



THE Simpson PRIZE

A COMPETITION FOR
YEAR 9 AND 10 STUDENTS

JOURNAL of TRIP to
GALLIPOLI

2010 Winner

Australian Capital Territory

Alexandra Biggs

Canberra Girls' Grammar School



Simpson Prize 2010 – Journal of Trip to Gallipoli

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17 April

At 10am, after desperately rushing off my debating factsheet to my coach, I set off to the airport with mum. There was a moment of panic (more like twenty minutes ...) when we reached the check-in counter, as, due to the volcanic ash cloud over Europe, they were unable to guarantee my flight to Istanbul. I was also warned of the possibility of not being able to catch my flight from Singapore due to the huge number of people stuck there. I finally got upstairs to the departure lounge, where I said goodbye to mum and walked across the tarmac to catch the tiny plane from Canberra to Sydney. I was in a row all on my own, as the plane was only half full. Just before the scheduled take-off time, the captain announced that there were “technical difficulties” and that we were going to be delayed as an engineer fixed the problem. That statement didn’t exactly fill me with confidence, but soon enough we were off the ground. I entertained myself during that flight reading *Vanity Fair* magazine, but soon arrived in Sydney, only to discover that there was no-one there to meet me! After yet another panic and some wandering around, I found a teacher and joined Maisie and Kimberley, who had also just arrived. We went and found Sarah as she got off her plane, got her luggage and then boarded the train to the international terminal. The train ticket was \$5, which seemed a bit of a rip-off considering the train only took 100 seconds to get there. We met up with the rest of the group, and went to check in. At the check-in counter we discovered that Istanbul was the only place in Europe that still had its airport open. In the two hours since Canberra, Athens had been forced to shut by the ever-spreading ash cloud caused by a volcano in Iceland. So we just scraped through. Once we’d checked in we had some lunch (Krispy Kremes seemed to be the overwhelming favourite – even I couldn’t resist them) and then made it through customs to reach the duty-free area and departure gate. We boarded our plane – I was between Dale and Jackie. It was heart wrenching to walk through first class and business class, only end up in cramped economy. During the flight, I ate the best meal of my flying life, a Singaporean noodle dish. I had a *Glee* marathon, watching about five hours worth of episodes. Dale just about had an asthma attack, and we joked that if he made a big enough deal about it being “claustrophobia-induced”, they’d move him to business class! After *Glee*, I watched a few episodes of *How I Met Your Mother*, and finally we arrived in Singapore at about midnight Canberra time.

18 April

We disembarked at Singapore, and were told we'd have one hour to wander around the terminal. I walked off with the girls, first to freshen up in the bathroom, and then to check out the shops. Sarah and I had a milkshake craving, so we went on a desperate hunt – but to no avail. The nearest I could get was a weird Milo drink at Burger King. We rejoined the rest of the group and moved towards the departure gate. By this stage we were all semi-delirious because of sleep deprivation and were laughing at the weirdest things. Finally, at about 2am by my internal body clock, we boarded our flight to Istanbul. This time I was lucky enough to get a window seat, and was with Sarah and Sophie, and behind Maisie and Dale. They turned the cabin lights off as the plane took off, but Sarah, Sophie, Will & I could not stop giggling as we flicked through my Turkish phrasebook, with its catchy phrases like “yavash ol” (“easy tiger”)! Finally, I was overwhelmed with tiredness and fell asleep. I slept well, except for one brief half-dream where I thought I'd missed out on choc-chip pancakes for some reason. I woke up soon before we landed in Dubai. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to disembark in Dubai, but I took the opportunity to stretch my legs with some yoga with Sarah at the back of the plane. Some Emirati officials came through to check our boarding passes, but soon enough we were back in the air again. Once again, I spent most of the flight sleeping (like a baby, according to Sarah & Will) but finally, after hours of uncomfortable-ness, we landed to much excitement. “This is Turkish air we're breathing” became a bit of a catchphrase. After getting our Turkish visas for \$20, we collected our baggage (my new purple suitcase!) and found our tour guide, Eser. We caught our mini bus to our hotel in the old city, while taking in the amazing sights of Istanbul. Our hotel was really nice, with quite lovely décor. After having a shower (my hair went curly again after having been straightened for the flight) and getting changed, we had lunch in the hotel restaurant, which had views of the Sea of Marmara. Then, the whole group caught the mini bus to a cruise ship on the Bosphorus. We went on a beautiful cruise, with Eser giving us the lowdown on the history of Istanbul, which dates back to 7000 BC. Many of us picked out our dream houses on the waterfront, and also made the executive decision that it would rock to go to school in Istanbul – many of the high schools are housed in ex-royal palaces! I got very worried that my vocabulary was depleted when Eser told us that “bebek” (as in “bebek gibi” – “he's a babe”) meant “baby face”. Luckily, she told us that it also means handsome, so my fears were soon relieved. We then went to the Hagia Sophia, which means ‘divine wisdom’. It is a basilica/mosque/museum, and is technically the 4th largest church in the world. The walls are covered in beautiful gold Byzantium mosaics, but unfortunately most were covered during the Ottoman (aka Muslim) takeover. It was very beautiful, and both Maisie and I made a wish as we passed under the great dome, whose four guardian angels are supposed to take your wish directly to God. After taking in the splendour of the Hagia Sophia, we went back to our hotel. All eight of us students walked down to an apparently famous Turkish Delight shop, and bought eight pieces for the grand total of 1 Turkish lira – about 80 Australian cents. We ate them simultaneously, and toasted to our trip in Turkey. We went back to our hotel for dinner, and then retired to mine and Alice's room, where we watched gymnastics on TV and journalled, as well as catching up with emails and Facebook. We finally went to bed, all very tired after our exhausting day.

