

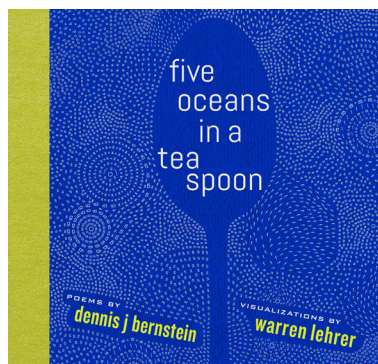
For Immediate Release

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independent publisher
of art and literature

*After a Forty Year Hiatus, Two Masters of Their Craft Complete
Book of Visual Poems That is Wide in Scope, Spare in Form*



Five Oceans in a Teaspoon

Written by **Dennis J Bernstein**

Visualization by **Warren Lehrer**

Introduction by Steven Heller.

Paper Crown Press, hardcover; \$35

ISBN: 978-0-9969506-3-3

ADVANCE PRAISE for FIVE OCEANS IN A TEASPOON:

“**Brilliant and beautiful.** I love it! Thank you for bringing in the new.”

Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and author of *The Color Purple*

“**Bernstein and Lehrer—the Lennon and McCartney of viz-lit—have reunited at the height of their creative powers.** The gutsiness and raw emotion of the writing, revelatory appeal of the visual compositions, and brevity of the form creates an intensely moving experiential journey.”

Steven Heller, design and visual culture historian and author of the *New York Times Book Review* Visuals column

“Imagine *Portnoy’s Complaint* rendered into Guillaume Apollinaire’s *Calligrammes* and you get some idea of the surprising combination of rich recollections and graphic scoring that animate the pages of *Five Oceans in a Teaspoon*. **This completely virtuosic work pairs two perfectly matched talents:** Bernstein’s detailed descriptions of childhood, family, love, life and death, and Lehrer’s typographic compositions combine in a wonderfully rich, broad, truly moving work that embodies precisely what it means to figure the word and render the multiple dimensions of human experience.

In the long history of graphic word works, few, if any, have this range and repletteness.”

Johanna Drucker, foremost visual literature scholar and Breslauer Professor of Bibliographical Studies, UCLA

“From a kidnap note for a world held hostage by an A-bomb, to a Holocaust survivor’s tattooed arms where the numbers just don’t add up, *Five Oceans in a Teaspoon* re-envision a poetry memoir via a textual kaleidoscope... Bernstein and Lehrer are the Rodgers and Hart of Visual Poetry.”

Bob Holman, poet, poetry activist and chronicler, and founder of the Bowery Poetry Club

FIVE OCEANS IN A TEASPOON (Paper Crown Press; September 19, 2019; \$35. hardcover), written by muckraking journalist/poet Dennis J Bernstein and visualized by pioneer designer/author Warren Lehrer—is a seven inch square, 300 page collection of 225 short visual poems that reads like a memoir in poems.

In 1979, Bernstein and Lehrer began working on a book of poems, originally titled *Stretch Marks*. Instead of completing that book, they leapt into writing their first play together, and over the intervening years they collaborated on three books, including *French Fries*, considered a classic in visual literature and expressive typography. A few years ago, they began collaborating again with a renewed focus on visual poetry, bringing together Bernstein's words and Lehrer's visualizations.

Now, on the 40th anniversary of their original effort and at the height of their creative powers, the two have completed **FIVE OCEANS IN A TEASPOON**.

Bernstein's poetry, like his investigative journalism, reflects the struggle of everyday people trying to survive in the face of adversity. **Divided into eight chapters, the book spans a lifetime:** growing up confused by dyslexia and a parental gambling addiction; graced by pogo sticks, boxing lessons and a mother's compassion; becoming a frontline witness to war and its aftermaths, to prison, street life, love and loss, open heart surgery, caring for aging parents and visitations from them after they're gone. Lehrer selected the poems (out of thousands) and arranged them into the book. His typographic compositions give form to the interior, emotional and metaphorical underpinnings of the poems. Together, the writing and visuals create a new whole that engages the reader to become an active participant in the navigation, discovery, and experience of each poem.

