

## SUNFLOWER

One cold November morning I noticed a sunflower coming into bloom on my patio. It was growing up from a crack between the house and the paving stones underneath the birdfeeder.

The little flower stood straight up. It had a thin stem with mottled green leaves and a small, round burst of bright yellow on top. It would never have made it into any flower shows, that's for sure. It was stunted, its bloom a crush of petals squashed together around its centre. They stuck up and out like a spikey hair-do, the biggest one no more than three-quarters of an inch long. It was a scrawny, misshapen little flower, and to me it was beautiful.

Beside it stood its much larger, and at one time, much grander sibling. A big, broad, perfectly formed flower once adorned the main stem. Five perfectly formed miniature versions of itself branched out below like accessories accentuating its beauty. But now, its leaves were crinkled and brown, the stalk yellowed like hay, the dry wilted flowers hanging down in petrified stillness. It had a different beauty now.

I sat and looked at these two flowers, and I wondered why I enjoyed them so much. I asked myself what they meant to me. The answer was very clear. They were a reminder to me of the mighty, unstoppable power of the life force. I looked at the little flower standing so proud and thought about will and determination, the carriers of that force. I remembered that struggles can be won and great things can be achieved against all odds... summer sunflowers do grow outside in the cold, dark days of early winter.

Looking at the splendor of each flower, I saw the glory of life past and the promise of life now, and I was reminded that renewal is a necessary part of life. It is what keeps life on this planet vibrant and alive. I was reminded renewal is a constant. Life never stops. And as I watched the bright splash of yellow dancing with abandon against the gray, windy skies, I remembered that renewal carries with it the seeds of hope and great joy.

In this world there is strife. There is hardship, and there is suffering. There is inequity. There is injustice. There is also abundant beauty amidst it all. And within that beauty there are reminders tucked away everywhere, encouraging us to persist, to strive, and to bring our dreams for a better world to life. We have only to open our hearts and look, and we will see them.

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