

*That sunflower field was the epitome of life. Here you had people, the sunflowers. They were vibrant, from their golden, sunkissed petals to their smooth chocolate center. They had no care, their whole purpose was to just exist and provide beauty to those that saw them. Then there were the outside forces in life, the sun. Unrelenting in its brutal rays, barreling down on the unsuspecting sunflowers. Now there were some that not just survived but thrived, taking the brutality and utilizing it as strength to grow. The majority, though, wither and fail to keep upright from all the pressure. Those that thrived are few and far between, rare gems that we all envy to be.*

It was like clockwork. Everyday at the same time. A routine that only I knew about, something that made it even more special. Being in high school at the time, there were a number of things that I had going on in my life from school to family issues. As soon as the bell rang and I started the drive home, it dulled me. It may be a different place with different problems but I always felt that same way, confined. The short drive from school to my house became the only time I had to myself, to not feel like I was being watched not just by people but all the issues and responsibilities in life. I had quickly realized that rather than taking the agonizing stretch of gray highway, there was a backroad that took me from point A to point B but didn't make me want to drive off the road. From the beginning of February to the last day of school in May, that road was mine. Mine to drive, mine to know, mine to care for. When summer came with the suffocating heat, endless shifts of a meaningless part-time job and no free time, I looked forward to that road even more. What I never imagined was that the cruel summer would turn my road into something out of a fairytale.

The pavement leading to my road was narrow, wide enough for two way traffic but almost made it seem like the cars were fighting for dominance. It could be dangerous, especially going over the hills and you would rise out of your seat, hoping to catch a glimpse of the other side. The danger leading up was what made the road seem even better. Starting from the four-way stop (one that no one ever paid any mind to) to the pointless roundabout, it was exactly 1.5 miles. It was mostly flat, no potholes, with some ups and downs and curves to make it more attractive to the eye. The grass towards the North was always expertly trimmed and so lushly green it almost made you envious how perfect it was. The real crowning glory, though, was on the South side of the road, something that only the summer brought.

In the summer, the road was out of my way since the bland highway was a straight shot to my house from wherever I was. However, I always took the detour to see my road. I may have been hallucinating at the time or I would rather remember it this way but whenever I drove that road it always felt perfect. The sky would be ocean blue with white clouds acting as waves, crashing over the calm sky. Rolling down the windows, I wanted to catch every feeling of the breeze. The heat was always persistent but the breeze would give momentary relief not in the form of a cold touch but a warm, soft embrace. All I could hear was the rush of air passing through, shoving my hair around in a violent manner looking for an escape. As I would snake around the first roundabout, then the second, the smell signaled the beauty about to come. It was crisp and fresh mixed with the smell of marshmallows from my favorite perfume. The natural and artificial would always play together to create an unforgettable symphony. Then, I would see it.

Normally, I hated the sun. I feel it really has two purposes. To give life and take it. Unfortunately, in the summer when people drink more alcohol than water and plants have no access to the latter, it likes to take more than give. Despite its murderous tendencies in the summer time, for my road, it was a blessing. On the South side of the road, for only one summer, there was a sunflower field. Typically, the field was occupied by wheat or corn but never sunflowers. It was as if a gift dropped from the heavens. The golden sun kissed petals mixed with the smooth chocolate center, topped on vibrant green stems creating a collage of color. As I said, for my road, the sun gave life. A blanket of its finest seeds and its rays casting a personal spotlight on them, showing pride in what it created. I never dreamed much because I found it useless to wish for something you could never have, to give false hope when we as people are already so fragile. However, seeing that sunflower field, it was like my own personal dream came to life. The hope that something can grow when everything else is against it. These sunflowers were never meant to be there. They were supposed to be corn or wheat or dried and withered from the merciless sun. They grew though. Despite what should have happened, despite what was against them, they grew. If these resilient flowers could grow then maybe so could I.

If you asked my mother how she recalled my road, it would be a different tale. The logistics would be the same. The pointless roundabout, the ignored four way stop and the 1.5 mile stretch of fresh road. In regards to the sunflowers, she doesn't remember it like I do. In fact, she doesn't remember sunflowers at all. She remembers that summer being hot, so hot that you would be blinded by your own sweat dripping off your forehead. She remembers that road being dull and lifeless since the sun would have had to have killed anything that lived there. She remembers

them building on that road so it extended to the old baseball field that all the local kids went to. She doesn't remember sunflowers though. It almost makes me wonder if they ever did exist. Was I so desperate for some sign of hope that life would be okay that I made them up? I needed to feel as if I were like a sunflower myself, surviving the harsh conditions and rather than withering, I became beautiful. I never took any pictures of the sunflowers. I tell myself it's because I wanted to be in the moment with them and also didn't want to get pulled over for using my phone. Maybe instead, it was because if I had taken a picture, I would have seen that instead of my radiant sunflowers, I would have seen what the world really had placed there. A field of dead wheat.

There was one day in particular that stuck with me though, one that makes me think they had been there. My best friend had passed away. I've never been good at emotions but I was told that I should cry. I should be angry. I should scream and break down. I should just do something. However, I couldn't. It wasn't because I didn't care because I did. I just never felt like any of those emotions or actions were good enough though. None of them encompassed how I felt. So, I drove to my road. To the one place where I could feel the emotions I had inside. I drove with my windows down in the heat of summer, feeling the familiar breeze, smelling the mix of nature's perfume and my own favorite marshmallow one. This time I stopped though. I pulled over on the side of the road, put my hazards on and got out once I heard the rhythmic clicking of them. I had always seen the golden rays but I had never stopped to appreciate them from a different perspective. From here, standing in front of them, I smelled the unique scent that was like honey and grass mixed together. Where I normally heard nothing but the chaotic air, all I could hear was the stillness of the field and the occasional gentle sway of the

sunflowers' stems. All this time I had never touched them. Reaching my hand out, hesitant that it might just pass through air rather than feel the flower, I grazed one petal. It was the softest thing I had ever touched. A smooth, cool texture brought my senses to life, making me realize that all this time I had just passed them by without experiencing the best part of them. I started to cry. I thought it had been just because of how perfect these beautiful creatures were but in reality, I was coping. I realized as I felt the hot tears stream down my face, tasting the salt and sadness mixing together as I fought to catch my breath, sunflowers had been her favorite. Maybe that's why I had always been attracted to them. Or, maybe that's why I want to remember them because in a way, I would be remembering her.

I still don't dream. I don't hope for things because disappointment is something that is hard to cope with and as I said, I'm not good with emotions. The sunflowers were real. My mother or anyone else may not remember them because they were unimportant. They didn't need them to help get through life. They didn't need the sunflowers to prove to them that they could survive. I did though. They were my escape from reality, watching their sunkissed petals with smooth chocolates centers pass by as the warm breeze wrapped me in a soft embrace. I needed them to be real because if they weren't, then it was as if she wasn't either, my best friend. My sunflower. I guess I lied though. I do dream. I dream of my sunflowers. I do hope. I hope my sunflowers were real and not just in my dreams and that one day, they would come back to me.