19 April

The started for me at 5:15am, when I was woken by the prayer call by the Imam from the mosque just down the street. After managing to finally get back to sleep, I had to wake up to get down to breakfast in time. It was definitely worth it – breakfast was amazing! There was such a variety, I really enjoyed it. Then, we met Eser (our tour guide) and caught the minibus to the hippodrome. Besides being the location of a massacre of 30,000 people during the time of Emperor Justinian, it is where the second largest obelisk

in the world is. After taking some jumping shots (“Toyota jump!”) in front of the obelisk, we walked over to the Blue Mosque (or Sultanahmet Mosque to the locals), which is famous for its six minarets. It has beautiful blue tiles on the inside dating back from the 16th century, all of different floral designs. Unfortunately, the stained glass windows had been smashed during the Turkish earthquake of 1999. They had been replaced, but the original, hundreds of years old ones had been lost. After taking lots of photos in the gorgeous interior, we caught our bus again to the Topkapi Palace, which had been the residence of the Ottoman Sultans. We particularly loved the many cats there, and I composed an ode, “Oh, to be a cat in the Topkapi palace!” We walked through the flourishing gardens to the second courtyard, which housed the library and treasury. While the library was certainly architecturally nice, there were no books in it! We moved on to the treasury, which housed some of the most amazing jewels in the world, including the Topkapi dagger – which we decided we were going to steal. We then were introduced to a Turkish school group by Andrew. They were there to practise their English, and so we had a nice conversation with them. They all fawned over Dale’s blue eyes, and we parted with promises of staying in touch over Facebook. After having lunch at a restaurant in the palace, we went to the Rustempasha Mosque. On the way Sarah coined the phrase “Get your mosque on!”, in response to Sophie having to cover up to go in. By this stage, we had established a serious “bebek” (“babe”) league, and all competed to find a guy who was the epitome of “Bebekosity”. After going to the mosque, we went to the Egyptian Spice Bazaar, which smelt amazing. I fell in love with a spice called sumak, which Eser told me is like lemon pepper. I bought some to take home, but then it was time to go back to the hotel. Eser told us that we actually had an hour and a half to spare before dinner, so we immediately took this as an invitation to briefly check out the Grand Bazaar, which was just down the road from our hotel! I had my first experience of haggling with Maisie, as we managed to lower the price of two rings we bought. We then went back to the hotel, quickly got changed and then left for dinner at an apparently posh restaurant. At dinner our waiter gave all of us ladies each a tulip folded from a paper napkin. After dinner, we went back to the hotel for another epic journal session and then to bed.

