

Journal of Gallipoli trip 16-29 April 2011

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DAY ONE AND TWO

When I woke up this morning, I couldn't believe that my Gallipoli trip was going to begin in just two hours. After a quick breakfast and some last-minute packing, I was on my way to the airport. Around ten minutes before landing in Sydney, my excitement began to build as I realised that I was soon going to meet my Simpson Prize friends to embark on an adventure of a lifetime!

After Zoe greeted me at the arrival gate, we collected my luggage and met Andrew and Stuart. Connor and Hayley had just landed so we entertained ourselves with the card game 'Cheat' until the others arrived. When everyone was ready, we had lunch at the food court and took a taxi to the international terminal.

While waiting for the flight to Singapore, Lauren, JP, Gene, Chelsea, Zoe and I had fun passing the time with more card games. Finally, we were able to board the plane to commence the first leg of our journey. I won't bore you with the long details of the flight, but Zoe, Chelsea and I managed to pass eight hours playing trivia games and watching 'Burlesque'. After landing in Singapore and struggling to stay awake, we transferred to another gate for our flight to Istanbul. Luckily, Andrew gave us girls a free yoga class in the middle of the terminal, and after sticking our legs in the air and rolling around on the floor, we felt much more energised. Then we (mainly Zoe and I) competed in some intense escalator races and eventually made our way to the kids' entertainment area. After what seemed like hours, we boarded our plane to Istanbul to complete the last leg of our journey.

I would have to admit that this was the most frustrating part of the trip, as every minute seemed to pass by as slow as it possibly could. Even though I spent the first eight hours sleeping, the next three hours were spent checking the flight path over and over again, fidgeting in my seat and walking pointlessly up and down the aisle - much to the annoyance of other passengers. Finally, after counting down the seconds, we touched down in Istanbul!!

After meeting our tour guide Fred (Ozgur), we travelled to the Antik Hotel, a small building located on a beautiful, quaint lane near the Grand Bazaar. We settled into our rooms (I was with Hayley) and treated ourselves to a hot shower and change of clothes.

After a lovely walk through some street markets, we had lunch at the hotel. It was my first real Turkish meal and it was amazing (whoever invented the idea of having dessert with lunch is a genius)! For starters there was a tomato and cucumber salad with cheese pastries, followed by grilled chicken. To top it off, there was fruit with strawberry sauce and cream.

Now that we were feeling refreshed and full of delicious food, we were ready to begin our cruise on the Bosphorus and get an initial glimpse of Istanbul's historical sites and scenery. It was so cold on the boat, my fingers were beginning to turn blue and I made a mental note to bring gloves in the future. After tasting our first cup of Turkish tea, we sat on the top level of the boat and listened to a song called 'Istanbul' (played by Andrew).

It went like this:

Istanbul was Constantinople,
Now it's Istanbul not Constantinople,
Been a long time gone
Since Constantinople
With Turkish delight, on a moonlight
night.

Every girl in Constantinople
Knows it's Istanbul
Not Constantinople,
So if you've a date in Constantinople
She'll be waiting in Istanbul.



There is more, but you will have to listen to the actual music to really appreciate the song! From the cruise, we went to the Military museum of Turkey. It was a majestic building and I was particularly impressed by the huge gun on display in the gardens. We were able to listen to the Janissary band concert whose extremely loud, strong music would have been really successful in frightening Turkish enemies. We also looked at the World War I displays, which gave me great insight into the war from a Turkish perspective. By this time, I am quite sure jet lag had conquered most of us so I was glad to return to the hotel. After a fabulous dinner (topped with some intense political debates between Stuey and JP), we all went to bed.

DAY THREE

My day began with a run in freezing weather on the wet, empty streets of Istanbul with Zoe and Stuart. It was a really interesting experience! I had fun and happily treated myself to my first Turkish breakfast - a scrumptious assortment of olives, bread, cheese, yoghurt, toast, fruit and juice. At nine o'clock, Andrew gave us these huge grey ponchos, which made us look like a cute band of penguins, and we departed for the Blue Mosque and the Hippodrome. First up we walked through the hippodrome, an area where chariot races were held during the 4th and 5th centuries B.C. There were three obelisks in the square, which were still set in their original foundations. Next, we entered the Blue Mosque, which is a remarkable building. After taking our shoes off at the door, we were able to behold marvellous hanging chandeliers, huge domes and coloured walls. Fred told us about the sultan Ahmed I who ordered the construction of the mosque in 1609. He died just one year after its completion. By the time we returned outside with our shoes back on, I was shivering and trying to pull my frozen hands further into my jacket. Everyone else was doing the same, because as soon as it started pouring with rain Fred decided to take us back to the hotel to get some warmer clothes.



