

# No Dirt In Common

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The road leading to our home was the color of maize, because the sand was brought to us from elsewhere. It made a beautiful ribbon of desert from the highway to the porch, sliding past Mrs. Thompson's blackberry vine, and continuing to the houses with brick siding. Our sand stayed loyal to us, and although it mated with the paved road, it sent the paved road on to higher ground immediately afterward.

I refused to wear shoes, and my toes were grateful for the talc texture of my road and its changeable beauty. The county road crew would sometimes come and scrape its face to smooth the ruts. Then, the first car passing would leave traces in the sand and kick up dust. This left me sulking on the planks of the porch, the road's virginity spoiled again. When it rained, I felt wonder at the way it would transmute itself into dark puddled tire ditches. I stomped in the mud, but never in the tire tracks, which seemed to me like tender veins.

The sand of my road was so soft and silky, that one night, in the annoying blackness of a new moon, I stepped on a snake, and didn't know my foot was resting on it until it twitched. The only sympathy I got was an admonishment that I should wear shoes. My bare footedness went on, undeterred.

At the edge of the road was large oak, where I entertained my Barbie doll by imagining her rooms between walls formed by roots, and her furniture derived from knots and bumps and scars in the bark. Her superpowers allowed her to jump from room to room, and unlike me, her bubble hairdo could simply have the sand shaken out of it. My sweat made my hair drip and stink, which never hindered me at all. My friend Jeanette was constantly trying to entice me toward the swing set in her backyard, which held no interest for me. It rested on grass, and she had a younger brother.

My routine day in the street ended with a call indoors and a bug inspection, which usually revealed bites on the soles of my feet. It took me years to learn how to control my urge to scratch, and I submitted nightly to a quarter cup of Clorox in my bath water to avoid developing impetigo. It would neither surprise or embarrass me to learn that my Mother had to worm me every few months, like a puppy. On the positive side, I suppose, all my mother's friends loved my summer streaked hair.

Fall came, with its school shoes and fitted clothes, and then another summer. I left my dirt for tree branches, stolen blackberries, sneaking to the trestle, and learning to "shoot the bird" by sticking up my middle finger. I was taught that no one says "shit damn", because shit and damn don't go together.

As an adult, I made a friend who loves gardening, and dirt of course, but not like I do. I'm still searching for someone who loves dirt like I do, but I take what I can get on matters such as this. She has since moved away, so now I have no dirt in common with her or anyone else. I feel a strange loneliness for her that I never felt as a child, when I was alone with my intimate dirt. Today, I think I will go to the beach, and forgive it for its sharp sand and lack of trees.

