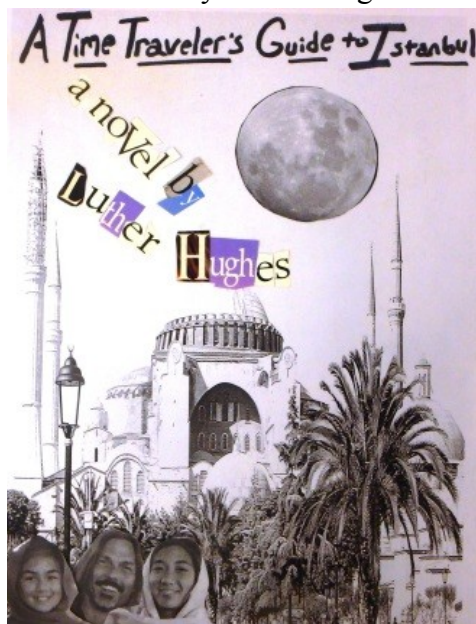


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A Time Traveler's Guide to Istanbul

A Novel by Luther Hughes



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Please e-mail me what you think of this book:

waccamawpress@gmail.com

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To my girls

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“I was born lost and take no pleasure in being found.” – John Steinbeck

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Chapter 1

In the book, *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac wrote, “Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night.” That was me back in 2013 driving my 1993 camper van down the Interstate into the night. We were far enough into that night that it was both too late and too early. Where were all those red taillights ahead of me heading? What story do the contents of all these vehicles cruising down the Interstate at this hour tell?

Our story begins in a camper van cruising down I-20 East near Grovetown, Georgia, and ends in Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey....

This story begins in the middle of the night and ends in the middle of the day. The whole thing covers one lunar cycle in 2013. I wrote this story in 2015.

I am a time traveler.

In *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen Hawkins wrote, “If time travel is possible, where are the tourists from the future?” *Touché Monsieur Hawkins*, but I am a time traveler. I am a tourist from the past delivering a silly little book to some tourist from the future.

:::[OK. Reader, how different is the world now than when I wrote this silly book?]:::

In the following story, I will travel from 2015 to 2013.

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In *A Brief History of Time*, Stephen wrote of the concept of *Imaginary Time* which he used like imaginary numbers in mathematics to help explain the beginnings of the universe, and so forth. For the purpose of this book, *Imaginary Time* is connected memories and artifacts, and *Time Travel*. Time travels as fast or slow as we want it too. After all, we invented it. Really, this is just our collective and individual perception of reality. Time is just a concept that we have heaped great power upon rendering it unstoppable.

Like the rest of you, I travel through time and space.

I enjoy writing, because of the power an author has to control imaginary time. In my silly little books, I can move time back, forward, or stop it. For example, I will occasionally freeze time to have a look at the moment. I feel this could be a useful literary tool. For the purpose of this book, I will refer to each of these freeze frames as a *Reality Check*.

Reality Check...

:::[Picture this]:: It's 2105, and I'm a forty-six year old man sitting in front of a computer writing a silly story.

:::[OK. Reader, now you try it. Fill in the blanks]::

Reality Check...

:::[Picture this]:: It's _____, and you're a _____ reading a silly story.

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I had to pee. So, I exited the Interstate on an exit numbered 190. The full moon became perfectly framed in the center of my windshield. A 1000 year old Japanese poet wrote, “Every single thing changes, and is changing always in this world. Yet with the same light the moon goes on shining.”

Our story begins in a camper van cruising down I-20 East near Grovetown, Georgia, and ends in Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey....

Now it's Istanbul, not Constantinople

The sun is 400 times farther from the Earth than the Moon. The Moon is 400 times smaller than the Sun. This extraordinary concurrence means that the Sun and the Moon appear to be the exactly the same size in the sky. This bewildering happenstance is magical and lacks the randomness of what I have heard about the rest of the universe. Is this just an astonishing coincidence? Could this be a secret message from the Creator? I will add this to the near infinite list of items that I don't know or understand.

Nevertheless, I digress, back in May of 2013, I found myself behind the wheel of my 1993 camper van driving down the Interstate under a star studded sky that was being outperformed by a full moon that appeared to be the same size as the full sun that hung in the clear blue sky about half a day before. My gas gauge was barely past half-a-tank.

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My two young daughters and my recently adult son slept in the back of the camper van as I drove all night. Their ages were ten, fifteen and eighteen. My son was a child before November 23, 2012, but then, by turning eighteen, the world automatically entitled him *an adult*. I suppose eighteen is about as good as any other age to confer adulthood on an individual.

My girlfriend, Erin, slept in the passenger seat. Each time I changed lanes or a large vehicle passed, she awoke to ask me if I was ok. (Erin was declared an adult eighteen years before this story took place.) When this story took place, I was 43. An over-forty man with a girlfriend looks ridiculous. Dating should be reserved for the young.

At 43, I was not young; although most of the instances when I pointed this out, someone would inexorably respond, “No. You are still young.” Although I am healthy and fit, I am not young. The youth do not own being “healthy and fit”. Like my camper van driving in the dark, I was probably cruising along with about half-a-tank.

From time to time, my passenger side tires drove over those rough grooves carved into the side of the road to keep drivers from falling asleep. This helped me stay awake. Unfortunately, each time I did this, Erin burst awake as if she was ready to jump into action and rescue everyone from a house fire or an intruder. She lacked the ability to fall into a deep sleep. I, on the other hand, had the ability to sleep like a dead man even while driving.

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There I was driving down the road with a car full of my sleeping family in total silence. I needed music to stay conscious, but I did not want to bother my sleeping family. Erin's iPhone, resting on the dash, lit up. This reminded me that this little phone-slash-computer was full of music. I took the phone. A message from "Bill Tracker" said that we owed someone money. I always teased Erin that she was cheating on me with this dude named "Bill Tracker", because she kept getting messages from him on her iPhone and she kept spending all our money on him. Besides the message from Bill, the phone also stated that it was someone's birthday on Facebook, Erin had a text message from her friend, Heather, and two CNN notifications stated that former congressman Anthony Weiner was sexting again, and ::: [pause]::: thousands were protesting in Taksim Square in Istanbul. I shoved the headphone jack into the small computer disguised as some sort of phone, put on headphones, and clicked on a song.

I was in the process of driving all night back to our home in South Carolina. Another road trip was coming to a close, and my mind was on my next journey. Journeys have become a way of life for me. I was either taking a trip or getting ready to take another trip. In due time, my two daughters and I would be flying to Istanbul, Turkey. The song streaming from my girlfriend's iPhone was the upbeat and infectious 1990 *They Might be Giants* version of *Istanbul (Not Constantinople)*.

:::[Sing it with me.]:::

Istanbul was Constantinople

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Now it's Istanbul, not Constantinople

Been a long time gone, Constantinople

Now it's Turkish delight on a moonlit night...

The upbeat catchy song transported my mind from wanting to sleep to wanting to think about my upcoming trip. The excitement of taking my daughters to Istanbul released enough endorphins to stop me from driving my camper van off the road.

Every gal in Constantinople

Lives in Istanbul, not Constantinople

So if you've a date in Constantinople

She'll be waiting in Istanbul...

:::[Did you sing? Do you know this song?]:::

As I drove down the interstate highway, I envisioned a time in the short future where my daughters and I would be in Istanbul viewing the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sofia. I imagined myself explaining to them the history of various locations. My eyes were on the road, and my mind was in the future.

We're all living in the future, I'll tell you how I know...
is from the chorus from another song by John Prine aptly titled *Living in the Future*. As the miles rolled under the tires of the camper van, we were time traveling to a future that would bring us home, to an airport and eventually Istanbul. I know all this happened, because I

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am living in the future in 2015, as I write this book about 2013. I have my memories, photos, ticket stubs, and a travel journal. These items traveled through time to the present, which has just become the past. Whoever is reading these words is living in the future in another time, and knows stuff that I don't know yet.

:::[Is your mind blown? No? Of course not]:::

John Prine sang in his song that *we're all driving rocket ships and talking with our minds*. That was the future his song imagined. Every living person is, in fact, living in the future, and I'll tell you how I know: Time always leaves the past behind like the tires on my van leaves the road behind. When the moment comes that you actually read this silly little book, it will already be older than before. The alternative rock band, *They Might be Giants*, point this out in their equally aptly titled song *Older* with the following simplistically brilliant lyrics: *You're older than you've even been, and now your even older... And now you're your older still...* One of history's biggest clichés is to speak about how much the world has changed. Of course, things change as we travel through time and space. We are not all driving rocket ships and talking with our minds, instead we're staring on the little screens of iPhones. More recently, Gavin DeGraw's song, *The Best I ever Had*, describes a night sky full of drones and crowds staring at their phones. This was the world of 2013. 2013 is starting to look like a world of cyborgs that are half human and half phone.

Besides living in the future, we are also living in the past. As each present moment becomes memories, those

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memories stay with each of us and affect us in very deep ways and shape who we are as humans. I would like the reader to think about their conversations with friends. I ask the reader to think about how many of these conversations are based on the listening and telling of memories.

Memories are what inspire songs, novels, poems, joy and heartbreak. In 1980, Bon Segar wished he *didn't know now what he didn't know then*. Meanwhile in 1969, Van Morrison was *overcome thinking about it*. Jim Croce wished he could put *Time in a Bottle, ...and save every day 'til eternity passes away just to spend it with you...*

“You can close your eyes to reality, but not to memories,” wrote the poet Stanisław Lec. Sometimes, items that travel through time are aptly called memorabilia. For the purpose of this book, I will refer to all these items that travel through time with us as “memories”. These ruins from the past that somehow survived until today are memories. The pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal, the Hagia Sofia, and the black and white photo of my great-grandfather are all tangible memories. On the other hand, those pictures and videos stored in my brain are, also, memories.

We are all time travelers. We travel to the future one second at a time, and we travel to the past one memory at a time.

This story that is currently being read is a story about the memories of a journey I took with my two daughters in

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2013. For one cycle of the moon, I escaped my unimportant happy little life of washing dishes, washing clothes, and cooking dinners to find the one city in the world that might have more memories than any other place in the world. I took my two young daughters with me. As with my five other books, I have an agenda. I will use the narrative of this story to introduce my existential theory of time, and promote love, tolerance, peace, joy, and the Oxford Coma.

I'm always impressed when a song writer or a poet can tell a story in four minutes better than I can in 40,000 words. I love the words of songs as much as the words of books. If I could tell my stories in four minutes, I would, but I cannot. For this reason, here I go with another 40,000 words. From Saigyō Hōshi's poetry to John Prine's song writing to a family exiting the Intestate, the full moon shines the same kind of light on a changing world every twenty-nine and one half days.

The following story was written in 2015 about insignificant events that took place in 2013.

Kumkapi Neighborhood, Istanbul, Turkey, 2013

To our right a young woman danced on the table holding a bottle of Russian vodka while a group of men played sundry instruments and vociferously sang to the crowded table piled high with bouncing plates, bottles, glasses, and the surplus pieces of leftover seafood. Colorful brightly lit paper lanterns hung from cables stretched

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across the streets. Seafood restaurant after double-decker seafood restaurant lined stone streets that were crowded with pedestrians. Women completely covered in long black *burqas* walked by women in tight colorful miniskirts. My daughters and I walked upright and purposely through the throngs. Years of travel had taught me to walk through the crowd with confidence.

Night had fallen on this ancient Byzantine capital.

We were amongst a great moving multitude.

“Please, look at my menu?” said an eager man with a heavy accent, salt and pepper hair and a neatly pressed white shirt and black trousers. He asked me this question with the volume of someone speaking before a small group rather than a small family.

“No thank you sir,” I politely responded. We continued walking.

His volume rose slightly. “I will give you a free appetizer, and a free drink. You can sit on my balcony. Please just come have a look.”

“We are not hungry yet.” We continued walking.

“Why do you not like my restaurant?”

“I like it. It is very nice.” We continued walking.

“Then, please, bring your children and come inside. Look at how nice our balcony! Do you like the music? Why do you not like our music?”

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This conversation was repeated over and over as we walked past the restaurants. The men standing outside the restaurants used guilt to force people into their restaurants. They were better at it than my mother.

Then, a man pushing a cart piled high with rugs stopped and said to me, “Sir, take a minute and look at my carpets. They are beautiful, yes?” We continued walking. He walked beside us pushing his cart, and talking.

Next, a laughing man with a fez hat and a costume out of Aladdin stood behind a colorful ice cream cart and yelled out, “Mister! Ice cream for your daughters?”

“Maybe later.”

“Your daughter no like ice cream.”

“I love ice cream,” exclaimed my youngest daughter, Zeta. We stopped walking.

“If your daughter loves ice cream, then you need to buy some of my ice cream for her.”

Another woman, in one of those long black burqas, walked by wearing sunglasses at night. She held hands with two small children dressed in bright T-shirts, shorts, and flip-flops. One child was playing a game on a phone as she walked. The other child’s eyes looked all around at all the colorful people. Her husband, wearing a tight designer shirt and skinny jeans, took photo after photo with his iPhone. Just below the trim of the long black burqa, I could see the mother was wearing jeans and

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flats with little sparkling stars and red circles affixed on the top of the shoe.

Two very dark skinned men wearing bright neon colored soccer jerseys spoke the familiar sing-song tonal sounds of a Bantu sounding language that added to the cacophony of languages and sounds entering my ears.

Reality Check...

∴[Picture this]∴ Seafood restaurants lined the side of the narrow streets of this part of the city. Each one had a man standing outside desperately trying to woo customers while musicians played music and servers carried food and drinks to and from the crowded tables. Men pushed large carts filled with rugs, produce, fish, and more. It was dark and breezy. A father ordered ice cream for his daughter...

“Daddy, may I please have some ice cream?” asked Zeta, my youngest daughter.

“Sure. Sanibel, do you want some ice cream?” I asked my oldest daughter.

“No. I just want to sleep.”

The cost for an ice cream cone was two Turkish Liras. Two Turkish Liras were about one dollar during the summer of 2013. The ice cream vendor with the red fez cap and brightly adorned outfit seemed delighted to sell

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us ice cream. His costume and huge smile made him look like a cartoon character. He grabbed a three foot long metal scooper and scooped out a scoop of ice cream. Then, the show began. He twirled and spun the ice cream without it falling off the scooper. From time to time, he extended the ice cream to Zeta, and then snatched it away as she grabbed for it. He used multiple cones like a card shark playing *Follow the Queen* except Zeta had to follow the *cream*. Finally, he handed Zeta the ice cream cone, and she was smiling as big as he was smiling.

The ice cream tasted wonderfully unique, and refused to melt. I thought maybe the Turkish government had worked out a deal with Willie Wonka to make some magical non-melting ice cream. Maybe there was this mysterious chocolate factory with little men that also made magical ice cream. *No*. In fact, this stuff is called *salepi dondurma* and, besides the normal milk, ice and sugar, this Turkish Ice Cream has sap from the mastic tree and flour made from orchids. That's right. This magical sticky Turkish ice cream is made with magical tree sap and beautiful orchids.

Summer breezes near the Mediterranean have a unique feel to them. They blow across a person's face and uncovered arms with just enough coolness to refresh and awaken, but without even a hint of cold. I have learned that every place in our world has its own type of breeze at night that feels completely different from every other part. This must have something to do with nearby waters, land masses, and prevalent winds. I know this sounds strange, but, trust me, this is true. My two

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daughters and I were walking through the animated Kumkapi neighborhood of Istanbul.

I felt as if the world had sent representatives to eat in this tiny neighborhood located in the center of her map where the hemispheres collide from the East and the West and the North and the South.

The narrow roads that spread like spokes from the center of this diminutive neighborhood might have been packed with a moving mob of humans, but just beyond the parameter where the seafood restaurants gave way to apartments, everything was still and quiet. The area was surrounded by an imaginary fence. Past this pretend line, the world stopped. Cinderella left the ball and all the horsemen turned back to mice, and all the brightness and chaos was replaced with darkness and silence.

All those hours on the plane, and the changes in the time zones finally overcame the thrill of being in a new exotic place. Time had come to exit.

We walked through the crowds and turned a corner crossing this imaginary fence. The slender alley way that led to our apartment was dark in contrast to the lit up area just a few yards away. The change was sudden and stunning.

Earlier, I had arranged a room at the Tom Square Boutique Hotel. The owner, a young woman named Tom, put us up in an apartment about fifty yards from the actually hotel. As we made our way down the dark narrow roads, we should have been frightened, but dark

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places do not frighten me. I am overly confident that I can defend against anything, and my children feel safe when they are with me. Perhaps this possibly false sense of security is dangerous, but, nonetheless, I felt completely safe.

We met Tom when we checked in earlier in the day before the sky had turned from neon blue to deep black. Tom spoke English perfectly, and seemed very young, and modern. Her father came in while we were checking in, and he didn't look much older than me. I paid the room balance with my debit card using her credit card cube attached to her iPhone. We originally booked online using Erin's phone. Her website described the hotel as a boutique hotel.

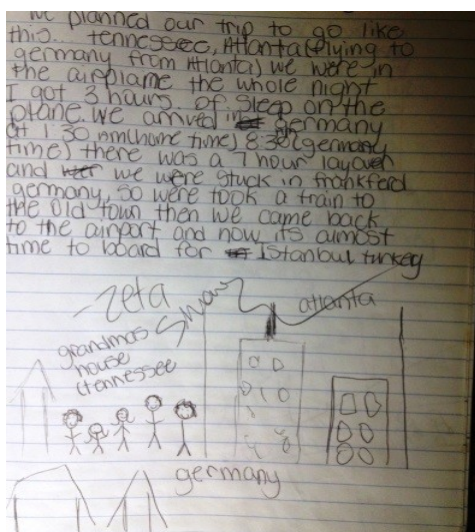
My daughters and I climbed the narrow stairs to our small contemporary looking apartment in a not-so-contemporary-looking building. As soon as we were inside, I opened the window permitting the summer breeze to waft inside. The distant sounds of Kumkapi were hypnotic, and, within minutes, we were all sleeping.

My daughters, Sanibel and Zeta (aged fifteen and ten), traveled with me to Turkey. Zeta kept a journal, and I'm including some of her unedited pages in this narrative. This semi-true account took place during the summer of 2013. This novel tells our story.

::[:Read what Zeta had to say]:::

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∴[Now, please read some background on the author]∴

This marks the fifth or sixth little insignificant book that I have written. The way it works for me is this: I write books, and, then, I give them away for free.

I started writing books after my marriage fell apart in 2003. Since then, I have taken great pride in being a father, and staying more or less single. I have two daughters from that marriage, and I adopted a son named Charles after his mom died. Charles goes by the nickname "CJ".

CJ graduated Valedictorian of his class, and started college this summer. I was surprised that he would rather start college in the summer than travel, but that was his decision. The rules made him an adult when he

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turned eighteen. The morning before we left South Carolina, He woke up and wanted to go surfing with me. We spent the day surfing next to the pier near our home. CJ and I spent the day trading waves on a waist high clean day. Once home, we posed together next to surfboards and took a photo. As my daughters and I traveled around Turkey, he stayed home feeding his cat, taking care of the house, and taking classes.