When we were all rugged up like Eskimos, our bus took us to Topkapi palace. First, we explored the four large courtyards. When the palace was inhabited, two were for public use and the other two were exclusively for the sultan. Then Fred took us to the divan room, which was used for conferences between the sultans' viziers. I thought it was really interesting how there was a one-way window in the room for the sultan as he was passing by, to ensure his advisors were doing their job properly. By now everyone was starving, so we were treated to a delicious lunch of lamb, chicken, beef, baklava and Turkish coffee (my first one!).

We were given one hour to explore the exhibits, including the artefacts room where Abraham's saucepan and Moses' walking stick were on display. There was also a treasury room, where an 86-carat diamond and 28-carat gold candles (each weighing 50kg) were exhibited. Then we boarded the bus back to the hotel.

Zoe and I offered to write the daily blog for Andrew and when we were done, we joined the others in the street markets. Here, we befriended a young Turkish jeans merchant named Amrah and his friends, who were willing to buy Chelsea for 5 chickens. But we rejected the offer (she is definitely worth more) and returned to the hotel. After a lovely dinner at Develi restaurant (I was still full from lunch) the waiters gave us tissue roses and we returned to the hotel. Then everyone gathered in Zoe and Lauren's room for a journal session.

DAY FOUR

I woke up today to the sound of the prayer call and after another intense run with Stuey, Zoe and Gene, we went down to breakfast. Soon we were on our way to the Cora Church but it was so crowded our route changed to the Rahmi Koc Science and Technology museum. There were many different exhibits including musical instruments, military medal displays and vehicles - cars, boats, trucks, planes and buses. Zoe and I momentarily entertained ourselves by playing limbo under the plane wings - it was really fun!



Soon after, we met many Turkish children who were on school excursions to the museum. We handed out small koalas and kangaroos as they practised their English on us and took photos. We were also able to extend our Turkish vocabulary as Fred taught us how to say 'My name is...' and 'Nice to meet you'. Now, by adding these phrases to words we already knew - hello, goodbye, thankyou - we could hold an almost decent Turkish conversation!

Just before noon, we all boarded the bus to Istiklal street, a trendy 1.6km road with shops and markets. We walked up the street as a group and had the opportunity to walk back at our own pace. Chelsea and I explored many alleyways together and almost had heart attacks when Andrew snuck up behind us and said 'What would you ladies like today?' in a low Turkish accent. Soon we met up with Zoe and Lauren who had been tricked into buying two lemon ice creams! After buying a couple of simits (a cross between a bagel and a pretzel), we purchased our first boxes of real Turkish delight.



Everyone met again for lunch (stuffed eggplant and rice pudding) before we retraced our steps back to Cora Church. It was decorated with beautiful mosaics and frescoes from the 15th century, each depicting the story of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. After stepping outside to buy pashminas and trinkets, we caught the bus to the Spice Bazaar. Here, everyone haggled their hearts out and we bought Turkish delight, love tea and pistachios to share. Zoe and I managed talk to the merchants in French to see if they would lower their prices and that was definitely the highlight of the night.

We returned to the hotel and had dinner on the top level. Then everyone came back to Zoe and Lauren's room to chat and write in our journals. We were all still feeling energetic so we asked if we could go out for a walk together. It was entertaining to witness Gene's professional haggling skills and then trying to make a joint decision about when to cross the busy road! After an hour of exploring the night streets of Istanbul, we returned to the hotel and talked until midnight. I could hardly sleep knowing that in 5 hours time, after another morning run, we would begin our trip to Gallipoli.

