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## Same river, never twice

By CATHERINE YİĞİT



The philosopher **Heraclitus**, born in Ephesus on the Aegean coast of Turkey, said in the fifth century BC, “*You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters are continually flowing on.*” Expats understand this concept more than most.

It's been over two years since I went home and I can feel the need to return pressing more urgently every day.

I realize things have changed. Ireland is in the middle of a crushing recession as the Celtic Tiger **exhales its last breath**. There have been additions and sudden unfortunate losses in my extended family. Yet when I think of going home I don't consider these to be more than the expected changes of life.

I imagine afternoons in warm pubs, pints of Guinness on the table and conversation flowing. Favorite holiday spots around the country; a session in **Falcarragh**, Co. Donegal or high tea in **Gougane Barra**, Co. Cork. I envision wandering through the streets of Dublin, listening to buskers, window-shopping, drifting at will through the city. Warm cups of milky coffee in **Bewley's café** with sinful cream slices.

The logistics only rarely cross my mind. Two young children who get bored being walked around the streets, who may not be welcome in the pub and would much prefer to visit the zoo. Trips down the country become a mess of rented or borrowed cars and car seats, expensive accommodation.

What I really miss is the lifestyle I had when I left Ireland, not just my family or even the place itself. I miss being a student, living away from home in the centre of a vibrant city, free to do what I want, when I want.

**What do you miss most about your home country? The solid reality of family and places — or an atmosphere long since vanished?**

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**Catherine Yiğit** is a native of Dublin, Ireland and writes from Çanakkale, northwestern Turkey where she lives with her Turkish husband and two children.

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- *xan*

And I came back. For good it seems. To this land of all childhood memories and adolescent anguish... and I can't find myself here, being away for so long, melting into another culture, building my adult life on different ground - it all have changed me too much to fit back in. Same river, never twice.

Got to re-learn swimming, learn to live in my old homeland as I have in those foreign places that now seem so much more "mine" than the land of my forefathers and mothers.

Cheers to all identity misfits ;)

- **Anastasia**

The disorientation is so palpable Xandra...

I get the image of a person walking through a ghosttown of memories, now overlaid with unfamiliar new life. And because people like us left, as you say, the person we are when we return is so changed by our experience finding points of connection is more akin to what we've already gone through in foreign lands.

- **Claudia**

Thank you for this very thoughtful post, Catherine. It really hits home as we are coming up to the Christmas Holidays. Lots of memories and how nothing seems the way it used to be, but how could it? Memory is a funny thing.

I miss the forests most of all, the deep, cool, moist forests of my grandmothers place, the rain and the weather changes, the smell of spring after a long winter, the cold steady breeze of salt and fish on the coast of Germany where I grew up. I do not miss the dark, overcast days that stretch on for weeks without any light and sun.

As to family and friends, it seems that when I get back time has not changed people much, apart from family additions and kids growing there is this sense of stepping right back in old conversations as if we never had been apart, which is somewhat comforting, somewhat discerning.

@rose, I love what you said, "...an artful balance of past, present, and future in one moment"!

@Catherine and @brian, I think we do compare differences as much as everyone, perhaps we have more to compare it with :-)

"I'd add that I miss drainpipes that go to the ground where there are drains for the rainwater" yep! :D

- **brian underdown**

how strange or not so , i felt like this back in october this year ,i guess however hard you try to move on ,the past always hold some memories you dont want to lose.Figen nailed it for me things like gardening,walking the dog across the fields to the north downs those simple sounding thoughts mean so much when in doubt. also thanks for the reminder but life is not so bad here in istanbul and the outings to country pubs in kent are dissapearing rapidly everything is focused on city centres where you will struggle to find that localised smell of ale. great post and can i ask a question to you all ? Do you think ex-pats are continously analyzing the differences ,if so why ? just curious of peoples thoughts ...brian

- **rosedeniz**

Catherine, it is reassuring to hear you say "humans rely on comparisons to draw conclusions" because so often I seek to situate myself in time and place, the past playing a big role. I don't think this negates the idea of living in the present, but is rather a artful balance of past, present, and future in one moment. Managing daily tasks of home with children while attempting to pursue one's own work can make the present moment rather raw and frazzled. Sometimes it is only at the the of the day, when the house is quiet and I creep off to bed, that I realize how splendid it was. That kind of nostalgia is something I would never want to replace with detachment.

- **Yazarc**

Rose I think having young children is the key to my nostalgia! Once they grow older I'll probably pine for the days when they were young and leaving the house was an ordeal!