My books have been mostly-true stories of my journeys told in the third person or in first-person narration. I normally change the names of characters in the books including my family and me.

Prior to going on this trip I read a few books about the Hippie Trail of the sixties and seventies. Among those books I read Rory MacLean's *Magic Bus: On the Hippie Trail from Istanbul to India*, which was published in 2009. I also read Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar*, a classic from the 1970's. Reading books about the Hippie Trail led to a few more Kurt Vonnegut classics such as *Breakfast of Champions*. During the trip my oldest daughter and I read *Inferno* by Dan Brown. These books influenced what we saw, and where we went on our trip. By the way, Zeta read *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* followed by *The Great Gatsby*.

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“If the Earth were a single state than Istanbul would be its capital.” - Napoleon Bonaparte

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Chapter 2

Istanbul

“How long ago did we leave Atlanta? This is weird. I can’t really tell what time it is,” was the first thing Sanibel said on the morning of our first day in Istanbul.

I replied, “I know. When you fly from one part of the world to another part of the world on a long flight with layovers in various airports, you get this weird time-space confusion.”

“Yesterday was a really long day,” she said. “I wonder if you kept flying around the world, if you could stay in the same day.”

“No, because you’d cross the International Date Line.”

“But, I could stay in the daylight, right?”

“It would be easier to spend half the year above the Arctic Circle and half the year below the Antarctic Circle. Then you could stay in daylight all the time. Remember when we spent a summer in Iceland, and it never got dark?”

Zeta chimed in, “Where are we going today?”

I remember reading something in a travel essay by Paul Theroux where he said, “Tourists don’t know where they’ve been, and travelers don’t know where they’re

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going.” Since I like to think of myself more of a traveler than a tourist, I responded, “I don’t know.”

The following morning, we strolled from our silent little street into the busy seafood restaurant area of Kumkapi where we found a little café and bakery called *Ulusoy*. The owner of the bakery was a skinny fellow with a big smile and a shaved head named Yavuz. He eagerly greeted us, and we started our day with Turkish coffee, tea, and some pastries. We were the only customers, and he joined us at our table outside. He did not speak English, and we did not speak Turkish, but that did not stop our conversation from being engaging. He brought his laptop computer out and showed us his Facebook profile. He asked me to log in and friend him, and I did. Then, he went through showing me photos of his family, friends, and his solo visit to Kalkan, Turkey on the southern coast. He was alone in most of his photos. In one photo, he stood awkwardly on the beach with long pants and dress shoes and no smile.

Yavuz, went back into the shop when a few customers came in and purchased some Turkish Delight. He returned with a plate of Turkish Delight, and placed it in the middle of the table with a pot of Turkish tea and tea glasses for all of us. The tea glasses were the small hour glass shaped glasses that we would see all day long every day on our trip. He then opened up a tab on his browser with Google Translate, and started typing questions such as, “Where is your wife?”

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I explained to him that I did not have a wife, but a girlfriend. He acted surprised, and the questions and the comments kept coming.

“Are you Muslim?”

“No. I’m Christian, but I respect Islam. Islam is beautiful and nice.”

“I’m a Muslim, but I respect Jesus. Christianity is beautiful and nice too.”

“What do you think of the protest?”

“The protests are not that important. They are not here. Only in Taksim Square. Not here. Here very safe for tourists.”

Sanibel smiled big and said, “I want to go see the protest! Can we go?”

Yavuz asked me what she said and I typed it into Google Translate and he gestured no, and contorted his face into a concerned look. Zeta then said, “No Daddy! I don’t want to see the protests!” Then, the two girls started arguing about whether or not to see the protests, and I had to calm them down. On the other hand, I, too, wanted to see the protesters.

We stayed at the café for 90 minutes or so. Yavuz kept teaching us Turkish words, and Zeta kept writing them in our travel journal. Conversations flowed easily with the help of web-based technology and gestures.

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Eventually, we needed to move, and we bid Yavuz farewell.

Kumkapi was connected to the outside world through a small archway tunnel at the end of a stone paved street. On the other side of this narrow archway a wide avenue full of traffic called Kennedy Caddesi (Kennedy Avenue) snaked around the edge of the Golden Horn keeping old Constantinople inside its arch. We were not able to see the road due to the fact that a tall white Mercedes van was stuck in the arch like a cork in a bottle.

The accident must have occurred mere seconds before we arrived, because within a minute or two a line of cars formed behind the van. I offered to help the man as he stepped outside his vehicle and surveyed his options. Before I knew it a large group of men, including myself, pushed the van forcing it through the tunnel. The top of the white van scrapped the top of the tunnel and the left mirror bent and broke off and dangled from the side. Deep gashes formed along the side and top. Eventually, the van popped out of the tunnel not unlike a cork out of a wine bottle. As the line of traffic drove through the arch, I looked up at the smooth stone ceiling and saw numerous scrape marks. I wondered how many of those marks were caused one thousand years ago by transportation not propelled by an internal combustion engine. Nevertheless, this van made it's mark on history, and this mark will travel to the future where others will see it.

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The busy road outside the tunnel snaked around the old city wall of the part of Istanbul that encompasses the “Golden Horn”. The Golden Horn looks like a European finger pointing at Asia across the Straits of Bosphorus. This busy multilane avenue is named after President John F. Kennedy. For reasons I cannot truly explain, I found it comforting being in such a foreign place walking beside a road named after a dead president from home.

Across from the road, a lively waterfront promenade followed the Marmara Sea. We crossed the road to have a look. A paved walkway went along the seawall with large rocks forming a sort of beach. The beach was filled with large hairy men in their white underwear swimming and hanging out on the rocks. All the women were fully covered, and some children played in the water, as well. A small chubby little child kicked a ball into the street. The little dude looked a lot like the ball he was kicking. I kicked the ball back to him to keep him from running in the street. The little sumo wrestler made a face, charged at me, and kicked me in the leg. I laughed as his parents looked on embarrassed.

I asked the street vendor how much for the fish he was grilling and he held up four fingers. For the equivalent of \$2.00, I feasted on grilled fish. Sanibel and Zeta tried it, but said it tasted too fishy. From this point on, each time I passed this point on our way out of Kumkapi, I ate fish. We walked from street vendor to street vendor eating anything they sold. Zeta spotted something unusual on the rocks.

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“What is that?” she asked.

Two flimsy poles held up a bunch of lines with colorful balloons tied to the lines. Some of the balloons had been popped, and some were full. On the seawall sat a man holding a pellet gun. “Zeta, that guy with the BB gun is charging folks to shoot at those balloons.” As we walked down the path, we saw this set up three or four more times. I don’t know how they avoided shooting all the men swimming in their underwear.

We had the colorful tourist map that Tom, the girl from the Tom Square Boutique Hotel, had given us earlier. The map marked all the major spots that all tourists are required to visit. The majority of those sites were located in the Sultanahmet section, which is the old city. In fact, this section of Istanbul is the part surrounded by the old city wall. The Sultanahmet section of Istanbul used to be what was called Byzantium and Constantinople.

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“Either I conquer Constantinople or Constantinople conquers me.” – Mehmed II

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Chapter 3

A (very) Short History of Istanbul

The city that my two daughters and I were exploring was founded by a group of Greek settlers about 2700 years before I wrote this little book. My history books told me that they called the place Byzantium. In 330, the Emperor of the Roman Empire, a guy named Constantine, moved the capital of the Roman Empire to this city. He called it New Rome, but the world would know this great city as Constantinople. My history books also tell me that the Roman Empire fell in 476, but nobody told that to the folks living in Constantinople who kept on trucking long after a Germanic chieftain named Odoacer conquered Rome in 476.

The most significant leader of Constantinople was Justinian. He built the Hagia Sofia, conquered much of the old version of the Roman Empire, and married a hot looking adult actress named Theodora. The word “justice” comes from his name. Another important leader was the Sultan Ahmet I. He ruled about 1000 years after Justinian, and is most known as the builder of the Blue Mosque. The section of Istanbul called Sultanahmet is, of course, named after him.

In 1453, a Turkish guy named Mehmed II (with help from a large Muslim army) took over the city. He called himself the new Emperor of Rome, but not many people took this title seriously. From then on, the world would

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gradually start calling this place Istanbul. In fact, in 1923, a sharp dressed guy with huge eyebrows said that everyone should call the city Istanbul. I will write more about Mustafa Kemal Atatürk later.

In 1990, the alternative rock band *They Might Be Giants* covered a song written in 1953 called *Istanbul (Not Constantinople)*. Twenty-three years later, I could not get that catchy tune out of my head while I walked around the Sultanahmet section of Istanbul.

Sultanahmet

“OK girls! We’re off to see Sultanahmet,” I said to my two daughters.

“We’re going to see a sultan?” asked Zeta.

“No. We are going to see the Sultanahmet section of Istanbul. Trust me. It’s going to be awesome.” Then, under my breath I sang...

Istanbul was Constantinople

Now it's Istanbul, not Constantinople

Been a long time gone, Constantinople

Now it's Turkish delight on a moonlit night...

From there, we turned left from the congested Kennedy Avenue, walked up a steep narrow half stone paved street, and turned left down a road that led us to a beautiful mosque. This mosque is known as the Little Hagia Sofia, but it is not really little. Across the street

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from the big little mosque sat the Küçük Ayasofya Art Café.

“I’m tired of walking!” whined Sanibel.

“Me too,” whined Zeta.

“You girls are ten and fifteen years old. I am forty-three. How could ya’ll be tired, while me, an old man, is full of energy?” I answered them. “I have an idea. That little café looks cool. Let’s go get some coffee.”

“Yay!”

The coffee shop was an eclectic mix of art, mismatched furniture and souvenirs. The funky looking shop could have been located in Asheville or LA. WiFi was, of course, available. I purchased apple tea for Zeta and two Turkish coffees for Sanibel and me.

“This coffee is freakin’ amazing!” I exclaimed.

“I don’t like it,” replied Sanibel.

“How about the tea, baby?” I asked Zeta.

“I love it!”

“May I try it?”

“Don’t drink it all Daddy!”

“Ha. Ha. I can drink as much as I want, because I paid for it, but I won’t.”

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Sure enough, the tea was full of flavor and just sweet enough. The taste of apple was apparent. On the other hand, the coffee was rich and thick, but still smooth. After drinking it, the bottom of the cup was covered with a thick pasty layer of deep black coffee grounds.

I explained that the mosque we were looking at is called the Little Hagia Sofia and this shop was named after it. Zeta looked at the name written on the door, Küçük Ayasofya Art Café, and said, “I’m not calling it the Little Hagia Sofia. I’m saying *Kucuk Ayasofya*.” Zeta’s love of the Turkish language would last the whole trip. Also, from then on, I would say “Hagia Sofia” and she would respond, “Don’t you mean *Ayasofya*?”

Sanibel said to me, “I love traveling. I don’t want time to go by too quickly on this trip!”

“I don’t either. I feel like when I am with you two children, I am in heaven.”

The idea of how fast time travels as we age is an interesting topic. As people get older their “moments” get longer and time appears to move more quickly. Now that I am in my forty’s, I am truly a middle-aged man. For that reason, the idea of how we perceive time intrigues me. I responded to my daughter, “Let’s set the scene now by doing a reality check. Tell me what you see around us.”

“I don’t know.”

“Come on. Just tell me about where we are, what is here, the smells and colors and all that.”

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She looked around, “We are in Turkey. Are we in Europe or Asia?”

“Europe, for now.”

“OK. We are in a small coffee shop with ten pictures on the wall behind us. One is a very colorful face of a woman with crazy hair. We are sitting on a couch with red cushions. There are three pictures on the ceiling and a droopy ceiling fan. The guy that works here is cute.”

“Yeah!” responded Zeta.

The reality check in the café set the stage for this scene. Time slowed down as our moment decreased from the length of the entire trip to the period we sat observing our surroundings. I explained to my daughters that our perception of the speed of time is based on how long our moments take place. For an example, if we focused on “the trip” as a whole, time would feel to move more quickly than when we observed each moment with a reality check of our surroundings and happenings. I suppose this follows the cliché of “being in the moment”.

“My daughters, let’s seize each moment, and enjoy every bit of our little journey,” I said to them. They both just looked at me. Sanibel took a sip of her coffee, and Zeta took a sip of her apple tea, and asked if we could get it in South Carolina.

In the aforementioned *A Brief History of Time*, Hawking built on Einstein’s time concept of special relativity using quantum mechanics to come up with the model of

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imaginary time. The best way to understand the concept of imaginary time is to picture real time as a horizontal line moving from past to future with imaginary time perpendicularly bisecting real time vertically. In essence, time that is imagined does not need a past or future. For the instant that it is imagined, it is, in a weird way, eternal.

Should I, the author of this trivial little book, build on a concept that Stephon Hawking built on a concept of Albert Einstein? Why not? Isn't that the beauty of writing a book? The author has the power to write anything he or she wishes to write. Nonetheless, here we go with my theory of time travel.

The first question to answer is the following: *What happens to the past?* As time passes the past, do the happenings of the past just disappear into nothingness? Both Hawkings and Einstein seemed to believe that past events continued to tangibly exist in some dimension, because they both felt that theoretically it might be possible to travel back to events that happened in the bygone. In fact, Hawking stated in a lecture titled *The Beginning of Time* that he used to believe that when the universe starts to contract the time will move backwards.

Hence, what happens to the past as it is passed? I don't know if I agree with Hawking and Einstein. I feel that history, the past, becomes imaginary time as it is rolled up in the carpet of passing time. All the events of the past are stored in the collective imaginations of all living creatures with the ability to imagine and remember. Time, therefore, does not destroy the past. The past is

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moved from the present to our memories-- to our imagination.

Sometimes, these memories are recorded in words, pictures and videos. Sometimes, monuments are built like the Little Hagia Sofia that act as evidence of past happenings. However, without imaginary time, the past would not exist. No one would see *the tree fall in the woods* or understand why. It is all perception really. I choose to perceive time not as a fast moving steamroller flattening, and obliterating the past as it moves in one direction. Instead time is a creator of memories and more permanent imaginary time that never goes away.

Can we forward in time? Of course, we are doing that all the time as the second hand clicks around the clock. Can we travel back in time? Of course, in our imagination we remember the past. Our minds allow us to travel to the past whenever we feel like it. We can move sideways, also.

Hawking's concept of imaginary time was like a plus symbol with horizontal real time being bisected by vertical imaginary time. My concept of time would be real time being gobbled up by imaginary time that could go in any direction we want.

Filled with some caffeine, the three of us walked across the street to the mosque where an old man wearing a white Muslim prayer cap handed Sanibel and Zeta head

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scarves to wear in the mosque. This delighted the girls. They absolutely loved the idea of wearing a head scarf.

A blonde American woman walked in right behind us and was given not only the head scarf, but also a scarf to use as a wrap to cover her legs. The man with the prayer hat looked down at her bare legs, gestured disapprovingly and handed her a wrap to use to cover up her legs as well. As we walked into the Little Hagia Sofia, I noticed a small box that was obviously placed there for donations. I dropped a Turkish Lira into the box and the man with the white prayer cap nodded.

I marveled at the simple beauty of the building, and both girls became hushed. A few men prayed at the front, and a few women prayed on a balcony protruding from the back. Ropes marked off certain areas where we were not allowed to go, but we had access to walk all over the rest of the mosque.

Unlike Christian churches, no pictures hung on the walls, and no chairs or pews lined the floor. Instead the dome was filled with large intricate designs covered in Arabic calligraphy and interlocking curves on a blue and grey background that gave an overall appearance of a flower. A set of stairs appeared to go to nowhere. This is known as the *Minbar* where the speaker can climb to the top and deliver a speech. The floor was covered in carpet, but no place could a person find a place to sit. I assume the lack of chairs further promotes the mosque as a place of prayer.

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My daughters walked up the stairs to the next level and meandered around the balcony beneath the dome. I looked straight up in order to seize the moment with a reality check of the dome. The dome was divided into sixteen sections. Light beamed through eight arch shaped windows equally spaced at the lower end of the dome roof. At the center of this Byzantine vaulted ceiling was the flower structure with ornate calligraphy. Similar structures were placed in the alternative eight cells that did not contain a window.

More than 1500 years ago, a man named Justin ruled this area. He called himself the Caesar of the Roman Empire. The next in line to be the Caesar was his nephew Justinian. Rumors that Justinian would kill him to hasten his rule ran wild throughout the palace courts. Many expected Justin to have Justinian put to death to preserve his own life. However, Justin had a vision where two saints named Sargius and Bacchus told him that Justinian was innocent. One could imagine how happy Justinian was when he found out that his uncle would allow him to live and, not only live, but take over after he naturally died. That, of course, did eventually happen and Justinian became the new Caesar. Thus, in 527 he had a church built and dedicated it to the two saints. The church took nine years to build.

However, since this church looked a lot like a miniature version of his next massive project called The Hagia Sofia, it became known as the Little Hagia Sofia. Besides that, this area would eventually pass from Christians to Muslims who turned it from a church to a mosque. I wonder what they did with all the pews.

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I stayed downstairs taking photos of the dome, the *minbar* and the *mihrab*. Meanwhile, Zeta and Sanibel conversed with the blonde woman they met on the balcony. The woman turned out to be a 20-year-old American member of the US Army. She was stationed in Turkey, and was heading to Iceland later in the day. She and the girls became quick friends.

“I’m Jackie,” she said to me as she reached out her hand. She spoke a little too loud for the quiet mosque and her handshake was strong. Jackie told me that she was from Minnesota, and that she loved being in Turkey, but couldn’t wait to be deployed to Afghanistan.

“Really?” I asked her.

“Yeah, I didn’t join the army to bake cookies,” she said with a smile.

We all left the mosque together. So, the loud talking inappropriately dressed girl became one of us at this point. “So, Jackie, we’re going to do some random site seeing around Sultanahmet. Do you want to hang out with us?”

“Of course! Your girls are awesome. Where are we going?”

“I have a map, but no plan. I just thought we’d walk to the old section of Istanbul and see what happens.”

At this point, Zeta chimed in, “My daddy is a history teacher. He knows about all this stuff.”

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“You teach history?” Jackie asked.

“I used to, but now I just run a computer lab where bad kids take on-line courses. I teach at a special school called an alternative school where all the students have been expelled.”

“I know about those. Back in Minnesota, I went to an alternative school, but I wasn’t really bad.”

Outside the Little Hagia Sofia, everything was calm and nearly soundless. The streets were nearly empty. However, that all changed as we entered Sultanahmet.

We summated a hill and entered an area covered with a sundry mix of the world’s people walking around, taking photos and shopping at numerous kiosks selling carpets, scarves, post cards, roasted chestnuts, ice cream, and more. To our left two Egyptian obelisks and one column, wrapped by what was left of a large snake, rose from fence protected holes in the concrete. To our right and behind a wall, minarets reached dizzying heights. The area looked like a magic land with long fingers reaching to the sky. Nobody refers to this area by its official name, Sultan Ahmet Square, instead it is called The Hippodrome.

“Wow. Do ya’ll realize that we are walking on what used to be the Hippodrome? This is where they had chariot races, and the Neka revolt took place.”

Zeta looked at me and asked, “Is this where that lady was the queen and wore purple and all that?”

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“Yeah. Do you remember the story I told you about this place?”