DAY FIVE: GALLIPOLI

This morning began with packing bags, having breakfast (the love tea had an interesting taste) and boarding a bus for Gallipoli. Chelsea, Lauren, Zoe and I took our places in the backseat ready to spend the next five hours writing in journals or snoozing. Instead, we made a playlist of songs on Stuey's ipod, had a loud bus karaoke session, listened to an intense debate between Jp and Stuey regarding religion and ideology and ate a huge amount of chocolate and Turkish delight. Then we reached Gallipoli!! The landscape was so beautiful and closely resembled the paintings we saw at the war memorial in Canberra.

After a light lunch, we visited Beach cemetery where Andrew showed us Simpson's grave. It was great to hear his true story and I was surprised to find out that he was quite a disobedient soldier!

Soon Channel 7 arrived to interview us and you can imagine how nervous I was when I found out I had to go first. Luckily, it went pretty well - but I was fidgeting with my jacket and the cameraman was getting really

annoyed with the sound of the velcro on the sleeves! While we were waiting for



everyone to be interviewed, Zoe, Lauren, Chelsea and I took photos. There is a lovely one of us together on the grass with the blue sky in the background and of course I can't forget the photo of our hiking boots - we were very much in fashion!

Next we walked to Ari Burnu cemetery and along Anzac Cove. Here, Sharon wanted to radio interview us - she is a journalist who is writing a documentary on the Anzacs. So while Jp, Connor, Zoe and I were interviewed individually, Andrew taught us to skim rocks - I got to five skips!

Around 7pm, while the sun was still up, we returned to the hotel for dinner. At the dessert table, there was a white cake-like thing and we had no idea what it was made of. It was hilarious when Stuey wouldn't tell us what was in it until we ate some - turned out it was blended chicken! After playing the card game 'solo' with Jp, Zoe, Connor and Geraldine, we all went to bed.

DAY SIX

Today began with a four-kilometre run on the hilly roads of Gallipoli. It was definitely colder than Istanbul but the beautiful scenery was much more interesting. I am so glad Stuey keeps me company on our runs - Zoe is too fast! After a cold shower (there was no hot water left) I had breakfast with the others.

Our first stop today was Plugge's plateau and cemetery. It was a steep climb up and I couldn't imagine how hard it must have been for the Aussie soldiers carrying heavy artillery while being under Turkish fire. On top of the plateau, we could see everything around us, from Anzac Cove to Lone Pine on the next ridge. I realised



how difficult it must have been for the Aussies to take Plugge's plateau as the Turkish machine gunners would have seen them easily. After taking photos, we descended into Shrapnel Valley. Stu surprised us by bringing hard tack and bully beef - the same food the Anzacs would have eaten 95 years ago! I also found the gravestone of Major Hugh Quinn - the man whose name inspired Quinn's Post. The epitaph on his stone read, "Some time, some day I trust to see the dear face I hold to memory." I could

imagine this touching message was from a wife or mother back home in Australia, who was grieving the loss of her husband or son.

From here, we drove to Lone Pine cemetery and walked through the Australian trenches. They were still in their original shape but had been filled in with mud and vegetation over the years. It was a chilling feeling to peer over the top of the trenches and across the road (no more than 10 metres) to see where the Turkish trenches would have been. The distance between the Aussie diggers and the Turks was so small - it would have been possible to see the actual face of the person you were shooting at!

Soon, everyone jumped back on the bus and we drove to the hotel for lunch.

Our next stop was Lone Pine cemetery (for the second time) where Andrew explained the battle which occurred there. Then we walked to Courtney's and Steele's Post cemetery, where there was a gravestone for Private C. Dodds of the 14th Battalion. His epitaph read, "Goodbye old pal, always I will remember you". This message was really sad and unique as it was from a mate's perspective.

We travelled to Quinn's Post, which was an extremely crucial position during the war. It was easy to understand why, as every surrounding ridge was visible. Here I told everyone about the soldier I had researched, Lieutenant Frances Armstrong, aged 34. The story of how he was killed is both heroic and sad. Lieutenant Armstrong was the last of his party to reach the safety of Quinn's Post after being driven out of an enemy trench. He was acutely distressed for his men and said, 'All my boys are killed or wounded out there'. He at once endeavoured to climb out and see if any wounded remained. The men with him tried to pull him down, but he resisted and was killed by Turkish fire.



