

My Father's Hands

I remember my father pushing back the living room furniture, "to build build a boat." Sister Thomas, my third grade teacher that fall, snorted, "What an imagination!" We were learning the difference between New Testament and Old, and she asked me, "Is he like Noah then, constructing an ark?" But it wasn't like we were expecting a flood. In the beginning, he laid out the blueprints in that long room that spanned the length of our former tavern now house, but creation began in the barn. She would be a catboat. I pictured a feline bow, with stained glass eyes, green on starboard, red on port. At first a skeleton of beams, he nailed her ribs, shaped her hefty hull, caulked and painted her flesh planks. With a bottle of Cold Duck, he christened her the "Flying Clod." We practiced the cycle of sail raising with a sea chanty: *Off with the sail covers, Unknot the ties, Pull up the main sail, Try not to jibe*, before tacking out to Star Island, peeing in a bucket, rowing ashore for pistachio ice-cream, skipping beach stones. At anchor we would swim off Clod's wide stern, my father's hands pulling us back aboard. On return trips, while my brothers kept watch for Moby Dick, as ship's cabin girl, I'd serve saltines with split slices of American cheese. As Captain at the rudder, my father would raise an imaginary cocktail glass, "Cheers! Thar she blows!" his laughter hearty, like sails singing up the halyard.

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