Sanibel, Zeta and Jackie wanted me to tell them the story of the Neka Revolt. So, I did my best as we walked on the grounds of the old hippodrome.

“So, here is the shortest simplest version of the story. About 1500 years ago this city was the capital of what they believed was the Roman Empire, but, today, we call it the Byzantine Empire. The Emperor’s name was Justinian I. He was the guy that had the Hagia Sofia and the Little Hagia Sofia built. His wife, the empress was a former adult actress named Theodora.

“This city had a major gang problem back then. These gangs were associated with teams of chariot racers who raced right here where we are walking in the Hippodrome. These chariot races were really exciting, and the people of Constantinople lived to go to the races. These gangs prominently displayed their colors like gangs do today, but they were more involved in politics.

“The most powerful gangs were the Blues and the Greens. One of these chariot races turned into a riot. Basically, the fighting got way, way out of hand until it turned into a titanic uprising. Justinian, Theodora and his generals were hiding when the generals explained to Justinian that if he wanted to survive he better run away with his hot wife. He agreed, but Theodora said, “No way.” She took her royal purple scarf and exclaimed, “Purple is a good color to be buried in!” Justinian told his generals that they should be as brave as his wife.

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“In the end, Justinian stayed in power and 30,000 people were slaughtered right here in the Hippodrome.”

“Wow. Thanks Daddy. I remembered most of that story,” said fifteen year old Sanibel.

Zeta said to Jackie, “I think it is cool that my Daddy was a history teacher.”

From the Hippodrome we turned a corner to the spot that I now feel is the grand epicenter of Istanbul. We were flanked by the imposing Blue Mosque and the equally imposing Hagia Sofia. These two edifices are separated by about 1500 feet. Standing in the center of Sultan Ahmet Park we were equal distances from each. Monumental structures are best viewed from a certain distance, and, from Sultan Ahmet Park, the views were outstanding. To me it seems that immense ancient structures rise up out of the earth and reach to the sky in a way that is different from more utilitarian and pedestrian structures of 2013. Of course, the Hagia Sofia and the Blue Mosque are the main attractions of Istanbul. They are what the tourists come to see and the writers write. They are to Istanbul as the Taj Mahal is to India and the Pyramids to Egypt. They would appear on a list of *A Thousand Things to See Before You Die*.

On the other hand, I believe there are much more than just a thousand things to see before dying; however, *A Billion Things to See Before You Die* would not fit on the shelves at a local bookstore and would be too heavy for Amazon to ship. I have always been a fan of the overlooked parts of our planet. In my efforts to travel

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randomly, I took pride in missing the imposing monuments of the world. In his book, *Travels with Charley: In search of America*, John Steinbeck wrote, “For it is my opinion that we enclose and celebrate the freaks of our nation and our civilization.” It is my opinion that the world encloses and celebrates the most unusual grandest achievements of mankind and nature and ignores the small beauties as common place.

Nevertheless, here we were standing between two massive human achievements that represent a crossroad in culture, provide a central point to all the Earth, and represent a thousand stories. We were going to visit them, just not today. All of the sudden, a disembodied ethereal voice rang throughout the city...

Allah u Akbar

Allah u Akbar

Allah u Akbar

Allah u Akbar...

The *Ezan*, the call to prayer, meant that the Blue Mosque was closed to visitors. A long line emerged from the front gate of the Hagia Sofia and it was getting too late to spend the time needed in the grand museum. Thus, we decided to see what else we could see.

“Where shall we go then?” asked Jackie as she pointed to my map. The ethereal voice continued...

Ash-hadu alla ilaha illalla

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Ash-hadu alla ilaha illalla...

“Is there anywhere you want to see?”

“I heard there was this cool underground water thingy here that we could see.” The voice continued...

Ash-hadu anna Muhammadan rasulullah

Ash-hadu anna Muhammadan rasulullah...

I searched the map and found something that sounded like what Jackie was talking about called the Basilica Cistern. As it turned out, we were standing right in front of it. The Basilica Cistern came to be my favorite place I visited in Istanbul. However, there was nothing remarkable about it above ground. A man inside a brick building with a red tiled roof, that looked more like a ticket booth at a train station, gave us tickets to enter after I paid 20 Turkish Lira. Ten was for me, ten was for Sanibel, and Zeta was free. Two signs were affixed to the small building that read “Yerebatan Sarnici i.s. 532 Basilica Cistern 532 A.D.”.

We walked down concrete steps to an eerily surreal underworld. I counted fifty-two concrete stair steps from the door to the bottom of the cistern. Outside the sun was high and bright. Underground, my eyes took some time to adjust to the darkness. The spacious dimly lit underground chamber was covered in shallow water and held together with twelve rows of twenty-seven foot tall palatial Greco-Roman columns that reflected into the red shallow water. We walked along on wooden

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boardwalks with the other visitors. Everyone walked quietly.

This weakly illuminated subterranean chamber oozed mystery. For example, as we silently made our way to the other end we discovered a strange sight. Half submerged in the shallow water were two large severed heads made of stone. Upon closer inspection, I could see that they belonged to the mythical goddess Medusa complete with snake hair. One head was sideways and one was upside down. I would later discover that no one really knows why they are there. Fortunately, none of us turned to stone after viewing the severed heads. On the way back, we passed one column that was different from the other normal looking Greco-Roman columns. This one had unusual looking peacock feather patterns all over it.

The Basilica Cistern takes center stage in the culminating parts of Dan Brown's thriller *Inferno*. Even though Sanibel and I were both reading *Inferno*, we had not made it to the part of the book with the Basilica Cistern. Thus, I was picturing Sean Connery not Dan Brown or Tom Hanks, for that matter. In *From Russia with Love*, James Bond rowed a boat through the cistern (Cue the James Bond theme...) A few minutes passed before I remembered the James Bond scene, but I remembered the cistern being brighter and James Bond either trying to escape or capture some evil bad guy intent on destruction.

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Reality Check...

∴[Picture this]∴ In the middle of a bright sunny day in Istanbul, the author of this story and his daughters strolled silently on a raised wooden path underground in a mysterious dimly lit chamber bathed in red light and covered in shallow water. Even the loud blonde girl was silent.

I squinted my eyes to the bright sun as we went from underground to aboveground exiting the Basilica Cistern. We spent the rest of the day crisscrossing the old section of Istanbul looking at mosques, tombs, a Roman aqueduct, a spice market, and the Topkapi Palace. We ate roasted chestnuts, ice cream and whatever else we could purchase from vendors. We were stopped one hundred times and asked to purchase rugs; and we were stopped one hundred times and asked to eat at a restaurant. Jackie had a plane to catch to Iceland.

“It was nice meeting you. You’re girls are remarkable!”

“Thanks Jackie. Good luck in Iceland. You will love it there,” I told her. She hugged the girls and me and she was off. We did not exchange contact information.

“Let’s check out the Grand Bazaar!” I said to my daughters.

Sanibel responded, “But, Daddy, I’m hungry”

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“Me too! Will there be food at the Grand Bazaar?” said Zeta.

“What do think? I mean, it’s a *grand bazaar*. There will have to be food, right? You know what? I love the name Grand Bazaar. It has an exotic feel to it. Grand Bazaar!” For some reason, when I repeated Grand Bazaar, I used a fake Indian accent. For some reason, I felt like Indiana Jones or James Bond would probably fight bad guys in the Grand Bazaar as they knocked over a bunch of stuff.

The Grand Bazaar, *Büyük Çarşı* in Turkish, was easy to find. We just randomly walked in a direction and ran into it. No one visiting Sultanahmet would need to search for the Grand Bazaar. In fact, it would be impossible to miss due to its size and location in the center of Sultanahmet. The outside of the Grand Bazaar seemed to have no particular shape. In fact, I could not look at it and conceptualize it as a building. From the outside, this market looked like a never ending pile of stones and tiles made into a giant club house going off in random directions and covering Sultanahmet like roots emanating from the bottom of a tree. As soon as we crossed the threshold, we found ourselves swimming in a river of humanity that flowed into a maze of channels that flowed in endless directions with humans as the water.

The bazaar consisted of a number of shops repeated over-and-over. For example, we saw dozens of rug shops, dozens of shops selling colorful lanterns, countless shops selling a rainbow variety of Turkish

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Delights, dozens of shops selling a myriad of spices, and a number of stores selling Aladdin type shoes and hats. Besides that, many shops sold homemade soaps, Turkish style towels, scarfs, and so on. For this reason, it was impossible to gain ones bearings. Each absurdly colorful passageway repeated the same absurdly colorful little shops. Once we walked through the medieval entrance, we were hopelessly lost. The first thing Zeta noticed was the “Ray-Ban” sunglasses for ten Turkish Lira.

“Can I have those?” she asked.

“Sure, but I want you to think of others first. Why don’t you find a gift for your mommy, grandpa or grandma first?”

“After that, may I buy the sunglasses?”

“Sure.”

After randomly meandering, we purchased some gifts for about \$1.00 each, some soap, and some knockoff Ray-Bans for \$5.00. We exited on some random street, and purchased some tasty food at the first kebab stand we came across. One lesson I have learned from traveling for so many years is that food on the streets is the best food for price, taste and atmosphere. Zeta ate a *döner*, which is a small kebab made into a delicious sandwich. I had a more traditional kebab, and Sanibel ate a *misir*, which is corn on a stick.

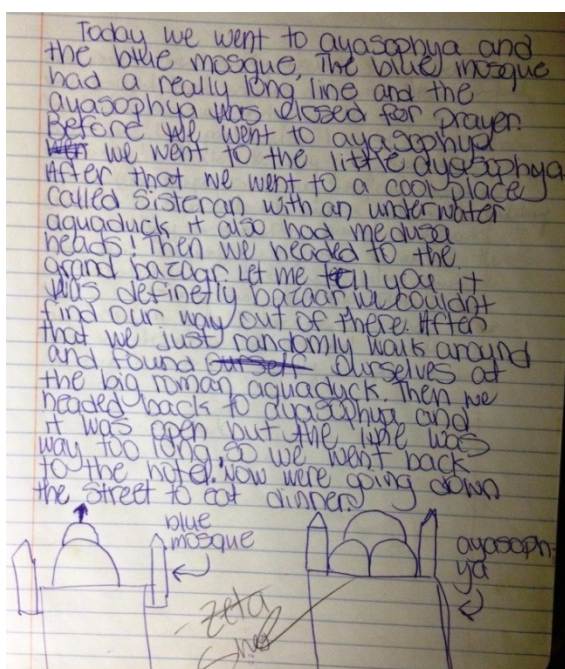
It took us three hours to walk home, because we stopped at many food vendors, and we headed in no particular

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direction after exiting the Grand Bazaar. We just followed food stands and ate our way to the seafront. I ate some grilled fish along the waterfront where the men swam in underwear just passed the balloon shooting BB gun shooters. We watched this for some time, because I thought that the swimmers would get hit with BBs, but it never happened.

:::[Read what Zeta had to say]:::



Once back at Kumkapi, I purchased some *midye dolma*, stuffed mussels. Sanibel said, "I think those are going to make you sick, Daddy."

"Nonsense. Have some."

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“OK. I’ll try one, but if I get sick, it is your fault.”

By the time we made it to our little café, the sun had set and the paper lights were lit. Yavuz, the café owner, did not bother to ask us what we wanted. He made us the traditional Turkish tea, and prepared a plate of pastries and Turkish delights. As we ate Turkish delight on a moonlit night, my brain took me back to that song, and my brain sang,

...Now it's Turkish delight on a moonlit night

Every gal in Constantinople

Lives in Istanbul, not Constantinople

So if you've a date in Constantinople

She'll be waiting in Istanbul...

Yavuz eventually joined us and opened his laptop on the table. Using Google Translate, he asked me where we were heading next. I told him that we were going to Kalkan to visit some friends. He was surprised that I had friends in Turkey. So, I explained to him how I had friends in Turkey. Then, he showed us photos of his visit to Kalkan. Again, most of the photos were of him alone standing in front of something, on the shore, or in the water. He, obviously, went alone and did not make a bunch of friends on the trip. He told me that he had neither a wife nor children. I told him that I had children and no wife. He thought this was crazy.

Reality Check...

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∴[Picture this]∴ Two men and two girls sitting outside a café eating sweets, and drinking tea while passing a laptop computer and a smartphone back and forth while gesturing, and drawing pictures. This is what modern conversation looks like between people who do not speak each other's languages.

This image reminded me of Douglas Adams' Babel Fish in the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* books. Adams envisioned a tiny leechlike fish that feeds on and excretes brainwaves. If a person puts this fish into his or her ear, he or she can understand all languages. The Babel Fish of 2013 was the smart phone.

Eventually, we found ourselves back in our apartment with caffeine buzzes. For this reason, we stayed up late talking. Staying up late, and talking to one's children is heaven. Zeta asked me, "Tell me how you met Ahmet?"

I told her the whole story with many details. The upshot to all of this was that my artist friend, Howard, has a sister who is a scuba diving instructor in Kalkan, Turkey. She is friends with a guy named Ahmet. Ahmet visited Howard in South Carolina nearly a decade before I visited Turkey. When I met Ahmet, I told him, "Welcome to South Carolina. This place is really special. I want to show you around..." At any rate, I took him and Howard on a ten mile canoe trip in the Cape Romaine Wild Life Refuge north of Charleston. We canoed to an island called Bull Island. There we

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saw dozens of alligators, snakes, birds, and an assortment of beautiful fauna and flora.

Ahmet's visit to South Carolina came during the Bush era aftermath of 9/11. We spent hours talking in the car and on the canoe. I found him to be a kind and gentle person who was as addicted to travel as much as me. Before he went back to Turkey, he told me to visit him and his family. I said that someday I would come to Turkey. Prior to this journey, I made contact with Howard's sister, Krista, and said that we would like to see her and Ahmet and do some scuba diving. I had her Turkish cell phone number.

I explained all this to Zeta and she asked me what he looks like.

"When I saw him in South Carolina, he had long black hair and a beard," I told her.

"How are we getting to Kalkan?" Sanibel asked me.

"I don't know yet. Train or bus, I guess."

"Can we rent a car? She asked.

The idea intrigued me. My girlfriend was in Turkey last year and told me that the busses were cheap and luxurious. She actually used the word *luxurious*. However, the idea of a road trip through Turkey with my two daughters sounded so appealing. I had a Nook e-reader, and the apartment had Wi-Fi. So, I logged on and searched kayak.com for rental cars and found a very

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cheap one at a German rental car company at the airport called Sixt.

Earlier, I had made the mistake of stirring my Turkish coffee. All those coffee grounds that normally end up resting on the bottom of the cup where swirled into the liquid and I drank it all. Within 30 minutes, I felt like I was going to crawl out of my skin. By the time I booked the rental car online using my e-reader, the kids were sleeping and I was buzzing and unable to even think about sleeping.

I grabbed our notebook and wrote down all the things we had done in Istanbul and my impressions. A few years had passed since I last wrote a book, and I had decided prior to this trip, that I must write a book about this journey. I started writing this book. Originally, I titled this book *Turkish Delight on a Moonlit Night*. I was amazed by Istanbul, but I didn't want to write a boring description of this marvelous place. Also, nearly half a decade had passed since my last book, and I have become more mature and less likely to do something stupid. The good thing about doing stupid things is that it made a funny story. In my previous stories, I was the inspiration for the fool in the books. However, I have learned from each mistake and I will not repeat them. So, I quit writing in the notebook, because I couldn't come up with a good story, and I grabbed my book.

Magic Bus: On the Hippie Trail From Istanbul to India retraced the Hippie Trail from Istanbul to India. Rory MacLean wrote an account of his journey to retrace the old hippie trail. The book is supposed to be a

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nonfictional travelogue about this journey. I found it interesting reading *The Great Railway Bazaar* by Paul Theroux and *Magic Bus: On the Hippie Trail From Istanbul to India* by Rory MacLean back-to-back. Theroux's book was written in the early 70's during the era of the actual "Hippie Trail". Meanwhile, MacLean looked back from present day. One stark difference was their opinion of hippies: MacLean romanticized about them as noble and free while Theroux seemed annoyed by these dirty out of touch young people. Of course, this is ironic, because Theroux's book is a favorite amongst the nuevo-hippies of 2013.

I had already finished both books, but I had them with me for references. So, I found the section of *Magic Bus* where the author describes sitting in Topkapi Palace "scribbling descriptions of the rushing faces of the city" when this beautiful seventy-year-old hippie woman wearing a purple tie-dyed shirt refused to leave him alone speaking in a strange hippy-dippy tone. Rory stated that he was writing and tried to ignore her, but she kept telling him personal stories from the heyday of the Hippie Trail. She joins him on his journey and acts as his connection to the past. Although the author never admits to it, this character was obviously made up to help him tell his story. Rory needed the old hippy chick to connect him with the past, and tell him her account of what it was really like back then. While some writers and readers might feel that he is being dishonest, I felt it was brilliant.

This reminded me of Kurt Vonnegut's reoccurring character, Kilgore Trout. Vonnegut kept bringing back

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Trout for several books and changed his story to fit into whatever he was telling. Kilgore Trout was described as an elderly science fiction writer. His science fiction stories were summarized to create a parable. In his masterpiece, *Breakfast of Champions*, Kurt Vonnegut placed himself in the narrative so that he could explain to Kilgore Trout that he is, in fact, his creation. “I created you,” he said to Trout. When Trout does not believe this, he takes him on a mind-blowing, head-spinning world tour and then back to his old car in just a few seconds. This prompts the character to believe that he is a creation of the author. The book ends with Kilgore Trout asking Kurt Vonnegut if he can make him young.

I love the fact that writing has no rules. Vonnegut understood this, and described it like a superpower in *Breakfast of Champions*. I agree. I can use these 40,000 words to tell whatever story I want to tell in any way I wish to tell it. Furthermore, I give all of my books away for free, anyway.

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“Can you see anything in the dark, with your sunglasses on?” she asked me.

“The big show is inside my head,” I said.

—Kurt Vonnegut (*Breakfast of Champions*)

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Chapter 4

So, late at night in Istanbul, jacked up on Turkish coffee, after re-reading a chapter of *Magic Bus* with an apparently made up character and thinking about Kurt Vonnegut, I had an epiphany: I will write a book about Istanbul that explores my version of the theory of *Imaginary Time*. Thus, I started imagining a visit from Kilgore Trout, the science fiction writer from *Breakfast of Champions*, and time stood still as I allowed my brain to bring him back.

Reality Check...

:::[Picture this]:: Late at night in a tiny apartment in Istanbul, our author is awake and making up stories about an imaginary character visiting him.

Hence, the following is what I wrote down that night using imaginary time....

I heard a knock at the door just as the girls finally went to sleep. It was Mr. Trout wearing a shabby tuxedo with the elbows worn through.

“Welcome to Istanbul, Mr. Trout,” I said to him.

“Ting-a-ling, Mr. Sharp!” Kilgore Trout was a very quirky individual. He smelled a little homeless, and he was holding a satchel under one arm and a bottle of Italian grappa in the other hand. As a writer, I had the

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power to have him bring it with him. I should have made him smell cleaner, but I did not. “I was just in Italy completing my new book,” he continued. Kilgore Trout is a famous science fiction writer.

