

POEMS ON MEMORIES, HOPE, AND HOME

*Written by the students of the
Spring 2026 Level 5 ESOL
Creative Writing Class*



International
Institute of
New England

About the International Institute of New England

For more than 100 years, the International Institute of New England (IINE) has created opportunities for refugees and immigrants to succeed through humanitarian relief, education, employment support, and legal services. With locations in Boston and Lowell, Massachusetts, and Manchester, New Hampshire, IINE serves thousands of individuals and families annually, including people displaced by political instability, violence, and climate crises; survivors of human trafficking; and unaccompanied children joining family members in New England. With the continued partnership of community and philanthropic supporters throughout New England, IINE will continue to change lives and the region for the better for the next 100 years and beyond.

For more information, visit iine.org.

To our readers:

This collection of poems reflects the hard work, creativity, and vulnerability of our advanced-level ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students.

As part of a Creative Writing class in the spring of 2026, I had the opportunity to bring my personal passion for poetry into the classroom. Students explored modern poetry by reading and discussing poems by Langston Hughes, Tishani Doshi, Ada Limón, Maggie Smith, and Marie-Célie Agnant. Through this study, they learned about figurative language, form, and voice. Then, using several prompts, they began creating poems of their own. The students told me that writing poetry helped them capture their memories and find a therapeutic outlet to process what it means to leave home behind and try to rebuild it somewhere new.

As their teacher, I was moved by their willingness to step outside their comfort zones and by the raw emotions—from sorrow to joy, longing to hope—that they shared in their writing. This project represents the best part of teaching for me: empowering students to tell their own stories and communicate with confidence. I loved learning about their countries, their families, and who they are, and I hope you will feel the same.

Thank you for your support of IINE and of our refugee and immigrant community members. It's this generosity that helps them find and use their voices here.

Caroline Sutphin
Lead ESOL Instructor

I Remember

By Valerie

I remember when I lived in my country, every morning I woke up to the song of a rooster.

I remember the smell of coffee waking me up in the morning.

I remember when the vendors used to walk through the neighborhoods.

I remember when it was really hot and I would enjoy an ice cream, tikarol.

I remember that every Sunday morning we had to go to church.

I remember when I was a child I wished every day was Sunday because I would eat salad, lasagnas, and fried chicken.

I remember the smell of the earth after the rain has drizzled.

I remember when I was a kid jumping rope.

I remember when I could smell the sea.

I remember when I was bathing in the rain.

I remember when I was happy when they turned on the electricity.

I remember I had a window in my kitchen from which you could see everything happening in the street.

I remember my native country and all its cultures.



Write to Connect

By Awad

As writers, we're at a physical distance from our readers.

But we can pull readers closer to us, invite them into our world, and make them feel like we're together.

We can put an arm around a shoulder and whisper a few words of encouragement. We can pat a reader on their back and celebrate a small achievement-we made it through another day.

We can laugh together, or cry together, or we can simply let ourselves be, listen to the birdsong, and let life flow past us.

I think writing is like magic sometimes!



I Remember

By Jean

I remember when I was a little boy.
When everyone lives in peace.
At that time, nobody was acting like a cowboy.
I remember the smell of coffee in the morning.
The cries of the street vendors.
Our grandfather's stories every evening.
At that time, we had many traditional doctors.
I remember how beautiful the rivers were.
How I loved swimming with my friends.
At that time, respect was everywhere.
I remember the look on my mother's face when I stayed out late.

Mom

By Rudbeckia

Today I write about my mom. Her name was Rudbeckia. She was the first female orthopedic surgeon in Cuba. She loved orthopedics, she loved the operating room, and she loved teaching.

For her, orthopedics was like a family. She never stopped studying or reading books. She had four children, and together with my grandmother, she educated us and helped shape the people we are today.

For her, the most important things were family and family harmony. Her home was the center of our family, a place where we shared both our problems and our joys. Her granddaughters adored her as well.

She was strong, capable, disciplined, and punctual. She passed away four years ago, but even today, whenever I feel tired or ready to give up, I think of her. Then I tell myself, "If she could do it, I can do it too," and I keep going.

My mother taught me that perseverance, love, and dedication can overcome any obstacle.