FIVE OCEANS IN A TEASPOON bridges art, literature, memoir, old and new media. In addition to the book, Lehrer is making animations of select poems, visualizing them in short videos via kinetic typography and sound. The animations augment the book, can be seen and shared online, are featured in Lehrer/Bernstein's live performance/readings and in the **FIVE OCEANS IN A TEASPOON** exhibition opening at City Lore Gallery in New York City on September 19 and running to October 19. Animations will soon be available for viewing at www.fiveoceansinateaspoon.com.

As Steven Heller writes in his introduction, **FIVE OCEANS IN A TEASPOON** “speaks to the madness, vulnerability, aspiration and language of our time.” It builds on historical traditions of visual literature and spoken word poetry with an innovative, revelatory, pared down approach—well suited for a contemporary audience with varying degrees of time on their hands, more visually attuned than ever, hungry for depth, humor, and meaningful reflections of a complex world.

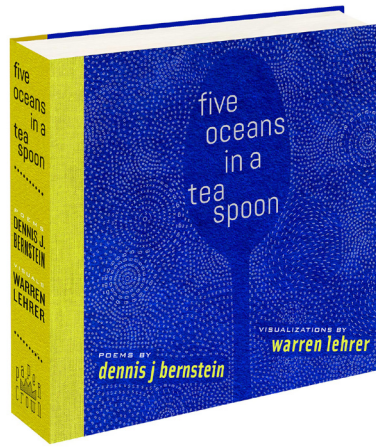
ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Dennis J Bernstein is a poet and investigative journalist based in San Francisco. He is the [award-winning host/producer of *Flashpoints*](#), syndicated on public and community radio stations across the United States. Bernstein is the recipient of many awards for his work, including the 2015 Pillar Award in Broadcast Journalism. In 2009, Pulse Media named him one of the “20 Top Global Media Figures.” His articles and essays have appeared in numerous newspapers and magazines. Bernstein is the author of *Henry Hyde’s Moral Universe* and the co-author of two decks of political trading cards, *Friendly Dictators* and *The S&L Scandal Trading Cards*. He founded the Muriel Rukeyser Reading Series in Brooklyn, New York, named after his friend and mentor the late poet and biographer Muriel Rukeyser. He is the author of the poetry collection *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*, which won the 2012 Artists Embassy International Literary Cultural Award. Alice Walker, Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Color Purple*, writes that *Special Ed* “is art turned to us through the eyes of love.” Bernstein’s poetry has appeared in *The New York Quarterly*, *The Chimæra*, *The Progressive*, the *Texas Observer*, *ZYZZYVA*, and elsewhere. His earliest poems appeared as a chapbook, *Particles of Light*, with woodcuts by Stan Kaplan. His artists’ books/plays *French Fries* and *GRRRHHHH: a study of social patterns*, co-authored with Warren Lehrer, are considered seminal works in the genre, and are in the collections of many museums throughout the world.

Warren Lehrer is a writer, designer and multimedia artist known internationally as [a pioneer in the fields of visual literature and design authorship](#). His work explores the vagaries and luminescence of character, the relationships between social structures and the individual, and the pathos and absurdity of life. Awards for his books and multimedia projects include: The Brendan Gill Prize, the IPPY Outstanding Book of the Year Award, the Innovative Use of Archives Award, the International Book Award for Best New Fiction, three AIGA Book Awards, a Media That Matters Award, and grants and fellowships from the NEA, NYSCA, NYFA, Rockefeller, Ford, and Greenwall Foundations. He is a 2016 Honoree of the Center for Book Arts “for extending the field of book arts to the broader worlds of contemporary design, art and literature.” His books are in the collections of MoMA, the Getty Museum, the Georges Pompidou Centre, the Tate Gallery and other museums and institutions. Over the last seven years, Lehrer has been setting stories and text into animation, video, and interactive media. A frequent lecturer, performer and keynote speaker, Lehrer is the Leff Distinguished Professor at SUNY Purchase, and a founding faculty member of the Designer As Author MFA program at the School of Visual Arts (SVA). With his wife Judith Sloan, he co-founded EarSay, a non-profit arts organization in Queens, New York, dedicated to uncovering and portraying the lives of the uncelebrated in print, on stage, on the radio, in exhibitions, concert halls, electronic media, and through educational programs in public schools, community centers, and prisons.