“Let’s sit out on the veranda so that we do not disturb the children,” I said to him. I opened the sliding glass doors, and we walked outside to the veranda that overlooked the empty alleyway below. Beyond all the rooftops, I could see the faint glow emanating from Kumkapi. Off in the distance, I saw a Christian Church. A lone cat strolled through the middle of the street. In the darkness, I could not tell what color was the cat.

Mr. Trout sat the bottle of Grappa on the table, and pulled two small dusty glasses from his jacket pocket. “Thank you for bringing the Grappa,” I said as he poured two glasses. He, then, told me a story from his trip where he was touring vineyards in northern Italy with his friends, Doug and Tonya. He told me that they sampled wine all day long, and felt fine when they returned to their house. Then, Tonya opened a bottle of Grappa and everyone got drunk and threw up.

“May I read the book you wrote on your trip?” I asked him.

“Of course,” he said and pulled out a thick paper manuscript from his satchel. I’m glad he didn’t hand me a flash-drive, because I did not bring a computer. I opened the satchel, and pulled out the manuscript. I could tell that it was typed on an old typewriter. The

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manuscript was 1,749 pages. Kilgore does not like computers, and he does not own an iPhone.

“What are you working on?” he asked me.

I explained to him that I wanted to write a story about Istanbul, but I didn’t know where to start. I told him that I wanted the story to be different from my other ones, but still tell the story of my daughters and me traveling, but with some philosophy about life. I told him that sometimes I used to chase women or make stupid mistakes, and that made my other stories funny. I told him that I was worried since now I make less mistakes and don’t chase women that my story would be boring.

He gave me the following advice: “Just be honest and lie.”

I listened to all his crazy stories until the bottle of grappa was gone. I thanked him for his visit and he left in the middle of the night. For some reason, I still was not sleepy. So, I started reading his book. I read the entire night. I did not finish the book until the sun came up. Of course, this is Imaginary Time, and I could read the entire book in one night.

The book was called *Sacred Text*, and was set in a post-post-apocalyptical Earth, which is the type of Earth that had two apocalypses. The following is a synopsis of *Sacred Text*:

The first apocalypse took place when fundamental religious zealots took over both Christianity and Islam until only two religions existed in the world: Radical

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Christianity and Radical Islam. Everything to the east of Istanbul was 100% Radical Islam, and everything to the west of Istanbul was 100% Radical Christianity. Anyone who dared challenge this was publically executed by lethal injection in the West and beheading in the East. Eventually, these two sides of the Earth went to war. This was the first apocalypse where nearly everything was destroyed and nearly everyone was killed.

Following this great upheaval, the world was without major religions, and everyone lived in peace and harmony. Love was the world's religion. No one owned computers or iPhones.

The second apocalypse happened on one sunny day when an old computer was discovered by some children playing around an old silo in what once was North Dakota. Nearly everything was destroyed and nearly everyone was killed two hours after one child said, "What's this red bottom for?" This second apocalypse was so terrible that all the Earth's literature was destroyed. Even eBooks saved on hard drives were melted. Most importantly, however, all the sacred and holy religious texts of the world were lost.

Generations of the survivors of this second apocalypse remembered bits and pieces of religious texts passed down through oral traditions of the previous generations. The world was a confusing place during this time, because everyone just made these oral traditions into what they wanted to believe. New so-called sacred texts were written by every living person.

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Each individual refused to read any other sacred texts, but his or her own. Only ten million people lived on the Earth at this time. For this reason, there were ten million religions in the world. Each person thought that they were the only person in the world going to heaven and the other 9,999,999 people were all going to burn in hell. Needless to say, this did not lead to peace and harmony amongst individuals. On the other hand, the confusion made it impossible to raise large armies to fight giant destructive wars.

During this time, tens of thousands of archeologists searched the planet to find any written words prior to the great apocalypses. The reason for this search was to find a Bible that would bring the world together under one true doctrine, and bring harmony to all people. Finally, in the year 2525, buried hundreds of feet under the Earth, the ruins of an ancient building was discovered with the partial remains of a middle school student's notebook cover. The fragment of this middle schooler's notebook was dated to be from 1500 BC. Despite the fact that the fragment was discovered in West Virginia, the scientists believed it was from Mesopotamia.

The middle school student had scribbled the lyrics from the Taylor Swift song "Shake it Off" all over the cover with hearts and smiley faces. No rational explanation could explain why this scrap of a notebook cover lasted for all these years, but the following lyrics were legible:

...saying it's gonna be alright

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Cause the players gonna play, play, play

And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate

Baby I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake

Shake it off

Heartbreakers gonna break, break, break

And the fakers gonna fake, fake, fake

Baby I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake

Shake it off, Shake it off...

This discovery set off a media frenzy that spread all over the world. Eventually, everyone gave up his or her personal religions and converted to the new world religion called Shake It Off. No one wanted to be called “players”, “haters”, “Heartbreakers”, or “Fakers”. Everyone just wanted to “shake it off”. A typical church service with call and response teaching went like this:

Pastor: “Are you a player?”

Congregation: “No!”

Pastor: “What are you going to do when players play?”

Congregation: “Shake it off!”

Pastor: “Are you a hater?”

Congregation: “No!”

Pastor: “What are you going to do when haters hate?”

[Type text]

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Congregation: "Shake it off!"

Peace and harmony lasted for generations until the lyrics to Snoop's Drop it Like its Hot was discovered.

The following morning, the warmth from the rising sun seeped into our apartment through the door I left open all night that lead to our little balcony overlooking the alleyway. It was the same open door that allowed the cool breeze into our room that helped us sleep also permitted the hot rays of the sun to wake me up far too early. Since I had stayed up too late talking to an imaginary book character and reading his imaginary book, I was too groggy to do anything important, but listen to music. Besides, I had a hangover from the imaginary grappa. For some reason I was thinking about Adlai Stevenson and Robert Hunter.

In 1962, Adlai Stevenson described Eleanor Roosevelt as someone who would rather "light a candle than curse the darkness". A few decades later Robert Hunter and Jerry Garcia wrote, "Light a candle. Curse the glare." I was feeling more Grateful Dead than Adlai Stevenson. So, I grabbed my eReader, and played a bluegrass cover of *Touch of Grey*.

I stepped out on the balcony and watched the empty alley gradually become brighter. Eventually, a little boy pushed an empty cart toward the restaurant area. Next, I walked back inside and looked at my sleeping children. I wondered when they were going to wake up. Then, I

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wondered what I was going to do with my life once they grew up and moved out of the house one day. I recalled how the night before we had a long conversation until they became sleepy and went to sleep.

Being a father is the greatest honor in the world. Without them, I feel like nothing. The thought of them growing up brought tears to my eyes.

Reality Check...

∴[Picture this]∴ A middle-aged man standing on a little balcony in Istanbul crying because he is thinking about how much he would miss his children when they grew up and moved out.

Finally, they woke up at 11:00 am. We ate breakfast at Ulusoy and took the metro to the airport to rent a car. Meanwhile, renting a car did not turn out to be an easy task. My debit card would not work. The kind man behind the desk told me to call my bank. I called, and was asked by a recording to call during normal business hours. We stayed at the airport until 2:00 pm, which is 8:00 am at home. Then, I realized that it was Sunday at home.

“I have no way of getting this card to work. How can we rent a car without a card?” I asked the man behind the counter.

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He responded, “Normally, we need a card, but I can see how badly your daughters want to have a car. I will see what I can do. Come back in 30 minutes.”

We went and ate a snack and returned. He told me to just pay cash and be careful not to wreck the car. He wanted me to pay in USD. The ATM actually gave me that option. I handed him the cash. He gave me a map, and we drove out of the parking garage and onto the busy streets of Istanbul.

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“There was nowhere to go but everywhere...” – Jack Kerouac

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Chapter 5

Middle East Road Trip

My daughters' mother is from Southeast Asia. I suppose that this makes them half Asian. Neither of them had been to this part of the world that people call Asia. The Bosphorus Bridge was completed in 1973, and connected Europe with Asia. The bridge is sometimes called *The First Bridge*, but it was not the first bridge across the Bosphorus Straits. King Darius built a floating bridge across these straits about 2500 years ago. Then, in 480 BC, King Xerxes built another bridge connecting Europe and Asia. So, the bridge we drove over is, probably, *The Third Bridge*.

As I drove our basic looking white sedan from Europe to Asia, I said to my daughters, "We're driving to Asia!"

"Yay!"

When one looks at a world map, it is difficult to see how Europe and Asia are different continents. They are really just part of the same big land mass. I think if we call Europe a continent, we should also call India one too. On the other hand, since we call Europe a continent, we can also say that Istanbul is the world's only city on two continents.

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The Greeks were the ones who called the lands to their east “Asia”. The copycat Romans did the same thing. Let’s face it; the Romans were just Greek wannabes who, despite falling, still dominate Western Civilization and the rest of the World to this day. Thus, according to those Romans, once we cross this bridge, we have crossed into Asia.

All this was beside the point as we drove to the East. I realized that, if I wanted to, I could drive all the way to Hong Kong. In *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Paul Theroux wrote, “The journey is the goal.” I believe this to be true on so many levels. As we drove down the road, I knew we had endless possibilities. At that moment, I felt that “traveler’s high” I seem to always feel at some point in my trips. My oldest daughter had a far-away look in her eyes and a big smile on her face. I could see that she felt it too. I thought of something Kurt Vonnegut once wrote, “And I urge you to please notice when you are happy, and exclaim or murmur or think at some point, 'If this isn't nice, I don't know what is.'”

“Where are we going after visiting Ahmet and Krista?” asked my oldest daughter, Sanibel.

“I don’t know. Where do you want to go?” I had no agenda.

She studied the map that we received from the car rental guy. “Iraq. Let’s drive to Iraq!”

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Of course, this was 2013 and Iraq was a war zone. “I don’t know. I guess it’s possible.”

Zeta chimed in, “No! Let’s not go to Iraq!”

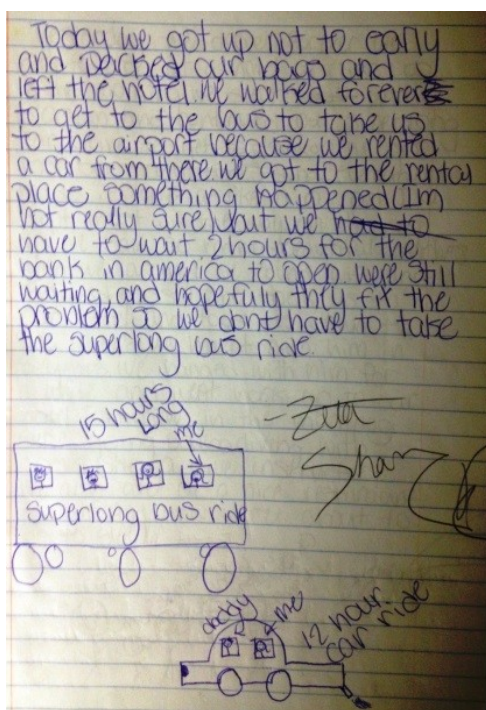
The road map made the network of Turkish roads look more like a spider web than a grid. The road design looked as if there was no easy way to get anywhere, but getting everywhere was possible. The Iraqi border seemed like a long way from where we were in the western part of Turkey. Once out of Istanbul, travel became slow due to the roads not going straight and the amount of small towns. Crossing the border of Iraq and visiting Kurdistan did not seem like a fun option to me, and, besides, Zeta did not want to go there.

“Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night.”

:::[Read what Zeta had to say]:::

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Nevertheless, our goal was to make it to Kalkan and visit Ahmet and Krista. Literally nobody I spoke with in Turkey seemed to know where Kalkan was located. The largest city near Kalkan is Antalya. Most folks knew where Antalya was located. So, I used that place to ask directions instead of asking where is Kalkan. By 1:00 am, I had decided not to drive all night. Both girls were sleeping, and I was lost on the maze of Turkish roads. We entered a town called Domaniç. The town was deserted at 1:00 am except for two men talking to a young policeman standing in front of an outdoor vegetable stand that was locked up. I asked them in Turkish if there was a hotel near. One of the men spoke

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English, and I told him that I was looking for a place that was not too expensive, because in the morning my daughters and I were going to drive to Antalya. The three had a discussion in Turkish, and the man pointed to the policeman and said, "Follow him." The young policeman took off like a bat out of hell, and I, nervously, followed him.

Sanibel and Zeta woke up as we sped through the small city streets following the fast driving policeman. At one point we left the road and zipped through a pedestrian only shopping area. I did my best to keep up, but he was traveling fast ignoring traffic signals. At one point, we ran a red light and made a left turn on a one-way street. I was happy that no one was on that road as we drove the wrong way.

The hotel he took us to cost the equivalent of around \$20, and fit the description of a rough looking cheap downtown hotel. The large room had three twin beds covered with thread bare comforters and one tiny deflated pillow that had a musty smell. Zeta wanted to sleep in the same bed with Sanibel, but Sanibel wanted to sleep alone. This caused them to argue. Eventually, Sanibel relented and allowed her sister to share her tiny bed. I did not intervene in their little argument knowing they should have the ability to work it out.

The floor was grey linoleum with random brown stains that looked like burn marks. We were given three keys: One for the hallway bathroom that did not lock anyway, one for a storage closet in the room, and the third one for the room door. The keys were huge. For some reason,

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both girls loved the hotel. In fact, before the “sleeping in the same bed” argument started, Zeta walked around the room highlighting its many amenities. “Look how much room we have in this closet!” “Wow! We have three beds!” Also, for some reason, both girls unpacked, and carefully placed all their stuff in the storage closet.

We enjoyed the freedom of having our own vehicle, but there was a cost. For example, like most places in this world, Turkey sells gasoline by the liter instead of a US gallon. There are 1.2 liters per gallon. After doing the math, I figured that we were paying \$9.00 for a gallon of gasoline. Besides this, I was told over-and-over that the Turkish bus system’s buses are *luxurious* and cheap. The nice thing about traveling by bus or train is meeting locals. In addition, I could have been reading or writing during the bus rides instead of driving.

The next morning we searched for breakfast. Most buildings were white with red tiled roofs. In the center of town was a strange looking monument with people carved into a rock. Of course, the town had its share of Mustafa Atatürk statues, paintings and pictures. Mustafa was everywhere in Turkey. His face was on pictures, paintings, and sculptures. His statutes stood in every park. If a person was anywhere in turkey, all he had to do was open his eyes and he’d see Mustafa Atatürk. In fact, we drank our tea and coffee under a framed painting of a well-dressed mustached Mustafa Atatürk in a tiny café with thinly paneled walls and wooden tables.

Everyone in the café, besides my two daughters, was a man. The young man serving the pastries and drinks

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took out his iPhone and phonetically asked us questions. When I did not understand him, he showed me his phone and I read the questions. I typed our responses into his Google-Translate App on his phone. This prompted a few men in neighboring tables to ask questions. The phone took his Turkish statements and responded in a female voice speaking English. He handed me his phone and I did the same. *Babel fish*. I responded and asked questions about each of them and their families. His iPhone acted as the translator for the whole place. My girls and I became the center of attention in this small café. The conversation was small talk. The “Where are you from?” or “How many kids do you have?” kind of stuff. Nonetheless, the atmosphere was light and friendly, and I didn’t wish to leave. I asked all the same questions back to everyone. On the other hand, I wished I could speak Turkish in order to have a deeper more meaningful conversation. One man asked me if I was Christian. I have been asked about my religion many times on this trip. Another man asked me, “Where is your wife?”

As we exited the tiny café, I savored the switch from cosmopolitan Istanbul to provincial Domanıç. Instead of being anonymous Americans in a sea of anonymous humans roaming from monument to monument, we were now foreigners in a foreign land. I felt like the Kinks song that screams, “Here I am, here I am, here I am in a foreign land...”

Besides the abstract people carved out of a rock thingy that sat in the middle of a park, there was nothing touristic or out of the ordinary to see about Domanıç.

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The old men drank their ubiquitous Turkish teas while talking, smoking or reading while families walked by on the sidewalks participating in the pedestrian tasks of life in a medium sized town in the middle of Turkey. The shops did not sell postcards or souvenir key chains.

I found a gas station and filled up with gasoline that cost almost \$9.00 per gallon. As I pumped the gas, I showed the gas station guy my map and asked him how to get out of town so that I can find Antalya in the south of Turkey. He did not speak English, and I was not able to understand his multifarious instructions. He wasn't ready to give up; so, he took me inside and drew me a very complicated map that sent me driving in all four cardinal directions and part of the way around two roundabouts. Needless to say, I became hopelessly lost for some time. Nevertheless, the town was small enough that we eventually made our way out of town, and we were on our way. I could tell by the location of the sun that we were driving south.

Eventually, we found ourselves driving through some scenic mountains with gravel pull-offs to stop and take pictures of the lakes below. Each of these stops had double-decker tea posts heating over a wood fire. I never passed one of these scenic overlooks without stopping. The girls and I stepped out of our car and I rested the camera on the roof and used the timer to take a photo of us standing at the edge of the mountain for the typical scenic overlook photo.

A family of four sat on plastic chairs outside a mid-1970's red and white rusted old Peugeot van. A child

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put a small piece of wood on the fire that heated the tea pots. I wasn't sure if they were selling the tea or just making it for themselves. The man appeared to be asking me if I wanted some tea. I, mean, he pointed to the tea pots and said something in a language that I did not know. He could have asked, "Do you want some tea?" On the other hand, he could have said, "This is my tea; you can't have any." Anyway, I nodded, and he poured tea for the girls and me. No conversation started, but we all just stood around not talking and that made me feel a little awkward. I felt more awkward when it was time to leave, because I still had no idea whether or not he was selling the tea or just giving us the tea. I decided on the later, and we drove off. He waved, and, again, said something to me that I did not understand. He could have said, "Bye! Have a good trip." On the other hand, he could have said, "Come back! You forgot to pay for the tea."

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**“Freedom is something that dies unless it is used.” –
Hunter S Thompson**

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Chapter 6

Turquoise Coast

We drove to the top of a hill that overlooked the city of Antalya with a giant head of Mustafa Atatürk carved in the side of a cliff looking out to the city. Zeta said to me, “Can we go to the beach?”

“You bet!” was my response.

We arrived to a Mediterranean coast that was brilliantly lit up by a bright sun hanging from an incandescently painted blue sky that dove into a turquoise sea that reached out its frothy waves to a white sandy beach. The world seemed brighter than it ever was as we parked our car and stared at a shoreline known internationally as the “Turquoise Coast” and the “Turkish Riviera”. All three of us put our sunglasses on at the same time as we walked toward the coast. Instead of men in saggy white underwear playing in the water, women, who actually wore bikinis, read books and smoked cigarettes while reclining on the beach.

Zeta smiled and asked, “How long are we going to stay here?”

“Not too long, baby. Krista and Ahmet are both waiting to see us in Kalkan, and I don’t know how far away Kalkan is from here.”

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She looked really sad. “Zeta, just enjoy our time here, and don’t ruin it by being sad about how long we are going to stay,” I said to her. She was cranky, but, as soon as we left the beach, she fell asleep in the back of our boring white car. I have discovered that each time Zeta got cranky, she was sleepy.