20 April

The day began with an early start, as we had to set off on the long drive to Gallipoli. Breakfast was once again amazing, and after somehow managing to pack all of ours stuff into our suitcases we were all ready to go. We all loaded into the bus, and set off. Istanbul seemed to go on forever, as it merged into the next towns with no gap in between. The bus ride was highly entertaining, and probably the noisiest of my life! We finally arrived at the Kum Hotel, after five hours on the road and two petrol station stops. After a fifteen-minute turnaround, we were back on the road heading towards the Gallipoli landing zone – Anzac Cove. We started at Beach Cemetery, which was so beautiful that one could hardly imagine it being a place of death. Flowers were scattered between the many graves, and a tree created a shadow over the graves. There was a TV crew from Australian channel 7, and they awkwardly filmed us looking at the graves. They then filmed me doing a presentation about one of the soldiers, and we left an information sheet about him and a poppy. We then walked up to Shrapnel Valley Cemetery, which is one of the largest Australian cemeteries. We picked some rosemary, which is a traditional symbol of remembrance. I made my substantial soldier presentation, about an indigenous serviceman, Private George Thomas Day. After laying a poppy at his grave, we continued climbing through the shrubbery until we reached Plugge’s Plateau. There were only a few graves here, and so then we continued up to the actual ridge of Plugge’s Plateau. From here we could see the sphinx, as well as the preparations for the huge dawn service on Anzac Day. It was also where the Australian soldiers encountered the “oh shit” moment (Andrew’s words, not mine!) where all of a sudden there is a sudden drop. Many of the soldiers weren’t sure what to do here, and sustained heavy losses. After clambering back down the hill, we caught the bus back to the

hotel and ran to the beach to check out the sunset over Lemnos Island. We then went to dinner, which had a huge range, and then retired to bed for an early night.

21 April

After trying for minutes to get Maisie out of bed, I reminded her that it was her birthday and suddenly she leaped out of bed all excited. After trying in vain to call her parents, we all traipsed down to breakfast, and then caught the bus. We drove the bus onto the ferry, and then went upstairs on the boat to watch the view as we crossed from Europe to Asia. It was freezing, with a biting and wind, and we were all glad that we'd brought our ugly (if highly warm) Simpson Prize jackets and beanies. After making a penguin huddle – with Maisie in the middle as it was her birthday – it was time to get back on the bus and drive off the ferry. After a half hour drive, we reached Troy, much to the excitement of the ancient history teacher, Sharee. Troy was pretty dismal and cold, although we did get a huge insight into the long history of the city, greatly thanks to Alice, who knew incredible amounts about the whole legend (or truth?) of the Trojan Wars. Other than that, it was pretty much all just piles of rocks, although I did like to story of Heinrich Schliemann, the treasure-hunter with an obsession with Homer's *Iliad* – who actually managed to find (and then botch up the excavation of) Troy. After finally escaping the cold of Troy (but of course only after taking cheesy photos of us in the fake Trojan horse), we then went to a hill overlooking the entrance to the Dardanelles. Andrew explained to us the naval conflict that took place here in 1915, and Will told us about the Australian submarine AE2 that made it all the way past the mines and anti-submarine nets to the Sea of Marmara, where it blew up numerous Turkish ships. It was then time for a delicious lunch overlooking the sea, which we all enjoyed. After that we went to the Cimenlik Fortress, constructed by Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror in 1461. Our tour there was more dedicated to a Turkish sailor telling us how the heroic actions of the Turks saved the peninsula in 1915. Of course this is all true, but it was just interesting to hear the Turkish perspective after everything I know about Gallipoli comes from the Australian and allied experience. We also heard about the famous Turkish ship 'Nusrat', which laid the mines that blew up the British and French battleships. We then spent an hour wandering around Canakkale, although there wasn't really much to do. I ate an icecream on the seaside along with Dale and Sophie, and then it was once again time to board the ferry back to Europe. We got back to the Kum Hotel and went and had dinner. I then somehow subtly dragged Maisie to the relaxing area of the Kum so we could have her surprise birthday cake. We gave her a hooker and a t-shirt with a photo of us on it. Then, after having a mini party in the boys' room, we went to bed.

