

Fluid mechanics

by [Brian Doyle](#) in the [April 30, 2014](#) issue

Sitting in a chapel high in the golden sculpted hills of California
A few minutes before Mass I reach down to a small wooden box
By my chair, where missals and songbooks are stored, and I find
A set of ancient eyeglasses folded into an old cloth case, so worn
That it feels like a pelt, and I realize that my chair must belong to
A certain sister here at the old mission. Maybe she's here at Mass,
Trying not to be peeved that I snagged her seat. After Mass I ask
Around and a sweet nun with a cane says oh no, dear, that's Sister
Maureen Mary's seat. She passed over two years ago. She was tall
And hilarious and subject to fits of darkness. She'd been a student
Of engineering, a really brilliant girl, when she decided to join our
Community. Her parents were appalled, or as Sister Maureen likes
To say, aghast. She became a wonderful teacher with us. When she
Died we got hundreds of notes from her former students. Teachers
Have to cultivate the long view, as Sister said herself. You haven't
Much immediate evidence of your labors. But you get flashes, here
And there, and hugs at the end of the year, she would say. She was
Still an engineer, she said—still actually working in fluid mechanics.
Her mom and dad began to visit once a year and then once a month.
Her sister never visited even once although she sent money. Sister's
Parents died and willed us the truck in which they came to visit their
Daughter. We use it all over the place. You'll see it go by today, for
Certain. When Sister died we left her glasses there just for moments
Like this, when someone discovers her. Often it is us, of course, and
We laugh, but then you spend the rest of the day remembering Sister
Maureen Mary, who is a most remarkable soul, whom I miss terribly.