Our next stop was The Nek, where we had a group photo and Stuart talked to us about the details of the battle. By sitting on the stone wall and looking at the small area of green grass in front of me, I could almost picture the battle occurring as Stuart explained it. The battle of the Nek was terrible as numerous waves of Anzac soldiers were ordered to charge towards

the Turkish trenches one after the other at three-minute intervals. During that time, the soldiers who were waiting to charge could hear their fellow men being slaughtered in no man's land. It was truly horrifying to imagine this, as the battlefield was quite small and the charging soldiers would have had no choice than to step on their dead mates. The question in my mind was if I were an Australian soldier would I step out of the trench and charge? I haven't had enough time to think of the answer, so I don't really know.

For the remainder of the afternoon, we visited Walker's Ridge cemetery, Baby 700 cemetery and Chanuk Bair cemetery before returning to the hotel for dinner. Then everyone sat down to watch Gallipoli but Zoe and I were so tired we left halfway through the movie. It was quite amusing as we managed to drag my mattress into the room Zoe was sharing with Chelsea (I was alone in the room next door), before falling asleep.

DAY SEVEN

This morning, Zoe and I both realised that four days of intense running on hard roads and cobblestones had taken its toll on our knees. So we began the day with a core workout to Burlesque music and even managed to have hot showers at 6.30am before having breakfast with the others.

At 8.30am, we jumped on the bus to drive to Çannakale (Chana-kalay) for a ferry ride to the ancient ruins of Troy. Here, we saw the two forts which guarded the entrance to the Dardanelles during World War I. It was freezing on the boat but luckily the ride only lasted 15 minutes. When we arrived in the city, there was still a reasonably long bus ride to reach Troy (I forgot to mention, our beloved bus had travelled on the ferry with us). Lauren, Chelsea, Zoe and I entertained ourselves by singing 'I am a Good Girl' by Christina Aguilera while everyone else (particularly Connor and Stuey) kept commenting on our fabulous performance skills. So, we made a bet with Connor that if we managed to sing the song perfectly before 9pm that night, he had to let us put makeup on his face. If not, we had to buy his drinks for the rest of the trip. At the time, I had the feeling we were definitely going to win!

When we reached Troy, we walked through the ruins while Fred talked explained the history of the city and how it was built in many layers over time. We had a group photo in the amphitheatre (which was used by the king and his ministers or

government when the city was operating) and had a run through of our song on the small stage. From here, we drove to the Mefsur Dardanus battery to discuss the Allied Naval assaults and Turkish mines in World War I. Then Stuart told us an interesting story about a submarine commander named Stoker, who made countless attempts to break through the mines but ended up being captured by the Turks.

At 1.30pm, we got into the bus to drive back to Çannakale for lunch - they served us whole grilled fish! Then everyone walked to the Naval Museum, where we went on board a small ship which deposited Turkish mines during the war. There were displays of maps, guns, hammocks and soldier's quarters. After we entered the museum within the fort, we were greeted by an actor who talked to us about the war in the role of a Turkish soldier. It was really entertaining and insightful at the same time.



Finally, we walked back through the streets of Çannakale to see the model of the Trojan horse - the same one that was used in the film 'Troy'. Andrew and Stuey took plenty of group photos of us from interesting angles on the ground before we boarded the ferry to return to Gallipoli. Back at the hotel, it was time to show off our skills to our judges (mainly Andrew) as part of our bet from earlier in the day. Chelsea, Lauren, Zoe and I performed our song (very impressively according to us) but lost!! However, being the fair and humble people that we are, we bought Connor a coke at dinner to uphold our side of the deal. Then Stuart asked him if he could eat 14 whole honey balls. So each of us went to the dessert table and carried back a plate of honey balls - much to the waiters' amusement. For the next 15 minutes, we were drum rolling on the table and yelling out different numbers in Turkish - it was hilarious. We all walked off to bed after Connor managed to eat 13 honey balls!



DAY EIGHT

Today, I slept through my alarm and when I woke up, Zoe had already left for a run. I went to my room for a shower but managed to fall asleep until 8am! Since the bus was leaving in 15 minutes, I had a minor panic attack as I changed and sprinted down to breakfast just in time.