Since 2010, **Paper Crown Press** has been publishing *Carrier Pigeon*, a quarterly magazine of illustrated fiction and fine art. More recently it began publishing outstanding books dedicated to art and literature and the collision of both. Our mission is to honor the age-old tradition of book arts by carrying the torch into the 21st century.

Print and/or web quality JPEGs of FIVE OCEANS IN A TEASPOON pages and page spreads, the book’s jacket, author photos, and animations will soon be available for download at: <http://www.fiveoceansinateaspoon.com/presskit>. For a review copy or to arrange an interview with Bernstein and Lehrer (both, either), please contact **Suzanne Williams** at 908.375.8159 or suzanne@shreviewilliams.com



The book sits at the center of a multiplatform project and is organized into eight chapters/movements.

THE MOVEMENTS:

- *Lake Childhood* encompasses growing up poems that inhabit the terrain of home, school (as a dyslexic kid), gym, car, street, skating rink, hospital, and fantasy-land.
- *Tracings* is a potpourri of poems tracing the activities, movements and yearnings of ants, flies, fish, birds, spirit wrestlers, marble losers, moon worshipers, flooded cities, lovers, musicians, and the wind.
- *Subtractions and Addictions* contains poems on drinking, drugging, gambling, binge eating, sparring with shadows and significant others, and addiction to work.
- *Front Lines* bear witness to invasion, war, occupation, and their aftermaths.
- *Dream Central* contains daydreams, night dreams and nightmares.
- *On the Streets, Under Lock'n' Key* is populated by people who are homeless, imprisoned, shot at, shooting at, earthquaked, on the bus, in pizza and dairy joints, in a strait jacket, and jogging down the center of the highway (crazy for peace).
- *He and She* reflects on a man with ten smiles, an interior designer who judges every book by its cover, an anti-gravity activist, and (among others) a journalist who died for a story she believed in.
- *River Returns the Sky* is about aging, looking after ailing parents, having open heart surgery, loss of memory and loved ones, rising out of wheelchairs to dance.

Sampling of What Critics, Peers, Historians Say About Warren Lehrer

“In Warren Lehrer’s books, words take on thought’s very form, bringing sensory experience to the reader as directly as ink on paper can allow... Once considered too far ahead of his time... Now the times are beginning to catch up to him.”
The New York Times Book Review *Julie Lasky*

“In Warren Lehrer’s ingenious, one-of-a-kind novel, *A Life In Books*, we see all the covers of all 101 books supposedly written by the narrator over the last several decades... A tour-de-force!” **Studio 360** *Kurt Andersen*

“In Warren Lehrer’s extraordinary books, full of typographic innovation, he seeks to trap thought, sound and speech in time and space on the printed page. The result is theater... The reader (viewer/listener) experiences the pathos within the mundane aspects of everyday life... reality, fantasy, along with art and literature travel parallel but inseparable roads..”
Print Magazine *Philip Meggs*

“We honor Warren Lehrer, innovator and boundary breaker, for his unique marriage of writing and typography, for extending the field of book arts to the broader worlds of contemporary design, art and literature.” **Center for Book Arts 2016 Honoree**

“*A Life In Books* is a book-lover’s fictional treat of books that never were... As Whitman said, ‘I contain multitudes,’ and Bleu Mobley contains 101 books. Wonderful!” **Bookworm, KCRW** *Michael Silverblatt*

“Lehrer’s books challenge readers to explore the act of reading; to break with the usual linear pattern, vary the pace, look back on earlier passages, or skip ahead. His typographic experiments anticipated new directions in graphic design and showed how ‘visual literature’ could be used to engage broader audiences, suggesting the possibility of a new literary genre that makes full use of design’s rhetorical dimension.” **No More Rules: Postmodern Design** *Rick Poynor*, Yale University Press

“In *A Life In Books*, author/graphic design visionary Warren Lehrer crafts a vivid kaleidoscopic odyssey that frames one man’s life through one hundred different books—and book jackets.” *Jessica Helfand* founding editor **Design Observer**