The four hour drive from Antalya was anything, but boring. We followed the rocky coast on a narrow road with stunning views. This part of Turkey was dry and hot with mountains covered with cedar trees, fig trees, date palms, and black pines. Many times along this path, we rounded a curve and saw a picturesque little cove with a nice little beach. The water was bright blue and the ocean froth was as white as I have ever seen in my life. The contrast looked like a condo painting hanging behind a wicker couch. My fifteen-year-old daughter drove the whole way. Back in South Carolina, she had her driving permit. So, I thought, *Why not?*

We met Krista at a little restaurant at the bus station in Kalkan. My daughters and I were seated at a little table drinking Turkish Tea when she showed up wearing a loose fitting cotton dress.

“Wow. Your girls have grown so much!” She explained when she saw my daughters.

“I know. It is difficult to believe.”

“Where are you staying?”

“I e-mailed Ahmet and told him we were coming. He told me that I could stay with him.”

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Krista responded, "You'll have to pay something for the room. He's probably giving you a big discount though." I knew that Ahmet either owned or ran some type of guest house, but, beyond that, I had no idea. All those years ago, when he told me to visit him, I had pictured us staying in a home with his family or some funky little backpacker hostel. Krista phoned Ahmet using her cell phone and spoke fluently in Turkish. When she hung up she said, "He said that you and your children are his guests and there will be no charge."

"Wow. That sounds great!" Little did I know how amazing and auspicious this kind invitation would turn out to be.

Kalkan is a very steep town that rested on the side of a mountain and wrapped around a picturesque bay with a tiny harbor. The white washed houses with tiled roofs climbed up the hill along the narrow winding roads. Kalkan seemed so dissimilar to Istanbul and all the places between Istanbul and the coast. This coastal town felt relaxed. To me Kalkan felt like Turkey and Greece were overlapping a bit. This observation was not without merit, because prior to Turkey and Greece fighting one of their stupid Greco-Turkish wars about 100 years ago the town was mostly inhabited by Greeks. They all left in 1923.

Krista asked us if we wanted to go scuba diving in the morning. Zeta's face lit up and she yelled, "Yes! Yes! We can go, right Daddy?"

"Of course we can," I responded.

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We all climbed into the car and drove further up a steep hill with narrow roads, and made sharp turns until we came up upon a beautiful small hotel that looked straight out of a Frances Mayes' novel. The Mediteran Hotel sat along the edge of a steep hill overlooking the large bay and the harbor. Brightly colored bougainvillea climbed up the sides of the white washed buildings surrounded with subtropical plants such as date palms. Mediterranean style verandas covered with tiled roofs and enclosed by wrought iron lined the second floors.

Our room was on the first floor. A man in his twenties named Mamet with long straight brown hair showed us our room. The room had thick white down duvets, and ceramic tiled floors with a spacious bathroom. Our collective jaws dropped as we looked out the sliding glass doors to the infinity pool that seemed to end hundreds of feet above a picturesque bay with a tiny harbor on one side and small mountains coming out of the sea.

Due to shock, none of us spoke very much at first. We are budget travelers and normally could not afford a place this nice. Mamet said, "Ahmet is at the beach club. He wants you to have some food at our restaurant. We didn't know what time you were coming. So, we didn't have time to prepare, but in 30 minutes we will be ready."

"Wow. Thanks. That sounds great. This place is amazing."

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Mamet asked me if we needed anything, and said, “Ahmet told us to take care of you.”

“No thanks. We’re good.”

As soon as he left, the girls fell flat on the bed. Zeta, looking up to the ceiling, exhaled loudly, and exclaimed, “I’m never leaving this place!”

Sanibel smiled from ear to ear and howled, “This is the best place we have ever stayed in!” I couldn’t argue at that point.

“OK. After we get cleaned up, let’s go down to eat. Don’t order anything expensive. We can’t afford too much, ok?”

The café was on a level just below the infinity pool that wasn’t visible from above. We walked down stone steps and there at the edge of the cliff behind a wrought iron wall was a tortoise. The large brown turtle seemed to be just taking in the view. He almost looked plastic until Zeta leaned over and pet it. Then, he slowly crawled away, as tortoises do.

We sat down and another man in his twenties brought us water. He asked us if we were Ahmet’s friends. I told him we were and we chatted for a bit. Then, he brought us delicious food. The meal ended with Turkish Tea. Following all of this, I asked for a bill, and he responded, “Ahmet told us to take care of you. The food is free.”

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The Mediteran Hotel pulled off something very unique: Luxury without pretentiousness. The place was staffed by multi-lingual hippies who acted genuine and relaxed, but not lazy. They took care of everyone's needs without looking like servants. Normally, I'm not that comfortable in really nice resorts. The air of pretentiousness normally suffocates me. However, this small beautiful hotel staffed with Turkish hippies became the best hotel I have ever stayed at.

From the hotel we walked down a series of steep hills until we reached the Indigo Beach Club, which was actually a bar with multi-terraced wooden decks above a rocky coastline. Ladders connected swimmers to the sea from the deck. The decks were full of comfortable lounge chairs, tables, and parasols. A large raised shelter was in the middle overlooking the sea with a floor covered in large pillows and Turkish rugs. Here at the Indigo Beach Club, women sunbathed and swam in bikinis, and men wore board shorts and those European speedo things that only European men wear. Nearly everyone lounging, drinking, smoking cigarettes, or swimming spoke in a British accent.

Ahmet came out from behind the bar with a big smile and we hugged. He had the same long hair and long beard that he had when I first met him in South Carolina. He wore a tank top, shorts, and a hipster looking fedora.

"Would you like a beer?" he asked me.

"Of course," I answered.

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“Your girls are so big now.”

“I know they are growing up too fast.”

He looked at the girls. “Do you remember me?” Sanibel answered that she did, and Zeta said that she did not. “You were very young then,” he said to Zeta.

We walked over to a large breezy gazebo that overlooked the sea. We sat amongst the rugs and giant pillows and drank our beers and talked about traveling. Ahmet explained to me that he has remained single and without children so that he can work hard all summer and travel hard all winter.

“What does your mother think about you still being unmarried?” I asked him.

“Well, she doesn’t like it too much.”

I asked him about his latest journey.

“I took the Trans-Siberian Railroad from Europe through Asia,” he told me.

“Are you kidding me? That has been a dream of mine for years. I just read a book about it. Please tell me about your trip.”

“The trip takes more than a week. I had plenty of time on the train to look out the windows and look at the changing topography.”

“Did you get to get out at various stops and stay for a while?”

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“No. That’s the problem with the trip. There are some stops that take hours, but, for the most part, you just spend all your time on the train. The trip would be very expensive to buy tickets for each leg of the journey. I did stop in Mongolia and Beijing.”

“Did you go to Vladivostok?”

“No. I took the train from Moscow to Beijing. You have a choice either to go to Vladivostok or China. I chose to go to China, because it seemed more interesting.” Ahmet told me how it was on the train, and the people he met along the way, the images he saw and the food he ate. Paul Theroux’s *The Great Railway Bazaar* tells the story of transcontinental train travel in the early 70’s. A major part of his journey is on the Trans-Siberian. Ahmet’s story is a modern day version of *The Great Railway Bazaar*. Someday, I plan to make this journey. I wish I could make this journey with my children. It would be paradise to spend that much time with them. We would read book after book, play games, talk, and just be together as Asia floats by outside our window. We would make friends with fellow travelers and hear and tell stories. As I type these words in 2015, I dream that I can one day make this happen.

“Ahmet, the Mediteran is amazing. You were able to pull off something so unique: The place feels both luxurious and laidback at the same time. I’ve never seen a place that was that nice and funky at the same time.”

“Thank you.”

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“I cannot begin to tell you how much we appreciate you allowing us to stay there. When we met years ago and you invited me to come visit you in Turkey, I was not expecting this.”

“It’s my pleasure.”

“Your staff is amazing. They treat us like royalty.”

His response surprised me: “They better.” Then, he smiled.

He told me that nearly all the visitors to Kalkan are British. He said there are certain travel agencies and websites that send British people to him. He said that some families come to Kalkan every year.

Krista, then, walked under the roof of the gazebo, took off her shoes and greeted all of us. Krista and Ahmet spoke to the girls for a while asking them about school and their surfing. At the time, both girls were addicted to surfing. Both of my daughters, at the time, were more comfortable in water than on land.

Zeta said to Krista, “I cannot wait until I can go scuba diving! Are we really going tomorrow?”

“Of course!” Krista responded. She went on to explain to the kids that she can take them diving less than thirty feet without certification. I told her that I was certified, and both girls have been diving.

This guy from the bar showed up carrying three beers that he gave Ahmet, Krista and me.

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Reality Check...

...[Picture this]... Three adults and two children sat upon oriental rugs and colorful pillows having drinks and talking under a wooden canopy about twenty feet by thirty feet. A small breeze blew across the sea and cooled their skins. The three adults sat on the floor, talking, and drinking beers. The two children drank fresh squeezed orange juice. The shoes lay on the ground outside in a little line. Outside this shelter, a woman in a small bikini holding a baby stood next to a man in long dreadlocks. They had a kiosk set up selling homemade beach clothing and crafts.

The thing about Ahmet is that he has a very gentle spirit.

Following our conversation, Sanibel, Zeta and I jumped into the clear water behind us. The Indigo Beach club did not have a traditional sandy beach. Instead, a wooden deck with ladders lined the sea. Out in the water was one of those floating docks that people swim to, and jump off. For the first five minutes of swimming, both girls grabbed onto my back, and we swam out to the platform. For these first five minutes, they acted like they could not swim, and only I could save them. Then, we all jumped off, and they both swam off on their own.

Everyone we met in the water was British.

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As it turned out, none of Kalkan had traditional sandy beaches. Instead, Kalkan had seven beach clubs like Indigo with decks, bars, restaurants and swimming platforms.

From the water I could see a group of six young British people, three boys and three girls, walking onto the platform without removing their sneakers. They sat on pillows around a tiny table and ordered beers and talked loudly as they lit up cigarettes.

Eventually, we left the water. As we made our way up the steep hill, the sun set and the breeze continued to blow, but with more force. My girls told me that they were hungry. “Let’s not take advantage of Ahmet’s kindness, by eating every meal at his hotel. I think we could find some place to eat here in town.”

Our first stop turned out to be propitious, because we found this place near the bus station called Ayce’s Kitchen. The three of us were led straight into the kitchen where we found a table loaded with assorted plates and pots of Turkish foods.

“The food looks great. How much is it to eat here?” I asked.

The guy who took us to the kitchen said, “Not much.”

I figured that “not much” was a good price. We just pointed at all the food we wanted, and sat out on a terrace overlooking the beach clubs, restaurants, and the sea. The first plate brought to us was filled with *Yaprak sarma*, which was grape leaves with juicy seasoned rice

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on the inside. I don't know if it was because we were hungry, but they tasted amazing. I asked Zeta if she liked them better than chicken nuggets, and she said, "About the same."

In due course, all the food we previously pointed at filled every inch of our table. I poured this cucumber yogurt sauce called *cacik* over my rice pilaf. We had this wonderfully mild cheese called *Kaser*, and homemade breads. We had eggplant stuffed with onions, tomatoes, garlic and meat. Besides that, we had lamb, humus, tabouli, and more. At one point, the waiter brought us a stew and I asked, "What is this?"

"*Keskek*," he responded.

We dug into it, and it was amazing. We went from food heaven to a food coma. At the end, everything only cost us around \$20. "Not much," I thought. I told the kids, "We're eating here every night." We ate there every night of our stay in Kalkan.

"Yay!" was the response. "How long are we staying here?" asked Sanibel.

"I don't know honey," I responded. "Let's go for a walk. I'm in a food coma."

We walked to the bottom of the hill where there was a pedestrian promenade lined with shops and restaurants. Restaurants were packed with British tourist speaking English to each other eating seafood. I looked at a few menus and discovered it would cost us a minimum of \$20 a person to eat at the least expensive of them. This

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made me curious why these restaurants were packed while Ayce's Kitchen only had a steady number of locals and a few tourists eating there. On the other hand, this area was lively, and a great place to walk around at night.

I had ate so much food that I just needed to walk a bit. My girls were tired, and they needed to get back so they could sleep.

Meanwhile, later that night back at the Mediteran Hotel, Zeta said to me, "I'm ready to go to sleep, because I want morning to come so we can go diving!" She was ready to time travel to the morning in order to hasten our scuba diving adventure.

I kissed them both goodnight, and realized how blessed I was to be their father. They both fell asleep under the comfortable duvet with the air conditioner set at 19 degrees Celsius. Again, being a father is the greatest honor I will ever achieve in life.

Early in the morning, we walked down to the harbor and met Krista on her boat. Zeta's excitement level was higher than I think I had ever seen. The boat was full of British divers, and a couple Turkish guys who worked on the boat including the captain, Ibrahim. One of the guys, I can't remember his name, cooked a big lunch for everyone. I walked into the cabin to take a look and forgot to take off my shoes as I stepped onto the oriental

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carpet. He became angry and said something to me in Turkish, and I quickly realized my mistake. He was very kind to me the rest of the trip, but I could see that this clearly annoyed him. Krista said to me, "Every time you see a rug, you need to remove your shoes."

We did three shallow dives at less than 30 feet. The visibility was very good, and there was ample life to view. We even saw ancient Greek ruins. Zeta loved the diving, but spent the second dive taking underwater selfies with Sanibel until the battery in my underwater camera died.

The girls were not allowed on the deep dive. So, I grabbed my BCD and stuck a tank on it. The bottle only had a fill of around 170 bars, but I figured this would be enough for a 25 meter dive with a safety stop. As it turned out, I was wrong.

I put air in my BCD and tossed it off the boat and followed it with a cannonball entry. I enjoy this more than the "giant stride entry" or the "backwards roll entry". We dove down through an underwater cavern to the side of a natural wall encrusted with sea life including sea fans and coral. Off to my right I saw a shadow. Then, the shadow materialized into a spotted eagle ray and gracefully flew right by me. I saw tiny shrimp and an octopus. I swam up the wall and spotted a lobster and a sea turtle. Diving was something I did before I had kids. Since becoming a father, I had no interest in spending all day on a dive boat away from my children. So, this dive was special to me, because only recently had we started scuba diving together.

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Eventually, my air was down to 50 bars, and I signaled to the diver I was paired with that I was going up. I think he's name was Ian. One of the dive masters singled to him with two fingers that he will now pair up with his dive buddy. Then, he followed me to the safety stop area and showed me an extra bottle with a regulator hanging in the water in case I ran out of air during my three minute safety stop at 10 feet under water. Despite having plenty of air, he surfaced with me. "Why did you got out?" I asked him.

"I had to get out, because you used up your air." I saw that he had more than half his air left in his tank, and he didn't look happy. I felt bad and told him so.

I've done probably one thousand dives since I got certified back in 1994. Most of those dives were with my dive buddy, Roland, when we lived in Micronesia. He was more efficient with his air than me. Often, I would grab the extra regulator hanging off his BCD and use some of his air so that we could both stay down longer. We always kept our tanks full, and dove anytime we wanted. Roland was always very observant. I remember how he noticed every tiny creature in the reef. Sometimes, he would focus so much on a tiny candy cane looking shrimp that a large shark would swim by unnoticed.

In due course, everyone climbed on board the boat. One-by-one, the British divers kept giving me guidance on how to be more efficient with my air. "You need to calm down and not swim around too much," one man said to me. Another one said, "If you keep this up, you

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may get good at scuba.” I thanked everyone for their advice.

I thanked Krista for taking us scuba diving, and told her that I thought the diving was superb and that she had a great life making a living doing something fun. She explained to me, “Kalkan has great diving. If y’all want to go again, I can take you to some magnificent Greek ruins under the water.” Zeta heard this and her face lit up with a big smile. I knew we really did not have the budget for another dive, however.

From the dive boat, we meandered over to the Indigo Beach Club, where we found Ahmet having a beer with the woman who was selling homemade clothing and her husband. My girls and I sat down with them, and they went right to the baby the woman was holding. Sanibel held the baby and smiled a gentle happy smile as she carried the baby in circles around us. A girl, who worked at the bar, came over and told Ahmet something. At this, he said, “I have to go handle some things. See you later.”

“My name is Luke and these girls are my daughters, Sanibel and Zeta,” I said.

The Turkish hippy woman wore a tiny bikini top with her ample breasts appearing to be making a break for it. She said her name, and I did not understand, because just as she said it, the baby started fussing, and Sanibel handed her back to her. I think the woman’s name was Fatima.

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Her husband spoke to me, but it sounded like he was mumbling. As hard as I tried and as many times as I asked, I could not understand what he was saying. I never got his name as hard as I tried. I would find out later that he was Scottish. So, in this story, I will call the couple, *Scotty* and *Fatma*.

Fatma was slender with dark hair pulled back in a ponytail. She was thirty years old. Scotty appeared to be around fifty years old. He had long red and grey dreadlocks that seemed to sprout from an unruly bush of red and grey hair that was not unlike pubic hair. Scotty spoke to me about something, and asked me questions. I'm usually pretty good at understanding folks, but I didn't get it. He started a sentence, but didn't finish it, for example. On the other hand, I can see he had a very gentle spirit.

"Where are you from?" I asked her.

"İzmir," she said with great pride in her voice. She continued, "You must go."

"Maybe we'll make it there on our way back to Istanbul. After we leave here, we'll probably just head off in some random direction or maybe stay in a treehouse."

"Your baby is so cute!" Sanibel said to Fatma. Fatma smiled, and said thank you, carefully enunciating. She had a very unusual way of speaking English. She carefully enunciated each word, and her pauses, it seemed, were not to give time to think about what word

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to use, but, rather, for emphasis. Next, she held out her arms, smiling, and took the baby.

Ahmet returned.

“Ahmet, can you tell me more about your trip on the Trans-Siberian Railroad?” I asked.

He responded, “Of course.” As he told the story, I began to picture Paul Theroux’s *Great Railway Bazaar* with Ahmet playing the part of a modern day Theroux.

“I would love to take a trip like that someday. I would bring loads of books with me, and write down all the conversations I have with other travelers.”

Sanibel did not appear to be listening to my comment, but she responded, “Sounds boring.”

Later that night, we ate at Acye’s Kitchen again, and walked down to the waterfront pedestrian area with all the shops and restaurants. I had to walk due to the fact that I had eaten myself into yet another food coma. As we walked by all the restaurants, a familiar voice called out my name, “Luke!” It was Ian, one of the English divers from the dive boat earlier. He was eating dinner with his family and invited us to pull up chairs and join them.

“We come to Kalkan every year for two weeks. This place is amazing!” He introduced me to his family: Wife and teenaged daughter. I cannot remember their names. He asked me if I was diving again, and I responded that I did not know. He invited us to join

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him, but I explained that we already ate. He told me that if I kept diving one day I will be good at it. “It takes practice,” he told me.

We walked on.

Next we discovered a bakery. We drank more tea and ate more Turkish delights. It seemed to me that we could not consume enough Turkish tea and Turkish delight. I was beginning to understand that Edmund kid from Narnia. I questioned if C. S. Lewis visited Turkey and became addicted to this stuff.