Living in the present is a great ideal, but I think without an idea of where we have come from, how we have changed and where we're headed, that day-to-day living can be very shallow. Humans rely on comparison to draw conclusions and experience from things.

- **Anastasia**

I know exactly what you mean about the shallowness of a moment's experience devoid of links to past or future. But the Buddhists would say living without desire (for what was, or could be) is how to eliminate suffering...and therefore when we achieve moments like that they are not shallow, but transcendent of human nature itself.

Eeek. So much enlightenment to receive, so little time!

- **Yazarc**

Funny I just came across the same sentiment written about a character in a "That They May Face the Rising Sun" by John McGahern

'He was no longer living from moment to moment, from blow to blow, pleasure to pleasure, refusing to look forward or back: he was now living these bus rides on Thursday in the mind as well. The seeds of calamity were sown.'

- **rosedeniz**

Catherine, I can relate to this having two small children that I travel home with, too. All my romantic notions of what I'll do when home fade away once I realize the impossibility of doing many of them, and that's not only a result of having children. I'm nostalgic for who I used to be and what I used to do, like you talk about, and even should I not have kids to hoist over the ocean by plane, who I used to be doesn't exist anymore. Now nearly five years abroad, I'm thinking it's time for me to develop a taste for enjoyable future unknowns and being in the present, rather than past trails. Thank you for delving into this subject so thoughtfully!

- **Yazarc**

Jocelyn loss of loved ones makes the whole process of homecoming more fraught as you say. Being away from home means grieving repeatedly in a way, when it happens and when you relive it every time you return.

Catherine I like the way you say you are back 'being the daughter' again! It sums it up so well. It can be difficult to reconcile being the wife and being the daughter at the same time! That I long for freedom while rooted and you long for rootedness while living between two countries probably says more about human nature than anything else!

Figen, I think the view of a long-term resident and that of a visitor are so different it can add another layer of alienation to homecoming. Everyone's complaining and we can't see why! I'd add that I miss drainpipes that go to the ground where there are drains for the rainwater to your list!

- **Figen Cakir**

Just reading your post made me pine! To me, it feels like the moment I started living in Turkey time stood still in London. It distresses me to read daily of how different Britain today has become and I don't want to let go of the Britain I knew and loved 15 years ago. I go back every two years, if not every year, and it doesn't seem changed to my biased eyes. But I suppose if I put my kids in school, started 'real' life, would I feel the changes everyone there complains about? I don't know. I only know that I miss my family, friends, being able to walk with a buggy on proper pavements, lush green parks, cars who stop for you, gardening and the laid-back atmosphere.

- **Catherine Bayar**

This post really tugs at me Catherine, especially since I am "home" this holiday season - or at least, in the place of my birth. Every winter when I return to California, I see how much it's changed. Nieces and nephews now taller than I am, friends who have moved off to other cities so are harder to see, favorite shops and restaurants that have closed so neighborhoods no longer feel like mine. But there is still so much the same that I'm thrown back into earlier days of being the daughter, the sister...sometimes I feel like I'm time-traveling, not just changing continents.

I have more a sense of passing time and getting older when I'm here. In my Turkish life, I never seem to age - or rather, I'm not so face to face with it. We have no children to place us firmly in time. Because of our work, we have new visitors to meet each day. They almost always ask what you have - what do you miss most? I'd have to say it's not having all of my loved ones nearby to enjoy the day to day, to be able to watch everyone's changes unfold.

It's interesting that you long for the freedom of your past. I'd like to feel slightly more rooted.

- **Jocelyn**

Thanks for the thoughtfully written post, Catherine!

It reminds me of how I pine for a vanished past of my own in the US. I lost my mother when I was 17, and I think I am often nostalgic for some of those times -- especially for those months before she died. As such, for a long time, "coming home" was always fraught with melancholy and the sense of loss. Sometimes, it is still is.

I have a box with memories of my mother and that time of my life. In those darkest moments, when I feel a longing for that place, I go to the box and look through it. Sometimes I laugh, sometimes I cry, but it helps me to cope at some level.

- **Silvana Vukadin-Hoitt**

Catherine's post resonates with me deeply. I have written a couple of posts on my website that I will share, regarding similar thoughts on places that I call home, not always the same country. Each place has it's own pull for a hundred different reasons: memories of youthful exuberance, family ties, a sense of cultural belonging. It is difficult to name exactly what it is but as I notice with Catherine's post, these vignettes most often contain the intimacy of the senses, sight, most pronouncedly, smell, touch, emotions akin to love. I like that she remembers her sense of freedom in that place she calls 'home'. at Silvanamondo 'Nostalgia' <http://tinyurl.com/ydqngwp>

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