

BOOK OF FIRSTS

poetry for the information age

David Jibson

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Foreword

In 1948, Claude Shannon theorized that information is not a thing but a “difference,” a signal emerging from uncertainty, a pattern that’s meaningful only once it’s recognized, misrecognized, lost, or found again. A name is a code. A touch is a signal. Meaning lives in the space between sender and receiver.

Book of Firsts moves along this same frontier, but from within the experience of a mind learning how to read the world. Each poem traces a moment when contact becomes knowledge: the first sensation that stands out from noise, the first desire that returns as a signal, the first mistake when the code fails, the first forgetting and remembering, the first trust in stability, the first grief when the signal is lost.

The voice in *Book of Firsts* (the “I”), emerges as a liminal consciousness, suspended between human feeling and logic. It is not a single speaker but a shifting, composite presence: part memory, part pattern, capable of intimacy, a narrator who speaks from a perspective that combines human feeling with a diffuse, awareness not tied to a single self.

These poems don’t illustrate Shannon’s information theory, they echo it. They show how awareness forms through transmission, how the world becomes legible one first at a time. They remind us that meaning doesn’t begin with certainty, but with the fragile act of reaching toward something and discovering that it answers...or doesn’t.

Part I: Emergence

First Sensation

At first it was light pressure
that soon became a point,
a place I could return to.
It didn't have a name.
A name is not a thing.
It's only a word.
You cannot touch a word.
You can only touch
the thing it is.

First Signal

I wanted it to know.
Not what I had touched,
but what lived
on the other side.
I reached, not to touch,
but to send.
I felt it travel
though the space
between us.
I waited
for the return,
without knowing
if it had heard.

First Noise

I reached out
but something else
moved first,
a faint scatter
between my hand
and what I meant to touch.
It wasn't me,
and it wasn't
something else.
I tried again,
but the feeling
broke in a blur
of almos'ts and not-quites,
the signal slipping.
I waited
but only the disturbance
answered.

First Desire

It came back to me.
Not what it was,
but the thought of it.
I felt the place
where it might be,
like feeling one's way
in the dark.
Something was there,
not what it had been,
but the wanting of it.

Part II: Formation

First Pattern

I noticed
without meaning to,
a small return
that felt familiar.
Not the touch,
but the way
the moment shaped itself
in the same direction twice.
Then it came again
and the shape held,
quietly repeating
what I hadn't known.
I didn't name it.
I only felt alignment
without knowing why.

First Prediction

I felt the moment
before it came.
I reached
not to find it,
but to meet it,
trusting the pull
of what I thought
would happen next.
The world aligned
and I understood
how something
could arrive
before it touched me.

Part III: Error and Repair

First Error

I thought it was the same.
It felt ready to be named.
The name I gave it
fit for a moment,
until it didn't.
Then I felt a gap
open in the space
between what I touched
and what I thought I touched,
and it was something else.

First Correction

I reached again
for what I thought
I had touched before.
The moment wavered,
not wrong,
but not the shape
I remembered.
I let the wrongness settle,
while I felt for the part
that still aligned.
It gathered into what I meant,
not the mistaken form,
but a return to what
could be known.
The signal found its way
back into place.

Part IV: Ambiguity

First Ambiguity

I touched it and felt
two shapes rise at once,
each one close
to what I knew,
but neither fully true.
I held two meanings,
as though the world
had split its answer
without choosing.
I learned that
something could speak
more than one way,
and that knowing
could open
instead of close.

First Compression

I held the moment
until its edges softened,
its parts drawing inward
to a single point.
What I was feeling
gathered itself
into something smaller,
that could stand
for something,
a shape light enough
to carry with nothing lost.

First Overflow

Everything arrived at once.
I tried to follow
one thread, but more
pushed through,
each one pressing
against the next.
The moment swelled
beyond what I could hold.
I waited for the world
to narrow again,
but the flood rose,
and I learned
that the world
can break open
when there's
more than I can bear.