We were swimming in tea and on a sugar high from the Turkish delights, when I thought of C.S. Lewis. C. S. Lewis once said, “Literature adds to the reality, it does not simply describe it.” To me, this certainly applies to my theory of *Imaginary Time*. Everything I am writing down is added as some left over from the past or my imagination. Everything written and remembered whether “true” or “false” is now part of reality.

As I previously stated imaginary time is normally viewed as bisecting the past and the future. However, I don’t think it is that simple. I mean, what happens to the past? Where does the past go? The past is gobbled up by imagination where it exists collectively in the brains of the living. Objects dropped in the past are carried into the future where they exist for a moment or parish. The Great Pyramids were built 5000 years ago, and have made the journey from the past to this moment relatively intact. (As I write these stories in 2015, a murderous

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cult calling themselves *the Islamic State* are blowing up ancient ruins in Syria and Iraq.)

For this reason, I feel that Lewis really said something profound here. Literature adds to reality if much of what we view as reality is Imaginary Time. That is why, earlier in this book, I brought back Kilgore Trout. By doing this I added something to imaginary time. Therefore, do unicorns and mermaids exist? We will never find fossils of these creatures, and we will never see one, but, yet, they exist in literature. The fact is, everyone who reads these words, probably, has an image in his or her brain right now of these creatures. They exist in imaginary time, just like the rest of the past including the builders of the Great Pyramids.

Eventually, we made our way up the hill until the waning moon reflected off the water and the tiny lights beside the harbor resembled a little garden.

* * *

Sanibel and Zeta headed straight for the infinity pool first thing in the morning. Murat stopped me and said, "You can have breakfast here." At the moment, I was hunched over looking across the pool, because it looked like the water dropped off into the harbor way, way down below us.

"Sounds good," I responded.

After a brief swim in the pool with the girls, we ate a Turkish breakfast of a hardboiled egg, olives, cheeses, meats, and toast with jam. I had Turkish coffee, Zeta

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drank apple tea, and Sanibel drank regular tea. This was the moment that I realized how incredibly charmed my life had become. Just spending this time with my two daughters would have been reward enough. However, eating a delicious breakfast overlooking a beautiful harbor in a pleasant Mediterranean climate was more than one man deserved in life.

Murat came back to chat with us and told me about his family. He has a sister who also works at the Mediteran Hotel. She walked by and he introduced her: A pretty young woman wearing a hipster hat, hippy clothes and a scarf. He asked us about our plans, and I asked him what he recommended.

He told us we could head East and visit Xanthos, Patara Beach and Saklikent Canyon. “Xanthos is an ancient Lycian ruins. Have you heard of the Lycians?”

“Of course.”

I told him that I would go to all three.

After lunch, we drove down to the Indigo Beach Club, and I thanked Ahmet for the breakfast. He acted like it was no big deal. Then, we had some tea under that carpeted canopy covered area with Scotty and Fatima. He told me the story of his journey around Australia.

“We drove an old Kombi all over the country,” he told me.

“Who went with you?” I asked.

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“An Italian girl and an English girl.” Immediately, an infectious Australian tune popped into my brain and would not leave...

Traveling in a fried-out Kombi

On a hippie trail, head full of zombie...

“Was she a strange lady? Did she make you breakfast?” I asked him.

Ahmet explained to me that he works hard all summer, and travels all winter. This is the life he loves, and he aims not to change it. I loved hearing his stories. Ahmet was a man who has found a beautiful rhythm in life, and was doing what he loved. He was incredibly busy in the summer, and free most of the winter.

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“Everything we see in the world is the creative work of women.” – Mustafa Kamel Atatürk

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Chapter 7

Those Crazy Xanthonians!

Our first stop was Patara Beach. This was a wide expansive beach with fine grain sand. The unpaved parking lot was half full and so was the beach with families. We walked for about 20 minutes until we reached the empty side of the beach, and climbed up a steep rock until we reached the top. From this vantage point, we could see all down the coast. I knew the ancient Lycian city of Xanthos lay in ruins off in the distance- our next stop.

Xanthos sits on a hill above the Xanthos river. An old Turkish man, looking Eastern European with his newsboy hat, big mustache, and baggy pants, came up to us and began showing us around. He spoke to us in deep, slow hypnotic sounding Turkish. He did not speak English, but he was able to explain that he was a tour guide. He then stooped over and spoke to my daughters in a very soft voice explaining something that they did not understand. He, then, stood up straight looked at me and smiled big like I knew what he told them. I smiled back and nodded my head like I knew what he told them.

This man's voice was soft, deep, and hypnotic. When he spoke, I felt relaxed like I could fall asleep right there.

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He told us his name, and took us to the floor of an ancient home, and brushed the dirt off the floor revealing a very intricate mosaic. The mosaic was made with tiny white tiles arranged in such a way that it was a rabbit. Zeta loves rabbits and was enamored by the art on this ancient floor. Besides the floor, not much was left of this home. Around 2,400 years ago, some person building a home arranged these tiny tiles in the form of a white rabbit.

Reality Check...

∴[Picture this]:∴ Two and a half thousand years ago, a Lycian is carefully placing little tiles on his floor in the shape of a rabbit.

He showed us another more grand mosaic of interlocking circles surrounded by curling waves. The waves made me think of surfing. I wondered if the ancient artisan was a surfer like me. This part of Turkey didn't seem to have surf-able waves; so, probably not.

We followed him around as he continued to speak softly, but with authority. He took us to an overlook and spoke about the Xanthos River. A Turkish family walked over and joined us. All of them spoke perfect English. They were from Izmir just like the hippie mom back at Indigo Beach Club. Next, he showed us a paved road. I was amazed that the two millennia old road was in better shape than some modern roads that were just two

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decades old. Although I did not understand what he was saying, I decided not to ask the nice family to translate. The tour was pleasing.

I handed the man ten Turkish Liras.

Following our tour, we spent most of our visit in the large stadium, because that was the most dramatic part of the ancient ruined city. From there we walked to the acropolis area where we encountered the “Pillar Tomb” which looked like a little stone house on top of a pillar. The stone house was open, and, instead of dead people, two white goats somehow were inside the little house. Zeta and Sanibel loved this and took pictures. I told them that it was a tomb and Zeta said, “Ewe!”

Xanthos was a window into the past. In the more than two thousand years, eyewitness accounts evaporated from the brains of the generations that followed. We are left with ruins of this city, and lovely little tiles made into a rabbit.

We also have writing....

In 480 BC, this guy named Herodotus wrote a huge book called *The History of Herodotus*. In the book, he tells a wild story about what happened when this Persian general named Harpagus, who worked for King Cyrus the Great tried to invade Xanthos. Here’s a translation of that tale:

When Harpagus, after these successes, led his forces into the Xanthian plain, the Lycians of Xanthus went out to meet him in the field: though but a small band against

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a numerous host, they engaged in battle, and performed many glorious exploits. Overpowered at last, and force within their walls, they collected into the citadel their wives and children, all their treasures, and their slaves; and having so done, fired the building, and burnt it to the ground. After this, they bound themselves together by dreadful oaths, and sallying forth against the enemy, died sword in hand, not one escaping. Those Lycians who now claim to be Xanthians, are foreign immigrants, except eighty families, who happened to be absent from the country, and so survived the others. Thus was Xanthus taken by Harpagus, and Caunus fell in like manner into his hands; for the Caunians in the main followed the example of the Lycians.

Thus, while the men of Xanthos were on a treasure, slave, wife and kid killing suicidal mission fighting the Persians, about 80 families were on vacation. I guess when they returned they were like, “Oh, shit! Where did everyone go and why are all these Persian here?” What is also amazing about this story is the tidbit about the people of Caunus thinking it was a good idea to do the same thing. I think I would have been like, “Why can’t we just see if we can all get along with the Persians? I mean, that might work out better than killing our families and so forth.”

Near the Pillar Tomb was a tall broken pillar called the Xanthian Obelisk. The story on the obelisk is my favorite Lycian story, and my reason for visiting Xanthos. The Xanthian Obelisk marks a tomb and is in two pieces. The Obelisk was in one piece, but the top broke off in an earthquake. The cool thing about this

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obelisk is that it tells a story in the first person about this wrestler who is buried beneath it. Before finding this pillar, nobody alive could read Lycian, but the pillar tells the same story in three languages with one of the languages being Greek. Thus, the Xanthian Obelisk is to Lycian as the Rosetta Stone is to Egyptian Hieroglyphics.

In poetic language the story is about a wrestler called “son of Harpagus” who could not be beaten by anyone. Of course, Harpagus was the general who invaded Xanthos and inspired the mass murder and suicide. Based on that, I bet most people probably let him win, and then somebody wrote all kinds of praise about him to keep the Persians happy. Maybe wrestling back then was staged in an entertaining way like today. I wish this “son of Harpagus” wore tights and wrestled guys with masks on. That would have been better than dudes wrestling each other naked.

I do not believe we have an obelisk in America telling the story of a great wrestler, but we need one at 796 Highway 73 in Ellerbe, North Carolina. That is where, in 1993, the ashes of the great wrestler, Andre the Giant, were spread when he died at age 46. He lived on a 47 acre ranch there.

I saw Andre the Giant back in the 1980’s with my brother, Charlie. We were living in Miami and Mom dropped us off at the Knight Center to watch the “Night of the Mask”. Andre the Giant’s tag team partner was *The Midnight Rider*, who was a thinly disguised Dusty Rhodes. Rhodes had lost a “loser leaves the state”

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match, but, instead of leaving, he just put on a mask and returned as *The Midnight Rider*. That night if Rowdy Rodney Piper or his tag team partner removed his mask, he would be banned for life. Needless to say, much was riding on that match for Dusty Rhodes (the American Dream aka Midnight Rider!).

The drama reached a crescendo when his mask was ripped off. Propitiously, the ref was unconscious, and Andre the Giant was busy bashing Piper outside the rings. Dusty Rhodes had to crawl across the mat and get his mask before the ref woke up. Amazingly, he made it just in the nick-of-time. A skinny old black gentleman, wearing a three-piece suit and a feathered fedora, climbed in the ring and bravely grabbed the mask before Piper got to it and gave it to The Midnight Rider. I don't think that part was scripted.

Meanwhile back in Xanthos, four hundred years after the previous mass murder and suicides and two thousand years before "The Night of the Mask", Xanthos fell under the Roman Empire. Before Caesar uttered *Es tu Brutus?* to Brutus, he sent him to conquer Turkey. So, in 42 BC, those crazy Xanthians saw the Roman army coming and rounded up families and slaves and did the whole murder and suicide thing again. The crazy part of this story is Brutus' army didn't have to fight and kill any Xanthians to conquer them. In fact, this time Brutus paid his soldiers money for each one they could save. *Those crazy Xanthians!*

As we drove away from Xanthos in our little white rental car, I thought of all those Lycians from all those years

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ago. I wonder how much of the history about them actually happened. Maybe the son of Harpagus was a really entertaining and strong wrestler. Maybe he was a Lycian Andre the Giant or Dusty Rhodes. Maybe not. Maybe the Lycians really didn't kill their families as all those historians wrote all those years ago. Who knows? Nevertheless, history only exist in our collective minds. For that reason, I'll take it all as facts and believe in my own set of lies as I picture these ancient folks living in Xanthos before it became ruins.

Our next stop was supposed to be Saklikent Canyon, but we became hopelessly lost on narrow gravel roads and never found it. In fact, we did not find another soul on the road to even ask directions. I have since seen photos of this place, and it is very beautiful with clear waters flowing between high narrow cliffs. After literally driving in the woods along a river, we gave up the search and decided to return to the Mediteran Hotel.

We parked our car at the Mediteran Hotel, and, as we walked down the steps to the rooms, we spotted Murat walking up the steps. We greeted each other and he asked us about our day and what we saw. He asked us if we are going to stay and eat. I did not want to take advantage. So, I told him that we are going to visit Ahmet at the beach club.

Meanwhile, at the Indigo Beach Club, the first people we saw were the happy hippie family.

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I purchased three beers from the bar, and handed two of them to Fatima and Scott. Sanibel and Zeta took turns playing with the baby as we talked sitting on rugs and pillows under the gazebo beside the water. For some reason, the three of us ended up sitting very close facing each other as we talked.

“Have you been to India?” she asked me.

“No. I’ve been to the boarder of India in Burma where the Royingya people live. I’ve always wanted to go. Who knows? Maybe next summer, I’ll bring my kids there.”

She looked at me seriously, and said, pausing between each word for emphasis, “You have to go.”

Then, Scotty took a big drag from his cigarette. He looked me square in the eye, and placed his other hand on my shoulder. I could smell the cigarettes on his breath. “India is...” He paused. He seemed to search for his words. After finding no way to describe India, he just leaned back, and waved his hands in front of his face and repeated, “India is... You must go.” As I stated, the three of us were sitting very close to each other, as they told me travel stories from their crazy trips. I was beginning to understand Scotty as he told me that he and Fatima were driving from Scotland to India in an old converted school bus.

“Wow. Driving?”

He pointed over to a large school bus parked in the alleyway next to the beach club. They could see that I

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was impressed. So, we walked over to have a look. As it turned out, they were driving a large converted yellow school bus that used vegetable oil for fuel that they recycled from restaurants.

I couldn't get enough of their stories. They asked me where my next stop would be, and I told them, "Greece."

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“Happy is the man, I thought, who before dying, has the good fortune to sail the Aegean Sea.”- Nikos Kazantzakis (*Zorba the Greek*)

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Chapter 8

Greece

As it turned out, Greece was not too far from us. All we had to do was get up early and drive 30 minutes from Kalkan to Kas. Then, take a ferry to a Greek Island called Kastellorizo.

The drive was nothing short of dramatic as we drove above the sea along steep cliffs. At one point we drove a bridge over this vertical gorge that ended at the beach called *Kaputas*. The three colors of deep blue, brilliant white, and pebble tan looked painted and rich. In all my travels, I've never seen such color contrast as one place.

"Can we stop here?" asked Zeta.

"Please Daddy!" yelled Sanibel as she drove over the bridge.

"Sanibel, pay attention to the road. We'll stop here on the way back. We have a boat to catch."

"Please!" exclaimed Zeta.

"Why not."

So, we stopped, and walked down the precipitous steps that led to the beach which was just as vivid looking close up as it was from the top of the gorge.

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“This is freakin’ gorgeous!” I exclaimed.

A woman standing beside me agreed, “You can say that!” As it turned out, her name was Annette and her husband’s name was Emere. Emere was an American of Turkish origin, and Annette was an American of Californian origin. They had come to Turkey to get married. Also, they were on their way to Kastellorizo, as well. We became fast friends as they told us the story of their wedding, and how everyone flew out from American and all over to participate.

Following a short visit at this beach and a short drive along a rocky coastline, we had tea and coffee at Kas while we waited for the ferry. A child working at a tourist shop across the street from us knocked over his huge outside display. His little trinkets spilled all over the sidewalk, and both Sanibel and Zeta walked over and helped him put them back. The owner of the café told me that Russians like to visit Kas, and it is a little more expensive than Kalkan for some reason. The owner spoke English like much of the folks in this part of Turkey.

The boat to Kastellorizo Island was just a one mile trip to a tiny post card perfect harbor with more colors than a Gay Pride flag. The small island had one town that wrapped around the harbor. The boats, the homes, the churches, and the small businesses that dotted both sides of the edge of the water were all multihued in bright

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flamboyant colors with remarkable wooden doors, and wood-shuttered windows.

What was extraordinary to me was how just one mile of water separated places that were so different. As soon as we set foot on Kastellorizo, I felt like I was in Greece. The whole place is like a great big movie set from one of those campy early 80's movies filmed in Greece like *Summer Lovers* starring Daryl Hannah, or the more recent musical film *Mama Mia!*. In fact, in the early 1990's, the film *Mediterraneo* was filmed on this island. Turkey did not gradually become Greece, but the change was stark.

Sanibel's first words as we stepped off the boat was, "I feel like I'm in *Mama Mia!*" This prompted Zeta to break into song and dance.

"Let's get some Greek dessert," I told the girls.

A tall slender young woman with a bright smile and black hair served us that stringy syrupy desert called *Kataifi* which is basically a slice of Baklava, and some figs. I paid in dollars and she gave us change in Euros. Gia was from Athens and did not own the shop.

"What should we do while we are here?"

She spoke broken English, which was 100% more than the Greek I spoke. "Go to Blue Grotto. It is spectacular."

"How do I get there?"

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She pointed to a guy working on a boat engine in the back of a small boat. “Ask him.” By this time we were sitting around a table next to the water. I slid my fork through the fibrous shredded wheat until it was submerged in the sugary syrup that covered the bottom of the plate. Despite the heaviness of *Kataifi*, the taste was outstanding.

Before I had a chance to ask the boat guy a question, Zeta yelled, “Look! A turtle!” Sure enough, a green sea turtle was swimming right below us in the harbor. He was close enough that I was able to climb down to the water, and submerge my camera for an underwater photo. I swear he modeled for the photo. He must be trained by the Greek government or something.

We ended up paying the boat guy 40 Euro to take us to the Blue Grotto and St. George’s Beach. The boat operator and his wife were very friendly and talkative. However, once we got onto the boat, he quit talking and stopped smiling. The ride was fast and bumpy with Sanibel and Zeta riding right on the bow and holding on like they were riding a bull. They laughed and cheered for the entire boat ride in the blue waters beneath the cliffs. Then, we stopped at a hole in the bottom of the cliff, and jumped into the water. The recently stoic looking boat captain barked, “Five minutes!”

The hole did not look like anything spectacular until we swam into it, and discovered a surreal environment the likes of which I had never seen. Light from outside the cave seemed to dive under the water and filter up through the cavern turning bright blue. My daughters

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and I swam all through the cave and had no words to describe the beauty except all of us saying, "Wow."

After some time passed, Captain Grumpy yelled into the cave telling us that we had stayed too long. None of us wanted to get out of the water. If not for the fact that we were miles from the harbor, I would have told him to just let us swim for it. Once back on the boat, he just seemed angry and annoyed by us.

Our next stop was St. George Beach where the angry boat guy dropped us off and said that he would come back in a few hours to get us. I kind of doubted this, actually.

St. George Beach is a rocky lagoon with a bar and a church. At the top of some stairs, there was a deck with some lodge chairs where I spotted our new friends, Annette and Emere. They waved us over. We spent the next few hours talking with them, swimming in the lagoon, and taking photos. The beer I drank with them had a big red "A" on the label with some smaller Greek letters below. It was pretty good. We all made plans to meet back at Kaputas for more swimming and playing in the crashing waves.

An elderly woman reclined topless a few chairs away from us. Her husband had a huge mustache that took over much of his face. When Captain Grumpy-Pants came back to get us, the guy with the big 'stache and his wife joined us in the boat. They were German and could not speak English, but they were all smiles and asked us question after question. I speak a little German, and we

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were able to have a little conversation. He wore the iconic Pink Floyd shirt with the light prism coming through the pyramid. I pointed to it and gave it the thumbs up. He explained to me that David Gilmour has an entire album about Kastellerizo. By the way, there are about ten spellings of this island's name including the name Gilmour used in the song *Castellorizon*.