“A stunningly unique take on the novel that unabashedly explores the relationship between narrator and reader. With *A Life in Books*, Lehrer has upended the modern novel form and its narrative limitations, creating a rich and engaging story through visual literature. Mindblowing... reality bending... a laugh riot and visual feast.”
2014 IPPY Outstanding Book of the Year Award “MOST ORIGINAL” *Independent Publisher*

“Lehrer pioneered what might be best termed “typographic performance” in the 1984 book/play *French Fries*, a hot type cacophony of word and image that is today considered by historians one of the lynchpins of the deconstructionist era... *Crossing the BLVD* highlights the richness (as well as a little darkness) of a poly-cultural critical mass representing the sights and sounds, customs and mores of ‘the new’ New York. It is eloquent, poignant, and smartly designed... an entirely satisfying piece of design and authorship.” **Eye Magazine** *Steven Heller*

“One of the most imaginative and ambitious book artists of our time.” **American Book Review** *Richard Kostelantetz*

“A celebratory chronicle of the immigrant experience in New York, *Crossing the BLVD* is a Whitmanesque book that reveals a staggering array of humanity... [It] chronicles life in Gotham in both its despair and boundless promise.”
Winner 2004 Brendan Gill Prize

“Immigrant life in Queens, as told in the intimate, rich, comic, ironic and sad stories so often seen but not heard in America’s big cities.” **The Washington Post** *Lynne Duke*

“In *A Life in Books*, Lehrer has designed a sort of Chinese puzzle whose myriad ideas, stories and characters from all parts of the globe intersect, overlap, and dovetail. Like Art Spiegelman, Chris Ware and Ben Katchor, Lehrer participates in the search for fresh and innovative ways to show, as well as tell, his many stories. Astonishing.” **The Brooklyn Rail** *Robert Berling*

“New York’s undersung borough of Queens, home to the new Ellis Island (the airports), is the most diverse county in the country today, and documentarians Lehrer and Sloan have innovatively brought it to life... A poetic, arresting, vividly printed mosaic.” **Publisher’s Weekly - Best Books of 2003**

Sampling of What Critics, Peers, Historians Say About **Dennis J Bernstein**

“Dennis J Bernstein is a hero to me because of his dedicated, unflinching reporting of real news on *Flashpoints*, at KPFA in Berkeley, California. But his fearless pursuit of the truth about what is happening in our rapidly transforming world did not prepare me for the beauty, depth, not-one-word-misplaced perception of this amazing book. Each word, each line, each thought has a weight, a texture, a surprise all its own. With its moving preface, in which Dennis shares his own struggles as a young child with special needs, *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom* is that unusual gift literature can be: We are connected to humanity in ways we might never have even considered or imagined before. Above all it is art turned to us through the eyes of love.” **Alice Walker**, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, author of *The Color Purple*

“Here is all the pain and grace of parents, of prisons, and of perception. And it is all done in such an artful plain style that one wonders how so much meaning can be embodied in so small a place. Dennis Bernstein’s work is intuitive and keen and deep, in the wonderful and loving and fearless tradition of Langston Hughes, Kenneth Patchen and Muriel Rukeyser.” **William Packard**, the late poet, editor, publisher of *NY Quarterly*

“Dennis J Bernstein’s short poems are polished jewels.”

Nina Serrano, Josephine Miles/PEN Oakland Awardee, *Open Book*, *Poet to Poet* radio host

“Be warned: this is not the pretty poetry that makes you smile knowingly at the talent of even the most impoverished lives made quaint. It’s rather the gift to the reader of sad, tragic, even brutal information. It’s the jolt to the body as some of the words land viscerally in the gut. And at other moments, it’s the dreamy reverie of a child, a teacher, or the reader that cradles a torn to bits but still beating human life — a possibility in rhythms that will no doubt want to be reread and become remembered... Their humanity brings us to the door of the harshest and saddest emotions, and the awareness that there was then as there is now, poverty and crime and lack of caring in the too often divisive United States of America. The poems are small, and they are small but packed stories... This is the stuff that could haunt those of us ready to hear...”

