JULIE VIEIRA

She wrote the way she lived:

On the fly,
Without retrospect,
Always on the way,
Climbing higher.

– inspired by Teresa de Ávila
written by Dennis Denny

"Driven," Sister Emma declared to me one day. You are driven." Until that moment, I had no words to describe the inner intensity that I had long felt—an intense vibe that has always animated me in everything from playing to praying and working to wondering.

So much of this life, my life, has been lived on the fly. Always in motion, always unprepared and always climbing. Deeper, further, higher. It's not a life I've chosen, but it's what is given, and after half a century of tangling with it, I gratefully receive it as a gift. To make sense of my life is to respect this gift, much like a hiker approaches the woods. Their path could just as easily contain Instagram-worthy vistas as it could a pack of wild animals. The hiker travels with both adventure and a healthy respect for the wildness of nature.

Becoming an IHM Sister of Monroe, Michigan, has been a way to honor this intense vibe, grasping onto the shirttails of the Holy Spirit, who is always on the fly.

I never wanted to be a "nun," but IHM life and mission suit me. Here, I have the spaciousness to "write" my own life and be part of a bigger narrative of IHM, religious life and the unfolding of creation. I grew up in Rochester, New York, within a chaotically loving family. I was restless, never quite fitting in. I gave myself to academics, sports, friendships and imagination.

While studying in Toronto, I discovered a passion for theology and spirituality and slowly began channeling my restlessness into writing of all kinds. I developed a great appreciation for the light and darkness of everyday life, the poetry and the roughest of prose. I learned to love the dynamic between these seeming opposites. My first IHM ministry put this to the test as I discerned a call to minister at a bicycle shop. Why couldn't God be present among the cogs and cranksets just as much as among the pews? I enjoyed pushing myself to work in various spaces – from Habitat for Humanity to Loyola Press, from Haiti to the U.S.-México border. I created one of the first blogs by a Catholic sister and encountered many people delighted with the chance to interact with a "real, live nun." This blog would become the inspiration for A Nun's Life nonprofit ministry, which I co-founded. We connected online with spiritual seekers in classrooms, tattoo parlors, board rooms, and even someone from their deathbed. Why couldn't God be present in cyberspace? Since then, my work has focused not so much on doing—although I do a lot of that—but on being. I am faithful to my own inner restlessness and the Spirit and also a presence for others with deep longings in their hearts. I do this through writing, workshops, consulting, crisis counseling with LGBTQIA+ youth, and, in the end, being ever on the lookout for the Spirit on the fly!