First of all, we drove down to Cape Helles and V beach cemetery, which was where the British soldiers landed in August 1915. Andrew explained the events of the landing using a large display of the landscape above V beach. It really struck me how different the nature of the terrain was for the British soldiers while they were landing compared to the Anzacs.

After a lovely group picture on the beach, we continued to drive to the main French cemetery. The crosses were different in this cemetery and all the epitaphs read 'Mort pour la France' which means 'Died for France'. The central monument had numerous messages, which were too advanced for my current French skills - luckily Jp was there to help! The main text translated as 'To the glory of our eternal France. To the glory of those who died for her. To the martyrs, to the valiant, to the brave! To those who keep alive their example, who desire a place in the temple and who will die as they themselves have died'. When we left this cemetery, I realised how much these soldiers must have loved their country and had given everything to save her.

Then we drove to the Turkish cemetery (our bus karaoke channel was on Kellie Clarkson at this point). There we met many Turkish students, with whom we took photos and talked. As we were walking among the Turkish gravestones, Zoe had an amazing idea to help the Simpsonites stay in touch - a chain letter. One person would write a letter and send it to another person until it had reached all of us in a circle around Australia!



After lunch at the hotel, we went to Lone Pine for the Anzac Day rehearsal. I was given the poem I was going to be presenting on Anzac Day - The Scots of the Riverina (it was actually a surprise as I thought I had to choose something myself). The rehearsal went on for an hour and a half, and at 2.30pm we rushed off for a cruise of Anzac Cove. We were lucky enough to sit on the roof of the boat (VIP seats of course), which was the highest viewing platform I had been on. The sights were incredible, the hills and ridges were almost exactly how the Anzacs would have seen them all those years ago! We took so many photos - but I don't think any of them could really capture the full view. It was really amusing as one of the shipmates entertained us with music from his phone and Chelsea and Connor taught me how to tie a tie! When the cruise was over, we returned to the hotel.



Before dinner, I learnt how to play an awesome Turkish game called Backgammon and a Turkish card game called Korzina.

DAY NINE

Today was the day before Anzac Day!! We had stayed up last night and managed to get only three hours of sleep, so by the time we dragged ourselves to breakfast it was 8am. Then everyone hopped on a bus to Chanuk Bair to begin a 9km hike across Kirectepe ridge overlooking Suvla Bay. The scenery was extremely picturesque and the weather was perfect. When we reached the end of our walk, the bus was waiting to take us to Evi Atatürk in the village of Bigali- the house where Mustafa Kemal lived for a couple of days during World War I. We explored the quaint building and also went to a teahouse for a hot drink. After returning to the hotel and having lunch, everyone decided to go for a swim in the Aegean - the water was so freezing my entire body was numb in 2 minutes! After a hot shower, the girls retired to Chelsea and Zoe's room for a journal session and nap.

Three hours later, there was a knock on the door and Geraldine poked her head through to call us to dinner. Zoe was still half asleep and answered her with an annoyed 'No!' and we all laughed. Eventually, we were able to drag ourselves from the beds, put on some decent clothes and walk to the dining room.

When we returned, the electricity was out in my room and I soon discovered the same thing had happened in Gene and Jp's room. So we called the hotel electrician to fix it - but he kept looking in our rooms for a minute then suddenly walking to reception. Then, Jp saw all the staff crowded around a TV at reception watching a soccer game! So we decided that the electrician must have had an impulse to check the score every minute. We passed the time helping Jp decide which scarf to wear to the Anzac Service - checkered, blue or red?

Eventually the electrician returned (the soccer game was over) and fixed our lights. Fifteen minutes later, we were all dressed very warmly and were walking to the cafe to entertain ourselves until we could leave for Anzac Cove at 1am.

Between 11pm and 1am, everyone was getting excited, then tired, then excited again. We played cards and backgammon until our brains felt like mush and it was still only midnight! So Jp and I took an executive decision to buy coke to help us stay awake - luckily it worked. I felt awake and energized half a can later! By quarter to 1, everyone was sitting on the couches in the cafe, surrounded by jackets, beanies, backpacks and sleeping bags. After months of anticipation, we were all ready to board the bus to the Dawn service.

