

# From Longing to Belonging

Category: Longing

written by Neeta Nayak | February 9, 2026

I wonder if there is anyone alive who does not suffer from a case of acute longing every now and then. I used to think that once I reached a certain age, or a certain level of maturity, or a certain financial condition, I would be rid of such feelings. I realize now that there is no such milestone. Longing does not ever retire.

I started writing poetry seriously during COVID, but my relationship with writing began much earlier. I remember writing my first poem when I was ten years old, about the sun being the biggest ball of fire: a bold metaphor, I thought. I showed it to an adult at school—who laughed and said that it was juvenile. That only Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Tagore were worthy of being called poets. That everyone else was plainly pretending.

Such a rejection is enough to shut a child up. I longed to write again, but those words haunted me: “Only so and so can be a poet, the rest are fake.” They surfaced every time I picked up a pencil, so I’d put it down again. I figured my longing to belong to the world of writers would likely stay a dream.

By the time I was fifteen, my longing to be a published writer was overwhelming. So I wrote a short essay for a newsmagazine, handwritten on a sheet of notebook paper, and mailed it in surreptitiously. For months, week after week, I checked the Sunday edition. One fine Sunday morning, it was there!

My dad found it first. He always had the honor of reading the voluminous newspaper as soon as it arrived. That morning, he looked at a certain page, then at me, then back at the page, and said, “I think I see your name,” almost unsure of what he was reading.

Once I looked it over and convinced myself it was indeed my article, I floated from cloud one to cloud nine faster than the speed of thought—indeed, faster than the speed of longing.

And suddenly, just like that, I understood that you did not need permission from history’s greats to write. One did not need to be Shakespeare reborn to belong to the clan of writers. I just had to stop believing that I was an outsider.

Longing is simply fuel to make a dream come true, and once it does you realize it’s just the first step to belonging.

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