22 April

This morning got off to a bad start, as I accidentally went down to breakfast twenty minutes early with Maisie by mistake. Luckily there was lots of yummy food so we were soon once again in jovial spirits. After breakfast we set off for Ari Burnu, another of the beautiful seaside cemeteries where it is just too beautiful to contemplate death. The day was incredibly nice and warm, and we could see the Greek island of Lemnos once more. We all picked up some pebbles from the beach to take home with us. We then started the hike up Artillery Road to Shell Green, all the while looking for artefacts. At Shell Green I found a grave for "A. Biggs", which scared me a bit! We also staged a re-enactment of the famous Shell Green cricket match of 17 December 1915 (AWM GO1289). We then continued up the hill to Lone Pine. Lone Pine was a bustle of activity, with lecterns being set up, soldiers rehearsing, TV crews filming – not to mention the many tourists! It was very noisy, so we made rubbings of the names of soldiers that presentations were being given about and took them to a quieter area behind the cenotaph. Here Kimberley made her presentation

about her indigenous serviceman. I made the fatal mistake of touching the cenotaph door, which had just been varnished, and so now my fingerprints are there for a while. We left Lone Pine (where, by the way, there is a lone pine) and walked down the road to check out some of the trenches. It was quite a moving experience to be walking in the same trenches as many Australian soldiers before us. We then looked at the Johnstone's Jolly Cemetery, where we met some very friendly Turkish dogs. I practised my Turkish on them, and they seemed to respond – which gave me new hope for the state of my Turkish. We kept walking along the road, passing the cemeteries at Courtney's & Steele's Post and Quinn's Post. At Quinn's Post I gave another soldier presentation, about my soldier with the sad eyes. We then continued on to the Turkish 57th Regiment Memorial. We didn't look at it in great detail, as we knew we'd be coming back later in the week. Next along the road (our feet were pretty tired by now) was The Nek. Although a small cemetery with only about a dozen graves, it is the site of a huge battle in which many Australians were lost. It is the battle featured at the end of the movie 'Gallipoli'. By this stage we were all starving, and headed back to our hotel for lunch. One of the people from the Australian War Memorial tour group gave us all really yummy "slouch hat" chocolates that we all gobbled down. After eating, Maisie, Sarah, Sophie and I got into our swimmers and went down to the beach. After the initial coldness of the water, we had an amazing time and staged a re-enactment of the Gallipoli landings (admittedly in swimmers and without guns and heavy packs!) in which Sarah and I were the ones who made it up the hills. All this took place with a lot of screaming and shouting, but soon enough it was time to get out and get ready to go again. We drove back out to Lone Pine, this time so that the wreath layers/presenters (aka everyone but me) could practise. I lay in the sun and read my book – all rather relaxing really! We then went to the Baby 700 Cemetery, where we spoke about the rugby player Swannell who was killed there on April 25 1915 while trying to teach his soldiers how to shoot a gun. All rather depressing really, but then we drove to a Turkish town on the peninsula that had a name that sounded something like "Badali", although I didn't catch the spelling. It was a beautiful little village, but attracts tourists because it lays claim to where Ataturk (aka Mustafa Kemal) lived in the weeks prior to the Gallipoli campaign. We went into the house where he stayed, which had been turned into almost a shrine to Ataturk. We chilled for a while in the town square drinking tea, and then it was back to the Kum Hotel. Maisie was feeling a bit sick by this stage so I put her to bed, and then went to join the others playing volleyball and soccer. It was then time for dinner, and while eating we composed the verse to go on our Simpson Prize wreath. I had been collecting epitaphs during the day, and so we decided on "To live in the hearts of those we love is not to die". I then went with some of the others to play some card games, in which Andrew thoroughly thrashed us (especially Sarah). We then retired to bed, and, despite being initially kept awake by howling dogs, I finally fell asleep.

23 April

The morning started with the usual yummy breakfast, and then it was onto the minibus and off to Cape Helles. Cape Helles, the tip of the Gallipoli peninsula, was a flurry of activity, as it was International Day of the Child, which is a national holiday in Turkey as it was founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. There were lots of Turkish tour buses filled with young Turks. We walked to the Allied memorial (although predominantly British) that overlooks the very tip of the entire peninsula. I found it a very emotional experience, as you could hear the waves of the Aegean while reading the names of thousands who gave their lives in the treacherous campaign. I find that, as Australians, we often forget the British lost far more than us during the campaign. This remained evident as we walked into a British cemetery, whose casualties were mainly from the landing of the ship the River Clyde. Andrew told us that the River Clyde had remained grounded for dozens of years after the war. I found a nice epitaph that I rather liked: "He discovereth deep things out of darkness and bringeth out to light the shadow of death". All this time we

