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English 1301

2 October 2019

### Not Only Sunflowers

My memory usually fails me most of the time, but not with this memory. No. Never. It was the first time I met the sea, but this did not make the moment significant. I was with my family, but this also did not define the importance of the moment. What really sealed the moment in the most beautiful space of my heart and mind was a simple and momentary picture. The picture was taken on the return of our trip from Puerto Peñasco. It was the one that inspired the nickname of “Sunflower” for my mom. Although in that moment I did not notice, it was this nickname that marked my life forever, making sunflowers my personal seal.

It is easy to recall each detail of this short memory, not only because it is short, but because of the irony of the situation. I have always said that I dislike flowers, and to date, I still do not like them. I do not hate them, nor mistreat them, but they just do not attract my attention. So it seems peculiar to me that an object that seemed indifferent to me could be used to describe the most precious thing I have in my life—the woman who carried me for nine months and two weeks and who received me with no less than unconditional love without even knowing my name.

“Click!” the camera sounded while I was sitting between the non-existent seat that was between my parents, so yes, I was sitting on top of them. We were in a bus traveling along with our church group. It was seven o'clock in the morning, and we just woke up as if it was Sunday morning. We were fatigued because being on a trip for fourteen hours without having enough

space to stretch or to stand up was almost unbearable. Now, imagine me, a hundred-and-twenty-pound crazy kiddo on top of my parents. Yeah! Horrible! Anyway, our eyes were tired, our hair was just going crazy, and our faces were kind of attractive at about ten percent—so not attractive at all. My mother turned around saying in an amusing, but at the same time grievous voice, *"No puede ser, Mocosá, me estás tomando fotos otra vez!"* – *This can't be, Brat, you are taking pictures of me again!* My mouth only responded with a Machiavellian smile. The picture captured the morning beauty of my mom: her frizzy goldish short hair, her pale skin, and the dark circles that were two shades darker than her natural skin color. I have to admit it, when I first saw the picture, I imagined an angry lion, but I decided to leave my cruelty aside and take out my sarcastic side. "You look like a sunflower!" I replied in a mocking tone with all the intention of bothering her. Of course, for the rest of the trip, I was expelled from my non-existent seat, yet the moment, the picture, and the memory were worth it.

Since then, I started using the nickname Sunflower to refer to my mom and essentially to that picture that I took of her only to make her angry, or at least, that was true at the beginning. However, the more I used her nickname, the more special sunflowers became for us. The more I called her "Sunflower," the more similarities I found between them. It was no longer just her fluffy golden hair; now it was her personality, her vibe, her words, and the atmosphere she created around her, around everybody. Then, I realized that what she projected since I nicknamed her "Sunflower" is what she has been projecting since I was born, or possibly long before that. Thus, I understood that during my whole life, I had lived with a sunflower.

My Sunflower, my mom, has always had a vivacious, joyful, and very enthusiastic personality, and this is what stands out in her. I remember that every time I saw a sunflower, whether it was planted or in an image, I noticed the perfect contrast that is created in the place

where it was embodied, and instantly I would think about my mother. I first thought about how the sunflower captivated my sight with its simplicity. I could not help thinking that just by being itself, it communicated beauty and grace effortlessly. Then I thought that just like the sunflower, my mother radiated charm only by being herself. This made me realize how unique my mother is among people.

When the 2017 academic year was approaching, I had to make the decision to come to live to El Paso and let her go; it was painful. It was the most difficult decision we both had to make because I had lived sixteen years under the protection, support, and, above all, the immeasurable love of my Sunflower. I was used to the idea that at the end of the day, every day of every month of every year, her warm arms would hug me once again. I was accustomed to the delectable smell of her homemade food. I got used to the presence of harmony and sensitivity that she inspired and that roamed freely inside our home. It was like breathing peace and tranquility in the morning and going to bed confident and blissful at night. Nevertheless, all of these subsided in less than a week when I packed up my belongings and left my beloved home for a new house. I had to release my friends, my routine, my confidence, but most importantly, my wonderful Sunflower. Fortunately, I managed to bring something with me that neither old age, nor kilometers, nor time could seize from me: my mom's nickname and its story! Since I arrived in El Paso, sunflowers became the inspiration of almost everything I do, my writings, my thoughts, my drawings, and my reflections, among other things. Sunflowers are a motivation in my life because they remind me of my purpose here, where I came from, where I go, and the person who is waiting on the other side for me to become the best version of myself.

Now that I can only enjoy my mom's presence two days a week, capturing sunflowers around me makes me feel closer to her. They make me remember what I have experienced and

overcome by her side and that I have grown so much as a person, but not only me. We have both grown throughout this separation. In every detail of the sunflower, I can see the perfect reflection of my mother: an enthusiastic, cunning, charismatic, singular, and lovely woman.

An “I love you,” a hug, or even several, will never be enough to show her how important she is in my life, nor to thank her for the role of mother, father, and friend that she has taken, and keeps taking despite the distance and years. I will never be prepared enough to let her go completely when that day arrives. Even if I had someone to warn me of the years, months, days, or hours that I have left to remain with her, I would not be prepared. The presence and love of my Sunflower have guided me throughout my life. She has been like a light in a tunnel that shows me my way out. It is a light that brings warmth and peace to my heart, soul, and spirit because it gives me the certainty that whatever she says or does for me, it will be for my own good.

Sunflowers are not only sunflowers anymore. They came in a very subtle way to stay forever within me. They snuck into my story to become the main character in this chapter of my life and they took as their possession what I adore the most in life to give her their name. Furthermore, they were involved throughout my transition process to the United States, and they made me brave. Thanks to them, I understood the value of the objects and the people around me and how sensitive I can be to them. They not only represent one thing in my life, but they also describe much of it: emotions, people, memories, feelings, and my origin. I might not have my mom, her light, her love, her presence here by my side as I used to, but while I wait to bring her here with me, her essence and charm will live in each of my writings, drawings, reflections, because there is where I will portray Sunflowers.