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ANYTHING WORTHWHILE

*for Pete Seeger*

Two inches deep through the bark  
I sink the spiel. A tin pail  
hangs to catch my recollections  
dripping each second, covered  
to keep insects out. I don't worry

about those extra words; I can filter  
my lines later, boil them down  
to the golden sugar crystallizing  
on both sides of the mason jars  
as it cools. For every forty gallons

only one will remain when  
it's been evaporated: warmed  
and then sustained until it reads like syrup,  
thinner than honey. Each day  
I consolidate buckets of thought

into one container where the surface solidifies,  
waiting, as the weather stays below  
freezing at night to thaw with the day,  
for the hours it will spend above  
both ends of the candle. I must revise soon:

leave it too long and the sap goes rancid, sour.  
No amount of boiling can sweeten  
a bad poem too far gone. If it's done right,  
it will condense to that  
grade 'A' dark amber, bottled and ready.