had been stalked around by a group of Turkish boys, and so now we took it upon ourselves to take the obligatory photos and exchange Facebook names. They all seemed enraptured by Maisie! We then got back on our bus and drove to the French memorial. The French cemetery was stylistically very different to the others we had visited, as it was not operated by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. I found the lines of stark black crosses very stark. Alice was able to translate for us the majority of the French texts, many of which were by Victor Hugo. Once again, it was time to get back on the bus, and this time it was off to the major Turkish memorial, an imposing concrete structure. It was packed with Turkish people, and so we embraced it as a good opportunity to get rid of the bulk of our kitschy Australian koalas. We struck up conversations with some groups of young Turks – all of whom were delighted to have the opportunity to practise their English with some Australians. We spent more time talking to Turks than actually checking out the memorial, but that was okay, because it seemed to make them all so happy to speak to us. It was like spreading the Simpson Prize love, really. We then drove just down the road to yet another Turkish memorial. All the Turkish memorials don't have individual graves, they just have symbolic references to the many thousands of Turks who died. This one, for example, had Turkish helmets with the names of all the towns and cities the soldiers came from inscribed on them. By this stage we were all starving, and went back to the hotel for lunch. Once lunch was over we drove to a port and boarded a ferry along with the Australian War Memorial group, the War Widows Guild of Australia and some individuals. We cruised down the coast of Gallipoli, but besides jumping up to take a photo of the Sphinx, I didn't really pay much attention to the land. I managed to initiate a conversation with one of the lovely war widows, Beryl, whose father had served at Gallipoli. She told me about his memories of swimming naked in the Aegean, and the terrible food that he called "dog biscuits". Another war widow, Maxine, showed me photos of her father serving in WWI. People like this are the last solid link we have with the 1915 Anzacs, and so I really appreciated talking to them before their stories are lost forever. We then went back to the hotel, and all of us went down to the beach for another swim. The water was beautiful, and although we considered it, we decided against trying to swim to Lemnos. The evening concluded with us eating dinner and retiring to the café to play some card games.

24 April

After getting an extra half hour sleep in and eating breakfast, we all hopped onto the minibus and drove into the Gallipoli national park area. Here we were stopped by the jandarma (military police) and once came onboard to tell us about the various road closures within the site due to preparations for Anzac Day. This messed up our plans to walk along Rhododendron Ridge, and so we instead walked from the Turkish 57th Regiment Memorial to Chunuk Bair. Far from being the quiet relaxing walk that Andrew envisioned, we ended up walking along the side of the road as buses full of Turkish people drove past, with black fumes pouring out. We arrived to find Chunuk Bair hugely busy with Turkish people, mainly because of its significance in the life of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founding president of the Turkish republic. During a battle there, he was hit just above the heart with a piece of shrapnel, but was saved by his pocket watch that was in his top pocket. It shattered, but he lived, and to this day Turkish people thank God for his deliverance. Because of this, there is a giant statue of Ataturk that we all had our photo in front of. Chunuk Bair is also the main New Zealand memorial, as there was an epic battle (equivalent to Lone Pine for the Australians) between the Turks and New Zealanders. We took photos with some bebek Turkish soldiers, and gave them the very last of our koalas. After this excursion, we went back to the Kum Hotel for lunch. After lunch we went to the café and chilled for a bit, accepting all our Facebook friend requests from all the Turkish people we'd met the previous day. In preparation for the evening, I went back to my room and went to sleep for about two hours. I woke up in time for dinner, which was at 5pm, and then it was time to go back to our rooms and try and get some sleep before the Dawn Service.

We ran through our plan one more time, and then went back to our rooms. I tried unsuccessfully to go to sleep, but the others were talking really loudly in the corridor so it was impossible. Eventually, at about 7:30pm, I went to Sarah and Sophie's room with Maisie, where we tried out some makeup and hairstyles. Maisie then convinced me to go to bed, and so finally I fell asleep.

