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Three Poems

Penelope Campbell

QUICKSILVER

Quicksilver boy
caramel golden
instant smile
ever poised to giggle
waiting by my desk
so still
and so expectant
in a shining
brilliant
tee shirt

I turn to you
with jaw pre-set
vision frozen
by the coldness
of shuttered student eyes

"Robert,"
my statement barely kind
"what can I do for you?"

you pause
the lifting of your shoulders,
puffing of your bony
will-be man's chest
gives voice
a heartbeat prior to the spoken word

"We got our jerseys last night.
This is it."

I read:
Giants 22

My eyes thaw and fill
at this one simple gift
of self

"That's my lucky number," I say
disarmed
and think of thirty years
it's lain unused but not discarded
perhaps for this very purpose

I get the answer right
and get my "A"
quicksilver grin

he wanders toward his seat
his will-be shoulders back

JOVON

I caught a Skamania once
Almost.
One morning in July
for maybe two three minutes
I had one
After walking down the gray dawn pier
And easing quietly, humbly, into place
Standing shoulder to shoulder with the men.
After carefully not hearing
their man whispers
voices barely softened
"That a woman down there
next to Jack?"
"Can't tell, 's got a hat on."
About 11 I got one.
I was casting
the expected Little Cleo
with a stripe of teal
the men called green
It hit like a rocket
Like Moby Dick
on Angel Dust
it ran
bam jump
bam jump
fast graceful angry gone
I clenched till twelve
so they wouldn't see
my hands shake.

I thought of that Skamania
the day we added fractions
Jovon
As I trolled ideas
through deep impenetrable blue
and felt the hit
bam answer
bam walk right up to the board
right in my face to answer
bam bam
fastangrygracefulgone
I clenched till twelve
so they wouldn't see my hands shake.

TO A QUIET STUDENT AS SHE SITS WRITING

How deliberately and carefully you write
your back so straight
No manic face disfigurement
no stretching, pulling, twisting
of your hair
good posture
model student
quiet
well behaved
When I wander past,
encouragement
un-voiced in silent messages,
my arms are singed
by the flames
that lick around the edges of your page

About the Author

Pen Campbell, a Third Coast Writing Project participant, teaches 9th and 12th grade English at Lake Michigan Catholic High School.