Carol Smaldino *The Huffington Post*

Dennis J Bernstein, for me, carries out the best of Elsa Knight Thompson’s Tradition at Pacifica Radio. He positions himself on the unsafe side. He honors his listeners by exposing them to viewpoints that will make them uncomfortable... Dennis collaborated with me in breaking a series of investigative reports during the Gulf War, exposing the Pentagon’s plans to occupy Kuwait—plans formulated even before Congress had approved sending troops to the region in the first place. Dennis did more to get the information out to the public than anything PNS, with all of its outlets to the newspaper world, could do.”

Sandy Close, MacArthur Genius Award Winner, founder of *Pacific News Service* and *The New American Media*

“Come into the Special Ed classroom, where the kids who don’t fit in anywhere else spend their day. For these kids—real kids Dennis J Bernstein taught in the NYC public schools before he became an internationally known investigative journalist—pistols, switchblades, police cars and hunger are more instructive than textbooks... Bernstein loves these kids fiercely, and we come to love them too as the collection unfolds. In these stunning, understated poems unafraid to name the darkest facts of our world and yet continually informed with compassion, we find ourselves in Rilke’s world of beauty and terror. To depict with love, as Bernstein does, is indeed to transform, the way a shattered guitar and broken glass are transformed by the kids in the special ed classroom into art and jewels.” **Anita Barrows**, PhD, poet, translator of Rainer Maria Rilke

“Dennis J Bernstein’s ongoing commitment to investigative reporting and fearless approach to broadcasting crucial information about some of the most controversial issues of our time is an example to be modeled.”

2015 Pillar Award in Broadcast Journalism 9th Whistle Blowers Summit, Washington D.C.

“Unquestionably, one of the most important programs reporting on covert operations engaged in by the United States. . . an indispensable source of information.” **Michael Ratner**, noted civil rights attorney, co-founder, former President, Center for Constitutional Rights

“Bernstein is (among other things) a sound poet, and previous books by these two men [Bernstein and Lehrer] have had double or triple identities as book, performance, and audio recording. A full set of reading resources for their books might include an eye for visual sequence, an ear for poetry, a voice for reading aloud, and a sense of adventure... *GRRRRHHHH* is a magnum opus that invents a new mythology, from the beginning, and sets out to replace Eden. I celebrate this wonderfully audacious and fundamentally human project.” **Fine Print** Betsy Davids

DB: Do you remember the first time you uncovered that I was a poet?

WL: Very early on. I was living with my parents and just starting Queens College. I answered an ad that you placed about sharing a house and a refrigerator and reading poetry around the fireplace. Within a day after moving in, I visited you in your room and you were writing. At the time, you were teaching poetry to your special ed students in Far Rockaway. Pretty quickly we were sharing our creative output with each other.

DB: One of the most amazing things for me that happened early on in our relationship: you began scavenging through my notebooks for good stuff. Do you remember that?

WL: Right away I was struck with your writing. You wrote so much poetry, note pads all over the place, in your bed, piled up on your desk, alongside other people's books. You were always reading, too. I think picking through to the great stuff was something I was interested in helping you do.

DB: That house is where I began to see your evolution as an artist and your commitment to working words into pictures. I was moved by the constant struggle you had with your teachers telling you that you can be a painter or a poet but you can't be both. That was incredibly moving to me, and somewhere that is the door we both came through together, with words and images. Where I started to understand that language could take on another dimension through the use of typography. You went from Queens College to Yale and began to publish your first books, in which you demonstrated that the look of language, the placement of the words on the page, is a part of the creation, and that the synergy can be beautiful and meaningful.

WL: That admonition came from one of my undergraduate painting teachers, who told me after I showed him a secret stash of drawings—which were filled with invented words and letterforms and shading and abstract lines—to *never* combine words and images. He told me, *They exist in two different parts of the brain*. I left his office feeling like I had been given a mission in life. To a certain extent he was right, because pictures do function differently than words. But I've since learned that there is quite a deep historical tradition to the intermingling of words and images. They started as one and the same. We can go back to cave paintings, ideograms, hieroglyphs, ancient pattern poetry. Eventually they did get wrenched into separate fields.