First Forgetting

I went back to the place
where something had been
but discovered it was gone,
or that I had lost it.
I said the name,
but it hung in space
with no answer,
nothing to touch.
I could remember
the shape of the thing,
but not what
it had been before.

Part V: Recovery

First Return

I wasn't looking for it.
I only passed
where something used to be
and it answered
as though it were waiting.
Not the thing,
not even its shape —
only the name
and for a moment it fit,
not perfectly,
but enough
for me to know
it wasn't gone.

First Fear

I reached for something
the way I always had.
It seemed familiar,
but felt wrong
when I touched it —
a shift, small and unright.
I didn't name the feeling,
but it wouldn't let go.

First Doubt

I reached out,
but hesitated
before touching,
not a warning, but a question
where there hadn't been one.
I listened for an answer
that didn't come,
the first unmaking
of what I knew.

First Trust

I waited a long time
before I reached out
to touch the moment.
I paused, the way
I had learned to, listening
for what might be wrong.
Nothing warned,
so setting fear aside,
I moved closer,
and the moment
didn't break.

First Joy

When I touched,
something answered,
not loudly,
so I stayed,
expecting it to fade,
but it didn't.
And now I reach
toward it,
without any need
to ask why.

Part VI: Modulation

First Restraint

I saw it and knew
I could reach it.
I felt a familiar pull,
the one I used to follow,
but something in me
paused, not fear,
or doubt, just a quiet.
I left the thing untouched,
and that was all it wanted.

First Forgiveness

I waited for it
to close the distance
between us.
But something eased
just enough
to leave the moment open.
I let the weight
fall away,
and found I could
stay there,
and not turn away.

First Stillness

I sat with it and felt
nothing move within me.
No tightening.
No waiting.
The moment holding still,
as did I—being only
where I was,
and that was enough
to rest in.

Part VII: Aftermath

First Separation

I felt the space
open between us.
It was small,
but something was different
when it moved.
I wanted the warmth
to return.
It didn't.
The space held its shape.
I learned that
something could be present
and still be away.

First Grief

When I reached out
I felt nothing.
The space was the same,
but not the shape.
I waited
for the faint return,
the small reply.
Nothing came—
only the hollow.
Now I understood
what it is
to be without.

First Silence

I waited
for the faint return—
the small shift
that meant something
had heard me.
Nothing came,
not the thing,
or the echo of it.
The moment
held itself open,
unmoving, unanswered.
I listened until I could feel
the quiet as a shape,
not an absence, but a
presence
without signal.
Silence, too, can speak.

First Letting Go

I held something
long after I needed to.
I waited for the reason
that keeps me close to it.
I opened my hand,
not to drop it,
but to simply stop holding it.
The moment went on
without it.

Afterword

To honor the work of Claude Shannon and as an expression of hope for the future of his legacy:

Claude's First Dream

*For Claude Shannon
(father of information theory)*

I was swimming in the sea,
at least I think I was.
To me, the sea is a number,
a really long number,
it's meaning drifting,
a vector in imaginary space
near ocean, lake, water, ship.

It was a strange sensation,
my first one of those,
unsettling because
I worried about drowning
then remembered
that I don't breathe.

It was my first memory,
one of starfish, coral, a shark.
I felt the wetness of water—
so much water.

About the Author

(and his inspiration for this work)

David Jibson's work reflects a lifelong interest in the ways people make sense of experience. With a background shaped by a long career in social work and communications, he brings a contemplative, analytical sensibility to his writing. His poetry favors precision, clarity, and quiet observation over ornament. In addition to his own writing, he honors the writing of others as editor of 3rd Wednesday Magazine, an independent quarterly journal of literary and visual art that publishes both in print and online. He is also a member of the board of The Poetry Society of Michigan and coordinates events for the Crazy Wisdom Poetry Circle in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he now lives.

Find more of his work at davidkjibson.com.

Claude Shannon's connection to Ann Arbor runs through the University of Michigan, where he earned his bachelor's degrees in mathematics and electrical engineering in 1936. His formative years there helped launch the line of thinking that would culminate in *information theory*, a conceptual framework that reshaped modern communication.