DAY TEN: ANZAC DAY

At one o'clock in the morning on Anzac Day, we were finally on the bus to the Dawn Service. It was still dark outside, so the views out the window were pitch black. Everyone was silent most of the way - I'm not sure whether it was tiredness, anticipation or disbelief that this day was finally here. Soon we were walking along a dirt road towards the commemorative site at such a fast pace, the other people sharing our bus couldn't keep up! I remember walking next to Zoe and holding her arm really tightly, as we were both extremely excited and extremely cold.



When we walked into the Service area, I was in awe. Close to the shoreline, there was a platform with VIP seats in front of it. Then there was an area of grass, which was filled with people wrapped in sleeping bags and blankets. Surrounding this, were three large sets of red-tiered seats. The atmosphere was alive and busy, with



people rushing about everywhere in the cold. It would have been dark too, if there hadn't been huge lights (very similar to the ones at the footy stadiums) shining into the area.

We managed to push through some crowds to find our seats; they were in the front row of the tiered seating to the right of the platform. From here, we had a great view of just about everything - Anzac Cove, the platform and the surrounding ridges and hills. I was sitting next to Zoe and Connor, who had both slipped into their sleeping bags. Eventually I did the same and I have to say, I am so glad Stuey bought them over - it was so warm inside! Soon we began watching the pre-service show, projected on a big screen, where friends and relatives of past Anzacs told their stories. My favourite part was when blue lights were shone over the ocean and up the cliffs towards the Sphinx - it was absolutely breathtaking!

By this stage, it was only 3am, so we still had another 2 1/2 hours before the Service began. Zoe decided it was time for a snooze, so she slid onto the floor between our legs, still wrapped in her sleeping bag. I have no idea how she managed to sleep, as everyone kept tripping over her or stepping on her hands or nudging her face and asking if she was alive (that was mainly me)! As for the rest of us, we spent those last 2 1/2 hours chatting, watching the screen, getting lost in our thoughts or exploring the food stalls just outside the service area. Finally, just as the sun's rays peeked over the horizon, the service began.

During the first 5 minutes, I had to really focus on keeping my eyes open (I think everyone else was experiencing the same problem). Thankfully, by the time the catafalque party mounted, I was wide awake. The service consisted of several addresses, a hymn and the Last Post with the Minutes Silence. Throughout the ceremony, there was a cool breeze off the ocean and a calm silence throughout the crowd, as each spoken word, emotion and trumpet call echoed into the surrounding hills. The Dawn Service was the most beautiful and moving remembrance ceremony I have ever experienced.

When it was over, Jp and I handed out choc-chip cookies. I don't know about everyone else, but I was in deep need of some sugar! We cleared our things and began walking with the crowd up to Lone Pine, only stopping at Shell Green Cemetery to regroup. By this time, everyone was de-layering - a term used when layers of t-shirts and jumpers are thrown off due to a sudden feeling of hotness! Soon, we reached the Lone Pine Service area. It wasn't scheduled to start until 10am, so we sat around on

the stands for a while before walking down to the 4th Battalion cemetery. Then, it was time to get ready so Andrew took me to a trailer with my uniform. It took me ages to get dressed as I was changing from six layers to only three - so it was quite cold when I stepped out into the open air! Everyone else had changed into their Simpson prize shirts with black shoes and looked as cold as I did. We went back to the service grounds where I had to take my seat and get ready to present the reading. I soon realized that I was sitting next to Brooke Streatfeild (Albert Jacka's relative) and we chatted for a while before the service started.

It began with readings of epitaphs from four school students (I remembered reading them on gravestones over the past days). Following this, were several addresses and hymns. As time went on, I became colder and colder (I could eventually see myself shivering), but thankfully my nerves seemed to melt away. All I could think about was trying to stop my knees knocking together - I knew I should have packed my school jumper! Luckily I didn't feel the chill as much while doing the reading and I was very grateful for my Simpson Prize jacket when I returned to my seat. Soon the wreath laying began and everyone did a wonderful job handing out the wreaths - I remember each of their focussed and serene faces! When the service was over, we walked back down the dirt track (our black shoes were now brown) to the bus. I was so exhausted!

