SECOND PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL POETRY

A Camp Sister’s Spirit
Gwyneth Morrell, Grade 8
D. Russell Parks Junior High School, Fullerton, CA
Teacher: Kimberly Halstead
Testimony: Elisabeth Mann

I don’t know how she did it:
Learn to paint pictures of the past when the present rubbed her raw

If only it had been a ghost that shattered the glass
An illusion, a fable that could be soothed back to sleep with a few choice words
Much worse was the hatred,
The way backs break under the pressure of it—
Under the pressure of a brother’s body
Under the pressure of a pained mind, a blank canvas to fill with memories

I don’t know how she did it:
Find friendship so deep in a place so foul and full of fear

First came the brutality and then the betrayal,
Her own country turned its back
In cattle cars and camps, smothering, crying, starving, dying
Weakened and aching, she found a light
A group of girls to share the weight of what could have been

I don’t know how she did it:
Hold their faces in her hands and whisper in their ears songs of hope

In straight lines they stood, awaiting their fate
Upholding a promise they made;
To always stand together and face the pain
Above the deadly hatred they rose
Like a rain cloud in the driest drought,
The camp sisters replenished each other’s hope

I don’t know how she did it:
Discover all the secrets of a sturdy spirit in a simple pact

It didn’t end poetically; it didn’t end at all, with endless haunted dreams
But even through threats of death, their bond could not be blackened
Through it all, a pact of loyalty, strength, peace
And in her ears the words of a sister rings,
“We have to survive and tell the world what has happened…”