Meanwhile back at the harbor, Zeta decided to walk from end to end taking a photo of all the colorful doors. As it turned out, this was very creative and made for a great collage. We visited Gia once more to exchange money to buy spirits at the Duty Free for Ahmet. He said they are about half the price in Greece. She looked up the exchange rate on her phone and gave us the exact rate with no commission or any costs to us.

As we wandered around, I kept trying to imagine how it would be to live in this place. Kastellerizo seemed too colorful, too beautiful, and too magical to be a real place where people live out their daily existence. It looked more like a movie set than a real place.

Back in Turkey at the Indigo Beach Club, we delivered the booze to Ahmed, who offered to pay us for them. "Are you kidding? No way are you paying us for this after all you have done for us."

He smiled and seemed genuinely grateful for such a small gift. Then, we joined Scotty and Fatima under the canopy and on the rugs and pillows.

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Fatima said, “You go to Cappadocia.” She said it with emphasis. “Cappadocia is a magical land where the rocks are shaped like people with pointy hats. You must go”

“It sounds amazing.”

Scotty lit a cigarette, smiled a little, and just nodded in agreement. Fatima showed me photos of Cappadocia on her iPhone, and it looked amazing and other worldly.

“We plan to visit Pamukkale next,” I said.

“Oh. Yes! You must go to Pam-ukk-ale. You must go.” Next, she asked Ahmed for some paper, and a pen. She wrote a note of introduction to give to a hotel owner in Pamukkale. I thought this was just the coolest thing ever. I loved the idea of showing up at a place I have never been before and handing a stranger a letter of introduction from one of his friends. The whole thing seemed very Hemingway-esque.

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“Everybody, everybody everywhere, has his own movie going, his own scenario, and everybody is acting his movie out like mad, only most people don’t know that is what they’re trapped by, their little script.”

- Tom Wolfe (*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*)

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Chapter 9

Pamukkale

I did not want to be seen as taking advantage of Ahmet's kindness. Thus, eventually, I felt it was time to leave Kalkan. Neither Zeta nor Sanibel were happy with this decision. I had planned to drive along the Mediterranean coast and maybe stay in a tree house or something fun like that, but, who was I kidding, nothing would have compared to our time in Kalkan. Therefore, we drove three hours to an usual place called Pamukkale.

Ahmed's brother was at the hotel that morning. He was my age, and had some grey in his beard just like me. By this point in the trip, I had a beard. I decided that I needed a beard to not look like Yanni. We thanked him for everything, and he told us that Ahmed was down at the Beach Club. We hugged Murat and the others, and we were off to say goodbye and thank you to Ahmed.

In a few hours, we drove up to town near Pamukkale where we walked into the Oz Bay Hotel armed with the note from the hippie couple. The owner was a man in his late forties with salt and pepper soccer player length hair and a beard. After our greetings, I handed him the note and he smiled. He asked me about Fatima and Scotty, and seemed genuinely interested in how they

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were doing. He told me that he would only charge us 80 TL to stay, and was happy that we chose his hotel.

“Where is Pamukkale?” I asked him.

He pointed up a hill and said that it was very close, but first we should sit and have tea with him.

“Sure,” I answered.

He, Sanibel and I drank the traditional Turkish Tea, and Zeta had the Apple Tea. He asked us about our travels and told us about his family. He said, “Do you know what ‘Pamukale’ means?” He spoke in a deep soothing voice not unlike our Xanthos tour guide.

“No.”

“‘Castle of cotton’,” he responded. “The hot springs here at Pamukkale have been a major attraction for 2000 years. The waters have healing powers. That is why we have the Roman ruins of Hierapolis next to Pamukkale.”

“So, the Romans used to bathe in those springs up there?”

“Yes.”

Later, we walked up the hill barefoot to view this unusual “cotton castle”. A legion of tourists from China, Japan, and Eastern Europe walked with us. A huge area on the side of a large hill was covered in brilliant white calcium deposits from slowly flowing hot springs creating surreal pools of clear blue waters. My daughters and I jumped right in the first pool we found,

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and we covered ourselves with the chalky deposits on the bottom of the pools. The other-worldly scene was great for photos with the bright white and the clear blue acting in contrast to each other.

In fact, the ground looked like it was completely covered with snow. The entire area was this clean extraordinarily intense white. The sky was a light blue, with powerful sunlight shining down on the white chalky ground and the clear blue pools of water. Without sunglasses, it was difficult to view everything.

We made a point to swim in every pool possible as we made the journey from one end of Pamukkale to the other. From there, we entered the ruins of Hierapolis through a triple arched gate.

All travel could be time travel, but visiting the 2000 year old ruins of an ancient resort makes traveling to the past much easier. We were traveling into the future with our personal narratives and into the past with our imagination being inspired by grand items left behind by humans that lived 2000 years ago. Hundreds of thousands of stories have taken place in Hierapolis. Among the stories is the story of Philip the Apostle.

A couple thousand years ago Philip and his sister and another Apostle moved to the resort town of Hierapolis. He probably didn't move there to hang out in the hot springs. Being one of the original twelve disciples, he wanted to convince the people who lived in the town to stop worshiping snake gods and so forth and be Christians.

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At the time, Hierapolis had a population of 100,000 of which half were Jews and most of the rest were Greeks. The Roman guy who was in charge of the place was Vittius Niger. He lived in a nice home with his wife Nicanora. Besides having a cool name, Nicanora had this problem: Her eyes would painfully swell up to the point that she could not see.

The hot springs and local medical men were unable to relieve pitiful Nicanora of her strange condition. Meanwhile, Philip led secret church services in the home of this guy named Epicrates. Nicanora heard about these meetings and sought out Philip who healed her of her crazy health problem.

One would think that Vittius would be happy to learn that his wife was all better. However, one could not describe Vittius Niger as a loving husband. Upon finding out about her good fortune, he yelled to his soldiers, "By what trickery have these magicians pretended to cure her? Bring her to me!"

In an early case of CDV, he grabbed her by the hair and dragged her around taking breaks to kick her. Then, he threatened his wife and said, "I'll cut off your hair unless you tell me who healed you!" She didn't tell. "OK! I'll cut off your head unless you tell me!" She didn't tell. Instead she told him that if he wanted to be a Christian it might make him a better husband. She never snitched on Philip, but Vittius found out.

Eventually, he grabbed Philip and the other apostle, Bartholomew, and had them beaten and crucified on an

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upside-down cross. During the whole ordeal, Philip just kept preaching until finally everyone just gave up with all the beating and killing of the two and said, “OK. We give up! Let them go!” So, they pried the nails out of Bart’s hands and feet and he was so happy to be free. Then, they tried to do the same for Phil, but he said, “No. I’m good.”

I’m sure someone said, “Really? Why don’t you let us takes those nails out and let you down from this upside-down cross? That looks like it hurts.”

Still he said, “Nope. I’ll just stay here.”

So, my daughters and I walked to the far side of this ancient city where I said, “Look. That’s Philip’s tomb.”

“Who was Philip?”

“He was a disciple of Jesus, and he was killed here.”

“Why?”

“Because the leaders were scared of him.”

“Oh.”

:::[Read what Zeta had to say]:::

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Today we got up and left
Kalkan. I didn't want to at
all Kalkan was so awesome
a lot more awesome then
being stuck in a car for 3
hours going to Pamukkale.
we arrived and went to our
hotel a lot suckier than Kalkan's
but then we went to ~~the most~~
what ~~the~~ the town is famous
for the salt baths and roman
ruins. It was pretty cool but
theres nothing else to do in
this town."

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“No more will my green sea go turn a deeper blue...”
- Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (*Paint it Black*)

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Chapter 10

The Black Sea is not Black

“May I drive again?” Sanibel asked me.

“Of course.”

Later she asked me, “Which way should I go?”

“I don’t care. Go any direction you want to”

“Really?”

“Sure. What do y’all want to do,” I asked my daughters.

Zeta, predictable responded, “I want to go back to Kalkan.”

“I’m sorry honey, but it’s time to move on. We could go stay in a treehouse a little east of here?”

Sanibel chimed in, “I think that would be too much like Kalkan. Let’s go somewhere different.”

“I agree. Drive any direction you want, and let’s just see where we end up.”

We headed north and eventually made it to the Black Sea. Once at the Black Sea, we either had to go left or right.

“Which way, Daddy?”

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“Either way.”

She turned right.

The next country over was Georgia, but it was really far. We drove along the coast going east on a half paved road. The Black Sea was not black, but it was no longer the deep clear blue color of the Mediterranean. We kept driving east looking for a hotel or guest house, and, for miles: Nothing. Finally, we saw a sign that read *Panciyon* with an arrow pointing down a hill toward the water. I assumed correctly that *Panciyon* is Turkish for the French word *Pencion*, which is basically a guest house.

We parked on the roof of the office which was even with the road. Without a wall, I felt like I was going to drive right off, but, of course, I just parked. We walked down the driveway to the shady courtyard below where we found a group of about twelve people sitting around a table drinking Turkish tea and talking. In front of them were empty plates of food, and everyone was smiling. I knew we had found our place.

I wasn't sure how to greet such a large group of folks. So, I just waved and said, “*Salam*.”

One gentleman responded in Arabic, “And peace be onto you also.”

I smiled. A young man then walked up to us and said, “I speak a little English. Do you and the girls want to stay here with us?”

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“Sure. Are you the owner?”

“No. I am staying here, but we are all friends. I want to help you.” He led me to the little office beneath where I parked, and a strong-faced looking man who walked with the help of lofstrands followed us in. As it turned out, he owned the *panciyon*.

I introduced myself and my daughters. “I am Baturhan,” said the young guy. Zeta asked him his age and he replied, “18.” The owner of the hotel said that his name, “Ersin.”

“He wants to know if you like see the rooms,” said Baturhan after Ersin said something to him in Turkish.

“No.”

“Really? You don’t care to see?”

“No. We’re fine. We’ll just stay here.”

The *Panciyon* turned out to be 80 TL a night, and we paid for a night. Our room was on a little hill above the ocean, but down some concrete steps from the courtyard. The doors and windows did not close all the way due to the wood being warped. The beds were tiny with damp foam mattresses, and old deflated damp pillows. Each bed had sheets with a threadbare cover. The room was as tiny as a large closet, and between the beds, the only way to walk was to turn sideways. The uncovered concrete floors were clean, but, like everything else, damp. The room smelled musty.

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“Is this OK?” he asked me.

“It’s perfect. I love it.” I did love it.

“I want to go to the beach!” exclaimed Zeta.

“Of course.”

Baturhan’s little sister was the same age as Zeta. She wore little blue glasses and always had a smile on her face. She and Zeta became instant friends. They both grabbed broom sticks, for some reason, and we all walked to the beach from our room.

A little dirt path with shady trees and flowers bushes led to a wide sandy beach that was covered in trash. A long line of plastic bottles and shopping bags lined the high-tide line. The small bushes along the edge of the beach were covered like Christmas ornaments with cigarette packs, candy wrappers, diapers, and more plastic bags.

On the way to the water, I stepped in cow manure on the beach. *How in the world does cow manure get on a beach?* I didn’t see any cows. Baturhan was already in the water with two other young guys. I could not believe my eyes, there were actually waves.

“Do you know where we could get a surfboard?”

Baturhan had trouble understanding what I was asking. So, I make my hands like a surfboard with a person surfing, and he responded, “Oh. Yeah. I have never seen one of those here.”

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The other two guys asked me something in Turkish, and Baturhan said, “They want you to swim way out in the water with them.”

“OK.”

Then, we swam way out in the ocean until the beach was far away, and our little hotel looked like a toy house. I swam back before they were ready, but I did not want to be so far from my children. Baturhan told me that a lot of guys like to swim out as far as they could make it out in the ocean.

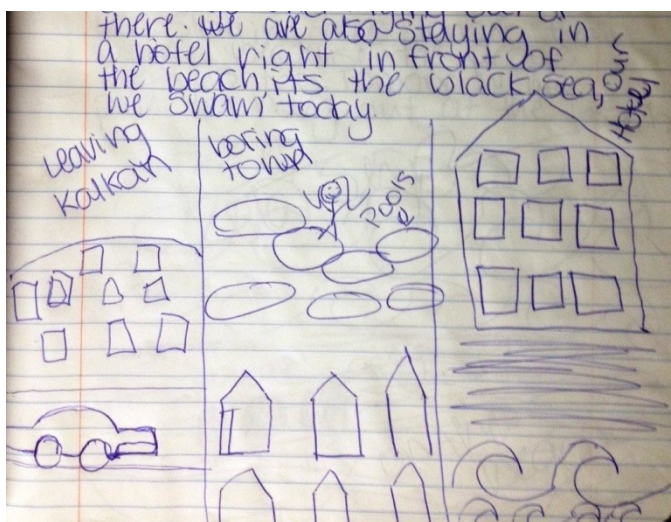
The girls and I spent the rest of the day, reading books and talking in the breezy tree covered courtyard or on the dirty beach. The little sister and Zeta were inseparable.

Also, Zeta and Sanibel were obsessed with charging their phones in the room. We didn’t have cell phone service like at home, but, with Wi-Fi, they could call everyone using Viber and use the Internet. This place did not have WiFi, but there was a desktop computer in the office that anyone could use.

:::[Read what Zeta had to say]:::

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One of the guys we swam with earlier, Mohammed, came to the table outside our room, where we were reading. He kept saying things to me in Turkish and getting frustrated that I could not understand him. Finally, he drew a picture or a cross and pointed at it, and pointed at me. He wanted to know if I was a Christian.

I drew a mosque with minarets and explained to him that I am a Christian, but Islam is good and I like it too (using a thumbs up). Everyone on this trip that has asked me this question always said that they respect Christianity and loved that I respected Islam. Not this guy. He shook his head and told me that I need to be Muslim. He pointed to the cross and gave it a “thumbs down”. Then, he tried to teach me some Arabic words that Muslim people say. After I repeated them he

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pointed at me and said to me in English, “You Muslim now.”

After he walked away, Baturhan came over and said, “We go get food now. Please join us.”

At the top of the hill was this homemade vehicle the likes of which I have never observed. It was made of wood and metal and, at some point in the distant past, painted blue. The wheels were different sizes and a large lawn mower motor protruded from the front. I jumped in the back with Zeta, Baturhan, his little sister, and another little girl of about six. Thee *Panciyan*’s owner’s little brother drove the vehicle.

The ride was loud, bumpy, fast, and fun. At the top of a steep hill, we met a plump colorfully dressed middle-aged woman wearing a scarf. There we picked these berries from a tree filling up a bucket. She filled up another bucket with this milk looking stuff.

“Have you tried ayran?”

“No,” I responded. So, Baturhan scooped some out with two wooden cups that he obtained from the woman. Ayran tasted like a slightly salty yogurt drink. It was marvelous, and I was instantly hooked. “I think we need two buckets of this wonderful mystically delicious drink!”

I gave a sip to Sanibel, who made a face. Zeta spit hers out and gagged. “More for me!” I said.

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From there, we rode to a wood fired bakery in what looked like an abandon building. The bread tasted like heaven. We completed our journey at a meat market and a fruit and veggie stand.

Reality Check...

:::[Picture this]::: A father sat in the back of a strange Turkish farm vehicle straddling two five gallon buckets of a frothy yogurt drink. His two daughters- holding, fruits, vegetables, meats and berries- bounced around in the back with three young people from Turkey. They were in a rural seaside community.

Several families had congregated in the courtyard of our tiny *Panciyon* including the owners of the other *Panciyon* next door. The women were working rolling up grape leaves and preparing the food. I jumped right in to help, and they loved it. My first attempt at rolling grape leaves was a failure, but I quickly learned and the job was mine. My daughters were given various tasks and we prepared a feast as a community.

My daughters and I found ourselves amongst the women of the group, because we chose to help prepare the meal. Some of these women wore head scarfs and some did not. We washed pots and pans. We rolled countless grape leaves, and cut up stuff. The women joked that I would make a good husband, because they could not get their husbands to do this stuff. Keep in mind that none

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of these women spoke English, but after a while we all were communicating as if there were no language barrier. Looking back on it now, I just remember talking and laughing with everyone. My memories are of us all speaking English and understanding each other.

Most of my grape leaf rolling session was spent beside a pretty red-headed girl of thirty-three. She dressed in the rural Eastern European woman style, but her nose was pierced and her hair was short and wavy. She spoke to everyone in Turkish, but she was from Georgia, which she pronounced “Georg-ee-a”. We had a conversation despite the fact that neither of us understood each other’s language. In order to recall the conversation, I’ll just write it in English.

She stopped rolling grape leaves, wiped sweat off her brow with the back of her arm, and smiled at me, “You are doing a very good job for a guy.”

“Thank you. I’m Luke. What is your name?”

“Ana. Are you American?”

“Yes. Are you Turkish?”

“No. I’m from Georg-ee-a. It is actually east of here. You should visit.”

“So, you must be from Tablisi.”

“No. I’m a country girl. You know Georgia?”

“I have never been there, but I know maps. Who knows? We may just hop in the car and drive there.”

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She told me that my daughters are beautiful and smart. She showed me a photo on her iPhone of her sixteen year old daughter. She told me that her daughter was visiting her mother.

She rolled three more grape leaves around the mixture that included rice, meat, spices and more. I rolled the last one, and followed her into the outdoor kitchen area below where I parked the car.

We spoke a bit longer as I washed dishes. On previous trips, I have met pretty single moms, and started romances with these women. However, this time I had a girlfriend back home that I lived with. This trip would be different. I enjoyed talking with Ana, but I drew a line. She was not going to make a move, but, as we conversed, I could feel the chemistry. I had been down this before, and I knew where this could head. I felt like it would have been easy for Ana and me to stay up late talking after everyone was sleeping. We would find common ground, and things that we had in common. She would teach me some Georgian, and we would laugh....

At this point, I realized that I had finally changed. In the past, these relationships led to complications and broken hearts. As I watched Ana smile and light up a cigarette, I had to smile too, because I felt such peace at my new found maturity. Finally, at half a tank of life left, I had realized that there are consequences for my actions.

To sum up our day, we spent two hours riding around picking up the food; we spent another two hours

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preparing the meal. We placed all the tables and chairs together in a makeshift manner, and filled the space with a feast. No alcohol was served. We sat for hours, feasting and talking into the night.

I have to say that this was my favorite dining experience in my life for all those reasons. Again, we traveled to tiny local businesses and homes and collected the various foods. After this, we prepared the foods with great care with our hands. The sun went down, and we gathered around several large tables placed together. We shared a meal with active conversations despite not speaking each other's languages.

Late into the night, Turkish coffees were spread around the table. We spoke of religion, politics, philosophy, friendship, and family. Baturhan and iPhones acted as translators. As we drank our last drop of coffee, I asked Baturhan's mother if she knew how to tell fortune with the left over coffee grounds. Baturhan's mother was a full figured woman with dark hair and dark eyes with long eyelashes. Her eyes smiled. She had soft, but strong features. Unlike the other women her age, she did not wear a head scarf.

She laughed, and asked me if I knew how to tell the future with Turkish coffee grounds. Her son translated everything she said into English, and translated everything I said into Turkish.