After a lunch of hot soup at the hotel, all we could think about was sleeping. For the next 5 ½ hours, Chelsea, Lauren, Zoe and I slept soundly in one room. We were woken up by Geraldine (once again), after what felt like a good night's sleep. After a quick dinner, Connor, Zoe and I had our final interviews with Sharon. After some games of backgammon, we all sat in Zoe and Chelsea's room with Stuey and talked before going to bed.

DAY ELEVEN: BACK IN ISTANBUL

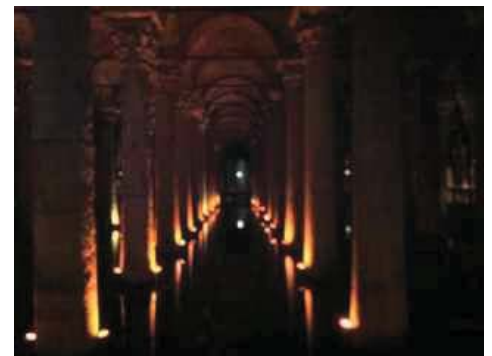
Today began with a quick breakfast and packing frenzy before boarding the bus back to Istanbul. We were all sitting up the back together and Fred entertained us with a riddle, "The music stopped and the woman died". We spent so long pondering the answer! The bus ride seemed much shorter than the previous one and when we stopped for lunch, it began to dawn upon me that our trip was almost over. But there was still so much to look forward to - the Hagia Sophia, the Grand Bazaar, the Spice market and the Final Dinner. That was enough to keep me smiling! Soon we arrived at the Antik Hotel, checked into our rooms (Lauren, Chelsea, Zoe and I were

together) and had showers. Lauren and Chelsea busied themselves pulling the mattresses off the beds and lining them up on the floor of our huge room. The cleaners walked in at that moment and, instead of being annoyed, helped arrange the beds on the floor - it was quite funny!

At around 4pm, we met in the lobby and went to the Grand Bazaar for the first time. It was amazing! Zoe and I haggled together and bought so many things, including funky harem pants. We also ran into Amrah again, but managed to get away before he could take us into his room full of jeans! Soon everyone retired to the hotel for a lovely dinner with live entertainment. There was an old man singing with a piano and some Turkish dancers performed as well. We were also given the opportunity to show off our belly dancing skills (which was great fun) and I finally learnt how to waltz properly thanks to Connor. But the night was far from over, as Stuey decided to take us out to look for a belly-dancing place. Instead, we saw the Blue Mosque at night, lit up in blue and yellow lights, and had some of the best ice cream I have ever tasted! Then everyone came back to our room for our nightly talk and we all fell asleep on the floor.

DAY TWELVE

Today was our last full day in Turkey! After a delicious breakfast, we went to the Cistern. It was really beautiful as each stone pillar was lit up in the darkness. The next stop was the Hagia Sophia, which was a huge and very impressive piece of architecture. There were two levels and hanging chandelier candles similar to those in the Blue Mosque.



After lunch at Duruzziyafe restaurant, we ventured into the Spice Market once again. Here Zoe, Chelsea, Lauren and I saw a friend from our previous visit, who sold us everything at great prices! Soon, we were off to the Grand Bazaar for more shopping. I haggled for belly dancing skirts with Chelsea and black trench coats with Zoe! Then Lauren, Zoe, Chelsea and I bought matching bracelets to hold the memories of this fabulous trip.

At 5.30pm, we hurried back to the hotel to get ready for the final dinner. When everyone was beautifully dressed, we boarded the bus. The restaurant was lovely as it was set in an old cistern. Despite the fact that we were split up into two tables, I had

an amazing time! Everyone took turns swapping seats so we could have a chance to talk to each other, which was really nice. And of course, like every meal we had experienced, the food was delicious! When dinner was over, we walked outside to find it was raining. No one had an umbrella, so we ran out into the water towards the bus. This was when I found out that my trench coat was waterproof!

When we returned to the hotel, everyone sat in a circle in the lobby for a small meeting. We presented Andrew and Stuey with matching tracksuits as gifts to thank them for teaching us so much about the Anzacs and Gallipoli. We were really grateful for everything they had done for us - their constant care, enthusiasm and humour. We also gave the teachers, Geraldine and Carol, wallets and tea sets to thank them for their help. Then Stuey took over and presented each of us with a beautiful pin - the Star of Gallipoli (originally to be awarded to soldiers who served in the Gallipoli campaign). He talked briefly about everyone and explained our individual awards. Each one was different and very funny - mine was for clumsiness!

