

Roots and Bloom: Nostalgia of Sunnyside
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(Photos by me, unless link provided)

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When I was little, Sunnyside felt endless, like the sky itself belonged to me. There weren't many stores or restaurants then; just a couple of small corner shops owned by neighbors, empty lots, and streets lined with beautiful houses. Because there wasn't much to do, I learned to pay attention to what was alive around me. I remember the purple flowers that grew tall in summer, the old trees that leaned toward the light, and the sky that watched me grow up through the seasons. The trees were my landmarks. I could tell where I was by the shape of their branches or the way they caught the light at sunset.





I used to spend hours outside, sitting under those trees, sometimes reading, sometimes just watching the neighborhood move slowly around me. There was a stillness then, one that I miss. A feeling that time didn't need to hurry. I think that's what made Sunnyside feel like home. It wasn't about the buildings or the streets; it was about the rhythm of life that grew quietly between them.

I've lived here since I was a toddler, with my grandma and grandpa. We walked to the little tiendita that their friend owned. Buying groceries for dinner and my mom's daily scratch tickets. The walks always felt so long, not the draining type of long. It was a walk I always looked forward to.

We always took the same path to the different places around our house; I could walk it with my eyes closed.

Now, when I walk through the same neighborhood, everything looks different. Bright murals stretch across once blank brick walls. Cafés spill out onto patios crowded with people and music. There are new smells in the air: coffee, breakfast, and paint. The streets feel busier, filled with movement and construction.

I don't know how to feel about the new energy; I don't recognize the people, our neighbors aren't friends with us anymore, and most of the ones I knew have passed away or couldn't afford to live here. Sometimes, it feels like the old calmness has been paved over.

Nostalgia is a powerful feeling, an emotion that I feel a lot. I don't want to sound negative because that's never fun, but it is sad to see your life changing so quickly as you grow up. Holidays aren't the same in my neighborhood anymore, and the connection I had with everyone around Sunnyside feels like it's slowly fading. I still pass by houses that used to belong to people I knew, but now there are new names on the mailboxes and new cars in the driveways. It's strange to realize that time doesn't pause for anyone, not for me, not for the places I love.





But it's not all bad. Change has its own kind of beauty if you know where to look. You can learn to love a new version of the place that raised you. The sky remains the same, with its clouds and sunsets. The rainbow still appears after the rain. The trees' leaves still whistle the same way they did when I was younger, like they're reminding me that not everything drifts away. The walks through the neighborhood are still pretty. Sometimes even more so now, with bursts of color from new gardens and fresh murals.

At the end of our block, there's a tiny white house, rustic, but not the scary kind. It's small and beautiful in its simplicity, like it's been there all along, waiting to be noticed. A new, lovely family lives there, and they've turned their yard into a community garden. Every season, it comes alive: tomatoes, sunflowers, herbs, and the gentle hum of bees. They even have ducks, chickens, and a few kittens that wander through the grass. I love walking by in the evenings when the light hits just right, and everything glows gold. I wish I had a picture of it when it's in full bloom because it feels like a photograph that already exists in my memory.

That little house reminds me of what community can still mean. Even if the people change, the history doesn't have to. The garden shows that Sunnyside is still alive, still growing. Maybe that's what growing up here has taught me: things don't stay the same, but they can remain beautiful. The flowers keep coming back, the sky keeps opening up, and the roots we plant, whether in the ground or in each other, keep finding their way home.

This is a picture I have taken from the garden, and one I look at often because it's so pretty.



Reflection

For my multimodal project, I created a photo essay titled "Roots and Bloom: Nostalgia in Sunnyside," inspired by the changes I've seen in my neighborhood over time. It's not exactly a travel essay in the original sense, since travel in my essay is through time. I wanted to capture both the nostalgia of my childhood and the new life that has grown here, showing how nature connects the old and the new. I also wanted to touch on the gentrification that I have observed in my neighborhood, which has led to the loss of many of my neighbors. I took all the photographs myself, except for the Sunnyside mural one. I focused on pictures with trees, flowers, and quiet corners that remind me of the past. I organized the photos like a walk through memory, starting with calm, familiar spaces, moving through newer ones. My audience is anyone who has experienced a place they love evolving and changing over time. If I had more time to find different pictures, I would include childhood photos or even sounds from the neighborhood to deepen the sense of connection. This project was very emotional and meant a lot to me because it helped me see that even though my community looks different now, its roots are still strong.