DB: I think our collaborations in the intervening years paved the way for FIVE OCEANS, which actually began forty years ago.

WL: At that time, we put together a little mock-up of the book that we didn't end up completing. We called it *Stretch Marks*.

DB: We even had an introduction from William Packard. But my sense in looking back is that neither one of us was quite ready to finish that book. We needed a little extra time.

DB: I guess you could say that a poem is worth waiting for.

WL: Then a few years ago I was in San Francisco touring with my illuminated novel *A Life in Books*, and you started showing me some new poems you had written in notebooks that were smaller than the ones you usually carry around.

DB: [Laughs] I had decided that big notebooks were too intimidating. All that blank space. The wonderful thing was, I had started thinking about visuals with some of these short poems. I even did some drawings. For me, as a profound dyslexic, drawing was always a nightmare. The teacher would tell us to draw an elephant and my drawing would come out looking like a Cyclops.

WL: The first poem of yours that I translated into typography when I was staying with you in San Francisco was called “Ten Smiles.” Most of the poems that are now in FIVE OCEANS didn’t have visual cues from you other than line breaks, the rhythms and the words and the metaphors behind them. But that poem did have a drawing of smiles that got larger and larger. I found a way to do it all through typography, making the smiles out of parentheses. I showed it to you and you really dug it. I worked on another poem on the flight back to New York. When I got home I emailed it to you. It kind of went back and forth like that for several years.

DB: That was the restarting of the process of coming back to this possibility of collaborating on poems. I don’t think when we started again we realized that this would essentially be a collected works. You have done a good job, Warren, of contextualizing the poems in terms of a flow from childhood to growing older, structuring the different phases and themes in the book. In a way, it becomes an autobiography in poetry and visuals.

WL: Of course, that’s a part of the mystery of the whole thing. As you say, there were thousands of poems which were written over a forty-year period, and finding a shape and an order to it, I realized, was part of my job.

DB: At a certain point I just started flooding you with poems. Many of them I had been working on for ages, and others came out of the completion of a cycle.

WL: I would go through dozens and dozens of iterations of each poem until a visual setting felt right. I waited until I reached that point, that it felt like the poem couldn’t be any other way before I emailed it to you. And then I’d wait to hear your reaction. Sometimes you would say, *no, no, no, no, you’ve gone too far*, or, *you broke that line, you can’t break that line there*. But mostly you seemed to really dig what I had done. I know during this period you were going through some hard times.

DB: Your emails were gifts to me. Sometimes I could barely get myself out of bed, and here this bouquet arrives in my in-box from the East Coast, greeting me.

WL: It motivated me to do more, that you dug what I was doing. You became my audience.

DB: I did confront some profound physical challenges after having open heart surgery, when you wonder if you have the energy to go on. But the other side of that is, if you are inspired, it can create the energy. It becomes a revival for the body and the mind. Now it seems like a whole new life, a next phase for me and, I hope, for us.

WL: More animations to come. That’s my summer.

DB: Can’t wait to see those.

WL: It’s another form of life for the poems to live and manifest themselves in. Right now we have two exhibitions planned, at City Lore Gallery in September and the Center for Book Arts in January, and of course the animations will live online. But one thing I envision that we don’t yet have lined up is having the animations projected outside, in windows or on large screens. Instead of all the advertising. Many of the poems are short enough to be read while walking down the street. Meet people where they are. That’s part of what this project is about, this book. You’re in the bathroom, there’s time to read one or two poems. You come out refreshed, or provoked, or remembering something about your own life you forgot all about.

Another thing I wanted to mention was the gift of the incredible trust you placed in me to take your poems and open them up in all these different ways. Your poems are strong. They’re amazingly honest and

meticulously crafted. They don't need visual help, but they do come to life in a different way in these settings. Not many poets would be willing to let another person inside their poems in this way. Johanna Drucker wrote that it seems like the visual and verbal expressions emerged as if from the same impulse. For me, with the best of these poems, it is not about illustrating the words but about helping create an experience for the reader of discovery, of wonder, of empathy. Of witnessing a father with Alzheimer's searching for letters which form words, reaching for memory—putting the reader inside that experience.

