

[Church Pew in Transit](#) [1]

December 26, 2016 [Writing and Faith](#) [2]

[Flash Nonfiction](#) [3]

Flash Nonfiction by Laura Page

Passing Fast on the Right



Even at a distance, I can see the trailer's cargo—one long church pew—is weathered. Maybe congregants got new seating arrangements, something less pew, less goldenrod upholstered. It's tethered, but its frame shudders, and little wonder. The pickup hauling it is vintage, and each gear-grinding shift makes it lurch and cough.

I imagine the pew sentient. Without that heft of buttocks and thighs shifting under weights of competing canons, perhaps it feels the lightness as an improbable joy.

Years ago, my parents' Baptist congregation switched out oxblood upholstered pews for minimalist chairs. Walking into the room after a long absence, I was surprised to see that folks left a few empty chairs between themselves and fellow churchgoers. When there had been pews, closer proximities were taken for granted, but perhaps younger church leaders thought the constant creaking of pews suggested doubt. Hence the update. Unintended: the physical distance

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Page 1 of 3

Church Pew in Transit

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between worshippers.

Once, sitting behind the wheel of a pickup nearly identical to the one idling ahead of me now, touching another's thighs on the bench seat, I felt joy replace my own doubts. The boy's pulse listed as he helped me learn the jerk of the clutch. The vehicle's transmission ground frequently, as if in protest at my lack of skill. The boy was patient and kind, but I sat too briefly in that seat, then too long in the pews he drove me over the country to sit in.

I've felt other joys since that driving lesson, but none that felt so charged. Then, there were more years ahead of me, more that seemed at stake. I wanted, for a long time, to believe the seat of that old Ford, covered with a Pendleton wool blanket, was another pew of sorts—it felt the way a pew should feel, a pew in literal transit, going somewhere new in an all-too-human stop-and-go, requiring different leaps and infinitely more courage—demanding the rub and risk of closeness.

The man hauling the trailer ahead looks as young as the boy I used to know. He goes southbound, and I stay on the straightaway, and it feels apropos, as though I'm moving beyond these memories of furniture and old Fords. The jerk and stomp of keeping myself going forward, while my history tugs me south, often seems like the only constant. I'm asking questions I don't feel brave enough to ask. I hear a familiar grinding and realize I've slowed too much for the transmission's comfort.

My engine balks as I step in to accelerate. Despite it all, I feel a lightness, in transit again, in the assembly of this morning's commuters.

Art Information

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Laura Page is a graduate of Southern Oregon University, where she studied English and sociology. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Dead King Magazine*, *Crab Creek Review*, *HYPertext Magazine*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Kindred*, *TINGE*, and others. Her debut chapbook, *Children, Apostates*, is forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press. Laura lives in and writes from the Pacific Northwest.

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Links:

[1] <https://talkingwriting.com/church-pew-transit>

[2] <https://talkingwriting.com/tw-issue-themes/writing-and-faith>

[3] <https://talkingwriting.com/tw-channels-and-categories/flash-nonfiction>

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Page 2 of 3

