First Love

Before sixteen
I was fast
enough to fake
my shadow out
and I could read
every crack and ripple
in that patch of asphalt. I
think lots of guys have similar patches of
asphalt. Carl Linder wrote a poem about his.

Some features to notice:
* How the diction is specific to the sport—it’s
  the language of basketball—and gives the
  poem its authority
* The strong verbs
* How the title, the last line, and the verbs com-
  bine to make this a love poem

Response stance: Please go back into “First
Love” on your own and consider two questions:
How does the title fit the poem? How does the
title connect with the poem’s conclusion? Write
a few notes for yourself.

Benediction: As people who exist in that
timeframe known as before sixteen, you have
your own first loves—each of you—that isn’t a
boy or a girl. Think about the poem you’ve yet
to write about your own first source of excite-
ment and self-confidence and comfort and love.

First Love

Before sixteen
I was fast
enough to fake
my shadow out
and I could read
every crack and ripple
in that patch of asphalt.
I owned
the slanted rim
knew
the dead spot in the backboard.
Always the ball
came back.
Every day I loved
to sharpen
my shooting eye,
waiting
for the touch.
Set shot, jump shot,
layup, hook—
after a while
I could feel
the ball hunger-
ing to clear
the lip of the rim,
the two of us
falling through.
—Carl Linder
Thank you for sampling this resource.

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