DB: Struggling early on with dyslexia in a way made me much more conscious of language, what is on the page and what isn't. Think of the word "must." Into my forties I always put the letter *n* in the word in place of the *u*. Your attention to the language, to the structure of the language, allows me to look again and see what I used to see and not see.

WL: Part of what you're saying is that it wasn't only something you had to overcome, but that maybe the dyslexia influenced your writing—for the better.

DB: It gave me a way to accept and to utilize in various ways my own learning disabilities. My battle with language, with words on the page, has always had a visual dimension. William Packard of the *New York Quarterly* would catch a lot of flack for putting a poem together with a visual. He liked my first poem so much—"Getting Tough"—that he published it with his own photograph. So from the get-go people were combining my poems with visuals. Something about them leaves an opening for collaboration with imagery.

WL: I can still see that poem ["Getting Tough"] being misconstrued. It is a character poem, a voice poem. You're not advocating brutality. You're reporting on it.

DB: Any kid growing up between 1950 and 1970 knew that the fights happened at the flagpole in front of school, that anything and everything went and was said. I remember an Ash Wednesday when some kids reopened the Crusades and showed up with ashes on their faces looking for a Jew to kick. The linguistics of those encounters became the substance of my early poetry.

WL: I knew that some of the poems were clearly about dyslexia. But now, all of a sudden I'm seeing that your poem "Avowel" is connected to that same visual struggle that you were dealing with early on. How the vowels were a minority somehow pulling the strings of the consonants, which became physicalized for you. Also quite funny.

DB: It still goes on but now I am more inclined to utilize the dyslexia than fear it. I remember when I was in graduate school getting my master's in education, I was doing an internship with a young woman who had just started learning disabilities training and was overjoyed to find an adult who she could do her tests on.

WL: At the time, dyslexia wasn't understood.

DB: I truly believe I would have been in jail by the time I was eighteen if I hadn't luckily gone to a school where they had an Olympian as a gymnastics teacher and I became a champion gymnast. Among the early things that I learned to read were books full of complicated diagrams of how to perform gymnastic tricks. The idea in gymnastics is that you put your body where your mind is. You imagine it and then you do it. That became part of the creative process throughout my life.

WL: Interesting way in. They had you for a dope and you've become a person of letters. Most people know you through your journalism, as the host of *Flashpoints* on KPFA five days a week for, I don't know, 25 years, or as a writer for the *Nation*, *The Progressive*, the *Village Voice*, *Spin* magazine. Knowing you as long as I have, I see you as a poet who is somehow compelled to do journalism. I wonder if you could talk about the difference between doing journalism and writing poetry. Do you approach these things from the same place?

DB: I recognize that frontline journalism is crucial for giving people the information they need to make decisions about their lives. I especially love uncovering stories that are otherwise overlooked. But reporting and journalism can also be shallow. To really get to somebody, you have to start with the heart, which is also where a poem starts for me. Oftentimes people are turned off by hard politics. But if you take a poem by my poetry teacher, Muriel Rukeyser, called "Islands," the first line is "Oh, for God's sake, they are connected underneath." Good poetry gets at the heart and inspires a different way of thinking, in this case of how to bring people together. I love the idea of poetry taking off where information doesn't go.

WL: That poem is so oral, it's not academic or written just for the page.

DB: Every time I quote that line in front of an audience, there is laughter, and for many it is one of those "aha moments."

WL: With journalism there's a laser-like interest in getting the story right, but poetry isn't stark like that. There's more room for ambiguity and contradictions. Poetry can also allow you to be a gentle witness to things that are otherwise not talked about. Witnessing two flies copulating on a wall, a fisherman on the Pacific Ocean, swarms of insects around an abandoned piece of candy, trying to add up the numbers on your aunt's concentration camp tattoo, the larger patterns of life.

DB: Yes, from the smallest issues to the largest. Poetry can deal with all kinds of content. Whereas hard information starts in the brain, good poetry starts in the heart and works its way out through the blood system, becoming a part of the body and informing the brain.