

1st Place, Poetry

Hanging Five Aboard the *Stella Irene*  
By Sandy Hiortdahl

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Mother once said I was conceived  
on a boat near Solomon's Island,  
thus my penchant for all things water,  
for dangling my legs over any pier,  
bow, stern, or gunwale, one leg freckled,  
the other shiny, plastic, fiberglass.

Aboard the *Stella Irene* at age four,  
I refused the captain's chair, the offer  
to steer and as we bounced over the waves  
I made my way up the starboard beam  
to the bow, the wooden boat lively  
as some happy puppy heading home.

My father trailed me, caught up, strung  
an anchor line between my belt loops, tied  
me in a midshipman's knot to the rail.  
He lifted each of my hands, placing  
my palms on the metal, gently curled  
my fingers over and said, "Hang tight."

I misheard the phrase as "Hang five,"  
thought he was punning "Hang Ten!"  
from *Gidget* we'd watched the night before,  
surfers on the front edges of their boards,  
all ten toes hanging—me on the bow,  
with only five real toes to hang.

Still, I was game, and nodded, as if  
the forty-foot Chris-Craft were my board.  
I slid my left toes forward and over the lip,  
my plastic right foot steady as a stork's  
planted behind me on the deck.  
And I've been hanging five  
ever since.