

## Pieces of Wood

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It was a few years ago  
that my husband decided to become a wooden boat builder.

He likes to build things.

He likes the water.

Wood is pliable and absorbs shocks and impact well.

Wood insulates against the elements.

Wooden boats are light and fast and beautiful.

My husband's first boat was, in fact,  
not particularly light or fast or beautiful.

There were no insulating elements.

The wood had not yet lived an experience of collisions or the impact of pounding waves.

It was untested before its first excursion into icy waters.

I asked him once,  
how does he know that the boat won't leak?

What if one starts out  
only to find water seeping in at your feet?

How do you ward off panic and uncertainty as the water closes in?

How do you have faith that what you have built is worthy?

A thorough investigation might identify stress cracks or gaps in joints

But more often than not  
collisions underwater with obstacles unseen,  
beaching without warning,  
pounding waves that breach the bow  
cause flaws

that cannot be detected on visual inspection.

You wait.

You may not immediately see a leak.

Or you may see a leak that is not the culprit.

When repaired, another leak surfaces fighting against buoyancy.

A leaky boat unfixed can quickly become a sinking ship

Not everyone will see the signs of stress that threaten.

Shock is not a strong enough word to describe the jolting details of my colleague's death.

I had not seen the cracks that threatened his demeanor

or the flaws in the corners of his smile.

I could not hear the pounding waves that breached the bow of his life and family.

Where had he lost faith in what he had built?

If someone had asked, might this tragedy have been prevented?

Might there have been a way to notice the leak that threatened to sink his ship?

Might there have been the right words to voice what was wrong?

Might there have been words to make order out of what was broken?

Those words are difficult for me to find now.

The words are like the random pieces of wood I find strewn throughout my house.

I never know if they are splinters of finished products, remnants of a failed undertaking,  
or if they will become part of something beautiful.

I wait to see where these pieces of wood will find their way

It seems like we continue waiting.  
Preparing again to let go.  
Waiting again for a purpose larger than ourselves.