

G'day Mates!
This is Arlene Forney, Class of 2009
From Down Under :)

Friday, February 23rd..... Twister Night

I never thought coming to Australia would expose me to beautiful moments like this. Meeting people like Reka and Arisa has surpassed my expectations of merely encountering some crocodile-hunter-characters and maybe some exotic bugs. I truly admire them as women who are taking the initiative to get an education in order to make a difference in the world, despite social norms.



Saturday, March 24th Holiday on Rottnest Island

Alarms buzzed throughout the P&O, waking us for an island adventure. Armed with sun cream, bug repellent, and bathing suits, we sped away from the mainland on the 9:30 ferry destined for Rotto. We arrived on a little piece of historical paradise, where cute little quokkas welcomed us to their island of beautiful beaches, salty lakes, and low-land vegetation. (Quokkas are endangered kangaroo-resembling creatures native to Rottnest Island.) We hiked to a lighthouse, hired out bikes, toured the tunnel system and 9.2 inch gun atop Oliver Hill, and enjoyed time in the sun on a private beach. In the evening, we went to a hotel to listen to some live guitar music and watch Aussie toddlers play cricket and run after the quokkas. Only in Australia: mother chasing a child; child chasing a mini marsupial.

Friday, 6 April 2007 ... Good Friday

The Australian government enforces a backward policy that requires aboriginal peoples spend thousands of dollars in court cases, proving traditional ownership of the land on which they have always lived. In one case, state attorneys called an aboriginal elder to the stand to recount a dreamtime story. When he began speaking in his aboriginal language, the white authorities demanded that he speak English. However, the elder stood his ground and insisted to talk about aboriginal land in the aboriginal language; if the government truly wanted to hear about the land in its integrity, they would have to learn indigenous tongue. Having learned a small piece of history connected to the area, I felt privileged to be welcomed to this land to leave footprints of my own. We concluded our visit by wading through the water, feeling the mud between our toes, making footprints of our own, only to be washed away by the rising tide. Next lesson: making a boomerang. One of the elders, named Brian, came to camp to demonstrate how to transform a section of log into a sleek weapon, using only an axe. Traditional carving methods exemplify the patience and perseverance required to live as a hunter-gatherer in the bush.

Tuesday, 10 April 2007 ... Cruisin'

Our third outing of the day consisted of a cruise down the Swan River. As we expected, the majority of the scenic cruisers were in the 60-and-up age group. The cruise was relaxing and quiet. We enjoyed complimentary coffee, read from our new books, and observed beautiful views through the windows. More than seeing billion dollar river houses, I enjoyed seeing the dolphins swim by, just meters away.

Saturday, 5 May 2007 ... Cinco de Mayo in the Pinnacles Desert

It was still dark when we woke up this morning. We were on a mission to tour the Nambung National Park in the Pinnacles Desert. A 3-hour bus ride took us to the park, about 245km north of Perth. The scene was a rainbow of colour, and the day was gorgeous. The hundreds of pinnacles were spectacular against the golden sand and blue sky. These geological creations formed 25-30 THOUSAND years ago from deposits of shell that have survived the test of time, erosion, sea recession and glaciers. It was incredible to experience 'real Australian' terrain as we strolled around the pinnacles.

Saturday, 12 May 2007 ... Surf's up!

Today was absolutely awesome. The day began with a surfing lesson at Lancelin Beach. Being our first time surfing, we were all pretty nervous, but it turned out to be so much fun! The surf school instructors were so nice and so Australian ... 'Sign right here mate, all righ' sweet as!' ('Sweet as' is slang similar to 'cool' or 'tight' ... it's not sweet as anything, just sweet as. Our first task was to slip into some pre-wet winter wet suits and learned that 'slipping' into a wet suit is not possible; 'squeezing' into a wet suit is more like it. The beginning of our lesson took place on land, where we learned about different tides, the parts of the surf board and marine wildlife. Our instructor, Tom, taught us the four steps of surfing (paddle, press, plant the back foot/crouch, and stand) and the next thing we knew, we were in the water for a few hours of practice. Surfing is so much fun! The wet suits kept us warm and comfortable in the ocean water, and we each had our fair share of salt-intake for the day. When it was all said and done, we walked back to the bus stop smiling and feeling pretty good about the whole experience.



Saturday, 19 May 2007 ... Margaret River

Going to down south to Margaret River was one of the most beautiful of days I have experienced in Australia. The weather was drizzly, but it made the hills look almost dream-like, and it was fun to watch the cows and sheep dotted across the landscape. We woke up early to catch a city bus to Murdoch University, where we got to know some of our fellow travelers before boarding the travel bus. We met a man named Andris, from Germany, and as we were talking, a motor cycle pulled up carrying Nicolas, from France, and Joanne, from the Philippines. It is neat to be an 'international' student, because little tourism trips like this one involve people from all over the world.

We departed for Margaret River at 8 AM and arrived at the Ngili Cave about three hours later. We climbed around in the cave a bit, 12 stories below the ground surface, where there were really neat calcified rock formations and a big chamber with perfect sound quality. Our group made a quick stop in town to pick up some lunch before making our way towards the picturesque Surfers Point – one of the premier surf beaches of Margaret River.

