of romance and tissue love

### In Business

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### La Palabra en la Calle

Examinando la Pregunta 2 un mes después

### Neighborhood News

South Ender Virginia Eskin to star at Jordan Hall

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Mayor Menino's Ponzi scheme

### Non Profit Sector

Pathways to Wellness receives "Out of the Blue" grant from The Boston Foundation

### Police Beat

Wrestling, wrestling away of vehicles, and smashing poles

### Political Notes

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### The Boston Sports Beat

The tragedy of A-Rod

### Youth Voices

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