25 April

Was woken just before midnight by my iPod alarm, but didn't properly get out of bed until our wake up call at midnight. I got out of bed, had a refreshing shower and then got warmly dressed in my thermals, long sleeved shirt, hoodie and then Simpson Prize jacket (at least on the top half). All rugged up, I went down to the café, refused to pick up the gross breakfast they provided, and collected my official pass from Andrew. I chugged down a cup of milky sugary tea, and then it was time to catch the bus. We were in a big bus along with the Australian War Memorial group, and I found myself sitting next to a veteran of the First Gulf War. We talked about Saudi Arabia together. The bus driver then turned off the lights and we gazed out at Gallipoli by night. The bus dropped us right near the commemorative area, and we poured out. By this stage I was jumping with excitement – the atmosphere was electric! We made our way through the security without any hitches, and flashed our official passes to get into our seats, which were right behind the Frank Macdonald kids from Tasmania. It wasn't particularly cold, but we went to grab a hot chocolate regardless. On the way we passed the masses fast asleep in their sleeping bags and the line for the portaloos. Throughout the morning they had presentations showing, my favourite of which was a singer who sang songs of the First World War era. Just before the service began, the fifth instalment of the Gallipoli Symphony, 'The Landing' by Elena Kats-Chernin, was premiered. This was accompanied by a lighting show representing the landing, and was highly moving. The official party, including the Governor General of Australia, Prime Minister of New Zealand and lots of other exciting people then arrived. At 5:30am the service finally began with the mounting of the Catafalque Party. I found Quentin Bryce's address particularly good, as well as the three national anthems. Among us Simpson Prize winners, the general consensus was that the anthems of Turkey and New Zealand were much cooler than our own. Throughout the service, a group of New Zealand veterans sat behind us giving a running commentary of the service – very entertaining! Throughout the service it had been growing lighter, and when it was over it was completely light. I was able to look out to sea and imagine the scene ninety-five years earlier. As the official party departed, the Governor General Quentin Bryce passed by our stand, and paused to say hello to us – not because we were Simpson Prize winners, but because we were enthusiastic young Australians. Speaking to her of course got me all excited, and I practically bounced up the arduous trek up Artillery Road. We arrived at Lone Pine to find ourselves practically the first people there, so went to find our sets in the official guest stand. The others went to get changed, and Andrew went to find my school uniform, which had been sent up in a bus. He found them, and then I was taken to a caravan to get changed. While it was quite an awkward manoeuvre to get into my school uniform, I was finally ready, and came out. Maisie helped me do my hair, which was a bit of a disaster after the Dawn Service, and then I went to find my seat – C20 – in preparation for the service, which was still over an hour away. Before the service the MC, Warren Brown, had an entertainment program going. He interviewed us Simpsonians, as well as interviewing Beryl, the war widow I had spoken to the other day. We then got word that the Governor General was arriving and wanted to speak to us. This of course got me ridiculously excited, and I could barely contain my excitement as she worked her way around the crowd to speak to us. Although our eventual conversation was brief, it made me so happy to speak to her. It was then time for the service to begin, so I went back to my seat. The service passed almost as a blur for me, as I was counting down the items until the poem I was reading. When it came, a very gallant soldier next to me held my hand and helped me over the headstone I was seated beside. When I got up to the lectern, I found myself looking at

thousands of expectant Australians, not to mention the many more watching on TV. I gazed out at them, and read my emotive poem, only having one minor slip-up. It all seemed to go okay, and the audience applauded enthusiastically. I went back to my seat, satisfied with my work. It was then time for the other Simpson Prize winners to do their wreath handling duties, which they carried out perfectly. Finally the service was over, and I found it really nice that lots of people came over to me and congratulated me on my poetry reading. We then trudged back down Artillery Road (me still in my CGGS winter uniform) and found our bus. We drove back to the Kum Hotel, ate a hearty lunch, and then chilled out for the rest of the afternoon. I went to the beach with Maisie and we sunbathed. While lying out there a fierce wind blew up, and all our stuff nearly blew away! It got so strong that we went back to our room and had a sleep, waking only for dinner. We were all dead tired, and so, after packing up my suitcase, I went to bed.