Thursday, 24 May 2007

Today is the Feast Day of the Patron Saint of Australia – Our Lady Help of Christians. I feel so blessed to have made such amazing friends in the States, and here at school. Meeting people outside of my close-knit home environment has allowed me to see how interconnected the lives of each person can be worldwide - even people you just pass on a bus or train. Just recently, a man named Andy died. I didn't meet him, but he met Bryan, Mickey, Sarah, Dave, and Will on a train ride to Chicago freshman year. From what I've heard, he was one of the nicest guys anyone had ever met. Hearing his story inspires me to show love to others through simply smiling and enjoying the presence of each person I meet as a glimpse of God at work. Even though my stay in Australia is relatively short, compared to the rest of my life, it has been a formative experience so far. I feel so blessed to have so many different opportunities to learn and grow. Every moment in life is precious.

Wednesday, 30 May 2007 ... Coffee and Conversation with Henry

In order to make up for my faulty camera battery yesterday, we met Henry in the Theology building for a photo opportunity. I would have been happy to have one picture with our lecturer, but Henry treated the occasion as if we were compiling a portfolio, taking us around to different offices in search of 'better lighting.' The next hour was one of my favourite moments of the week. After our 'photo shoot,' Henry invited Jessica and me to the Pasta Addiction for a 'cuppa.' We talked about everything from types of coffee, to healthcare, to history debates. Henry is an admirable person, and one of the most dedicated of professors I have encountered. The individual time Henry spent with us students is an example of how UNDA is devoted to educating the entire personhood of the students that come here. Interpersonal education works like a dance – a continuous exchange

of open learning and acceptance. Sincerity is not something that can be created in a teacher and student; rather, it comes from the genuine and caring hearts of those involved.

Wednesday, 6 June 2007 ... Snorkelling with the Sharks

This morning, I woke up with excitement and anxiousness for had a special outing with my friend Anne, from Saint Pat's. After a quick trip to pick up a few things at the store, Anne drove Jessica and me to the Aquarium of Western Australia (AQWA) at Hilary's Harbour. It was so kind of her to treat us to lunch at the DOME café (ah, dome away from dome; home away from home) and we spent some time browsing around the fun little shops on the harbour. As we finished eating, it began to rain – perfect timing for going indoors.

We had pre-arranged a 3PM snorkelling adventure, but we used the time before our session to explore the museum. The colours and variation among the sea creatures in at the aquarium were fascinating. The marine animals seemed to progress in size as we moved from tank to tank ... from plankton and little fish to jellyfish, sea stars, sea horses, stone fish, eels, crocodiles, sea lions, sting rays, sharks. Those sea horses have a rather admirable (some would argue evolutionarily-advanced) plan for bearing offspring. We made our last stop at the main feature of the aquarium, called the 'shipwreck coast.' This walk-through aquarium housed the creatures with which Jessica and I were bound to encounter up-close-and-personal. The 4-metre sharks, huge stingrays, and giant sea turtles were a bit intimidating, but magnificent, as they swam above us.

Before the plunge, Jessica and I hurried to meet with our divemaster, Tyler, from Oregon (he likes Australia so much that he's decided to stay. Tyler explained the basics of snorkelling in the big tank; it was rather unsettling how he showed us a stinger from one of the stingrays, named Morticia, and shark teeth, while he instructed us to remain calm in the water. Then, he asked about our prior snorkelling experience – haha ... our experiences as kids snorkelling in the pool were the best we had to offer.

When we arrived at the shark tank, one of the stingrays was basking in the entrance pool. After putting on our wet suits, Jessica and I followed Tyler into the tank. The scene was surreal. Jessica and I (inexperienced at snorkelling) stood in the cool water, adjusting our masks and fins, as the sharks swam past. We spent the next 45 minutes in the water, floating above massive sharks, turtles, stingrays, and fish. Tyler informed us that the viewing tube below actually makes the animals appear about 1/3 smaller than actual size; snorkelling allows for accurate perception. The first time one of the giant rays swam past brought me to a quick realisation of my situation: I am small and vulnerable; the sharks are big and powerful. Once I had my physical and mental position established, simply observing the majestic movements of God's marine creatures and listening to the peaceful sound of the water made for a relaxing experience.

It has been such a pleasant day, and reflecting on the happenings of the past few weeks leaves me in awe of God's perfect plan. He puts each of us in the right place at the right time and prepares us to experience sequential moments of wonder. I feel so blessed to have met people like Anne during my stay here in Australia and I've had the opportunity to participate in so many enriching activities: guarding the Basilica, observing second-year catechism, revegetation, snorkelling, camping in the bush, watching beautiful sunsets - all have been highlights in my experience of Western Australia.

Friday, 15 June 2007 ...

This is my final "G'day" from Australia, as I will be returning to the United States in one week. Tonight, the University hosted a Study Abroad Farewell evening, during which Quinlands provided dinner, followed by speeches, awards, a slide show, and even a little song-and-dance number, performed by the boys from Oregon. It feels strange to be saying good-bye with a week left to go ... I still have two exams and lots to pack away before the semester comes to an end. Nevertheless, it felt good to look back on this semester as a whole. I've only been in this country for 4 months, but I feel like what I have learned here will impact the rest of my life. I had no idea what to expect from studying abroad, but I couldn't be happier with my experience. I truly love

Australia, but I do feel ready to go back. The task of preparing for remaining final exams helps me look forward to the conclusion of my studies as a sophomore – sunny summer days in Southern California provide an enticing image to chase home to the States.

Saturday, 23 June 2007 ...

That's all folks! Of the things I've learned on this trip, several can be applied to life anywhere ... the world isn't as big as it seems, adventure can be found anywhere, so long as we take the time to notice the beauty of God's creation and appreciate what each of us can offer to each other as individuals living together. I'm looking forward to experiencing further adventures in each day to come, starting with this summer in the United States.

Love,
Arlene