When Chelsea, Lauren, Zoe and I got back to our room, everyone was in high spirits and we belly danced, talked and sang until 2 o'clock in the morning. Our last night in Turkey was unforgettable!

DAY THIRTEEN: COMING HOME

The next morning after breakfast, everyone made a final dash to the Bazaar. We returned to pack our suitcases - luckily I didn't have to sit on mine to make it close! We bid Andrew farewell, as he was going to Europe on a holiday, and soon we were at the airport. After saying goodbye to Fred, our fabulous tour guide, and our bus driver who had transported us to every single place we could think of, we lined up for our flight. It was quite funny that the plane leaving from the gate next to ours was going to Paris - we all joked that our next stop should be the Western Front! On the first flight, we watched movies and talked. When the plane landed in Singapore, everyone was craving ice cream. Even after an hour of searching, we couldn't find any (it was ridiculous really) so we settled for Starbucks instead! Soon we were on the plane to Sydney where I slept most of the way. Luckily, I woke up just in time to exchange phone numbers and addresses with the others for the chain letter.

We all knew we would have to say goodbye soon and I'm very sure nobody wanted to. When we landed in Sydney, our first goodbye was to Jp right outside customs. Our

second was to Connor and Carol at the domestic terminal and our third was to me at my gate! By this stage, everyone was crying (including Stuey) and we were so loud people were turning around to watch our emotional scenes. It was really horrible leaving everyone, which is why I was so glad when Lauren, Chelsea and Zoe ran back through several gates to say a final goodbye! We sat on each other, sang our favourite songs for the last time and promised to organise a reunion as soon as we could. When I landed home in Brisbane that night, I was sure that someday soon we would meet each other again.

REFLECTIONS

When this trip began, I didn't know what to expect. Here were eight different teenagers, with eight different lives, from eight different states, who were about to embark on an experience of a lifetime. I recall people commenting, "So one person from every other state is going with you? Do you know them well? That's going to be



challenging." But it wasn't - because Simpsonites aren't ordinary teenagers (as pointed out by Stu on the first night). I have never met a more knowledgeable, hilarious, talented, friendly group of people in my life. We all got along so well, that it seemed we had known each other for years. I am so glad that we were able to go on this journey together.

The trip itself was a wonderful and extremely memorable experience. I learnt so much about the Gallipoli campaign and the Anzac spirit while gaining an insight into Turkish history and culture. It is really hard to explain the feeling one gets when walking through the original Australian trenches at Lone Pine, while standing at the top of Plugge's plateau and looking down into Shrapnel Valley or while walking amongst rows of grave stones, each with the name of an Anzac soldier who gave his life on the battlefield. I have gained a deeper understanding into the sacrifices of the Anzacs, some of whom were only a couple of years older to us. It made me think that we could have been here as soldiers, nurses or stretcher-bearers, walking these same ridges 95 years ago. It was also challenging for me to change the green valleys, the beach, the trees and blossoming flowers in the cemeteries into horrific battlefields. It seemed unreal that such a tranquil place was once the scene of a war campaign. As

for Istanbul, it is one of those cities that you never forget. Whether I was running through the cold cobbled streets at 6 am or beholding the Blue Mosque decorated with lights at 10.30pm, I was always wondering why I had never thought about coming here before. Our visits to the historic mosques, Topkapi palace, the Spice Market and of course the Grand Bazaar were fantastic.

The hardest thing for me was returning home and trying to explain this trip in words - 'amazing' doesn't seem to do enough justice.

The Simpson prize trip is unique - it is an experience that I have shared with seven close friends and it has taught me so much. I won't forget our karaoke in the bus, the tracksuit obsession, an offer of 75 camels, belly dancing down the corridor or those other amazing moments spent with Zoe, Chelsea, Connor, Lauren, JP, Hayley and Gene. I miss all of you so much, but we are all Simpsonites and I know it is impossible for us not to meet again in the future.