26 April

The morning got off to an early start, as we woke and breakfasted early in order to get on our bus and set off on the long journey back to Istanbul. It was fairly uneventful, as we were so tired that we were pretty quiet. I sat and listened to music with Alice, who I discovered has an awesome taste in music. We stopped for lunch at a place called Tekirdag (I thought it was pronounced “turkey dag”) and had our final Turkish lunch, which made us all a bit sad. However, we weren’t sad for long, as we were back on the bus and soon in Istanbul, where we first stopped at Istiklal Street, which is the main shopping street of Istanbul. I bought some presents for people, and went with Dale to grab a Starbucks. There were four on the one street alone! We didn’t stay too long, as all of us were keen to go back to the Grand Bazaar and get shopping. We dropped our bags at the Antik Hotel and hit the shops! Two and a half hours of intensive shopping followed. I went with Dale, Sophie and Alice, as we all seemed to have similar shopping intentions. I improved on my haggling skills, making lots of good purchases. A highlight for me was hearing a Turkish shopkeeper singing Justin Bieber, which made me laugh so much. A shopkeeper who Dale bought a carpet from also suggested that we girls were his harem and he was a Sultan, which seemed to make Dale very happy. Finally exhausted from shopping, we returned to the hotel to have dinner in the cistern which it had been built above. As well as the food, there were touching speeches from Andrew and Eser. Andrew gave us a replica Gallipoli Star pin, which we all put on in remembrance of our amazing experience at Gallipoli. We gave Eser a turquoise necklace to say thankyou for being such a good guide. This made us all sad, but then Andrew suggested taking a night stroll through Istanbul. We had lots of fun, going to the Blue Mosque by night and charging around the hippodrome, pretending to race our chariots. We returned to the hotel, and Sarah and I (who were roomies) found ourselves packing until 1am in the morning. We finally got to bed after packing up the last of our stuff.

27 April

In the morning, after breakfast and just five hours sleep, I found myself back at the Grand Bazaar, shopping predominantly for presents for Andrew, Jackie, Sharee and our bus driver Ondur. The present we bought for Andrew was a fez, but then we all personalised it by all signing in permanent marker. After stuffing my final purchases into my suitcase and presenting our tokens of appreciation, it was time to board our minibus for the last time and set off for the airport. On the way we wrote a playlist of music for our time in Turkey, and took some final photos of the city which so many of us now loved. I knew that I’d be coming back again sometime, and so spared myself from crying. We got to the airport and had to say a sad farewell to Eser, who had been so good to us. After this, us kids went and ate Burger King with the last of our Turkish money. We then went and boarded our plane, where I found myself between

Dale and Andrew. I found myself unable to sleep on the plane, and so ended up watching the movies ‘Brothers’, which depressed me, and then ‘Invictus’, which made me feel good again. Soon enough we found ourselves descending into Singapore.

28 April

Arriving in Singapore I was pretty grouchy and not feeling very well, mainly because of sleep deprivation I think. We got off our plane, and the first thing we did was simply go to the bathroom and freshen up. I didn’t feel up to going and looking at the shops with the others, so I lay on the floor of the terminal with Sophie and just dozed. Finally it was time for our next flight, so we caught the train that took us to a different terminal and then boarded our flight. I was once again with Dale and Andrew (a result of booking in together, I think) but Dale moved to the row ahead of us which was empty so he could lie out. This resulted in me getting a window seat, so I was able to solidly sleep for a good five hours, missing dinner in the process. I woke up as we were flying over Australia, and I could see the red sands of the desert below us. It made me sad to think that our great adventure was over, but happy to nearly be home. We came down to Sydney in the early evening and proceeded to collect our luggage. After a few hassles at customs we made it through to the entrance of the airport. This became the site of our tearful farewells, as Alice was going home in Sydney, and only a few of us were flying onto our own states that evening. Finally, after lots of hugs and promises to stay in touch, I went through to the domestic terminal with Maisie, Will and Sharee. I bought a Grazia and a Krispy Kreme and then it was time to board my flight. As I descended into Canberra to meet my mum, I reflected on what an amazing time I’d had in Turkey.

Reflections on Simpson Prize trip 2010

I never thought that throwing together eight teenagers from around Australia who barely knew each other would work. But strangely enough, it did. More than a historical experience, I found the Simpson Prize trip to Turkey to be an incredible social experience. Of course, there were the other students (including my own cousin), and I felt we all bonded really quickly (whether this is due to our Turkish delight ritual on the first day or just that we get on really well I don’t know). There were also the many other people we met along our travels – Turkish school children, Australian war widows and other young students from Australia and New Zealand. It was truly special to share our experiences with all these people, who, like us, are following in the footsteps of ANZAC soldiers nearly 100 years ago.