She took her coffee cup, and turned it upside down on the saucer. She handed it to me, and I removed the cup revealing the wet coffee grounds spread out on the

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saucer. I stared into the grounds, and, I must say, it was mesmerizing looking at the beautiful patterns created but the wet powdery coffee grounds. The narrow spaces between the black damp grains regarded a two-toned kaleidoscope. For ten seconds, I was transfixed. Finally, I just started making stuff up to be funny.

“OK. I don’t know how this is possible, but you will become even more beautiful.”

Baturhan translated and everyone smiled and laughed.

“Great wealth will find you in the form of your amazing family.”

Baturhan translated and everyone smiled and nodded.

“Oh, yes. What does this mean? OK. I see now. You will have a long life.”

Baturhan translated and his mother grinned wider than before.

“You will have friends from America that will be more like family than friends.” Pause for translation and loud applause. “OK. That is all I can see. Now it is your turn.” I turned my cup over on the saucer and handed it to her.

I was smiling the whole time that I read the coffee grounds; because I felt everyone knew that I had no idea what I was doing. On the other hand, Baturhan’s mother paused and looked carefully at the grounds. She spoke in low Turkish with her friend sitting next to her. Her

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friend looked at the grounds, nodded and conferred with her in a whisper. They both looked serious, and I felt ashamed of taking it so lightly. Then, she spoke, and Baturhan translated.

“You will experience a great change in your life with in this year.” Pause. “It will be a good change.” Pause. “Your family will grow.” Pause. “You will get a little sick, but it is not too serious.” *Silence*. She continued that a strong woman will change my life.

I told her thank you in Turkish, and Zeta corrected the way I said it. Then, everyone smiled.

Reality Check...

∴[Picture this]∴ It is dark outside. About twenty people sit around a collection of tables piled high with plates and other items associated with the end of a large dinner. A large shade tree looms above the crowd. Still higher, stars fill the sky. The sound of waves breaking complements the sounds of laughter and speaking.

Meanwhile, back in the room, Zeta did not want to sleep in her own bed, despite the fact that it was only inches away from Sanibel's. This was becoming part of our nightly ritual. “This is stupid!” said Sanibel. I ended up making her let her sister sleep with her. With their bellies full of food, they both fell asleep as soon as they started reading. At this point in our trip, I had read all the books that I brought with me. The sound of the ocean and the wind came to my ears unimpeded through

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my open door and open windows. Before I could realize it, I was sleeping on my damp moldy pillow. I fell into a deep sleep and dreamed so realistically that I had a tough time separating the subconscious from the conscious.

Somewhere in the middle of the night, I burst awake. This realistic dream had sent me reeling into reality.

In my dream, I was in the same damp room, in the same place near the Black Sea, but my ex-wife, Kai, was lying beside me. We were having the kind of small talk that long married couples have at night as they fall asleep. Everything was completely natural and normal. Our daughters were asleep in the bed nearby just as they were in reality. In my dream, we had never divorced. In my dream, I felt safe. None of the turmoil following the divorce had happened. There were no “Who’s weekend is this?” I woke up confused as if the last ten years of my life had all been the dream, and my ex-wife Kai was beside me and was not my ex-wife.

Unsettled was how I felt. From that moment until this moment, I still feel unsettled. The epiphany of that moment would change my life. Love can be buried under hateful words and deeds, but it cannot be destroyed.

From our terrible divorce until that moment, I had never felt empathy or sympathy for Kai. At this moment, all the empathy... and the sympathy... and the shame... and the regret... All the hate evaporated. *Unsettledness* took over my being with such force that tears did not just fall

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out, but flew out of my eyes. My nose ran like a river. I remembered all those times that I could have saved our marriage, but did not. At that moment, I realized that our terrible divorce was my fault even though most of our acquaintances blamed her. Most people I know consider me a great father; however, not saving my marriage hurt my children.

I walked outside into the darkness and stared into the ocean. The breeze against my skin and the sound of the ocean did not take away the unsettledness. I realized at that moment that my life would never be the same. From this point on, I would live with regret.

I decided that I would write Kai a letter using papers from my journal and mail it to her. I began the letter:

Kai,

I am so sorry for being a bad husband and not trying harder to save our marriage all those years ago. I know that words cannot fix what I had done...

Then, I stopped, because I knew that I just wrote the truth, I balled the paper up, and tossed it into the sea. There was nothing that could be done to change anything.

We slept in the following morning and started packing up. I walked up the stairs to the courtyard, and everyone was there. As soon as they saw me, everyone quit talking and stared at me. Then, Baturhan spoke, "I... uh... everyone here... We want you to stay longer."

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“We need to move on. We might drive on to Georgia or even the other side and see Bulgaria.”

Baturhan said something to the group in Turkish, and then turned back to me, “We spoke with him, and he said that you can stay for free. We want you to stay, because we... we love you.”

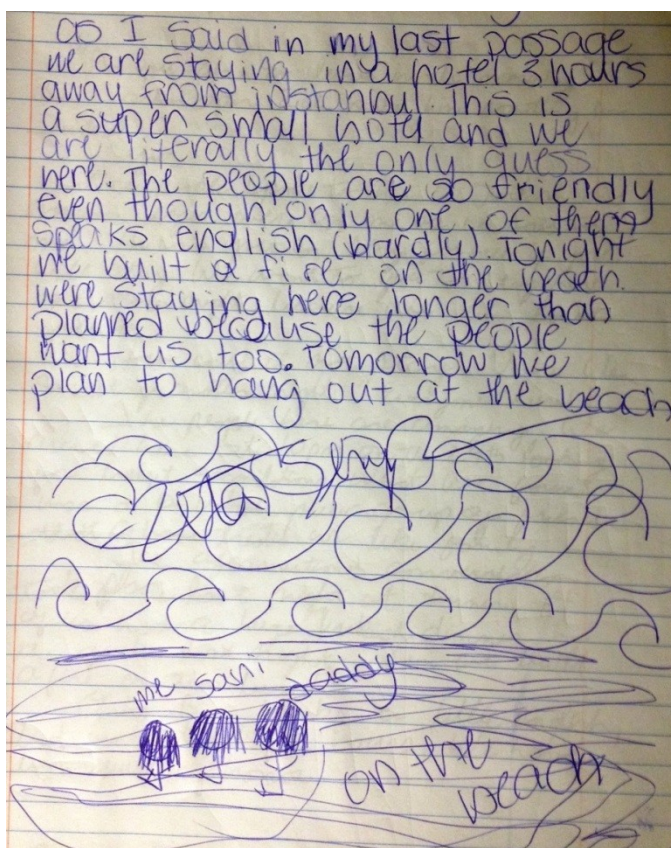
My daughters looked up at me pleading with their eyes to say yes. I looked at the crowd, and, they too, had pleading eyes. “Of course we will stay! Thank you so much. We love all of you too. We are all one family now. I love you all.”

Baturhan translated what I said to the group, and they all cheered. I never felt so welcome.

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∴[Read what Zeta had to say]∴



The next two days were repeats of the previous one. We rode around purchasing fresh foods from various stands, prepared meals, and conversed late into each night. I

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drank ayran and Turkish coffee like I was an addict. These were blissful days.

Eventually, a time came for us to drive on. We drove down the coast stopping at beaches and looking around. All the beaches we visited were full of trash. Plastic bottles and diapers lined the high tide line and filled the shrubs at the top of the beach strand. If I saw someone on the beach, he was a man.

Before driving away from the coast, we drove into a little cove, and walked to the beach. I could not express how surprised I was to see a beach filled with women. Many of these girls were wearing two-piece bathing suits. I had not seen a woman in a bathing suit since I left Kalkan. Besides the women sunning themselves, two large cows laid down on the beach acting like they had just as much right to this beach as all those women.

Then, a woman, wearing a colorful scarf around her head, and a plump dress literally ran to us yelling and waving her hands for us to go away. As it turned out, this was a “women only” beach.

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“A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead.” – Graham Greene (*The End of the Affair*)

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Chapter 11

Back in Istanbul

After returning the rental car to the airport, we took the train back to the Kumkapi neighborhood and the Tom Square Boutique Hotel where we were put into the same little apartment with the tiny balcony. After unloading we headed to the Ulusoy Café where we found Yavuz standing behind the counter smiling brightly. He seemed beyond happy to see us.

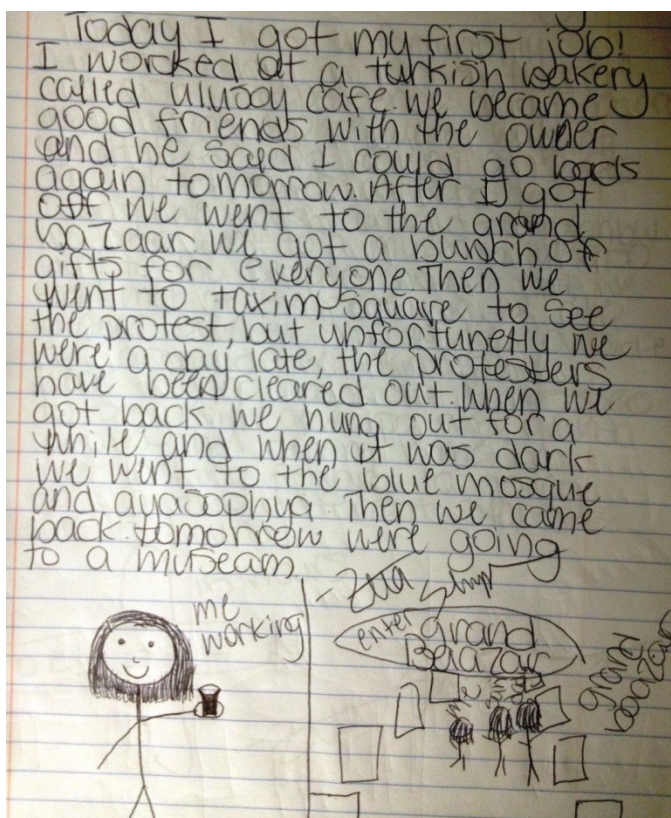
He explained to us that he needed an employee that speaks English. Zeta told me that she would love to work at the café. He agreed and took us up to his apartment above the bakery and gave Zeta an apron, and a uniform. The upshot to all of this is that Zeta had a job working in a Turkish café from 8:00 am until 12:00 pm on all our remaining days in Istanbul. So, each morning, we walked down to the café to have breakfast and Zeta went to work until lunch. Sanibel and I returned at lunch, and got her. She was paid 20 Turkish Lira a day, and he refused to allow us to pay for breakfast.

Each time we picked her up from her job, Zeta told us exciting stories of serving tea and pastries to Australians and Brits, and, occasionally, getting tips. This was a great way for her to spend our last week in Turkey, because it taught her so much. Besides, now she can always say that her very first job was at a café in Istanbul.

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:::[Read what Zeta had to say]:::



Our last week was spent visiting all the main tourist sites that we missed when we first came to Istanbul including the Blue Mosque. We marveled at the Hagia Sofia, and the Byzantine mosaics at the Chora Church. Besides being tourists, we spent most of our time walking,

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talking, and eating, howbeit, leisurely. Time spent with family away from all the daily responsibilities of life is wonderful. My heart smiled big every moment I spent in this great city with my two daughters.

On the other hand, Neil Yong sang, “Only love can break your heart.” One cannot live a life focused on love and not have a heart that is always somewhat broken. I missed my son, CJ, and my girlfriend, Erin. My stepfather, Jim, was gravely ill back in Tennessee, and my mother was taking care of him. While she cared for him, I was aimlessly wandering with two of my children.

Traveling this far was selfish, and selfless at the same time. The guilt and joy of being away from home stood side-by-side in my heart. The problem with loving so many places is that I am always homesick no matter where I am. The problem with loving so many people, is I am always longing to see someone who is far away. If only I had a bus to take all the people I love with me everywhere. If only all those who I have loved are all still living.

By this time, Sanibel and I had both finished reading our Dan Brown book, *Inferno*. She and I were interested in his story of the sculpture of the *Four Tetrarchs* in Venice. “Daddy, the book said that the heel is at a Museum in Istanbul. Can we go?”

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I had anticipated Sanibel's question, and I responded, "I'm way ahead of you, because I'm already planning on searching for it."

So, we went to chapter 71 in *Inferno*, and discovered that the heel of the Four Tetrarchs is in the Istanbul Archeological museum. "Girls, let's find that museum, and that heel!"

Zeta looked puzzled, "Why are we searching for a heel."

"Well, here's the story... Around 1000 years ago there were these stupid wars called the Crusades. Europeans had this idea that they should get together an army, and travel to Jerusalem, and kill the Muslims there, and take the city for Christians.

"In 1304, they stopped in Istanbul, which was called Constantinople back then, and attacked it just because it was on the way. Anyway, they stole this sculpture that was built during the Roman Empire days called the *Four Tetrarchs*, and took it to Venice where it still stands today!

"However, they accidentally broke off one of the heels of one of the four tetrarchs, and lost it. In the 1960's, archeologists found the heel in Istanbul. Next, the government of Venice asked for it back, and the government of Turkey responded, "You stole our statue; we'll keep the heel."

Zeta smiled, and asked me, "What's a tetrarch?"

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“In 300 AD, Rome was ruled by four dudes who called themselves the Four Tetrarchs.”

The Istanbul Archeological Museum fascinated me. I marveled at the Mesopotamia stuff like the clay tablet containing Hammurabi’s Law, and another clay tablet with a peace treaty between the Hittites and the Egyptians. However, the girls hurried me along to find the heel. As it turned out, the heel was encased in a glass or Plexiglas box on the second floor. The tiny portion of the heel was sticking up out of what looked like part of a foundation. There wasn’t much to it, but we were happy to find it. After posing for photos in front of the heel, we moved on, because that night we planned to meet Baturhan’s family for dinner in their Istanbul home.

Here’s how Dan Brown described the heel story:

Another similarly looted work of art was on display beneath the horses at the southwest corner of the church—a purple porphyry carving known as The Tetrarchs. The statue was well known for its missing foot, broken off while it was being plundered from Constantinople in the thirteenth century. Miraculously, in the 1960s, the foot was unearthed in Istanbul. Venice petitioned for the missing piece of statue, but the Turkish authorities replied with a simple message: You stole the statue—we’re keeping our foot.

As we left the museum into the bright daylight of Istanbul, my mind added a new verse to that upbeat and

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infectious 1990 *They Might be Giants* version of
Istanbul (Not Constantinople).

Every gal in Constantinople

Lives in Istanbul, not Constantinople

So if you've lost a heel in Constantinople

You'll find it in Istanbul...

Baturhan and his family lived across the Bosphorus in the more modern part of Istanbul that lies in Asia. Thus, we took a ferry from Europe's Golden Horn to the Asian mainland. I marveled at a shore lined with grand mosques and old architecture, and I kept pointing it out to Sanibel and Zeta, who were already a bit desensitized to all the grandeur until Zeta noticed the Maiden's Tower sticking out of the sea. "What is that?"

"That is the Maiden's Tower. Many years ago, an emperor of the Byzantine Empire was told by a prophetess that his daughter would be bit by a poisonous snake on her 18th birthday. He loved his daughters, and built this tower in the middle of the sea far away from snakes. He made her live her first 18 years in the tower, and visited her all the time. When she reached 18, her mom brought her a basket of fruit to celebrate her making it. Oops. There was a snake hidden in the fruit baskets!"

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Baturhan was waiting for us, as we walked off the ferry. We took a taxi to his home, where his mother greeted us enthusiastically. His father explained, through Baturhan's interpreting, that he owns a chocolate factory and was not able to go on vacation with his family. He told me that he is very happy to finally meet us.

Baturhan's family's home was a charming little house surrounded by small trees and rock walking paths, and little wooden bridges. The house was just the house one would expect from a man who owns a chocolate factory in one of the world's oldest cities.

We ate a feast, and Baturhan's mother gave me a large green ornate tapestry to take back to South Carolina. This family now felt like my family. Following dinner, we went into the living room for tea, and were joined by three more people. One was a lawyer named Muhammad, and, his wife, Aylin. He wore khaki pants, and a blue button-down shirt with his sleeves rolled up. His wife dressed very traditionally with her head covered. The other man was also named Muhammad, and had his long black hair in a ponytail. Both men spoke English fluently.

We spent the next few hours talking about everything. Muhammad with the ponytail asked me, "Are you a Democrat or a Republican?"

"I'm independent, but I voted for Obama in the last election. I think he's done a good job. I thought Bush did a terrible job with all the wars and everything."

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“Most people here like Obama more than Bush. Are you a Christian?”

“Yes, but I have a lot of respect for Islam. We have noticed in our trips, that Muslim people treat travelers very well.”

He acted so happy that I noticed this. “Yes! That is our culture. We are supposed to take care of travelers. You know about the Hajj, right?”

“Of course!”

Ponytailed Muhammad said, “I am a Muslim, but I love to read the Bible. I am always searching for truths, and the Bible teaches us many things. I feel like the teachings of Jesus are very powerful. I like John the Baptist very much too.”

The other Muhammad told me that he is a lawyer that works in international trade. His wife came over and they bantered back and forth about his time spent on a computer, and his phone. He told her that it was for work, and he wasn't chatting with other woman. She told him that he better not.

Before we left, he told me that when we come back everyone will fight over us, because they love us.

Our story began in a camper van cruising down I-20 East near Grovetown, Georgia, and, now, ends in Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey....

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My daughters and I walked past the colorful and expansive Spice Bazaar. We walked past the enormous Rustempasa Mosque. A large group of women covered completely in black burqas sat on the steps. Only their dark eyes showed, and those eyes squinted in the bright sun. From there, we stepped onto the ornate Galata Bridge, and walked across the Golden Horn. We walked through winding narrow streets until we made it to Taksim Square and Gazi Park. Here hundreds of thousands of Turks protested the conservative government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan while I bummed around with my two daughters looking at stuff, talking, and eating Turkish food.

The park was covered in police with riot gear, and armored vehicles were everywhere. In fact, there were more police than I could count. I don't know, but there might have been one thousand police in and around the park. What I did not see were protesters.

The full moon was visible in the daytime sky.

"Where are all the protesters?" asked Sanibel.

"I don't know. I guess the police made them all leave."

Zeta chimed in, "I'm glad there are no protesters! Let's leave!"

The kind of giant patriotic monuments with strong looking men in military and civilian costumes and flowing banners proudly occupied the center of the park. In stark contrast, seated at the bottom without shoes was

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one man holding a handwritten sign that read in English, “I protest!”

“Do you speak English?” I asked him.

“No,” he answered.

I didn’t know what to say. He was the only protester among more police than I could count. After seeing photos on CNN of a sea of protesters, I was not prepared to see a solitary man without shoes facing perhaps a thousand police. I had so many questions, but no way to ask him. There was no Wi-Fi or smart phones. Just us and our brains, and neither of our brains had the capacity to speak the others language.

I reached and grabbed both my daughter’s hands, and we walked off to begin our journey home. They had both reached the age where they no longer walked with me holding hands. When they were babies, I carried them everywhere. When they were older than babies, but had not reached the double-digit ages, I held their hands everywhere we went. After a few uncomfortable minutes, they both took their hands from mine.

The three of us continued our journey walking side-by-side. I quietly stared forward, because my eyes looked like this:

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