BEEN PAINTING MY BOAT

Applying new varnish to sixty-five-year-old wood,

Stained, yellowed in places, and sun blazed.

Time’s worn well on my “Whirlwind.”

It’s something I built

At the age of fourteen.

“You think you can do this

If I buy you the kit?”

“Oh, yes!” I replied.

“It’s a man’s project,” he said,

Meant to make you grow up.”

I took on the challenge:

Fifty pre-cut fir pieces,

Two thousand brass screws,

A book of instructions,

And a father’s calculated dare.

Two summer months

Of sweat and hard work.

I planed and sanded,

Measured and drilled.

Douglas fir plywood

And boards screwed together--

Fourteen feet long,

Four feet in width,

A boat began to emerge—

A boy’s wildest dream.

She’s taken the waves

Off Fripp Island in the Atlantic,

Encountered turbulent windy passes,

At Gulf Shores, Destin, Mobile Bay.

Seafaring me with my parents,

And later my friends,

Then under my watchful eye,

In storms or clear days,

My sons took the wheel,

Each having his turn

At boat handling, fishing,

And safe navigation—

Aboard this gift from my father,

I gave what I had been given.

--Steve Coleman

5/27/20