Her example, her values, and her strength continue to guide me every day. She will always live in my heart and in the hearts of everyone who had the privilege of knowing and loving her.



Little Haiti

By Atyanax

Little Haiti, Haiti was the first free black republic in 1804. Where mountains rise to meet the sky and the sea sparkles blue and bright.

When you wake up, you hear sounds of roosters at 5 o'clock in the morning. I would tell you about warm sunshine, drinking a cup of tea, fresh food and the beach.

I would tell you about the street filled with music, beautiful Caribbean, waterfalls, and design on the block. Behind mountains, there are mountains. January first is a very important day for Haitians to celebrate and share the special dish, 'soup joumou'.

I would tell you that Haiti is rich, strong, a country built on courage and hope.

My grandmother always tells me that what you don't know is greater than you.

I Remember

By Austria

I remember the smell of warm bread drifting
through the kitchen, the way morning sunlight
punted gold across the floor.

I remember the sound of my grandmother's stories,
woven like threads that stitched the past into my
palm.

I remember the first time I felt small in a big world,
and how someone's kindness made it feel less
frightening.

I remember the dreams I carried like stones in my
pockets, heavy at first, then lighter as I learned to
let them grow.

From the window, everything felt possible, the
trees whisper secrets to the breeze, the whole
world waiting, patient and wide, for me to step into
it.



Les Cayes Botanical Garden

By Rachelle

The Botanical Garden is an amazing place
The beauty of the landscapes filled with wonder
The decorative trees are breathtaking to behold
The lush green trees with fragrant scents
Fruit trees with delicious flavors fill the garden
with their fragrance

The garden strikes with admiration visitors
How beautiful it is to visit this square,
where the flowers delight the eyes
An atmosphere of calm and serenity,
helps people connect with nature
The beautiful garden, I remember you.

I Remember

By Daniela

I remember my elementary school,
the classrooms, the playground, and my teachers' smiles.
I remember learning new things every day
and dreaming about the future.

I remember the simple life we lived,
when happiness came from small things.
I remember the strong bonds in my family,
filled with love, support, and togetherness.

I remember the neighborhood where our house stood,
the familiar streets, the kind neighbors, and my friends.
I remember spending long afternoons outside,
laughing and playing until sunset.

I remember family and school trips,
especially on Fridays, our day off.
I remember the excitement of traveling together
and creating memories that still make me smile.

I remember the Spring Festival in my city,
with its colors, music, and joyful celebrations.
I remember the beauty of those days
and the happiness that filled the air.

I remember all these moments today,
and they take me back to a distant and innocent time.
I remember a childhood full of warmth and wonder,
a chapter of life I will always treasure.



Hope

By Jeffley

Hope is that little voice we hear saying, “don’t
give up”.

On your back is a heavy burden that prevents you
from looking up.

Pretending to be happy while hiding tears of
despair.

Even if you lose the strength of your youth, keep
fighting as long as you can breathe the air.

Where I Was Born

By Beverly

Let us not speak of gray days, nor of the farewell traced upon the windowpane. Let us not dwell on the dust of the road, nor the biting cold at the threshold. Instead, let us look at our hands, the bridges, the cities, and our home. But if you ask me, little one, where I come from where I belong I will tell you that my land is a hidden heartbeat, a place where children play in the town squares, where the wind smells of flowers and birds sing in the trees. I hold within my heart old memories: the scent of morning bread, the cobblestone streets, and the tiled roof houses where the rain gently rocks the window. It is not a map of drawn lines that I carry hidden in my soul, but songs and laughter the roots of a past that has never truly left. And though I live a different life now, and the wind here speaks with a different accent, I tell you the story of my origins so that the wind may carry it into your memory. So that you may know, little traveler, that the world is vast and ready to embrace you, yet there will always be a light in some corner of the earth the source of the very blood that makes you dream today.



My Mother (Guerrier)

By Claireus

My mother has a kind smile, and gentle. She is patient, loving, and always encourages me to do my best. She always helps our family, and tells me to never give up.

I remember walking with her and laughing together. I remember her hugs when I felt sad. I remember when we lived in Haiti. We spent time together at the beach, listened to the sound of the waves.

She is strong and loving. She is my inspiration. I am thankful for her every day, and I will always love her.



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