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From Çanakkale, thoughts about family create an invitation to a global community.

by [Catherine Yiğit](#) on 2 August 2010

It started with a newspaper article, that impersonal medium seeming personally addressed to me – two American women living in Istanbul were looking for submissions for an anthology. I read twice to make sure I understood the Turkish completely.

I was living in Çanakkale, home to [Troy](#), the birthplace of literature and [Gallipoli](#), the end of the Ottoman empire. Both have a constant stream of visitors, but few stay for more than a day or two, blown on by the incessant wind. Though there are a few expats, there is no expat community and I was lonely.

After two years in Turkey I was not put off by the title “Tales from the Expat Harem.” I knew it was more than the seedy stereotype known outside of Turkey. The [harem](#) was the centre of the Sultan’s household, the domestic powerbase that supported him. Girls were brought to the harem from throughout the Sultan’s realm, many from outside the borders of modern Turkey.

Thrown into a new culture and new language, I shared some of their bewilderment and loneliness. Though the harem bore little relation to my life in Turkey, the desire to link to a community of women in a similar position was overpowering. Letting my 9-month-old oversleep, I wrote a raw piece about my first arrival to Turkey and hit send.

It was rejected.

The editors, Anastasia Ashman and [Jennifer Eaton Gökmen](#), asked if I could write another piece, more relevant to life within Turkey. [‘The Food Factory’](#) was about my acceptance of my place as *gelin*, bride, within a typical Turkish family. Through months of back and forth editing my imagination was alive with thoughts of the book’s launch. I would travel to Istanbul, meet these unknown friends, live my 15 minutes.

It didn’t happen.

By the time of the book’s Turkish release in late 2005 I was over eight months pregnant, and the six-hour commute with a toddler was too much. The official launch was a week after my son’s birth; 15 minutes of sleep was the limit of my ambition. Needless to say I missed the American launch the following spring.

travellers, the culturally aware could interact. Launched in October 2009 the [expat+HAREM](#) has sparked conversations on topics as varied as motherhood, language, archaeology and the dangers of smiling. Contributors, both male and female, are geographically spread from Taiwan to Turkey, New York to Moscow and represent half a dozen nationalities. [Rose Deniz](#), spurred on by [Tara Lutman Ağacayak](#), developed [Dialogue2010](#), a place to talk about art, culture and the hybrid life of the expat.

In the last eight months I finally made it to Istanbul and met Anastasia. I participated in a global phone conversation with nine other expats. I've set up my own business. I've expanded my blog.

Being surrounded by a dynamic group has ignited my drive. Friendships made with inspiring, creative women, linking up through social media, interacting in a real sense, having real conversations.

I've found my community without stirring from my desk chair.

2007 photograph of the Harem at Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, © Catherine Yiğit.

Catherine Yiğit runs a language-editing business [Skaian Gates English](#), blogs at the [Skaian Gates](#) and [tweets](#) with an ever-expanding circle of expats, writers and the culturally aware from her home in northwest Turkey. She holds a degree in geology from Trinity College in Dublin.



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{ 3 comments... read them below or [add one](#) }



[1 Judith van Praag](#) 2 August 2010 at 10:19 am

Dear Catherine,
Wonderful to count myself as one of your community, Dialogue2010 sister!
Warmly from my behind my desk in Seattle,
Judith van Praag



[2 Elisa Croatia](#) 5 August 2010 at 3:01 am

Hi Catherine,
I found your link via reading Rose's blog. I'm truly inspired to be reading your story. You see, I have been living in Croatia, and I never imagined I would be blogging, sharing my life with the world, but it began as a way to 'let off steam' I needed to journal my life in a new land. Now a year has passed by. I have met wonderful people, like you said, 'behind my desk.' I look forward to reading more about your journey in Turkey.

Elisa



[3 Catherine Yiğit](#) 6 August 2010 at 8:41 am

Judith, you're an inspiration with your energy and art. Truly a pleasure and an honour to be in the same community.

Elisa, I know that initial need to vent in some way, to acknowledge that things are different by throwing away privacy! Wonderful to 'meet' you, thank you for your kind words.

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• Remember Mercury?

Mercury is the messenger god in Roman mythology. He is tied to the Greek god Hermes, also the god of travelers, and to the Egyptian god Thoth, inventor of writing. The Romans used Mercury to win market share over Lugh, a similar Celtic god, taking over his value proposition.

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