Historically, of course, I learnt so much. I greatly expanded my knowledge about the Gallipoli campaign (and wider Turkish history) during the Simpson Prize trip. There’s something truly special about walking in the very same trenches as Australians before us, and it really gives you a greater sense of just how crazy the campaign was – there was literally just meters between some of the Turkish and Australian trenches. Also, walking among the many gravestones really gave me a better understanding of the level of sacrifice involved. We saw graves for young men only a few years older than ourselves, which really did make me think. Would we really consider enlisting for war in just one or two years time? I remember in Shell Green Cemetery seeing a grave for an “A. Biggs”, which really did, for lack of better words, touch me. I’ve since looked at the service records of this A. Biggs – Archibald Biggs, K.I.A. 20/05/1915.

Visiting Turkey has left me with many unanswered questions. Why is it that we, as young Australians, gravitate towards a conflict ninety-five years ago that was clearly a failure for the allies? The representation of Australians at the Dawn and Lone Pine Services was predominantly young, and of course, highly

enthusiastic. We were part of this young and enthusiastic crowd – exemplified by when I nearly fell off the stand at the Lone Pine in excitement when I found out we’d be meeting the Governor General!

But besides from the serious aspects, we did of course have lots of fun. From our epic haggling skills in the Grand Bazaar to swimming in the Aegean, there were many memorable moments. The Grand Bazaar was all of our greatest shopping fantasies under one roof – our empty wallets on the return trip were testament to that! From shopkeepers singing Justin Bieber to lure us in, Dale being accused of being a sultan with us girls as his harem to a spice seller who told me of his grandfather who fought at Gallipoli, it was certainly the site of many great moments.

At Gallipoli, there was our iconic staging of the famous Shell Green cricket match, charging through the surf of the Aegean Sea, picking up pebbles on Anzac Cove, and clambering up Artillery Road. Despite our ardent quest to find remnants of the conflict, the best we could do was finding what was (according to all-knowing Andrew) part of a ceramic jug for food storage used by the Allies. To most of us it just looked like a chunk of smooth stone, but there you go! We instead had to satisfy our desires at the Kum Hotel, where they had a huge collection of bullets and the like. Another thing we found in Gallipoli was that it was almost too beautiful. With flowers blossoming next to every gravestone, the Judas tree in Shrapnel Valley Cemetery in full bloom and the sound of the waves gently lapping the shoreline, it seemed too peaceful a place to be the sight of horrific battles. It took large stretches of the imagination to picture the scene ninety-five years back.

It’s funny the moments about Anzac Day that stick in your memory. For me, it is the day before, at the Kum Hotel, watching Peter Weir’s *Gallipoli* with the War Widows Guild tour group. Many of the women, who’d had fathers serving at Gallipoli, found it too much and had to leave. I spoke to one, Beryl, whose father had been a member of the 10th Light Horse, but had not been a part of the bloody battle of the Nek as he’d been on a hospital ship sick. These women are some of the last direct links we have to the Anzacs, and I found it so special to be able to talk to them. As each generation gets more and more distant from the men who went out to Gallipoli ninety five years ago, I think it is increasingly important to hear these stories before they are lost. On Anzac Day itself, it was at the end of the Lone Pine service, when the band struck up ‘I am Australian’. Normally not such a fan of this song, even I joined in as the thousands of Australians in the stands united to sing. On reflection, it seemed such an odd moment – standing above the resting places of Australian soldiers, the pomp and ceremony over, all joining in to sing of our unity as a nation in the middle of Turkey.

On that last day in Istanbul, driving on our beloved, koala-bedecked minibus back to the airport, I really didn’t want to leave. I know I’ll be back though – Turkey is one of those captivating places that really does cast a spell over you. Maybe next time I’ll fulfill my desire to find a Turkish *bebek* (for those of you not in the know, it means ‘handsome’, or literally, ‘baby-faced’) husband who can cook! But for now, it is not so much goodbye, as *au revoir*. Until next time, Turkey.

