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Clarion Review

General

Penelope Bat: Her Odyssey With the Spirits of Nature
Ken Renshaw
Robert Rosenthal, illustrator
Constellation Press
978-0-9794000-5-6
Four Stars (out of Five)

In the stark beauty of Yosemite National Park, a woman mourns a broken relationship. She is walking back to her hotel when she encounters a Girl Scout troop sitting around a campfire preparing to listen to a Park Ranger's tale. She joins the group and hears the story of Penelope Bat, a spotted bat who is different from all the other bats she knows. Penelope has a voice in her head that tells her she is not as good as other bats and makes her afraid to try new things. When the barn where she roosts is destroyed, Penelope is visited by a black crow who convinces her to follow him. The crow teaches Penelope to lean into the wind and to use the currents of air to carry her higher and farther than she has ever flown. She flies towards the high country of Yosemite and observes rock, water, air, and fire. The ways in which these elements interact to create the landscape inspires Penelope to learn courage and persistence. By embracing the spirit of these elements and the lessons they teach, Penelope learns her own self-worth. She is able to let go of the voice of doubt in her head and become a teacher to the other bats in Yosemite.

Author Ken Renshaw has created a lovely little book about letting go of self-doubt and finding purpose. Though the story is very simple, there is a deep meaning. For example, when Penelope begins to synthesize the message the elements are teaching her, the author writes:

> *Flying didn't have to be a struggle. Water would nourish her, and Rock and Air would allow her to go where no other bat had gone before. She was no longer bound to the life of other bats who had to flap their arms flying near the ground. All she had to do was to call on her courage, think of where she wanted to go, and then persist as she joined the power of the Spirits to get there.*

The story is straightforward and easy to follow, and anyone who has ever struggled with self-doubt can find meaning here. Illustrator Robert Rosenthal contributes several small and delicate images of bats that are a pleasure to look at, and a list of Web sites provides information on where readers can learn more about these creatures. *Penelope Bat* is appropriate for all ages.

Catherine Thureson